

Lines of Opportunity

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BETWEEN THE LINES



Randy Peers, Chief Executive Officer

Dear Friends & Colleagues,

This will be the last newsletter that will feature a note from me as CEO of Opportunities for a Better Tomorrow (OBT). After almost eleven years leading this amazing organization, I have accepted the position of President & CEO of the newly formed (by way of merger), Greater Reading Chamber & Economic Development Corporation in Berks County, PA. January 25th will be my last day at OBT.

When I began at OBT on May 15, 2006, I could not have predicted what a wonderful journey I was about to undertake. Having spent my entire professional career prior to 2006 serving in non-profit senior leadership roles, OBT provided me my first opportunity to serve in an executive leadership role. At the time, I inherited an organization going through a major transition due to the untimely death of the organization's founder, Sr. Mary Franciscus, RSM. The emotional turmoil of losing one's leader took a major toll on the staff. Cuts in government funding left a \$300K operating deficit to deal with. Performance challenges were impacting our one expansion site in Bushwick and several board members had recently resigned. Together with our Board Chair at the time, Frank Morizio, we embarked on what would later be described as one of the most notable organizational turnarounds in NYC non-profit history.

Fast forward to today, OBT is now the leading provider of job training and education services to "Opportunity Youth" in NYC. We also provide highly effective adult literacy programs, citizenship & immigration services, and adult employment programs throughout Brooklyn. We have advanced training programs for youth in the fields of healthcare and web design & coding. All totaled, we operate out of six locations across three boroughs while serving 4,000+ people annually. Our annual budget will exceed \$8MM this fiscal year, and our 100+ employees carry on Sr. Mary's vision of providing empowerment programs to disadvantaged youth and adults each day. I am proud of the legacy of continuing success I will leave behind.

I am most proud of the senior leadership team that is in place to continue our great work. Dr. Liliana Polo-McKenna, who began as our Chief Program Officer (CPO) in September, will take on the role of Interim CEO. You can read more about her on page two in this newsletter. Long-time OBT Senior Director Dani Smejkal will be elevated to Interim CPO overseeing most of our youth employment initiatives. They both will be leading a talented team of senior leaders and directors who have a wealth of experience designing and managing effective programs. I am confident that this team will take OBT to new heights of success, while maintaining our core principles of building careers through confidence, discipline and professionalism. Finally, I thank all of you for making these last eleven years the most rewarding professional experience of my life.

MEET OUR INTERIM CEO – DR. LILIANA POLO-MCKENNA



Liliana has, in many ways, come full circle in her life by joining OBT as Chief Program Officer (CPO). She is a native of Sunset Park, and daughter of Colombian immigrants whose family members worked in what is now Industry City on the Brooklyn waterfront. Liliana brings almost twenty years of experience in working with young people and building teams to best serve their needs. Beginning her career as a teacher at Boys and Girls High School, Liliana went on to become founding principal of West Brooklyn Community High School. As principal of West Brooklyn, she worked in partnership with Good Shepherd Services to replicate its model transfer school, serving over-aged/under-credited students in Sunset Park, Brooklyn, the community where Liliana was born and raised. Through working in partnership with students whom the traditional high school systems had failed, families, and staff, Liliana saw the potential of a school that was built around the needs of those within it. Liliana credits the partnership with Good Shepherd Services and the incredible staff at West Brooklyn with making it one of the top performing transfer schools in the city.

When presented with the opportunity to pursue a doctorate, her focus was building programs at state and district levels that effectively support staff to meet young people's needs. After completing her studies, Liliana became Vice President of the New York City Leadership Academy where she led programming for principals and their teams in school districts across the country to assist in their transformation efforts. A dedicated leader for equality and a strong advocate for OBT's mission, Liliana is a welcome addition to the leadership team. Liliana holds a Doctorate in Education Leadership (EdLD) from the Harvard Graduate School of Education, a BA and MAT from Brown University, and a Specialist Diploma from Queens College.

OBT Board Chair, Vincent Chirico, who recently announced Liliana's appointment as the Interim CEO remarked, "We are proud to welcome Liliana as Interim CEO. During her tenure as CPO, she designed and implemented multiple programmatic reforms, which have already improved the effectiveness of the organization. Liliana's expertise in the education industry will ensure a seamless transition into the CEO role. Under her leadership, we are confident that OBT will continue to grow and progress."

