



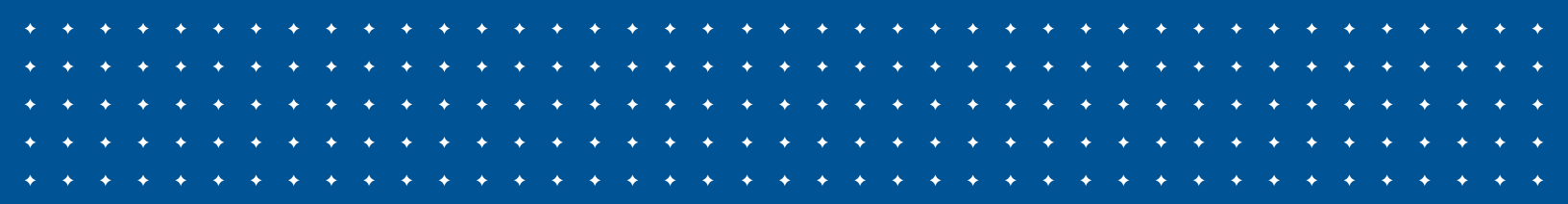
25 YEARS *of*  
 PARTNERSHIP *and*  
 AUTHENTICITY

2021 ANNUAL REPORT



SISTERS *of* CHARITY  
 FOUNDATION  
 OF CLEVELAND

*A Ministry of the Sisters of Charity Health System*



*I am inspired by the quiet, thoughtful  
and impactful work of the Sisters of Charity  
of St. Augustine through SOCF.*

The Sisters never seek recognition or thanks; rather, they seek only to help those in need.

I am grateful to participate in their important work.



**JOSEPH GIBBONS**

**Partner, Schneider Smeltz Spieth Bell LLP**

Board Member, Sisters of Charity Foundation of Cleveland

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## **BOARD & STAFF LIST**

# LETTER *from* OUR PRESIDENT & BOARD CHAIR

**When the Sisters of Charity Foundation of Cleveland was established 25 years ago, our founding sisters gave us the charge to change the trajectory of poverty in Cleveland.** We would accomplish this by addressing the causes of poverty at their roots, identifying the social determinants, moments and opportunities that can affect individual health and well-being.

A quarter century later, we are still seeing drastic disparities among our communities, and many of those disparities have been exacerbated by systemic racist policies and an ongoing pandemic. Thus, we remain far from achieving our vision of an equitable community where opportunities for growth and quality of life are shared by all.

Yet, we have hope. A constant refrain of ours is **“Where others see impossible, we see God’s people.”** When we spend time with one another, with those who have varied backgrounds and experiences and outlooks, it is hard not to hope. As an organization with Catholic social teaching at our center, we see dignity and divine value in every life—no one more important than another. We take intentional steps to hear from individuals, especially those who have lived and been affected by the issues we are helping to solve. Whether they have professed vows as a sister or faced housing instability, been incarcerated or witnessed traumatic violence, **they are the experts.** We need to listen.

The work of authentic listening is difficult. We are part of a system that wields a great deal of influence in our community, a system that has for centuries looked to those at the top as the most knowledgeable.

#### **Now we are asking:**

- *What changes have we seen?*
- *What if we look to those who have been sidelined, marginalized, and turned away and seek their input on issues that affect their lives?*

In those margins and in those conversations, we find vibrancy, brilliance and a power that has been silenced for far too long. In listening together, we find healing.

Healing requires hard work. Hope is a discipline. However, the pain and perseverance in the pursuit of hope and healing pales in comparison to the devastation that results from not listening. We must seek new ways of working together if we want to realize new outcomes.

This report shares several stories of how we are working to center lived expertise in our program strategies, evaluation practices and grantmaking processes. We invite all our partners across greater Cleveland to consider what it looks like to partner in authenticity and share power and knowledge among all members of a community.

