

# Our Stories

are Your Stories



# Our Values

## OPPORTUNITY

All people deserve the opportunity to reach their full potential.

## FAMILY

Families belong together whenever possible.

## DIVERSITY

We should celebrate diversity and its power to enrich us all.

## MENTORSHIP

The presence of at least one caring, committed adult is a non-negotiable requirement for a child's success.

## SAFE SPACES

Housing should be safe, beautiful, and affordable.

## EDUCATION

A high-quality education empowers children to create a brighter future.

## TRUST

We partner with and trust our young people and families.

# Thank you

Last year, your support enabled us to serve over 17,000 children and families. We couldn't have done it without you.

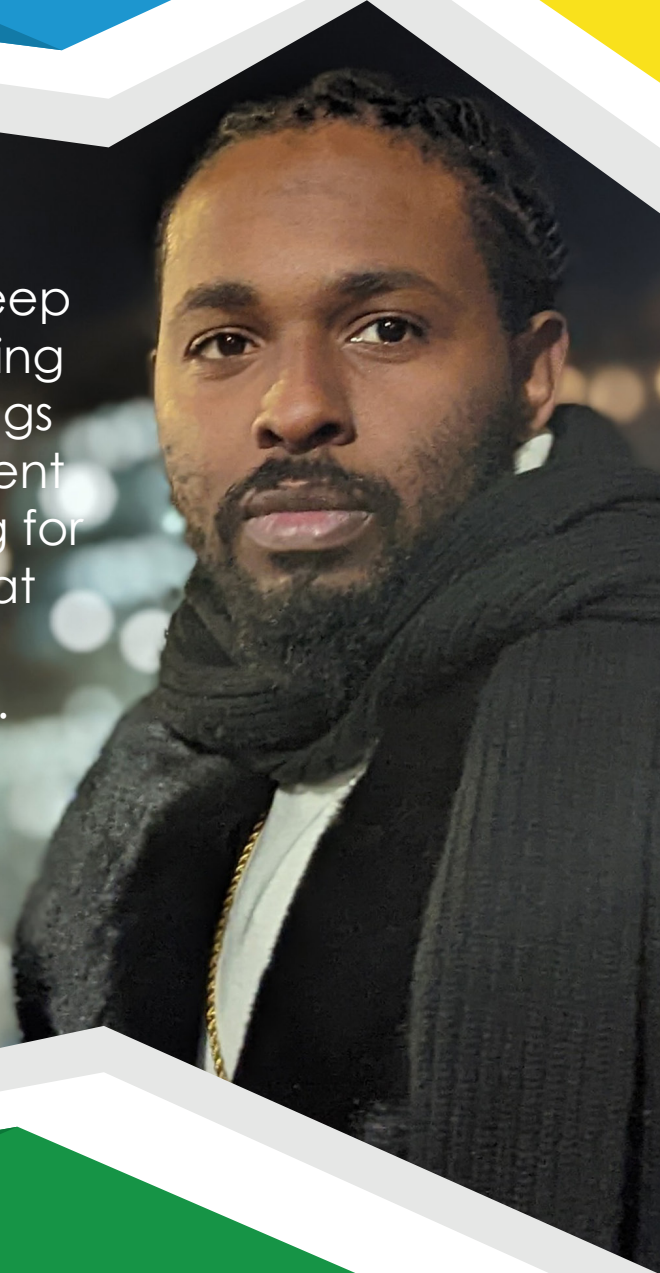
Thanks to friends like you, we are able to provide:

- Family reunification and support.
- Community and school-based programs.
- Alternatives to incarceration.
- Trafficking and homelessness prevention.
- Life coaching and long-term support from credible messengers.
- Housing that is safe, affordable, and beautiful.

The stories in this book were written by young people, families, and staff. We hope reading them helps you understand the impact your support has on so many lives. As you'll read in the following pages, the results are life changing and the people are inspiring.

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



A portrait of Lu'Keus J. Isler, a Black man with short braided hair and a beard, wearing a dark jacket and a scarf. He is looking slightly to the left of the camera with a neutral expression. The background is dark with some bokeh light effects.

I have a deep understanding of the feelings of entrapment and longing for freedom that our young people feel.

