


Bloomburgh

HOMELESS CHILDREN'S EDUCATION FUND Annual Report 2024


Our Bold Prediction

By 2027, we will serve half of Allegheny County homeless youth. What will it take?







The story behind the 4.
READ ON PAGE 1



She walked through a snowstorm. Now she's blazing trails.
READ ON PAGE 3



From uncertain nights to unstoppable dreams.
READ ON PAGE 4



Not charity. Commitment. That's why we show up.
READ ON PAGE 5

LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT & CHAIR

Belief Is the Beginning.
Investment Changes
Everything.

What happens when we stop asking if they can thrive and start investing like we know they will?

Dear Friends,

Thousands of children in our county are experiencing homelessness. They are sleeping in shelters, cars, basements, and borrowed spaces. They are waking up to uncertainty, walking into classrooms carrying trauma they didn't choose. And still, they rise.

At HCEF, we rise with them. Every single day.

We bring more than school supplies. We bring presence. We bring stability. We bring possibility. From pre-K to their first job, we walk with students. We tutor after school, feed during the summers, equip them with skills, connect them to careers, and position them for long-term success.

This is our Continuum of Programming. An always-there, never-let-go model of support. And it works. Our students are stepping into futures they once couldn't imagine. They teach, code, build businesses, serve their communities, and create policies. They contribute. They lead. They grow the region's economy and inspire the next generation.

But we have only just begun.

We are currently reaching 1,100 of the nearly 3,500 students who need us. That means more than 2,000 young people still do not have access to this kind of support. Not because the need isn't there, but because the resources are not.

That's why we're growing. With your belief, we're building toward a \$4 million organization. With your continued partnership, we can stretch that vision to \$5 million because growth means access. It means more students



"We don't just respond to crisis. We invest in futures."

— AJ JEFFERSON, PRESIDENT AND CEO

in Mobile Learning. More teens in Teen CEO. More young people prepared for the workforce, positioned for promotion, and leading change in their communities. More lives changed. More futures rewritten.

This report is not just a reflection of 2024, but a blueprint of what's possible when we grow to \$4M by 2027.

When you invest in HCEF, you break cycles. You turn pain into power and survival into leadership. You don't just change lives. You shape the future of this region.

