

SAY CONNECTS

A YEAR-LONG SERIES FOCUSING ON COMMUNICATING OUR PRIORITIES FOR CHILDREN

INTRODUCTION

Linda Francis

Building connections

It is all about being connected.

A parent with their child. That child to a friend. Each of our children to our community. That child's connection might be to a neighbor who stops them for a chat on the block, a soccer coach who knows how to listen, a teacher who is a keen observer and an active connector.

Connection. Belonging. It is what our heart tells us is essential. And it is what the data tells us about our opportunity to grow Oak Park and River Forest into villages where every child is welcome and knows it.

We are SAY. Success of All Youth. We are a part of the Oak Park-River Community Foundation. Our tagline is "Community Care from Cradle to Career." And our work over these past years has been to connect children and families to all the community partners already at work in our villages, to make sure that we know what's most important in that work, that we use actual information (data) to set our priorities and to measure whether our shared efforts are working toward this single goal:

Every child is empowered to reach her/his full potential. That's success.

Moving ahead, it is also clear that SAY needs to work harder to tell our stories to our villages. In partnership with Wednesday Journal and with financial support from the Good Heart Work Smart Foundation, SAY is launching a year-long project focusing on communicating

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Kuumba Kids perform a dance titled *All Ah We*, during the 10th Annual Harambee Celebration at Longfellow Elementary School in Oak Park in 2016. Donna Callender (right) is the artistic director of Harambee, a cultural arts program she initiated.

A mom, advocating for her son, grows African American arts program

Harambee, now a Longfellow School staple, boosts belonging

By **CASSANDRA WEST**
Contributing Reporter

Hasani Cannon was about to start first grade when his mother wanted to know whether Oak Park's Longfellow School offered an African American history program.

When Donna Callender heard the answer—no—she decided to put on a program herself. Working with Longfellow's Parents of African American Children (PAAC), she launched Night at the Museum, an annual Black History Month program that flourished for several years at the school, 715 Highland Ave.

Eventually, Callender rebranded the cultural arts program as Harambee, Swahili for "let's pull together."

"I wanted people to understand that we're all in this together as one community of people," Callender says in explaining the name change. "The only way of getting all of our children to be successful and getting the same

advantages despite their racial background is we all can do it as one body."

A West African dance teacher and performer, Callender also started Kuumba Kids, a dance troupe that became a popular extracurricular program within Harambee.

See **HARAMBEE** on **page 2**



In partnership with



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OAK PARK-RIVER FOREST
Community Foundation

Sponsored by



Making our communities a better place — one child at a time!

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our priorities for children.

Starting today, SAY Connects will be a multimedia communication campaign to help connect the dots, connect our community on issues of importance to ensure that all kids can be successful.

On the third Wednesday of each month, you'll find this special section in the Journal. We're committed to in-depth reporting and compelling story telling about the real challenges families face, the paths over and around obstacles, the successes and the stumbles we will make in seeking genuine change. And because we want this effort to be practical and real, we'll offer up local resources families can latch on to and the data we're looking at on the indicators of child/youth well-being that our community is tackling.

Watch for a new series of videos produced by the Journal on topics of connection and belonging. And four times this year, we'll convene for a speakers series on topics most important to building strong and happy families.

This is a journey. We are asking all community members to join us on the journey. We do not have all the answers and we will, undoubtedly, fail from time to time. But we are committed to "failing forward" as we learn how to get it right. Join us.



Linda Francis

Director
Success of All Youth

Our website is SAYoprf.org. And we're on Facebook at Success of All Youth.

Summer's not created equal

Enrichment is great. But it is costly and a challenge to navigate

By **CASSANDRA WEST**
Contributing Reporter

Name a child who doesn't look forward to a summer break from nine straight months of school? Parents, on the other hand, not so much.