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*We firmly believe that it is only together that we can effectively open our hearts to heal and move forward. Please join us on our continued journey toward a future where everyone can reach the potential God created them for. Join us in turning hope into action and bringing important voices into every conversation.*

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## WITH HOPE AND PERSEVERANCE,



*Woodrow Whitlow, Jr.*

**WOODROW WHITLOW JR., PH.D**

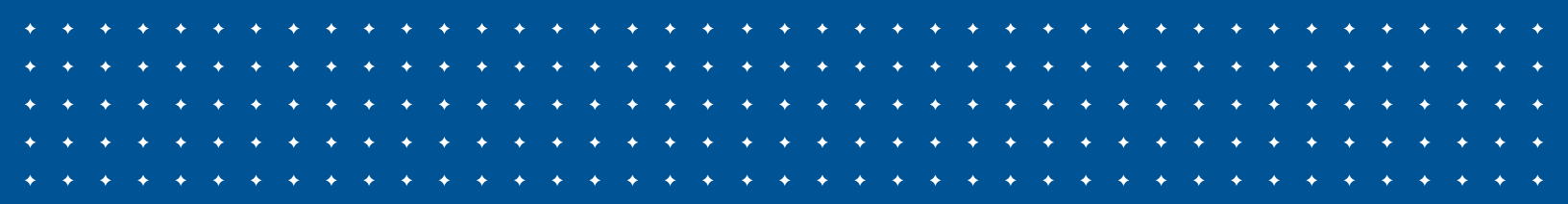
*Chair, Sisters of Charity Foundation of Cleveland  
Board of Directors*



*Susanna H. Krey*

**SUSANNA H. KREY**

*President, Sisters of Charity Foundation of Cleveland*



*Serving on the SOCF board has brought me  
to a much deeper understanding of the harsh day-to-day  
impact of poverty on the people of our community,  
made even worse by the pandemic.*

I have been most changed personally by the foundation's recent engagement of residents  
in determining the focus and needs of grant allocations. I have learned that their opinions and experiences  
enrich our collective efforts in a unique way.



**LYNN SINGER, PH.D**  
**Distinguished University Professor, Case Western Reserve University**  
Board Member, Sisters of Charity Foundation of Cleveland

# ABOUT SISTERS OF CHARITY FOUNDATION OF CLEVELAND 2021



## TOTAL INVESTED 2021:

Total: \$3,100,127

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### MISSION

*In the spirit of the Sisters of Charity of St. Augustine, we increase the community's ability to improve the lives of people living in poverty.*

### VISION

*We envision an equitable community where opportunities for growth and quality of life are shared by all.*

Since 1996, the Sisters of Charity Foundation of Cleveland has partnered with residents, nonprofits and community leaders to change the trajectory of poverty in Cuyahoga County. Its nearly \$80 million endowment includes the first health care conversion foundation and first foundation formed by a congregation of Catholic sisters in the United States.

Through **grantmaking, collaboration, advocacy and more**, the Sisters of Charity Foundation of Cleveland works to improve the lives of those most in need with special attention to families, women and children living in poverty. The foundation works to end homelessness in Cuyahoga County and to reduce health disparities and improve educational opportunities in Cleveland's Central neighborhood. As a Catholic organization, the foundation extends the values of Jesus Christ through the mission of its founders—the Sisters of Charity of St. Augustine—and also works to sustain the ministries of Catholic sisters in Northeast Ohio.

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SECTION I

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# LIVED EXPERTISE INFLUENCES STRATEGY *and* DIRECTION

*To effectively serve and support a community, we recognize that we cannot work on behalf of or “for” any specific population. Sisters of Charity Foundation of Cleveland is committed to working and walking with community members.*

By encountering challenges alongside our partners, we can better understand how to direct our resources to break down barriers and make real change. In this way, our community members share their lived expertise so we can gain a stronger perspective for how to direct our strategy.



STORY

*The Young Voices  
that are Ending  
Youth Homelessness*

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A PLACE 4 ME

**Between the ages of 16 and 24**, young people go through a crucial stage of growth, with an exponential spike in cognitive, social and emotional development similar to that of very young children. Unlike those young children, however, adolescents are expected to hold steady jobs, provide for family, and utilize goods and services designed for adults with different needs.

*It is no surprise that in this system of unreachable expectations, many of these adolescents in Cuyahoga County find themselves facing severe housing instability with little support.*

For more than two decades, Sisters of Charity Foundation of Cleveland has been a close partner to the Cuyahoga County Office of Homeless Services (OHS). While long-term homelessness—experienced most often by older, single adults—has been reduced significantly through the community’s Housing First initiative, the county office noted the challenge of capturing information about 18- to 24-year-olds experiencing homelessness.

