



# WORCESTER YOUTH CENTER

2014 Annual Report

[worcesteryouthcenter.org](http://worcesteryouthcenter.org)

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## COVER

*Out of the Ashes*, collaborative work, YouthReach Arts Program participants, watercolor (2015), a program funded in part by the Massachusetts Cultural Council.



*All Are Equal*, Leona Withers, acrylic on canvas (2015).



## 20 YEARS, STILL COUNTING

Taking time to celebrate the 20th anniversary of the Worcester Youth Center has offered us the chance to reflect on how far we've come and how much work remains to be done to help young people build lasting, positive changes in their lives.

As one of our alumni featured in this report shared, "Don't forget to look back while you're focused on moving forward." In our 20th year, the Worcester Youth Center has taken this advice to heart. We honored UMass Memorial Health Care for more than 18 years of support by presenting the WYC Community Partner Award to CEO Eric Dickson, MD. Founding member Jason Perez read a message sent by former Executive Director Adolfo Arrastia, applauding current members for keeping the Center "alive and vibrant. Truly, a Beacon of Light. Forever, a Place to Go Farther."

Our focus is on assisting young people to complete high school, enter college and obtain employment. This multi-pronged approach helps us to have an impact in other areas, including the reduction of youth violence, as well as providing a safe place for youth to discuss and explore issues of race and identity. The YouthReach Arts program participants, whose work illustrates much of this annual report, chose to examine racism and adopted the theme "Eracism" – building solidarity through equality. They shine light on issues that matter to them through their own artistic expression.

We thank you for your continued support of our work with city youth. While our anniversary theme was "Past, Present and Future," we clearly understand that today's youth can't wait until "someday" for better opportunities in a world free of violence and discrimination. Here at the Worcester Youth Center, our youth aren't just our future, they are foremost our present.

Samuel Martin  
*Executive Director*

Laurie Ross  
*President*

*The Colors of Change,*  
youth artist collaboration  
(2015).

## WYC Alumni Awards

### The Founders

Sammy Addo  
Fontella Addo  
Sam Calderon  
Luis Dijon  
Manny Guerra  
Sean Harris  
Anne Moriarty  
Jeff Owusu  
Jason Perez  
Pito Perez  
Sabrina Rivera  
Lynne Simonds  
Dekedras Wright

### WYC Youth Award

Gina Antuna

### WYC Community Partner Award

UMass Memorial Health Care, Inc.

## GROWTH THROUGH WATERING



Young Adult Forester waters a “gator” with WTI supervisor.

Worcester has long been known as a city of trees. After the massive infestation of the Asian Longhorn Beetle (ALB), however, the city’s leafy canopy thinned out considerably, with the removal of tens of thousands of maples and other hardwoods. Thanks, in part, to the Worcester Tree Initiative (WTI), new, ALB-resistant trees are being planted in the hardest-hit areas of the city, and Worcester Youth Center members are helping to ensure they thrive.

Traveling across town with a 250-gallon water tank, these Young Adult Foresters are planting, removing stakes from trees that no longer need them, and canvassing residents to encourage tree watering, as well as refilling “gators” – those green bags seen hugging the slender trunks of newly-planted trees.

“The city is planting 800 trees each fall and spring, and we have the capacity to water 400,” explained Ruth Seward, Executive Director. “That’s why we encourage people to water, too.” A newly planted tree needs 15 gallons of water a week in the summer. The program runs five days a week with two four-hour shifts. WTI partners with the Youth Center because they want to expose 18- to 21-year-olds to environmental careers, Ruth said. “We give them a little light to help their growth.”

One Circle girls show off their Paint Night creations.



## ONE CIRCLE GIRLS COME FULL CIRCLE

From rock climbing to roller blading, this year’s One Circle girls were on the move. In a program shift with weekly meetings at the Youth Center, Latino Education Institute and Plumley Village, the group of 30 girls ages 13 and 14 from schools across the city enjoyed eight field trips together throughout the school year.

Another new format found the group taking advantage of Worcester’s art resources, visiting a dance academy, enjoying paint night at Worcester State University and making bracelets at the Youth Center. Other excursions offered the girls a focus on the future, with speakers on financial literacy and career readiness, plus a college campus tour.

“We did a lot of work on healthy relationships,” said program coordinator Jennifer Jimenez. The 10 Youth Center girls undertook self-reflection through journaling and other exercises to grapple with identity issues and recognize their strengths. Together, they planned a community project to support the Worcester Animal Rescue League, selling lollipops at Sullivan Middle School with the paw-print message “I hope this makes your day less ruff.”

