

ABOUT JUST-A-START CORPORATION (JAS)

JAS's Goals and How They are Achieved

JAS is dedicated to creating opportunity, strengthening community, and improving lives. Toward that vision, JAS is organized as a not-for-profit community development agency providing affordable housing, education, training, community engagement, and supportive services.

JAS was founded in 1968 as a community revitalization and youth training program focused on the goal of improving Cambridge's then-struggling Wellington-Harrington neighborhood. JAS was officially incorporated as a non-profit multi-service organization in 1971. Currently, JAS is undergoing a period of structural change, including infrastructure reorganization and instituting the organization's first strategic plan. Improvements to core functions include restructuring financial management, increasing fundraising capacity, overhauling IT systems, and better integrating programs to provide clients with a broader range of services that will better meet all of their needs. JAS also recently gained official certification as a Community Development Corporation (CDC) by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts.

JAS's primary service area is Cambridge, a city that is home to two economically divergent communities. The gentrification and growth of the city has created substantial wealth, which has exacerbated the problem of access to affordable housing and contributed to the income insecurity of many residents. JAS works to help build economic resiliency among low- to moderate-income individuals and families to allow them to attain financial stability and upward mobility. Given this guiding principle, the goals of the organization are:

- 1) To provide training, education, job placement, and related support services for youth and adults that need to gain competencies to enhance their employability and earning potential;
- 2) To develop and maintain affordable rental housing and first-time home buyer opportunities that promote community cohesion;
- 3) To offer housing resources, including homelessness prevention services, linkages to public benefits, and financial services and education, to allow low- to moderate-income individuals to attain long-term housing and economic stability.

Metrics Indicating Successes

Over the organization's 47 year history, some of JAS's key accomplishments include:

- 1) Developing and administering five education and training programs that serve 200 or more low- to moderate-income youth and adults each year;
- 2) Providing homelessness prevention for up to 600 clients annually through landlord-tenant mediation and emergency financial assistance;
- 3) Stabilizing housing occupancy in approximately 40 rental and owner-occupied housing units each year through a rehab and financing program;
- 4) Operating a homeless shelter that provides temporary housing and comprehensive education, training, and counseling services to about 30 teen mothers and their children every year;

- 5) Developing 10-15 affordable housing units with long-term affordability restrictions annually;
- 6) Maintaining a portfolio of approximately 600 affordable rental units under long-term affordability restriction; and
- 7) Constructing and rehabbing 171 first time home buyer units with long-term affordability restrictions to date.

Director's Commitment

Deborah Ruhe joined JAS as its Executive Director in 2013. She has a long track record of leading non-profits in work to expand access to their services, ranging from health care to travel, and now community development. Throughout her career, Deborah has demonstrated her ability to strengthen organizations infrastructure and increase their capacity to serve clients. In particular, her experience with strategic planning of new services, facilities, and programs, and culture change have been valuable as JAS has begun a transitional phase to modernize administration of the organization and programs under her leadership.

Deborah is also a Cambridge resident, giving her an ingrained personal connection to the community she serves. She sees economic and cultural diversity as critical components to maintaining a vibrant city and hopes that JAS helps to preserve these characteristics in her community.

Past Recipients' Involvement in JAS

For JAS's Biomedical Careers Program, a tuition-free nine month education and training program to help low-income adults gain entry into the biomedical industry, 22 years of program alums who work locally offer a network to aid in recruitment of new students and in job placement post-graduation. This helps the program to continue to be well known within the biomedical industry for producing quality candidates for entry level positions. Employers who have hired BCP graduates include Shire, the Broad Institute, Genzyme, Biogen Idec, Millennium, Etex, and hospitals and universities. Each year successful alumni return to speak at the program graduation, showing their appreciation for the program and giving students an idea of what they can achieve in the near future. Additionally, an active Facebook page of 78 alumni fosters post-graduation engagement and community, as well as a new Linked In alumni group that gives students a soundboard for networking possibilities.

Many former participants in JAS's summer and after school programs for Cambridge high school students have returned to become involved in JAS's work. Three recent examples include John, Luis, and Pentagrammaton. With the help of JAS's programs, these young men developed their academic and professional skills to the point where they eventually became exemplary staff members for JAS.

