

A BETTER  
CHICAGO

Changing the odds for

# OUR YOUTH

2020  
Investor Report





**“Your support propelled our mission forward to fight poverty by investing in bold ideas that create opportunity for Chicago’s youth.”**

In a year of extraordinary challenges, our portfolio not only persevered, but provided Chicago’s youth with critical holistic support and delivered an unprecedented level of impact. Our portfolio organizations now reach more than 42,000 youth from cradle to career, providing a range of innovative, life changing opportunities for our city’s young people.

In addition to our core portfolio, our Emergency Relief Fund provided essential support to more than 600,000 youth and families. And through our newly launched Catalyst Fund, we strengthened and broadened our core portfolio with five new investments on Chicago’s West Side.

In a year of unrelenting challenges, your support propelled our mission forward to fight poverty by investing in bold ideas that create opportunity for Chicago’s youth. We are grateful for your continued partnership in this work.

Sincerely,  
**Beth Swanson**  
CEO

### **Portfolio Impact Snapshot**

**42,079**

Our portfolio served more than 42,000 youth—from cradle to career—in 2020.

- An **increase of 2,640** more youth than in 2019.

**4,200**

Due to the work of our grantee organizations, 4,200 **more** students are on track to long-term success.\*

- **879 more** than last year.
- **28,721 total youth on track** to achieve critical milestones (vs. **24,563** benchmark).

**67%**

Of youth served by our grantees **67% are on track to achieve long-term success**. This is 10% more than similar Chicago youth who are not beneficiaries of our support.

*\*Our key success metric, youth on track to long-term success, is a product of both the size of our portfolio (reach) and the strength of its outcomes (achievement of key success milestones).*

# THE CHALLENGE

## Poverty rates continue to rise<sup>1</sup>

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National poverty rose 2 points from **June to July** in 2020 to **11.4%** (**40%** more than the largest historical one-year change).

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Impacts are largest for Black Americans, children, and those without a high school degree.

## Academic impacts are less dramatic than feared; but gaps continue to widen

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High school attendance fell **by 7 points to 81%** and elementary school attendance fell **by 3 points to 92%** between the 2019–2020 and the 2020–2021 academic years.<sup>2</sup>

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Low-income and non-white youth suffered the most across school attendance and enrollment metrics.

## Youth employment outcomes suffer

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As of December 2020, Illinois was one of six states with unemployment rates **5 percentage points** higher than pre-pandemic.<sup>3</sup>

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If prior years' positive trends had persisted, **33%** of Illinois youth ages 16–19 would have been employed in summer 2020. Instead, only **16%** were.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> UChicago's Harris School of Public Policy

<sup>2</sup> CPS via ABC News

<sup>3</sup> Mathematicas

<sup>4</sup> Illinois Policy

# OUR IMPACT

## PORTFOLIO REACH

**43,079** Youth

+2,640 YoY from 2019

Our portfolio continues to serve more young people year after year. In 2020, our grantees served more than 42,000 youth—from early learners to college graduates.



## DOLLARS RAISED

**\$8.03M**

The generosity of our donors and corporate partners makes our work possible. We reached a new fundraising record in 2020 with more than \$8 million dollars raised to support our portfolio of youth-serving nonprofits.

## DONORS ENGAGED

**1,069**

We are proud to have a diverse group of individuals, corporations, and foundations that donate to help break the cycle of poverty for current and future generations. In 2020 alone, we engaged more than 1000 donors.

# GROWING THE PORTFOLIO

## NEW INVESTMENTS

Our five new Catalyst Fund investments grantees are Black, community-embedded leaders with innovative approaches to serving youth on the West Side.



### Austin Childcare Providers Network

Austin Childcare Providers Network is an organization focused on elevating childcare provider quality and developing a collaborative pilot focused on ensuring that children leave early childcare provides ready for kindergarten by creating continuity of learning and practice among childcare (pre-K) providers and elementary schools.

### The Bloc

Along with learning the sport of boxing, which serves as a meaningful physical outlet for youth, The Bloc provides youth from the West Side of Chicago with academic coaching and mentorship.

### MAAFA Redemption Project

MAAFA's mission is to repair and rebuild West Garfield Park by improving the quality of life of emerging adult, Black and Brown men and their families. MAAFA focuses on creating holistic "oasis of opportunity" for these young men to equip and empower their movement from "at risk" to thriving.

### Firehouse Community Arts Center – VIP Program

The Firehouse Community Arts Center's VIP (Very Important Process) Program is focused on the prevention and interruption of violence by providing young adult men with mentorship, leadership development and access to skills training and job opportunities.

### West Side United

West Side United's Cluster of Care Community Hub will provide students and families with wraparound services and resources conveniently located in the school building. The Hub's key programmatic support areas will include primary care, mental health services, social-emotional learning support, and trauma-informed professional development training.



## PORTFOLIO IMPACT

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# MANAGEMENT SUPPORT PROJECTS

In 2020, we executed seven different external management support projects with six of our grantee organizations. Many of these projects were portfolio-wide workshops to address challenges regarding fundraising and communications strategies during the pandemic.