For moms, and it's usually moms, the search to find ways for kids to spend their summers begins almost right after (a much shorter) winter holiday break. It takes sharp investigative skills, patience and a checkbook. In today's academically and socially competitive high-stakes educational world, parents send their kids "to camp."

But these aren't some rustic, bunk bed outfitted, spider-laden places in the woods. Today's camps involve tinkering and coding and urban adventures: the kind of learning that doesn't always fit into a conventional school year.

Parents' circumstances are a big determinant of camp options that, in the Oak Park-River Forest area, can range from just under \$100 per week for basic camps to nearly \$1,000 per week for immersive STEM-type camps.

In 2014, according to The New York Times, parents reported that they would probably spend an average of \$958 per child on summer expenses.

"It's expensive," says Carrie Summy, a River Forest mother of four who range in age from 7 to 14. Summy says she spends lots of time "collating information and sitting with lots of paper" that she prints out about "all the organizations I know exist."

Although Summy explores cheaper options, final choices come down to



Students prepare to install zines they created in a summer arts program hosted by the Oak Park Education Foundation in 2015. The class installed the zines to give away for free on a pedestrian bridge on Home Avenue in Oak Park. (FILE)

ones that match schedules and still getting to her job in a timely manner. The running around in previous years "was insane," getting from one park district location to the next. Luckily, she works in downtown Oak Park. And as her children get older, the scramble has gotten easier, she admits.

Last year, was "very piecemeal, a park district thing here, a sleep away YMCA camp in Wisconsin. You're just

kind of building blocks of time over the summer, a little family vacation, time at a camp. And there's the day camp stuff to cover because I've got to actually work."

And the cost? "I don't want to admit how much I spend...thousands of dollars," says Summy. "A week of camp is \$150 to \$300."

This summer, Summy plans to stick "pretty much with the River Forest

Park District," which has a general day camp, "nothing super elaborate." But she's glad it's an option where her kids "will know all their friends and they're outside for the day."

Oak Park resident Juanta Griffin, also a mother of four, ages 6 to 18, knows well the juggling act and the cost of summer activity options. As a part-time employee at Oak Park's Hephzibah Children's Association

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"I teach through the premise of arts through education," which teaches students how to marry arts with their academics, Callender says of the after-school program that starts in October and culminates with Longfellow's Black History Month Harambee production.

This year, the three-hour production required an overflow room at the school. Hasani, 17, now an Oak Park and River Forest High School senior, grew up immersed in Harambee, playing drums for Kuumba (Swahili for creativity) Kids. Callender, 43, is the artis-

tic director of the dance troupe.

Hasani, who plans on a career in the fine arts, says being involved with Kuumba Kids boosted his confidence as a performer and influenced his desire to continue studying African music. Twelve years ago, his mother simply was looking for a way for her young son to connect to his heritage and take pride in expressing it.

"He's the reason I even wanted to do anything," Callender says. "At the time, there was nothing for him to relate to" culturally. Hasani has gone through the program from elementary through high school.

Back in 2006, PAAC was looking at ideas to help bridge the cultural gap that often leaves children of color not feeling a part of the total school experience.

Studies on social emotional development consistently show that extracurricular activities are crucial to educational attainment and even earnings later in life. Such activities also engender a sense of belonging, which Success of All Youth (SAY) sees as the cornerstone of efforts to empower young people to reach their full potential.

Within Kuumba Kids, which is open

to all students, Callender sees students blossom. Initially introverted students have ended up getting involved with a variety of extracurricular activities such as CAST, the theater arts program at Percy Julian Middle School. "One mother thanked me, saying that Kuumba Kids gave her daughter confidence to try out," Callender says.

"Parents embrace it because it's definitely a one-of-a-kind program in Oak Park, a town where we are a minority. It offers those children of color something they can be proud of and look forward to."

