

Summer Newsletter 2014

Ready, Set, Go...to work and more!

Steepletown is once again offering “summer jobs” for youth, ages 16-24. However, the “job” is less focused on keeping busy at a worksite and much more focused on gaining the skills and social network needed to better position the youth for on-going employment opportunities.

Over the many years of further refining our workforce development efforts, especially in employing youth during the summer, it has been noted that many youth lack confidence in their abilities to complete job tasks. According to site supervisors, most often poor performance can be attributed to self-doubt. To that end one of the primary components of the initial two week training focused on the core beliefs out of which a young person operates, uncovering how one’s thinking (self-concept) and feelings (self-esteem) shape their behaviors and attitudes. These sessions were facilitated by Wesley G. Morgan, MA, LLC, from Renewed Counseling Services. He helped youth understand the basis of their current framework and assisted them in transforming this to becoming more mindful, resilient, confident, and motivated.

Beginning the week of July 7th youth entered one of four sector-specific trainings which will lead to the acquisition of workforce credentials, some of which are nationally recognized industry credentials: the ServSafe Certification in the food industry, the National Retail Federation (NRF) credential in customer service, and the Child Development Associate (CDA) credential. The fourth area is related to lawn maintenance/landscaping which will involve extensive MIOSHA training and certification. As part of the sector-specific training component, youth are also placed in an internship to gain on-the-job experience and to further develop their employability skills. Youth will “work” an average of 20 hours a week for eight weeks throughout the program.

If you are an owner of a company or in management and have employment opportunities in the food industry, customer service, or early childhood care/education, give Steepletown a call. We would love to partner with you on work placement and retention of some very talented young people.

Neighbors Helping Neighbors...

Several years ago Steepletown was looking for a way to develop work readiness skills for youth while providing a service to the community. What developed was the Steepletown Lawn Care Service, offering a full range of lawn care services for Senior households. Initially a donation was asked for the service, but a few years ago Steepletown applied for Kent County Senior Millage funding to offset the costs associated with providing this service to qualifying Senior households.

This work is funded as a "home chore" service under the Senior Millage funding and is intended to provide resources and services to Seniors to make it possible for them to continue living independently within our communities. This and several other services are coordinated by the Area Agency on Aging of Western Michigan; all services can be viewed by going to their website.

The current Lawn Care Supervisor, Kyle Aukerman, has been doing this work for the past couple years. As a young man himself, he is not sure if he will have a long-term career in lawn care and landscaping, but appreciates this opportunity to participate in the community in a way that is helpful to both the Seniors and the other young persons who are under his guidance and training. Currently the Steepletown Lawn Crew helps out over 70 households.

This Fall voters will have a chance to decide the fate of the Kent County Senior Millage ballot proposal. Currently the millage serves 17,000 people a year with 43 different services. Demand for millage services continues to increase as the population ages. The number of older adults in Kent County has increased by more than 30% since 2000; waiting lists and unmet needs for meals, home care, and transportation are growing as well. Increasing the millage rate from 1/3 to 1/2 mill will cost the owner of a \$150,000 house an extra \$12.50 a year, well worth our support!

Rx Run At It Again...

It was the longest day of the year, and certainly a long day for those who ran more than 50 miles! On Saturday, June 21st, the second annual Rx Run was held here on the West Side. The purpose of this event is to help educate and inform members of the community on the use of exercise as a valid form of mental health treatment. This event is put on by The Well Being, LLC, which is located at 1118 Front Avenue NW, and a partner in Steepletown's workforce development initiatives.

Many of the young adults who come to Steepletown to complete their GED bring mental health challenges. Often these stem from abusive and/or traumatic experiences growing up that literally can hinder brain development and that later manifest themselves as Major Depressive Disorders, anxiety, or any number of mental or emotional health difficulties. Over the past year, with the guidance of Tim and Brendan from the Well Being, Steepletown has offered mental health screenings for these young adults as part of the orientation process. Tim and Brendan also make themselves available for any follow up counseling if that is desired.

There is a large and growing body of scientific evidence that supports the position of physical exercise as the best mental health "medication" available. According to the American Psychiatric Association, the research on aerobic exercise shows "at least a moderate improvement in mood symptoms for patients with Major Depressive Disorder." It is no wonder that those who participated in the Rx Run left feeling good on many different levels, especially those who ran more than 50 miles! Visit the Rx Run Facebook page to view some photos on the day. <http://on.fb.me/1noLbiv>

Changing Lives of All Shapes and Sizes....

Steepletown Preschool's mission is to "create a partnership for families to grow and thrive in our neighborhood." We believe that a parent is a child's first teacher and together we are able to strengthen that partnership for the success of the child. Steepletown Preschool is able to provide a high quality preschool education for vulnerable four year-olds on the West Side. In partnership with the Early Learning Neighborhood Collaborative (ELNC) sixteen scholarship positions were made available to neighborhood children in the fall of 2013.

Steepletown Preschool had a successful first year. Using both Creative Curriculum and the Second Steps Social Emotional Curriculum our graduating class will be both academically and socially ready for Kindergarten this Fall. We focused on 5 studies during the year including Trees, Recycling, Clothes, Buildings, and Balls. Our studies promoted independence, fostered decision-making and encouraged exploration.

We know that providing vulnerable families with the opportunity to attend a quality Early Childhood Education programs is a key component for them to grow and thrive in our neighborhood. Parents are essential partners in a child's development and education process and must not only be part of the solution but the driving force for a new program called Empowering Parents Impacting Children (EPIC). This program is a two generational approach to create the conditions that help children be successful in learning, in school and in life. Steepletown Preschool and ELNC will pilot this program in the fall of 2014. A Family Coach will provide mentoring, case management, resource referrals and ongoing follow-ups so each family may be successful in the completion of goals. Together we will continue to help families grow and thrive on the West-Side.

Steepletown is also grateful to the parish of St. Adalbert Basilica who has opened their hearts and building, i.e. the Basilica Center, to house the preschool. In fact this fall a second classroom will be opened in addition to offering extended care for families who are working or have other commitments.