



DECEMBER 2025

Creating Equity  
Through Education

REDEFINING THE POSSIBLE

A MESSAGE FROM AJ JEFFERSON,  
PRESIDENT AND CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER

## Momentum & Mission

When I was a child experiencing unstable housing, I went quiet in school. My silence was misunderstood as inability instead of a response to uncertainty and fear. No one asked what I needed. No one asked why. I wasn't seen.

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EVENT HIGHLIGHT

## HTLA

READ ABOUT 11TH ANNUAL HOPE THROUGH LEARNING AWARDS (HTLA) LUNCHEON — PG3

EVENT HIGHLIGHT

## Summer Bash

SUMMER BASH 2025 WAS OUR BIGGEST YET! — PG3

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READ MORE ABOUT TRE — PG3

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## Divya Thirumala

SOPHOMORE DIVYA THIRUMALA STARTED VOLUNTEERING IN JUNE 2025 — PG4



## MOMENTUM &amp; MISSION

When I was a child experiencing unstable housing, I went quiet in school. My silence was misunderstood as inability instead of a response to uncertainty and fear. No one asked what I needed. No one asked why. I wasn't seen.

That memory returns to me when I look at the students we serve today. Brilliant young people navigating instability, pressure, and expectations that no child should have to balance. Children whose potential deserves to be nurtured, not overlooked.

Across the country, families are stretched thin.

Food is more expensive.

Childcare is harder to secure.

Transportation is unpredictable.

A lost paycheck can unravel everything.

And yet through all of this, children still have homework. They still have dreams. They still need backpacks, tutors, warm coats, hygiene products, technology, connection, and someone who believes their story isn't defined by their circumstances.

So, when you give, you do something powerful.

You feed a growing body.

You clothe a cold child.

You offer academic support that keeps a student on track.

You provide dignity, stability and belonging.

## AND YES, YOUR GIVING ALSO CARRIES FINANCIAL BENEFITS.

Under the most recent federal tax rules, non-itemizing taxpayers may deduct up to \$1,000 as an individual or \$2,000 when filing jointly for charitable giving. Additional tools such as donor-advised funds, IRA charitable distributions, appreciated assets, gift bunching and Pennsylvania's EITC program can further support your philanthropic goals while reducing taxable income. Please consult your tax advisor to explore what aligns with your situation.

Your generosity does more than meet a need. It builds a foundation. It creates possibility. It helps ensure that students who have already endured enough finally experience consistency, care and the opportunity to thrive.

Thank you for giving.

Thank you for seeing.

Thank you for choosing hope.



## FEATURES



## HTLA

## EVENT HIGHLIGHT

HCEF recognized 35 students and awarded \$85,500 – the most in the organization's 26-year history – at the 11th Annual Hope Through Learning Awards (HTLA) luncheon. Named for HCEF's founder, the Joseph Lagana Perseverance Award of \$500 was presented to Jada Guiste, a HTLA past recipient who successfully graduated from post-secondary education.

HTLA supports students from Southwestern Pennsylvania who are enrolled in a post-secondary program. Applicants must have experienced homelessness or housing instability during school and may use the award for tuition, books, transportation, or childcare.



## TréSean "Tre"

## STUDENT HIGHLIGHT

TréSean "Tre" is a bright and creative seventh grader at West Mifflin Middle School who excels in STEM subjects, especially mathematics and engineering. He has set goals for the school year, including earning an "A" in reading and language arts, reading for at least 20 minutes five days a week and completing the entire Percy Jackson series. He loves mastering algebra concepts and fractions and working with scientific notation in math.

During Tre's HCEF tutoring sessions, he has continued to develop his word attack and vocabulary skills. He has also embraced free reading activities, showing special interest in air and space topics. And, Tre designs amusement park rides with Legos and stays active by playing tennis and soccer.

With career aspirations in architecture or engineering, Tre is already laying the foundation for a bright future.



## Summer Bash

## EVENT HIGHLIGHT

Summer Bash 2025 was our biggest yet! Attendance grew from 50 students in 2022 to over 200 students and families. This year, we connected families with community resources and ensured every student started the 2025-2026 school year with a new backpack, school supplies, fun fidgets, and a snack-filled lunch box.



## Divya Thirumala

### DONOR SPOTLIGHT

Sophomore Divya Thirumala started volunteering with HCEF in June 2025 and is already making a huge impact! She learned about HCEF through Chinmaya Mission Pittsburgh Sunday School, where HCEF was named the charity of the year for 2024–2025.

Divya's youth group, Youth for Seva, raised an impressive \$20,000 through bake sales, movie nights and other creative activities. The group presented the check to HCEF at the Pittsburgh Indian Community & Friends PIC5K race in September.

A passionate education advocate, Divya has worked at her local library for four years, promotes STEM learning, co-founded the STEM Explorers Initiative to bring STEM programs to shelters and after-school programs, and participates in an all-girls robotics team. Her dedication inspires peers and younger students alike.

She thanks HCEF staff – Brian, Renna and Olivia – for their guidance and support over the last several months. Lookout, Divya is just getting started!

### SCHOOL SHOULDN'T BE THE HARDEST PART OF A CHILD'S DAY

**School is hard.**

**School without a bed at night, food in your belly, or transportation to school is nearly impossible.**

That's the reality for thousands of children in Allegheny County.

More than 3,600 students are experiencing homelessness. HCEF is walking alongside 1,100, but more keep reaching out for help. The need isn't slowing. Our students can't wait.

A warm meal shouldn't determine whether a child can focus.

A bus pass shouldn't be the difference between graduating or giving up.

A lack of stability shouldn't silence potential.

With your support, HCEF provides tutoring, transportation, emergency supplies, college readiness, and the steady encouragement every young person deserves. But to meet the urgency of this moment, we need to raise \$50,000.

Your gift becomes a lifeline in a child's day and a reminder that their future still matters.

#### Please give today.

Because every child deserves to learn from a place of safety and possibility, not survival.



# THE Shift

Our newly imagined newsletter from the  
Homeless Children's Education Fund.

This isn't just a name change—it's a reflection of who we've become. We've shifted from a small nonprofit with a big heart to a regional force driving systems of change for students experiencing homelessness. As we grow in size, scope, and strategy, this space will bring you deeper into the journey: the models we're building, the voices we're lifting, and the futures we are fighting for. We're not chasing what's probable—we're redefining what's possible.

