



 Cohesion

2024 Impact Report



Our Mission

We partner with residents and leaders to grow changemakers and build thriving, connected communities.

Dear Cohesion Community,

In 2024, we witnessed something powerful: neighbors stepping up for one another, young people stepping into leadership, and communities stepping forward with vision and purpose. 2024 was not just a year of programs—it was a year of momentum.

In the 1st & 6th Wards and Franklin Park, our Community Ambassadors have continued to demonstrate what grassroots leadership looks like. From block-level outreach to resource coordination, these neighbors are helping shape safer, stronger, more connected communities from the inside out.

Our Positive Discipline workshops created safe, encouraging spaces for parents and educators to grow together, learning practical tools to strengthen relationships with children and each other. These sessions continue to be a catalyst for healing and hope in families across our city.

And in schools throughout the region, our Connections Character Education curriculum has equipped students with the skills to lead, the language to express themselves, and the confidence to believe that who they are matters.

This work is only possible because of you—our volunteers, donors, partners, and neighbors. You have given your time, your voice, your resources, and your belief in a better future.

As we look ahead, I invite you to stay close. Stay engaged. Stay hopeful. Because when we lead with connection, we create the kind of community where everyone can thrive.

With gratitude,



Darian Colbert

Executive Director

Dear Cohesion Community,

I can't thank you enough for your partnership, support, and belief in Cohesion Network's mission.

Looking back at 2024, I'm truly grateful and proud of the incredible work we've done together. This year has shown me how powerful community and collaboration can be, and I firmly believe that every one of us has the potential to lead and inspire change.

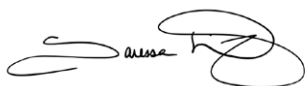
Our mission— to partner with residents and leaders to grow changemakers and build thriving, connected communities —has been the guiding force behind our initiatives. Through our Community Engagement initiatives, we have partnered closely with local leaders to serve as liaisons between residents and city officials and have continued to see progress and gain momentum in the Franklin Park and 1st and 6th Ward neighborhoods.

Our Character Education program has continued to be a cornerstone of our efforts, reaching hundreds of students across the Lehigh Valley. Through this program, we are equipping young people with the character, confidence, and leadership skills to succeed and become the next generation of leaders in our community.

None of this would be possible without the dedication of our staff, the partnership of our board, the commitment of our volunteers, and the generous support of our donors. Together, we've sparked positive change that's growing and inspiring more people every day.

Looking ahead, we're committed to building a community where everyone has the chance to thrive. I invite you to keep supporting our mission and join us in creating lasting change together.

With deep appreciation,



Taressa Diaz
Board Chair

The Heart of What We Do

We advance holistic community development by empowering young leaders and fostering resident-driven solutions for thriving neighborhoods.