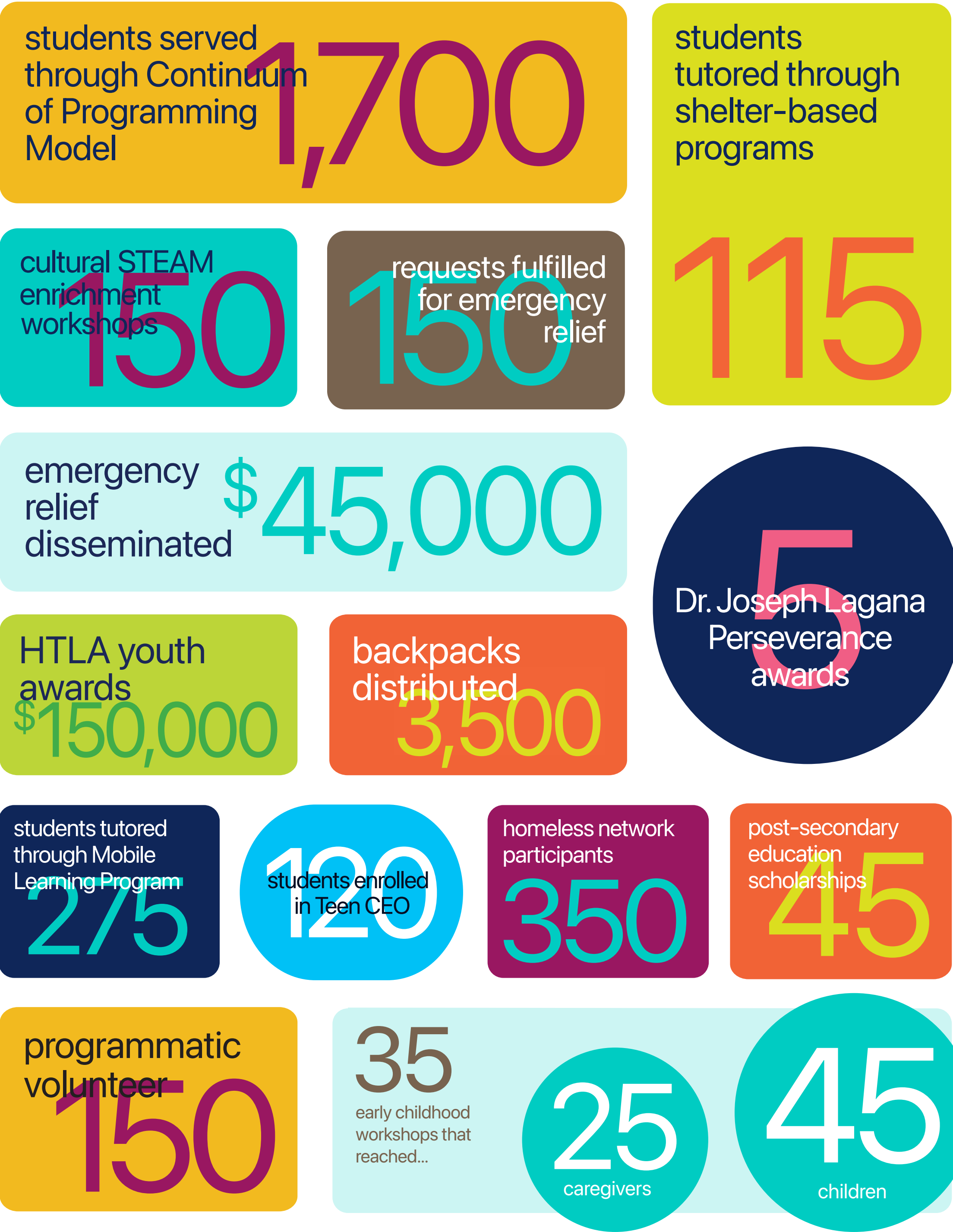
With gratitude and bold ambition,


AJ JEFFERSON
PRESIDENT AND CEO


JO CLARK
BOARD CHAIR

2027 IMPACT NUMBERS

What \$4M Unlocks by 2027



STUDENT STORY

Morgan's Story

I was homeless. I grew up in chaos and fear. When I was 14, my dad bought a house in New York and forced us to move. That year became the darkest time of my life. My parents were always fighting. My mom ended up moving back to Pittsburgh because of the horrific environment.

The house was never a home. It was a battlefield. My dad was abusive. I never felt safe, so I moved into a safe house for a while. But I eventually had to go back.

One night during a snowstorm, we got into a huge argument. He screamed, threatened and manipulated me. He took my keys and kicked me out. I walked through five feet of snow in slippers, shaking, freezing and terrified. With help from friends, the police and attorneys, I was advised to return to Pittsburgh for my safety. My mom drove for hours to get me.

Now, my mom and I live in my grandparents' basement. We also live with two uncles and my brother, who eventually moved back to Pittsburgh. We don't have much, but I'm with my mom. I feel safe and that's all that matters.

I enrolled in high school. Even though I did well academically, I couldn't let go of the trauma – it was eating me alive. It was hard to focus. Every day felt like a fight to show up. I asked for help, and that's when my school counselor introduced me to HCEF and Mr. Terrel.

Meeting Mr. Terrel was life changing. For the first time, I felt seen. He told me I was strong and resilient. HCEF became my safety net. They helped me with food, personal items and even new clothes so I could get a job.

Mr. Terrel encouraged me to join Teen CEO and that opened a whole new world. I've had experiences I never thought possible for someone like me.



“I know what it feels like to need saving. One day, I want to be the one who runs toward the fire.”

— MORGAN KELLER, HCEF TEEN CEO

Now, I'm planning for my future. I hope to attend Chatham University for business, but I also have a huge heart for giving back. I could see myself becoming a firefighter one day – someone who runs toward the fire to help others because I know what it feels like to need saving.

If it weren't for Mr. Terrel and HCEF, I wouldn't be where I am today.

HTLA ALUMNI STORY

Jada's Story



For a long time, I kept everything hidden. I smiled, went to school, acted like everything was fine even when I had no idea where I would sleep that night.

When my mom could not pay the bills, we moved into my cousin's basement. Four of us and a dog were crammed into a space the size of a bedroom. Then things got worse. My mom began using drugs and drinking. Eventually, we were asked to leave.

I bounced between relatives, but nothing lasted. I was scared, and for the first time in my life, I had to ask for help. That conversation with a friend changed everything. My teachers connected me to the Homeless Children's Education Fund, and for the first time in years, I felt seen.

As a high school senior, HCEF encouraged me to apply for the Hope Through Learning Award. I became a three-time recipient, which helped me stay in school, buy supplies, and focus on my future instead of just my survival.

