LEAP’s fall semester was jam packed with learning, adventures and fun. Lots of homework help, reading exercises, swimming, and computer and cooking classes filled our days. Amazingly, we just won a Google Rise award (one of just 25 worldwide) for our work with kids and computers.

But with all this good news, it is important to highlight something else. Following the presidential election many of our young people were confused and some quite scared. LEAP’s children, teens, junior and senior counselors are overwhelmingly African American and Latino. Many have at least one parent who is an undocumented immigrant. Some of our young people are Muslim and some are members of the LGBTQ community. They are concerned about what may happen to their families and what their place is in the United States.

We have assured them that at LEAP all are welcome and we will work hard to keep everyone safe. Through large meetings and in one-on-one conversations, we have explained our commitment and answered their questions.

This commitment is possible because of your support. At this time your efforts mean so much to the young people of our city.

Henry Fernandez, Executive Director

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Watch for your printed invitation in the mail, via email or check online at leapforkids.org the week of 1/24. Then buy your tickets to attend a dinner with one of these Guests of Honor at our Hosts’ homes.

James Atlas  •  Paul Bass  •  Emily Bazelon
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Anna Reisman  •  Stephen Roach
Andrew Rubenoff  •  Alexis H. Smith
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This fall, LEAP launched the Building Bridges partnership between LEAP and the New Haven Police Academy. Recruits from the New Haven Police Academy and teens from LEAP’s Leaders in Training program are working together on community service projects and sharing time together at both the police academy and at LEAP’s community center. In the face of protests around the country centered on policing in communities of color, we wanted to introduce recruits and teens to each other so they get to know each other as real human beings with aspirations, commitments, families, hobbies and tremendous potential. By serving food to the homeless together at a local soup kitchen, doing problem solving games, shadowing each other in their respective environments, and getting to know each other in social settings, we open the door for honest discussions between the recruits and teens, facilitated by local and national experts on community and policing. Over the six months they are together, we believe these teens and recruits can learn from each other and be ambassadors to their peers – helping to build bridges between community and police.

On Friday, October 28, LEAP’s annual Halloween Party was a blast. Hundreds of children, parents, grandparents and volunteers joined for a magical and spooky night complete with games, pumpkin painting, trick-or-treating, movies and a “haunted house” that was in fact a haunted locker room.

Early in the festivities, police recruits and teens in the LEAP LIT program got to know each other before volunteering with the younger children. The recruits got to see LEAP up close at our Halloween Festival as they volunteered with LEAP teens. The recruits went through LEAP’s haunted house, escorted kids trick-or-treating, and, at the end of the night, treated us all to a dance performance to Michael Jackson’s Thriller.

Face painting was in high demand, and lots of friends—spooky and not-so-spooky—had a good time trading stories, playing games and trick-or-treating on Lyon and Williams Streets. Among those in attendance were Representative Rosa DeLauro with her grandkids, some skeleton brides, cute cats, and lots of superheroes.
I Am Thankful Because...

On November 22, LEAP held its annual Thankful Dinner with several hundred LEAP kids, counselors and volunteers celebrating together at Hillhouse High School cafeteria. The Thankful Dinner is one of the few times each year that children from all of LEAP’s community based programs come together. It is a chance to build community and to see smiling faces galore while everyone enjoys a wonderful meal.

The Thankful Dinner always kicks off with children sharing what they are thankful for. Azariyha said, "What I learned in LEAP is to always have courage and believe in yourself. Thank you." Keyani followed with, “I am thankful to my counselor for helping me." Then LEAP Alumni and parents were joined by New Haven Police Department recruits in serving hundreds of meals. There was laughter, singing and LEAP’s traditional Thankful Dinner dance party at the end!

Thank you to Yorkside Pizza, T & J Market, and LEAP board members and staff for donating all the food. Chef Edwin Armstrong and his students at Eli Whitney Vocational Tech High School donated their services and cooked the delicious turkeys.

LEAP is proud of our Recent Grants

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LEAP was one of only 25 winners worldwide (and one of only 12 in the US) to win a Google K-12 Education Outreach Fund of Tides Foundation award for our work with children in computer science!

A Conversation with a Leader In Training (LIT)

We interviewed 15-year-old LEAP Leader In Training Ramzia, a smart young woman who is African American, Muslim and the daughter of immigrants. Given ugly rhetoric targeting women, immigrants, black people, and religious minorities during the election, we asked for her thoughts about both America and LEAP.

**Why do you come to LEAP?**

There are many different kinds of people at LEAP so you can really find people you relate to. I got a lot out of the college tour in February. At law camp, I loved getting to debate even though I was very nervous. And during the summer, it kept me out of the house and we had so many different activities that I would not have been doing otherwise.

**Since the election, have you experienced any negative reactions to your race or religion?**

We had a hate letter sent to where we worship. Many people are doing hateful things -- thinking all Muslims are terrorists. But not all Muslims are terrorists and not all terrorists are Muslim. That’s why I like coming to LEAP. I don’t see a difference in people based on their religion and neither do other people at LEAP.

**Do you worry for yourself or your younger brothers?**

Most of the time I hope my brothers don’t have to go through the things that I had to go through—that they aren’t looked at differently because of their religion. I hope they are looked at for the bright personalities that they have. When I first started covering my hair, I was worried what people thought. Because when you say you’re a Muslim, the first thing that pops into someone’s head might be something negative. So for my brothers it will be easier because they don’t have to cover their hair. But I don’t want my brothers to be judged for one aspect of themselves.

**Given the recent events, how do you think LEAP can be helpful?**

At first I didn’t realize that LEAP could be helpful, but I worried less after the conversation I had with Mr. Henry regarding what Donald Trump may do. There are people out there who care. LEAP really encourages people from any background to be better people. I certainly like LEAP a lot. I suggest more people come to it. It’s a great opportunity. I will certainly encourage my brothers to become LITs.
Creating A New Haven For Our Children
Leadership, Education, and Athletics in Partnership, Inc.
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