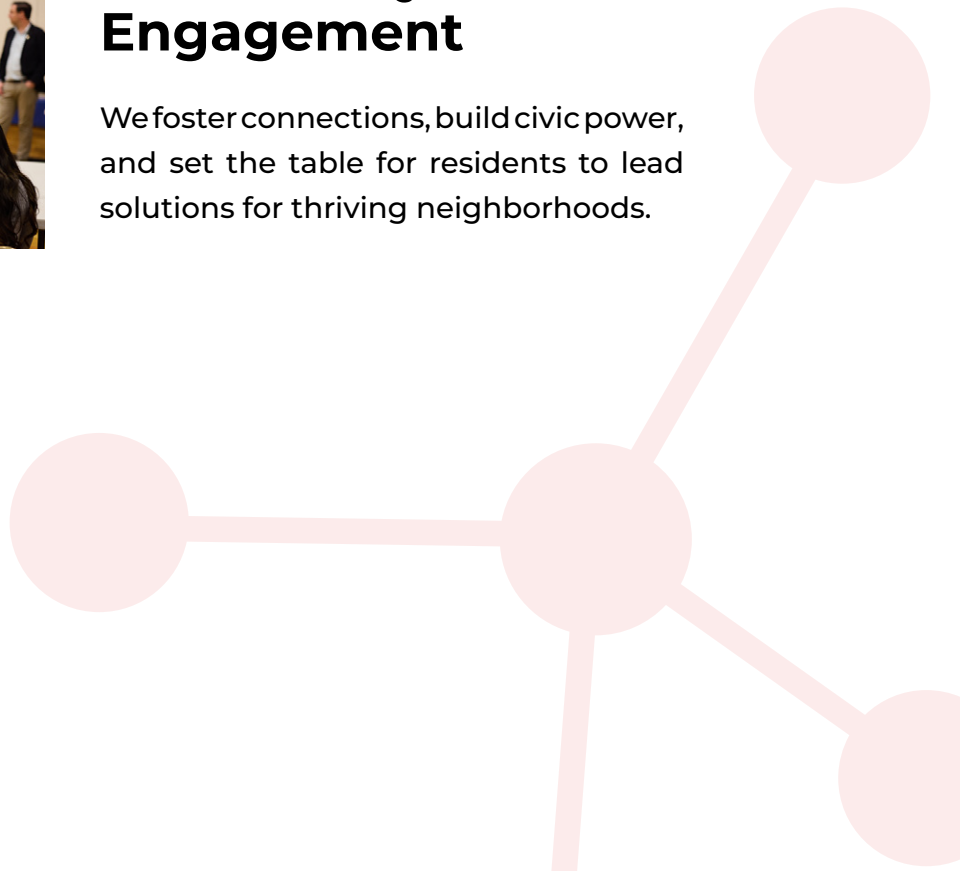
Youth Development

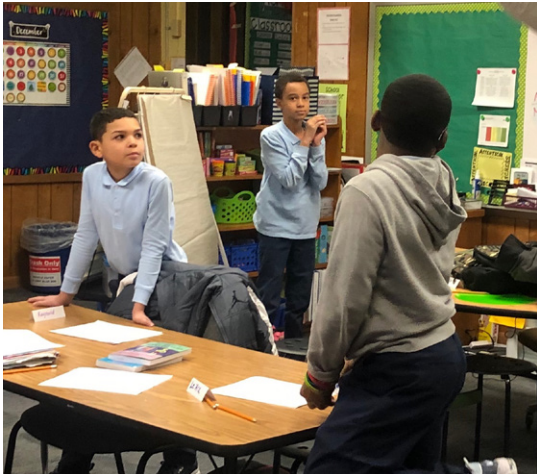
We empower young leaders with tools to grow, lead, and contribute positively to their communities.



Community Engagement

We foster connections, build civic power, and set the table for residents to lead solutions for thriving neighborhoods.





Character Education

Rooted in our seven-point curriculum, we guide students, professionals, and civic leaders through interactive sessions that build character, leadership, and self-awareness. Each experience emphasizes trust, respect, and personal growth, equipping participants to strengthen relationships and contribute to their communities.



Positive Discipline Workshops

Certified facilitators equip parents, teachers, and caregivers with practical, relationship-based discipline tools. Through honest, hands-on sessions, participants learn to foster empathy, respect, and problem-solving in children at home, in schools, and beyond.



Community Conversations

We host monthly meetings and connect regularly with trained neighborhood leaders. These leaders build relationships, represent their communities at city meetings, and help families access vital resources.



Bridging Voices and Building Trust

Honest conversations that spark hope, healing, and change in Allentown's neighborhoods.

Our monthly gatherings are where neighbors become co-creators. They bring together residents, leaders, and partners for honest, heart-level dialogue about the needs and dreams of Allentown's under-resourced communities. Grounded in lived experience, each session creates space for collective planning, shared problem-solving, and real action. Together, we set neighborhood goals, design solutions, and build the kind of community we want to live in—one rooted in trust, inclusion, and impact.

Each session creates space for:

- Community members to speak from lived experience
- Local leaders and decision-makers to listen and engage
- Cross-sector collaboration to emerge in real-time
- Solutions to be shaped by those closest to the challenges

2024 Highlights

In 2024, we strengthened our work across schools and neighborhoods—supporting youth, families, and local leaders in building connection, growing leadership, and advancing community-driven change.

