

ANNUAL IMPACT REPORT

# Promoting Economic Mobility for ALL



2023



Office of

Community Empowerment and Opportunity





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# Empowering Residents

WHO FACE SYSTEMIC BARRIERS TO ECONOMIC MOBILITY

## OUR MISSION

The Office of Community Empowerment and Opportunity (CEO) provides leadership on issues of economic justice by advancing racial equity and inclusive growth to ensure that all Philadelphians share in the City’s prosperous future.

## OUR VALUES

**DIGNITY:** We actively respect our individual colleagues and people in the community.

**INCLUSIVITY:** Our work is more beneficial, valuable, and valid when our full range of experiences, knowledge, and skills can contribute.

**PERSISTENCE:** We recognize the challenges inherent in this work, and when we get discouraged, we find ways to be resilient, lift each other up, and push forward.

**ACCOUNTABILITY:** We are transparent and honest about our plans, our actions, and our results.

**HONESTY:** We create a space to have healthy, honest dialogues about systems, people, and misconceptions and then communicate truthfully.

## OUR GUIDING PRINCIPLES

The people of Philadelphia deserve the opportunity to live happy, healthy, full lives.

City government should both recognize its culpability in creating and sustaining inequity and fulfill its responsibility to provide opportunities for, represent the best interests of, and promote the well-being of all residents.

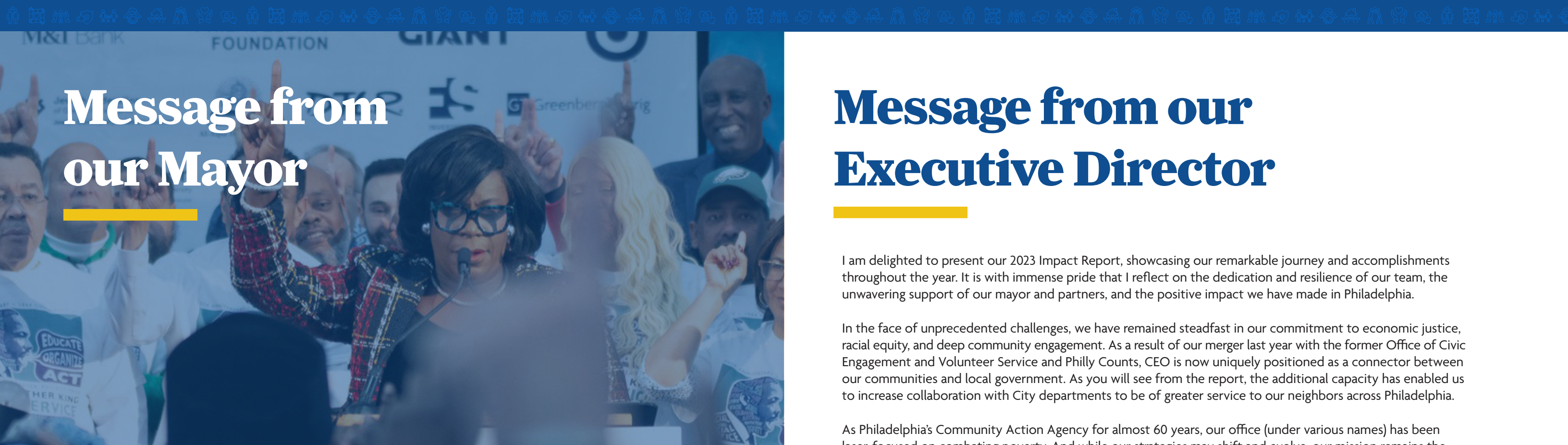
People can offer meaningful insights into both their personal experiences and how the systems around them function.

Poverty is a deliberately created systemic issue and city government can lead in calling for justice and creating solutions for economic mobility.

## CEO

is among a national network of 1,000 Community Action Agencies fighting poverty in urban, rural, and suburban communities. Established in 1965, CEO serves as Philadelphia’s designated community action agency.





