



From The Classroom To The FIFA World Cup Pitch: Project GOAL Students Become Official Player Escorts

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The tunnel lights come up at Boston Stadium. The anthem is about to play. The FIFA World Cup is about to begin. Walking out on the field together with the world's best soccer players are 21 kids from Rhode Island's most underserved

Providence and Calcutt Middle School in Central Falls stepped onto the pitch as official Player Escorts for the Morocco vs. Scotland World Cup match, one of the most-watched sporting events on the planet.

For these students, all student members of [Project GOAL](#), it was the payoff for a season of balancing books and the ball.

"My dreams have come true because of Project GOAL," [Joseph Bonilla, Project GOAL participant told WPRI 12](#). "Watching our Project GOAL kids walk out onto that World Cup pitch at Boston Stadium was an overwhelmingly emotional, surreal moment that brought tears to my eyes," said Project GOAL Co-Founder Darius Shirzadi. "The kids have been absolutely buzzing, and their reactions remind me exactly why we do this work. Before the match, they were a mix of pure adrenaline and nerves, recognizing that this was a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. After walking off the pitch, they couldn't stop talking about how loud the crowd was, how enormous the stadium felt, and what it felt like looking up into the stands while the countries' national anthems were playing. I understand many of the kids wore their match kits from FIFA in school for a few days afterward to show them off."

The opportunity came through Quaker, which runs the official World Cup 26 Player Escort Program, in partnership with Common Goal, a global network of soccer-based community organizations. Together, they identified more than 1,400 youth across all 11-U.S. FIFA World Cup host cities and Project GOAL's students were among them.

To be nominated, students first had to complete a 10-week course with Quaker Foods focused on nutrition and well-being, on top of meeting Project GOAL's own standards for grades and attendance. They learned they'd been selected back in the spring and have spent the months since getting ready for their moment on the world's biggest stage.

More than just the thrill of the game, Shirzadi said the students shared a deep sense of pride.

"They realized that they earned this spot by committing to their nutrition programs, their attendance, and their schoolwork," he said. "It has given them a massive boost of confidence that they are carrying right back into the classroom and onto our local pitches."



Trinity Rep To Expand Programs And Community Access With Creation Of Public Square

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For more than 60 years, [Trinity Repertory Company](#), Rhode Island's Tony Award-winning theater, has provided audiences with extraordinary performances that entertain and bring people together. But Trinity Rep offers much more than award-winning performances. Through education, community engagement, and artistic innovation, Trinity has evolved into a vital cultural resource for Rhode Island.

The curtain continues to rise and as the years have passed, so has Trinity Rep's need to evolve, eliminate barriers, and provide access to the theater and its educational programs for all Rhode Islanders to experience, including those with limitations.

Rhode Island's creative sector employs nearly 18,000 workers. The arts add \$2.37 billion to the state's economy. Many employers value the skillsets gained through arts and technical theater training, yet access to training and exposure is not equal, especially for youth in under-resourced districts, underserved communities, and low-income adults seeking workforce re-entry.

With support from Papitto Opportunity Connection (POC), Trinity Rep can eliminate barriers and expand community access by creating a fully accessible Public Square, a vibrant downtown community arts, workforce training, and cultural hub for all Rhode Islanders to experience.

"We are deeply grateful for POC's partnership and excited about the opportunities for expanded education and engagement programming that this support will unlock for our community," said Trinity Rep Executive Director Kate Liberman.

POC's support will allow Trinity Rep to amplify creative workforce programs, job training, apprenticeships, and mentorship opportunities, while increasing access for youth, older adults, veterans, people with disabilities, and underserved communities. It will also strengthen community partnerships, broaden representation in programming, and create more opportunities for civic dialogue and intergenerational connection.

"Trinity Rep has always aspired to be more than a theater. We strive to be a true public square for all Rhode Islanders," said Lieberman. "Papitto Opportunity Connection's extraordinary investment helps make that vision a reality by creating more accessible, welcoming spaces for everyone to gather, create, learn, and see themselves reflected in our work."



Justice Assistance Opens JA Health

& Wellness Clinic

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Pictured above, from left to right: JA Founder, Jon Houston; JA Chief Medical Officer, Dr. Michael McCarten; POC Founder and Trustee, Barbara Papitto; JA CEO, Jake Bissailon; JA Health & Wellness Clinical Director, Frances DaLomba; RI Congressman, Gabe Amo; and R.I. General Treasurer, James Diossa.

Recently, Justice Assistance cut the ribbon on its new JA Health and Wellness Clinic in Cranston. The integrated health clinic, which was funded in part by POC, is a continuation of Justice Assistance's mission to provide innovative and effective restoration services for justice-involved individuals. The center provides physical, mental, and dental health services.

According to Justice Assistance, "as of June 2026, 62 percent of all Justice Assistance clients require some kind of physical or mental health and/or substance use treatment. Research shows that justice-involved individuals often face significant unmet health needs, including behavioral health and substance use challenges, along with barriers related to poverty, housing instability, transportation, insurance coverage, and stigma. In Rhode Island, where the primary care system is already under significant strain, accessible healthcare is a critical component of successful reentry and long-term stability."

POC founder and trustee Barbara Papitto emphasized access to healthcare isn't a privilege, it's a foundation for rebuilding a life.

