



**CEDAR-RIVERSIDE
OPPORTUNITY
CENTER**

ANNUAL REPORT

2019/2020

PREPARED BY
THE CEDAR-RIVERSIDE PARTNERSHIP

OUR MISSION & HISTORY

We connect all activities to our guiding mission and roots in the community.

Our mission: Provide access to employment, education, and training opportunities for Cedar-Riverside residents by bringing employers and higher education institutions into the community to support building prosperity for all.

The idea for the center was in response to the nearly 18% unemployment rate as well as the estimated 30% of working-age adults who have not completed high school level education in Cedar-Riverside. The Cedar-Riverside Partnership saw these alarming numbers as a gap that could be filled with a holistic approach to education and employment. In September 2016, the Cedar-Riverside Partnership succeeded in raising \$950,000 in capital funds for the construction of the Opportunity Center.

Many centers have targeted this area, but what makes the Cedar-Riverside Opportunity Center different is it's tailored for the community it serves. Every decision was made with the community in mind, such as the use of large windows translates to transparency for many cultures represented, the staff hired has proficiency in various languages to connect with community members, programs are culturally relevant, and the building is easily accessible to those who need it most.

Now, the Cedar-Riverside Opportunity Center is a one-stop-shop for educational and workforce resources and pipeline to quality jobs for people of all ages, made possible through the committed presence of public and private sector employers. The ultimate goal of the Opportunity Center is to reduce unemployment and increase higher education attainment and enrollment within the Cedar-Riverside neighborhood.

THE PARTNERS

The Cedar-Riverside Opportunity Center is only possible with the following partners.

EMERGE Community Development: EMERGE is the managing partner of the center, facilitating day-to-day operations. EMERGE provides intake, assessment, job search/career exploration, employment counseling, job development, job placement, and case management services to youth and adult job seekers in the neighborhood.

Hennepin County Library: The library partners with other organizations to build enthusiasm, spark ideas, and develop skills that support career pathways for youth in the Cedar-Riverside community.

Hennepin County Workforce Development: Hennepin County Workforce Development helps oversee the employment aspect of the Cedar-Riverside Opportunity Center and assists with the recruitment of employer partners.

Minneapolis College: Minneapolis College assists individuals at the center by providing information on options available for higher education or workforce skills training at MCTC and the other 36 colleges and universities that are part of the Minnesota State Colleges and Universities System.

City of Minneapolis: The City of Minneapolis coordinates services in the Cedar-Riverside neighborhood through community engagement and collaboration under the leadership of Saeed Bihi, Cedar-Riverside Opportunity Center Manager. The City also facilitates relationships between employers, educators, and community partners.



