



Home is where the heart is.



OUR MISSION

My Place Teen Center's mission is to provide a safe haven for youth, ages 10-18, sustaining them with comfort, meals, resources, and hope.

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OUR VISION

All youth will have the academic, job readiness, and life skills necessary to lead independent adult lives filled with stewardship, courage, passion, and joy.

From **Tim and Donna**



What is possible in 25+ years?

In 2023, My Place Teen Center celebrated its 25th Anniversary! Think of it: Thousands of kids mentored, kept safe, loved, fed, and shown a different path. And we could not have made it this far without the support of our volunteers, benefactors, and so many kind friends like you. As we reflect on the magnitude of this auspicious anniversary, we want to send our most gracious thanks.

Some of our work at My Place Teen Center is unquantifiable - the smile on a young person's face when they accomplish something they never thought they could do. The feeling of relief knowing a child is in a safe, nurturing place when they could be on the streets. A sense of community is created when the friends and family of My Place Teen Center come out to serve a meal, plant a garden, or mentor our teens.

And then there is the work we can tally up. In 25 years, My Place Teen Center has served over 210,000 hot meals to kids who might not have access to enough healthy food at home. Every year, we deliver 1,200 hours, per child, of curricular support and tutoring to at-risk teens. Every day, we help 150 teens with a curriculum that fosters grit and resilience - teens that otherwise risk getting caught up in drugs and alcohol.

All of these quantifiable and unquantifiable things are possible because of people like you.

As we enter the next phase of our evolution and business model of being a teen oasis, we invite you to peruse this booklet and consider your MPTC partnership.

We thank you for your 25+ years of glorious friendships and the endeavor to SAVE LIVES.

Sincerely yours,

Tim Higgins, Chair of the BOD

Donna Dwyer, President and CEO

HOW WE GOT HERE

In December of 1995, the community of Westbrook saw a need and chose to respond to it. How it persisted and embraced young people has made MPTC a model for teen centers and communities partnering with youth to enact change.

The concerns identified in that first meeting focused on a need for more passion, direction, and connections with others for far too many adolescents. A community attitudes survey by the Westbrook Police Department indicated that many community members shared these same concerns. The American Drug and Alcohol survey was administered to all grades six through twelve students and suggested use significantly above national norms. Police records stated petty crimes common to teens with little direction or meaningful activity. Most importantly, these concerns were borne out by the practical experience of the representatives from law enforcement, schools, churches, business, health care, city government, and teenagers that comprised the new Board of Directors.

The recommendations were always the same - and soon became the original mission of the organization: **"To create and support an emotionally and physically safe multi-purpose teen center which provides access to meaningful activities, mentoring relationships and support systems which foster positive development and healthy decisions."**

Recognizing that this described a Center that was firmly rooted in the life of the community, the Board made an additional commitment: **"Whenever possible, this mission will be accomplished with adult and youth volunteers and through collaboration with existing resources in the Greater Portland area."**



Thirty months after that initial meeting, on May 16, 1998, the Teen Center opened in 7,300 square feet space in a renovated mill – one mile from each school, central to downtown, and with the full support and cooperation of the schools, municipal government, police, and business community.

A diverse 21-member Teen Advisory Board designed the Center and crafted a unique set of policies and philosophies. Inspired by their thoughtful planning, thirty-six businesses and dozens of volunteers donated 90% of the \$116,000 in renovation costs in labor, materials, and furnishings. Because of the depth of support and investment, over 1,000 people attended the Grand Opening. Nearly 120 teens came in each day in the first week, 30 to 70 per day through the summer, and 350 different teens in the first six weeks.

In 2004, due to the dramatic growth of its membership, the Center moved to its current location – the apex of the most socially and economically challenged neighborhoods in Westbrook – and drew many "high-risk" teens from this and other low-income locales throughout the greater Portland area. Diverse programming attracted teens with the greatest needs and fewest resources and those who experienced strong family, social, and economic support.

Today, we have two locations - 755 Main St in Westbrook and 75 Bacon St in Biddeford. We serve 800 youth and prepare 20,000 meals annually.





**We're not just raising kids here,
we're raising the next generation
of adults, and they're headed
your way...**

WHO WE ARE

Opened in 1998, we are an impactful and energetic southern Maine afterschool, year-round teen oasis that supports the needs of at-risk youth, their families, and the surrounding community. Two+ decades of data show that our programs:

- Engage youth in learning and boost school attendance
- Support social and emotional development
- Prevent youth violence
- Accelerate on-time graduation

The Top Four Things We Do:

1. Feed hungry kids.
2. Nurture a sense of purpose and belonging. Mattering matters.
3. Provide relevant, translatable job and life skills.
4. Encourage emotional well-being.



