

# The Open Door Boys & Girls Club of Greater Lowell · Fall 2018



## A message from Joe

A moment that always makes me smile happens each afternoon in front of the Club. One by one, buses from schools all over Lowell stop and eager Club members run towards our front doors, barely able to contain their backpacks or their excitement. It's a great moment, but I choose this career because I love seeing the impact that your investment in Lowell's youth has over time. It's amazing to see these young people strive to be their best selves and overcome obstacles because of folks like you who are being *your* best selves by supporting them. It is because of this that I truly believe we will someday achieve our vision of ending generational poverty in Lowell.

Your choice to invest in kids and teens that others tend to discount matters. It sends a message to them that they are just as worthy as anyone else, even your own children. We know we have amazing members, they just need a chance and to know that others believe in them too – and you send that message consistently. The fact that our community rallied around our

new Teen Center speaks to the belief that Lowell's most vulnerable youth **can and will break the cycle of poverty** in their lives.

It means so much to teens like Meghan, who's growing confidence is pushing her to try new things and take on new challenges, and Cameron, who raves about our newly renovated Teen Center where he will pursue his goals and build a successful future for himself, or the a parent who found the Club to be an important factor to finding financial security for her family. It is by believing in our youth and their families that you are helping our vision of ending generational poverty in Lowell come closer to reality.

*"The Junior Staff program has improved my communication skills a lot. Before, I didn't know how to talk to people and I was getting in trouble all of the time. Now, the way I talk is more mature and people respect me more because of it."*

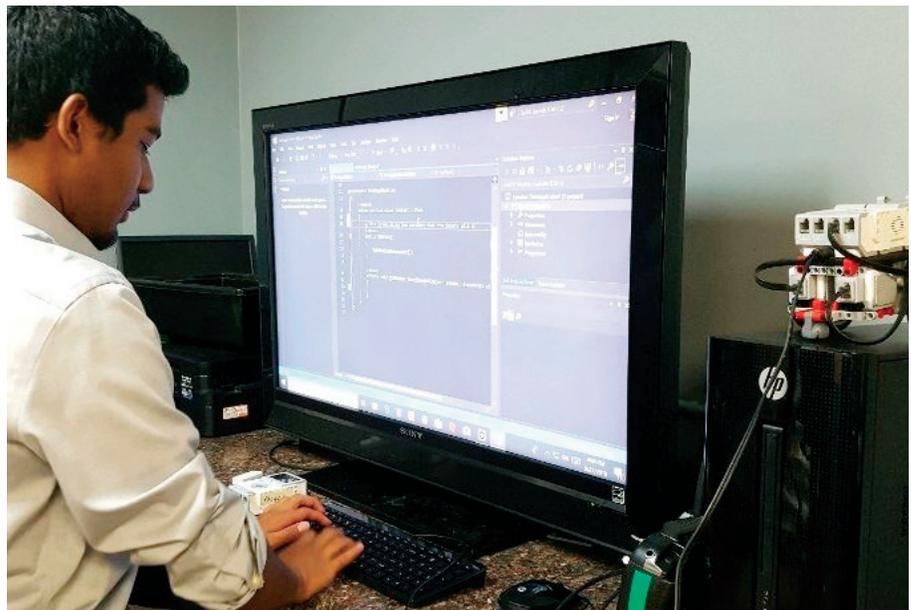
*– Zachary, a participant in the new Junior Staff*

*"Teens are a crucial focus area for the Club to achieve our vision of ending generational poverty."*

Joe Hungler, Executive Director



Executive Director Joe Hungler with enthusiastic Club member Matthew



*"The Club has allowed me to access more opportunities than I thought I ever could. I can say that I'm ready to head off to college and pursue any dream I've ever wanted."*

-- Anthony, high school Junior

# The Open Door

Boys & Girls Club of Greater Lowell • Fall 2018

## More teens, more often

*“I can never thank you enough for giving me and my fellow teens more opportunities and things to do at the Club.”*

Cameron, age 16

Although our younger members typically come to the Club after school out of necessity, our teen members usually choose to be a member of the Boys & Girls Club on their own. Creating an environment that is welcoming and attractive to teens is important to our vision for many reasons. According to the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, “nearly one-fifth (19%) of juvenile violent crimes occur in the 4 hours between 3 p.m. and 7 p.m. on school days.” – but when teens are busy participating in engaging programs during those hours, crime rates go down. Additionally, After-school programs are critical in helping to ensure that all young people are afforded the opportunities that will help them thrive and meet their full potential.

After-school programs encourage teens to explore different interest areas to find their passion, offer academic help to students who are struggling with their schoolwork, and help alleviate hunger by providing nutritious foods.<sup>1</sup>

Executive Director Joe Hungler explains “Teens are a crucial focus area for the Club to achieve our vision of ending generational poverty. **The high school years are when teens decide, either intentionally or not, what happens in their future.** The Club offers critical opportunities for teens to expand their perception of what options are available to them, for role models and mentors to raise their expectations of what they are capable of, and to gain the skills and knowledge necessary to be prepared for a successful life beyond high school. These teens also become the role models for the elementary and middle school youth at the Club.”

