

Reinforce, Build, and Expand

OPPORTUNITY INFRASTRUCTURE

Annual Report FY 2021

A group of diverse children are interacting with the large, 3D, metallic-textured letters of the title 'OPPORTUNITY INFRASTRUCTURE'. Some children are standing on top of the letters, while others are jumping or running around them. The children are dressed in casual clothing like jeans, t-shirts, and overalls.

children
FIRST
THE ADVOCATE FOR KIDS
FORMERLY PCCY

Every child's life is strengthened when the infrastructure created to protect and nurture them is strong and robust.

That strength is built when the public demands support to finish the work of building out the early learning system, shoring up public schools, modernizing public health and nutrition programs, and holding the institutions responsible to heal children, who are abused and neglected, to the highest possible standards. These are the core elements of what we call the opportunity infrastructure that is essential for flourishing, equitable communities where children thrive.

We at Children First are proud that we made significant progress in 2021 in paving the way for safer, sturdier, and wider pathways to opportunity for all children.



John Summers
President, Children First Board of Directors



When children and families faced insurmountable risks triggered by COVID, Children First removed barriers, built new platforms, and preserved elements of the opportunity infrastructure for children.

In 2021, we:

- Designed the Equity Principles to Improve Public School Capacity
- Preserved the Early Learning System
- Built the Grid to End Childhood Lead Poisoning
- Added a Layer of Protection for Children Living in Institutions
- Reinforced Public Education

PRESERVING AND EXPANDING THE OPPORTUNITY INFRASTRUCTURE

OUR IMPACT

1.1 million students attend the state's lowest wealth school districts

240,000 children of color

83,000 children from low-income families in child care

40,000 children of color

900 Philadelphia children forced to live in institutions

700 children of color

9,000 children poisoned by lead paint

3,800 children of color

360,000 students attending suburban Philadelphia school districts

84,000 children of color

200,000 students attending Philadelphia public schools

173,000 children of color





The suburban public school infrastructure in southeastern Pennsylvania is serving more diverse students and more students from low-income families than ever before. These once homogeneous school districts are showing early warning signs of growing inequity.

Children First published the groundbreaking examination of racial disparity in suburban Philadelphia school districts, *No More Dreams Deferred*, which helped galvanize school leaders, parents, and students. They embraced and built on our proposed principles for school equity and are creating actionable plans to address the systemic barriers to success for students of color.

Through our efforts, school leaders from more than a dozen suburban districts are putting equity principles in place to create access to rigorous, inspiring, learning environments for students of color and improve the learning experience for every student.

POTENTIAL IMPACT OF EXPANDING THE OPPORTUNITY INFRASTRUCTURE

SCHOOL EQUITY

Gap in achievement
scores on average at least

16 points
between children of
color and White peers

363,500 students
attending suburban
Philadelphia school districts

83,605
children of color

\$35,000
less to spend
per classroom
where children
of color are
concentrated

"After almost a year of research that uncovered and documented deep equity challenges in suburban school districts, we are now having real and very deep discussions about equity in these districts with students, parents, and educational leaders.

These tough conversations are made even tougher because of the hyper-partisan environment where Critical Race Theory is being used to divide communities. Nevertheless, we are undaunted. With our partners, we will continue to hold schools accountable and ensure they dismantle policies that undermine the success of students of color.

Rhetorical battles may make the front page news, but we are doing the hard work behind the scenes to improve educational equity for thousands of students by ensuring these students can attend rigorous classes and schools where they are welcome and valued.



Of course, we carry on the fight for every public school to be adequately and equitably funded because that's essential for our educational equity goals to be achieved in many school districts, even in the suburbs."

- Tomea Sippio-Smith, K12 Education Policy Director

"Norristown Area School District remains committed to ensuring equity and belonging are cornerstones of the educational opportunities we strive to provide in our district. We are proud to partner with Children First to build community support as we collaborate on this work."

- Christopher T. Dormer, Superintendent of Norristown Area School District





The building blocks of learning and life for most children depend on a system of publicly supported early learning programs that nurture the development of Black, Hispanic, and low-income children while their parents are working.

COVID buckled the foundation of this system as hundreds of programs closed and classes for young children were shuttered.

Children First, together with partners across the state, persuaded state lawmakers to adopt our plan of \$130 million in emergency financial supports to undergird the early learning system throughout the crisis.

Our plan represented the largest use of discretionary American Rescue Plan resources designated by state lawmakers.

With these supports, and those also allocated by Congress, 85% of all early learning programs were able to remain open, making it possible for this critical element of our child raising infrastructure to continue to nurture child development and the gainful employment of parents.

