New Community Outreach Annual Report 2024

new community outreach

Letter from Our Executive Director: Sonia Wang

2024 was a reminder to us that the restorative spaces we are cultivating are critical and rare. Throughout the year, we repeatedly heard from youth and neighbors with whom we developed relationships about how much they need community and as a result, how important it is to have access to the spaces and opportunities that we offer.

As an organization, we also explored the importance of activating our imaginations in these collective spaces where we feel safe to grow, to love and be loved, to cry, to laugh. These spaces are not just important, they are necessary for our survival. During a staff retreat, we had an imagining session where one of our interns dreamed about how students would gather and build a community together. She pushed us to remember that people with different backgrounds and experiences can and will connect on a human level and grow in a deeper understanding of ourselves as we grow in understanding one another. This collective dreaming and pursuit is what guides and grounds the circles and spaces we get to be part of through NCO. And it is here that we find flourishing.

I remember distinctly how the spaces we have had the honor of hosting and nurturing in 2024 were the places for new relationships, collective healing, and self-discovery. To be able to do this work consistently, year in and year out, means there is a growing trust and love between NCO and our partners, neighbors, youth, and supporters. That trust is invaluable. And we know that the work continues; it is something that is ongoing so that we can all continue to heal, reconcile, and flourish in our restorative relationships and spaces.

As you read this Annual Report for 2024, I thank you for the many ways you have supported NCO's work and our efforts in serving the greater Bronzeville neighborhood on the south side of Chicago. I thank you for getting involved and staying involved.

Thank you for your continued partnership,
Sonia Wang,
NCO Executive Director

Our mission, vision, and values

Mission

New Community Outreach creates restorative spaces for healing, reconciliation and flourishing.

Vision

New Community Outreach creates restorative spaces for healing, reconciliation and flourishing.

Values

- **Sankofa:** We build on the foundation of our community's history.
- **Healing-Centered:** We ground our practices in the understanding that holistic restoration from trauma occurs collectively in community and always with abundance as a starting point.
- **Reconciliation:** We confront violence, segregation, and racism as harms opposed to flourishing.
- **Justice:** We fight the root causes of inequity and poverty in pursuit of peace.
- **Youth:** We focus our efforts on uncovering opportunities and exposing challenges facing young people.
- **Collaboration:** We learn from, work with, and support our community partners.
- **Receptivity:** We assess and adapt our programs to maximize effectiveness.
- **Hope:** We orient our attitudes and efforts toward a hopeful future.

Our Team: **Leadership**

Sonia M. Wang
Executive Director

Kaitlin Sobeck-Kim
Operations Manager

Hope Hammond
KEY Program Lead

Kate Cater
KEY Program Lead

Pete Blodgett
Community & Volunteer Engagement Manager

Karlos Dodson
Board of Directors Chairperson

David Swanson
Founder

Our Team: **Staff**

Circle Keepers

The KEY Program Circle Keepers (CK) provide trauma-responsive support for youth. The CK are responsible for running the KEY Program with fidelity so that students have a designated safe space to process emotions and experiences and access tools and opportunities to flourish. All staff have certification in circle keeping by an approved circle keeper training organization.

2024-2025 KEY Staff/Circle Keepers (left to right): Hope Hammond, Kate Carter, Dani Jones, Jonathan Norman, Pete Blodgett, Sonia Wang

KEY Interns

KEY interns are current high-school students who have completed our Summer Leadership Program and restorative justice training. Interns are team members who co-facilitate peace circles for their peers and commit to relationship building and cultivating a safe space throughout the KEY School Year Program.

2024-2025 KEY Staff/Interns (left to right): Hope Hammond (Intern Supervisor/ Coach), Kayla W. (11th), Janessa S. (12th), Zorah M. (12th), Amirah R. (11th)

Garden to Table

The Garden to Table team manages the Garden to Table Program, ensuring growth and proper maintenance of our garden. NCO maintains a community garden with Jackie Robinson Elementary School that our team and volunteers tend to and harvest weekly. The Garden Manager (GM) and Assistant Manager work together on the garden and harvest program.