MPTC Differentiators:

- Free
- Five days/per week and year-round
- Southern Maine access
 - Cumberland and York County locations
- Physical space: Warm, living-room vibe aesthetic
- Homemade, daily meals
- Teen-centric + a cohort of 18-24-year-olds
 - "Adulting 101"
- Job and life preparedness
- Emotional wellness, curiosity, leadership, and accountability
- Drop-in and program-specific
- Local control; local decision-making
- Haven for high-risk youth



Program Domains:

- Emotional health and well-being, job skills, civic engagement, life skills, and youth leadership.

OUR HALLMARK PROGRAMS:

1. Youth Leadership Academy is a specialized positive youth development program designed to increase developmental assets and reduce risky behaviors. Youth will attend year-long health and wellness units, Leadership and Social/Emotional competencies, STEAM, Workforce Readiness, and Character Education/Civic Engagement.

2. Restaurant Job Training Program (RJTP) – embedding life skills, workforce development modules, accountability protocols, STEM principles, and financial literacy practices, the RJTP allows teens to train as proprietors, cooks, servers, bussers, hosts, hostesses, and dishwashers in a restaurant-like environment, preparing made-from-scratch dinners in the teaching kitchen, and serving thousands of veggie-laden meals to their fellow teens in MPTC's dining room.

3. Get Urban Kids Outside! – getting city kids to explore and maintain the woods and local trails, share, listen, and problem-solve teen angst, discuss healthy lifestyle choices outdoors, glean and forage fresh produce, and engage in ecology studies. Justification: The outdoors can provide a physical and mental refuge allowing youth to process and deal with stressors. This can be incredibly transformative for youth from underserved communities disproportionately affected by violence, unemployment, and school dropouts. A solid connection to the outdoors and positive role models can enable these youth to challenge themselves safely, explore new possibilities, and inspire them to pursue their full potential.

4. Making Proud Choices! is an evidence-based, safer-sex approach to teen pregnancy and HIV/STD prevention. An 8-module curriculum provides adolescents with the knowledge, confidence, and skills necessary to reduce their risk of sexually transmitted diseases (STIs), HIV, and pregnancy by abstaining from sex or using condoms if they choose to have sex.

5. Adulting 101 – For ages 18-24, it includes skill-building related to emotional maturity, prevention of out-of-wedlock pregnancy, job guidance, housing stability, financial literacy, life skills, healthy behavioral patterns, and decision-making. Adulting 101 focuses on the internal and external Developmental Assets needed for personal sustainability and family/community accountability.



NEED AND WHY MPTC MATTERS

Maine teens who identify as LGBTQ+ face high social stigma, discrimination, violence, and harassment. Black, Indigenous, and people of color are more likely than white people to experience discrimination, live in poverty, and be housing insecure. These experiences put teens who are LGBTQ+ and BIPOC at greater risk for mental health problems and substance use disorders. Teens unlock their power and agency to take control by working closely with MPTC staff and starting with small, daily tasks of affirmation, choice, and communication skills.

Analyzing data obtained from the Federal Bureau of Investigation's Uniform Crime Reporting database, Fight Crime: Invest in Kids' report, From Risk to Opportunity: Afterschool Programs Keep Kids Safe When Juvenile Crime Peaks, determined that 2 p.m. to 6 p.m. is the peak time for juvenile crime in Maine during school days, with 29% of juvenile crimes occurring during this period. **MPTC covers these hours and then some, year-round, five days per week.**



Every child who winds up doing well has had at least one stable and committed relationship with a supportive adult.

What the Kids are Saying:

"MPTC impacted me not only by teaching social skills but helped me grow strong friendships that are loyal and trustworthy."

Spencer, age 14.

I couldn't believe I had any authority over my life. I do not want to live the life I am currently living. I want to THRIVE! I must practice what I want out loud, but the crux of this learning is the BELIEVING part."

Stix, age 15

"Being part of the Teen Center has helped me be the goal-oriented, independent-thinking, and confident person I am today."

Jamora, age 16.

"At MPTC, it became my second home—a place where my friends and I felt safe and hung out. We got to discover who we were, take risks, and try new things."

Kimber, age 19.

"What I love most about the MPTC opportunity is connecting with teens with similar viewpoints. Communicating with other kids on developing community projects and activities that impact kids and society is exciting. At MPTC, we focus on mental health challenges amongst youth ages 15-18 and what types of services and resources should be available to us. I enjoy working in an open and non-judgmental environment, especially with caring adults who encourage me to take pride in my beliefs while respecting others' opinions. I love MPTC. And the food is pretty great too."

Mikayla, MPTC Youth Leadership Council, Class of 2026.

