

# The Canopy Center

A nurturing and protective environment where children ages 0-4 and their families can thrive. Like the canopy of a tree that shields and shelters, we offer a safe space for young minds to grow, discover, and develop while providing the support their families need.

## CONTEXT

**Tree Street Youth** was founded in 2011 as a homework help program to meet the needs of the children of immigrant and refugee families facing language, cultural and economic barriers in Lewiston, Maine.

14 years later, the Center has evolved to be a community anchor serving nearly 1,000 youth per year ages 4 to 24 with a range of programs that support social-emotional development, academic success, leadership skills, workforce development and college/career prep. The organization has forged successful partnerships with the Department of Corrections, Lewiston Public Schools, Department of Labor, and a network of community partners.

In 2022, Tree Street piloted a **Pre-K Bridge Program** to fill gaps in early childhood programming and affordable child care for families in Lewiston. Through this initial pilot, we began hearing stories of parents who desperately wanted/needed to work, but often were having to call out due to limited childcare, bus cancellations, or behavioral issues with children at school programs. Additionally, these young parents wanted positive connections to other parents in the community and to improve their parenting skills.



## RESEARCH & DESIGN YEAR

In the 2021-2022 academic year, Tree Street staff conducted a **Research & Design Year** exploring community needs and solutions for a two-generation approach with positive outcomes in child readiness for school that would also support parents to enter and stay in the workforce as their children become more prepared for school. We identified the following needs:

- Working parents struggle to find programs that meet their work schedules all year round and have flexibility (like drop-in)
- Families need care for their children ages 2-4.
- Families are unsure how to access evaluation, services, and resources for children with developmental delays & disabilities
- Families cited lack of affordability in available programs.
- Single parents, disabled parents, families without access to transportation are looking for support and resources for the whole family
- Not enough staff to keep classrooms open leads to less children being served in the community.

In response to these data findings, the vision for **the Canopy Center** emerged.

## PROGRAM & SERVICES SNAPSHOT

**The Canopy Center** will provide opportunities for families to access community resources, including parenting support, and health, wellness, financial literacy, workforce development training, and high quality early childhood education.

### The space will accommodate/feature:

- Large indoor playground/discovery space
- Teaching kitchen for nutrition and cooking classes
- Pre-K bridge program classrooms
- Workforce training ground for older youth interested in early childhood education
- Dedicated area for service providers (CDS, OT, PT, etc.) to conduct early childhood screening visits, evaluations, and family consultations.
- Area to host supervised family visits
- Structured programming for parents
- Private events by families or organizations of the community.



## COMMUNITY SERVED

The benefits will be far reaching across the region; however the intended beneficiaries of **the Canopy Center** would be the Tree Street community where our project is located.



- Over two-thirds (72%) of the children diagnosed with elevated blood lead levels citywide between 2013 and 2017 lived in the Tree Street neighborhood surrounding the center
- Almost 80 percent of our housing units were built prior to 1970 and present risks of lead poisoning.
- Many children in the target population of the project attend the second and third worst performing elementary schools in the State of Maine.
- Almost half (49%) of families in Downtown Lewiston “Tree Street neighborhood” live in poverty. Among families with children, the poverty rate is 62 percent.
- Unemployment in the immediate surrounding community is nine percent, a rate nearly twice that of the City (5%).
- 22.5% children report having 4 or more adverse childhood experiences.
- Lewiston graduation rate (in 4 years) is approximately 67% compared to 86.1% in Maine as a whole with Chronic absenteeism for nearly double the statewide average, (48.1% for economically disadvantaged).
- Nearly all youth who currently attend Tree Street’s programming live at or below the poverty level: 35% identifying as generationally living in the Lewiston community and 65% of youth come from immigrant or refugee families; with 85% of youth identify as BIPOC, speaking 26 languages.



## WHAT'S NEXT?

Tree Street Youth has secured \$1 million in Congressional Directed Spending to help fund this project. Preliminary estimates have been provided by Harriman, and in the coming months, we'll finalize the drawings to lock in a Guaranteed Maximum Price for the construction. We will also be seeking philanthropic support from individuals, corporations, and foundations to make our vision of **the Canopy Center** a reality.



Renderings of  
**143 Howe St.**



144 Howe Street  
Lewiston, ME 04240

Website  
[treestreetyouth.org](http://treestreetyouth.org)

Email  
[info@treestreetyouth.org](mailto:info@treestreetyouth.org)

Phone  
207-513-6866