OBT WELCOMES

NEW BOARD MEMBERS



Damian Bivona
Assistant Vice President,
Consumer Operations
AIG

Jillian Hopman
Managing Attorney,
Jillian Hopman Law



Marc Gross
Director Of Operations,
Chris Wayne & Associates

Sasha Urquidi
Vice President, Portfolio Management,
Foundations and Endowments
Goldman Sachs



NEW STAFF MEMBERS

David Arroyo (SUNSET PARK)
Quality Assurance/
Data Reporting Manager

Nelson Gonzalez (BWRC)
Vocational Coordinator

Iris Hidalgo (BWRC)
AELP Coordinator

Traci Prevost (JAMAICA)
Counselor, YAIP

John Robinson Jr (BUSHWICK)
Job Developer

Gail Smith (INNOVATION LAB)
Senior Program Associate,
Web Design & Coding

Elsa Taveras (BUSHWICK)
Program Associate

Jessicka Duran (BED-STUY)
Counselor, YAIP

Detric Hicks (BUSHWICK)
Case Manager/
Computer Instructor, YAIP

Olga Mexina (SUNSET PARK)
English Instructor, OSY

Iyeshia Redrick (JAMAICA)
Counselor/
Retention Specialist, MAA

Alexis Santiago (BWRC)
Data Specialist/Job Coach

Matthew Soto (INNOVATION LAB)
Assistant Teacher,
Web Design & Coding

OBT HONORS PARTNERS AT 2016 FALL GALA AND OPPORTUNITY FOR YOUTH AWARDS

On October 18th, 350 OBT supporters attended the Fall Gala and Opportunity for Youth Awards. OBT honored Kathryn Wylde, CEO of the Partnership for NYC, and awarded several corporate partners who support OBT's work through employment, internships, and professional development events. Awardees included: AIG, Dynamex, Fresh Direct, FSO Outsourcing, Goldman Sachs, Investor's Bank, Modell's, MUFG, NYU Lutheran, and Pimco. Additional sponsors included Industry City, Fisher Brothers, JP Morgan Chase, and Salmar Properties.



The Opportunity Closet

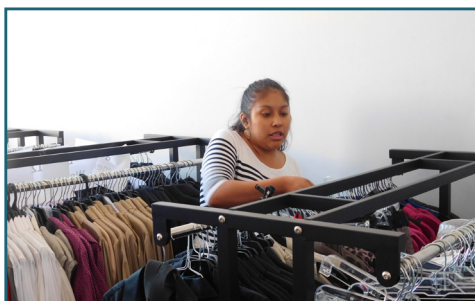
Since opening its doors in 1983, one of Opportunities for a Better Tomorrow's core models is that trainees must come dressed in professional clothing. For many participants, this is the first time they have worn a suit or tied a tie. For years, participants relied on second hand clothing donations and community partners like Dress for Success for professional attire, but now trainees can now "shop" at OBT's Opportunity Closet!

The Opportunity Closet, located in Sunset Park is stocked with clothing donated as a result of a new partnership between OBT and a high end clothing company. As a result of this partnership, OBT realized that the trainees needed a central location where they could come try on professional workwear in a comfortable and friendly environment.



Trainees and staff, led by Senior Workforce Manager Pablo Sierra, were enthusiastic about the idea and pitched in to give the space, donated by Sahadi's Fine Foods, a new coat of paint and assisted in organizing all the clothing by size. Trainees can now visit the OBT closet once a week and shop with "OBT Cash" they earn for attendance and community service. In addition, OBT has opened up the closet to community partners and other workforce development agencies.

Yanni Deconescu, Manager of Curriculum Design & Teacher Development, who oversees the Opportunity Closet says, "It's a place where all our youth program participants can build a professional wardrobe and present themselves appropriately at job interviews, internship sites, as well as in the classroom. In addition, the Opportunity Closet provides participants with service learning activities, and we're proud that the space is created and maintained with them, by them, and for them."



