

20  
23



 Cohesion  
**Impact  
Report**



# Our Mission

We collaborate with residents, organizations, and local government to support one another to flourish and become leaders who promote lasting change.



## Dear Cohesion Community,

As we reflect on the past year, I am filled with gratitude for the support and dedication of our community members, partners, and team. Together, we have continued to make meaningful strides toward our mission of fostering inclusive, vibrant, and empowered neighborhoods.

In 2023, we expanded our work to address the unique needs and challenges of our communities. Our Community Block Ambassadors program, operating in the 1st & 6th Wards and Franklin Park neighborhoods of Allentown, has been a beacon of community empowerment. Through collaborative efforts and grassroots engagement, we have seen firsthand the transformative power of community-led initiatives.

Our Positive Discipline Workshops have equipped parents and educators with invaluable tools and resources to support positive child development and strengthen family dynamics. By fostering open-hearted dialogue and providing evidence-based strategies, we are empowering families to navigate challenges and build stronger, more resilient relationships.

Our Connection Character Program continues to focus on building leadership skills through hands-on sessions with elementary and middle school students that promote self-awareness and healthy relationships. We provide practical experiences for diverse participants, helping them grow personally and contribute positively to their communities.

None of this would be possible without the dedication and commitment of our incredible team, volunteers, and supporters. You truly made a difference in the lives of individuals and families throughout our community.

As we look ahead to the future, let us continue to work together, uplift one another, and strive for positive change.

*With gratitude,*

**Darian Colbert**  
Executive Director



## Dear Cohesion Community, Partners, and Friends,

Thank you so much for your support, kindness, and teamwork. Because of you, the Cohesion Network team is making real progress in our mission to promote lasting change in the communities we serve. I've been on the Cohesion Board of Directors for five years, spending the last 18 months as Board Chair. This experience has taught me the incredible power of our community working together – “we” really is greater than “me.”

I'm thrilled about all the good work we've done in 2023:

- Our community programs have really taken off, with people coming together more than ever to collaborate on shared challenges and make positive changes in their neighborhoods.
- We've reached more schools in the Lehigh Valley, teaching parents and educators positive ways to manage their classrooms and homes, which is making a real difference.
- We've managed to get our character education program into more classrooms, helping even more students learn about self-acceptance and how to be their best selves.

Every year, I see how much we're growing and how much we're managing to do, and it continues to inspire me. We have big plans, and every year, we're making them a reality thanks to our fantastic Cohesion Network team, dedicated partners, and everyone in our communities who gets involved.

I would like to personally thank our Cohesion team, our Board of Directors, and our Executive Director, Darian Colbert, for their hard work, dedication, and commitment to Cohesion's purpose. They live our mission every day, and it's making a huge difference in our communities.



*With respect and gratitude,*

**Taressa Diaz**  
Board Chair

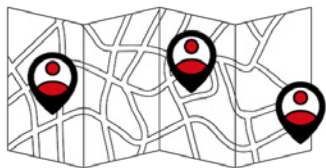




# Our Programs

## Collaborating for Lasting Change

In the past year, we've expanded and deepened our work, focusing on investing in leaders to promote lasting change by supporting our neighbors to thrive socially, educationally, and economically. Emphasizing connectivity and relationships, our programs aim to create the conditions for outcomes that directly impact our local communities.



## Community Engagement/ Block Ambassadors

We support Community Ambassadors to serve as liaisons between residents and local government, addressing urgent needs and driving tangible improvements in their neighborhoods. Through monthly meetings and ongoing communication, these leaders establish meaningful relationships, represent their neighbors at community meetings, and provide vital resources to families in need. Our approach fosters safe, hospitable neighborhoods where relationships are built, resources are shared, and residents thrive.

Collaborating with the Leonard Parker Pool Institute For Health and the Lupton Center, we're developing a Blueprint for Neighborhood Engagement to guide residents, service providers, and city allies.

Additionally, our six-part community organizing training, in partnership with City of Allentown Manager of Civic Innovation, Laura Ballek-Cole, has equipped residents and partners with storytelling skills, relationship-building strategies, and strategic thinking to address pressing neighborhood concerns effectively.



# Our Programs



## Positive Discipline Workshops

Our certified facilitators specialize in the Positive Discipline Parenting and Classroom Management model, providing essential tools and resources to parents, teachers, childcare providers, and youth workers. Through authentic and open-hearted sessions, participants learn to implement these principles

effectively at home, in the community, and in the classroom. Positive Discipline fosters responsible, respectful, and resourceful behavior among young people, emphasizing mutually respectful relationships and the use of kindness and firmness simultaneously without being punitive or permissive.

### What Parents, Educators and Students Are Saying:



“Thank you so much for this opportunity to learn how we can improve our parenting”



“The presentation was very informative. As a young mom, I really needed to hear everything that was taught. I am thankful I came today.”



“The workshop was extremely relatable, which made me feel very comfortable and able to open up.”



“I felt like this program was literally describing my life.”



“I love how involved and personable the facilitators are.”



“Please keep doing events like this!”



## Connection Character Program

We engage elementary and middle school students in leadership development through our character education curriculum. Our interactive sessions provide practical, hands-on experience to help students develop strong character, fostering self-awareness and the skills for healthy relationships within themselves, with others, and in their community.

