



2025 Impact Report





OUR MISSION

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

Across the Lehigh Valley, Cohesion works alongside neighbors, schools, and local leaders to strengthen relationships, grow leadership, and equip communities to shape their own future.

Our work begins with a simple belief: when people are connected, equipped, and trusted to lead, neighborhoods thrive.

LETTER FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Dear Cohesion Community,

The work of community transformation rarely makes headlines. It grows quietly through relationships—neighbor to neighbor, student to mentor, parent to teacher. Yet when we pause and look back on this past year, the impact is unmistakable.

In classrooms across the region, students are discovering the power of character, empathy, and leadership through our Connections Character Education curriculum. Young people are learning not only how to succeed academically, but how to build healthy relationships and lead with integrity.

In neighborhoods throughout Allentown, residents continue stepping into leadership through our Community Engagement work. Community Ambassadors are strengthening connections between neighbors and city leaders, helping ensure that the people closest to the challenges are shaping the solutions.

Families and educators are also gaining practical tools through our Positive Discipline workshops—tools that build respect, understanding, and stronger relationships between adults and children.

This year also brought a meaningful moment of recognition for our community. Yolanda and I were deeply honored to receive the **Good Neighbor Award from Lehigh Valley Public Media**, an award inspired by the legacy of Fred Rogers. While the award bears our names, it truly belongs to the many neighbors, volunteers, and partners who believe that transformation begins with trust and relationships.

Cohesion's work continues to grow because of you. Your partnership allows us to walk alongside communities, raise up leaders, and build the kind of neighborhoods where every person can flourish.

Thank you for believing that **WE is greater than ME.**

With gratitude,



Darian Colbert
Executive Director

LETTER FROM OUR BOARD CHAIR

Dear Friends,

When I reflect on this past year, I'm struck by how powerful community leadership can be when people are given the opportunity and support to step forward.

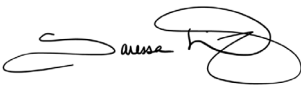
Cohesion continues to serve as a bridge between residents, schools, and civic systems—helping neighbors organize around shared priorities and equipping young people with the character and leadership skills needed for the future.

Through our Youth Development programs, students across the Lehigh Valley are gaining the confidence and self-awareness to lead with integrity. Through Community Engagement initiatives, residents are building relationships, strengthening civic participation, and shaping decisions that impact their neighborhoods.

