



**Media Contact:**  
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## Future Chefs Moves to Boston

Future Chefs prepares urban teens in Greater Boston for quality early employment and post-secondary opportunities in the culinary arts and supports them in developing a broad base of transferable skills as they transition to the working world. Future Chefs' vision is that one day all youth will be prepared and motivated to succeed in work that is personally fulfilling and provides economic self-sufficiency.

- Who:** FUTURE CHEFS
- What:** Moves into a teaching kitchen and career center of its own.
- How:** With significant support, guidance and expertise from Shawmut Design and Construction, Harbour Food Service Equipment and the City of Boston. And continued support from community members, individuals, foundations and businesses.
- When:** Feb. 13, 2012: Staff moves into office space.  
May 31, 2012: Teaching kitchen and classroom construction completed.  
July, 2012: Future Chefs "Summer Stage" programming begins.
- Where:** To Boston's South End/Lower Roxbury neighborhood, a community rich with young people, employment opportunities and restaurant partners.  
  
560 Albany Street  
Boston, MA 02118
- Why:** To provide increased programming and opportunity to Boston teens in need of a quality pathway forward. Transitioning into a community-based operation enables staff to spend 4x more time with high school-aged students, providing hard and soft skills development, entry level job readiness coaching, individualized goal setting and ongoing academic and employment support. Future Chefs partners with local chefs, post-secondary educators and businesses to provide high expectations and opportunities that build the mindset and behaviors needed to succeed in the world of work and higher education.
- Build:** 2200 sq. feet fully equipped with a professional grade teaching kitchen and separate classroom and office space. Construction and permitting provided by Shawmut Design and Construction. Kitchen design, equipment and hard wares provided by Harbour Food Service Equipment. Initial seed funding provided by the Richard and Susan Smith Family Foundation (\$35,910), the City of Boston (\$10,000) and a privately-raised Challenge Gift (\$85,000).
- Online:** Web: [www.FutureChefs.net](http://www.FutureChefs.net)  
Twitter: @FutureChefs  
Facebook: [www.facebook.com/FutureChefs](http://www.facebook.com/FutureChefs)
- Current Staff:** Toni Elka: Executive Director & Founder  
Jill Rowell: Manager, Culinary Pathways Program  
Kathleen Sykes: Grants Coordinator & Foundation Liaison  
Abbie Waite: Operations & Development Manager  
Aquila Kentish: Culinary Skills Educator  
Chris Titus: Kitchen Manager & Social Enterprise Coordinator  
Will Barclay: Americorps Volunteer Outreach Coordinator (Social Capital, Inc.)
- Founded:** 2008



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**TONI ELKA**  
**EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR & FOUNDER**

With a rich and varied background in the arts, community organizing and youth development, Toni Elka is synthesizing best practices with the real world challenges of leading her small, non-profit in these lean times. She is a lifelong youth advocate and a creative and constructive activist for social change.

In 1991, Toni took a position with The Medical Foundation (Health Resources In Action) as Event Coordinator of the Massachusetts Statewide Peer Institute. She immersed herself in youth development literature and helped write the Department of Public Health's first policy paper on youth work. Toni led the effort to shift the program focus. She led the transformation of an Alcohol and Tobacco educational program into an effective youth/adult collaboration that engaged urban, rural and suburban 'at-risk' teens. She planned, implemented and evaluated a three-day residential youth empowerment event that also explored diversity. The strategy won a federal award for exemplary programming from the Centers for Substance Abuse Prevention in 1993.

In 1995, Toni developed a pilot program, Circle of Girls, an innovative, arts and voice centered prevention strategy for inner city middle school girls based on Harvard professor Carol Gilligan's research. Toni's pilot was one of 10 programs within a three year Girls Initiative sponsored by the Fireman Family. It was Toni's first experience with fiscal sponsorship and foundation funding. Invaluable lessons were learned!

In 1998, Toni took a sabbatical to paint and write, supporting herself as a caterer and cook and volunteering at Fenway High School, where she spearheaded an effort to infuse the arts in the core curriculum through effective design literacy training for teaching staff. In 2000, she took a position as Executive Assistant to the Executive Director at Harvard Business School Press. This timeframe was pivotal in that it underscored her need for creative work that expressed her core values and desire to lead and innovate.

In 2004, Toni became Program Director for the Culinary Apprenticeship Program at the Anthony Spinazzola Foundation. Once again, she devoted herself to work that tapped her passion. When Spinazzola closed in 2007, there was no question she would continue this effort. She sought and singularly found the funding and support to begin Future Chefs.

Toni completed a year-long certificate at the Institute for Non Profit Management and Leadership at Boston University. Her earlier education involved steadily attending classes while working culinary jobs. She graduated with honors from Mass College of Art with a BFA in painting in 1986 and has completed graduate level writing and education classes at Harvard Ed School, Harvard Extension and Radcliffe Seminars.

Toni is the oldest daughter of first generation Americans, whose families settled in New England to farm. Her Ukrainian grandfather was a dairy farmer and shipyard union organizer. Toni inherited his resourceful and power-sharing leadership style. She remains devoted to the challenges facing youth and their families and is exploring an idea for a charter school that will engage youth with the visual, manual and creative intelligence to work as 21<sup>st</sup> century artisans.