PRESERVING THE OPPORTUNITY INFRASTRUCTURE

EARLY CHILDHOOD

**\$130
million**

targeted
investment

85%

of early learning programs continue
to operate despite COVID

150,000
children from
low-income
families

60,000
children
of color

**Tens of
Thousands**
of working
parents

“With our allies in the statewide Start Strong Campaign, we crafted an urgent legislative ask – informed by the child care sector itself – to dedicate American Rescue Plan funds to stop the disintegration of the child care infrastructure.

We were repeatedly told that our proposal was clear, well-founded on data, and comprehensive enough to make a difference.



In a few short months, legislative leaders followed our lead, putting funds on the table to save the child care sector.

Smart coalitions can do a lot for children when they advance well-developed proposals. I can’t wait to do more of the same in 2022.”

– Mai Miksic, Early Childhood Policy Director

“The extra Rescue Act Funds we received were a godsend to the children we serve and the people we employ. We are all indebted to the tireless advocacy for child care by Children First.”

– Damaris Alvarado-Rodriguez, Director of Children’s Playhouse





From the childhood lead poisoning hot spots of Delaware and Montgomery counties to the most toxic blocks in Philadelphia, we've expanded access to lead poisoning screening and lead paint remediation, and spurred aggressive, new code enforcement practices. These are the components of remediating lead from our housing infrastructure.

The local commitment to lead free homes took hold in 2021. Enforcement of the sweeping Philadelphia Lead Ordinance we helped enact in 2019 was rolled out to the most toxic neighborhoods causing landlords to guarantee their apartments are safe for children. Norristown City Council enacted an even more aggressive bill to protect children in their city. And municipal leaders in Delaware County built their capacity to crack down on housing code violations associated with exposing children to lead paint.

We also set our sights on statewide protections and built a strong framework, which unites advocates and agencies to end childhood lead poisoning called the Pennsylvania Lead-Free Promise Project. Together, 47 rural, suburban, and urban organizations are working together to build support for new state protections and resources so that, in the near future, no child in Pennsylvania tests positive for lead poisoning.

EXPANDING THE OPPORTUNITY INFRASTRUCTURE

CHILDREN'S HEALTH

Proposed investment of

\$40 million

to make homes
lead safe

10,858 children tested positive
for lead poisoning

4,244 children of color

"We were so inspired by our big wins with the Philadelphia lead poisoning prevention law that we stepped up to create a statewide campaign to get lead out of the homes of children."

With partners in the Thriving PA Campaign, we designed Pennsylvania's Lead-Free Promise Project, a new statewide coalition determined to end childhood lead poisoning.



It's been so gratifying to find so many partners from every corner of the state joining the Promise Project and building support of state lawmakers for this urgent cause."

– Colleen McCauley, Child Health Policy Director

"I cannot thank Children First enough for giving me my first opportunity to tell the story of my daughter who was poisoned by lead. I don't want any other parent to have to go through what my family is going through. We have to make sure children are safe and we have to do it now."

– Sandra Ortiz, Juniata County parent



The tragic accounts of children being abused behind the walls of institutions continue to make headlines from Glen Mills to MidAtlantic to Devereaux and Wordsworth. These programs intended for the care of the most vulnerable children continue to fail them. They continue to put children of color and children from low-income families at grave risk.

Our Philadelphia youth safety coalition successfully created a safety valve for these children by persuading Philadelphia City Council to fund the first Youth Ombudspersons Office in the state. Philadelphia City Council stepped forward because we made sure they heard from parents, youth, and whistleblowers that the system of protection for these children needed reinforcement.

This new office, poised to open in 2022, will be independent of the child welfare agencies and charged with investigating institutional abuse when children fear for their safety. Because nearly half of the children detained in institutions across the state are from Philadelphia, this new layer of protection has the potential to safeguard children, who are institutionalized, from harm, statewide.

EXPANDING THE OPPORTUNITY INFRASTRUCTURE

VULNERABLE YOUTH

\$500,000

available for
new protections
in Philadelphia

931 Philadelphia youth
sent to live in institutions

876 Philadelphia children of color
sent to live in institutions

“When we began working with City Council, it was clear they shared our concern about the risk that children face living in institutions and they, like Children First, wanted to find and fund alternatives. We all agreed that right now, new protections had to be put in place.

Nearly every member of Council embraced our proposed Youth Ombudspersons Office. It’s the first of its kind in the country and I am so proud to have played a role in making it happen. Now we can begin the heavy lift of retooling the system so that no child is ever forced to be institutionalized.”



– Laurie Dow, Vulnerable Youth Policy Director

“I was asked to testify about my daughter's experience being placed in an institution. It was scary and empowering, and I am so grateful that Children First made sure my voice was heard.”

– Geneva Williams, Philadelphia parent





Every aspect of our community, economy, and civic life depends on the infrastructure of public schools, which are charged with preparing the next generation for their time to lead. For children of color and children in low-income households to be prepared for that challenge, the schools that educate them must be improved – requiring significant reinforcement of resources and supports.

