



KING STREET CENTER'S MISSION IS TO EMPOWER YOUTH TO EXPLORE THEIR TALENTS AND FIND THEIR VOICE THROUGH LEARNING, PLAY, & OPPORTUNITY.



# Crowning Moments

King Street Center | Established 1971 | [www.kingstreetcenter.org](http://www.kingstreetcenter.org) | Fall 2023

## ACADEMIC & CAREER EXPLORATION PROGRAM

### A NEW CHAPTER FOR KING STREET CENTER TEENS

Imagine you're 14 years old, just starting high school, and already you are being asked what you want to do when you grow up. The truth is, you have no idea. Right now, you are just trying to navigate everyday life – social pressures, academics, and family expectations. Where would you even start anyway? Besides, you have more responsibilities than a lot of the kids in your grade. Your parents work really hard, have non-traditional work hours, and you have to take on an after school job and/or be responsible for your younger siblings. Even if you wanted to figure out what your future might hold, you simply cannot add that to the list of things to juggle.

Senior year arrives in a flash. Fellow students your age have spent the last three years building up a resume and are starting to apply for colleges, frantically writing essays about where they see their future headed. You too have worked hard in school, but you've also had to work outside of school and there's been no room for future planning. It feels overwhelming to know what to do next, and you

freeze. Graduation day arrives and you are feeling no closer to knowing how to answer the question you were asked at 14 years old: what do you want to do? And as you listen to the opportunities your friends have had time to build for themselves, you dream of one day having the resources and support to do the same.

For many kids in our community, this is their experience. The reality is that for low-income families, every member is responsible for the overall well-being of the household. After learning from and listening to over 200 members of our King Street Center community this past year – including parents, youth, and alumni – it was clear that parents want nothing more for their child than to find a successful path in life. Yet, there is a serious gap for high school aged youth in Burlington with limited or no financial resources to have equal access to opportunities helping them discover their passion and direction.

For more than 50 years, King Street Center has served the youth of this community, and we know that just one exposure to a potential career can

change the trajectory of a child's life. A little over a year ago, one of our students took a flight lesson with his mentor and is now a Civil Air Patrol Cadet with his eyes set on joining the AirForce. Another student determined to become an FBI investigator is now personally connected to Vermont's sole congressional representative who is putting her in touch with FBI officials. We've witnessed this moment of spark in many eyes over the years. Now, we're reaching for more of it.

That is why we are expanding upon our current Job Club program for



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 STORY

**\*NEW\* Academic & Career Exploration Program!** The King Street Center Teen Program has gotten a massive upgrade! Read all about our new programming and how it better serves our community's youth inside.



**Thank you for continuing to support learning, play, and opportunity for our community's youth.**



# From the Director

Friends,

October marked two years as executive director of King Street Center. I remember my interview like it was yesterday. Covid still very much in its height, I met on the rooftop with a group of staff and board members to try and explain why I am the right person for the Center and why the Center is right for me. I shared

with them that for my entire career, I've dedicated myself to advocating for children and families, and that I cared deeply about creating a world where all of us belonged. I said, what makes King Street Center so special -- the deeper reason I wanted to be the organization's leader -- is the community and how it connects back to my own childhood.

You see, I am the first generation in my family born in the United States. I spent a lot of my childhood, especially teen years, navigating the space in between being from there and being from here. I grasped hard for a sense of belonging. In fact, I went by Beth up until transitioning to this role because it was easier to pronounce than Shabnam, and with my maiden last name being Vahabzadeh, well... I did what so many kids do to fit in. I spared people from feeling awkward at the expense of my own culture and identity. It took me too long to realize that it didn't have to be that way. That you can be both from there and from here and not have to choose. That you don't have to fit yourself into an identity box.

The experience of being in between cultures is one our youth also navigate and I want them to have a confidence and pride in who they are that did not come easily to me. I want to have an impact on a community I care about. It's why I came here two years ago and it's why I'm here today. I believe it's also why you continue to read these newsletters.

In the coming year, we are committed to centering equity, deepening family engagement, and enhancing our youth development programs, with a special eye towards re-imagining our teen program. And I truly believe that we are creating a world where every child and family is thriving in an equitable community.

For me, there is nothing more beautiful than that. So, thank you. Thank you for showing up year after year for us. Thank you for volunteering your time for our kids. And thank you for being the foundation that allows us to be bold and welcome change in service of a better future for all of us.

With Gratitude,

## ...ACE Program (FROM PAGE 1)

middle schoolers and establishing an Academic & Career Exploration (ACE) Program for high school youth. In its 26 years of existence, our current Job Club has helped over 300 students learn vital job, life, and financial literacy skills.

The ACE Program aims to build on this impact by exposing high school aged youth to a variety of career fields, such as tech, medical, customer service, culinary arts, education, government, and more, and will provide a stipend for participation. Financially resourcing them means more kids will no longer have to choose between opportunities and income. The program will also support youth interested in exploring additional academic endeavors -- whether through community college, technical school, or a traditional four year college -- by introducing them to what it would be like and supporting them in getting there.



Congresswoman Becca Balint visits with King Street Center teens & staff.

A program like this will catapult more kids into a reality where they do not have to wonder what might have been if they had the financial resources to say yes. ACE is a bridge to the future, and there is so much for our kids to explore on the other side.

We are so thankful to the Courtney and Victoria Buffum Family Foundation for a generous endowment gift that will seed this essential and critical programming for our future leaders.

## King Street Center on STEAM

Over the summer, we turned our focus to STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Art, and Math). The framework of STEAM teaches students how to think critically, solve problems, and utilize creativity while preparing them for career fields that are poised for growth. A report from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, STEAM-related occupations have a projected growth of 10% between now and 2029, compared to 2.3% for non-STEAM occupations. It also lists median annual wages of over \$86,000 compared to \$39,000 for all occupations. Our new Academic & Career Exploration program aims to expose youth to a variety of career opportunities, and STEAM is at the forefront.



In August, youth engaged in a week-long event building robotics and rocket launchers, and exploring the latest makerspace technology, thanks to our friends at BETA Technologies and FIRST in Vermont. At the end of the week, teens presented their Lego robotics in a STEAM Showcase. Every single one of them moved! Some gave out high fives, while others moved cranes to pick up other Lego-made items. Each one more impressive than the last, many of the teens' eyes lit up as their robots accomplished what they intended it to do.

While the teens showed off their robots, our kindergarten through 5th grade students explored the ToolBus, a mobile solar-powered innovation studio, built to empower boundless creative freedom built by Worcester Polytechnic Institute student, Jeremy Trilling. From laser cutters and 3D printers to CNC routers, welding stations and solar energy, every King Street kid got a chance to learn about tools that will only continue to get better and become more relevant to everyday life in the future.

# high five

## 2023 Award Winners!

Every year, we give out 5 High Fives for those who make King Street Center especially bright.

Please give it up for these incredible winners!

Generously supported by:



**Staff:**  
Kelli Shonter



**Student:**  
Calvin Millham-Berry



**Volunteer:**  
Linda Wellings



**Community Partner:**  
Chill Foundation



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## Mentors Needed!

**"Every kid is one caring adult away from being a success story."**

- Josh Shipp



Join King Street Center's award-winning Mentor Program today and invest your time in the leaders, innovators, and change-makers of tomorrow.