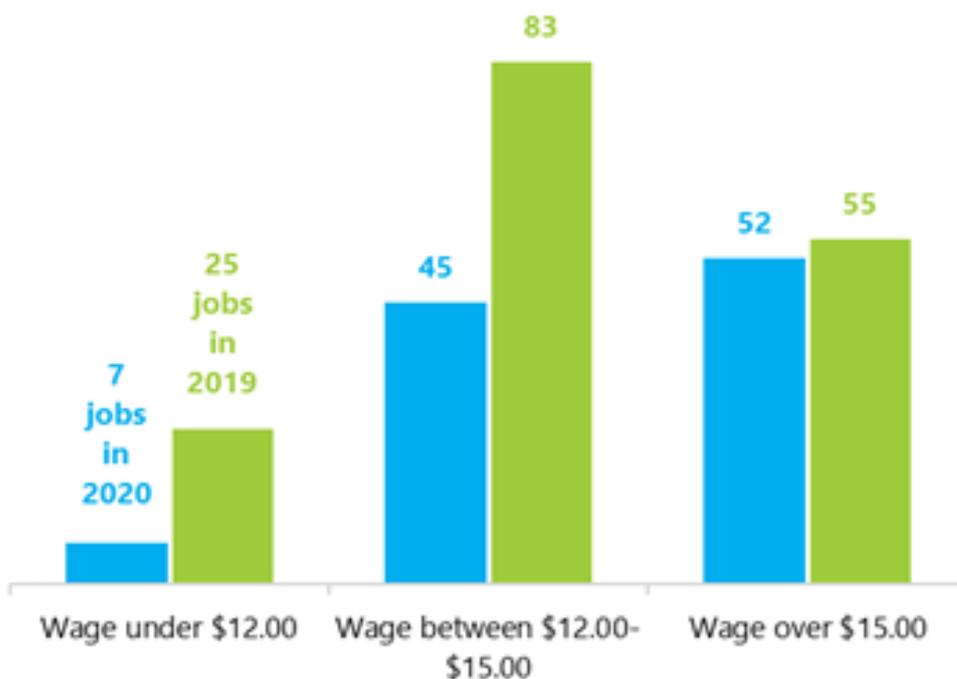
OUTCOMES

The Cedar-Riverside Opportunity Center is grounded in tangible outcomes. Below are a sampling of outcomes in (from) the last two years.

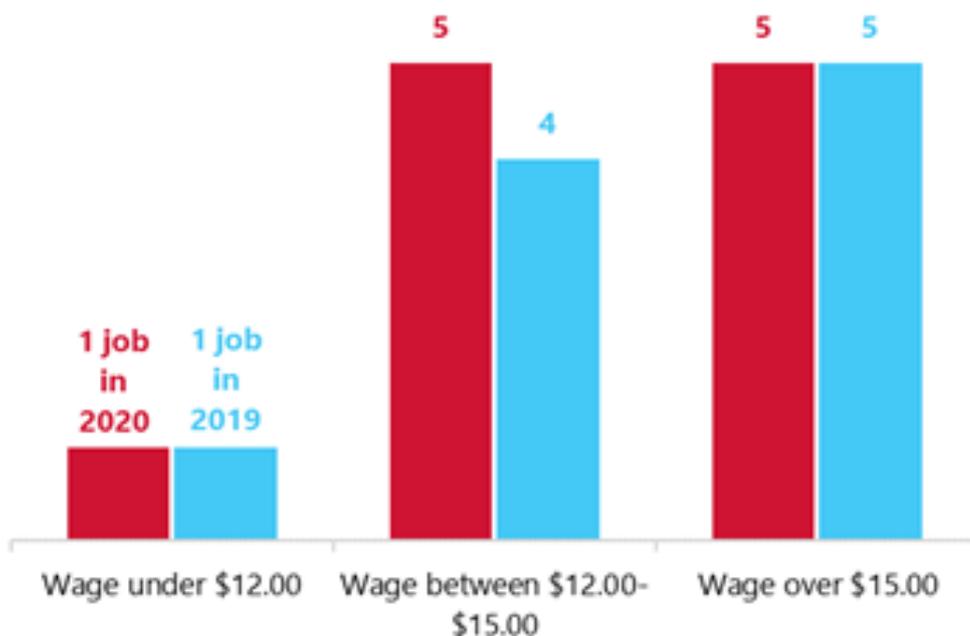
PARTICIPANTS SERVED 2019 + 2020



A SHIFT IN WAGES OCCURED



YOUTH WAGES REMAIN SIMILAR



JOB PLACEMENTS: ADULT



144 PARTICIPANTS OBTAINED
163 PLACEMENTS IN 2019



85 PARTICIPANTS OBTAINED
104 PLACEMENTS IN 2020

JOB PLACEMENTS: YOUTH



10 PARTICIPANTS OBTAINED 10 PLACEMENTS IN 2019



11 PARTICIPANTS OBTAINED 11 PLACEMENTS IN 2020

INTERNSHIPS

08

Internships in 2019 at...