COVID created a unique opportunity to make the case for the public schools that have the fewest resources and that educate students from the lowest income families.

We struck while the iron was hot and shaped a new tool to get funds to the state’s 100 poorest school districts. With partners, we created the Level Up Coalition that paved the way for \$100 million in new state funding for the districts that need it the most.

This doesn’t solve the state’s school funding crisis, but Level Up hastened the pace of closing the equity gap among school districts in Pennsylvania.

EXPANDING THE OPPORTUNITY INFRASTRUCTURE

EDUCATION FUNDING

100 lowest spending schools educating the most low-income students

1.1 million

million students attend the state's lowest wealth school districts

240,000 children of color

\$100 million targeted investment

"With many of our partners from the PA Schools Work Campaign we constructed a novel new method of getting more state funding to the districts that need it most -- without negatively affecting the Fair School Funding Formula we helped get enacted in 2015.

We called the campaign Level Up because our approach accelerated the pace of increasing state resources to the lowest spending, neediest school districts.



After just four months, we secured support from a majority of lawmakers on both sides of the aisle for our proposal. We were pleasantly surprised and inspired and became determined to do more of the same next year."

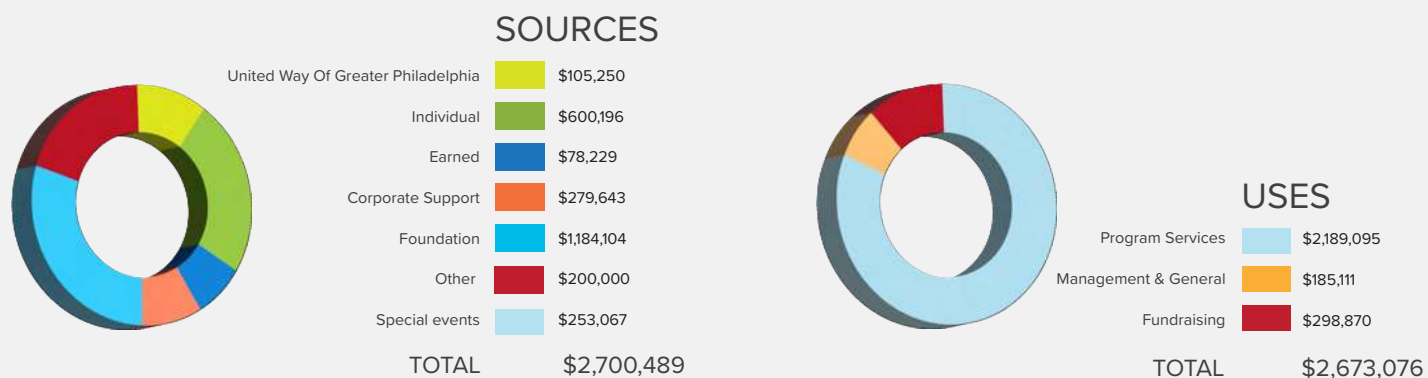
- Donna Cooper, Executive Director

"Once the 'Level Up' idea was planted and took root, it bore \$100 million in fruit for our students. Thanks to Children First for partnering with us to carry the ball down the field, getting this great first down!"

- Superintendent Rodriquez, Pottstown School District



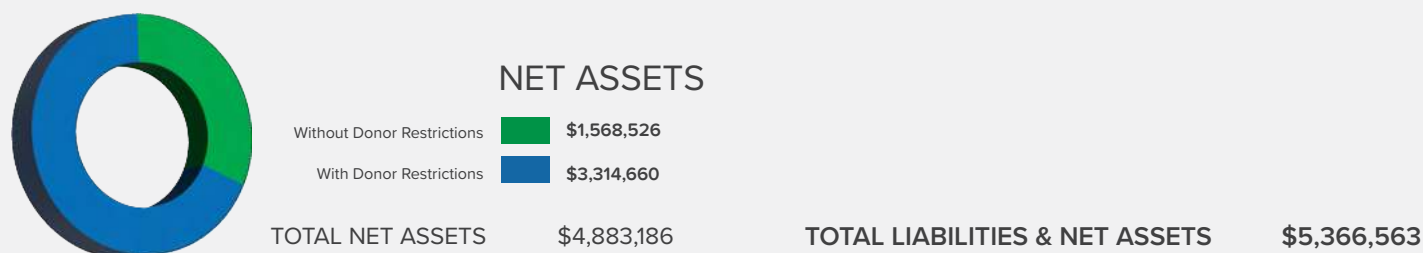
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Sources are based on revenue without donor restrictions before other.

Statement of Financial Position

As of May 31, 2021



The complete audited financial statements for FY20-21 are available upon request.

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- Michael Pearson, Children First
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