

NEWS



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Liberty Bank Foundation Leads Collaborative Effort to Support Summer Jobs For Youth in Meriden and Wallingford



Participants in a collaborative to expand summer employment programs for low-income youth in Wallingford and Meriden celebrate the additional \$35,000 in funding donated, enabling more than 50 added jobs. Left to right: Lisa Pippa, Meriden Health and Human Services; Sneyha Patidar, Wallingford Youth and Social Services; Mayor Manuel Santos, City of Meriden; Daria Smith, James H. Napier Foundation; Robert Ford, Workforce Alliance; Terren Emery, Meriden Youth Services; Kevin Curry, Meriden Foundation and CUNO Foundation; Pedro Valentin, youth employment program participant; Chandler J. Howard, Liberty Bank; Ashley Chevrette, youth employment program participant; Denise Keating, Meriden Youth and Family Services; Mayor William Dickinson, Jr., Town of Wallingford; State Representative Hilda Santiago.

MERIDEN, CT — Thanks to a collaborative effort among four local philanthropic funders and two municipalities, more low-income youth in Meriden and Wallingford will be working this summer. At a press conference this morning, funders announced that they had committed a total of \$35,000 in additional support for summer youth employment programs in the two towns, supplying jobs for at least 50 additional young people.

Chandler Howard, president and CEO of Liberty Bank and the Liberty Bank Foundation, noted the importance of summer jobs in preparing young people for the workforce. “I’ll bet everyone here remembers their first summer job,” he said. “And who doesn’t remember the feeling of getting that first paycheck, and a pat on the back from the boss for a job well done? It’s an experience every teenager should have.” He also cited research that indicates that young

people who have a summer work experience are more likely to be employed in the future, to attend school more, and are less likely to become involved in criminal activity.

The funding initiative in Meriden and Wallingford began in the spring, when Betty Sugerman Weintraub, associate director of the Liberty Bank Foundation, suggested that funders collaborate to expand summer youth employment programs to accommodate the large wait lists of low-income students in both towns. Weintraub brought this idea to both the Wallingford Forum, a group of nonprofit, municipal, and philanthropic representatives that meets bimonthly to discuss community needs, and the Meriden Funders Group, a group of funders convened regularly by the Napier Foundation and the United Way of Meriden and Wallingford to discuss community needs and projects.



State Representative Hilda Santiago: "It's important that kids feel proud, buying their own clothes, helping their parents in hard times. Thanks to the foundations and other partners who are helping to make sure our kids are working"

The Wallingford Forum members heard a presentation about summer youth employment from the Workforce Alliance, the Workforce Investment Board that allocates state funds for such programs throughout 22 communities in south central Connecticut. One fact that stood out in that presentation was that only about 20 Wallingford youth would be able to participate in the summer jobs program offered through the Quinnipiac Chamber of Commerce. Subsequent discussions between the Chamber, Wallingford Youth and Social Services (WYSS), the public school system, and the Liberty Bank Foundation resulted in a commitment from WYSS to operate a program to employ at least 25 more young people if funding could be found. Grants from the Liberty Bank Foundation and the James H. Napier Foundation, along with funding from the town of Wallingford, provided the \$15,000 needed to achieve this—doubling the number of low-income youth served by the program.

In Meriden, the funders group immediately took interest in the program expansion idea. Inquiries to Meriden Youth Services, which operates the city's summer youth employment program, revealed that this agency could support additional youth if private funding could be supplied. Four of the funders in the group collaborated to contribute \$20,000 to the program, providing jobs for at least an additional 25 students: Liberty Bank Foundation, James H. Napier Foundation, CUNO Foundation, and the Meriden Foundation. This represents a 35% expansion of the program.

Robert Ford, marketing director for the Workforce Alliance, said, "Teens and young adults have seen no gain in employment since 2009. Since 2007, we've lost a quarter of the jobs typically held by young people—the worst it's been since right after World War II. It's incredibly

important that we find ways to put more young people to work.” He noted that Connecticut was one of few states that supported youth employment with state funding, but that the addition of private donations was important to making more jobs available.

Teens participating in the summer youth employment program receive pre-employment preparation that emphasizes the “soft skills” required for success in the workplace: being on time, dressing appropriately, following instructions, and conducting themselves in a professional manner. They are then placed in part-time positions for up to six weeks with local employers, which may include the municipal government, the school system, nonprofits, and/or for-profit businesses. The youth are actually employed by the Youth Services agencies, and there is no cost to the employers for their services, so it provides a benefit to the employers as well. In some cases, the summer job has led to a longer-term hire by the employer when the young person has performed well and the employer has a position available.



*Mayor Manuel Santos of Meriden:
“Nothing prepares one for adulthood
better than working at a young age. It
fosters responsibility and self-esteem.”*

The Liberty Bank Foundation has led efforts to increase the number of summer jobs for low-income youth in Middletown and Southeastern Connecticut since 2012, building funding collaborations among more than 30 local foundations, corporate giving programs, and municipalities. Over the past three years, these collaborations, along with the new one for Meriden and Wallingford, have added almost \$325,000 in funding, resulting in an additional 315 youth employed.

“Liberty is proud to have spearheaded this collaborative effort, but I think ‘partnership’ is really the word for the day,” said Chandler Howard. “Everyone joined forces—the funders, the towns, the school systems, and the youth services agencies—to make these added opportunities available to our young people. And it makes perfect sense, because every one of us has a stake in making sure that our young people have a good introduction to the world of work.”

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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