- Pillsbury United Communities
- EMERGE
- Step Up
- Xpressmen
- Hennepin County Library

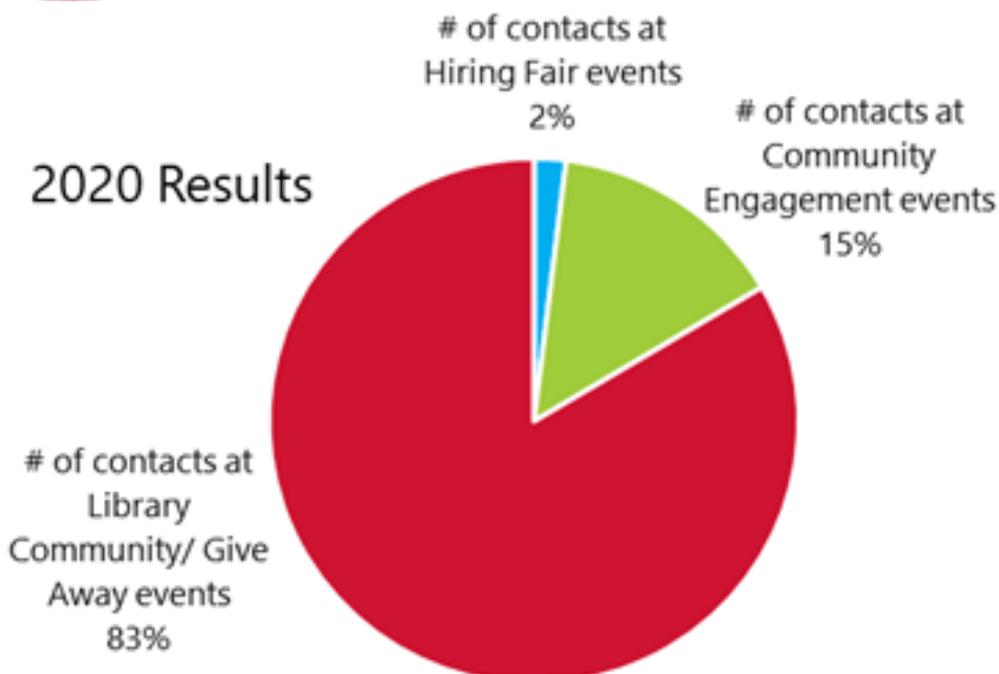
11

Internships in 2020 at...

- Cedar-Riverside Opportunity Center
- EMERGE
- Extended Health Services
- Hope Wellness Center
- MN Somali Community
- Minneapolis Park Board
- Twin Cities Home Healthcare

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Specific Area	2020 Results	2019 Results
# of contacts at Hiring Fair events	27	141
# of contacts at Community Engagement events	202	224
# of contacts at Library Community/ Give Away events	1160	869



PARTNERSHIP HIGHLIGHTS

Now, we will showcase the amazing work of each partner individually.



CAREER PATHWAYS + TRAINING

When the stay at home order was put in place by the governor in 2020, it effectively shut down EMERGE's Nursing Assistant program. In-person classes at Minneapolis College ceased, ABE classes ceased, and Emerge EMERGE facilities closed. With all programming requiring an immediate transition to a virtual format, Minneapolis College began offering the Nursing Assistant program virtually. However, the hands-on training, including student clinicals, remains unavailable. While credential testing became available in June, participants cannot fully achieve the credential until they complete their clinical.

Participant engagement in training also became an issue during 2020. Many students stopped participating due to the impact COVID-19 was having on their lives. Several students contracted the virus, while others expressed that they were too afraid to carry on any activities that weren't related to their basic needs, and put training on hold. Due to COVID-19, EMERGE's Training Department went to great lengths to make the programming available virtually and build broader digital offerings.

Some of the new technology initiatives are: fillable intake forms participants can access online, providing computers to participants, and converting the Career Advancement and Financial Wellness curriculum to virtual formats.