# Message from our Mayor


As the 100th Mayor of the City of Philadelphia, it is an honor to serve all Philadelphians. And I know that for many in our great city, economic security feels impossible, particularly for those who experience deep poverty. Yet, I am working tirelessly to create a safer, cleaner, greener Philadelphia with economic opportunity for all.

By unlocking that economic opportunity, we can create a Philadelphia where all our communities are vibrant and have access to the opportunities to build intergenerational wealth. CEO plays a vital role in achieving that goal as you'll see in this Impact Report. They have demonstrated the ability to connect those with lower incomes to vital resources like public benefits, workforce training, and financial counseling. CEO also leads collective impact work with stakeholders like the Same Day Work and Pay initiative (SDWP), helping to build intergovernmental and multi-sector support for this and other critical work.

We will build on that work and bridge economic disparities by continuing to invest in workforce development, creating alternative pathways to careers, and ensuring that “big bet” initiatives benefit local workers. As we witnessed during the COVID-19 pandemic, our communities are strongest when we look out for one another, so let's strengthen our social safety net so that all Philadelphians have the means to meet their basic needs and live with dignity.

Collectively, the City will foster an inclusive, thriving economy that helps put people on a path to self-sufficiency. It demands collaboration, innovation, and persistence—qualities that Philadelphians demonstrate every day in neighborhoods across our beloved city.

I invite you to join us in our efforts to create One Philly, a United City.

Sincerely,  
  
Cherelle L. Parker  
Mayor

# Message from our Executive Director

I am delighted to present our 2023 Impact Report, showcasing our remarkable journey and accomplishments throughout the year. It is with immense pride that I reflect on the dedication and resilience of our team, the unwavering support of our mayor and partners, and the positive impact we have made in Philadelphia.


In the face of unprecedented challenges, we have remained steadfast in our commitment to economic justice, racial equity, and deep community engagement. As a result of our merger last year with the former Office of Civic Engagement and Volunteer Service and Philly Counts, CEO is now uniquely positioned as a connector between our communities and local government. As you will see from the report, the additional capacity has enabled us to increase collaboration with City departments to be of greater service to our neighbors across Philadelphia.

As Philadelphia's Community Action Agency for almost 60 years, our office (under various names) has been laser-focused on combating poverty. And while our strategies may shift and evolve, our mission remains the same: to ensure that all Philadelphians have an opportunity to share in the city's prosperous future.

We envision a Philadelphia where residents will not need to rely on our services because they will be financially independent, but there is still much work to be done. The city's poverty rate has decreased from over 28 percent a decade ago to where it is today. But despite our progress, in 2022, approximately 329,000 Philadelphians, or 21.7 percent of the population, had incomes below the federal poverty level. For a family of four, that means \$31,200 or less. Nearly 10 percent of residents were in “deep poverty,” with incomes of \$15,600 or less for a four-person household.

Looking ahead, we remain dedicated to our core values, ensuring our services meet the ever-changing needs of residents, and uplifting our communities. We are excited about the opportunities that lie ahead and confident in our ability to navigate the evolving landscape.

On behalf of the entire leadership team, I assure you that we will continue to prioritize accountability, honesty, and inclusivity in everything we do. Together, let us embrace the future with optimism and determination, knowing that our collective efforts will shape a brighter tomorrow.

Sincerely,  
  
Orlando Rendon  
Executive Director







# Our Team

## 2023 OVERSIGHT BOARD

Loree D. Jones  
Chair  
Philabundance  
Chief Executive Officer

Leslie Benoliel  
Entrepreneur Works  
President & CEO

Cathy Carr  
University of Pennsylvania  
Law School, School of  
Social Policy and Practice  
Adjunct Professor of Law

H. Patrick Clancy  
Philadelphia Works  
Executive Director

Rev. Danny Cortes  
Esperanza  
Exec. VP & Chief of Staff

James Crowder  
Annie E. Casey Foundation  
Senior Associate

Anne Fadullon  
Department of Planning  
& Development  
City of Philadelphia  
Director

