

We believe that children succeed when they have love, unconditional belonging, and access to opportunity. We build, support, and partner with families to make our communities stronger.



The Children's Village  
Anthology 2022



**the children's  
village**

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# Our Stories are Your Stories

**the children's  
village**

Keeping children safe  
and families together –  
your support makes our work  
possible!

The Children's Village builds stronger communities by keeping families together and creating new families when needed. We partner with children and families to continually update and improve our approach, whether that be providing direct assistance through the pandemic, preventing family separation, providing short-term intensive residential interventions, building beautiful and affordable housing, or deploying wherever we are needed.



With your help, this year we:

- **Supported migrant children entering the US.** We deployed to the US/Mexico border to help train border patrol staff on how to best care for unaccompanied migrant children and work towards reunification. We have also sent staff to El Salvador and Iraq, where we work with community partners to provide support for children and families.
- **Reaffirmed our commitment to housing that is beautiful and deeply affordable.** This year we broke ground on the Eliza, which will house a brand-new NY public library, a STEM Learning Center, internet and Wi-Fi access, a universal pre-k facility, a community center with a teaching kitchen, and 174 deeply affordable and beautiful apartments for the residents of Inwood, Manhattan. Everyone deserves housing that is safe, affordable, and beautiful!
- **Invested in staff and families directly.** With the support of our Trustees, we invested in frontline staff salaries, scholarships for education, and professional development. We also provided financial assistance directly to those who experienced hardships during the pandemic. Our incredible staff and families are the reason we remain able to do this work, and we will continue to support them in every way possible.

The stories in this book were written by youth and staff. We hope reading them helps you understand the impact your support has on so many lives. The work is difficult, but as you'll read in the following pages, the results are life changing.

You made these stories happen. **Thank you.**



“The biggest feeling of joy I get is watching them take care of each other. They look out for each other and have each other’s backs. It’s what I wish I had as a kid, what I now know I needed. Being able to make a difference in their lives and help change their outlook by being trustworthy means the world to me.”



## Ms. Johnson's Story

I come from a big family – I was the oldest of 6 siblings. I always thought we would be close when we got older, but life circumstances changed that. When I was 11 years old our home was reported unsafe, and my siblings and I were forced to split up and enter the foster care system.

I spent time in different group homes and families, but I kept running away. There was definitely trauma to my situation, and I didn't realize until I was older how much of that was from not being with family that I knew I had out there. Even now as adults, my siblings and I struggle to connect. We lack that bond of growing up together, and I so wish it could be different. I even tried to take care of my younger siblings. When I turned 18, I became their foster parent. Unfortunately it was really difficult to parent my own brothers and sisters, and they ended up back in the system.

These experiences led me to my current focus in life, my children. I have adopted a large sibling group of 4 boys, and I am fostering their half-sister as well. I am happy to provide unconditional love, food, shelter, and clothing. But most importantly, I am so proud to be able to keep these siblings together. Being in foster care with all the uncertainty that brings is difficult enough – the least we can do is keep kids with their own siblings.

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It's not always easy, but when you see a sibling group together and the love and bond that they're building it's beautiful. They have experienced separation, they are hurting, but they are together.

*Ms. Johnson is a foster/adoptive parent through CV's Family Foster Care program. Thousands of young people are needlessly removed from the families each year and are stuck in the foster care system awaiting placement. The groups who linger in the system longest are large sibling groups and older teens. CV partners with amazing people like Ms. Johnson, who provide the unconditional love and belonging that these children deserve.*

## Davon's Story

“Mentors who provide unconditional belonging allow you to break down walls and open up like never before, so that’s what I try to bring every day.”

I grew up in Harlem, and I experienced the criminal justice system firsthand. I wish I had a mentor who I could relate to when I was younger or when I was leaving the justice system. I am where I am today despite not having that support, but it should be available to everyone.

I actually started mentoring in prison. As people I knew got close to leaving, I saw how difficult it was for them to get a job and a stable place to stay. I helped them with paperwork, job applications, and things like that. When I was released at age 26, I had honed my skills and relationships and was able to find work within a few days. I loved the feeling of helping others and wanted to continue to sharing my experiences as lessons, so I decided to join CV as a mentor.

I was definitely nervous about being a role model to others outside of prison. But I soon realized that Harlem is home, and relating to my mentees was mostly about being my authentic self. I feel like my shared background with my mentees creates the opportunity for deeper levels of trust and discussion. They know that I’ve been where they are, and so they want to hear what I have to say.

