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**\*\*MEDIA ADVISORY\*\***

PAWTUCKET, RI – While knowing barber shops have served as special places among African Americans since the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, a dedicated team of community leaders have created a safe space for inner city youth to get a free haircut and life lesson from someone who looks like them.

As the **Haircuts & Heritage Project's** website address states, it's **more than a cut**. Referred students from partnering middle and high schools in Pawtucket, Central Falls and Providence are selected based on their grades, behavior, and good deeds to be members of this elite club full of inspiration, opportunities, and resources.

When it is time for their scheduled appointment in the barber chair, a guest speaker of color based on the youths' ambitions, hobbies and needs will also be at the new hub at **28 Summer Street, in Pawtucket** – one of the most underserved cities in Rhode Island.

“The fact is our BIPOC youth just need someone to talk to in a safe space,” said **owner Kobi Dennis**, “and that conversation with the entrepreneur, musician, spoken word artist, black police chief, politician or another professional can be a gamechanger.”

Dennis has a proven commitment to impacting the lives of youth and families through positive change with the many nonprofits, equity programs and community initiatives he has spearheaded or contributed to for nearly 30 years. He and eight others from the Keep Forward Movement Group (KFM), all leaders in their own rights, have been planning the collaboration for about two years.

The Haircuts & Heritage Project is also made possible with financial support from the Papitto Opportunity Connection (POC) Foundation. POC is dedicated to having a tremendous, positive, and measurable impact on the lives of BIPOC people.

“We noticed that many black students cannot afford a haircut, leaving their self-esteem low and very little interaction with teachers and their peers,” read its website, <https://www.morethanacutri.com/>. “Here's where we bridge the gap and provide free haircuts.”

The space also includes a monthly community art exhibition, library nook, art gallery, health and wellness resources and cultural materials and educational programs playing daily on a big screen tv to further the young members' development.

**A ribbon cutting Ceremony with Pawtucket Mayor Donald R. Grebien will take place on Friday, September 17, 2021 at 11AM. Free haircut reservations begin on Monday, October 4<sup>th</sup> with the free haircut & conversations starting on Monday, October 18<sup>th</sup>.**