Although all programs were halted due to the stay-home order, eventually, EMERGE was able to reconvene them all. This was due, in large part, to a collaborative effort to create virtual training environments for all three programs. The new virtual learning included real-time classes on formats such as Zoom, distance learning curriculum including materials mailed or emailed to students that they could work on at home and send back, and online curriculum including videos and lectures available for students to watch at their own pace and report on. In some cases, a combination of all these strategies were implemented. All three training programs were up and running and serving students again by the late second quarter.

To accomplish this conversion to virtual learning formats, EMERGE worked closely with its training partners including Minneapolis College, Met Council, and Mayle Transportation. All training partners adapted and created virtual programming.

EMERGE also ensured participants possessed the technology and training to successfully access the programs. The Training Department partnered with PCs for People and Minnesota Computers for Schools to purchase laptops for all participants that needed one. This initiative was possible through funding provided by CARES Act and other emergency funding sources.

Overall, 137 participants were served in career training in 2020 with some engaged in more than one training. EMERGE also dispersed \$105,775 in tuition support, and \$14,263 in direct financial supports.



YOUTH PROGRAMMING

Youth programming at the center, much like all other programs, came to a halt when the pandemic began. However, then the programs pivoted to adapt to the new environment. Some of the activities that continued were youth workshops, digital literacy, one-on-one coaching, and youth internships. Many new internship opportunities were built around COVID-19 responses as well. For example, in December 2020, C-ROC youth partnered with Michael's Apparel to operate a coat drive which gave young community members, who couldn't otherwise afford it due to the pandemic, access to appropriate winter apparel in preparation for the extreme weather conditions.

Between 2019 and 2020, EMERGE served 213 young people with at least one service. Six of them obtained a credential or certificate, and 21 were placed in an unsubsidized internship.

MFIP

In 2019, the EMERGE MFIP program served 718 participants, with 75-90 people per counselor caseload. In 2020, EMERGE saw a shift. 731 participants were assigned to a counselor in caseloads of 103-115. The MFIP team served more people with higher-volume caseloads. Other changes due to the pandemic were: a rise in the number of participants being considered "essential workers" but a lower number of participants working overall, usually due to layoffs or furloughs. Engagement with participants at the beginning of the pandemic was also a challenge.

To combat the challenges brought on by the pandemic, the MFIP team increased their outreach to participants, assisted in connecting participants with basic needs and relevant community programs, and expanded cash assistance such as housing assistance, car repair assistance, and technology needs assistance.



TEEN TECH SQUAD

Teen Tech Squad cultivates 21st-century learning and innovation skills in youth through STEAM-based activities. The squad at the Cedar-Riverside Opportunity Center is comprised of local youth employed by the library to develop and lead STEAM-based activities and workshops for youth in the community. Squad employees are equipped with tools to research, design, implement, and facilitate the activities for youth. Teen employees build skills in leadership, technology, interpersonal, and career readiness by planning and delivering workshops. [Hennepin County Library facilitated over 800 interactions in 2019 and 2020 through this program.](#)



HOMWORK HELP

K-12 Homework Help is a drop-in, after-school program that offers children and teens a free, safe, and welcoming space to master academic concepts, complete homework assignments, and build confidence and expertise in their learning.

Homework help tutors include neighborhood college students, guided by the lead tutors and other staff members, providing additional peer leadership and job skill development.

Homework help surveys completed by students at the Opportunity Center show that one-on-one support from tutors is valued and a big reason they return to the program.

Youth participating in the library's homework help program also reported that they feel more confident about the areas they came in for help with and that they are doing better in school because of the program. [Over 1,800 homework help tutoring sessions were facilitated in 2019 and 2020.](#)



YOUTH CAREER AND LEADERSHIP PROGRAMMING

Driven by community youth, the Cedar Youth Leadership Group (CYLG) was formed to give youth in the East African community opportunities to facilitate discussions about school, family, and community with young people and families in the neighborhood. The group gives opportunities for young people to be at the center of creating community-wide dialogue.