## Lu'Keus

*I came to CV with some of my own knowledge, but I have been given great opportunities to learn so much more.*

My name is Lu'Keus J. Isler. I am a performing artist, community activist, and a member of the Transformative Mentoring team at The Children's Village (CV) for just over a year. I've been involved in doing this kind of work since I was a teenager. Growing up in Harlem, I was privileged enough to be a part of several rites of passage programs including Impact Repertory Theatre and The Order of The Feather Fraternity. These programs focused on concepts such as performing arts, leadership, and activist training. Being a part of these experiences at a younger age while also navigating through my own knuckleheaded growing pains gives me a nuanced perspective on carrying out the work with our young people today. I have a deep understanding of the feelings of entrapment and longing for freedom that our young people feel. We're able to have those special moments and connect through our shared lived experience. And for me, the best part of mentoring is how my mentees help me understand some of the circumstances and pressures that are weighing on the future of our community.

I came to CV with some of my own knowledge, but I have been given great opportunities to learn so much more. With CV's support I graduated from The New School's Institute of Transformative Mentoring last year, and have taken several trainings with the Credible Messenger Justice Center. I'm now enrolled in the Community Leadership Program at the CUNY School of Labor and Urban Studies. My main goal in this work is not to "change" young people, but to change the environment in which we raise them. If the children are the future and it takes a village to raise a child, then the state of our village will be the state of our future. Asé\*.

*\*Asé, originally from the Yoruba of Nigeria, can be translated as "power, authority, command." A person who, through training, experience, and initiation, learns how to use the essential life force of things to willfully effect change is called an alaase.*

*Lu'Keus Isler is team leader of the ECHOES Be Ready program, which focuses on mentoring court involved youth through individual and group sessions about restorative justice. The program uses lived experience and credible messengers to reduce recidivism and help young people with education, employment, and relationship building.*

**D** devote time

**R** reflect on your reasons why

**E** effort shows change

**A** accept responsibility

**M** motivate

**S** say sorry, show affection

It's never too late to learn skills to help improve my relationship with my loved ones.

- Poem by Ms. Hart about what working with CV meant to her

## Ms. Hart

*... right away I felt like an equal partner and team member to the CV staff.*



When the pandemic began, I got very ill and was worried that I might not be able to take care of my two teenagers, Zoco and Jacari. We were already having a difficult time as a family. The boys had a lot of resistance to my parenting, and because of my illness I lost a lot of strength and confidence in myself.

Zoco, my eldest, was hurting. He had just come out as gay before the pandemic, and our communication was nonexistent. We fully accepted him, but he was shutting down and had a lot of hostility. Often times when I tried to talk to him he would yell "leave me alone" or bang on the walls, and we couldn't have productive conversations. We needed help to change things quickly.

My local Police Athletic League referred me to the Multisystemic Therapy Program at The Children's Village, where we could get services in our home, and right away I felt like an equal partner and team member to the CV staff. They made me feel comfortable and helped with some communication tools I could use to improve our family dynamic. Zoco was resistant at first, but once he got to know our social worker Ms. Ashley, he really started to open up and change.

I was raised in a different time. There was no questioning of parents, it was simply "do what you're told". Kids today need different things, and I knew that I needed some new parenting skills to become Ms. Hart 2.0! I think that when my boys saw me willing to learn and grow, they embraced it too. And now my voice is being heard and respected. Ms. Ashley broke that barrier to reconnect us. Her and the CV team will always be there for me, I feel like I made an additional family member!

*Ms. Hart partnered with CV's Multisystemic Therapy (MST) team to get the services her family needed in their own home. MST helps families gain the skills they need to stay together, prevent separation, and thrive.*



I have been exposed to so many opportunities like speaking at the International Women's Day Presentation, attending the WAY awards dinner with Ms. Watford (left), and I also received a certificate for my achievements at The Sanctuary Family and Friends Day.