I try to help provide a “fast forward” look into how their actions could lead to great rewards or harsh ramifications. This helps my youth through their rebellious phases and come out stronger on the other side. The thing that impacts me



the most is seeing young people embrace vulnerability. When we take our youth out of adverse environments, they become big kids. I believe we help them remove that mask and create a safe space for them to be themselves. Mentors who provide unconditional belonging allow you to break down walls and open up like never before, so that’s what I try to bring every day.

In addition to mentoring in my community, I am a research assistant investigating the impact of Credible Messengers across NYC, and a lead employment training specialist working to help match young people with job opportunities. My life experiences have led me to this point, and I feel grateful to be able to give back.

*Davon is a mentor in the Next S.T.E.P.S. (Striving Towards Empowerment and Peaceful Solutions) program, part of CV's Transformative Mentoring Division, where he works with young people previously in the juvenile justice system to strengthen skills like decision making, coping with stress, building healthy relationships, and more.*

## Nadia's Story

“I grew up in and out of the foster care system, so I was used to being independent, but it was scary to truly be on my own with a daughter to take care of and no support system to lean on.”

Being a teen mom is not easy. I gave birth to a beautiful baby girl named Isis in March, and lost my father that November. Growing up I always took care of my dad, and that inspired me to want to help others. I spent time in and out of the foster care system, so I was used to being independent, but it was scary to truly be on my own with a daughter to take care of and no support system to lean on.

Thankfully I found a maternity residence through the Inwood House Division at CV quickly. The staff were amazing and made me feel so comfortable. They helped me create a plan to find stable work, get childcare for my daughter, and set career goals. It wasn't just major support like therapy and counseling, they also helped with all the little things that I wanted to learn: how to make a bottle, how to cook, find a doula, process my emotions, and more.

Eventually I found work in a nursing home, where I help people get to their appointments. I got promoted to a full-time position, and recently got another promotion to Recreation Leader. I really enjoy helping the residents and bringing some joy to their day, just like I was able to do for my father. I met an employee who was close to my age range who had become Senior Executive Director of Recreation for over 50 buildings. She inspired me to get my GED and further my education, and I am now on the path to becoming a nurse.

I worked at the nursing home throughout the pandemic, and it has been tremendously painful and overwhelming. There are days I break down because we have lost so many people, and I worry about how it affects my family. Nonetheless, I know that I am making a difference and setting a strong example for Isis. I'm also enrolled at Bronx Community College, working towards getting my degree and building a future. I know that I have a lot to give back, and I can be a role model for my daughter Isis by pursuing my dreams.



*Nadia and Isis lived in a mother and baby home provided by the Inwood House Division at CV. Inwood House helps young mothers complete their education and acquire the skills they need to become independent, while providing a stable place for them and their babies to live. Inwood House helps young women explore career interests, work on resumes, look for job opportunities, prepare for interviews, and plan for their family's future.*



### Rosa's Story

“I needed that next step to help me gain confidence and prepare me to reach my goals.”

*Rosa resided at The Sanctuary at CV – Westchester's only homeless shelter for teens. The Sanctuary provides a safe place to stay, individual and group counseling, family-style meals, and life coaching for youth returning to their communities. Teens should not be living on the street, couch surfing, forced to enter a shelter, or trading their bodies for food or housing.*

At the age of 14, I was forced to leave home due to an abusive environment. One late night I was walking around downtown Yonkers and the Sanctuary's Street Outreach Van and Mr. Charles appeared right in front of me. He asked me if I was okay. Nobody in my life had ever asked me that before, I didn't know how to react. He then asked if I was lost, and I explained that I was not, I simply had no place to go. I had been planning to sleep hidden in the library that night, but Mr. Charles told me that there was a safe place to stay with hot meals and other young people facing similar situations. It all seemed too good to be true, but still I finally felt like things were going to be okay.

The Sanctuary ended up being my safe haven. To this day I remember being called in to set the table and have family-style meals, connecting with other young people (who I'm still in touch with!) about our shared experiences, and having that feeling of support behind me. I spent time there on and off for 5 years, until Mr. Charles recommended me for a transitional living program so I could get out on my own and build a future for myself. I needed that next step to help me gain confidence and prepare me to reach my goals. The way that Mr. Charles and the other amazing people at the Sanctuary helped me drives me to help others.

Today, over 15 years after I left the Sanctuary, I am a registered nurse in a cardiothoracic unit in Westchester County. I consider my job to be an advocate for my patients. I've spent time on many units in my training, including the ICU and operating room. I have even been able to recognize the signs and provide immediate support to victims of abuse due to my own experiences growing up. I'm really happy to be in a place where I can give back. I am forever grateful to the Sanctuary for helping me get to where I am today.

“This opportunity made me realize that I wanted to do something better with my life and help young people who are going through the same challenges that I faced at their age.”