**CHICAGO  
SCHOLARS**

## **Chicago Scholars** – DEI Strategy Assessment

Through their recently completed strategic planning process, Chicago Scholars identified that their scholars consistently experience structural exclusion based on race and class in both college and the workplace. As a result, the organization pursued this project to intentionally and explicitly integrate diversity, equity, and inclusion into how Chicago Scholars achieves its organizational goals. A Better Chicago provided input during the consultant selection process and funded 50% of project costs.



**pitch** in

## **Pitch In** – Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) Capacity Building

With a program model anchored in SEL, Pitch In bolstered its program team's knowledge, skills, and capacity in SEL and redoubled its goal of delivering developmentally scaffolded, high-quality curriculum and student supports through an extended series of professional development workshops and coaching. A Better Chicago provided input during the consultant selection process and funded 75% of project costs.



**KIPP Chicago**  
COLLEGE PREP PUBLIC SCHOOLS

## **KIPP Chicago** – Network Leadership DEI Competency Development

As part of its commitment to becoming an anti-racist organization, KIPP Chicago's network-wide leadership team engaged in a series of DEI workshops to create a clear vision and pathway towards a more racially just and equitable experience for students, families, teachers and staff. A Better Chicago funded 50% of project costs.

# YEAR IN REVIEW

2020 was a particularly important year for A Better Chicago as we celebrated 10 years of impact. We launched innovative partnerships, hosted compelling events, and redirected critical resources to communities in need while introducing our work to new audiences.

## FEBRUARY

We became one of the anchor residents of FBRK Impact House, joining fellow funders in Chicago's first innovation-based philanthropy center founded by former Bears player Israel Idonije.



## MARCH

We hosted the *Chicago at the Crossroads* documentary screening and panel discussion with filmmaker Schodorf and Firehouse Community Art Center Executive Director Pastor Phil Jackson.



## APRIL

We launched Emergency Relief Fund in response to the COVID-19 pandemic's disproportionate impact on youth from low-income, Black, and Latinx communities.



## JUNE

We teamed up with World Central Kitchen, Chicago Public Schools, and NFL Player Adrian Clayborn to support students and families by providing more than 11,000 meals to more than 5,000 households during the summer months.

We celebrated Chicago Public Schools' highest-ever graduation rate of 83% that was propelled by gains from Black students. Additionally, we invested with CompUDopt to supply thousands of graduating seniors facing financial hardship with laptops and other technology needed to pursue their postsecondary goals in a hybrid learning environment.





## AUGUST

We joined forces with Mikva Challenge to host the first-ever State of Chicago's Youth virtual town hall where youth leaders shared policy recommendations focused on health, education, juvenile justice, housing, and safety/policing.

We co-hosted an "Innovation Through Crisis" event with The Chicago Public Education Fund to showcase exemplary leaders in our schools and their efforts to empower Chicago's youth to thrive even in times of uncertainty.



## SEPTEMBER

We launched our One West Side partnership with the Chicago Blackhawks Foundation to invest at least \$2 million in exemplary BIPOC leaders from Chicago's West Side serving youth from cradle to career.

We made our first Catalyst Fund investments to support community-embedded leaders with innovative approaches to serving youth across the South and West sides of our city.



## OCTOBER

We celebrated 10 years of impact with our A Better Future virtual fundraiser honoring the nonprofit leaders, youth changemakers, and generous donors who are stepping up to build a better future for us all.



# EMERGENCY RELIEF FUND

Through our Emergency Relief Fund, we invested \$2.5 million in 47 local nonprofits serving more than 600,000 youth and families. The organizations below worked diligently to bring direct financial support, essential goods, and innovative educational programming to communities hardest hit by COVID-19.

**600,000**

**YOUTH AND FAMILIES SERVED**

**GRANTEES**

32 new to ABC (13 current grantees, 2 former grantees)

**47**

Identified 76 organizations for potential future funding

**INVESTED**

**\$2.5M**

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## THE NEED

The significant volume of applications we received represent the massive and evolving need, especially on the South and West sides of our city. **Of these applications, about 35% were related to food and groceries, 15% for mental health supports, and 20% for remote learning technology (e.g., devices) and/or wifi.**



15%

Mental Health  
Supports



20%

Remote Learning  
Technology



35%

Food and Groceries

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## THE IMPACT

Our Emergency Relief Fund grantees focused on three main areas of need, with the majority of organizations addressing more than one need.



26

Organizations  
focused funds  
towards innovative  
programming



22

Organizations gave  
direct financial  
assistance



18

Organizations  
provided food and  
other basic essentials

## ABOUT US

A Better Chicago is changing how Chicago fights poverty by investing in bold ideas that create opportunity for our youth. We raise funds from donors who want to amplify their impact, then invest both meaningful grant dollars and strategic capacity-building support that help our grantees grow in scale and impact.



## RACIAL EQUITY STATEMENT

A Better Chicago is committed to advancing racial equity and ensuring Chicago youth are economically mobile and thriving in education, career, and life. Given this nation's longstanding history of systemic inequity, we focus our efforts on funding and scaling ideas that expand opportunities for Black and Latinx youth, with particular emphasis on those ideas coming directly from the communities we serve. Read our full racial equity statement at [abetterchicago.org/staff/racial-equity-statement](https://abetterchicago.org/staff/racial-equity-statement).

