

# Papitto Opportunity Connection

December 2025

## A Season Of Remembrance And Gratitude

This has been a week in Rhode Island of unbelievable tragedy and sadness as the result of the horrific events at Brown University. We are grieving along with the Brown community, and our hearts are with the two students who lost their lives, those who were injured, and their families.

As we head into the holiday season, we want to share some good news about people in our community who are making a difference—who are the true definition of community, working to make the lives of others better. The passion and dedication of Rhode Island's nonprofit community does not go unnoticed—and we are grateful to be a small part of this journey to help shape a stronger, more equitable Rhode Island.

Warmly,

Barbara Papitto



## Adrian Bautista: First At National Entrepreneurship Challenge And A Top Four At Global Competition

Adrian Bautista may have had to pinch himself to make sure he wasn't dreaming. He turned on Zoom, and across from him on the screen was Daymond John, a co-star of *Shark Tank* and CEO of FUBU, a \$6 billion hip-hop apparel company. For the next 45 minutes, Adrian and his business partner Evan Perez shared the vision for their business, *Color Your Life*, and absorbed every bit of advice Daymond had to offer.

The meeting with Daymond was just a few of the many recent events that felt surreal for Adrian, an alum of the Met School, who is a URI freshman and a 2024 Transform RI Scholarship recipient.



Pictured above: Adrian Bautista and Evan Perez during a mentorship session with Daymond John (top), a co-star of *Shark Tank* and CEO of FUBU, a \$6 billion hip-hop apparel company.

In October, Adrian and Evan earned First Place at the 2025 NFTE (Network for Teaching Entrepreneurship) National Youth Entrepreneurship Challenge, rising above more than 82,000 student participants from across the country.

At the regional competition in New York City, the entrepreneurs from Providence beat out 40 finalists from across the nation. Adrian wowed the judges with ***Color Your Life***—a personalized coloring book that uses AI to turn memories into hands-on experiences designed to reduce screen time. As the grand prize winners, they received \$10,000 and an exclusive mentorship session with Daymond.

“If you told me a year ago this is where I would be I wouldn’t have believed you,” said Adrian. “It’s been amazing. I’ve enjoyed meeting different people and sharing similar interests and goals. It showed me so many opportunities I didn’t even know were possible.”



Image above: Adrian Bautista and Evan Perez present at the 2025 NFTE (Network For Teaching Entrepreneurship) Challenge.

At the World Youth Entrepreneurship Challenge at the United Nations in November, Adrian and Evan placed among the top 4, competing against 34 students from 13 countries.

“Adrian is quiet, but has inner confidence. That’s how he wins,” said Jodie Woodruff, Director of The Met Center for Innovation and Entrepreneurship. “He works hard and makes things happen.”

Adrian’s ability to dream big was evident when he entered the 2024 TRIS Scholarship. His idea—to create a mobile job center that brings resources and support directly to those experiencing homelessness in Rhode Island—earned him a spot amongst the Top 10 finalists and a \$10,000 scholarship from POC.

“He thinks out of the box and how he can help people,” said Jodie.



## **The Asthenis Ecosystem: Health Beyond The Doctor's Office**

The fluorescent light inside [Asthenis](#), a Cranston Street pharmacy and community health hub in Providence, carries a different kind of glow. It’s not the stark fluorescent lighting of a typical retail store, but one that illuminates a space where trust is meticulously built, prescription by prescription, conversation by conversation.

“Welcome to Asthenis,” said founder Dr. Eugenio Fernandez Jr. “Our mission here is we wanted to find a place where people can get information for their health outside the doctor’s office. Especially because at the time when we started, people didn’t spend enough time with their doctors. We want to be a reliable source of information outside the doctor’s office, in the community.”

Dr. Fernandez has been a part of this community most of his life. Asthenis sits within the affordable-housing complex Wiggins Village, right next to the low-income neighborhood Dr. Fernandez grew up in, on Hanover Street. The Classical High School, URI, and Harvard University graduate founded Asthenis in 2018, the name meaning “patient” in Greek. What started out as a small, independently owned organization, today employs seven staff members.

Asthenis has dispensed tens of thousands of prescriptions, administered free covid tests, and vaccines at no cost to patients and served thousands of individuals.



Pictured above and below: Barbara Papitto with Asthenis founder Dr. Eugenio Fernandez Jr.

POC founder Barbara Papitto recently visited Asthenis and listened intently to Dr. Fernandez as he showed her the technology at the center of this innovative clinic and his approach to patient care. Their discussion quickly evolved past a simple site visit into a meaningful conversation about philanthropy, community service, and the true meaning of health in the 21st century.

