

# RIBA ASPIRA

by New Opportunities, Inc.

Region 1 • Waterbury, Connecticut  
newoppinc.org



## Employment • Adult Education • Job Training • Social Services

### INITIATIVE OVERVIEW

The goal of the RIBA ASPIRA initiative is to **reduce the unemployment rate by 50% for Waterbury’s South End (Ri)ver (Ba)ldwin (RIBA) neighborhood community over a ten-year span.** The project is currently moving into year three and has a target rate of reducing unemployment by 16.7% at the end of that year. The initiative is addressing unemployment through the development of the RIBA Career Academy which is a collaborative partnership that brings employment training, basic education skills, workforce investment, and social services in one site for RIBA residents.



### LOCAL NEED ADDRESSED

The RIBA neighborhood has an unemployment rate of 23%, which is nearly four times the unemployment average in the City of Waterbury alone. Factors contributing to unemployment in the RIBA neighborhood include low educational attainment, limited access to job services, and a fragmented social services system.

- The median household income for the neighborhood’s census tract is \$24,201
- 43.9% of neighborhood residents live below the poverty line.
- Only 68.3% of RIBA neighborhood residents have a high school diploma, which is 23% lower than the state of Connecticut average.
- Minorities are nearly three times more likely to be in poverty in the Waterbury area, according to New Opportunities’ 2018 comprehensive community needs assessment.

The RIBA neighborhood lacks an organized and structured way for residents to provide feedback regarding the condition of their community and the implementation of policies (many of which contribute to racial inequities).

- A recent example includes a local planning effort led by the Community Development Agency for the City of Waterbury, which did not include resident engagement.
- RIBA initiative supporters were able to separately engage agency officials to ensure resident concerns and feedback were addressed in the plan.
- Additionally, community resident surveys conducted during the development of the RIBA initiative indicated that only about 10% of residents engaged in civic activities to address the economic conditions of their neighborhood.

## ROLE OF CSBG FUNDS

CSBG funds are utilized to support staff time associated with the engagement with the Leadership team for the RIBA ASPIRA initiative. This includes the development of strategic objectives and program implementation plans, and the review of program level data as the initiative utilizes the agency's case management Software System.

## TRANSFORMATIVE IMPACT

The transformative impact of the initiative is twofold. The first is the revitalization of the RIBA neighborhood, as many community development projects have either been completed or are underway. The RIBA ASPIRA academy has been an integral component of these revitalization efforts, as it offers employment readiness and educational services that were previously unavailable in the neighborhood. The second is empowering local residents to become their own advocates. Now, they are engaged in a model that seeks to emphasize and share their stories in way that promotes dialogue and change in local policy.

## EVIDENCE-BASED OUTCOMES

There were two cohorts of English as a Second Language (ESL) classes developed for neighborhood residents based on community engagement activities. All participants' anecdotal feedback was positive and related to their interaction with the instructor as well as their appreciation for the accessibility of this resource. A total of nineteen individuals completed the ESL classes.

There was also one GED cohort class that took place during the reporting period and was directly available at the RIBA Career Academy. Participants stated that accessibility and gaining knowledge were the highlights of this class. A total of three participants successfully completed the class and earned their GED diploma.

- 132 Adults completed Literacy training
- 118 Individuals received external referrals for employment opportunities
- 17 Individuals completed GED/High School prep program
- 33 individuals received job readiness services

## EQUITY LENS

One of the community concepts implemented through RIBA ASPIRA was South End Socials, which is based on the Neighbor Night concept developed by national consultant William Traynor. These events centered around community gatherings as a springboard to conducting meaningful community conversations.

So far, two events that have taken place; however, this model is becoming a major point of emphasis in the 3rd and 4th year of initiative activities. The census tract being engaged is predominantly Hispanic with disproportionate unemployment, educational attainment, and poverty rates. A major point of emphasis is engaging residents to share their stories and to help impact local policies.

## CUSTOMER VOICE

The RIBA ASPIRA initiative utilizes neighborhood residents as block captains to engage potential initiative participants. The block captains bring ideas and serve as members of the leadership team. One of the main objectives for block captains is to train community residents in public education and engagement issues that have local policy implications.

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