

A Call to Action

for Schenectady's Youth

March 1, 2015

OWNING RESPONSIBILITY FOR OUR CHILDREN – OUR FUTURE

It's often been said that "our children are our future". If we truly believe and embrace that sentiment, then we must consistently demonstrate our ownership of and concern for what that future will look like. Too many of our children growing up in under-resourced communities face inequities stemming from race and poverty, and lack access to resources that can enable their advancement. The steep challenges of growing up encountering the barriers erected by poverty and racism are well-documented. The inequities and trauma experienced by impoverished children and teens are reflected in a host of factors such as lower likelihood to graduate from high school, attend college, or to obtain employment, as well as increased teen pregnancy and involvement in the criminal justice system.

But, we also observe young people who, despite significant barriers, with the right guidance, support and influence from caring adults, have succeeded -- if not thrived. Being able to access and make effective use of personal and community resources is critical to their success.

Resources are not just financial. Important resources for youth include community, social and positive peer support that help them to conceive a future story for themselves -- to aspire to what they can become -- and to reach for and to consistently and persistently work toward that success.

We all have a stake in the prosperity of our young community members. The return on our investment in our children comes back many times over – not only in seeing them prosper as individuals – but in the benefits to the community. Indeed, our future will be significantly influenced by how successful we are in helping our younger generation thrive.

This "***Call to Action for Schenectady's Youth***" has been embraced by a coalition of citizens and organizations who believe that our community is in a pivotal place with regard to the well-being and empowerment of our youth. Our "***Call to Action***" calls on all members and sectors of our community to embrace the following ideas, and to act on them with passion and urgency. We will imbed these principles in our individual, organizational and programmatic endeavors to support the achievements of our young community members.

Our Vision

Schenectady values, respects and honors our youth, advancing their positive development, well-being and achievement through a collaborative and supportive system of adults organized and trained to help them realize their potential. As adult community members we are committed to the following principles and priorities. We will:

1. Listen to youths and include their voice in our considerations and planning for community programs designed to support them;
2. Stand against systemic racism, sexism and other forms of prejudice imposing inequities upon our families and their children; and to continually build and improve relationships in the community that address issues of race and prejudice;
3. Promote youth leadership, offering new avenues to build knowledge, talents and skills so that their influence is felt in civic engagement, educational policy and community programs and activities;
4. Engage youths in service to their community through activism, volunteerism and through their personal investment in community improvement projects;
5. Create sustainable employment opportunities that build skills, teach teamwork and responsibility, build equity and pave a pathway to future vocations and careers;
6. Stand with youths as their allies, advocates, guides and mentors to help them see and realize their potential, to be activists for their best interests and to use our influence to impact positive outcomes for them;
7. Emphasize talent development and skill acquisition in our youth programs;
8. Help our youths learn to navigate and effectively utilize community resources;
9. Advocate for policy changes that result in more equitable access to public resources and opportunities;
10. Work together toward collective impact through collaboration, adoption of common goals and strategies, and sharing resources and information.

Our Pledge

The undersigned people, businesses and organizations are committed to this **Call to Action**, and will work actively and in earnest to incorporate these principles in our daily interactions with youth in our programs, in our schools and in the community.

The following have pledged their commitment to this ***Call to Action for Schenectady's Youth:***

Organizations and Businesses

The Schenectady Foundation

Individuals

Robert A. Carreau