

# NEWS

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## **Funders Partner for More Summer Jobs for Youth In Meriden and Wallingford**

MERIDEN, CT — Thanks to a collaboration of funders led by the Liberty Bank Foundation, some 50 additional low-income youth in Meriden and Wallingford will be working this summer. This is the second year that local funders have partnered to provide \$35,000 in grants to expand job opportunities offered through the Youth @ Work program, which operates through the Youth Services departments of both towns. A press conference was held yesterday to announce the expansion.



*Students in the Youth @ Work program shared their summer job experiences at a press conference yesterday, where officials celebrated \$35,000 in collaborative funding that enabled the expansion of the program in Meriden and Wallingford. The funding partners included the Liberty Bank Foundation, the James H. Napier Foundation, the CUNO Foundation, the Meriden Foundation, and the town of Wallingford. Left to right: Mike Helfgott, chairman of the Liberty Bank Foundation; Maleek Myers, a participant in the Wallingford Summer Youth Employment program; Denise Keating, Meriden Youth Services; Sophia Pannone and Michaela Crandall, participants in the Meriden program; and Sneha Patidar, Wallingford Youth and Social Services.*

“A teenager’s first summer job is an essential rite of passage into adulthood,” said Michael Helfgott, chairman of the Liberty Bank Foundation. “We need to be sure that young people in Meriden and Wallingford have these opportunities, just as we did.”

Meriden Youth Services Director Denise Keating said that 135 youth are participating in the Meriden program, and praised the MidState Chamber of Commerce and the many new businesses that made jobs available to the teens. Liberty Bank Foundation, the James H.

Napier Foundation, the CUNO Foundation, and the Meriden Foundation each contributed \$5,000 to enable additional youth to work.

One of the Meriden employers participating for the first time was the Augusta Curtis Arts Center. Director Staci Roy explained that with attendance doubling at the Center's summer music program, the two students from Youth @ Work offered some much-needed help. "It was a win-win situation for us. The kids are phenomenal—it's exciting to think that one day they'll be running our nonprofits."

In Wallingford, the Youth @ Work program expanded from 19 students in 2014 to 28 this summer. Craig Turner, director of Wallingford Youth and Social Services, noted that for many of the students in the program, the work experience was only one of its benefits. "Some of these kids are using their paychecks to pay family bills—gas, groceries, the electric bill. We've learned that there was a group of teens who didn't qualify for the program under the Workforce Alliance income guidelines, but have a high level of need, so we were able to use the private funds for them." Contributors to the Wallingford program included Liberty Bank Foundation, The James H. Napier Foundation, and the town of Wallingford, each granting \$5,000.

Sophia Pannone described her experience working at the Wallingford Community Daycare for the second summer: "Every day I'm so excited to come to work. Teenagers aren't usually in charge, but at the daycare, I have to make decisions and decide what's right."

The major funder of the Youth @ Work program in Meriden, Wallingford, and other local communities is the Workforce Alliance, which was represented at the press conference by Bill Pitre, special projects specialist. He commented, "I visit 26 towns every summer, and it's amazing the talent that's out there among these youth. All they need is a chance."

"As Napier enters its 60<sup>th</sup> year, we're looking at how we can continue to support the community, and supporting youth employment is a great way to do that," said Daria Smith, executive director of the James H. Napier Foundation.

Representing the CUNO Foundation, Kevin Curry noted that when interviewing students for scholarships, he always asks them about their summer plans. "Every one of them says, 'I'm looking for a job'—and these are our best and brightest students. When our best and brightest can't find a summer job, you know there is a need."

Wallingford Mayor Bill Dickinson remarked, "These funders are the vehicle taking us to members of our community we don't want to be forgotten. They're opening doors to new horizons for these young people."

"Little more prepares our youth for the challenges of adulthood than a real job," said Mayor Manuel Santos of Meriden. "A summer job can introduce you to a field you might never had considered."

Maleek Myers, a Meriden participant who is spending the summer working at the MidState Chamber of Commerce, summed up his experience this way: “This program gave me a start as to what it’s like to work. That’s what everyone needs—a start.”

The Liberty Bank Foundation has led efforts to increase the number of summer jobs for low-income youth in Middletown, Meriden, Wallingford, and Southeastern Connecticut since 2012, building funding collaborations among more than 32 local foundations, corporate giving programs, and municipalities. Over the past four years, these collaborations have added over \$359,000 in funding, resulting in an additional 367 youth employed during those summers.

Since its inception in 1997, the Liberty Bank Foundation has awarded over \$8 million in grants to nonprofit organizations within Liberty Bank’s market area. The foundation seeks to improve the quality of life for people of low or moderate income by investing in three areas: education to promote economic success for children and families; affordable housing; and nonprofit capacity building. Along with its grantmaking, the foundation strives to foster the convening and collaboration of nonprofits, funders, business, and government to address community issues.

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