Garden to Table staff (left to right): Maggie Swanson (GM), Sara Woody, Takara Harden

Fun Fair Planning Committee

The Planning Committee is an opportunity for volunteer leaders to get involved in planning and running our Annual Back to School Fun fair. The committee leads community partner outreach, purchasing and creating fair materials, day of operations, and more.

Planning Committee (left to right): Daynah Parker, Pete Blodgett

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2024 in Review...

In 2024, New Community Outreach **deepened its roots and grew with purpose.** We expanded our team, strengthened partnerships, and broadened programs to better serve our neighbors.

We consistently showed up through **mentorship, community events, and restorative programming,** creating safe and supportive spaces for youth.

Thanks to this growth, we engaged over 1,700 youth and community members in Greater Bronzeville, fostering connection, healing, and growth.

This report highlights our journey and impact from January to December 2024.

NCO Impact in Action

1,662
Bags of produce & non-perishable food distributed

21
High school students mentored in Bronzeville

208
Students received backpacks & school supplies

94.3%
KEY students feel that they can positively change someone's life

135
Students in KEY school year program, up 32% from 2023

38%
of Garden to Table attendees consider themselves regulars (visited 6+ times)

124
Volunteers participated in NCO programs or events

Key events in 2024

1. **April 13** Garden to Table Program begins
2. **June 1** KEY School Year Program Ends
3. **June 18** KEY Summer Leadership Program starts
4. **August 1** KEY Summer Leadership Program ends
5. **August 5** Annual Back to School Fun Fair
6. **September 30** KEY School Year Program begins
7. **October 26** Garden to Table Program concludes

Throughout the year NCO worked on...

Fundraising Campaigns and Events:

- Participation in Strides for Peace: Race Against Gun Violence
- Board of Directors mixer
- Hoodie campaign featuring new branding logo
- Giving Tuesday campaign

Community Engagement:

- Participation in six community events
- Two Harvest Celebrations (July and October)
- Quarterly Community Circles

Organizational Development:

- Comprehensive branding process and launch of new logo
- Strategic Planning Process resulting in new three-year plan

Team Growth:

- Addition of three new staff members: Pete Blodgett, Kate Carter, and Hope Hammond

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Our Programs

KEY School Year Program

KEY Summer Leadership Program

Garden to Table Program

Back to School Fun Fair

KEY School Year Program

The KEY Program uses the circle process, a **restorative justice** practice, to help high school students process feelings, experiences, and circumstances in a safe space. The KEY program **addresses trauma**, particularly gun violence, and fosters **healthy** coping **skills**, positive **peer relationships**, and **community connections**.

135
students completed the program (+32% from last year)