The frequent field trips helped girls bond across the three groups, even though they attended different schools. By the end of the year, Jennifer said, “These girls now have a direction and see the world with greater depth.”



## CONNECTING THE DISCONNECTED

Giovanni Hostos was on “a wheel headed in the wrong direction” when he first came to the Worcester Youth Center five years ago. “On the streets, nobody was pushing me to go the right way,” he said. At the Youth Center, however, he has been involved in a basketball league and number of job training programs, and it’s helped him find his strengths.

Giovanni was in the first cohort of youth identified through a state-funded program, the Safe and Successful Youth Initiative Program (SSYI), established by former Governor Deval Patrick in 2011 to reduce violence in 11 of the state’s cities with high crime rates. Connecting the disconnected through intensive outreach, the Youth Center is a key partner for this intervention program targeting 14- to 24-year-olds at high risk to become involved in violent crime as a victim or perpetrator. Through trauma-informed case management, education, career and parenting guidance, the Center is helping close to 50 youth interrupt that cycle of violence.

“Working with these youth provides the biggest bang for your buck for reducing violence,” said Sgt. Miguel Lopez, Youth Program Director for the Worcester Police Department. “The Worcester Youth Center has been one of our strongest partners. They understand the nature of this work, how good kids can go bad without a positive connection.”

While the program seeks changes in people’s lives over time, the results are already looking positive. Gov. Patrick visited the Youth Center on December 22, 2014 to celebrate.

The impact on Worcester is clear. “The Safe and Successful Youth Initiative Program is indispensable in combating violent crime in our community,” said City Manager Edward M. Augustus, Jr. “Since its inception in 2011, we have seen an average of 116 fewer victims of violent crime each year in Worcester, and more than 100 participants have been mentored and trained, enabling them to receive an education and find meaningful employment – and have a brighter future. The City of Worcester is proud to continue to support this vital program.”

The Center’s anti-violence work extends beyond SSYI-funded activities, including the December 2014 champion youth team in the Worcester Police Athletic & Activities League basketball program and ongoing education support and job training programming for young men and women.



TOP

Former Governor Deval Patrick and Worcester Youth Center staff celebrate the Safe and Successful Youth Initiative on December 22, 2014.

ABOVE

Giovanni Hostos

Gov. Patrick and Executive Director Samuel Martin

## FROM RAP LYRICS TO LEGAL BRIEFS

Cesar Vega was passionate about rap music, and the Worcester Youth Center gave him space without judgment. Seeking a supportive place to write and rehearse with friends, he found it at 526 Main Street in 1997. His mother, who moved with him from Peru when he was 10, had taught him poems to memorize and recite at family gatherings. A teacher at North High encouraged him, letting him submit poetry assignments to boost his English grade.

Those writing skills helped launch his career in law, although via a non-traditional path – with detours including a baby, a high school equivalency diploma and with Youth Center staff urging him on, studies at Quinsigamond Community College. In a constitutional law course there, Supreme Court opinions fascinated him. He knew he wanted to write like that.

Transferring to Clark University, Cesar studied government and international relations. His heart set on law school, his grades and board scores sank his chances. In despair, he asked his advisor, “How could they shut the door on my dream?” The advisor replied with his own question – had Cesar contacted any of the schools directly?

One call led to an interview with the dean of Suffolk University Law School, and he became a law student. “I didn’t know people to show me how to do things,” he recalled, “so necessity made me a

“How could they shut the door on my dream?”



networker.” Graduating during the severe economic downturn of 2009 led him to “cold email” associates at law firms, asking for five minutes of job search advice. Don’t forget to look back while you’re focused on moving forward, he was told. That prompted him to contact Judge Timothy Hillman, who had judged his mock trial class at Clark. Cesar asked to be his law clerk, unpaid, to gain experience. He also reconnected with a QCC professor, and became adjunct faculty in criminal law.

Judge Hillman referred him for an opening with the District Attorney’s office, and in 2010, Cesar became an assistant DA. In 2013, Cesar was named an assistant city solicitor, where he represents the city of Worcester in civil litigation and claims. Looking back once more, in September 2014, he joined the Worcester Youth Center board.



“I really connected with certain staff there.”

## MEMBER TO MENTOR

Lucia Alfaro was that girl in high school involved in everything. From her home base at the Pleasant Street Neighborhood Network Center, her activities included the public library’s Teen Advisory Group, Minority Achievers Program and Bruce Wells Upward Bound. At Doherty Memorial High School, it was the soccer team, MLK Welcoming Committee, and Educational Talent Search. The Worcester Youth Center, just a few blocks from school, became her place to hang out.

