

Working to end poverty where we live



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Tufts Students Help CAAS Head Start Family Recover after Fire

By Margarita Ashton

When disaster struck a Head Start family, students from Tufts University came to their aid. For years, student volunteers from Tufts have been working at CAAS Head Start through the non-profit organization Jumpstart. Jumpstart is working toward the day every child in America enters school prepared to succeed. Their ultimate goal, mirroring that of Head Start, is to prepare children for school and for life.

At CAAS Head Start, Jumpstart students work hands-on in the classrooms with our teachers. They enrich the children's language and literacy skills and help to narrow the educational gap between socio-economic classes. Volunteers are assigned a "partner child" whom they mentor for a whole year, an average of 10 hours per week. They make learning fun through one-to-one reading and group literacy activities and games.

On the evening of February 22, one of our Head Start student's worlds was turned upside down when her house was devastated by a fire. Her mentor, as well as the other seven Jumpstart members working at CAAS' Jack Hamilton Center, immediately offered practical assistance. Going above and beyond their mentorship roles, they adopted an idea proposed by member Frances Jones and decided to hold a bake sale to raise funds for the child's family.

Jumpstart member Gali Peleg led the group to take advantage of the upcoming Tufts campus restaurant fair, at which local eateries promote their fare to students. She and her fellow...



Jumpstart volunteers from Tufts University raised money to help a CAAS Head Start family whose house burned down.

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CAAS is Meeting Today's Workforce Demands in Somerville

a message from Executive Director Kimberly Smith-Cofield



Due to today's rapidly changing economy and workforce demands, many have found themselves ill-equipped for the challenges they face in securing a job, especially one with opportunity for advancement and benefits. Having a "competitive edge" means something very different in the 21st century, and even more so over the past few years, as we watched the downturn of our economy take its toll on the entire working and non-working population.

We are seeing people doing many more jobs over the course of their lifetimes than our grandparents or even parents had to. The education business needs to adapt, as people have to be retrained and re-

Having a "competitive edge" means something different in the 21st century.

skilled throughout their lives. Given those demands, educators must pay attention to those who are disenfranchised, including the unemployed and the overwhelming

number of the underemployed: those who are not graduating from high school, or who fall below the poverty line, or are from first-generation immigrant families, for example.

To avoid an even greater divide between haves and have-nots, we must think about education as a necessary way of bringing people who are currently outside the system into it, to ensure we have a population that is educated and competent to carry the economy forward. We need workers at all levels to be productively engaged. This is social justice, but it is also an economic reality.

CAAS has teamed up with a couple of other Somerville organizations to provide much-needed services to better prepare members of our community for the future. To open the doors

of college to all Somerville young people who might not have otherwise considered it as an option, CAAS and The Welcome Project have joined forces to provide education and training to both the parents and students on the process of applying for college and financial aid. Similarly, for the individuals who need job skills development, job coaching and pre-employment training, CAAS and the Somerville Center for Adult Learning Experiences (SCALE) have designed a curriculum that speaks to the practical, technical, and emotional requirements of gaining employment.

The skills that will make an individual stand out are often referred to as "soft skills." Our program seeks to help students learn and appreciate the importance of reliability, having a positive attitude, good personal appearance, motivation, ability to follow rules, interpersonal skills, willingness to learn, plus the ability to fill out a job application, listen, be cooperative, self-supervising, adaptable, etc., in addition to having math, reading comprehension, writing, resume development, language and computer skills. It's the combination of all of these skills that will empower them to market themselves in a competitive environment. Likewise, these are the *transferable skills* needed, not just for an individual's career, but also for their personal growth as well.

CAAS wants to continue to make a way for those who need a hand up and to provide them with the tools to gaining long-term self-sufficiency. We know that with these services, Somerville will be better positioned to sustain economic growth in the future.

Thank you for your continued support of CAAS' mission to eliminate poverty in Somerville and the societal conditions that cause and perpetuate it. ♦

A Community Gets a Garden

By Jocelyn Scott

In January 2009 I met Rachel Bedick, the Community Organizer from CAAS. She was at a Clarendon Hill Tenant Association meeting and mentioned the idea of a community garden, and I love gardening. Over the next several months more tenants became interested, and we started having regular meetings. Rachel had one-on-one meetings with each of us to get to know our interests and our strengths. By the end of summer 2009, we had drawn up a Document of Support (the name developed by Rachel to replace the word “petition”). So, for approximately six weeks, we tenants went around to all 216 apartment units in our housing development with the Document of Support written in four different languages. We acquired roughly 120 signatures from residents interested in having a community garden. As well, during the summer of 2009 I grew a very successful flower garden for the Somerville Housing Authority (SHA) on site at Clarendon Hill.



Jocelyn (front row, third from left), Rachel (back row, far right) and friends celebrate the new Clarendon Hill community garden



Jocelyn's flower garden adds beauty to Clarendon Hill Development.

In mid-October, we sent the signed Document of Support to SHA Executive Director Joe Macaluso, Deputy Director Paul Mackey, and the SHA Board of Commissioners with a request to use land on the housing grounds to build ...

our very own Community Garden. Within five days our request was granted! The garden planning group picked out the best piece of land on the grounds.

We still needed funds, so Rachel recruited Tai Dinnan from Groundwork Somerville, Lisa Brukilacchio from the Somerville Health Agenda, and Chris Cote, a student at Tufts, to write a New England Grassroots Environmental Fund (NEGEF) Grant. On April 14th, 2010 I found out from NEGEF that we were awarded \$5,800 to build the garden. A truly joyous day! On May 15th, the

Clarendon Hill Community Garden group with the help of volunteers from Groundwork Somerville and the Somerville Housing Authority maintenance crew will break ground to build our garden.

Our Community Garden is a monumentally important accomplishment. This would not be happening if Rachel Bedick had not come to us to offer her support and guidance to teach us how to become leaders ourselves. Through meeting Rachel and CAAS, we have learned to work together for a common interest despite language barriers. We will be able to grow our own fruits, vegetables, and flowers, enabling us and our children to eat healthier food, save money and learn how to work together as a community. I can't express how fortunate I feel to have come to know the special people at CAAS and look forward to working with them in any way I can possible help in the future. Thank you. ♦



The seeds of community will continue to grow at Clarendon Hill.

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*Working to End Poverty
Where We Live*

Tufts Students Help CAAS Head Start Family Recover After Fire

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***The monetary
result: \$500 to the
affected family.***

Jumpstart members piggybacked onto this venue, setting up their own table with desserts for sale along with... flyers about the fundraiser. Tufts students had order forms ready for prospective buyers. They followed up on the bake sale through extensive emailing to family, friends and Tufts University members and the ever-popular Facebook.



CAAS Head Start Children enjoy Tufts students in their classrooms.

The monetary end result was \$500 given to the affected family in the form of gift certificates to Market Basket, Boston Burger Company, Marshall's, and Bob's Discount Furniture. The spiritual and educational end results: immeasurable and growing far into the future. CAAS thanks the Tufts Jumpstart program and salutes them for going far beyond the call of duty. ♦

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