Melissa Sirak, program director of the Cuyahoga County Office of Homeless Services (OHS), said that of the 500 to 600 young people seeking emergency housing services each year in Cuyahoga County, nearly one-third do not follow up on the shelter referral they receive.

“We know from national and local data that young people are wary of public systems, are reluctant to seek services in an adult-oriented environment, and often do not seek support through traditional channels,” Sirak said.

SOCF, OHS, the county Division of Children and Family Services and the YWCA Greater Cleveland formed a series of visioning sessions in 2013 to think about how to support this population and guide them toward housing stability. Through connections in the county offices, the collaborative was able to survey young people on their needs.

*We can do better for young people experiencing homelessness in our community.*

**MELISSA SIRAK**

Program Director, Cuyahoga County Office of Homeless Services

*It turns out, we didn't really know anything about this group and we really do need young people to be able to advise us.*

**KATE LODGE**

Director of A Place 4 Me



Kate Lodge is director of A Place 4 Me, a collective impact initiative centered around the voices and experience of young people facing housing instability. The initiative was created following those 2013 visioning sessions, when it became clear that the community needed to dedicate resources specifically to the unique needs of young people. SOCF Cleveland and the Annie E. Casey Foundation provided initial funding and have remained lead partners over nearly a decade.

With space at the YWCA for hosting meetings and group support conversations, plus a small amount of funding for stipends to compensate young people for their knowledge and time, Lodge built relationships and trust with many young people who sought help. While A Place 4 Me aims to change the systems that create housing instability for young people, it has also grown into a direct-service resource to those in immediate need. A partnership with the Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative helped build direct-service capacity and provided a valuable model for sustained youth engagement.

*In 2016, A Place 4 Me launched the REACH action board, a youth advisory committee comprising young people with lived expertise in housing instability. Initially named as an acronym—Resolution, Education, Awareness, Community, Hope—it’s been known simply as REACH in the years since.*

Kai, the lead youth navigator at A Place 4 Me, joined the staff at in 2019 after connecting with A Place 4 Me through Opportunity Passport. She joined REACH shortly after that.

“When I first joined REACH, it was scary,” Kai said. “It’s a great place for imposter syndrome, because you’ve been conditioned not to expect excellence for yourself, but I have built so much confidence in myself as a person and as a young professional.”

Kai began her A Place 4 Me staff role as a navigator in early 2019. In 2020, another young professional, Shajuana, joined the staff as a navigator focused on youth aging out of foster care. Kai said the role of the youth navigators is central to helping other young people empower themselves to make change.

Christie Sozio, assistant director of A Place 4 Me, has facilitated the work of the REACH board since its inception. She says she feels a tremendous responsibility to be facing broken systems on their behalf.

“I’m motivated by systems-change work, but it’s really difficult to continue to come up against a long history of oppression and bias, and there’s a lot of responsibility in that,” Sozio said. “But the beauty is to be able to learn from these young people, to step back so they can create the spaces where they feel comfortable and can thrive.”

REACH has met monthly since fall 2016. Today, there are 10 young adults who regularly attend meetings and join committees. Over the last several years, REACH board members have educated themselves on youth homelessness data and social determinants of health and homelessness, served on subcommittees in organizations across the county, participated in youth advocacy efforts, and developed, planned and reviewed applicants for A Place 4 Me’s youth navigator positions.



*Being a peer to other young people like me is so rewarding. I represent to others that you are not your mistakes or experiences. You can overcome that and be the kind of person you want to be.*

**KAI**

Lead Youth Navigator at A Place 4 Me

Together with several partners, in 2021 A Place 4 Me announced plans to build a new 50-unit supportive housing development designed specifically to serve transition-aged youth aged 18 to 24 (TAY) experiencing homelessness. Supportive housing links well-designed, safe, affordable housing with flexible, voluntary support services designed to help an individual stay housed, meet their goals and thrive in the community. REACH board members led the decision processes for site selection, building design and service providers. Residents in the TAY development will coordinate with property management and service providers to set individual goals related to housing stability, education, employment and well-being.

Now, A Place 4 Me's focus is toward what Sozio calls "one of the biggest dreams of the REACH board"—a low-barrier, "drop-in" resource center where young people can find respite from the sustained trauma of housing instability. With food, hygiene materials, spaces for young children (about 25 percent of young people in this demographic are parents) and community partners in housing and health care access and employment resources, the center seeks to meet young people where they are.