John, who has been involved with JAS for 12 years, and is currently a Job Developer and Counselor for teens in the organization's summer and after school youth programs. Throughout his tenure with JAS, he has continued to grow and take on more accountability, and from the beginning he proved that JAS's programming had an important impact on his professional skills and drive. Luis, who was in JAS's youth programs for 7 years, has been on staff with the organization's Summer Youth Enrichment Program for the past two years and his site is widely regarded as the best in the program by staff. Pentagrammaton also helped to contribute to the success of the summer program last year, after 7 years of participating in JAS programs. He worked as the administrative assistant and as a supervisor to junior program staff, providing integral support for a successful summer.

JAS's YouthBuild (YB) program also often forms strong connections with program participants. YB gives at-risk youth who have dropped out of high school a chance to complete their secondary education and gain work experience through community service. For example, Brandon Menjares started YB at 18 and earned his high school diploma through the program. He is now working to obtain a Human Services associates degree with the goal of becoming a case manager for youth. While he is a student, Brandon is also an intern for Senator Sal DiDomenico at the State House, works part time for YouthBuild USA, the national organization that oversees YouthBuild programs across the country, and works part time at the City of Cambridge's Frizolli Youth Center. Despite all of these time commitments, Brandon continues to be involved with JAS YB by mentoring current students. He is also a resident of JAS's affordable rental housing, which allows him to continue his education while working part time.

Lastly, one of JAS's board members, Joel Miranda, also came to JAS as a participant in YB. Later, as a JAS YB employee he served as Brandon's mentor. Today, Joel is the Director of Leadership Development at YouthBuild USA. He is also a community fellow a Boston University School of Management's Institute for Non-Profit Management and Leadership. It is clear that Joel's experience with JAS YB imparted him with a strong work ethic, commitment to giving back to his community, and dedication to JAS.

JAS's Other Sources of Funding for 2015

Foundation and corporate funders:

Fredrick C. Lutze and Christian Rausch Family Foundation: \$5,000
Cambridge Trust Company: \$2,000
People's United Community Foundation: \$2,500
Massachusetts Life Sciences Center: \$90,028
Cambridge Community Foundation: \$5,000
Shelia Gamble Fund (Cambridge Community Foundation): \$5,000
Americo J. Francisco Fund (Cambridge Community Foundation): \$7,000
Genzyme: \$20,000

Government contract funders:

City of Cambridge: \$429,063
Department of Labor: \$506,995
Department of Transitional Assistance: \$901,855
Department of Education: \$189,413
Cambridge Housing Authority: \$28,000
Cambridge School Department: \$6,000
Community Development Block Grants: \$622,615

How JAS Has Addressed Challenges

Over the past two years, JAS has been going through a period of substantial organizational change, which is always a challenge for a long established organization. JAS's founding Executive Director, who led the organization for 45 years, retired in 2012. Having a leader who founded the organization in this role for so long, his management style and the established structure had become customary for long-time employees, which made change difficult.

After bringing on a new Executive Director, JAS began to purposefully transition, restructuring administrative functions and program organization, beginning its first strategic planning process, and

updating systems. Despite these substantial changes, JAS was able to maintain buy-in from old and new staff alike by incorporating their feedback into the planning process, which will determine the direction that the organization takes over the next five years. The strategic plan is also incorporating feedback from clients and community members, to be sure that the organization can become even more responsive to the needs of the communities it serves.

JAS's Legal Issues

Throughout its 47 year history, JAS has faced very few legal issues. However, in recent years, a client brought legal charges against two JAS employees because she was unhappy with renovations done to her house utilizing JAS's Home Improvement Program (HIP), which provides technical and/or financial assistance to Cambridge residents and landlords to help them preserve, stabilize, and improve their homes. In October of 2014, JAS's employees were found not to be liable for the client's complaints and cleared of charges. Unfortunately, the client was disappointed with this ruling and is appealing the case. While one individual filed a legal complaint, this is countered by the over 2,000 people that JAS serves every year who are satisfied with, and often express gratitude for, the services that JAS provides.

JAS YOUTHBUILD PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Request Amount and Purpose

JAS respectfully requests \$10,000 from Framingham State University's Nonprofit Giving Course to support its YouthBuild (YB) program. YB is a comprehensive youth development program that offers low-income youth aged 16-24 who have dropped out of high school with a second chance to earn a diploma or HiSET (formerly GED), transition into a career or post-secondary education, and engage in rehabilitating their community. During their time in YB, program participants develop academic, vocational, leadership, and life skills.