Bishop J. Louis Felton  
Mount Airy Church  
of God in Christ  
Pastor

Steve Gardner  
Clarifi  
Executive Director  
& President

Mary Horstmann  
City of Philadelphia  
Deputy Managing Director for  
Health & Human Services Cabinet

Curtis Jones, Jr.  
Councilmember  
4th District

Yocasta Lora  
AARP Pennsylvania, Assoc. State  
Director for Advocacy  
and Community Outreach

Pedro Ramos  
Philadelphia Foundation  
President & CEO

Sulaiman Rahman  
DiverseForce LLC  
President & CEO

Dr. David E. Thomas  
Community College of  
Philadelphia, VP Strategic  
Initiatives & Community  
Engagement

Eric Westbrook  
Mayor's Office of  
Black Male Engagement  
Director

Tonie Willis  
Ardella's House  
Founder & Executive Director

# Our Portfolio

Centering our work in racial equity, we address the causes and conditions of poverty by leading programs and investing in community-based organizations that help Philadelphians advance toward economic mobility. They build knowledge and skills, get money back in their pockets, and connect to other resources to become financially secure. We also advocate for change to systems that create and maintain inequities.

## INCOME SUPPORTS

CEO and its partners provide one-on-one enrollment support for public benefits, legal representation for those denied benefits, and free income tax preparation.

## HOUSING SECURITY

CEO and its partners provide rental assistance to those facing eviction. We also offer financial and housing counseling and microgrants to those formerly incarcerated to help them achieve their goals.

## RESOURCE CONNECTION

CEO meets residents where they are to connect them to vital resources and programs that help them achieve stability.

## ECONOMIC MOBILITY

CEO and its partners provide financial counseling to help residents reduce debt, increase savings, improve credit, and open bank accounts. We also coordinate consumer protection efforts.

## WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

CEO and its partners provide training, resume building, and transitional work opportunities to individuals formerly incarcerated, experiencing housing insecurity, or facing other barriers.

## CAPACITY BUILDING

Using a racial equity lens, CEO offers training to City staff, community-based organizations, and residents to enhance equitable engagement, volunteer management, and civic participation.

## PLACE-BASED INITIATIVES

CEO and its partners provide support to community-based organizations and high schools in and around the West Philadelphia Promise Zone.

## ADVOCACY

CEO advocates at the local, state, and federal level for policies and programs that advance racial equity and economic justice.





# By the Numbers

**\$32.7M**

Income tax refunds processed for Philadelphia households

**\$555K**

Total wages dispersed to SDWP participants

**3,354**

Unique individuals who participated in Same Day Work and Pay Initiative (SDWP)

**\$8.2M**

Estimated total value of benefits enrollments

**3,588**

Confirmed enrollments for public benefits

**14,567**

Face-to-face conversations by canvassers

**2,000**

Philadelphia Water Department customers protected from initial shutoff

**100%**

Graduation rate of JEVS Work Ready participants enrolled in high school

**232**

City employees engaged in Equitable Engagement Collaborative virtual meetings





## Racial Income Gap Persists




53%

In 2022, Black and Hispanic households in Philadelphia earned roughly \$0.53 for every dollar a White household earned. This is due to several historical factors, including structural racism in employment, housing, education and other systems that disadvantage Black and Brown communities.

# Income Supports

All Philadelphians should have sufficient income to meet their basic needs. Public benefits, free income tax preparation, and anti-poverty initiatives like the Earned Income Tax Credit can free up income to help families achieve stability.

CEO and its partners lead programs that improve the social safety net for residents who are unemployed, underemployed, or retired.

|   |  |
|---|--|
| <p><b>\$32.7M</b></p> <p>Total income tax refunds processed for households by our tax prep partners</p>   |  <p><b>\$5.3M</b></p> <p>In Earned Income Tax Credit funds received by households</p> |
|  <p><b>\$10.8M</b></p> <p>In Child Tax Credit funds received by households</p> | <p><b>\$7K</b></p> <p>Estimated average value of benefits received per household for confirmed enrollments</p>   |
| <p><b>\$8.2M</b></p> <p>Estimated total value of public benefits received through our enrollment support</p>  |    |

## CLIENT STORY

“It helped me save a lot of money for living so I can do a lot of things ... and can help me make the American dream” - Mr. Kun Chen



Mr. Kun Chen and his 13-year-old daughter immigrated to Philadelphia from China in August of 2023 to seek medical treatment for his daughter's rare birth defect.