**We serve over 800 kids every year.
Here are some of their stories.**



Meet Aisha Age 12

Aisha is smart, funny, full of energy. Everyone who meets Aisha sees these qualities right away. Often everyone, except Aisha. It used to be if you paid her a compliment she would shrug and disagree. Her home life is rocky and she has experienced things that kids just shouldn't have to experience. MPTC offers Aisha stability. Aisha knows that she can come here and just be herself. She can hang out with her friends, she can talk with staff, she can mess up and know that we are going to love her anyway. So she comes, every day, and every day we have seen her self-confidence grow a little bit more. Now when you compliment Aisha, she will smile back, give you thanks, and throw in, "I know."

Meet Mark Age 14

Mark is a freshman and plays freshman football. He loves rap music and action movies. Mark is full of energy and always has a smile on his face. Mark is the kind of kid who can easily get himself in trouble. He spends a lot of time away from his house. He likes to come to the teen center because it is fun place to hang out. MPTC is more than a fun place. If Mark were not here, he would be hanging out on the streets, in the park, unsupervised. MPTC gives Mark a safe place to be – and still have a lot of fun.

Meet Soladad Age 12

Soladad is in 7th grade – and comes to MPTC almost every day after school. Soladad has a pretty big family and she and her sister do not always get along. She loves coming to the teen center because it gives her something to do after school. At MPTC she can hang out with her friends, listen to music, and play games, do the things that kids her age should be doing. If she were not coming to MPTC, Soladad would be home and she and her sister would be fighting. MPTC gives Soladad a safe place to hang out without drama.

Meet Anne Age 14

Anne is homeschooled. MPTC offers her a place where she can interact on a social level with her peer group and participate in activities. Anne is a force. She is funny, spunky, and outgoing. As a homeschooled student Anne spends a lot of time with her parents, adults, and by herself. MPTC offers her a place to connect with other kids her own age and develop some of the very important social skills that kids often develop through school.

Meet Victor Age 12

Victor loves video games, kickball, and computers. What he doesn't love is homework. When Victor fell behind in his school work his mother contacted us. We were able to work with Victor to encourage him to get his school work done. Staff were there to assist him when he had questions and praise him when he completed an assignment. This school year, Victor is committed to getting his work done on-time. We are able to help him out here by offering homework assistance every day!

Meet Dominic Age 15

Dominic is a kid who has had a tremendous amount of upheaval in his young life. Substance use, domestic violence, significant loss. This upheaval has had its impact. Dominic regularly runs away from home. Couch surfing is preferable to sleeping in his own bed. Sleeping on a friend's couch feels safer than sleeping at home. Dominic struggles with responsibility. He is in and out of school, in and out of trouble. At MPTC Dominic finds something he does not find at home. Consistency, stability, meals, comfort, love. Dominic is a work in progress but at MPTC, we keep working because he matters.

Meet Lea Age 11

Lea has been coming to us since she was 10. When we first met Lea she was a quiet, shy girl. Lea decided to join our hip-hop dance team. As the year progressed we saw Lea's confidence grow. Lea had never done anything like dance before. The night of the recital she was nervous, but when the curtain lifted, this quiet girl danced her heart out and she loved it! Lea is looking forward to dance beginning again this year.

Meet Heidi Age 15

Heidi loves fashion, art, and has a flare for the dramatic. She dreams of being a fashion designer. Daily life can be challenging for Heidi. She has mental illness and often struggles with self-esteem. Here at MPTC, Heidi has a place to express her dreams, to try out her ideas, and to be herself. She was an active member of the fashion club, making new clothing from old. She loved the improv acting class. She always participates in arts and crafts. She loves Karaoke. At MPTC Heidi is able to live some of her dreams and find encouragement to keep following them.

Meet Mandy Age 12

Mandy is adorable. When you see her, you just want to hug her. She is small and looks very young for her age. She also acts young for her age. Mandy has some learning disabilities and severe ADHD. Her mom, a single mother, struggles to keep up with all the demands. Mandy's mom has found an ally in MPTC. She has been forthcoming about Mandy's needs and we have stepped up to help Mom meet some of them. Mom knows that Mandy can get help with her homework, work out some of her energy, and improve her social skills. She also gets dinner and a ride home! It is a huge service for this family and a huge relief to a busy and tired mom struggling to get it all done.

Meet Azalee Age 14

When Azalee first started coming to the teen center she was withdrawn, crass, and hard to talk to. She was hard to get to know. Over the past year, however, we have seen an amazing young woman emerge. A talented artist, she creates beautiful comic book style drawings. She has connected with other young women and has developed some very close friendships. These friendships have eased her transition from middle school to high school. Sometimes she still sits alone, but now it is because she seeks space, not because there is no one to fill it.

Meet Hope Age 14

Hope is an outstanding member of the MPTC community. She is always willing to lend a hand, is respectful, and a good friend. When Hope first started coming to MPTC she was shy and quiet. Over the past year we have seen tremendous growth in Hope as she has opened up to our community. We have undergone some major renovations here at MPTC. Throughout the renovation period, Hope was always ready to volunteer for whatever needed to be done. Her help was greatly appreciated by both staff and her peers. Hope loves music and dreams of becoming a singer.

