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17 Students Complete HiSET and Graduate YouthBuild Just A Start Program

Cambridge, MA — September 12, 2024 — On Thursday, August 29th, 2024, [YouthBuild Just A Start](#) celebrated the accomplishments of its 2024 graduating class at the Cambridge Public Library. Seventeen students successfully completed three or more HiSET exams (in math, science, writing, social studies, or reading) and earned credentials in Home Builders Institute Pre-Apprenticeship Certification Training (HBI PACT) or Retail Industry Fundamentals (RIF).

YouthBuild Just A Start is a comprehensive workforce development program serving students aged 16 to 24 from the Boston Metro North region. The program equips young people with the skills and credentials needed to earn their high school equivalency and build career pathways in the construction or retail industries.

The ceremony featured remarks from Miriam Ortiz, Director of Education and Training at Just A Start, Nate Bae Kupel, Managing Director of Youth Programs, the program's Alumni Advisory Board, and a powerful speech by **graduate Daniel Lancaster**. Reflecting on the journey and looking ahead, Lancaster shared, "Not just me, but everyone on this stage now has billions of new possibilities... Anyone here can achieve anything they want, all they need is to stay committed."

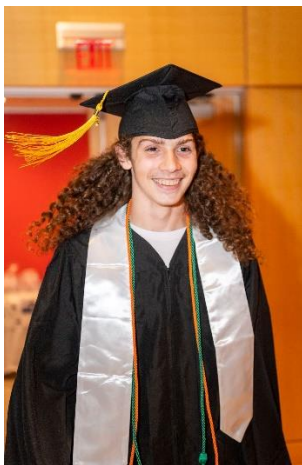
"YouthBuild Just A Start is more than just a workforce development program—it's a community. Through our wraparound services, students not only gain hands-on experience and industry-recognized credentials but also develop essential life skills that help them succeed in all aspects of their lives," said **Nate Bae Kupel, Managing Director of Youth Programs** at Just A Start. "Whether it's navigating the job market, balancing personal challenges, or setting long-term goals, our graduates leave with the confidence and tools to shape their own futures."

YouthBuild Just A Start also presented two awards. The **Alumni Advisory Board Leadership Award** was given to **Travis Coelin** for his exceptional leadership skills, which often inspired his peers to take on new challenges. Coelin was also recently chosen as one of the first construction apprentices in Just A Start's [inaugural Bald Hill Builders Apprenticeship Program](#). **Thomas Rodriguez**, Director of Youth Program Pathways, received the **Charlie Parker Award** for his dedication to youth services. Upon accepting the award, he shared, "It is a joy to be part of a team and be working a job that you can say fits with your values and the sort of work that you like to do... I can wholeheartedly say that here at YouthBuild."

Graduates of YouthBuild Just A Start come from cities across the region, including Watertown, Everett, Malden, Boston, Somerville, and others. With credentials in hand, many graduates are moving forward with job placements or apprenticeships. Some notable placements include opportunities at Bald Hill Builders, The New England Aquarium, Bunker Hill Community College, Whole Foods, The Old North Church, and more. Graduates continue to receive support from Jess Maddox, Youth Employment Specialist, as they navigate their job and program searches.



YouthBuild Just A Start Class of 2024 Graduates



Graduate and Student
Speaker Daniel Lancaster



L to R: Charlie Parker Award Recipient and Director of
Youth Program Pathways, Thomas Rodriguez with Managing
Director of Youth Programs, Nate Bae Kupel

Photos by Lee Daniel Tran Photography

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About Just A Start

[Just A Start](#) believes that access to stable housing and sustainable careers are the essential building blocks of equitable communities. For more than 50 years, we have focused on meeting the fundamental needs of individuals and families who have been systemically denied opportunities to realize their full potential. Our programs include affordable housing, education and job training, and comprehensive support services, spanning Cambridge and beyond. We have developed and currently maintain 600 affordable apartments. To keep community members housed, we also offer financial and technical assistance to prevent evictions, and support low- and moderate-income homeowners. Finally, we prepare individuals of all ages and circumstances with the skills and knowledge they need to secure fulfilling careers, leveraging their talents to achieve economic mobility and strengthen the region's workforce.