

ACHIEVE

SPRING 2025



CHRISTOPHER HOUSE
LEARN DREAM ACHIEVE

WHAT'S INSIDE:

Hear from our Newest
Board Members

Learn about our Staff
Development Program

Meet our
Alumni

OUR MISSION

Christopher House creates opportunity and advances equity for scholars and families through a continuum of personalized, high-quality education with immersive family supports, starting at birth.

A LETTER FROM OUR CEO

Founded as one of the original settlement houses in Chicago, Christopher House has built its legacy on a foundation of support, inclusion, and empowerment. For over a century, we have stood as a beacon of hope for all members of our community. As we look to the future, we are committed to continuing this vital work, honoring our rich history while adapting to meet the ever-evolving needs of those we serve.

At the heart of our mission is an unwavering dedication to excellence in education. We believe that every child, deserves the opportunity to succeed—not only in school but in life and beyond. Guided by our core values of commitment to excellence, respect and compassion, achievement, perseverance, and equity, we nurture and empower the children in our care, instilling in them the confidence and tools to reach their fullest potential.

By partnering with us, you are a vital part of something much greater—an enduring movement grounded in hope, resilience, and the belief that through education, we can create a better tomorrow. Your generosity helps us continue this essential work, and for that, we are deeply grateful. Thank you for shaping the future—one scholar, one family, and one community at a time.



Julie Dakers
Julie Dakers, CEO

OUR VALUES

- Commitment to Excellence
- Achievement and Perseverance
- Respect and Compassion
- Equity

OUR BELIEFS

CHILDREN AND FAMILIES THRIVE WHEN:

- They have access to a high-quality education
- Education begins at birth, with parents as the first teacher, and continues through life
- Parents have high standards and set high expectations for their children and themselves
- Professionally trained teachers use strength-based instruction and know their students as individuals
- Parents support their children financially and emotionally
- Evaluations and program adjustments are data driven
- Education includes developing perseverance and social intelligence
- Parents and teachers work together to continuously improve programs



GROWING OUR OWN
Innovative Approaches to Expanding the Early Childhood Workforce

At Christopher House, we recognize that our programs are only as strong as our staff and teachers, and therefore, we are committed to finding, training, and retaining the most highly-qualified, passionate, and dedicated members of our community to join the Christopher House family.

Coming out of the pandemic, our shared community was, and in many ways still is, experiencing a national teacher shortage in the Early Childhood field. Motivated by our desire to develop accessible career pathways within our community, improve pay equity amongst staff, and close the wealth gap, Christopher House created a unique and innovative solution – the Christopher House Child Development Associate (CDA) Training Program.

What once was a pilot program – in its infancy only a year ago – is now a successful institution that is rapidly growing to meet the ongoing needs of today’s educational landscape. By the end of our pilot year, 100% of participants completed the 12-week training program, receiving 9 transferable college credits upon completion, a 9% increase in overall wages, and practical skills and knowledge that can be directly incorporated into our Early Childhood classrooms.

Our past participants look back on their experience with fondness, pride, and gratitude for the accessible opportunity to further their educational careers, employees like Jorge de la Vega.

First joining the Christopher House team as a paraprofessional working with diverse learning students at our Uptown Campus, Jorge quickly felt right at home. Bringing with him his previous knowledge and experience as an educational psychologist in Spain, Jorge saw Christopher House CDA Pilot Program as an opportunity to expand upon his knowledge of Early Childhood Development and gain a deeper understanding to the United States education system.

“It was a great experience – a challenge and a commitment to my students, my work and myself. Through this experience I was able to connect the theory with my current practice, since the space that the CDA gave us as professionals was incredibly useful, allowing us to share work experiences and knowledge, creating ‘science’ in the process.

– JORGE DE LA VEGA,
EARLY CHILDHOOD PARAPROFESSIONAL

With the first cohort successfully complete, the second cohort is now well underway. As the program continues to grow and expand to offering 3 cohorts annually, as well as piloting an online cohort, Christopher House has invited a community partner, Concordia Place, to share in this vital work.

“Christopher House is not only focused on building up our internal workforce, but on having a positive impact on the Early Childhood workforce across the communities that we serve. Inviting external partners like Concordia to engage in the high-quality professional development opportunities that we are able to offer supports Christopher House’s larger vision as a leader in the field of Early Childhood.”