Meet Jarvis Age 17

Jarvis has had a tumultuous adolescence. As a younger teen, Jarvis struggled with gender identity. This struggle left him with little support at home and he has spent much of his teenage years homeless, couch-surfing, and trying to avoid trouble. Jarvis attends school in Portland, but comes to MPTC after school. He says he comes here because MPTC offers a lot for him to do and it makes it easier to make the right choices. When he is here, his anxiety is less. He is happier. He is safe.

Meet Declan Age 15

Declan immigrated to the United States from Pakistan when he was in elementary school. Declan is now a sophomore in high school and has been a part of the MPTC community for a few years. An avid athlete, he plays football and basketball. He is a proud student, who dreams of college. He speaks two languages. Declan is a role model for many of our younger kids and carries himself with dignity. We are proud to have Declan as part of our community.

Meet Daniel Age 12

A 7th grader, Daniel is an absolute joy to have around. This kid is always smiling and his laugh is infectious. He likes jogging, camping, computers, and video games. He is always friendly to the other kids and to staff. When asked why he likes coming to MPTC he said, "There are a lot of good people here!"



Meet Ella Age 12

Ella is a shy, small kid who often finds herself the subject of other kid's jokes. Her clothes are worn, her hair is knotted, her social skills are limited. When Ella comes to MPTC she comes with a caseworker. At other places this might set Ella apart, but at MPTC, many of the kids who come here have one-on-ones who work with them. Here Ella finds other kids she can relate to.

DOES MY PLACE TEEN CENTER WORK?

In 2016, MPTC worked with Dr. MaryAnn Corsello, Ph.D., Research and Evaluation Director of the Building Assets, Reducing Risks (BARR) program, to develop a robust and scientifically-based evaluation model. Based on this external evaluative work, all youth now receive Search Institute's scientific instrument, The Developmental Assets Profile (DAP), twice per year. The DAP is available online, and computers are made available to each youth. Dr. Corsello also developed an internal process measure to document the activities staff offer to participants, dosage, and quality of program delivery.

Daily attendance documents frequency of involvement among members and meals eaten, curriculum units completed, incentives earned, and community service projects completed. Staff fill out youth observation forms to measure attitudes and skills.

Data analysis consists of comparing results from the administration of surveys and testing for statistically significant improvements. Process measures are analyzed and compared with outcome measures to see how programming is related to youth outcomes. Areas of success, as well as those needing improvement, are targeted.

According to our 2024 administered Search Institute surveys to our middle and high school students, youth increased these key character strengths:

- 65% have a more positive view of the future;
- 71% feel they function with increased integrity;
- 67% demonstrate greater responsibility;
- 53% describe a greater sense of purpose;
- 78% indicate an increased interpersonal competence, including empathy, sensitivity, and friendship skills; and,
- 65% feel they have better planning and decision-making.



In a nutshell: Youth are safe, warm, fed, and LOVED.



CUMBERLAND COUNTY

755 Main Street, Westbook
Red Doors opened in 1998



YORK COUNTY

75 Bacon Street, Biddeford
Red Doors to be opened fall 2024



Communities We Serve



Our culture is one in which we are loving first and firm when needed. A family-type, anti-bullying, safe environment is our hallmark.



Temporary York County Location

208 Graham Street, Biddeford

QUALIFICATIONS

Our CEO, Donna Dwyer, has 25 years in social services, 15 years of nonprofit executive director/CEO positions, and holds three graduate degrees including an MBA with a focus on Entrepreneurship, a Certificate of Advanced Study in Educational Leadership, and a MS.Ed. in Special Education.



Our Director of Operations, Tina Burns, has extensive social services case management experience and seventeen years of non-profit accounting and office management.

In addition to our Board of Directors, in 2015, we formed an Advisory Council to help advance the mission of the organization through their individual and collective expertise and relationships in the community. This statewide group consists of a diverse pool of individuals that serve a variety of tasks such as raising the organization's profile, monitoring community needs and organizational trends, suggesting ideas, assisting with fundraising resources, linking to other groups of stakeholders, and offering informed guidance.



My name is Eldad and I'm 13 years old.
I come to the Teen center almost everyday
after school because sometimes if I have
homework I know that I'll get help from the
Teen center. The Teen center help me how to be a
good kid, how to be in a communities, how to respect
adult and other people...
I Love MPTC.

Home is where the heart is. Our home, in a renovated church on Main Street in Westbrook, and a new one in a former church in Biddeford, is where we nurture, inspire, and safeguard at-risk teens, many of whom have nowhere else to go. With steely resolve, and a passion for grit and accountability, we keep kids safe, fed, loved, and shown a different path. Join us as we change lives.



For more information, please contact: Donna Dwyer, president/CEO

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