“I found my voice. Now I help others find theirs.”

— JADA GUISTE, HTLA ALUMNI

This year, I was honored with the HCEF Joseph Lagana Perseverance Award for graduating from college despite experiencing homelessness. I also serve as a founding member of the HCEF Collegiate Advocacy Committee and as a Student Ambassador, helping others find their voice the same way I found mine.

With determination and support, I graduated early from the University of Pittsburgh with a degree in psychology. Now I am pursuing my master's at North Carolina A&T.

HCEF did not just help me. They believed in me. They walked beside me. They reminded me that asking for help is not a weakness. It is courage. Sometimes, one open door is all it takes to change everything.

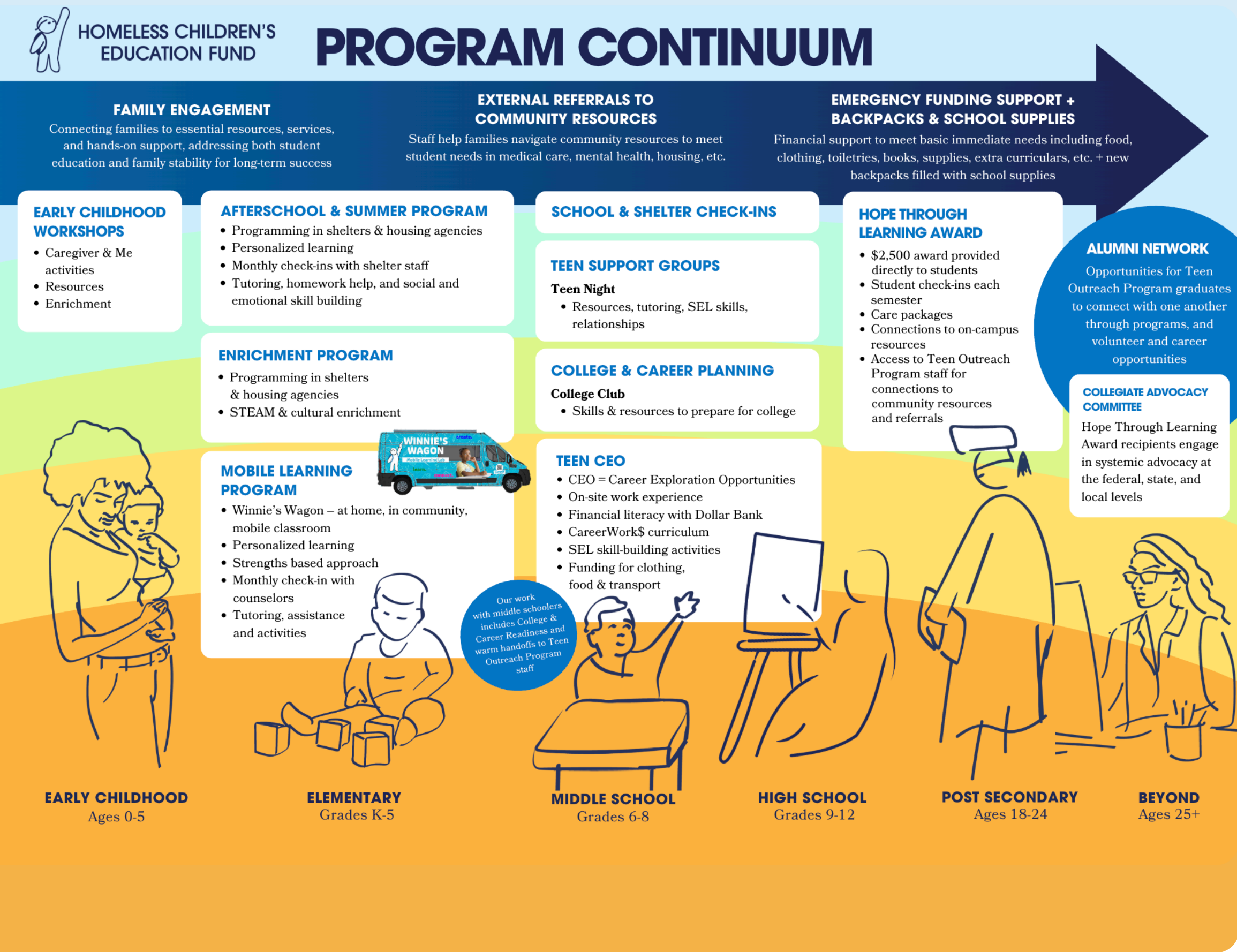
PROGRAM CONTINUUM

What makes us stand out...

