

MAKING A DIFFERENCE

POIC + RAHS

BY ELISA HORNECKER

Portland Opportunities Industrialization Center + Rosemary Anderson High School (POIC + RAHS) is committed to the success of at-risk youth and adults, providing the highest quality services in education, mentoring, family outreach, employment training, and placement.

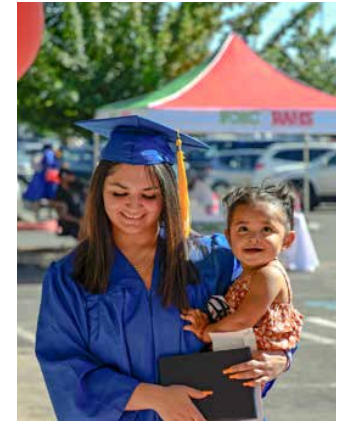
Established in 1967 in North Portland as part of the OIC of America network, POIC added programming in the 1980s to reach struggling youth earlier in life. The first high school, eventually named after Executive Director Rosemary Anderson, opened in 1983 and today there are four Rosemary Anderson

High Schools and one Middle School. All are private alternative schools, offering open-door and culturally specific education opportunities to at-risk youth struggling and underserved in traditional public school systems. I was able to tour a Rosemary Anderson campus through my involvement with ninety-nine girlfriends, who awarded a grant to the organization. The school felt welcoming and the staff was supportive. Besides the traditional classrooms one would expect to find at a school, there were rooms that served as spaces where students could meditate and decompress, or take a book into a cozy corner and read by soft lamplight. There were also thoughtful, but sad reminders of the classmates they had lost due to gun violence.

The school's legacy of graduate success led to recognition as a leader in serving low-income, minority, and adjudicated youth. Currently, POIC + RAHS serves more than 3,000 students, work trainees, and families annually; 80% are Black or Latinx. During the 2021/22 school year amidst the COVID-19 pandemic, RAHS had a 92% graduation rate - 10% higher than the state average. The higher graduation rate is notable, considering many students come to Rosemary Anderson schools two to four years behind in academic skills and credits. Students also demonstrated improved attendance rates compared to their time in public school. To learn more about the barriers these students are working through in order to achieve these goals - and sometimes just survive, please read, "The Safest Place," a four-part series featured during December 2022 in *The Oregonian*. It follows the journey of Rosemary Anderson students finding hope and safety at school.

One factor contributing to the increased graduation rate is the robust mental health programming in the schools, bolstered by a partnership with Trillium Family Services. The program provides a higher level of support for the behavioral and mental health of students, families, and staff. Long-term, POIC + RAHS continues to grow its mental health program and related services each year through ongoing private financial support and partnerships.

In addition to Rosemary Anderson Schools, POIC programs include Youth Services, Community Healing Initiatives, Public Safety, and Work Opportunities Training. For example, POIC has a 12-week paid training pre-apprenticeship program for adults to gain experience in the construction field. Programs like these reconnect alienated at-risk youth and adults, affected by poverty, family instability, and homelessness - to education, career training, and culturally specific wraparound programs, including services for families impacted by the criminal justice system. Recent funding has aided the focused growth of public safety programs, such as the Healing Hurt People program, a hospital-based violence intervention program that has served over 200 individuals immediately following a



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violent incident, helping to curb the rise of gun violence in Portland. Life Coaches continue to support these victims, operating as mentors and using their lived experience to build trust and relationships that lead to positive outcomes. POIC + RAHS lead community efforts to reduce violence on a broader scale through the Public Safety Village model, which provides capacity-building support to smaller, grassroots organizations and is expanding statewide in Oregon.

Another exceptional achievement for the organization was the opening of the POIC Kitchen in June of 2022 at the Rockwood Market Hall. I was fortunate to visit the POIC Kitchen - a true culinary experience! The Kitchen feeds all Rosemary Anderson students delicious and healthy food. Students are more likely to attend school and do better in school when they are well-fed. As Culinary Director and Chef Kiara Hardy says, "Food is Love" - and these students feel the love! This long-time dream of the organization not only serves the students, but is a culinary institute that will train underserved young adults to become the future top chefs in Portland. The Culinary + Hospitality Emergent

Fellowship Academy (CHEF) program spans 12-weeks to develop clear pathways to success. Students are paid as they learn basic industry skills.

POIC + RAHS President and CEO, Joe McFerrin II notes, "The POIC Kitchen is where all of these opportunities come together - health, education, employment, community, and camaraderie. The Kitchen is the place where real nourishment starts; for our students, their families, and our shared community."

For more information about the organization and how you can support it please:

- Subscribe to POIC + RAHS newsletter and refer others to do the same by visiting their website at www.portlandoic.org.
- Amplify their mission by following them on social media and sharing with your friends and family. POIC is always looking to help as many young people as possible, and this sharing helps to enroll and get more people to apply to programs.
- Sponsor a summer work intern in your business helping youth gain real work experience while POIC pays their salary.
- Lastly, donate to support the schools and programming that help rewrite life stories directly.