Mr. Chen had enrolled his daughter in school when he was introduced to Stacie Brown, a benefits specialist at CEO, to apply for medical coverage. Accessing benefits such as for food and utility assistance, medical care, cash assistance, and other benefits amounts to a time tax on those with low incomes as well as immigrants, refugees, and asylees. Archaic systems force them to navigate bureaucratic hurdles to get enrolled and stay enrolled. Stacie helped Mr. Chen gather the necessary documents and submit the applications. Mr. Chen was not only approved for Medical Assistance for him and his daughter, but also received SNAP to help pay for groceries.

“It helped me save a lot of money for living so I can do a lot of things ... and can help me make the American dream,” he said.

Mr. Chen got more good news. His wife, a ceramic artist, was able to relocate to Philadelphia in March. He has found work as a rideshare driver and hopes to open a clothing store.

Despite the challenges in relocating to a new country, Mr. Chen is optimistic that he can help his daughter pursue her dream of becoming a musician.



# Housing Security

All Philadelphians should have equitable access to safe, stable housing. Without it, individuals face significant obstacles in pursuing and maintaining employment, education, and other opportunities.

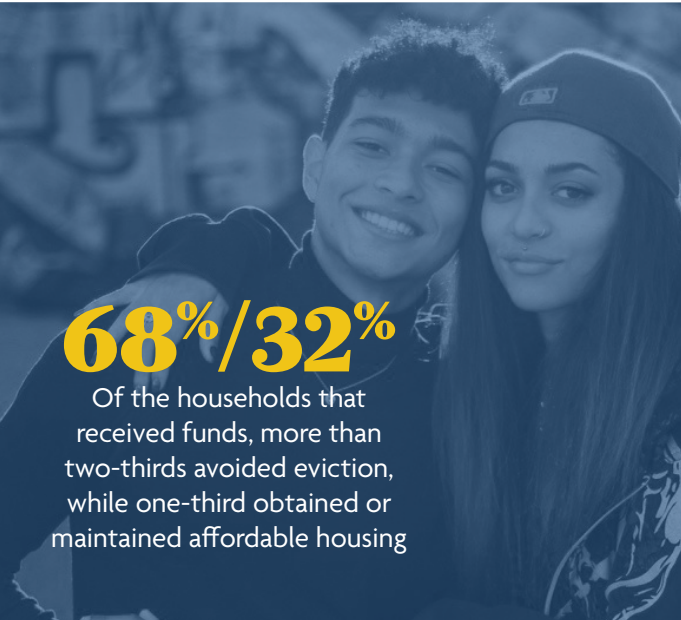
CEO and its partners lead programs that help secure housing for Philadelphians who are at risk of eviction, in unsuitable housing, or returning from incarceration. CEO also convenes a Housing Security Working Group which has focused on reducing eviction filings and improving housing quality, especially for tenants with low incomes.



**\$415K**  
Total microgrants distributed to participants in our Reentry Housing program to help them secure housing or cover other basic needs



**\$2,427**  
Average amount of assistance households received toward rental arrears, security deposits, or ongoing rental assistance



**68%/32%**  
Of the households that received funds, more than two-thirds avoided eviction, while one-third obtained or maintained affordable housing



**\$301K**  
Total distributed for rental arrears, security deposits, or ongoing rental assistance through the Office of Homeless Services



Mr. Johnson\*, 33, had been incarcerated through most of 2022. For justice-involved individuals, especially those who are Black, finding stable employment can be a major challenge. Despite having the necessary qualifications, people with criminal records are five times more likely to be unemployed than the general public.