Students participate in 45 to 60-minute interactive lessons, such as:

- Who Am I (Identity)
- Friends Matter (Healthy Friendships)
- You Choose (Choices)
- Draw the Line (Healthy Boundaries)
- Handle Your Business (Self Discipline)
- Know Your Role (Authority)
- Take Your Place (Service)

The format includes demonstrations, group questions, weekly quote memorization, journaling, small group discussions, and action plans.

“

“I feel loved and cared for, and I feel good when I leave.”

“

“I like coming here because I like the feeling of I am somebody [and] I do matter.”

“

“It tells me about problems that are happening in the streets so they won't happen to us and about decisions when we grow up and become adults.”

“

“They talked to us about our problems, and they helped me become a better person inside and out.”

“

“Wow, it is crazy. What I like best about this program is that it taught me to be real and me.”

“

“It changed my life.”



# 2023 Highlights

## Partnerships

- Strengthened partnerships with Muhlenberg University, Leonard Parker Pool Institute for Health, Ripple Community Inc., and Community Bike Works.
- Partnered with Leonard Parker Pool Institute for Health and Lupton Center to create a community engagement blueprint.

## Education

- Positive shift in student behaviors, classroom, and school culture.
- Beginning to develop curriculum in a kit resource for educators.

## Community

- Held consistent Community Ambassador meetings and communication to build relationships and address neighborhood issues.
- Made changes in parking regulations, street use, and increased sense of belonging.

## Internal

- Strong and engaged board leadership.
- Expanded staff to include administrative support and outreach management.

**21**  
SCHOOLS

Facilitated Character Education program at **21 schools with 1,150 students.**

**24**  
SCHOOLS

Led Positive Discipline workshops for parents and administrators at **24 schools.**

**\$1M**

In fall 2023, we helped mobilize the community to secure **\$1 million in ARPA funds** for Ripple Community Inc. to redevelop the church at 1547 Chew Street into affordable housing, a community center, and medical respite rooms. Despite recent zoning challenges, Cohesion is partnering with RCI to rally community support for the upcoming March hearing.



**2024**

As we move into 2024, we're focusing on listening to concerns the community wants to address. Two areas that continue to take center stage in our conversations are updating open community spaces such as Franklin Park and housing access and affordability.





## Yamilett's Story



**Yamilett is a lifelong resident of Allentown's 1st Ward and has been a passionate advocate for our community for many years.** She grew up in the area, attended Dieruff High School, and now successfully runs a hair salon in the city.

Recently, she became aware of her neighbors' concerns regarding tractor-trailers using residential streets near Bucky Boyle Park. These trucks posed safety hazards and damaged cars as they traversed the streets. Yamilett began documenting the incidents and sharing them on social media, catching the attention of a city council member.

However, Yamilett's advocacy work didn't start with the incidents involving the tractor-trailers. She has been listening to her neighbors' concerns and has fought for their rights for years.

Encouraged by the support she received, Yamilett directly addressed the city council, demanding action to address her neighbors' concerns. Within 60 days, a resolution was reached prohibiting trucks from using the narrow streets of the 1st and 6th Wards.

Yamilett didn't stop there. Once the issue with the trucks was settled, she started focusing on the parking authority's unfair practices, which

seemed to disproportionately target her community. She initiated a petition and rallied residents from across the city, resulting in special meetings and town halls where she voiced the people's concerns.

**Recognizing her leadership qualities, the mayor appointed Yamilett to the parking authority board.** In this role, she advocated for changes in the guidelines, including limited enforcement hours and fairer criteria for parking violations.

Yamilett's dedication extended to attending city council meetings, ensuring her community's concerns were heard. Additionally, she pursued her passion for real estate and became a licensed realtor.

Despite her busy schedule, Yamilett remained a devoted mother and wife. Raising her family in the community was a foundational motivation to make a positive impact.

**Yamilett is an amazing example of the power of advocacy and the significant impact one individual can have on their community.**

We are grateful for her commitment to improving our community and her work as a Community Ambassador!

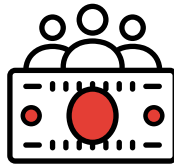
# Financial Overview

We earned and raised a total of **\$299,319.65** to collaborate with our local community to promote lasting change.

## Revenue



**Program Service Fees**  
**\$162,655.20**






**Foundations & Grants**  
**\$96,934.68**



**Individual Donors**  
**\$39,729.77**

## Expenses



 Administrative	<b>\$53,502.42</b>
 Programs	<b>\$187,258.48</b>
 Fundraising	<b>\$26,751.22</b>

# Our Team

## Staff

### **Darian Colbert\***

Executive Director

### **Yolanda Colbert\***

Director Of Operations

### **Ciara Lumbayi**

Bookkeeper

### **Graciela Santana**

Communications Manager

### **Jenna Azar**

Community Engagement

### **Laura Savenelli**

Grant Writer

### **Ana Martinez**

Spanish Interpreter

*\*Also on the Board of Directors*

## Board of Directors

### **Taressa Diaz**

Board Chair

### **Jenna Azar**

Secretary

### **Emmanuel Lumbayi**

Treasurer

### **Marc Rittle**

### **Angela Castro**

### **Bill Cummings**

## Our Partners





**We truly believe that  
WE is greater than ME.**



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