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## Nashville's Youth Opportunity Center First to Be Recognized as Promise Place

By Esther Berg

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America's Promise Alliance (the Alliance) announced the launch of its new 'Promise Places' initiative February 28. The announcement was made at the dedication of Nashville's Youth Opportunity Center (YOC) – the first official Promise Place designee. A Promise Place is a school, community center, place of worship, business, or organization that provides all Five Promises— caring adults; safe places; a healthy start; an effective education; and opportunities to help others--to youth.



As a model establishment, the YOC represents the collaboration of several different sectors of the community and provides all Five Promises in one place.

Nashville Mayor Karl Dean, America's Promise Alliance COO Kathy Spangler, Metro Council Member-at-Large Ronnie Steine and others joined the event VIPs – the city's youth for the dedication of the YOC. In addition to receiving 'YOC VIP' buttons, young people were the bulk of the speakers list. Kaneshia Butler, a freshman at Tennessee State University and Oasis Center Board Member opened the ceremony. Other speakers included Rose Wang, chair of the Mayor's Youth Council; and high school seniors April Harris and Brandon Jones.



"Thanks to the YOC, I have the opportunity to go to college," said Brandon Jones. "Thank you for believing that we, the youth, can 'Be the Change.'"



As Nashville's largest nonprofit collaboration ever, the Center represents a collective of ten youth-serving organizations including the Oasis Center, STARS Nashville, Big Brothers Big Sisters of Middle Tennessee, and Metro Nashville Public Schools. Together, YOC partners have served more than 50,000 young people in the Nashville area, and will continue to serve thousands of local youth annually through more than 30 programs offered onsite including: health care, job assistance, counseling, education support, emergency residential services, college counseling, youth leadership opportunities, and a youth-run business. The YOC is home to Nashville's only therapeutic counseling center for adolescents, provides the city's only long-term transitional living center for homeless youth, and is the state's only drop-in center for homeless and runaway youth.

"We have ten different agencies who have come together and made a significant and very public commitment to close the opportunity gap that exists for far too many young people in this town," said Hal Cato, CEO of Oasis Center. "I have no doubt that the Youth Opportunity Center is going to be the vehicle that makes this vision a reality."

The event concluded with a blessing by Reverend Neely Williams. As part of a responsive reading, the crowd pledged to "work to create a loving community where all young people are safe, valued, connected with caring adults, and prepared for productive and fulfilling lives."

To apply to become a Promise Place, visit [www.americaspromise.org/promiseplaces](http://www.americaspromise.org/promiseplaces).

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