BASE Camp increases its scholarships

BASE Camp, the summer program of the Oak Park Education Foundation, will offer more than 55 camp options across the STEAM spectrum this year. And more kids will be able to take advantage of the specialty camps, thanks to funding that will allow the foundation to offer more scholarships to families who couldn't otherwise afford an expense that could top \$600 for four weeks.

"The whole idea around the scholarship program was born of the reality that there are two summers, depending on your economic circumstances," says Tracy Dell'Angela Barber, executive director. "One is full of enrichment and full of different kinds of experiences and maybe a morning of learning and then an afternoon with a parent. The reality for other families who are working really hard to make ends meet is that their kids don't necessarily access that kind of enrichment."

A foundation funder stepped up who is intentionally focused on of "eliminating the summer enrichment gap," says Dell'Angela.

The foundation also put more emphasis on getting out the word about scholarships. It developed stronger connections with social workers "so they help us advertise early on," says

Lindsay Bruce, BASE Camp director.

"We also partnered with different community orgs like Strive for Success and Success for All Youth." Over the holiday season, postcards about BASE Camp scholarships were put in the food and gift baskets some families receive through the township.

Dell'Angela Barber says, "We used to have to hunt families and say, 'Hey, do you want a scholarship?' " It was completely transformed this year. Fifty percent of the (scholarship) spots were gone in five hours."

BASE Camp registration opened Jan. 31 and by early March was about 90 percent full.

Ellie Edgeworth, 11, a rising fifth grader, received a scholarship last year and will get one this year, much to the delight of her mother, Lenita,

who quickly paid a \$40 per family co-pay fee.

Edgeworth wasn't aware of the scholarships until a school staffer urged her to see whether the family would qualify. She seemed to relish the experience as much as Ellie, who took a Lego engineering and coding session, did. "It's not only a summer camp. It's more an opportunity for children to get a feel for what they like over the summer without the pressure of [a standard] curriculum."

Ellie will do the full four weeks of BASE Camp then finish up her summer at Hephzibah.

BASE Camp will run from June 11 to July 6 at Beye Elementary, 230 N. Cuyler Ave., and Percy Julian Middle School, 416 S. Ridgeland Ave.



who is also finishing a degree at Concordia University Chicago, Griffin has explored multiple options, but defaults to Hephzibah because it's more affordable.

"For the summer, my kids go to Hephzibah," she says. As a Hephzibah staff member she will pay a nominal amount for tuition.

Griffin's older son used to attend a sports camp, but she and her husband couldn't maintain it. "It was expensive," hundreds of dollars that the family could not spare as they work to keep up with the other costs that come with living in Oak Park.

Griffin looks for summer scholarships, but for son in special education classes, those are hard to find, she says. "You have to be severely delayed. There's

nothing for people who are kind of in the middle. Or you have to be really good at sports or instruments. What about kids who just want to be kids?"

Hephzibah does a good job of providing summer experiences for those kids but only until 6th grade, Griffin says.

"When you ask what I'm doing for the summer, I don't know," says Griffin. "I'm going to try to make it work."

For lots of families, out-of-school plans will always be a patchwork as parents must juggle their every option. "I also have a mom who helps out, the support of people of around me who help," says Summy. "We do make it work. I know there's plenty of people in community who don't have that support."

Action Item SCHOLARSHIPS

- Families looking for scholarships to attend the **BASE Camp** program are invited to join a waiting list in the event an opening occurs. Learn more at opef.org/base-camp/
- **\$75,000** in BASE Camp scholarships have been awarded so far this year. That covers 119 children.
- Scholarship amounts ranged from **\$300 to \$1,000** per child.

