



For Immediate Release
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Lodestar Background

On a warm August day, ten high schoolers were digging in the dirt at the remains of the Buick City plant. They were searching for contaminants in the soil that may have been left behind by the plant. The high schoolers were part of a new program offered by Lodestar, a local business based in Flint, Michigan. By collecting samples of soil around Flint and testing them for metals like lead and arsenic, participants have created a working map of Flint's soil health. Participants are supported in collaborating with adults in the community to increase their understanding of science as well as exploring their role within the community.

Lodestar was founded by Aujanee Young, a native of Flint. The city is full of creative, caring, resilient individuals who make up a unique community. Despite many economic and social challenges, the people of the city are still here. Her calling has been to support the community that she feels gave her so much. Lodestar, as her business is called, uses the unique curriculum Ms. Young developed specifically with the needs and values of the Flint community in mind. "My philosophy is that education is often too broad and misses opportunities to connect with how and where we live." says Ms. Young. Education that is relevant to the community can empower people to advocate for the changes they would like to see. The community members, more than anyone else, can best tell you what matters to them and how they can best be served.

Events like the ongoing water crisis have proven that those in power will not hold one another accountable and that they don't have the capacity to put people first and fully serve communities that will be hit hardest by their neglect. Lodestar aims to build the community's capacity to serve itself with the tools and knowledge to collect, critically interpret and disseminate local data through its environmental justice and media programming.

This philosophy was evident in the environmental research program. Youth not only explored public health and environmental justice issues, but also learned about the use of media and art in advocating for social change while creating their own action projects. Lodestar also offers a number of life skill courses including cooking, gardening, and financial literacy that support the learning of MI K-12 academic standards.

Lodestar programming has been well received by participants and community members. One participant in the environmental research program wondered how

contaminants in the soil might be getting into his grandmother's garden. Another student stated, "[Lodestar] made me realize that as citizens we should do a better job in knowing what is hazardous to our community and how can we keep the environment as safe as possible."

The Community Ethics Review Board endorsed the environmental education program and its activities with youth, stating that it "*will provide the Flint community with an evidenced based program aimed at exposing young people to learning how to positively impact the health environment of their community. It was further determined that the young participants will be able to see the value and possibilities of pursuing a stem career, possibly in the health sciences/ public health.*"

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