26%
students were returning KEY participants

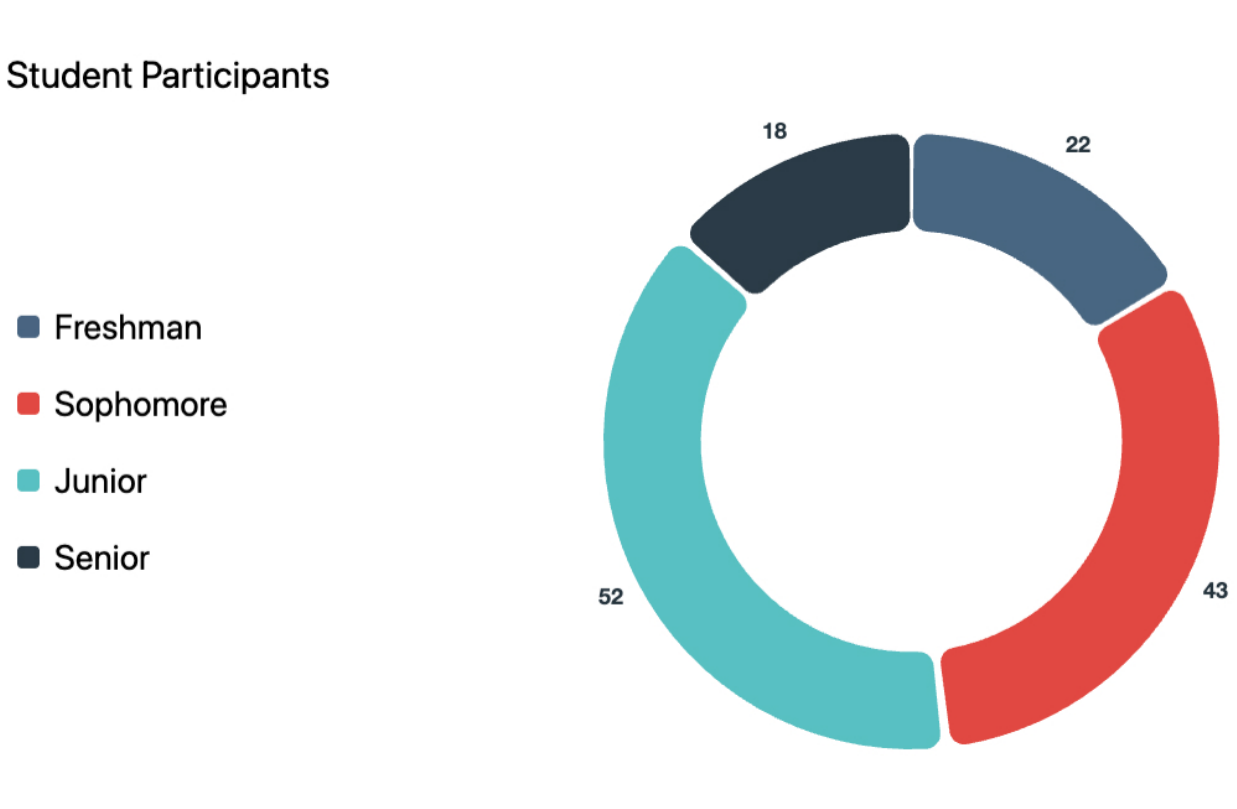
94%
Participants believe they can positively impact their community