“I really connected with certain staff there,” she said. Involved with the youth leadership program, Urban Community Action Planning for Teens (UCAPT) for neighborhood problem-solving and planning, Lucia recalled the first days of the relocated Youth Center at 326 Chandler Street in 2004.

Attending Assumption College, she would return for needed support. Graduating in 2010 with a bachelor’s degree in human services, Lucia spent the next year working toward a master’s in rehabilitation counseling. Her practical training was 100 hours at the Youth Center, doing “a little bit of everything,” but particularly working with youth in the High School Equivalency program. Her formal internship was with the Massachusetts Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (MSPCC) as an outpatient clinician and case manager. Her career ever since has tracked both organizations, including roles as the MSPCC milieu counselor, supporting both youth and staff at the Center, and clinical case manager for SSYI participants.

Today, she is the clinical specialist for MSPCC’s Healthy Families of Greater Worcester program, a management position that has opened her eyes to the organization’s broader impact. She supports supervisors, home visitors and program participants, and participates in hiring decisions and new staff training. And as a positive Latina role model, she still provides counseling services at the Youth Center.

With her skills and experience, she’s now a colleague and advisor to current and former Youth Center staff she once saw as mentors. Acknowledging that her own background has helped her build rapport with young adults from similar circumstances, she said, “the Youth Center has always been there for me.”



## THE COLORS OF CHANGE

Art unleashes creative thinking and provides an outlet for ideas and feelings too difficult to put into words. More than a dozen students spent the year developing their creative voices in the YouthReach Arts Program. Beyond gaining skills with pencils and paint at the Worcester Art Museum, participants chose to focus their artistic energy on changing the way we express our views about race and racism.

It was a tough topic for the group. Both art teacher Jen Swan and program coordinator Darius Barosy engaged them in conversations about racism at both the systemic and individual levels. They took a field trip to see the film “Selma” and created a collaborative work of the Edmund Pettus Bridge. Sharing news articles, Jen and Darius encouraged the youth to be open, honest and respect different opinions and life experiences. “There were some really awkward and difficult moments,” said Jen.

Yet their artwork offers more hope than despair. The collaborative image of the phoenix rising from the ashes (*see cover*) recurs in several individual works. A series of illustrated famous quotations from Rosa Parks to Chris Rock strike a positive note. “With time and trust we were able to tackle the issue and create some powerful artwork,” said Jen.

Their paintings’ exhibition, titled “Eracism,” is defined as building solidarity for equality. After its opening at the Youth Center, it will travel to other community sites to share the youth’s message.



TOP  
*Rising Anew*, Brian Colon (2015).

ABOVE  
*Breaking Free*, Yancie Martinez  
and Lacey Nguyen (2015).

## Your Dollars at Work

Over the past two decades, the Worcester Youth Center has touched thousands of young people’s lives and helped them make positive changes. Your contributions make a significant difference in many ways. We have much to celebrate and remain grateful for the community’s confidence and support.

### Statement of Financial Position — December 31, 2014

#### ASSETS

##### Current Assets

Cash and equivalents	\$141,981
Investments	\$839,572
Grants and contracts receivable	\$143,988
Prepaid expenses	\$23,117

**Total Current Assets** **\$1,148,658**

Property and equipment, net **\$549,208**

**TOTAL ASSETS** **\$1,697,866**

#### LIABILITIES AND NET ASSETS

##### Liabilities

Accounts payable	\$13,941
Accrued expenses	\$32,077

**Total Liabilities** **\$63,565**

##### Net Assets

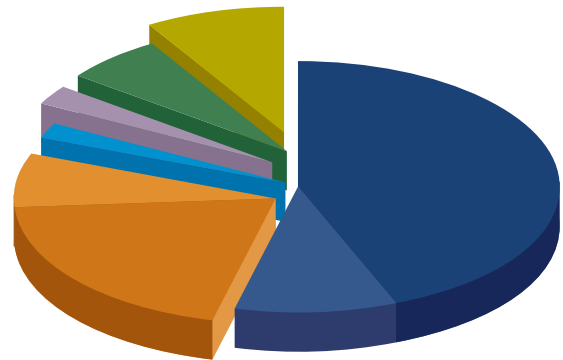
Unrestricted	\$1,593,731
Temporarily restricted	\$40,570