- Secured Character Ed contracts across all 22 Allentown schools
- Expanded Bethlehem programming from 4 to 10 schools
- Launched new kindergarten Character Ed lessons for the first time
- Facilitated Positive Discipline workshops for families and educators
- Distributed 500+ backpacks at our largest back-to-school event yet
- Trained 19 residents to lead the Franklin Park neighborhood survey
- Grew monthly Community Conversations to 35–40 engaged residents
- Partnered with Allentown to launch Love Your Block in Franklin Park
- Piloted youth storytelling project as part of the Allentown Youth Climate Change initiative
- Presented keynotes and workshops at major regional conferences

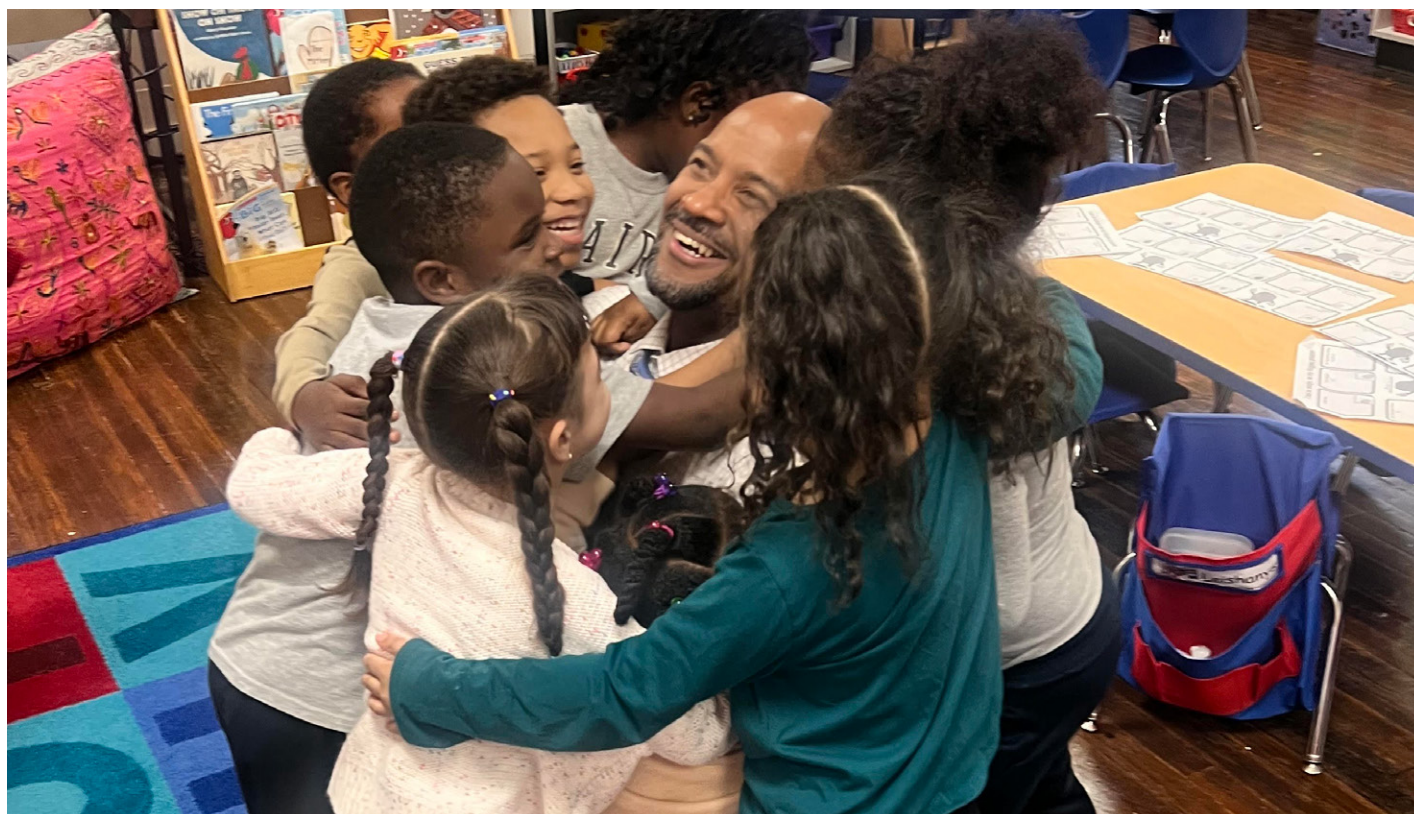
Partnership Highlights

At Cohesion, we deeply value collaboration because trusted partnerships make it possible to support youth, families, and local leaders in building connection, growing leadership, and driving community-led change.

- Expanded partnerships with the Allentown and Bethlehem school districts
- Strengthened collaboration with Sheridan Elementary and Communities In Schools
- Partnered with United Way and community school coordinators to enhance building-level support
- Co-led a learning trip to Atlanta with the Leonard Parker Pool Institute for Health and Ripple Community, Inc.
- Supported by key institutional partners: United Way of the Greater Lehigh Valley, City of Allentown, Leonard Parker Pool Institute for Health, Ripple Community Inc., and Lehigh Valley Community Foundation

Impact by the Numbers

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| 22 Allentown schools served with character education | 10 Bethlehem schools engaged | 19 residents trained for neighborhood data collection | 500+ backpacks distributed at the back-to-school bash |
| 40 residents attending monthly Community Conversations | 03 Toxic Charity book club sessions hosted | 04 jammy-style organizing sessions focused on voter engagement | 70% homeownership rate witnessed on Atlanta learning trip—an aspirational benchmark for Allentown's neighborhoods |



A Moment That Says It All, Sheridan Elementary, 2024

In 2024, Cohesion expanded its reach to include kindergarten students for the first time—planting seeds of self-worth and resilience at an even earlier stage in a child’s development. At Sheridan Elementary, Executive Director Darian Colbert—known to students as “Mr. D”—stood eye-to-eye with a room full of 5-year-olds, leading them through a series of “I am” statements.

