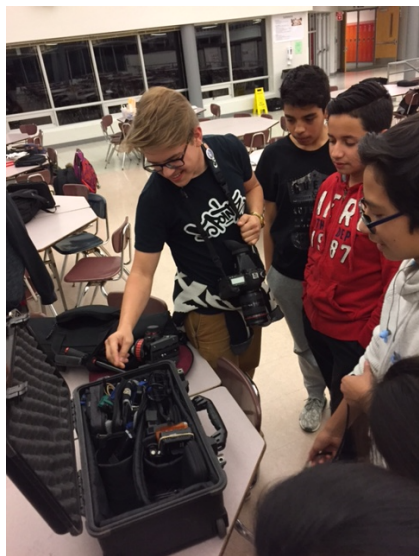


DEVELOPING YOUNG LEADERS

*At POC, we believe that if we improve the lives of our youth, we will have a more stable and healthy community. This year we are focusing even more on our teens and young adults. These amazing people are learning side by side with our volunteers, mentors, board members, and staff how to love and support all people in their community. They are learning to be interested in social justice and what their lives' purpose can be. This newsletter is **dedicated** to some of our young staff that began their journey with POC as program participants, or volunteers and are now positive role models for hundreds of youth. New POC staff member, Justin Lanier wrote this edition. Justin is a recent graduate of NYU and former graduate of Fremd High School. He is dedicating his first year after graduation to improving and uniting his hometown of Palatine. - Kathy Millin, POC Executive Director*

MEET JUSTIN LANIER

Having been around POC since I was a high schooler in 2012, I have had a plethora of opportunities to grow: from feeling self-satisfied for volunteering a few hours for Fremd's graduation requirements, to now feeling like I must give my lifetime to address how deep disparity really goes in Palatine; from feeling helpless to change things, to now knowing that the future lies in organizing our community for collaboration and dialog. But none of this growth would have been possible without the patience and open-mindedness of the POC staff, who have acted as my shepherds. They listen to me and endure thousands of



Justin Lanier with students at POC's Community School at Winston Campus Junior High

questions. They position me to meet talented and influential people. And most of all, they trust me when I try to create something new, and give their time and energy when I ask for their help with it. I am blessed to work with people who I consider mentors. They do the kind of work that is in their hearts and never absent from their minds - and for that we should all be grateful. They give their time selflessly so other people can pursue jobs, provide for families, and chase dreams. I thank these staff, these *partners for our communities*, for allowing me to grow

with them; I only hope I can grow to fill their shoes.

Vision –

***A community of strong citizens,
healthy families, and
vibrant neighborhoods***

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2018 Upcoming Fundraisers

Cinco de Mayo – May 3, 2018

Golf Outing – August 3, 2018

Cristina Correa grew up seeing many teens struggle to make their way in the world. She was inspired and energized to dedicate her work to providing families with the best chance for their children to succeed. At only 19 she began running the Northeast Palatine Summer Camp, which meant managing a staff made up of Palatine Police officers, Village of Palatine employees, and other caring community members donating their time. Having proven herself as a mover and shaker, she began managing the then-new Edgebrook Community Center in the Baldwin Green apartment complex. As a young and unfamiliar face she dealt with skeptical and downright rude parents, but as Cristina said, "I'm feisty." She came back with twice as much care and energy, and now is able to see the payoff: Her "ICompete and Edgebrook Kids" have grown up to thank her for the difference those programs made in their lives; she has witnessed firsthand what children who are invested in can achieve. Now Cristina sees her challenge as training the next generation of leaders, imbuing in them the same persistence and "feistiness" that made her so successful in Palatine but even more so, the value of partnerships; she worked hard as an individual and in turn learned that the key to a brighter future for Palatine's families and children is collaboration in leadership.



Rachel Lara, Cristina's sister, admits to feeling like she grew up in her older sister's shadow, but quickly took this as a reason to prove herself. Since her first time volunteering at age 15, she has worked directly with some of the most underserved children in Palatine, and thusly developed a deep understanding of their needs, eventually earning her the title of Youth and Family Specialist at the Palatine Park District. As Rachel put it, "Only through working with the kids did I see the need of the parents." She possesses an enormous amount of respect for the challenges facing parents in the northeast quadrant of Palatine, and it shows through in her work: Rachel leverages the support of many amazing partner organizations in creative ways to provide families with the resources and affordable, quality programming that they need. Her passion for her work is endless and obvious, as she feels she is never truly off the clock: Rachel is always thinking about her families and kids, falling asleep exhausted but satisfied from a long day of work. "There is not a single day I wake up dreading my job." Her tireless dedication has catapulted Rachel from uncertainty to the confidence needed to respond to any family's questions and crises, and it can be said with certainty that she has accomplished her goal of "leaving Palatine better than she found it."