100%
of surveyed parents would recommend the KEY Program

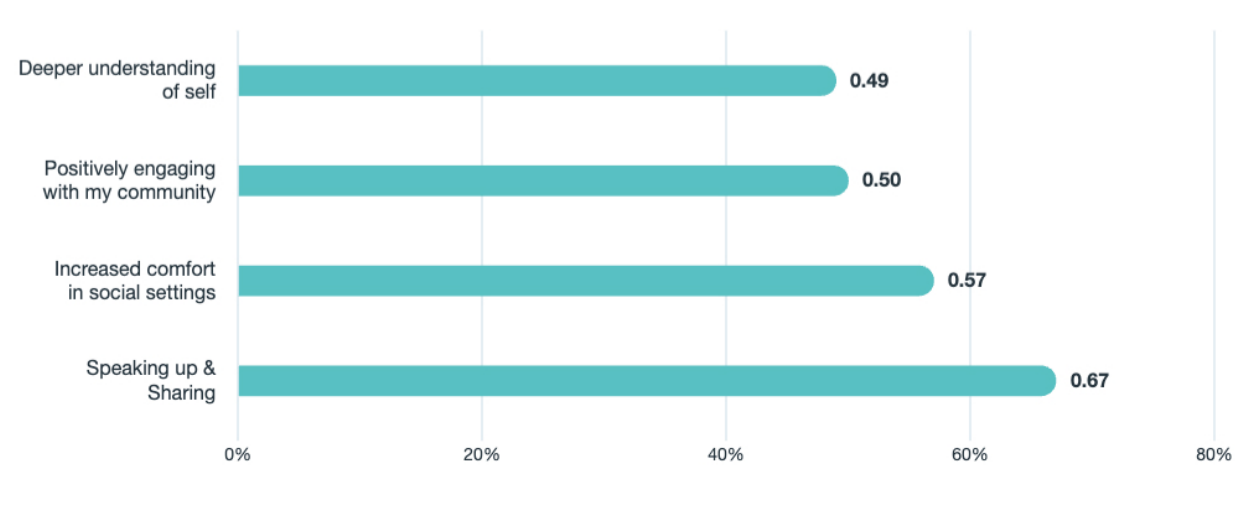
14
KEY Mentors Supported 20 students

70%
average attendance over 25 weeks of programming

Student Participants



Areas Positively Impacted by KEY



The graph showcases the KEY Program's impact on students' lives, based on end-of-year surveys evaluating the program's effectiveness in fostering **personal growth** and community connections.

2024 Capstone Projects

Students developed and led projects on:

- Hosting unity circles in schools
- Distributing care packages in neighborhoods
- Creating awareness campaigns for social issues

Photo: KEY Students Lead Unity Circle at School on unity & togetherness

Our **strategic partners** provide students with diverse experiences. **Bright Star Community Outreach and the Chicago Center for Youth Violence Prevention** offered training in areas such as trauma-informed communication, cultural humility, and sexuality & gender identity, equipping students to better guide mentees through daily challenges.

THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO
CHICAGO CENTER FOR YOUTH VIOLENCE PREVENTION
Crown Family School of Social Work, Policy, and Practice

BRIGHT STAR
COMMUNITY OUTREACH

Looking Ahead:

- Expanding to 11 school day sessions
- Hosting summer KEY sessions
- Piloting an elementary KEY session at Jackie Robinson Elementary
- Adding two new Program Leads

KEY Summer Leadership Program

From June to August, **ten high school students** were selected to participate in our KEY Summer Leadership Program, focusing on **restorative justice, social justice, and activism.**

Two **student interns** who previously participated in the program and completed restorative justice training got the chance to build their leadership skills by **co-leading the circle** with adult circle keepers.

Summer 2024 highlights

Dynamic Learning:
Students met with 10 guest speakers to learn about community history, trauma processing, and political activism, and built skills in **financial literacy** and **impactful leadership**

Experiential Field Trips:
Visits to the Chicago Race Riot of 1919 Commemoration Project and Precious Blood Ministry of Reconciliation deepened students' understanding of **social justice in action**

Community Impact:
With support from the Chicago Bulls, students **designed and pitched a project** to raise awareness about predatory behaviors targeting youth, **earning $1,000** to host a Youth Awareness Gathering

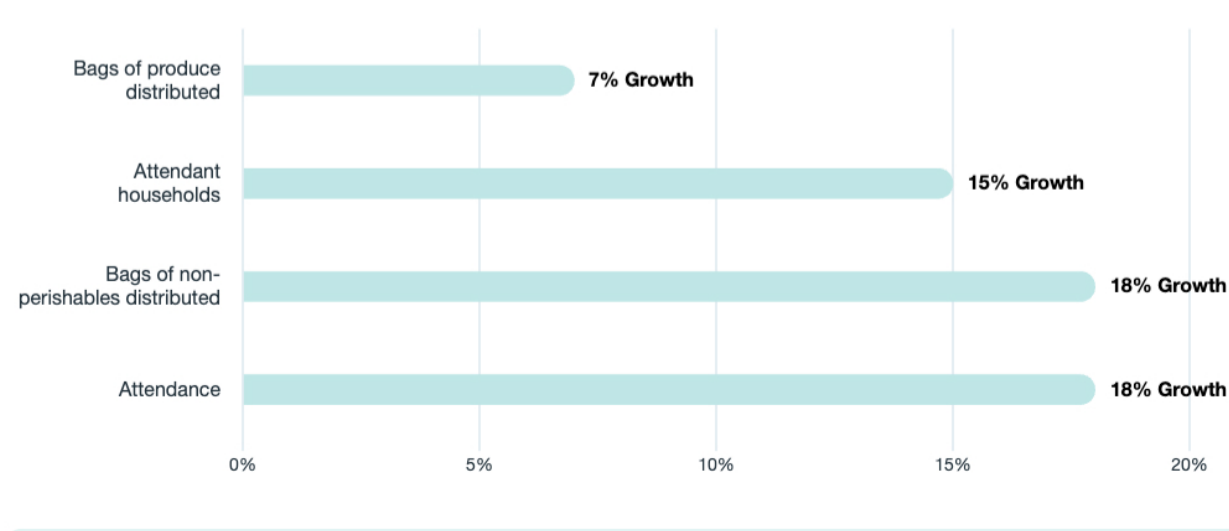
Celebrating Success:
Students showcased leadership, shared personal stories, and **provided resources for the community,** and all students earned stipends for completing the program