REACH board members and other young adult leaders make up 50 percent of the center's planning team, and they are instrumental in ensuring the center is equipped to care for young people's unique needs. A Place 4 Me is looking to grow in 2022 and add additional navigators to its team who will work directly with young people at the center.

SOCF Cleveland continues to be a close partner and adviser on the center's core planning team.

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*Authentically partnering with young people is a newer approach in philanthropy. The effort to end youth homelessness is about relationships, mutual trust and continuous learning. We work in this new way to achieve results our community has never seen before, and the work is richer and more relevant because of the leadership of young people.*

**ANGELA D'ORAZIO**  
Senior Program Officer for Housing  
Sisters of Charity Foundation of Cleveland

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Youth navigator Shajuana said that her collaboration with SOCF is the first time she's been able to partner with a foundation's staff in a way that feels productive.

"It wasn't until I started working for A Place 4 Me that I really saw how things could change for the better," she said. Having gone through the foster care system, she said her trust was eroded by the many unfulfilled promises she heard. "And now I'm working alongside people who recognize that something needs to happen, and they are doing the work to make it actually happen. It's not just talk."

**Lodge said that this example is one that SOCF Cleveland set from the beginning.**

# IF SOMETHING IS GOING TO GET DONE, WE CAN'T DO IT ALONE.

*The team at Sisters of Charity has been  
rolling up their sleeves and working alongside us  
since the very beginning.*

Thought leadership, communications support, grantwriting, building connections and trusting relationships,

**Sisters of Charity** has been persistent and really taught us what engaged philanthropy is.



**KATE LODGE**

Director of A Place 4 Me





STORY

# *Creating a Health Campus*

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OUR COMMITMENT  
& OUR LEARNING

In June 2021, the Sisters of Charity Foundation of Cleveland (SOCF), Sisters of Charity Health System, St. Vincent Charity Medical Center and Sisters of Charity of St. Augustine announced plans to co-create a new vision for the property owned by the Sisters of Charity at East 22nd Street in Cleveland's Central neighborhood.



**The goal is to provide care for the whole person by bringing new services to the community that address the social determinants of health.**

Together with many partners who live, learn, work and play in this neighborhood, SOCF Cleveland has embarked on a journey to transform Sisters of Charity's East 22nd Street Campus into the St. Vincent Charity Health Campus. This vibrant hub will align health care and services that address the social determinants of health while building on the important community outreach St. Vincent Charity Medical Center has provided for more than a century.

This Health Campus will be a place of connection, healing and spirituality, co-created with and by Central and the larger Cleveland community to holistically serve and empower all people along their journey of life.



*The main focus of the Health Campus is to support, sustain and build community for all of our neighbors and stakeholders. The members of this project have continued the long-standing commitment of the Sisters of Charity Foundation of Cleveland to engage, listen, act and impact. We know that it is imperative to listen to the community in order to serve the community.*

**ROBYN GORDON**

Board Chair, St. Vincent Charity Health Campus

From the start of the project, community engagement has been a foundational basis for the campus vision. For more than a year, we have purposefully engaged diverse community partners, families and residents to provide services that meet the spiritual, physical, social and emotional needs of the community today. Together with the Sisters of Charity of St. Augustine, Sisters of Charity Health System and its ministries, and St. Vincent Charity Medical Center, SOCF Cleveland worked alongside MASS Design Group on this important planning work.

Beginning in early 2021, Richaun Bunton, managing director of the Cleveland Central Promise Neighborhood, leveraged relationships and neighborhood insights to bring residents, organizations, community leaders and other stakeholders into conversation about the needs of Central and greater Cleveland. These include social service organizations, primary care providers, youth development organizations, food security organizations and champions, community gardeners, workforce development organizations, higher education leaders, foundation leaders, real estate developers, public libraries, artists, cultivators and public officials.

**Bunton pointed out that many members of the community carry deep mistrust in institutions, and an authentic engagement process helps create accountability and trust.**

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*When we ask community members, leaders, residents, families and many others to join in the co-creation of the Health Campus it allows us to re-establish and strengthen a relationship between an institution and those who have felt used and unheard by other institutions. I knew we had to be held accountable for our part of the relationship and honor their voices, hear about their previous experiences and rely on their wisdom and expertise throughout the process.*

**RICHAUN BUNTON**

Managing Director, Cleveland Central Promise Neighborhood

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## 2021 ENGAGEMENT ACTIVITIES



## JULY 2021

MASS Design Group visited Cleveland to conduct an immersion week to explore and meet the community in their environment. Through a multimodal exploration, the team walked, biked, bussed, drove and played alongside the community to find out more about what makes their neighborhood special.