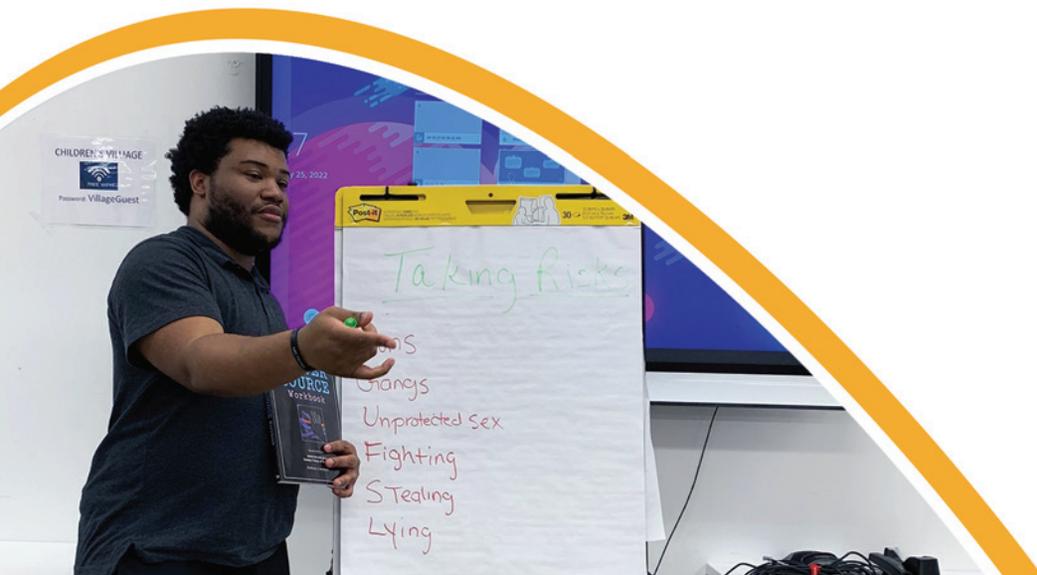
### Malik's Story

I grew up in the foster care system, and lived at CV from 13 to 18 years old. When I was getting ready to age out, I enrolled in the WAY to success aftercare program, where I met my mentor Robyn Tolliver. For the next 5 years I was making ends meet, but I was unsure what I wanted to do with my life. I just knew I wanted to give back. Unexpectedly, Robyn and I reconnected at a BBQ, and I expressed my interest in mentoring. She brought me on as an unpaid intern to learn the roles and responsibilities of being a mentor. I was able to assist with group preparation and plan how best to engage our program participants. This opportunity made me realize that I wanted to do something better with my life and help young people who are going through the same challenges that I faced at their age.

In the Spring of 2021, I was hired to be a mentor at CV. I was ready and willing to learn from others, but I also bring my own ideas into the mix from my lived experience. When I was a resident at CV and navigating my trauma and stressors, I learned Dialectical Behavior Therapy (DBT), where we practiced mindfulness in our everyday lives. I continue to practice DBT training weekly and I integrate what I've learned into my mentoring sessions. Staff in CV's cottages even reach out to me to help conduct DBT workshops! Having a former resident who was often misunderstood and was missing the skills to sort out disagreements with his peers talk to youth currently experiencing the same situation is extremely healing for me.

While I am still new at mentoring, I am evolving and working towards becoming a more effective leader. By utilizing the skills that I'm learning along the way and integrating my lived experience, I believe that the impact I can make is limitless!

*Malik is a mentor in the ICM Plus Mentoring Program, which helps young people in the community who are in danger of entering the juvenile justice system. The program focuses on conflict resolution, building healthy relationships, education, and employment. Malik's experience is unique and brings tremendous value to his role as a mentor.*



## Outcomes and Achievements

We work with youth and families to build strong communities. To that end, we track key indicators like education, work, family reunification, and housing. The following are some of our recent outcomes.

With your support, The Children's Village served over 17,000 youth and families last year. These numbers were affected by the pandemic, and do not include children and families served by our strategic partners Harlem Dowling – West Side Center, Bridge Builders Community Partnership, Bravehearts, You Gotta Believe, and day students served by Greenburgh Eleven, the public school on CV's Dobbs Ferry campus.

**650+** young people in our home and community-based programs remained with family.

**94%** of youth exited our homeless shelters and transitional homes with stable housing and life coaching.

**93%** of mentees in our transformative mentoring programs avoided re-arrest.



**250** out of 252 youth in our aftercare programs prevented a return to residential care.

**92%** of young people in our aftercare programs are working at least part-time.

**100%** of youth in our WAY Home program have graduated high school and are currently enrolled in College and earning credits.