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Mission

To introduce underserved families to athletics, arts, and academics by breaking down the barriers of access in order to stimulate interest, provide academic support, and increase opportunities for underserved families to participate in organized sports, clubs or community programs.



Stephanie at Summer Camp. This year will mark 18 years of this collaborative program, which has served 100 children each year.

Stephanie Butera began her journey at POC volunteering in the ICompete program, and in turn was plugged into other programs, where as she puts it, she found “a part of me”. Some great mentors - Rachel and Cristina - took her under their wings from the beginning, recognizing her passion and infectious spirit. Stephanie was quickly asked to work at POC’s after school club, summer camps, and Edgebrook Community Center, where she began to develop an understanding of the disparities in Palatine. There, Stephanie developed an appreciation for the amazing efforts that parents and their children make to create a better life for themselves. To this day she says that, “Edgebrook is home.” She continues to work at POC as the Palatine Park District Assistant Program Coordinator. Expecting to graduate in spring 2018 from Depaul University having studied public relations and advertising, Stephanie plans to build upon her experiences at POC and ICompete and continue to magnify the message of those helping people in need.

Erick Flores remembers being six years old, walking alongside his mother on cold and hot days alike, as she pushed Erick’s baby brother in a stroller from their apartment to POC. He would make that walk for five years, he and his brother attending childcare and eventually pre-school programs, their mother pursuing an ESL education, then a GED, and eventually jobs with partner organizations NCH and District 15. Erick attended every program that POC was involved in: ICompete summer camp, the Learning Lab, and many special events. And then at only eleven years old, Erick began to develop a desire to help others the way his family had been helped. He remembers seeing the smiling faces of YMCA campers receiving free meals that may have been their only that day and knowing he wanted to help. So for years, he has: “I had people that were there for me as a kid ... I’ve seen a lot of those people disappear - for better things, I’m not holding it against them - but



Erick mentoring a little friend

someone had to fill their shoes, to take initiative ... to try and be someone that parents and kids can be comfortable with.” Erick is now an 18-year-old with humility and wisdom well beyond his years; he could only have obtained them through the countless hours he has spent at POC, working with both children and their parents. He is a face known and trusted by families in a way few others in Northeast Palatine are. “The only reason I figured these things out is because they gave me a chance. The difference is I had the opportunity ... but so many people don’t. POC helped me figure out what I want to do, and that I can make a difference if I try.”

Teen Leadership

In the spirit of passing the torch of leadership, we also want to highlight two groups of teenagers taking strides to create a better future for their community...



Fremd Football players helping at the Roots Community Garden. The garden harvested 4,100 lbs of vegetables last year.

Iron Will: Last year, the Fremd Football team helped prepare the POC Roots Community Garden for cultivation in the spring, and for dormancy in the fall. Student Brian Morel said, "It felt great to be able to finish the garden after starting it last spring. It's awesome knowing that people put their own work into the garden and got a lot out of it. We were so happy to actually see the impact of our work in the community, and we hope we will be able to continue with our service program next year." Fremd Football's service program Iron Will Outreach contributed **95** hours of service to the community last year alone.

Teen Advisory Board: We are always excited by our community members that get engaged in solving our communities' issues, and no group is more inspiring to see work than our Teen Advisory Board. Composed of more than **70** students from Fremd and Palatine high schools, the group has defined for itself a mission of creating its own events and service projects in order to bridge the social divide between the two schools, as well as respond to some of the community's needs like food and warm clothing. Along the way, the students are developing valuable leadership skills like how to organize a group of people around a mission, how to develop a strategy for completing that mission, and how to ensure accountability from one another in order to enact that strategy. Keep an eye out for the TAB's upcoming event series aimed at bringing together community members to engage in dialogue about what they have deemed as pressing issues, like the opioid crisis and undocumented immigrant identity.