

# Papitto Opportunity Connection

*January 2023*

## **Million Dollar Idea**

Each day while driving through her community, a teenage daughter of West African immigrants, passes her peers wasting time hanging out on the streets, empty parks filled with debris and wrappers from discarded fast food restaurants that are prevalent in the town. She dreams of making her community a better place to live, a place to thrive. She envisions a community that offers career exploration, clean parks enjoyed by young and old, financial literacy programs, mental health wellness opportunities for young people of color and access to healthy food, especially in the schools where she has witnessed first hand young people eat processed and packaged food or else go hungry. She had a plan to change and restore her community.

She wasn't alone.

An African American teen from Providence who had struggled through the pandemic had an idea to develop a yoga mat with a QR code that would provide constantly changing information on health and mental wellness. That yoga mat would be given free of charge to schools in underserved communities so that everyone would have access to critical resources.

A Latino teen from Providence, who had experienced food insecurity firsthand, had visions of creating a sustainable urban agriculture program to combat food insecurity in her community and create access to healthy foods.

But who could these young people share their ideas with? Who would listen?

Too often, young people have shared with us they are often seen, but never heard. Their voice remains silent. They don't have the opportunity to share their hopes, dreams, and ideas for a better community.

No one is listening.

Below from left: Founder and Trustee, Barbara Papitto; POC Managing Partner, John Tarantino; 2022 TRIS winners; and Ford Foundation President, Darren Walker. Photo credit: Ian Barnard Photography



That's why one year ago, Papitto Opportunity Connection (POC) created the Transform Rhode Island Scholarship (TRIS), a program to empower high school students of color and provide them with the opportunity to use their voice and share their ideas to create real change in their community.

To enter the scholarship competition, Rhode Island's high school students of color are asked to answer one simple question:

**“If you were given a million dollars to better the lives of Rhode Island’s communities of color either through education, job skills training, business, housing or healthcare, how would you do it?”**

POC has committed to investing \$1 million in making the winning idea a reality and the winning student not only receives a \$25,000 scholarship, but also has a seat at the table and is part of implementing the idea.

We began to listen.

Photo credit below: Ian Barnard Photography



In the spring of 2022, Mariam Kaba, a student at the Career and Technical Center at Woonsocket High School, became the first-ever TRIS winner. She is now a high school junior who is working closely with Leadership Rhode Island and POC to make her big idea to restore her community come to life.

Now in its second year, the 2023 TRIS is bigger and better than before. This year **TEN** TRIS finalists will be awarded one-time scholarships worth between **\$5,000-\$25,000** and **POC will once again invest \$1 million** to make the winning idea become a reality.

We encourage you to spread the word about this amazing opportunity that offers an opportunity for RI's high school students of color to have a voice and create real change in their communities.

We're listening. To learn more, click [here](#).

Photo credit below: Ian Barnard Photography



## Future Gen Cancer Scholarship Program

High school students, including a teen from Ghana and his Latino classmate, stood in the back of the classroom recently at Shea High School in Pawtucket and listened intently about a program aimed to change their lives - and others who look like them.

Papitto Opportunity Connection has partnered with the Lifespan Cancer Institute and recently announced a transformational new program designed to close the racial gap and create more opportunities for people of color in careers in cancer medicine and research.

**According to a 2017 report by the American Society of Clinical Oncology, only 2% of the physician workforce self-identifies as Black/African American and 3% as Hispanic/Latino.**

Below right, POC Managing Trustee John Tarantino with students at Shea High School.

Photo credit below: Erin Smithers Photography



The Future Gen Cancer Scholars program, the first of its kind fellowship, seeks to address this disparity. The program will enroll and train 20 high school students of color from Pawtucket, Central Falls and Providence, for careers in cancer medicine and build the next generation of cancer physicians and researchers reflective of their communities.

The Future Gen Cancer Scholars program is a paid summer fellowship program that will allow students of color to shadow some of the nation's leading cancer doctors at Rhode Island, The Miriam, and Hasbro Children's hospitals and have access to state-of-the-art laboratories at the Lifespan Cancer Institute and the Cancer Center at Brown. Additionally, program administrators will work directly with school guidance counselors and to offer support with the college application and admissions process.

"If your doctor doesn't look like you, if your doctor doesn't come from the same cultural background, if he or she doesn't understand the family dynamics in that background, it's going to be hard," POC Managing Trustee John Tarantino said at the recent announcement at Pawtucket's Shea High School. "The doctor cares, the doctor wants to do everything he or she can do for the patient, but there's a problem, because they're not from the same cultural background. And this program is going to address that issue."

Below center, Dr. Howard Safran, chief Hematology/Oncology, Lifespan Cancer Institute, with students from Shea High School, Pawtucket, RI. Photo credit below: Erin Smithers Photography



## Hope & Main Makers Market Opens in Downtown Providence

Seeking to create more equitable access for emerging diverse foodpreneurs and small business owners, Hope & Main, Rhode Island's first food business incubator, has opened the Makers Marketplace at 100 Westminster Street in the heart of downtown Providence. Hope & Main's first entry into Rhode Island's capital city marks the beginning of the next era for the organization which has helped more than 450 food businesses to launch since its inception in 2014.

Hope & Main Makers Market is now open for breakfast and lunch and offers hand-crafted and locally sourced made-to-order items, grab-and-go hot and cold foods, corporate catering, plus Hope & Main members' products and prepared foods.

Photo credit below: Erin Smithers Photography



Lisa Raiola, President and Founder of Hope & Main said, “For a new food business, the journey to a retail shelf is full of high hurdles. It could take years. We’ve removed those barriers. The opportunity, just a few months into launching your business at Hope & Main, to feature your product at the Downtown Makers Marketplace is a huge advantage for food startups.”

With support from Papitto Opportunity Connection and Paolino Properties, this new concept creates more equitable access for emerging food-preneurs. Both organizations embraced Hope & Main's mission to create more equitable access for emerging food-preneurs of all means and backgrounds, and believe in the potential of the project to attract local food enthusiasts and tourists and to revitalize the downtown. Forty percent of the makers are people of color.

Photo credit below: Erin Smithers Photography



“By bringing its Maker’s Market alive in downtown Providence, Hope & Main is giving power to foodpreneurs of color located in our state’s urban core. This new market provides critical exposure to food businesses at the time when they need it most.

“Papitto Opportunity Connection is pleased to support this important work” said Barbara Papitto, founder and trustee of Papitto Opportunity Connection.