



Apex Youth Connection responds to the needs of local youth during the pandemic

With Biddeford schools adopting a hybrid schedule for high school students this fall in response to Covid-19, **Apex Youth Connection** is working overtime to develop a program providing in-person support for students who may struggle with remote schooling. This is a great example of how Apex, formerly The Community Bicycle Center, responds to the needs of our community's youth -- from the need for human connection through these trying times, to food insecurity, and now, to academic support.

When the Coronavirus hit in March and closed schools, Apex continued to connect with their kids remotely throughout the spring with online support and weekend food distributions. Then, starting June 8th, summer programs were held outside, with proper safety measures in place.

"We never stopped connecting with our kids, I think that's really the most important thing. We continued to support them, and we continue to let them lead their learning," Apex Executive Director Melissa Cilley said.

Cilley said they did however hear from their kids that remote schoolwork was challenging. From these reports, Apex identified a new goal for school year 20-21: to ensure students stay engaged with remote learning and do not fall behind.

In order to offer the new program this fall, Apex is in need of a 3000 square foot open space, close to Downtown, so the kids can be attentive to their studies and active on breaks while spreading out safely. They hope to serve two cohorts of 20 students, and are also in need of financial support to hire another temporary staff member to work with the kids academically.

"We want to provide a consistent safe place they can go with peers, and stay motivated, and motivate each other," Cilley said.

Apex Youth Connection has a 20- year legacy of connecting kids through bikes. Now, as Apex, they continue to connect with kids using all the original bike programs as well as other adventures and experiences leveraging the power of human relationships to get youth "out there", aspiring toward the future, persisting through challenges, and exploring the world around them.

Located at 25 Granite Street and with a Community Hub at 46 Sullivan Street, Apex programs are tuition-free, intentionally inclusive, and available to any youth from 5th to 12th grade, connecting them with mentors, their community, and the great outdoors.

This is a "little engine that could" organization that models resiliency and persistence for area youth every day. For example, Apex Bike Factory, the non-profit's job readiness program, is a hands-on bike shop run by middle and high school students, where students build and repair bikes as a medium for learning workplace expectations, professional conduct, deliverable outcomes, and responsibility. When the pandemic hit, staff took the opportunity to introduce the youth to online marketing, setting up an eBay marketplace where they could sell the refurbished bikes. The students did the marketing, researching specs for the bikes, and writing all of the copy for the listings.

Apex, like the youth they serve, continues to learn and grow. "One thing we've learned is that listening to our families and our kids is critical. We've also learned that we can share a lot more power with our kids, and they will step up and meet that demand."

Apex Youth Connection receives no state or federal funding and serves hundreds of youth each year. They are always seeking volunteer mentors to guide youth toward their brightest future.

For more information, contact Apex at outreach@apexyouthconnection.org, go online to www.apexyouthconnection.org, or check out our Facebook page at www.facebook.com/apexyouthconnection/.