Project Overview

The mission of JAS YB is to develop the skills and abilities of youth in order to maximize their opportunities for personal growth and productive citizenship. YB is based on the premise that youth have the capacity for positive leadership, and that community service is an important element in developing this potential. The program hopes to expand youth's perspectives about their capabilities and make new avenues available to them in the future.

YB is a year round program, with the exception of four week long breaks spread through the year. Students participate in YB five days a week from 8:30am to 4:30pm, with an alternating weekly schedule where half of the youth are in academic classes and half are on work sites each week. Students can opt to pursue their high school diploma or HiSET, so the duration of participation can range from one to two years. During classroom weeks, students receive instruction in math, science, English language arts, social science, life skills, and career development. During work experience weeks, students complete community service projects and receive related training. Construction projects are performed on affordable housing units in partnership with the Chelsea and Cambridge Housing Authorities and the Chelsea Soldiers Home. Academic and work site staff meet regularly to ensure that both program components are integrated. Case managers also work with students to overcome potential barriers to success, such as parenting obligations, homelessness, or involvement with the justice system.

YB is also focused on preparing all students to attain the skills needed to succeed in college, vocational training, or enter sustainable careers. Through a partnership with Bunker Hill Community College (BHCC), faculty have consulted to strengthen the YB curriculum and students can dually enroll in college courses. This collaboration provides students with opportunities to experience advanced academic work and become familiar with the environment and demands of post-secondary education before enrolling in college. Additionally, college tours and help with applications, scholarships, and the FAFSA ensure that students are familiar with navigating the college application and financial aid processes.

How this Project is Distinct

JAS YB is unique in the comprehensive nature of services that it provides to at-risk youth. While many programs offer education, job training, or community service opportunities, YB combines all of these components to give youth well-rounded knowledge, experience, and a sense of pride in themselves and their community. While YouthBuild is a national model, and JAS operates one of many programs across the country, JAS YB stands out for a few reasons. Most YB programs either offer a high school diploma or a HiSET, and do not give students the option to choose which high school credential is best for them to pursue. Additionally, it is not typical for YB programs to offer dual enrollment college courses, as JAS does with BHCC. Similarly, most YB programs are not particularly focused on putting students on a trajectory to enter post-secondary education (PSE), whereas JAS offer specific tracks for PSE in healthcare and construction. JAS YB's location in the heart of Cambridge, near Kendall Square, also offers students access to a wide range of healthcare and biotech employers.

Future Directions of JAS YouthBuild

As a part of JAS's strategic planning process, it became very apparent that integrating all of the organization's services must be a priority. This will include having a clear referral process between JAS programs, which will greatly benefit YB students by helping them to access JAS's adult Biomedical Careers program after obtaining a high school credential, and connect them to affordable housing options, training, and resources. Additionally, residents of JAS's shelter for homeless teen mothers will be connected to YB as an educational opportunity. JAS's overall workforce development strategy for this year also includes developing an employer advisory board and implementing an internship program, both of which would give YB participants more connections to local employment.

Metrics Indicating Local Impact

JAS YB serves a diverse population of disadvantaged youth, the majority of whom are from Chelsea (74%) and Cambridge (23%). Most students are teenagers, with 55% between 17 and 18, 26% between 19 and 20, and 19% from 21 to 24. Students served are also majority minority, as 77% are Latino/a, 13% are black, and 10% are white. Many students face substantial life challenges, where 29% are parents or expectant parents, and 10% experienced homelessness in the past year.

Last year, YB served 64 youth in the program and 35 youth obtained a high school diploma or HiSET. 90% of students demonstrated an increase of at least two grade levels in numeracy/literacy (measured by TABE testing). Additionally, 54 youth (89%) obtained an industry-recognized certificate, such as HBI PACT (Pre-Apprenticeship Construction Training), HBI Facilities maintenance, or CNA (Certified Nursing Assistant). Of those youth who completed the program, 16 entered higher education, five entered a vocational training program, and 39 were placed in employment. Youth in the program also rehabilitated 82 units of affordable housing in Cambridge and 231 units of affordable housing in Chelsea, 20 of which were housing for veterans. Similar outcomes are expected for the program this year.