Garden to Table Program

In 2024, our Garden Manager, two Assistant Managers, and **81 volunteers** worked on the Garden to Table program. Together, we harvested and shared **794lbs of produce- a 7% increase** from 2023.

We held **two Harvest Celebrations** in July and October, with food from our garden's produce, community partner booths, and giveaways.

2024 Program Growth



Over the course of our **20-week** distribution, we reached key milestones in serving the community:

Saw an **18%** rise in people using our message center **(167 total)**,

Distributed **1,290 bags** of produce and **372** bags of non-perishables

Recorded **1,107** household visits (includes repeat visits) to our distribution table

These numbers reflect our commitment to expanding access to fresh, nutritious food, and ensuring that more families benefit from our efforts every season, bringing our community closer together

Annual Back to School Fun Fair

With the help of organizing committee members Pete Blodgett, Daynah Parker, & Sonia Wang, this year's Annual Back to School Fun Fair brought together **380 community members**, including **208 students**, for a day of fun, food, and community building at Jackie Robinson Elementary School's outdoor area.

With the support of **75 volunteers** from local churches and community organizations, as well as **30+ partners** who hosted a resource booth and/or provided financial and in-kind donations, the event was a huge success in preparing students and families for the new school year!

380
community members

75
volunteers

30
partners engaged

Community Engagement:
17 community partner booths provided valuable resources and information to students and families

Community Support:
Volunteers from New Community Covenant Church, Hinsdale Covenant Church, and Garden City Covenant Church played a vital role in making the event possible

Gratitude:
A special thank you to our partners and supporters who helped make this event a success by contributing time, resources, and enthusiasm

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Testimonials

> [Volunteering with NCO] gave me a way to marry my professional expertise with the needs of my own community, helped me put action to my values
>
> - NCO volunteer

> I became able to put my emotions into words instead of turning them into negative emotions
>
> - KEY participant

> The garden and produce distribution is a positive and protective element in our neighborhood and I'm sure everyone who has participated enjoys and has benefited from the free produce
>
> - Garden to Table participant

> I grew by expressing myself and overcoming fear. I learned how to harness my emotions and turn them into something positive.
>
> - KEY participant

> You benefit just as much being involved in things that are for the good of the community as the people who the events are geared toward
>
> - NCO volunteer

> I gained a deeper understanding of myself and others in my community becoming more open to actually caring about others, something I struggled with often
>
> - KEY participant

Community Engagement & Partnerships

Collaboration drives our work, and strong partnerships amplify our impact. By learning from and supporting each other, we expand our reach and deepen community engagement.