"We are proud to stand with Justice Assistance in opening doors to physical, mental, and dental care for people who are working hard to move forward," said Papitto. "This is the kind of investment that creates real, lasting change not just for individuals, but for our entire community."




CANCER FREE RI

1 August 2026

Close out the summer with your community!

VOL. 2

ROGER WILLIAMS GATEWAY CENTER 1197 BROAD ST PROVIDENCE RI 12:00 PM - 3:00 PM

12:00P-3:00P	EVENT START	Future Gen Cancer Scholars
12:00P-3:00P	FREE HAIRCUTS & BRAIDING	Freshmen Barbershop Barbershop Love
12:10P-12:40P	BACHATA CLASS	Cultura Dance Arts
12:45-1:15P	TAI CHI	Be Balanced Tai Chi
2:00-3:00P	ZOOMOBILE	Roger Williams Park Zoo
2:30P-3:00P	SALSA CLASS	Cultura Dance Arts

BECOME A VENDOR! EVENT COORDINATOR VALERIE PEREZ VPerez2@BrownHealth.org




FREE

Screenings
Haircuts
Food
Music
School Supplies

Scan for More Info



FutureGen Cancer Scholars Host “Cancer Free RI” Block Party

[Learn More](#)

Please join the [FutureGen Cancer Scholars](#) at a Block Party on August 1 as they share the impact of their work in medicine with the community. “Cancer Free RI,” is a FREE event focused on providing cancer screening resources and educational support to underrepresented communities in Rhode Island.

Held at [Roger Williams Park Gateway Center](#), 1197 Broad Street in Providence, the event will provide back to school supplies (while they last) free food, haircuts, braiding for children under the age of 16, and many other activities. We hope to see you there!

Supported by POC, the FutureGen Cancer Scholars program is a first-of-its-kind, paid fellowship designed to cultivate the next generation of cancer physicians and researchers from the communities they will serve.

This six-week program engages high school students from Rhode Island's urban core, providing them with hands-on shadowing experience with top cancer doctors

The WARM Center Ensures There Are No Empty Stomachs This Summer

[Learn More](#)

School breakfast and lunch programs are a lifeline for many children throughout the academic year. When summer arrives and those programs disappear, the gap can be impossible to close - especially for parents already stretched thin, forced to choose between groceries and rent.

That's where POC grantee, the [WARM Center](#) steps in. At the WARM Center, preventing and ending homelessness means addressing the full picture of what families need to stay stable. The Children's Summer Lunch Program is one piece of that - small in concept, enormous in impact.

Each weekday this summer, WARM Center staff and volunteers are preparing and delivering healthy lunches to six summer camps and one neighborhood location across southern Rhode Island and southeastern Connecticut. The children receiving these meals are the same ones who rely on free or reduced-price meals during the school year - kids for whom a missed lunch isn't just an inconvenience; it's a real hardship.

"At WARM Center, we understand that preventing homelessness means addressing the challenges that can push families into crisis. By providing healthy meals to children throughout the summer, we're helping families remain stable, reducing financial stress, and ensuring that every child has the nourishment they need to learn, grow, and succeed." said Jessica Lowry, Executive Director.

The need is growing. In 2024, the program delivered 774 lunches per week. By 2025, that number had climbed to 1,173. This summer, the WARM Center is on track to serve 1,600 lunches every week - more than double what it was just two years ago.

It takes a village to make it happen. Dedicated staff, generous volunteers, community partners like POC, and supporters all play a part - preparing, packing, and sending out thousands of lunches so that no child has to wonder where their next meal is coming from just because school is on break.



News & Notes

Cape Verdean Museum Hosts Celebration

Cape Verdean customs, culture and food will be celebrated Saturday, July 25, 2-6pm at India Point Park in Providence as the Cape Verdean Museum, celebrates 250 years of nation building.

The schooner Ernestina-Morrissee will be docked at India Point and open for tours to the public. The free event also serves as a fundraiser for the [Cape Verdean Museum](#) in Pawtucket. Open since 2005, the Cape Verdean Museum is the first and only museum in the world celebrating the history and culture of the Cape Verde islands and Cape Verdean Americans.



Mark Your Calendar: Dominican Fest Is August 9 At Roger Williams Park

The 34th Annual Dominican Parade and Festival will be held on Sunday, August 9 with music, food, cultural performances, and community gathering at Roger Williams Park. The annual parade kicks off at 10am at the corner of Thurbers Avenue and Broad Street followed by the festival beginning at noon at the Temple to Music.

The event is hosted by [Quisqueya in Action](#) (QIA) to celebrate Dominican heritage, culture, and community contributions in New England.



RIBBA Celebrates Sweet 16

RIBBA's 16th Annual Gala and Awards will be held on August 28 beginning at 6pm at the Kirkbrae Country Club in Lincoln. The annual celebration recognizes small businesses, entrepreneurs and professionals. Proceeds from ticket sales support and help sustain vital programs that provide access to funding, training, certifications, and opportunities for businesses, professionals, and youth to grow and succeed.

This year's honorees include US Sen. Jack Reed, Gerald Fernandez, Lamel J. Moore, Kelly Nevins, Ty'Relle Stephens, Momoh Fahnbulleh, Steven Santos, Barbra Sokoloff and Theresa Guzman Stokes.

To learn more or to purchase tickets, click [here](#).

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