“I am brave.”

“I am smart.”

“I can do hard things.”

These affirmations might sound simple, but they carry weight. Research shows it takes seven positive statements to counteract a single negative one—especially for young children internalizing the world’s messages about who they are and what they can become. As Mr. D knelt to their level, modeling each phrase with joy and sincerity, something unexpected happened. One child ran across the room, leapt into his arms, and wrapped him in a hug: “I love you, Mr. D!” he exclaimed. The rest of the class followed suit, creating a spontaneous pile of giggles, arms, and joy.

That small moment held something big.

It reflected the heart of Cohesion’s work—helping children feel seen, safe, and powerful. Through character education, positive discipline, and trusted relationships, Cohesion creates space for youth to build confidence, emotional intelligence, and connection. **What began as a classroom lesson ended as something deeper: a glimpse of the kind of community Cohesion is working to build every day.**

Financial Overview

We earned and raised a total of **\$329,671** to collaborate with our local community to promote lasting change.

Program Service Fees	\$206,734
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Grants & Individual Donors	\$122,937
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Expenses

Administrative	\$66,125.04	20%
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Programs	\$231,437.67	70%
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Fundraising	\$33,062.52	10%
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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

Board of Directors

- Taressa Diaz**
Chairperson
- Jenna Azar**
Secretary
- Emmanuel Lumbay**
Treasurer
- Marc Rittle**
- Angela Castro**
- Tiffany Polek**
- Bill Cummings**
- Darian Colbert**
- Yolanda Colbert**



Our Partners

We're grateful for the foundations, corporations, school districts, and community organizations that partner with us. Their support is vital to advancing our mission and making a lasting impact in the neighborhoods we serve.

21st Century



Community Health Workers



Franklin Park Community



Lehigh County Water Authority



We truly believe that WE is greater than ME.



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