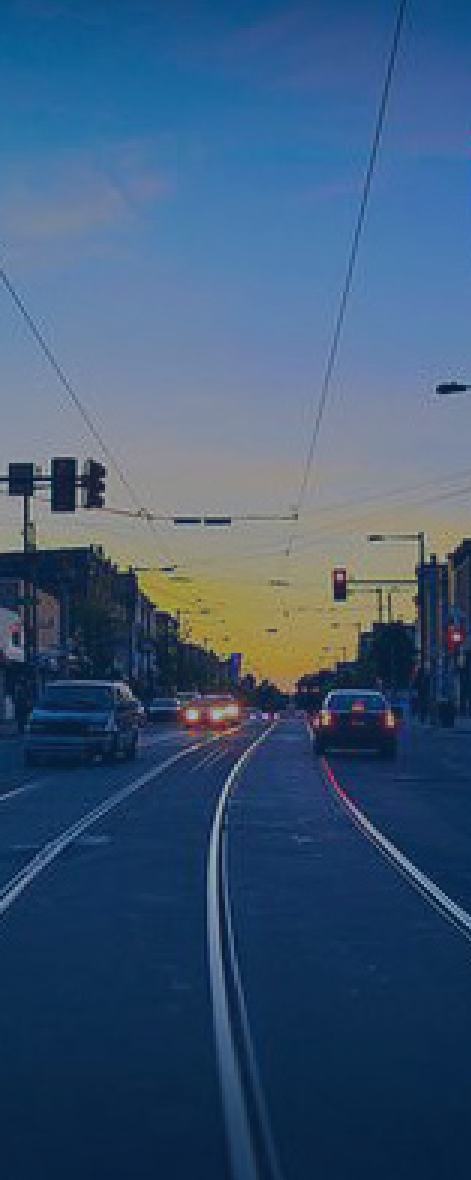
Towards the end of the year, Mr. Johnson began working at the Center for Employment Opportunities, which offers transitional work opportunities to justice-involved individuals.

By the time Mr. Johnson reached Clarifi, he had already been feeling better about the potential of a secure future through employment. He had a plan in place for continued employment and safe housing. Yet, to reach his goals, Mr. Johnson knew he needed to learn more about his financial capabilities, including establishing credit and learning how to make his credit work for him.

When Mr. Johnson first worked with his counselor, he had no credit history and no knowledge about how to build credit. He also had been struggling with income and learning how to budget his money.

Counselor Jessica Nocho worked with Mr. Johnson. Across the two financial health sessions, he made great strides. Mr. Johnson had a revamped budget with \$105 per month in expected savings capacity and opened a secure credit card, which he learned to use properly. Within three months of opening the card, he established a credit score. He also obtained a full-time job at the U.S. Postal Service.

By completing the mandatory counseling sessions and achieving an outcome, he was able to receive the \$1,000 microgrant. The grant helped him stabilize his budget by paying off some overdue bills. Thanks to his continued hard work and resilience, Mr. Johnson is now empowered to continue building his credit and savings and working towards eventual homeownership.



**Massive need for reentry services**

**17,897**

The number of people released from Pennsylvania's state and federal prisons annually is 17,987, according to the Bureau of Justice Statistics. That does not include people released from local jails. The need for reentry services far outweighs the resources available.

*\*Not the client's actual name*



# Workforce Development

All Philadelphians should have equitable access to a living-wage job that allows them to care for themselves and their families. Job training, education, and other supports can help narrow the gap for those who disproportionately face barriers to secure employment.

CEO and its partners lead workforce development programs for individuals facing the most significant barriers to long-term employment.



# Resource Connection

All Philadelphians should have equitable access to key resources and information, enabling them to further their education, improve their physical and mental well-being, support their businesses, and build wealth.

CEO and its partners use grassroots outreach to connect residents in under-resourced communities to vital programs and services.



2,000

Water customers protected from initial shutoff thanks to direct outreach

5,276

Fentanyl test strips distributed through door-to-door canvassing from October to December 31

3,944

Naloxone doses distributed through door-to-door canvassing from October to December 31

## HIGHLIGHT

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the Philadelphia Water Department (PWD) and the Water Revenue Bureau issued a moratorium on shutoffs for nonpayment. The utility also restored service for residents who had already been shut off due to nonpayment.