With support from the Smith Family Foundation, Planet Fitness, The Theodore and Mary Baker Family and the UPS Foundation, this past year saw major improvements to our Teen Center. The footprint for teens doubled from one Teen Room

to three separate spaces, which includes a Teen Lounge, a Career & College Readiness Center, and Teen STEM Center. Additionally, a former leased space was converted into a Makerspace for STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts and Mathematics) programs. Our Makerspace and expanded Teen Center allow teens to discover new passions and develop 21<sup>st</sup> Century skills that are imperative in our current job market. Our Sports & Fitness program now includes a state-of-the-art mini judgement-free fitness center – with all renovations and equipment provided by Planet Fitness.

These changes allow our Club to now serve twice as many teens in the afternoon and evening hours – and we are striving to see at least 150 teens each day after school. Club teens are already remarking about the improvements:

**“I like all the new opportunities we have in the Teen Center”** shares Thomas, and Joshua says **“I already told my friends (that they should join the Club) because it is amazing here.”** ■

<sup>1</sup>“America after 3 PM , Afterschool in Communities of Concentrated poverty”, Afterschool Alliance, 2016.



Teens in the new Career & College Readiness Center prepare their portfolios



Teens participating in a Gender Issues workshop in the newly expanded Teen Lounge



Meghan (right) shows off a geodesic structure she and friend built in the STEM room

## The Club is my first home

*"I would say the Club is my first home now, because my foster home is just a foster home. I'd rather be here. I feel most comfortable here."* Meghan, age 14

Meghan has been coming to the Boys & Girls Club of Greater Lowell for about 5 years now – though she has moved around the area quite a bit, the Club remains a constant in her life. Over the past couple years, Meghan has been in and out of foster care, at times separated from her 4 siblings. In the midst of this instability, she grounds herself at the Club.

One of Meghan's early experiences at the Club was attending the summer program where she was able to take art lessons at the Whistler House with other Club members every day for a week. This sparked her interest in art, which she still nurtures today in the new Makerspace with staff member Na Lam. Her creative



Meghan works on a painting while Board member Kristyn McKenna looks on

interests have expanded to writing, which helps her process the more challenging situations in her life.

Program Director Alisha Harrison is proud of the growth she's seen in Meghan in the past 18 months "She was always a good kid, but she laid low with headphones on and seemed disengaged and excluded. The art program helped her learn ways to express herself, and now she is getting more involved in programs like photography, FLY group (an all-girls discussion forum) and is looking forward to joining Diplomas 2 Degrees and Keystone."

Now, Meghan shares that she comes to the Club every day and stays as late as she can. "The staff keep me coming back every day, they are great to talk to." She goes on to say **"the Club has changed who I am as a person.** Now I say 'hi' to people and they know me."

Thank you for providing a place for young people like Meghan to grow and thrive in the face of challenging situations. ■



Club teens were thrilled when they saw the Planet Fitness mini judgement free zone for the first time



Teens made their mark in the new Makerspace by designing and painting this graphic on the wall.



Theresa Farrah and her two sons

*The Club provides an environment where children are encouraged to grow and reach for the stars no matter where they started."*

-Theresa Farrah

When asked what she might like to share with the community of individuals and companies that support the Club, Theresa says "The Club is an invaluable asset to our community. Your support of our youth and families will come full circle. The support that funds the Club will go back into Lowell to make our community stronger and create much needed leaders."

■ [Read Theresa's success story on the next page.](#)

To learn more about the Boys & Girls Club of Greater Lowell's teen programs visit [www.lbgc.org/teens](http://www.lbgc.org/teens), or contact Angel at [abrunelle@lbgc.org](mailto:abrunelle@lbgc.org) to set up a time to visit and take a tour of the new spaces.



**Boys & Girls Club of Greater Lowell**  
657 Middlesex Street  
Lowell, MA 01851  
Tel: 978-458-4526  
Fax: 978-453-9740  
[www.lbgc.org](http://www.lbgc.org)

## The Club and my first home

The Boys & Girls Club has affected three generations of Theresa Farrah's family in a positive way. Theresa's history with the Boys & Girls Club of Greater Lowell began with her father, who attended the "Lowell Boys Club" when he was growing up. "My dad would glow when he talked about the various fitness competitions he participated in with the Club. It is doubtful he would have had these wonderful experiences if the Boys & Girls Club was not in his community as he was one of five children raised by a single father."

Years later, Theresa and her sister learned to swim at the Club as children. The Club came back into Theresa's life during a challenging period for her as a single parent.

"One afternoon, in a discussion with another mother I mentioned the expense of after school care. I explained how frustrating it was to have a good job and barely make ends meet, while supporting my 7 and 8 year old sons on my own. She suggested I look into the Boys & Girls Club in Lowell because her son loved it." Theresa decided to enroll her boys at the Club,

noting how grateful she was to learn that there was a place for her sons to be engaged after school that only cost \$30 per year to join.

**"The Club has given me the most amazing gift, homeownership.**

After a couple years of not paying for expensive after school care, I was able to save enough money to purchase our home! It was a challenge to support two growing boys on my own. The reduced cost for summer care and weekly after school care allowed me to breathe a sigh of relief."

Not only did Theresa find the Boys & Girls Club to relieve a substantial financial burden, she also shared that the program was really beneficial for her children. "My boys loved the wrestling program, the music room, and computer lab. The best sight was picking them up from the club when they were all sweaty and red faced rambling about whatever sport they were just playing.

**The Club provides an environment where children are encouraged to grow and reach for the stars no matter where they started.**



Theresa's father was in a band at the Lowell Boys Club ■

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