Hennepin County Library hosts job and career panels that bring East African professionals to the Opportunity Center to discuss their careers and answer questions about education and job paths. Panel topics have included healthcare, entrepreneurship, information technology, law enforcement, and jobs with Hennepin County. The library also partners with the Somali Student Association at the University of Minnesota to offer programming geared toward college-bound youth. [Over 1,200 participants attended programming in 2019 and 2020.](#)

CULTURAL PRESERVATION PROGRAMMING

Cultural programming occurs through a partnership with the Somali Museum of Minnesota and other cultural organizations to bring dancers and artists into the Opportunity Center. Oromo and other East African cultures are represented to reflect the diversity within the local community. [Over 800 participants attended cultural programming in 2019 and 2020.](#)

YOUTH EMPLOYMENT AND VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES

The library offers both employment and volunteer opportunities at the center. In 2019 and 2020, four youth were employed as Teen Tech Squad members and four youth members lead the Cedar Youth Leadership Group. [In 2019 and 2020, 13 young adult volunteers contributed over 900 hours of service at the Opportunity Center.](#)

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND POP-UP LIBRARIES

Due to the pandemic, community outreach in 2020 was more robust. Hundreds of giveaway books and STEAM-based activity kits were distributed to youth in the Cedar-Riverside community.

Library youth employees from the Teen Tech Squad and the Cedar Youth Leadership Group began to work together virtually. Through this combined effort, they became the Cedar Youth Alliance. The mission of the Cedar Youth Alliance is to serve kids, teens, and young adults in the Cedar-Riverside neighborhood by creating projects and activities, promoting online homework help, and hosting college, career, and community conversations for youth. [Youth employees also designed and created the Cedar Youth Alliance website.](#)

Through a partnership with Riverside Plaza Tenants Association English Language Learning (ELL) program and the Minneapolis Family Investment Program (MFIP) at EMERGE, the library distributed 25 Wi-Fi hotspots to community members.

The library also partnered with the Cedar-Riverside Community Council to distribute 50 CARES-funded Chromebooks to neighborhood students and families who lacked the technology needed for distance learning.





BUSINESS & COMMUNITY OUTREACH

The City of Minneapolis, and specifically Saeed Bihi, plays a major role in coordinating services in the Cedar-Riverside neighborhood through community engagement and collaborations, working directly in the community and fostering relationships between employers, educators, and training providers. This partnership also brings City Enterprises and services directly into the neighborhood. [Before the pandemic](#), many City of Minneapolis departments had offered services here at C-ROC [monthly](#). Some of which were, including:

- The Small Business Office held a monthly session to provide resources and support to the local Cedar-Riverside businesses and increase their access to the City's resources.
- The Neighborhood Community Relations held monthly events to enhance the East African Community Organizations and the City Enterprises' relationship.
- The Department of Health held monthly meetings to explore the community's health needs and what resources they can provide.

[In 2020, dominated by COVID-19 and civil unrest](#), the City worked primarily with Cedar-Riverside and East African businesses that had been affected by these tragedies [to link them to the resources of the city, the state, and the federal government](#). Bihi guided community members throughout the process and obtained the resources they needed, whether it was a loan, a grant, or other assistance.

PARTICIPANT STORIES

Success is truly measured by the stories of participants. Below are a sampling of real stories.



HANAN

"Teen Tech Squad increased my confidence to do things I wasn't used to doing before. Because I learned a lot about how to communicate and feel free to share my ideas, I met a lot of new people. Some of them helped me get the job I have now at the University of Minnesota, at The Toaster, which is a lot of fun. We also get to collaborate with the Teen Tech Squad at The Toaster, which is a great connection."

TINA

Before Tina's time in EMERGE's digital literacy program, she was almost a complete stranger to computers. After nearly three months of hard work, Tina passed eight assessments through Northstar Digital Literacy. She now admits that she is constantly surprised by how comfortable and competent she is when working with computers. She is especially impressed by how quickly her typing skills improved. This summer, she plans to apply to more computer-inclined jobs and hopes to work as a receptionist.