Happenings around OBT



**Job Fair at
OBT Bushwick
October 6, 2016**



**Young Adult Internship
Program Plus Graduation
December 16, 2016**



**OBT Participant Family
Holiday Party
December 15, 2016**



**Brooklyn LGBTQ Youth
Summit 2016
November 19, 2016**





NEW PROGRAMS

(Young Adult Internship Plus Program & Young Adult Literacy Program)

Young adults in New York City's foster care and court systems have fallen behind. Compared to youth in the general population, individuals who have been in foster care are more likely to rely on public assistance, be incarcerated, and suffer from mental health problems. Additionally, young adults who have been formerly incarcerated have trouble finding employment and often have mental health problems as a result of their incarceration. OBT has long served both foster care and formerly incarcerated youth; however, OBT recently launched a new program – the Young Adult Internship Plus program – specifically designed to help these high-need young adults succeed and move on to gainful full-time employment and higher education. Participants in the program receive intensive mental health counseling, job training, paid work experience, and support services. Upon completing the program, youth will receive job placement assistance, referrals to HSE programs, one-on-one college counseling, and retention services. The program targets young adults who have “aged out” and are currently in foster care to help them gain the necessary skills to live independently.



Another new addition to OBT's program portfolio is the Young Adult Literacy Program designed to boost young adults' reading and math levels that are too low to gain admittance into an HSE program. Through this program, participants are able to develop their reading and math skills until they can enter into OBT's Youth Education and Job Training Program and/or the Young Adult Internship program.

Dani Smejkal, Interim Chief Program Officer said, “Both the YAIP Plus Program and the YALP program allow OBT to help two new groups of young adults more effectively by providing services that are designed to fit their unique challenges. The group size is also significantly smaller so that participants can benefit from more individualized attention. Graduates of both programs can feed into OBT's general programs as well, allowing OBT to maximize its involvement with each trainee.”

NEW HSE CLASSES HELP FAR ROCKAWAY AND CONEY ISLAND RESIDENTS

Residents of Far Rockaway and Coney Island were hungry for jobs when new Workforce 1 centers opened in both communities last year. However, despite residents' enthusiasm and hunger for work, many were lacking a high school diploma or its equivalency, now required for most jobs. With the help of the Consortium for Workers Education, OBT expanded its High School Equivalency classes to both communities to better help residents earn their HSEs and obtain gainful employment. Participants are grateful as well. Angela Johnson, a Coney Island resident and student in the HSE classes said, “I used to be a bookkeeper and store manager but now you can't move forward with another job if you don't have a diploma. I'm a mother of three and I could never enroll in an HSE program as the hours of the program didn't work for my schedule and were too far. These classes are three blocks away from my house and now I can tell my children, ‘Mommy's going to school so you have to go to school.’”



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783 Fourth Avenue
Brooklyn, NY 11232
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BUSHWICK
25 Thornton Street
Brooklyn, NY 11206
Tel: 718-387-1600

**BUSHWICK
WORKFORCE
RESOURCE CENTER**
280 Wyckoff Avenue
Brooklyn, NY 11237
Tel: 718-381-3222

BED-STUY
20 New York Avenue
Brooklyn, NY 11216
Tel: 718-399-9700

Y ROADS JAMAICA
161-04 Jamaica Avenue
Jamaica, NY 11432
Tel: 212-630-9727

INNOVATION LAB
87 35th Street, 2nd Fl
Brooklyn, NY 11232
Tel: 718-801-8970

Visit us online at:
www.obtjobs.org

SPOTLIGHT ON SUCCESS

Matthew Soto was looking for a second chance when he turned on the news one morning. Watching NY1, he saw a segment about the opening of the Innovation Lab and OBT's new Website Design and Coding Fundamentals Program in Sunset Park. A lifelong community resident, Matthew Soto had dropped out of college after feeling underprepared and unable to adjust to the college environment. He was always interested in computers and technology but didn't know how to get a job or internship in the field.

After seeing the NY1 segment, he enrolled in the program the same week and soon after was designing websites dedicated to his favorite super hero Spiderman for a class project. Upon completion of the program, Matthew got an internship at Industry City at Time Inc working with the web development team. Through his internship he helped update web pages and built an email sign up form for a site. When his internship ended, Program Director, Miguel Pacheco offered Matthew a job as an

assistant teacher for the program. Matthew Soto flourished in this role and loves teaching others about his passions. "I love this program, I hope to continue to learn in both the fields of technology and education so I can one day be a head technology instructor."



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*Building careers through confidence,
discipline, and professionalism*

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