In June 2022, CEO collaborated with PWD and Water Revenue to begin assisting with enrollment in new and expanded protections against service suspension. And in 2023, thanks to advocacy from CEO and many others, PWD and Water Revenue developed a new initiative, Raise Your Hand, which protected additional households.

Our direct outreach and enrollment support protected 2,000 water customers from initial shutoff, helping them to preserve an essential resource for health and well-being.

“This young person basically told me that her life was... at risk because she did not have any running water. She used to go to the Y or to the schools in the morning to wash up and clean up because she had not had water for months. When the pandemic hit... she revealed to me these conversations about using hoses or whatever she could, or sneaking into buildings that weren’t secure, to be able to use water. And the infections that she’s had for not having ongoing water—it’s just horrific. Her body has sores on it.”

- Health service provider



SAVING LIVES THROUGH PREVENTION

In 2022, Philadelphia had the highest rate of drug overdose deaths of any major U.S. city, with a disproportionate increase among Black and Hispanic populations. Since 2018, overdose fatalities increased by 87 percent among Black individuals and 43 percent among Hispanic individuals. Due to historical factors, these communities are less likely to self-identify as a person who uses drugs and seek treatment.

As part of the City of Philadelphia’s coordinated response, CEO began canvassing in October in neighborhoods with the sharpest rise in overdose deaths. We also recruit residents for our Trusted Community Messenger program. The program offers free training on harm reduction, overdose reversal, and treatment options, plus a lifesaver toolkit.

“One lady who used to be on Percocets [and struggled with] addiction since high school said she’s been clean almost 3 years. It’s still hard for her, especially because all her friends are still addicted. She was surprised as well as relieved to see us out in her neighborhood.”

—Canvasser in Juniata Park

“[I learned] how accidental drug overdoses can be, how to administer Narcan, and how to openly have the conversation about drug overdoses without judgment.”

—Resident in Trusted Messenger

Economic Mobility

All Philadelphians should be able to improve their economic status during the course of their lifetimes. Helping them reduce debt, improve credit, and save for major purchases is not only about personal financial well-being, it’s a vital step toward building wealth and creating a more equitable society.

CEO and its partners provide asset-building services through financial empowerment centers. The centers offer financial and housing counseling to all Philadelphians, regardless of income.

3,109  
Total financial counseling sessions attended by FEC clients

\$851K  
Total debt reduction realized by FEC clients

\$256K  
Combined increase in savings by FEC clients

\$3.4/1  
Clients increased their personal wealth by \$3.40 for every dollar spent on FECs





CLIENT STORY



Renting wasn't Rosheka's endgame.

For years, Rosheka spun her wheels from rent increases and a stagnant savings account. She felt stuck in the same cycle as her parents: Never owning, not knowing key financial steps. Still, if she could spend \$1,000 on rent, she was determined to afford a mortgage.

At first, Rosheka was leery of Clarifi's services—could this place actually help her buy a home? But through counseling sessions, she soaked up financial knowledge like a sponge. She learned that good credit was key to buying a home and that debt could be negotiated: After two phone calls to her creditor, she paid off her \$7,000 debt with just \$3,000.

She adopted the mantra, "Start saving and spend less." She stopped habitually buying her kids everything they asked for. As she paid the bills off, her credit score improved. The progress was tangible. "Those are tools I didn't have before... If I could tell my past self anything, it would be, 'Save.'"

Rosheka's counselor had assured her that together, they'd prepare her for homeownership. Two years after that initial counseling session, Rosheka bought her first home, a newly renovated rowhouse on a quiet block.

**"Right now I can say this is mine," Rosheka said. "This is my home. I own it."**

Last year, she got a call from Clarifi: She qualified for a cash grant, no strings attached. Rosheka decided to make a direct investment in her home by buying a new stove, washer, and dryer, then saving the rest to repair the steps on her stoop.

