

Health official joins chat on gun violence

Hosted by UTEC leaders

Submitted Article

LOWELL » Rep. Lori Trahan and U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Secretary Xavier Becerra joined with UTEC leaders as well as state and local

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partners to highlight federally supported programs with a proven track record of reducing youth recidivism and addressing gun violence in Lowell, Lawrence and Haverhill.

“I’m grateful for the opportunity to show Secretary Becerra the incredible work being done at UTEC each day to improve the lives of children and young adults across the region,” Trahan said. “It’s thanks to their ongoing efforts that have persisted through the pandemic, as well as robust federal investments, that hundreds of at-risk young adults remain on track to achieving employment or graduating with their degree. It’s heartening to know that we have a champion for organizations like UTEC in Secretary Becerra leading the Department largely responsible for those investments, and I look forward to partnering with him on a number of initiatives in the future.”

“I applaud organizations like UTEC that bring communities together and help nurture tomorrow’s leaders,” Becerra said. “They’re fighting poverty and prejudice with hope and opportunity. We will continue to support such programs that enrich the lives of young people and help our nation build back better. There is no greater invest-



JULIA MALAKIE PHOTOS / LOWELL SUN

Health and Human Services Secretary Xavier Becerra visits UTEC to discuss reducing recidivism and supporting youth with local leaders on Tuesday.

our public health, and our economic prosperity.”

Originally founded by young people in 1999 as the “United Teen Equality Centers,” Becerra said. “They’re fighting poverty and prejudice with hope and opportunity. We will continue to support such programs that enrich the lives of young people and help our nation build back better. There is no greater invest-

In addition to offering child care and special en-

organization has prioritized reducing young adult recidivism rates in the communities they serve through a number of programs and initiatives, including streetworker outreach, correctional facility inreach, transitional coaching, workforce development, mental health services, gun violence prevention training, and more.

“We are thrilled to wel-



Health and Human Services secretary Xavier Becerra visits UTEC with U.S. Rep. Lori Trahan, to discuss reducing recidivism and supporting youth with local leaders. From left, streetworker Paul Chaleunphong, Armando Melo, Trahan, Becerra, Jovi Cruz, Felix Nieves and Miguel Jackson pose for a photo.

UTEC alongside Congresswoman Trahan, Secretary Sudders, and other city and state leaders,” said Gregg Croteau, UTEC CEO. “We couldn’t be more proud of the work our young adults do on a daily basis. As we firmly believe in the importance of centering young adults in conversations regarding the policies impacting their success, it is an honor to have the highest human services official in the country join us. And we are beyond appreciative for the many partnerships that have solidified this region as a true innovator in best serving young adults as they pursue social and economic success.”

Last year, UTEC served 168 young adults through its intensive enrollment

individuals through its streetworker and community outreach and violence intervention efforts.

All of those served were from low-income families and an overwhelming majority met high risk factors that include a previous criminal record, gang involvement, lack of a high school credential, and expecting or already parenting children.

Despite those challenges, more than four out of every five participants had no new arrests and maintained employment or enrolled in postsecondary education.

Additionally, since July 2020, UTEC repurposed its catering and events social enterprise to deliver free, nutritious meals to indi-

viduals facing food insecurity across the region. To date, UTEC has partnered with local partners across the Merrimack Valley to deliver more than 100,000 meals.

UTEC has been the recipient of multiple federal grants to support the many programs offered at its sites, including \$156,000 in funding last fiscal year for its child care facility from the HHS’s Office of Head Start through a partnership with Community Teamwork Inc., a \$700,000 HHS economic development grant to create employment and business opportunities for low-income families and individuals, and a \$750,000 Department of Justice grant to bolster their recidivism re-