## AUGUST–SEPTEMBER 2021

A series of in-person workshops, virtual focus groups, and interviews were held around the topic of health care access, experiences and support systems, with a specific emphasis on behavioral health. We also hosted a booth at Fresh Fest where we ran activities and had conversations with residents about food access and culture and the various ways that food impacts overall health and well-being.

## SEPTEMBER–OCTOBER 2021

We continued facilitating a wide array of focus groups and discussions with partners and community members. Topics included early childhood development, education, housing, workforce development, transportation and arts & culture.

## INTO 2022

With those conversations establishing a foundation of ideas, SOCF and MASS developed a scorecard to prioritize the ideas emerging from the engagements. Into 2022, Bunton and her team rolled out scorecards across the community to gather feedback, while subcommittees took deeper looks into potential service areas, especially focused on safety, parent and family support, education, food security and more.

### WHEN WE SPEAK DIRECTLY WITH THE COMMUNITY, WHAT DO WE LEARN?

Many of these conversations raised ongoing struggles with community trauma, especially as it comes from violence. Community members have a desire to create safe spaces that evoke beauty and remembrance.

Community engagement is iterative and an ongoing partnership. It is the intention of this project to continue to engage with the community regarding emerging ideas, themes, pilots and opportunities, and get ongoing feedback and input to continue to shape this Health Campus.

*The greatest value in hearing from the community continues to be their ingenuity. The passion that they have for seeing Central return to its roots of community trust, vibrancy and well-being is inspiring.*

#### **RICHAUN BUNTON**

Managing Director, Cleveland Central Promise Neighborhood

“The significant effort made to reach, discuss and collect feedback from community stakeholders at all levels using multiple venues and processes has been inspiring,” said Robyn Gordon, board chair of the Health Campus. “When you step back and consider the amount of input, the quality of the interaction and the depth of the insights gathered from a very diverse group, ‘impressive’ is an understatement.”

# 1

Our community engagement efforts will at all times represent the mission and values of the Sisters of Charity of St. Augustine: manifesting love, truth and justice for the persons we serve and with whom we work; and by promoting the advancement and application of new knowledge, which will promote health and quality of life.



# 2

We will approach our community engagement efforts with an open mind and share our research, concepts and visions respectfully, understanding that the **community's needs and interests come first.**



# 3

We will listen authentically to all whom we engage, help build capacity within our community and ensure that our community feels **valued and empowered** to cocreate solutions that address the needs identified by our community.

## HEALTH CAMPUS COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT GUIDING PRINCIPLES





**4** We will actively and deliberately seek out those who may be underrepresented in our community and who have been subjected to systemic racism and its impacts on their well-being.



**5** We will seek out local leaders who are representative of the community that we serve to help **conduct outreach and build trust.**



**6** We will strive to be **culturally sensitive** and be aware that our unconscious biases may impact our outreach efforts.



**7** We believe the best community engagement is a **two-way conversation.** We commit to reporting back to our community and providing additional opportunities for feedback.





STORY

# *Collaboration with Catholic Sisters*

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PAST, PRESENT  
& FUTURE

**With a more than 40-year history of supporting sisters through the work of the Saint Ann Foundation, SOCF Cleveland is investing in building connections among sisters in a variety of ways, including through congregational collaboration and mission formation among lay professionals and young adults.**



As sister congregations and ministries change, we are committed to finding new approaches to carrying forward gospel-inspired service through innovative approaches in the model of the Sisters of Charity of St. Augustine, whose mission we are privileged to advance.

*This program area continues to evolve, but its goal remains: To support Catholic sisters and their ministries in Northeast Ohio to meet the needs of God's most vulnerable people.*

**Read on to see the fruitful potential of collaboration through our past and into the future.**

#### **THEN: COLLABORATION AMONG CONGREGATIONS**

Across Northeast Ohio, Catholic sister ministries have provided critical service for decades. Sisters and their ministries continue to respond to the needs of the community. However, as sisters age and their numbers decline they have embraced collaboration both across congregations and with lay partners. Over the last 25 years, SOCF Cleveland has worked alongside congregations to build partnerships and maximize available resources to meet the needs of the times.