## Sarah

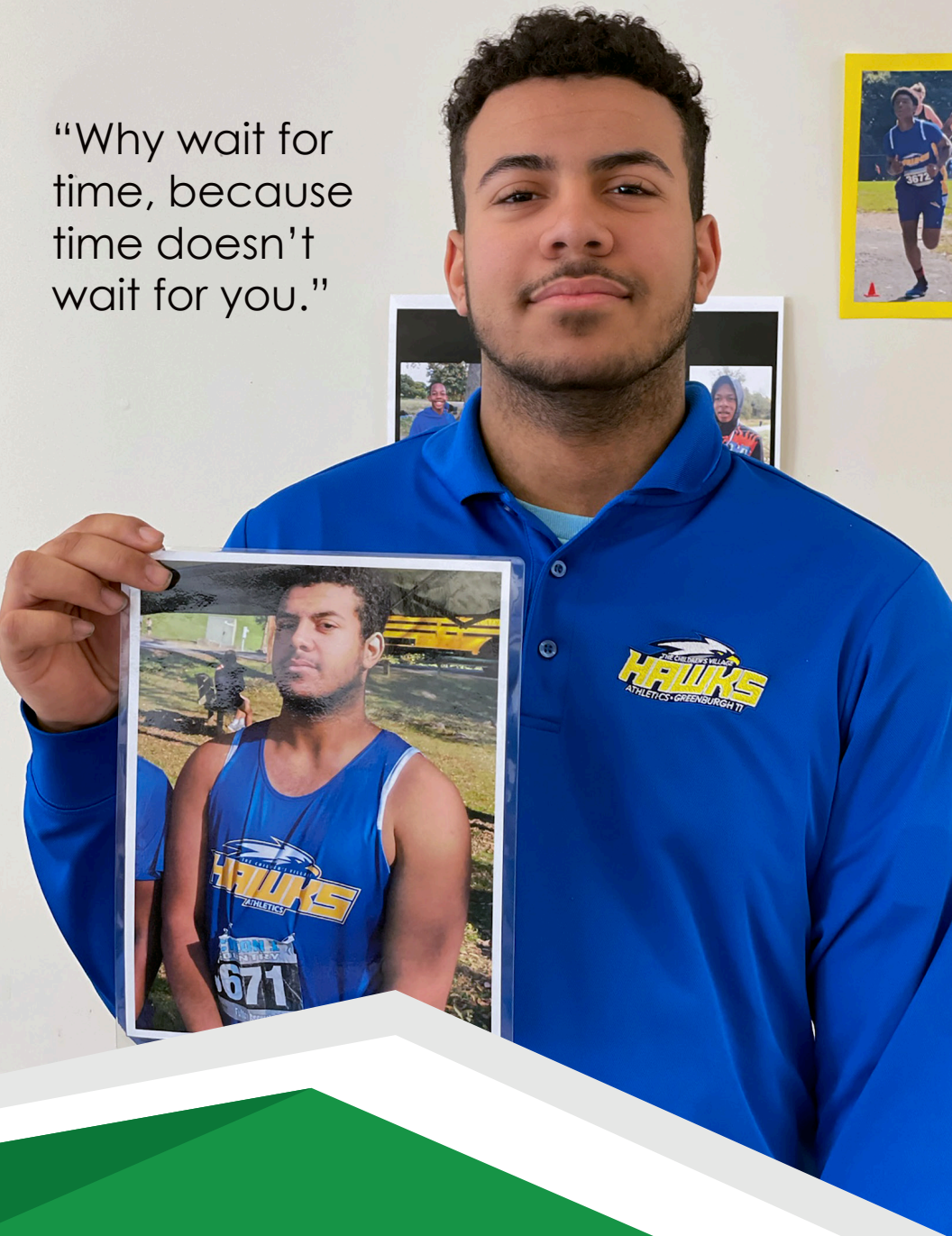
*I finally felt the courage to speak up during family planning meetings and decide what would come next in my life.*

Two years ago, I was in a bad place in my life and was at risk of being separated from my family. Staff at my school referred me to The Sanctuary at The Children's Village. At first, I was very skeptical about it helping me, but when I got there it was a different story. I was shy and going through a lot with my family relationships - I was full of pent-up anger. The staff welcomed me with open arms and stepped up for me. They became the family that I didn't have at the time! We talked and worked through difficult situations involving my mental health. They encouraged me to be a better person, and I started to feel a huge change. I learned to become an advocate for myself and my peers. I finally felt the courage to speak up during family planning meetings and decide what would come next in my life.

I quickly realized that I didn't want to leave this safe space just yet. So, I signed up to be a Youth Advocate at The Sanctuary and join CV's Youth Advisory Council. Now, I help plan trips and events about sexual education and mental health, and I also work with young people that were in my situation a few months prior. I am grateful that I can be seen as an older sister, a friend, a mentor, or someone to ask questions to. I have been exposed to so many opportunities like speaking at the International Women's Day Presentation, attending the WAY awards dinner with Ms. Watford, and I also received a certificate for my achievements at The Sanctuary Family and Friends Day. My favorite trip was a hike up Mohawk Mountain. It was so nice to get out of my neighborhood and try something new. The climb was so hard that I actually fell! But even though there were things in our way, once we got to the top it was all worth it and the view was amazing. By the end of the trip, we all had such a strong bond. I'm currently in high school and getting ready to graduate, and I'm thinking of applying for full-time jobs at CV! I think I would be a great staff member. I want to continue to make sure I am successful now and in the future.