"For me, financial empowerment is breaking generational curses," Rosheka said. She's teaching her kids about credit, budgeting, and saving. She's breaking barriers to homeownership, to financial capability, to wealth—for herself and her family.

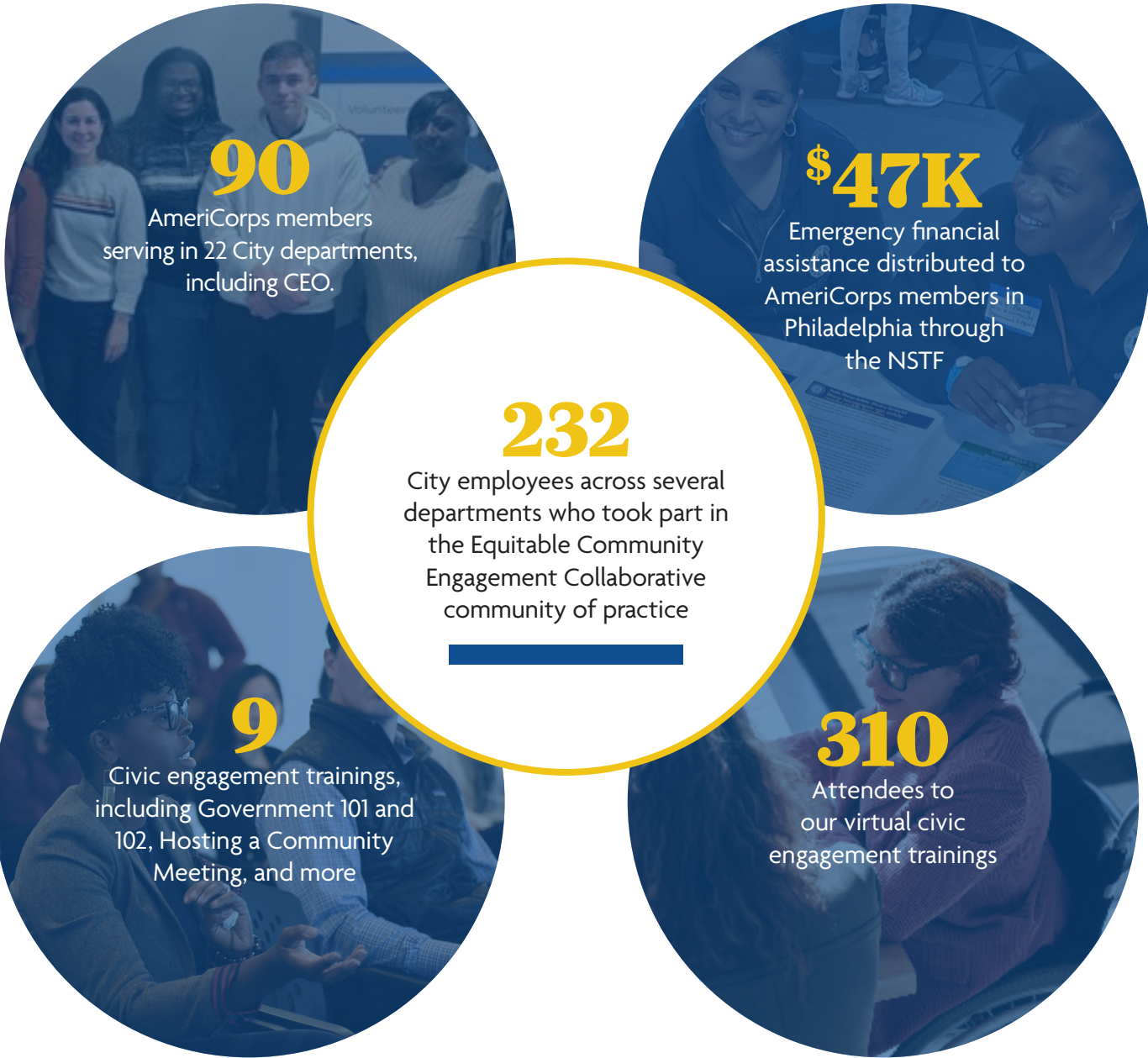
"If I only knew these things ahead of time, or years ago, I would have handled it differently," she said. Rosheka was 45 when she bought her first home. With the healthy financial habits her mother passed down from Clarifi, Rosheka's 21-year-old daughter, Alexis, is working to become a homeowner even sooner.