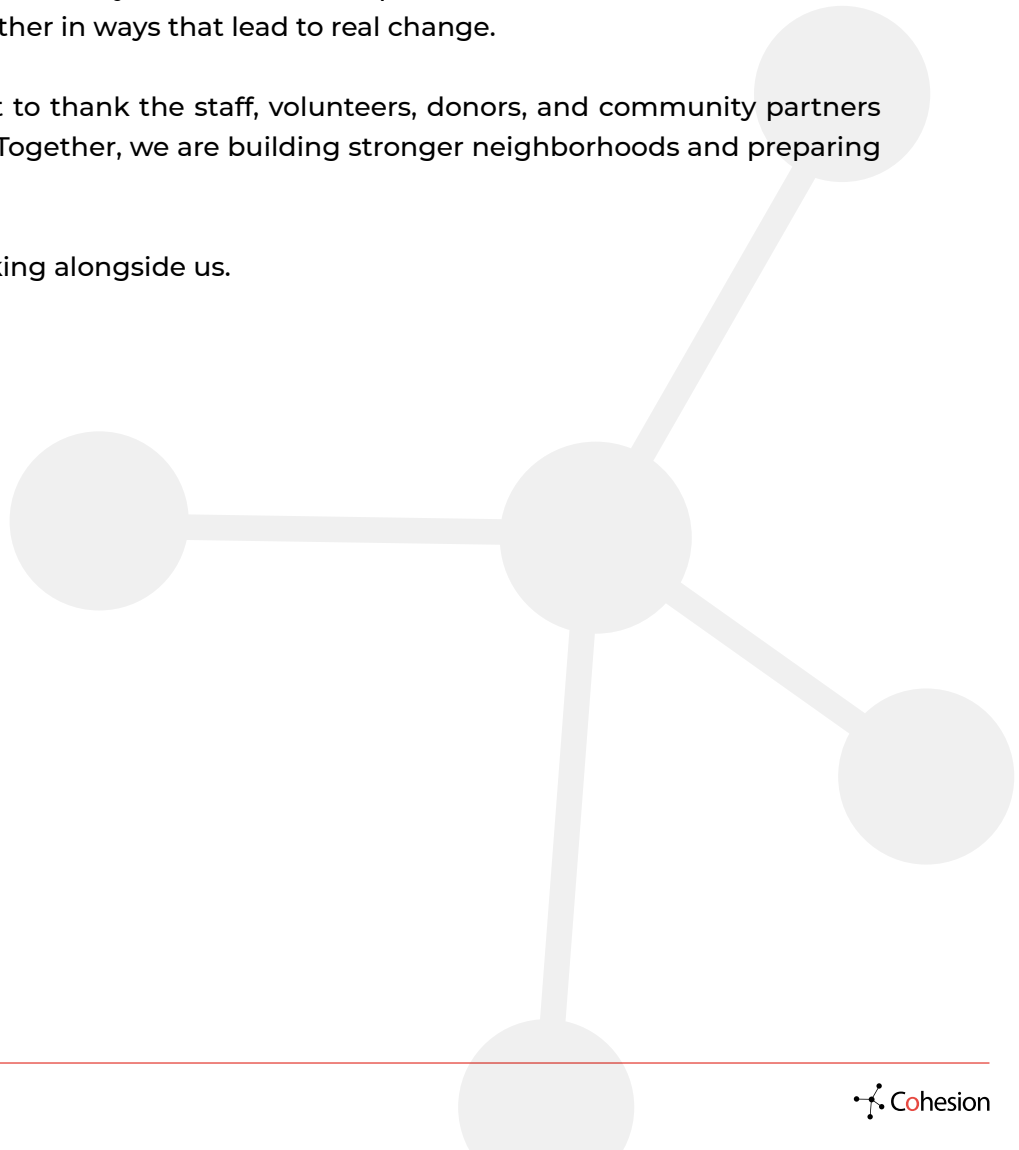
What makes Cohesion unique is its roots. Founded and led by lifelong residents of Allentown's 1st Ward, the organization brings credibility, trust, and lived experience to its work. That trust allows Cohesion to bring people together in ways that lead to real change.

On behalf of the board, I want to thank the staff, volunteers, donors, and community partners who make this work possible. Together, we are building stronger neighborhoods and preparing the next generation of leaders.

We invite you to continue walking alongside us.
With appreciation,



Taressa Diaz
Board Chair



OUR FOCUS

Connecting People. Strengthening Communities

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



Youth Development

We support young people as they build the character, leadership skills, and confidence needed to thrive in school, relationships, and community life.



Community Engagement

We strengthen neighborhoods by building trust, fostering collaboration, and equipping residents to lead solutions for the challenges facing their communities.

This work reflects our core belief that lasting change grows from within communities themselves.

YOUTH DEVELOPMENT

Character Education

Our interactive curriculum equips students with tools for self-awareness, leadership, and healthy relationships. Through interactive lessons grounded in a seven-point framework, students explore integrity, responsibility, empathy, and resilience.

Students gain:

- Greater self-awareness
- Stronger communication and relationship skills
- A deeper understanding of leadership and responsibility

Positive Discipline Workshops

We equip parents, educators, and caregivers with practical tools for building respectful relationships with children. Certified facilitators guide hands-on sessions focused on:

- Empathy and connection
- Accountability and conflict resolution
- Encouraging responsibility in children

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Bridging Voices and Building Trust

We create space where residents become leaders in shaping their neighborhoods. Monthly gatherings bring together neighbors, local leaders, and partner organizations for honest dialogue about challenges and opportunities.