*Sarah resided at The Sanctuary, Westchester County's only homeless shelter specifically 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. It supports teens who should not be living on the street, couch surfing, forced to enter a shelter, or trading their bodies for food or housing.*

“Why wait for time, because time doesn't wait for you.”



## Ben

*It reminds me to do things every day that make me better, and I've definitely learned that at CV.*

When I came to The Children's Village (CV) I was over 300 pounds, struggling with Asthma, and was at risk of getting diabetes at just 14 years old. There was a flyer up in Butler Cottage for the basketball team and I decided to try out. I was slowly starting to lose weight and feel better about myself, and when the season ended I said "OK what's next?" Coach Eddie told me that there was a track and field team, and I told myself if I have the opportunity to do things I've never been able to, why not take it? The first week of practice was killing me, but I'm a competitive guy. I started working out more and getting stronger. I eventually made it to 280 pounds and was doing great with the shotput and discus. Coach Eddie was telling me that coming up next was cross country running. He thought I might love it and really get in better shape, lose the weight, and keep it off. I was hiding from him for a couple of weeks but I eventually decided to join!

It was a tough transition. But I was looking at my teammates thinking I may not be able to get faster than them, but I know I can be better than what I was. I started practicing more and more, doing pushups in between rounds, and I just started adapting really well. I've learned that every race is different – different course, different runners, all of that. I'm only a Freshman, but I'm learning how to win the race within me and make the right decisions to beat my previous times.

I learned so much discipline from getting access to these different sports and working with Coach Eddie. I like to write quotes myself every day to reflect. One of my favorite is "Why wait for time, because time doesn't wait for you." It reminds me to do things every day that make me better, and I've definitely learned that at CV.

I'm now down to 213 - I've lost 122 pounds since I came to CV. It feels amazing. I never even thought about weight loss before coming here, but now my mindset of just trying to be better and better is driving me, and I'm thinking big!

*Ben is a resident at CV's campus in Dobbs Ferry, NY, where young people attend Greenburgh 11 public school and have access to sports, internships, paid job opportunities, trips, and more.*

# Angel

*... it's just a beauty knowing that I have resources and people to rely on when I need help.*

When COVID struck in 2020, I was a senior in high school and didn't have a place to live. A lot of the time I was couch surfing, staying with family members or friends. I was working, but I was bouncing around with no real stability. It was confusing because everywhere I went, I actually paid rent. I've always tried to contribute to wherever I was residing at. Still, I didn't feel any kind of safety and wasn't moving forward with my life.

I decided I just had to brainstorm and invest all my time into myself, which for me meant finding my own apartment and using the resources that are eligible to me. Luckily I found CV's Harlem Apartments, which was the first step to me getting to the next level. Having my own space is really essential. It allowed me to be comfortable, have peace of mind, and I'm really a lot more calm now. I've learned a lot and get the support I need from the CV team. I cook, clean, and perform all of the necessary household tasks that I used to do for others, but now I get to do it in my own space. Getting an apartment helped me get back into trade school and learn things that I thought I would have never learned. I took my MTA test this November and I passed! If it wasn't for having my apartment, I never would have gotten back in school, gotten a waiver to cover my fee for the MTA test, and so much more – it's just a beauty knowing that I have resources and people to rely on when I need help.

I still know individuals who are homeless and couch surfing, and what I tell them is you have to dedicate your time and your effort towards the good, not the things that waste your energy. Make sure at the end of the day that you're good and upholding your sanity. For me, that meant focusing on getting my own space. Waking up every day and just breathing, just being happy where I'm at...I just feel grateful. I'm only 21, this is just a stepping stone for me, the first of many. I have a long life to live, and I hope to just live it to the fullest.

*Angel lives in CV's Harlem Apartments, which are reserved for young people who have aged out of foster care. The Harlem Building at 127th and Adam Clayton Powell provides affordable apartments that are safe, beautiful, and full of the amenities that young people and families deserve. The building is in the heart of Harlem, close to transportation and grocery stores, and includes wraparound support services for young people.*



# Outcomes and Achievements

The Children's Village served over 17,000 children and families this year. We track key indicators like education, work, family reunification, and housing. The following are some of our recent outcomes that your support made possible:



*This information does not include children and families CV serves at the southern border or by our strategic partners Harlem Dowling – West Side Center, Bridge Builders Community Partnership, Bravehearts, You Gotta Believe, and day students served by Greenburgh 11, the public school on CV's Dobbs Ferry campus.*



# the children's village<sup>®</sup>

[www.childrensvillage.org](http://www.childrensvillage.org)

Stay in touch! Search for "The Children's Village"  
on social media and follow or like our page.