Inspired by the collaborative example set by Regina Health Center, which brought together congregations across the region to create a long-term care home for aging religious, SOCF Cleveland launched the **Collaboration for Ministry Initiative (CMI)** in 2002. In Cleveland, a series of CMI conferences and workshops prompted sisters from different congregations to better recognize diverse needs and collaboratively launch new ministries, including The Collaborative to End Human Trafficking and Collinwood Neighborhood Catholic Ministries. CMI demonstrated the sustaining power of collaboration among congregations, and it opened doors to discussion about how to develop a new generation of ministry leadership.

## NOW: CONNECTING WITH MISSION-MINDED YOUNG LEADERS

Through focus groups and conversation, SOCF Cleveland uncovered a particular opportunity to connect with the lay community, especially young adults, who felt called to serve in leadership roles in ministries that emphasized social justice and spirituality. Following the success of intercongregational collaboration in CMI, SOCF Cleveland built on its model by creating connections between Catholic sisters and these young adults. This opportunity for intergenerational collaboration and knowledge-sharing launched in 2016, called the Generative Spirit initiative.

Together with support from the **Conrad N. Hilton Foundation**, SOCF Cleveland launched Generative Spirit in 2016. The initiative is focused on forming the next generation of lay people who understand and follow the model of Catholic sisters to become leaders in service and ministry for our cities, country and the world.

Building relationships with the next generation is a capacity—just like collaboration—and requires an openness to learn new skills, share knowledge and practice, through mentorship, internships, and dialogue. Women religious do this informally, but a more concerted effort is required, particularly to overcome challenges related to differences in age, ethnic diversity, and the social and economic realities of today.

Generative Spirit programming seeks to create more opportunities to engage young adults outside of traditional Catholic networks. In this way, Generative Spirit began to create a community of college students, young adults in ministry and lay nonprofit professionals to work in partnership with sisters.



*The Generative Spirit initiative launched several collaborative programs, including two cohorts of the Ministry Leadership Program, which paired young adult employees at sister-sponsored schools or mission-centered organizations with sister companions. Additionally, the Generative Spirit grant opportunity awarded more than 20 grants to support new partners who share the goals of Generative Spirit.*

We learned through Generative Spirit conversations and questions that “gospel-inspired service” is highly valued among lay people in ministry, and sisters have modeled this work over generations.

We must now consider how to support lay people and organizations to sustainably carry forward this service model, without losing the history and context of how sisters have historically answered the call.



**NEXT: PRESERVING THE PAST TO INFORM THE FUTURE**

As the number of sisters in Northeast Ohio and the United States decline, there is a need to keep the mission, charism and history of sisters alive in our communities. As congregations shrink in size, they are struggling to balance needs of aging and fewer members with other congregational issues, including managing and planning for the preservation of their archives. Interviews of 15 congregations in Ohio, Pennsylvania and Kentucky found that:

- 80 percent of congregations have less than 100 members
- 33 percent have archives in jeopardy due to lack of storage space or too few members to manage them
- 20 percent have professional archivists

Congregations need collaborative solutions to ensure their history is not lost and that their mission and charisms are passed on to future generations. The archives of women religious have been carefully managed throughout decades as repositories of rich resources, which provide historical context to their past service while also helping to inform future works. Given the rapid aging of congregations, there is an urgency to begin a process to plan for a collaborative archives and heritage space; otherwise, we risk losing these valuable sources of history and legacy.

Through 2021, SOCF facilitated connections and dialogue to establish the **Women Religious Archives Collaborative**. The collaborative will include a physical space that will serve as a permanent repository for the archives of women religious in Northeast Ohio and surrounding regions, as well as a dynamic space open to the public for research and programming. Currently, invitations to join the collaborative space have been made to congregations in Ohio, Pennsylvania and Kentucky, but there is not a geographic requirement. Congregations are welcome to participate based on their unique needs. Some may need this space to house their total collection; others may already have permanently housed collections or plans toward that end but could contribute or loan pieces of their collection to demonstrate their contributions in ministry and service.