Every child's journey is different. Some grow up with safety and stability. Others wake up in shelters, motels, or basements, carrying burdens they didn't choose. HCEF walks every step with them—from first crayons to first paychecks—through our Continuum of Programming. Morgan's story shows what it means to survive instability with courage. Jada's story shows what's possible when that courage meets opportunity—when a student moves through our continuum from support to success.

These are not 11 separate programs. It's one seamless lifeline. And when we reach a \$4M budget, that lifeline stretches further—more early childhood workshops to prepare kids for kindergarten, more Mobile Learning sessions to fill learning gaps, more Teen CEO internships to give young people their first job and more HTLA scholarships to open doors to college and careers.

Your investment doesn't just fund programs. It builds futures. It turns instability into possibility.



DONOR STORY

An Interview with

Jim McQuade

PRESIDENT AND CEO
DollarBank®



“Not with grand gestures, but with quiet consistency. That’s what I’ve seen HCEF do, time and time again.”

— JIM MCQUADE, PRESIDENT AND CEO, DOLLAR BANK

Lately, I've been reflecting on what it means to show up for someone. Not with grand gestures, but with quiet consistency. The kind of presence that says, “You matter,” just by being there. That’s what I’ve seen the Homeless Children’s Education Fund do, time and time again.

When I first learned about HCEF, I didn’t see an organization, I saw people who refused to let kids fall through the cracks. Kids who’d been let down more than anyone should have to bear. And yet, here was this team showing up, believing in them, walking alongside them. No spotlight. No shortcuts. Just care and commitment.

That stayed with me.

What’s always been hard for me to accept is how unfair the starting line is for so many kids. They didn’t ask for their circumstances. They didn’t choose housing instability. They deserve someone to believe in them, even when the rest of the world looks the other way.

That’s what HCEF does, and that’s why our partnership matters so deeply to me. Not as a leader. As a person. As a father. As someone who cares about the community we’re building.

Every summer, we welcome interns from HCEF – two individuals who’ve faced more than most adults I know, yet still show up eager to learn, work and grow. They’re not just students. They’re reminders that the work HCEF does truly matters. And that we all have a role to play.

Supporting HCEF isn’t about checking a box or fulfilling a mission statement. It’s about giving these kids a chance to be seen and heard. And for more than two decades, Joe Stromei has done just that. He has nurtured this relationship because he believes in this organization and that every child deserves to be valued, supported and given the chance to thrive.

2024 IMPACT NUMBERS

Last year we...

students served through Continuum of Programming Model

1,100

students tutored through shelter-based programs

95

cultural STEAM enrichment workshops

158

requests fulfilled for emergency relief

99

emergency relief disseminated

\$14,160

HTLA youth awards

\$53,556

backpacks distributed

3,383

Dr. Joseph Lagana Perseverance award

1

students tutored through Mobile Learning Program

134

students enrolled in Teen CEO

32

homeless network participants

14

post-secondary education scholarships

24

programmatic volunteer

72

20 early childhood workshops that reached...


