A LEAP supporter said to me recently with surprise, “LEAP does so much!” She’s right. While we focus on the little interactions that matter to kids, we have grown dramatically, impacting thousands of young people, families, and community members.

So much is happening! With Boroson Architects, we just began the renovation design for the Roslyn Milstein Meyer LEAP Community Center. The 100-year-old building will gain accessibility upgrades, new teaching and art spaces, improvements to our pool and gym, and greater energy efficiency.

This summer, we are expanding our camping program via partnerships with Appalachian Mountain Club and the Wilderness School. We are growing the number of teen girls spending a week at Connecticut College, taking classes with David Dorfman Dance, staying in dorms, and participating in seminars by college professors. And dozens of our young people just returned from a weeklong college tour in Virginia and Maryland.

Many of you have heard about LEAP’s wonderful $2 million donation from MacKenzie Scott. This is a significant support to our $6.5 million budget. We will use the funds to stabilize our budget given federal cutbacks, strengthen key operations to support our growth, and expand and improve programs for children. The gift is a real validation of what we have built together.

We would not be where we are without all of you. Whether kids are camping, studying at college, or learning to read, your support makes it possible.

Henry Fernandez
Executive Director
LEAP is gearing up for its annual Career Fair on May 3rd at the Q House. This event is an opportunity for over 100 high school and college students to interact with professionals from a wide range of industries, spanning from social work to pharmaceutical research. Beyond networking, students will engage in a mock interview session, where volunteers will help them hone their interview skills for future career prospects.

Youth Entrepreneurs, one of LEAP’s partner organizations, will continue facilitating career readiness workshops for our LITs. This workshop series has now been extended to our older students, so our Junior Counselors will receive training in relevant topics such as financial literacy, computer skills, internship opportunities, and launching entrepreneurial business ventures.

LEAP is enhancing our Career Readiness programming to incorporate a diverse range of career focuses. Through our existing and new partnerships with organizations like Youth Entrepreneurs, LEAP is ensuring our students are equipped for success regardless of which career they decide to pursue.

LEAP Takes Students out of New Haven on Spring Break College Tour

Counselors and LITs visit nine schools in Virginia and Maryland

LEAP’s annual spring college tour took place in April. Our Leaders-in-Training (LITs) and our Junior Counselors (JCs) had the opportunity to see a variety of colleges in different states for an entire week.

This year, our high school students visited five HBCUs in Virginia and Maryland, amongst other schools. Many of our students explored out-of-state schools for the first time. Brandon, a student at Common Ground High School, says he wanted to attend the college tour because he wanted to “explore the southern colleges and see all the opportunities they could offer. [I] also wanted to travel since I’ve never been down south before and wanted to get the experience and knowledge of being at a southern university.”

Alongside college tours, our LITs and JCs participated in enriching experiences, such as visiting the Virginia Air & Space Science Center in Hampton, Virginia. This college tour is just one aspect of the comprehensive college access work at LEAP, where our students are given support with resumes, interviewing practice, and more.
John Lee, former Site Coordinator at the Newhallville Site, was drawn to LEAP through his interest in community engagement. His work as a chess teacher led to a summer counselor position, and then the role of site coordinator. "I had a really magical first summer at LEAP," he recalls, describing the sense of belonging and the value of youth leadership. John credits LEAP with shaping his views on work and his career trajectory.

Now a student at Yale's Divinity School, he reflects on the disparities in New Haven and the role of the university in the city. "I think working with young people feels like kind of shaping what they think is possible," he says. Inspired by LEAP's youth leadership focus, he became involved in labor organizing, questioning how to create more systemic and sustainable change.

He sees the need to challenge economic practices, envisioning a future where the city's resources benefit all its residents. Although John is no longer a site coordinator, he still remains close to LEAP and currently teaches chess again at the Newhallville and Dixwell sites.

Cultivating Life Skills and Fresh Produce

The LEAP garden is in full bloom

With flowers and trees already in full bloom, LEAP is prepping its garden for another bountiful harvest of fresh fruits and vegetables. Each summer, our Leaders-in-Training (LITs) plant and harvest vegetables, all while learning about nutritious diets, how to grow food, and how to prepare healthy dishes with the fresh ingredients they cultivated. One of the LITs' favorite gardening activities is creating a 'plant part salad.' Susan Anton, LEAP’s gardening instructor, shows the LITs how to build a nutritious salad using even the most unassuming parts of a plant, like its stalks and roots, that they have grown.

Gardening is also a very therapeutic activity, and LITs have gotten to experience the wellness benefits of being outdoors. With a background in botany and biochemistry, Susan has gotten our LITs passionate about natural science and learning STEM-related subjects through her immersive lessons. Thanks to the MFUNd for supporting LEAP’s gardening program.
A Journey of Growth and Mentorship at LEAP

From counselor to Deputy Director of the Q House

Angie's journey with LEAP began as a conversation at Albertus Magnus College, where she learned about the opportunity to combine work with her passion for helping children. She joined LEAP as a senior counselor at the Fair Haven North site. Angie's ability to speak Spanish and her shared experiences with the community allowed her to form deep, impactful connections with both the children and their parents. Her dedication and relatability led to a promotion from senior counselor to assistant site coordinator under the guidance of Maithé Ulloa, LEAP's counselor development coordinator. “Maithé really showed me the ropes. Without her guidance, I'm not sure I would be in this position.”

In 2022, Angie was again promoted to site coordinator at LEAP's [then] new Quinnipiac Meadows site, where she continued to inspire both her colleagues and the children. Recently, she transitioned to a new role at the Q House, aiming to expand her impact and continue her personal growth. She says, “I’m very happy that I’m able to help my community in a different way. I’m grateful that LEAP continues to inspire me and others to always reach further.”

Angie exemplifies LEAP's mission to foster potential and encourage advancement among its members. Her story proves that with passion and perseverance, one can truly make a difference. We are thrilled to see her journey unfold as she takes on new challenges at the Q House, supported by LEAP's enduring commitment to nurturing leadership and growth.

25th Annual Julia’s Run

Celebrating community and legacy

The 25th annual Julia's Run for Children, held on April 28, was a remarkable testament to community spirit and dedication to a worthy cause. Thankfully, the weather stayed clear for participants of all ages to gather at Edgewood Park to honor Julia Rusinek's memory and support childhood education programs through the Julia Rusinek Memorial Fund, which generously donates all profits to LEAP.

The event kicked off with the Kids Fun Run, where motivated young runners dashed the 3/4 mile course. Following them, runners of all ages took on the challenging 5K course. Motivated by the sea of supporters, runners pushed through fatigue with each step, being cheered closer to the finish line.

The day was a success thanks to the unwavering support of volunteers, sponsors, and LEAP counselors, showcasing the power of community coming together. As participants crossed the finish line, they celebrated their personal achievements and honored Julia's legacy.