*Provided by Clarifi.*

# Capacity Building

All Philadelphians should have equitable access to their government and the tools to improve their neighborhoods, empowering them to be changemakers in their communities.

CEO offers free training for community members and volunteer-led organizations and hosts a community of practice for city employees to share best practices on how to equitably engage our communities. We also lead the Serve Philadelphia VISTA program, Community Resource Corps, and National Service Task Force.





# Place-Based Initiatives

All communities should have equitable investment to spur job creation, safe neighborhoods, and economic growth, while not displacing long-term residents. These investments create places where people can live, work, play, and pray.

CEO and its partners coordinate activities in and around the West Philadelphia Promise Zone, a federal designation created in 2014 under the Obama administration. We also hire AmeriCorps members to provide academic support to students in four area high schools.

**\$400K**

Two-year grant from the Barra Foundation to build capacity of the Promise Zone Research Connection

**183**

Students participated in Promise Corps college and career programming during the 2022-23 academic year to prepare for postsecondary opportunities

**\$165K**

Distributed to 11 community-based organizations through the Promise Zone Sustainability Fund



## TESTIMONIALS

“The Promise Zone designation did so many wonderful things for this community. Most importantly, it fostered the relationships that led to people being able to advocate for more resources and better policies. We appreciate all that CEO has done in support of the West Philadelphia Promise Zone.”

**Michael Thorpe**

Mount Vernon Manor CDC



“CEO has been an exceptional partner in outreach initiatives focused not only on increasing access and water affordability but also helping with other necessities like heat, food, disability, and healthcare benefits, which has brought more financial stability to our most disinvested residents and families.”

**Susan M. Crosby**

Water Revenue Bureau, City of Philadelphia



“When there was a great need to disseminate critical information about the availability and accessibility of the Child Tax Credit and stimulus payments to underserved populations, CEO was able to swiftly and adeptly set up a vast community-based network to help share this information and expertise. Philadelphia is lucky to have CEO.”

**Jennifer Burdick**

Community Legal Services of Philadelphia





# Budget

|                                       | FY22 ACTUAL  | FY23 ACTUAL  | FY24 BUDGET  |
|---------------------------------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|
| Personnel                             | \$2,464,543  | \$3,005,648  | \$6,889,522  |
| Contracted Services & Community Funds | \$20,446,140 | \$23,194,801 | \$29,490,650 |
| Supplies & Equipment                  | \$212,407    | \$40,171     | \$57,281     |
| TOTAL                                 | \$23,123,090 | \$26,240,620 | \$36,437,453 |

Our Fiscal Year runs from July 1 - June 30



# Thank You

CEO would like to acknowledge its contracted partners who serve our communities:

- Benefits Data Trust

Campaign for Working Families

Catholic Social Services Southwest

Ceiba

Center for Employment Opportunities

Community Legal Services

Clarifi

Crossroad Community Resources

Drexel University

First Step Staffing
- Impact Services

JEVS Human Services

Nueva Esperanza

Office of Homeless Services

Philadelphia FIGHT

Scattergood Foundation

School for Parent Education

UESF

Uplift Solutions

CEO would like acknowledge its funding partners that support our work:

- Arnold Ventures

Cities for Financial Empowerment Fund

City Fund for Philadelphia

Corporation for National and Community Service

Drexel University

Human Services Development Fund

JP Morgan Chase

PA Department of Community and Economic Development

PA Department of Human Services

PennServe

Pennsylvania Housing Finance Agency

PHENND

Philadelphia Works

Urban Institute



# ANNUAL IMPACT REPORT

## 2023



Office of  
**Community Empowerment and Opportunity**

📍 1617 JFK Blvd., Suite 1800, Philadelphia, PA 19103

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