**Total Net Assets** **\$1,634,301**

**TOTAL LIABILITIES AND NET ASSETS** **\$1,697,866**

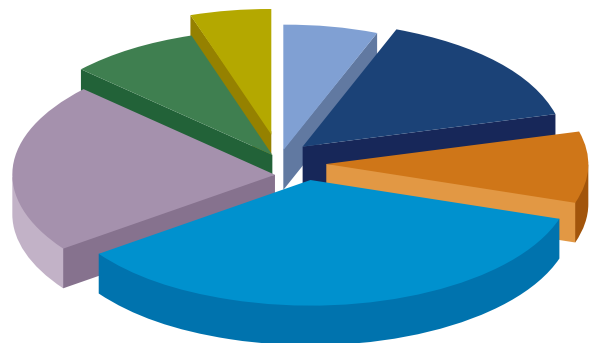
#### REVENUE Year ending December 31, 2014

Grants and contracts	\$428,144
Temporarily restricted	\$94,500
Contributions	\$186,831
Temporarily restricted	\$58,130
Investment income, net of investment fees	\$14,808
Net realized and unrealized gain on investments	\$16,428
Contributions in-kind	\$59,503
Other income	\$7,996
<b>Total Revenue and Support</b>	<b>\$866,340</b>



#### EXPENSES Year ending December 31, 2014

Recreation	\$47,706
Leadership	\$122,395
Health and wellness	\$71,504
Work readiness	\$331,534
Education	\$202,948
Management and general	\$37,384
Fundraising	\$33,266
<b>Total Expenses</b>	<b>\$846,737</b>







## Thank You to Our Generous Donors in 2014

### CORPORATE, FOUNDATION AND GOVERNMENT DONORS

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# WORCESTER YOUTH CENTER YOUTH SPREE DAY JULY 9 1998



Showcase of local talent carries Youth Center banner

Chris (left) is also on stage. "The city manager is aware of the show, the mayor is aware of the show, the chief of police... — they all know about it," says Marlene. "Many" Guerns, an outreach worker for the center and one of the organizers of the show. "They are all willing to be here. But I also know that it is a special and an incident happens, but it will be the end for a long time of anyone going to the show." Some 60 groups auditioned before the final cut. "I had no idea the money would be so good," says Guerns, whose group #20, E.S.I., (Parents Of Educated Blacks) is scheduled to close the show. "I know that we



Participating in the Youth Convention were, from left, Jeff A. "Junior" Owens, Officer Daniel Rossario, Sean M. Harris, Officer Karen A. Shea, Marlene "Manny" Guerra and Officer John J. Grady.

## Police, teens trade shoes



## Youth Center move remains an open issue



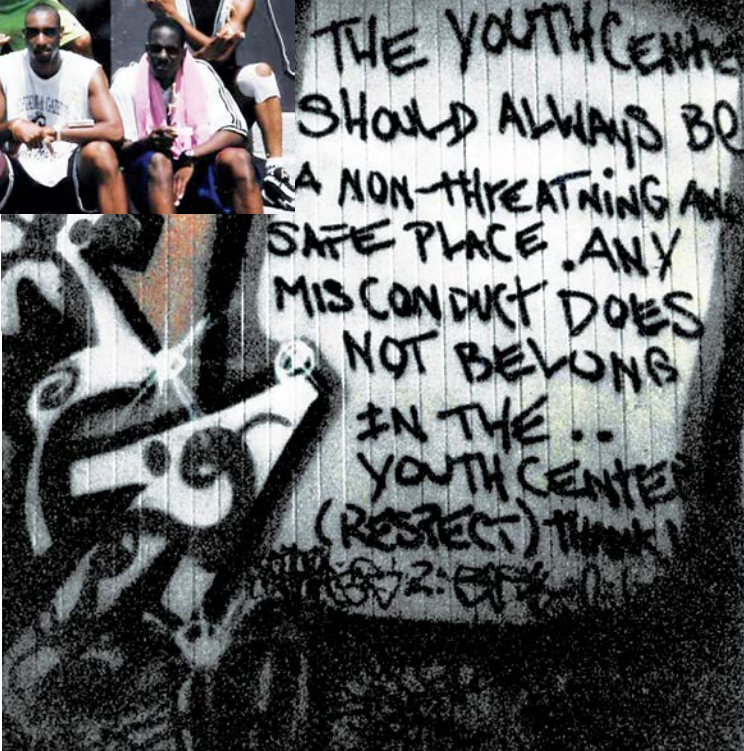
## Hip-hop hopes

Reno hears from all sides



After her speech, Attorney General Janet Reno talks with three members of a Worcester youth group, Teen Action. From left, Marlene Guerra, Jeffrey Owens and Sean Harris.

