



FALL/WINTER 2025 NEWSLETTER

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Executive Director's Note

This fall brought immense joy but also deep sorrow. We came together to celebrate Halloween and trick or treat with hundreds of children, volunteers, and partner organizations. At seven neighborhood schools, we celebrated Thanksgiving with full meals and children sharing what they are thankful for. These happy times represent the city we are all building together every day.

We also lost two teenagers to violence. Uzziah Shell, age 16, was

a former LEAPER known for his kindness. Daily Jackson, age 17, started working with us in October at the Q House. He was happy to lend a hand, and our staff enjoyed him immensely. Both were killed in a neighborhood, city, state and country with too many guns.

The grand generosity of our neighbors that make LEAP's events possible and the violence that claims beautiful young lives happen simultaneously in our city.

At LEAP, I have seen love change countless young lives. It will, I believe, ultimately change our city. We are working hard now

to build more support and to ensure children are safe and know they are loved.

As we enter the holiday season, please know that your being part of LEAP makes the love we share possible. I encourage you to give your loved ones a hug and know that we are doing the same on your behalf.

Henry Fernandez

Executive Director



30th ANNIVERSARY LEAP YEAR EVENT THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 27, 2025 ADDITIONAL DINNERS ON MARCH 1

In-person Reception
5-7 p.m. ▶ Dixwell Community "Q" House

Followed by an elegant evening
of fine dining and conversation

HONORING
Ann Baker Pepe
& Ed Cleary

This cherished tradition—now in its 30th year!—will feature fine dining and conversation in homes and restaurants in the Greater New Haven area. For more information about the event, visit www.leapforkids.org/lye. If you have any questions, please email Alison Bonds at abonds@leapforkids.org or by phone at 203-767-7413.

GUESTS OF HONOR

Rev. William Barber II
Matt A. Barreto
Emily Bazelon
Marc Brackett
Khalilah Brown-Dean
Vlad Coric
Karen DuBois-Walton
Jeffrey Fletcher

Philip Galanes
Kahlil Greene
Anne Higonnet
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Betsy Lerner
Maurie McInnis

Carolyn Mazure
Ebony Nelson
Eeva-Liisa Pelkonen
Jacques Pépin
Ann Johnson Prum
Norman Silber
Jason Stanley
Todd Stern
Alex Twining
Stephanie Wiles &
Yale Art Gallery

FORMAL INVITATION TO FOLLOW





LEAPers Share a Thanksgiving Meal and Show their Gratitude

In the spirit of being grateful and celebrating together, each of our eight sites had its own Thankful Dinner where our students could share a meal with their peers and express their gratitude. Before the meal, LEAPers were given a chance to stand in front of their friends and share what they are thankful for. One student said, "I'm thankful for my family, for the food I get, and for everybody at LEAP." Students also expressed appreciation for their hobbies and the activities they get to participate in at LEAP such as athletics.

This event was a true community effort with LEAP staff preparing dishes like turkey, mashed potatoes, and green beans, and parents supplying additional treats like homemade cookies and cupcakes. Other LEAP parents and volunteers joined the kids to help serve food and engage in conversation. It was such a special evening filled with joy and laughter.

LEAP's Fall Enrichment Adventures

This fall, LEAP facilitated a variety of enrichment activities, offering LEAPers exciting ways to learn and grow. Cooking classes transformed the kitchen into a classroom, where students learned basic culinary techniques and explored healthy eating habits.

For those seeking a sporty challenge, lacrosse provided an opportunity to develop teamwork and athletic skills while enjoying a fast-paced and competitive sport. Yoga classes showed our LEAPers what it means to be "Zen," promoting mindfulness, relaxation, and physical well-being.

Creative expression flourished in crochet classes, where LEAPers learned to create beautiful and

functional items while developing patience and focus. The vibrant art of capoeira, with its unique blend of dance and martial arts, captivated LEAPers, enhancing their coordination, agility, and cultural awareness. And through environmental education programs, LEAPers connected with nature, gaining a deeper understanding of sustainability and conservation.

These diverse offerings ensured a well-rounded after school experience, creating space for creativity, physical wellness, and social-emotional development in every LEAPER. These experiences are made possible by the support of our LEAP community!



LEAP staff and volunteers serve children food.



Students clap as peers share Thankful speeches.

Maithé's LEAP to Leadership: From Counselor to Manager

Maithé's journey with LEAP began in the summer of 2019 as a counselor fresh out of college with a degree in bilingual elementary education. What started as a summer job turned into a fulfilling career path, thanks to the growth-oriented environment at LEAP.

"LEAP helped me see what my students need outside of the classroom and support them in a social-emotional way, which was very motivating for me." LEAP encouraged Maithé to pursue her master's degree in school counseling while working, recognizing the value of her continued education and enhancing her skills in supporting students. "I'm very thankful to LEAP for allowing me to continue my education while working here."

Mentorship played a crucial role in Maithé's professional development. Her supervisor, Frankie, became a role model and advocate, pushing her to embrace leadership opportunities. "He pushed me beyond my self-perceived limits... He was my biggest advocate."

Maithé's dedication to

supporting LEAP counselors is evident in her advocacy for their well-being and professional growth. She helped establish a dedicated counselor development office, a space for her team and the counselors she oversees. "Now as Counselor Development Manager, I've been able to do so many things that I couldn't do before, and my counselors benefit from it because I never stopped advocating for them."

Maithé's story exemplifies the transformative power of opportunity, mentorship, and a commitment to personal and professional growth. LEAP provided the fertile ground for her to flourish, and in turn, she has enriched the organization with her passion, dedication, and leadership.



Maithé surrounded by her counselors.

LEAP Opens College Access Doors

This fall, LEAP took 18 of our Leaders-in-Training (LITs) and Junior Counselors (JCs) to Boston for our annual fall college tour.

They toured Northeastern University and Boston University. We also held our annual College & Career Skills Day which included representatives from public and private colleges, trade schools, and various agencies to establish partnerships and provide students with rich resources and networking opportunities.

LEAP's Academic Success

Coordinator has worked with our Junior and Senior Counselors to identify their needs and best support them. We have welcomed over 100 new counselors to our team. The focus has been on equipping them with essential tools and resources related to high school transitions, SAT preparation, college applications, and financial aid. Albertus Magnus continues to provide tutoring sessions to keep our counselors on track academically and improve academic performance.

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Are you 70½ or older and taking Required Minimum Distributions (RMDs) from your IRA? Consider donating your RMD directly to LEAP! It's a simple way to support our programs while lowering your tax burden.

Ready to give? Visit our website or contact us today to learn more about Qualified Charitable Distributions (QCDs).



LITs and JCs at Northeastern University



Students tour Boston University.

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