- Scholarships for summer programs from the **Park District of Oak Park** are on the rise. In 2017, \$65,300 in scholarships were redeemed. That's up from \$30,700 the previous year. Learn more at pdop.org/camps
- **The YES Fund** is another effort to fund scholarships for local youth looking for enrichment. Almost 60 students earned \$20,000 in need-based scholarships in 2017. Scholarships are offered year-round. Find out more at oprfc.org/for-students/enrichment-grants

OP-RF Summer Camp Options

Hephzibah: Summer Hephzibah
www.aanderson@hephzibahhome.org

Oak Park Education Foundation (OPEF): BASE Camp
www.opef.org/base-camp/

Oak Park Park District
www.pdop.org/camps

River Forest Park District
www.rfparks.com/programs/summer-camps/

West Cook YMCA
www.westcookymca.org/main/summer-camp/

River Forest Community Center
www.rfcc.info/summer-camps/

CAST: Summer Arts Institute
www.jprisching.wixsite.com/castsummer/castsummer-arts-page

CAST: Youth Arts Institute
www.jprisching.wixsite.com/castsummer/youth-arts-page

Bravo: Frozen or Freaky Friday, Jr. Jr. Bravo: Jungle Books, Kids
www.bravoperformingarts.org/bravo-summer-academies/about

Code Play Learn: Sports & Coding Camp
www.codeplaylearn.com/summer-2018-oak-park/

Oak Park Art League: Gallery + S.T.U.D.I.O.
www.oakparkartleague.org

Heph Ed Incredicamp: Goop 3D Adventure
www.hephed.com/#goop2

Incredicamp: Sparks Quadcopter Adventure
www.hephed.com/#sparks

The Viola Project
www.violaproject.org/oak-park-camps-2018

Magical Minds: Harry Potter, Fashion & Trends, Pre-K
www.magicalmindsstudio.com/holidays-and-camps/

School of Rock
www.oakpark-sor.pike13.com/categories/16660

Dominican University: Summer Gifted and Talented Program
www.educate.dom.edu/academics/gifted-talented

Steve and Kate's Camp
www.steveandkatescamp.com/locations/oak-park-river-forest/

Oak Park Friends School
www.opfs.org/summer-camp.html

Alcuin Montessori: Camp Alcuin
www.alcuin.org/summer-camp.html

Camp Galileo: Innovation Camps for Kids
www.galileo-camps.com/camp-galileo/location/river-forest

St. Luke: Summer Camp
www.legacysportscamp.com/summer/st-luke-summer-camp-2018



From basic to high tech

Hephzibah Summer Day Care

Hephzibah, Oak Park's oldest social service agency, will host a summer day care running from June 11 to Aug. 10 at Irving Elementary School, 1125 Cuyler Ave. The day runs from 7:30 a.m. to 6 p.m. A new feature for 2018 are two-week Playshops that range from fashion design to adventures in engineering. The summer program can accommodate 250 students from kindergarten through 5th grade. Participating families need to be working or in enrolled in school or training program. Fees are based on a sliding scale based on family income.

Learn more by e-mailing aanderson@hephzibahhome.org

HephEd Incredicamps

Incredicamps are weeklong, hands-on sessions centered on STEAM activities. Two camps are offered: Goop for kids 8 to 12 and Sparks for ages 13 to 17. Goop focuses on 3D design and robotic fabrication. In the Sparks camp, participants build and pilot quadcopters and drones. Fees range from \$900 (includes field trip fee) to \$1,295 (includes materials). The day runs from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. Camps are held at Concordia University Chicago in River Forest.

Just one adult

Teacher, coach or neighbor, kids who connect find stronger path

By **CASSANDRA WEST**
Contributing Reporter

All kids need just one person who wants to find out what their dream is in life and then help them get there.

Frances Kraft remembers hearing that sentence spoken by Ron Ferguson, an economist who researches the achievement gap, during a conference she attended at Harvard University in 2013. And it now informs a lot of the work she does every day in Oak Park.

A teacher and education advocate who organized the student support coalition called the E-Team, Kraft says Ferguson calls the statement the "north star."

After she heard Ferguson frame it that way, she returned to Oak Park and started asking teenagers, "What's the number one thing you need in life?" By far, the teens told her that they needed just one person, an adult, who wants to take time to find out what their dreams are.