Each gathering creates space for:

- Residents to share lived experiences
- Local leaders to listen and respond
- Community-led solutions to take shape

2025 HIGHLIGHTS

A Year of Growing Leadership and Community Connection

This past year strengthened Cohesion's role as a bridge between schools, neighborhoods, and local systems.

Key milestones included:

Expanded Character Education programming across **21 schools** throughout the Lehigh Valley, reaching more classrooms than ever before.

Reached over **1,150+ students** actively engaged in character education sessions, building skills in empathy, responsibility, and leadership.

Partnered on a neighborhood cleanup effort that removed over **500 pounds of trash**, contributing to a cleaner, safer environment for residents.

Positive Discipline workshops supported educators and families across **12 schools**, strengthening relationships at home and in the classroom.

Hosted **12 "Funday Mondays"** in Franklin Park, alongside 6 large-scale community events such as Trunk-or-Treat and a Back-to-School Bash, connecting families together and activating shared spaces.

Promoted **civic leadership in action:** a community member launched a City Council campaign at a neighborhood meeting and was elected with the second-highest number of votes.

These milestones reflect the steady growth of a community-centered approach to change.

2025 HIGHLIGHTS

Good 2025
NEIGHBOR
AWARDS

2025 Lehigh Valley Public Media Good Neighbor Award Cohesion Network founders Darian and Yolanda Colbert were honored in the spirit of Fred Rogers for their compassion, integrity, and deep commitment to community.

The recognition reflects what anyone who knows Darian and Yolanda already understands: they don't just lead an organization. They live the mission — bringing the same presence and passion to every school, every block, and every conversation.

That's not just about programs. It's about a way of life.

“What Darian and Yolanda bring to this work — their passion, their love for their neighbors — that's the legacy of Fred Rogers lived out in real life.”

— **Bill Cummings**
Founding Board Chair





A Moment That Says It All

Seventeen years ago, our executive director, Darian Colbert, walked into Allen High School once a week to meet with a group of young men who were struggling to find their footing. The students called themselves “The Justice League”.

Darian showed up every week for 20 weeks. He walked them through Cohesion’s seven-point character framework. He told each of them they were powerful — that what they brought to the world, nobody else could bring. Then life moved on, as it does. This past year, one of those young men found Darian on Facebook and sent him a message. His name is Scott H. — “Scotty” back in the day.

He wrote:

“Pastor D., I’m not sure if you remember me. I was part of a group called The Justice League... You were my mentor. I never got a chance to thank you for everything. You helped me in ways you don’t know. Having a positive man show up interested in helping me changed my life, and it was pivotal.”

He followed up with this: “I am successful both professionally and with my family because of being in that program. You guys really changed how I see myself and the people around me.”

Scott H. is now a sales manager at the top Honda dealership in Pennsylvania. When Darian was asked what he takes from a moment like that, his answer was immediate: “The number one thing these young men took away from me is the belief in themselves. Believing in who they are as an individual.”

That is what Cohesion has always been about.

Character work takes time. Scott H. is proof that it works. Seventeen years after Darian walked into Allen High School, a young man who needed someone to show up for him is now showing up for others.

We track our impact through consistent, research-based measurement across our Character Education Program and Positive Discipline Workshops.

The Hope Scale — a tool that measures students' confidence, problem-solving ability, and resilience — has been administered across 21 schools in the Allentown and Bethlehem Area school districts, reaching more than 1,150 students. Surveys have been conducted across both districts since 2023, with several schools participating for several consecutive years. Dodd Elementary, Ritter Elementary, Roosevelt, Sheridan, Trexler Middle School, and Thomas Jefferson are among the schools with multiple years of data — reflecting sustained presence rather than one-time visits.

Positive Discipline workshops have reached parents and educators across 24 schools in the same two districts. Since 2022, we have collected structured feedback from parents and educators at every session, tracking what participants learned, what they plan to apply, and whether they would recommend the experience to others.