– KAREN ROSS WILLIAMS,
CHIEF OF EARLY LEARNING



MEET OUR NEWEST ADDITIONS

to the Board of Directors



Katheryn Steward

Katheryn Steward retired in 2022 after a distinguished 20-year career in nonprofit financial leadership. She spent the latter part of her career as the Chief Financial Officer at Christopher House in Chicago and as the Vice President & Chief Financial Officer at Para Los Niños in Los Angeles. Beyond her professional accomplishments, Katheryn has been an active volunteer and advisor to several organizations, including the Los Angeles Chapter of Tuskegee Airmen, Inc., the National Council of Negro Women (San Fernando Valley Section), and LEARN Council. Additionally, she served as a Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) for Los Angeles County, advocating for children in the foster care system. With her extensive experience and commitment to community service, Katheryn has made significant contributions to the growth and impact of organizations such as Christopher House, helping them better serve families in the Chicago area.

Justin Orr

In 2014, Justin Orr graduated from the University of Notre Dame – where here served as an Articles Editor for the Georgetown Journal of Legal Ethics and was a member of Georgetown’s moot court team – with a Bachelor of Arts degree in History and English, magna cum laude. Currently, Justin is an associate in the Real Estate practice of Paul Hastings Chicago firm. He focuses on various aspects of real estate development including financing, leasing, purchasing, and selling properties.

“I joined Christopher House to assist this invaluable institution in its mission of providing educational excellence to people of all backgrounds. I was introduced to the impressive work done by Christopher House through my law firm and hope that my contributions will sustain that work for generations to come.”



Desire Bernard-Forbes

Desire is a Senior Portfolio Manager in the Inclusive Economy Lab, where she leverages her extensive experience in project management, nonprofit leadership, and community organization to drive impactful research initiatives. A graduate of The University of Chicago Crown Family School of Social Work, Policy, and Practice, Desire earned her master’s in social service administration, equipping her with a strong foundation in policy and practice.

In addition to her professional role, Desire is the founder and CEO of Don’t Stop Belizein, a nonprofit organization dedicated to empowering under-resourced communities in Belize and beyond. Through innovative programs addressing food insecurity, technology access, and essential resource distribution, Desire leads initiatives such as circular economy projects, annual toy drives, and in-kind goods programs. Her work reflects a deep commitment to equity, social impact, and community-driven solutions.

Donors to Christopher House - \$1,000+

July 1, 2024 -
January 31, 2024

INDIVIDUALS

Anonymous	Patrick McGovern
Gwendolyn and Zeb Barnes	Amy Moran
Ronit and Brian Barrett	Peter and Christine Neely
Anastasia and Harrison Bernbaum	Jill Nolte
Cassandra Brown	Liam O’Kane
Nessim J. Cicurel	In Memorial of Mary Papajani
James and Elyssa Cuber	Alap Patel
Joe Curci and Lisa Centone	Gretchen Rakowicz
Mr. Eric P and Mrs. Melissa Dresselhuys	Sarah and Mark Ricciardi
Katherine Florig	David and Kitty Rothschild
William and December Gladden Family Fund	Sheila Ruder
Anastasia Gomez	Mike and Kathy Ruhland
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Kevin and Nicole McCormack	Michael and Mary Woolever
Joyce McGlade	Jennifer Worthington

ORGANIZATIONS

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Affirm	Park Ridge Presbyterian Church
Andrew and Alice Fischer Charitable Trust	Patrick and Anna M. Cudahy Fund
Anonymous	Polk Bros. Foundation
Aura Staffing Partners	Presbyterian Church of Barrington
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CIBC Bank USA	RBC Capital Markets
Cisco Meraki	Southminster Presbyterian Church
Constellation Energy	Thoma Bravo
Egarter Family Foundation	Wake N Bakery Homewood
Ellis Goodman Family Foundation	Women of the First Presbyterian Church of Arlington Heights
First Presbyterian Church of Arlington Heights	
Franklin Monroe	
Harley-Davidson Financial Services	
Imbert International Inc.	
KKR	

Christopher House Expands Food Pantry Program Through New Partnership

For over 35 years, Christopher House has provided essential food resources to families in need. However, due to rising food costs and budget constraints following the pandemic, we could no longer financially sustain our on-site food pantries alone. To continue this vital service, we partnered with the Greater Chicago Food Depository (GCFD) to enhance and expand our food pantry program.

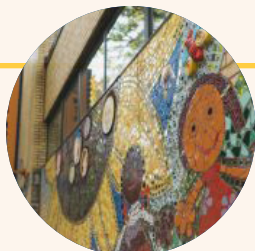
In October 2024, we re-launched our Stewart campus food pantry with food provided by GCFD, offering our families greater access to nutritious items such as produce, canned and dried goods, milk, eggs, peanut butter, and bread. Our Uptown campus pantry is set to re-launch in March 2025, and our Logan Square campus families now have access to the Stewart pantry.