“You are amazing, we’re so grateful because it’s easy for me to support an organization like yours,” said Barbara. “It’s people like you that are there, day and night, taking care of people. That’s what counts.”



While the model is successful, it faces real-world operational challenges. A recent setback has the pharmacy dealing with the loss of funding for a community health worker program.

“We lost our ability to bill as a community health worker provider, someone that will help people find doctors, that will help people find housing,” he explained, noting these workers are vital for identifying unsafe situations for children or helping older children, who often struggle more to find pediatricians than infants, navigate the healthcare system. “That’s a huge problem.”

Still, Dr. Fernandez remains committed to its system, to fighting today’s public health challenges, and to nurturing a single, healthier community for all Rhode Islanders.

“We try to do the right thing and do it very well. We’re going to help as many as we can,” he said.



## **City Year RI Makes An Impact In Central Falls**

It’s been just over a year since [City Year Rhode Island](#) expanded into Central Falls and created a partnership with Calcutt Middle School and Raices Dual Language School. In the state’s smallest, but most underserved city, City Year AmeriCorps members serve as Student Success Coaches, tutors and role models, helping Central Falls students to reach their goals and thrive.

“Every day our AmeriCorps members prove that our service changes lives. Students gain confidence, schools grow stronger, and communities thrive as we build bridges of opportunity that ensure every young person has the chance to succeed,” said City Year

Rhode Island Executive Director Nirva LaFortune, noting the positive impact a City Year AmeriCorp member had on her as a young girl attending Providence schools.



Image above: City Year's Kwamahn Gillard mentors youth at Calcutt Middle School in Central Falls.

Kwamahn Gillard, a recent graduate of East Providence High, is one of City Year's Student Success Coaches who has embraced his role in Central Falls and is dedicated to supporting the academic growth and success of Central Falls youth.

Gillard was emotional when speaking of the experience he has had with the students and said he has benefitted from the experience as much as the students have. He has gone above and beyond his role with City Year and now serves as a volunteer track coach at the urban core school.

"I see the impact," said Kwamahn. "We're making a difference in the lives of so many (young people). I've become a leader and lead with confidence. The kids gravitate to you so they can be more successful in the classroom. It's been an amazing experience."



## **Beyond The Stigma: ClariTEA Highlights A New Era For Women's Health**

Experts stressed the importance of personalized care during the 2<sup>nd</sup> annual [ClariTEA and Care: Black Women Understanding Menopause](#) event held at The Met in Providence, sponsored in part by POC. Hosted by POC grantee [Jammat Housing and Community Development](#), in partnership with Sister Friends Circle, the conference brought together a high profile panel of providers and more than 100 women.

"For far too long, menopause and perimenopause have been stigmatized and rarely discussed among women, particularly within Black and Latino communities. We want to change that dynamic," said Jammat's Khadija Lewis Khan.



Pictured above: ClariTEA and Care: Black Women Understanding Menopause participants.

Emphasizing that treatment including hormone therapy, lifestyle changes, and supplements must be tailored to the individual, were among the key themes of several discussion panels, featuring women doctors, who provided attendees with resources and insight. Experts detailed the importance of lifestyle changes like strength training, reducing sugar, and prioritizing sleep and stress management as essential foundations for women experiencing menopause and perimenopause.

“Today we are talking about it openly and confidently,” said Dr. Kim Francis, chief nursing officer at Women & Infants. “When women are supported and connected families and communities thrive. Together we are ensuring that women’s health in every season of life is seen and prioritized.”



Pictured above from left to right: ClariTEA and Care Planning committee Melissa Husband, Sharon Conard-Wells, Khadija Lewis Khan, Angela Ankoma.

The panels also underscored the urgency of addressing severe disparities, citing studies like SWAN (Study of Women’s Health Across the Nation) which show Black women

experience symptoms longer, yet are less likely to receive hormone therapy or essential medical services.

Among the most impactful developments was a discussion on local legislative leaps. Rhode Island recently became the first state in the nation to pass menopause protections, granting women up to three days off without explanation and mandating workplace accommodations. This recognizes the \$1.8 billion in nationwide annual productivity loss linked to menopausal symptoms. State Representative Karen Alzate, one of the elected officials in attendance, stressed this protection ensures that women can remain confident and competitive in the workplace.



## **Grant Update: December Requests For Grant Proposals**

We received more than 130 grant applications for both our Million Dollar Innovation Challenge grant as well as our Small Operational grant program over a 15-day period.

The applications came from myriad organizations both big and small from across the Ocean State and reflect a wide spectrum of community work. Our POC Trustees will now begin the process of reviewing each grant request and make decisions on funding.

This process generally takes at least 90 days. We expect to make announcements on grant funding early in the second quarter of 2026.

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Papitto Opportunity Connection

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02903 US

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