22

caregivers


31

children


Meet the Team




AJ JEFFERSON
President and CEO




KAITLYN NYKWIST
Senior Director of Programs




COLLYN O'DONNELL
Controller




BRIAN KNIGHT
Director of Community Engagement




NEAL DONOVAN
K-8 Program Manager




TERREL WILLIAMS
Teen Outreach Manager




RENNA BROWN
STEAM Education Support Coordinator




CHERELLE FORD
Teen Outreach Coordinator




LOREN KURPIEWSKI
Education Support Coordinator




DEMETRIUS MOYE
Workforce Development Coordinator




AALEAH OLIVER
Administrative Coordinator




VERONICA SHANNON
Family Engagement Coordinator



ALIZÉ STRICKLAND
Family Engagement Coordinator



LAMEKA-LESHE DOLBY
Individual and Corporate Giving Specialist



OLIVIA ROWLAND
Volunteer Specialist

HCEF Board

JO CLARK **CHAIR**
Highmark Health *Vice President*

JOYCE BENDER **VICE-CHAIR**
Bender Consulting Services *CEO*

MIKE JASPER **TREASURER**
Community Volunteer

ALAN STEINBERG **SECRETARY**
Community Volunteer

AJ JEFFERSON **PRESIDENT AND CEO**
Homeless Children’s Education Fund

TY ALLEN
Unity Concord Real Estate
Founder and Broker Owner

BRYAN BATTAGLIA
Hillman Company
Vice President/Treasurer

DANIEL BENCUN
PPG Advanced Surface Technologies
CEO

CHELSEA BEGGS
BNY Mellon
Vice President, Regulatory Oversight

CHRISTOPHER BRENNAN
Reed Smith LLP
Attorney

MATTHEW CLARK
Comcast
Product Manager

COURTNEY DAVENPORT
BNY Mellon
Vice President, Belonging and Inclusion

DR. TINAMARIE ESTES-WASHINGTON
Allegheny Health Network
Director of Nursing

KATHY FITZGERALD
Rendezvous PGH
Owner, Corporate Event Planner

TRICIA HENNING
Goldberg Kamin & Garvin
Attorney

CARRIE KELLER
UPMC Insurance Services Division
AVP Brand, Advertising, and Creative Strategy

PETER KUBISKA
Dollar Bank
SVP, Chief Marketing Officer

JULIE KUHN
BNY Mellon
Vice President, People Experience, Contracts

KEVION LATHAM
GreenRose Wealth Management
Managing Director

STACEYLYN MACHI
CGI
Director of Consulting Services

DR. KALANI PALMER
Indiana University of Pennsylvania
Professor/Program Director

DR. TASHA PEACOCK
Institute of Politics at University of Pittsburgh
Assistant Director of Student

Programs & Community Outreach

PETER SCHRAMM
Latitude
Founder and CEO

BRIAN SHERIDAN
M&T Bank
Vice President, Account Manager

THOMAS SIEG
Highmark/enGen
Vice President, Provider Technology Solution

JOE STROMEI
Dollar Bank
Vice President, Treasury Management

STAFFORD THOMPSON, JR.
Globe Life
Sr. Vice President and Chief Actuary



Founding Board Members (EMERITUS)

- Dr. Joseph Lagana **FOUNDER**
- Linda Dickerson **CHAIR EMERITA**
- Becky Rodgers
- Tony Accamando
- Veronica Edwards
- Jerry Wozniak

2024 Financials

REVENUES
\$1,873,836
Grants/Contributions—\$1,415,598
Special Events—\$275,741
Other/Interest Income—\$50,013
Net Realized and Unrealized Gain (loss) on Investments—\$132,484

NET ASSETS BEGINNING
\$3,059,362

TOTAL LIABILITIES AND NET ASSETS
\$2,731,580

ASSETS
\$2,731,580
Cash and Cash Equivalents—\$794,134
Contributions and Grants Receivable—\$271,097
Prepaid Expenses—\$25,423
Investments—\$1,525,276
Property and Equipment (net)—\$115,651

EXPENSES
\$2,264,285
Program Services—\$1,357,340
Administrative—\$399,593
Fundraising—\$507,352

Thank you.

To our beloved explorers, wayfinders and advocates for equity in education, thank you for making 2024 a truly impactful year.



OUR DONORS LIST



LETTER FROM JO CLARK, BOARD CHAIR

Volunteer

At Homeless Children’s Education Fund, we don’t just believe every child deserves the chance to learn, dream, and succeed, we build the pathways to make it possible.

