



SouthCoastTODAY

Y.O.U. helps children build ‘confidence, leadership’

By Ja'Loni Owens / Contributing Writer

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NEW BEDFORD — Since 2004, Youth Opportunities Unlimited, formerly Trips for Kids New Bedford, has been doing exactly what its name implies: Providing children opportunities.

“We open our doors to those who would be overlooked for the opportunity to have such a rich summer experience afforded to them,” said Bernadette Souza, executive director of Y.O.U. “... and we feel that our role is to provide a safe space where a kid can come and just be a kid.”

The nonprofit serves children in Greater New Bedford and strives to create a space where each participant, regardless of housing or economic status, feels comfortable. Programs range from bicycling to food to exploration around the city, all in the hopes of building “confidence, leadership and civic engagement.”

Though registration for the summer session is closed, Y.O.U. will launch an afternoon summer reading program from 1 to 3 p.m. July 24 to Aug. 25. The program will piggyback off Mayor Jon Mitchell’s new literacy initiative, New Bedford Reads, which plans to distribute 12,500 books.

Chance Perks, director of operations and one of the newest additions to the Y.O.U. team, said many elementary and middle school students do not complete their summer reading because they need guidance. That’s where Y.O.U. plans to step in this summer.

“At the end of the day, it’s about meeting the need and if a kid needs, we provide,” Souza said.

For example, Souza said a mother came to Y.O.U. asking if someone could help teach her son how to ride his bike.

“Chance (Perks) took that child under his wing,” she said with tears in her eyes. “By the third day, that kid had on his Ninja Turtle helmet and rode that bike with the most infectious smile ... I’ll never forget that day and neither will that kid.”

Carissa Willis-DeMello, program and development coordinator, added: “(The kids) just feel so free and acknowledged here for who they are, what they care about and what they want to do.”

Children’s time with Y.O.U. is not defined by any schedule or agenda; it’s defined by that child’s curiosity and passions, she said.

When asked what the Y.O.U. team hopes their passions will ignite, Souza said, “Whatever we’re giving out and they are putting in, come back ... if you leave with a gift, come back and share it.”

For more information about Y.O.U., call 508-994-6586 or come by the office at 224 Brock Ave. in New Bedford. Keep up with [Y.O.U. on Facebook](#) and Instagram [@y.o.u.nb](#).