2024 highlights

Expanding Our Reach
This year, we partnered with **41 organizations, including 6 new partnerships**

Back to School & Harvest Festivals
Our partners played a key role in bringing valuable resources, and support to these signature events

Supporting Restorative Justice
Partners provided care packages, field trips, and learning sessions for students in our KEY restorative justice program

Empowering KEY Mentors & Staff
Community experts facilitated educational sessions to equip our mentors and staff with new skills

Active Community Engagement
Beyond our own initiatives, we actively participated in **6 community events** citywide, including partner-hosted events

Growing Community Impact
Thanks to our partners, our programming continues to expand, fostering stronger connections and creating lasting change

Community Partners

CHICAGO BULLS

Chicago Bulls

The Chicago Bulls Community Relations Department is a long-time NCO partner. They have offered our students unique opportunities to expand their leadership abilities and become change agents through professional learning workshops and events during our KEY Summer Leadership Program (SLP). The Bulls have sponsored student-led community impact projects for SLP and provided game tickets for KEY school year field trips and giveaways for student care packages and our annual Back to School Fun Fair.

The Farm

The Farm is a family-owned farm and produce stand in the western suburbs of Chicago. The Farm donates produce to supplement what we grow and distribute through our Garden to Table Program. This enables NCO to offer unique vegetables and fruit that we cannot grow in our own garden and provide access to a greater variety of fresh food. Their donations also allow us to serve more neighbors, furthering the reach of our Garden to Table program and the health of our community.

Financials

NCO relies **entirely on fundraising and donations** to provide our programs at **no cost to all participants**. Every dollar we raise goes directly into supporting our community and ensuring that everyone has access to our services.

This year NCO had **37 recurring** and over **50 one-time donations** from both individual and corporate donors and received over **$220,00 in grant funds** to support our work.

We are especially grateful to have so many **donors** that also serve as **volunteers, partners, and participate** in our programs.

We'd like to extend a special thank you to all the donors and volunteers who made our work possible in 2024

Aaron Blodgett
Aaron Bartolome
Abby Barbeau
Alex Yoo
Alicia Alexander
Amy Calkin
Andrena Logan
Andrew Lauber
Andrew Koetz
Angel Tatum
Anu Onabolu
Aricel Dunn
Becky Flood
Ben Anderson
Brad Clark
Brent Rolland
Cait Chelsen
Caitlin Wong Hickernell
Candice White
Caraline Sepich
Casey Josh Henson
Cassidy Stratton
Celia Mayora
Cherise Wilson
Christine Wright
Colby Mecher
Cosette Hammond
Daniel Salazar
Danielle Jones
David Yoo
David Freeburg
David Swanson
Dayna Appiah
Daynah Parker
Delaney Hawkes
Dennis Bourne
Derrick Dunn
DJ Blodgett
Dominic Rubin
Eddie Tao
Eliot Swanson
Elisa Pleasant
Ervin Olson
Esther Kang
Eva Tao
Ezra Yu
Favor Ezewuzie
Fern Brown-Tyler
Gabriel Catanus
Gregory Sepich-Poore
Hadassah Dodson
Hope Hammond
Isaac King
Jackson Nguyen
Jacqueline Rodney
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James Kim
Jane Lee
Janet Yim
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Jasmine Tzeggai
Jasmine Armand
Jaxon Blodgett
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Melissa Casiano
Mellody Hill
Melody Ratliff
Mia Rubin
Michael Washington
Michelle Dodson
Milton Ferrell
Monica LaFrance Sejour
Morgan White
Morgan McClelland
Naomi Hammond
Nathaniel Wright
Nikki Blodgett
Nikkita McPherson
Paul Hewitt
Prisca Dodson
Priscilla Molina
Richard Wilson
Ryan Rubin
Ryan Nguyen
Samantha Lockenour
Sara Woody
Sarah Clark
Siyanda Mohutsiwa
Sonia Wang
Stacey Sirota
Stella Cho
Stephanie Lin
TaKara Harden
Theo Yoo
Thomas Nguyen
Tiarra Tucker
Toby Tao
Tolu Williams
Tumi Onabolu
Valeri Tao
Winnie Nguyen
Winston Swanson
Won Kim
Yeena Yoo
Zach Gallentine
Zion Hall
Zonda Carriel

Call to Action

Stay Connected:

newcommunityoutreach.org

Volunteer With Us:

info@newcommunityoutreach.org

Donate to NCO:

DONATE NOW

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