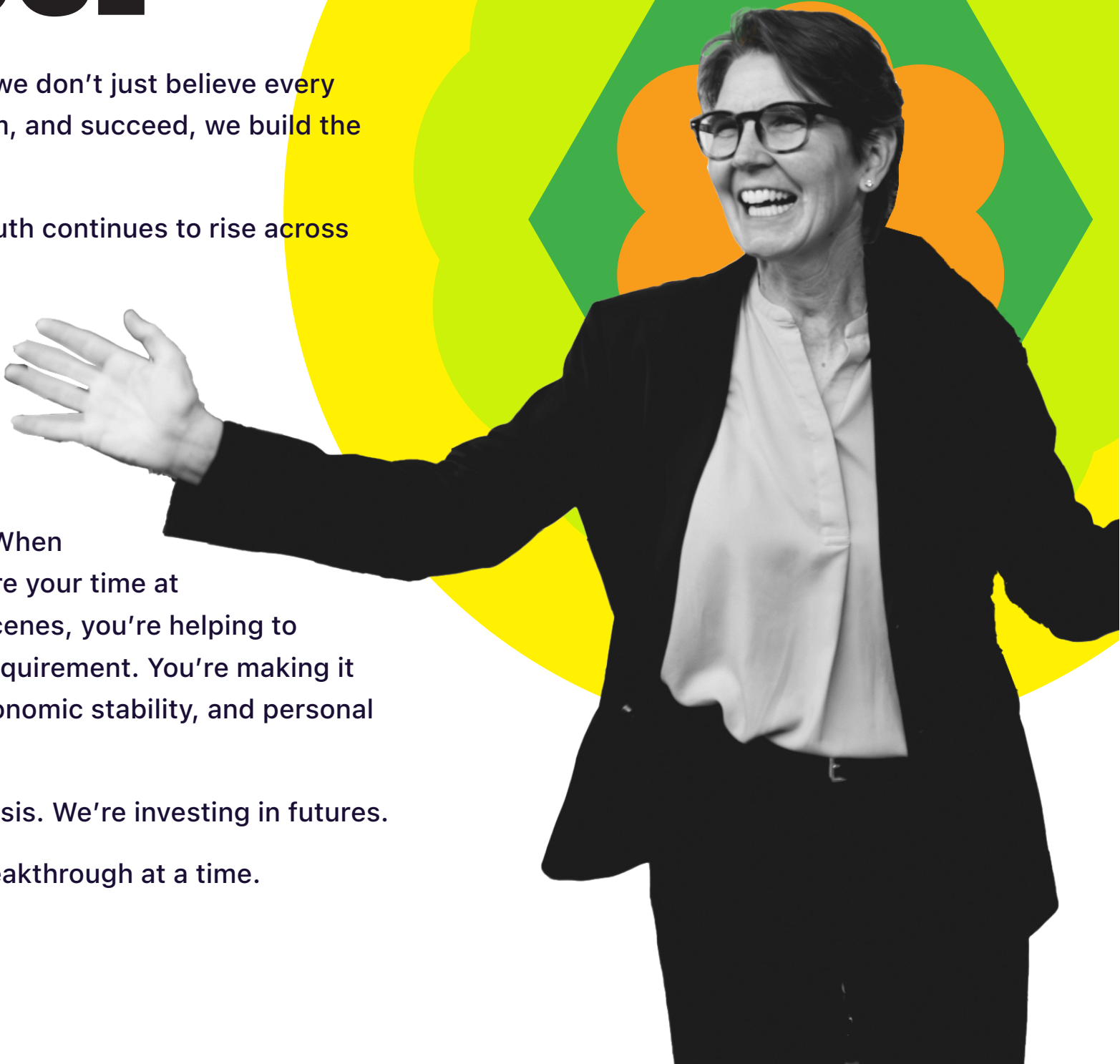
As homelessness among children and youth continues to rise across Allegheny County, the need for academic support, mentorship and consistent presence grows. HCEF steps in as both a safety net and a springboard providing not just immediate relief, but long-term opportunity.

Volunteers are essential to this mission. When you show up to help with homework, share your time at an event, or lend your skills behind the scenes, you’re helping to leverage education as more than just a requirement. You’re making it the foundation for career exploration, economic stability, and personal growth.

Together, we’re not just responding to crisis. We’re investing in futures.

Join us. One hour, one backpack, one breakthrough at a time.

Jo Clark



The Next Chapter is Waiting. Will You Write It With Us?

Your one-time gift or multi-year commitment can help close the critical gap in reaching more youth experiencing homelessness. Here’s how.

Your donation can be the key to unlocking a successful future.

Make an online donation at www.homelessfund.org/donate-now, through the United Way (Contributor Choice #963315) or by returning this envelope.

DONATE DIGITALLY



☐ **Legacy Gift**

I want to make a lasting gift that helps HCEF reach its 2027 goals and beyond.

☐ **Volunteer**

I want to give my time or help connect HCEF with people who can help close the gap.

☐ **\$25,000** ☐ **\$10,000** ☐ **\$5,000** ☐ **\$1,000** ☐ **\$500** ☐ **\$100** ☐ **\$50** ☐ OTHER: _____

☐ My company will match my gift.

PLEASE MAKE CHECKS PAYABLE TO “HCEF” OR PAY WITH A CREDIT CARD: ☐  ☐  ☐ 

NAME ADDRESS CITY/STATE/ZIP EMAIL ADDRESS

CARD NUMBER EXP DATE SIGNATURE COMPANY NAME

Your gift supports HCEF’s mission to provide children and youth experiencing homelessness with a more equitable educational experience.
To find out more, call us at 412-562-0154 or visit our website at www.homelessfund.org.