

Cambridge College and Project Hope team up for “neighborhood college” in the heart of Roxbury

CAMBRIDGE — Cambridge College has been awarded a \$70,000 grant by the Mabel Louise Riley Foundation to lay the groundwork for what the College hopes will become a true “neighborhood college” in the Dudley Street neighborhood of Roxbury. What began with a dialogue with the Dudley Street Neighborhood Initiative (DSNI) has now become a dynamic collaboration between the college and Project Hope, which provides a wide array of services to neighborhood residents.

State law requires staff at child care centers to have college degrees, a mandate that may soon be extended to licensed family day care providers. Acting to meet that need, Cambridge College and Project Hope will train a group of 20 low-income early care workers from the greater Dudley neighborhood and provide them with a package of credit-bearing courses that will lead to a certificate in early care and education.

“We are extremely excited about the prospect of working with the people and organizations of the Dudley Street Neighborhood,” said Joel Nitzberg, director of Cambridge College’s Institute for Lifelong Learning and Community Building.

One major element of the program aims to provide Dudley residents improved job training and access to higher education. Less than 40 percent of Dudley neighborhood families earn incomes that enable them to maintain economic self-sufficiency, and only 7 percent of Dudley Square residents have attained a bachelor’s degree or higher, limiting their career opportunities and earning potential.

Elizabeth Zarrella, director of development and external affairs for Project Hope, said the partnership’s greatest impact will be developing and extending resources that can help improve those dire numbers.

“Child care workers will gain the educational skills to better their career prospects, the children they serve stand to gain from higher-quality care, and Project Hope’s classroom space in our new building will be used to broaden opportunities for the community,” Zarrella said. “This is a partnership that can lead to unlimited potential for the community.”

The initial program will begin in mid-February and will continue for one year. Cambridge College is currently looking for a neighborhood coordinator to develop a more extensive program to continue beyond this year.