This commitment to measurement reflects a simple conviction: the work should be held accountable to the people it serves.



Data-Driven Community Change:

The Franklin Park Flourishing Neighborhood Index

Learning From the People Who Live Here

Throughout 2025, Cohesion team members and community partners sat down one-on-one with over 300 Franklin Park residents — on porches, at community events, and door-to-door — to capture their perspectives on community strengths, needs, and areas for improvement. Each conversation lasted up to an hour and covered 13 dimensions of community life.

What We Heard

Residents told us Franklin Park is a place they are proud of, with 66% of participants describing their neighborhood as friendly and welcoming. Many neighbors also reported feeling some connection to the people around them. That sense of community is a real asset — and it's where the work of change truly begins.

They also told us where the gaps are:

Housing costs are rising, and residents worry about being pushed out of their homes.

Jobs feel like dead ends, with few resources or pathways to something better.

Schools are stretched thin, and after-school options are scarce.

Getting around the city without a car is hard, and the gap has real consequences for employment.

When someone gets sick, the emergency room often feels like the only accessible option.

When neighborhood decisions get made, residents rarely feel like they have a seat at the table.

These are not complaints about the neighborhood. They are honest assessments of systems that have underinvested in Franklin Park for a long time.

WHAT COMES NEXT

Cohesion is invested in Franklin Park, and through monthly community meetings, ongoing relationships, and partner organizations led by people who live there, we are making real progress toward addressing these concerns. This spring, we are excited to move to the next phase together: sharing what we heard and asking residents to set the priorities. **What do you want to move forward on? What can we take to the city?** The Franklin Park Collaborative is building a neighborhood plan around those answers, shaped by residents from the start.

That is what Cohesion has always been about.



Financial Overview

In 2025, Cohesion generated and invested resources to strengthen youth leadership and community-driven change across the Lehigh Valley.

Total Revenue	\$373,836
Program Service Fees	\$254,447
Grants & Individual Donors	\$119,389

Expenses

Administrative	20%
Programs	70%
Fundraising	10%

The majority of resources directly support programming that equips youth, families, and neighborhood leaders.

STAFF & BOARD

Staff

Darian Colbert
Executive Director

Yolanda Colbert
Director Of Operations

Laura Ballek Cole
Director of Community
Engagement

Ciara Lumbayi
Bookkeeper

Graciela Santana
Communications Manager

Jenna Azar
Programs & Partnerships
Consultant

Laura Savenelli
Grant Writer

Board of Directors

Taressa Diaz
Chairperson

Jenna Azar
Secretary

Emmanuel Lumbayi
Treasurer

Marc Rittle

Angela Castro

Tiffany Polek

Bill Cummings

Darian Colbert

Yolanda Colbert

Our Partners

Our work is strengthened by partners across the Lehigh Valley who share a commitment to community leadership and connection.

Core Partners

Ripple Community Inc.
Ripple Church
Leonard Parker Pool Institute for Health
Valley Health Partners
City of Allentown
Allentown School District
Bethlehem Area School District
Liminal Creative
Congruence Consulting
Our Franklin Park
Strive Together
School Board School

Collaborative Partners

Lehigh Valley Economic Development Corporation
Allentown Parking Authority
Allentown Works
Community Bike Works
United Way of the Greater Lehigh Valley
Lehigh Valley Community Foundation
Community Services for Children
League of Women Voters
Lehigh County Authority

Supporters & Connectors

21st Century Community Learning Centers
St. Luke's University Health Network
Lehigh Valley Health Network
Barry M. and Diane E. Kessler Fund for Social Justice
The Fleming Foundation
New Bethany Ministries
Community Action Lehigh Valley
Allentown Police Department
Volunteer Center of the Lehigh Valley
Blue Zones
LANTA (Lehigh and Northampton Transportation Authority)
Lehigh Valley Planning Commission
Lehigh Valley Public Media (PBS39)
Resilient Lehigh Valley
Integrity Cleaning
execHRconsulting



WE is
greater
than **ME.**



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