## Students have first, last word



## Youths seek a chance from 'suits'

### INDIVIDUAL DONORS

#### Mentor Society Members

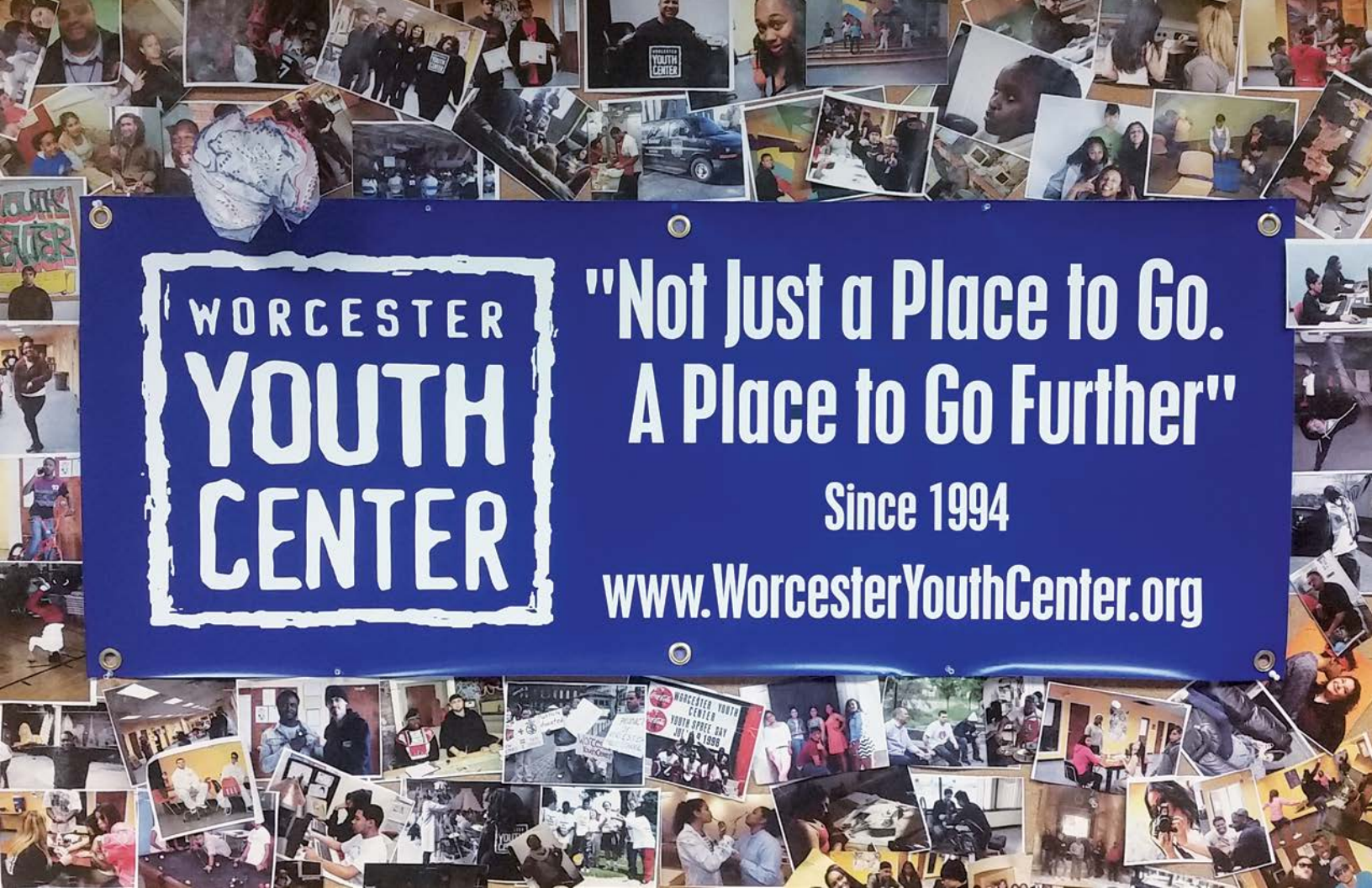
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# WORCESTER YOUTH CENTER

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\* Deceased



326 Chandler Street  
Worcester, MA 01602

BELOW

*All Blood Is Red*, Brett Connor,  
YouthReach Arts Program  
participant (2015).



NOT JUST A PLACE TO GO. A PLACE TO GO FURTHER.

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