In addition to food, we rely on our corporate partners and generous supporters to help supply essential household and hygiene items, including paper towels, dish soap, bath tissue, and toothpaste. With your continued support, we can ensure that Christopher House families have access to the resources they need to thrive.

Christopher House Welcomes a new Mixed Income Model for Logan Square Campus

We are thrilled to announce that Christopher House will be moving to a mixed income model at our Logan Square campus, welcoming families of all income levels with children ages 2-5 from the Logan Square community to enroll. Applications for the 2025-2025 school year will open April 1st and – for the first time – will be available online!

For over 100 years, Christopher House has been serving children and families across Chicago. Known for our high-quality, personalized education, Christopher House Infant and Preschool serves over 400 young scholars in Logan Square, Belmont Cragin, and Uptown. With our highly trained staff, unique continuum of education model, Reggio-Emilia inspired curriculum, and proven impact on kindergarten readiness we work to ensure our young scholars have access to all of they resources the need to thrive.





Spreading Holiday Cheer

Family-to-Family Giving Program

For over 35 years, Christopher House has helped bring holiday joy to families through our Family-to-Family (F2F) Holiday Giving Program. Each year, this cherished program supports over 450 families, connecting them with generous donors who fulfill their holiday wish lists. Families share three items they want and three items they need, and donors step in to make the season brighter.

One of our most dedicated supporters has been Kenilworth Union Church (KUC), whose members adopt an estimated 100 families annually. Their generosity has had a profound impact on our families year after year, ensuring children and caregivers alike experience the warmth of the holiday season.

“The holidays are particularly difficult for many of our families financially,” said Judith O’Callahan, Manager of Emergency and Community Support Services. “This program helps fulfill some needs and bring joy during this time of year, allowing families to redirect their limited financial resources to other critical areas.”

Thanks to the generosity of our donors, the Family-to-Family program raises over \$120,000 in in-kind donations each year, providing essential gifts and necessities that make a meaningful difference for our families.

We are deeply grateful to KUC and all our donors who help make this program a success. Your kindness brings not only gifts but also hope, relief, and a sense of community to our families during the holidays.



Honoring our Community

In Memory of Sally A. Kilham

Ms. Sally was an unwavering supporter of Christopher House. She wasn’t just a volunteer – she was a leader. She coordinated and engaged so many others to support the cause she believed in, Christopher House’s mission.

Through her time, talents and treasure she had incredible impact on so many families. We are so grateful for her life, her legacy, and all the lives she impacted.

Connecting with our Alumni

Meet Emmanuel Odiase



In 1998, Emmanuel took his first steps down the halls of Christopher House as a 5-year-old scholar in kindergarten at our Uptown campus. Now a full-time Manufacturing Operations Coordinator at Cisco Meraki and Christopher House volunteer, Emmanuel reflects back on his 14 years here with love and gratitude for his unforgettable memories.

Q. WHAT DO YOU REMEMBER MOST ABOUT YOUR TIME AS A CHRISTOPHER HOUSE SCHOLAR?

Looking back on my time as a Christopher House scholar, I participated in kindergarten, the After School and Summer Program, Big City Mountaineers and the Gear Up College Prep Program. The thing I remember most is learning how to interact with peers and teachers every day. I will never forget the summer job opportunities I had with Christopher House, which helped me prepare for the professional world by being trusted with the responsibility of being on time each day and working my shift before heading home.

Q. WHAT DO YOU WISH MORE PEOPLE KNEW ABOUT CHRISTOPHER HOUSE?

I wish more people knew how above and beyond Christopher House goes to help their families, ensuring that they have access to any resources that children and families may need. Personally, my family participated in the holiday program – receiving holiday gifts from generous donors, the food pantry, and the Gear Up program – which provided college scholarships to youth. A memory that has always stuck with me was one year my teacher and her family donated sneakers to me when I had holes in mine. I’ve always been grateful for their compassion and the memories that I have formed over the years.

Q. WHAT IS UNIQUE ABOUT CHRISTOPHER HOUSE?

I think the depth of the relationships formed at Christopher House is truly unique. My relationships with my teachers were great! They taught the curriculum but also brought parts of their own personalities into the classroom that made the learning experience all the more enjoyable – like sharing Michael Jackson videos which fueled my love of music. I still talk to many of them to this day. They have served as teachers, role models, and true mentors in my development.

Emmanuel may have graduated from Christopher House, but he will forever be a treasured and valued member of our family. He remains involved through personal relationships and volunteer opportunities along with colleagues from Cisco Meraki. Emmanuel, we thank you for continuing to donate your time and heart to our community, ensuring the love and education you experienced will be accessible for thousands more scholars and families for years to come.



our future
OUR IMPACT
our legacy

CHRISTOPHER
HOUSE

