

*City of Taunton
Office of the Mayor*



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**O’Connell Announces Sponsorship of Taunton Youth Summer Program through ARPA Grant;
Collaboration with T.R.U.E. Diversity and Raising Multicultural Kids**

Taunton, MA... Today Mayor O’Connell announced the Office of the Mayor is sponsoring a Taunton youth summer program through an American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) grant.

The Taunton T.O.G.E.T.H.E.R. Youth Program, sponsored by the Mayor’s Office and developed and operated by T.R.U.E. Diversity and Raising Multicultural Kids, promotes social and emotional learning for young people. The program will focus on developing skills in relationship building, self-care and education for Taunton youth.

Mayor O’Connell allocated \$236,000 in ARPA funding to subsidize the summer program, citing the importance of supporting mental health initiatives for our youth. O’Connell is excited that Taunton children will have an opportunity to have fun while learning valuable skills this summer. “Our kids have had a rough year. The social isolation and pressures from the pandemic have presented enormous challenges to our youth. This summer program developed as an off-shoot of our Make It OK mental health campaign as we explored ideas for supporting the mental health needs of our children.”

T.R.U.E. Diversity is a Taunton-based grassroots civic and social non-profit organization dedicated to advocating for diversity, equity, equality and inclusion within communities. Raising Multicultural Kids, based out of Easton, is an education-based non-profit organization dedicated to increasing racial and cultural competency in local communities through deep engagement with schools, educational experts, and local citizens.

Tanya Lobo, Founder and Executive Director of T.R.U.E. Diversity, has worked closely with O’Connell to launch the Make It OK mental health campaign and appreciates the Mayor’s focus on the mental health needs of children. “The Taunton T.O.G.E.T.H.E.R. Youth Program was built on the fundamental belief that all children can succeed with equitable access to social and emotional learning. When more of us rise, the entire community benefits,” said Lobo.

The program will be provided free of charge to children ages 6 and older who qualify through federal poverty guidelines, or SNAP benefits or MassHealth eligibility. The program will run from July 6th through August 6th, Monday-Friday, from 8:30am-3:00pm.

Taunton High School will be the location of the summer program and Taunton Public Schools will provide breakfast and lunch. In addition to providing this opportunity for younger children, the program will also be hiring local teenagers and college students as mentors to help with the daily curriculum.

Kelly Ann Lamb, Co-Founder and President of Raising Multicultural Kids, emphasizes the importance of multiple community stakeholders. “In addition to the sponsorship by the Mayor’s Office, the partnership includes the generous support and resources of many in the Taunton area who are invested in our kids. It is truly a community effort.”

ARPA provides funding to municipalities to mitigate the negative impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. The Taunton T.O.G.E.T.H.E.R. Youth Program meets ARPA’s goals of addressing educational disparities students faced during school closures, promoting a healthy environment for children while parents are working, addressing food insecurities by providing meals, and incorporating physical activities designed to address the social, emotional and mental health needs of children impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic.

O’Connell enthuses, “This is such a welcome opportunity for our children. They have been remarkably resilient thus far in enduring the pandemic, but it feels particularly gratifying to be able to offer them a chance to go back to being kids and enjoying some summer fun. I can’t wait for the program to start!”

For additional information about the program, please refer to www.togetheryouthma.org. Follow on Facebook and Instagram @TOGETHERYouthMA. ###