Using that insight, the E-Team works to build personal relationships with the student, Kraft says. She points to an OPRF freshman currently in the

tutoring program that she co-leads at the Oak Park Library, as an example of how the E-Team creates a "safe space" for students to ask for help. This particular student has a very supportive family, she says, but didn't connect with his teachers. It took him months to open up. "It's not like it's one (adult) he's got a relationship with, now it's several people. We're trying to create a family there."

In both Oak Park and River Forest, it's a community norm for youth to have more than one adult with whom they can talk about important things in their life, the 2016 Illinois Youth Survey found. A solid majority of youth in grades 8, 10 and 12 who took the

survey said they have at least one adult with whom they can talk

about life issues, although the percentages drop for students in higher grades.

Caring non-parental adults aren't always teachers. They can be coaches or mentors,

even a neighbor. The roles they serve are invaluable. They can give advice, ease anxieties about academics and other relationships, write recommendations, be that older friend who possesses the wisdom younger people have not gained.

Action Item

"Excellence with Equity," also known as the E-Team, just won a \$50,000 grant to grow the program. The funding came from "The Big Idea," a program of Entrepreneur Leaders in Philanthropy, a part of the Oak Park-River Forest Community Foundation. The money is raised each year from some 40 local business people.



Coach James Foster facilitates a skills practice at Oak Park and River Forest High School. His program, IMPACT basketball, focuses on developing the whole player. (FILE)

Sports and arts activities are often the easiest routes through which young people encounter adults with whom they can develop comfortable and positive relationships.

James Foster, who has run the Impact Basketball program in Oak Park since 2000, does "mentorship through basketball." About 200 kids a year go through the program, which also assists with tutoring and scholarships.

He subscribes to the "it takes a village" approach to inspire young people. "It takes more than just parents," he says. "These days, it has to be a joint effort" that involves other

committed adults.

Friends of the Children is an organization with a lot of Oak Park support that will launch soon in the Austin neighborhood. It takes a more intensive approach to connecting adults and children. The non-profit started in Portland 25 years ago, and pairs at-risk kids starting in kindergarten with paid professional adult mentors, called Friends, who make at least a three-year commitment to be involved in the

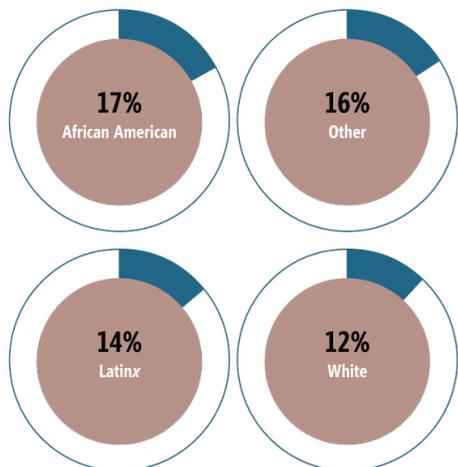


Taal Hasak-Lowy

child's life.

"We know if someone stays with a child for less than a year and a half, that can actually do more harm than good," says Taal Hasak-Lowy, executive director for Friends of the Children's Chicago Chapter. "Research has shown that the single most important factor for building resiliency in children who faced the highest risk is a long-term, consistent relationship with a caring adult."

In 2016, more than 10% of our teens said they have NO adult (besides a parent) who they can talk to about important things; highest for students of color.



Report that they have "more than one adult" who they can talk to.

Distribution of information by a community group in accordance with District 97 policy does not imply, directly or indirectly, that the group's program(s), event(s) and/or service(s) is sanctioned, sponsored or endorsed by the district, the Board of Education or the superintendent.

OUR GOAL

90% (or more) in 2022 who say they have "more than 1 adult" they can talk to 5% or less who say they have "NO adult" they can talk to.

HOW

Remove barriers so that more kids connect to caring adults and peers through participation in activities and civic life.