“The Sisters of Charity Foundation of Cleveland has provided remarkable support to sister-led projects and believes in supporting initiatives that are mission-driven and aim to serve individuals who have been marginalized,” said Sr. Susan Durkin, OSU, executive director of the Women Religious Archives Collaborative. “This collaborative will provide a space for education and research so future generations will learn how to create ministries to serve the needs in their time.”

*As we continue to uplift the mission of Catholic sisters and their ministries, we must preserve and recognize the history that has brought us to this point. There will always be a hunger to serve others among both lay and religious populations, and this archives collaborative ensures that we can continue learning from the model of the sisters long into the future.*

**MARGARET EIGSTI**

Senior Program Officer, Catholic Sisters  
Sisters of Charity Foundation of Cleveland

This joint undertaking will honor the past accomplishments of women religious while also inspiring future generations to think, dream and serve in response to the needs and challenges of their time. The center will be one of many linked together under a “virtual roof” as part of a network across the United States with links to colleges, universities, libraries and museums.



STORY

# *Residents in Power*

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CREATING FOOD  
JUSTICE AND DIGITAL  
EQUITY IN  
CENTRAL-KINSMAN

**Individuals and families who live in the Central-Kinsman neighborhoods are hungry for justice and transformation,** and SOCF Cleveland is proud to support movements that move residents to the head of the table.



## EXPANDING FOOD ACCESS

Food insecurity is an issue that impacts many Cuyahoga County residents. The problem is even more acute in the **Central and Kinsman** neighborhoods of Cleveland. On a county level, social service agencies noted that food access, insufficiency, daily hunger, and healthy food options are issues that many residents are grappling with. In the Cuyahoga County Community Health Needs Assessment conducted in 2019, 18.9 percent of surveyed Cuyahoga County adults worried about whether their food would run out before they had money to buy more. Also, 16.2 percent of Cuyahoga County adults reported running out of food and not having money to buy more.

Since 1980, Environmental Health Watch (EHW) has engaged and convened concerned citizens and representatives regarding evolving environmental justice issues, including many of the social determinants of health, like food access. According to Kimberly Foreman, executive director of EHW, there is consensus among core partners that black people have lost much of the control over their financial and economic lives; wealth has diminished, and black ownership has diminished.

*Holistic neighborhood change will not be achieved without addressing a diversity of issues like lack of access to health care, quality education and nutrition. These communities are increasingly marginalized to the point that they are not able to participate in or benefit from the economic landscape of the city.*

**ADRIENNE MUNDORF**

**Vice President, Programs and Strategy**

Sisters of Charity Foundation of Cleveland



**These disparities are exacerbated by COVID-19 and deeply rooted in structural racism, reinforcing inequity across our community.**

To address some of these feelings in the Central neighborhood, EHW has partnered with FARE (Food Access Raises Everyone) to work directly with community residents affected by the social determinants of health, including food insecurity, healthy food access and health promotion.

These organizations center the voices and expertise of the main community stakeholders: residents.



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*In 2021, FARE and EHW continued work to connect partners and community members in Central-Kinsman who are passionate about their community and have a desire to create new opportunities for a better quality of life.*

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This gave space and trust to resident leaders, who established the Central-Kinsman Community Collective and the Central-Kinsman Food Cooperative Steering Committee.

As residents grow their capacity and stakes in neighborhood change, they provide for both economic and food needs, while also expanding market access for small-scale local farmers and producers of color. This work is focused on economic power, teaching skills of self-sufficiency and providing the tools necessary for residents to co-create the community they envision. We see this across the communities in which we invest: residents stay engaged and involved for much longer when they recognize their own power, community events like Fresh Fest keep growing (with 10,000 annual attendees targeted for the next three years), and over \$250,000 in national funding has been awarded for the food cooperative planning over the last three years.

Resident-led work and community engagement is an iterative, long-term process, yet one that will lead to an increased representation of people of color and leadership in the local food movement, a reduction in health disparities and an increase in community access to healthy food in Cleveland.

**Visit the links below to learn more:**

[THEFAREPROJECT.ORG](https://thefareproject.org)

[EHW.ORG](https://ehw.org)

## CONNECTING NORTHEAST OHIO ACROSS THE DIGITAL DIVIDE

The advent of the digital age created tremendous opportunity, but just as we've seen with other social determinants of health, individuals and families in marginalized communities are often denied access to the most basic programs and services. The digital divide deepens marginalization and disenfranchisement of the poorer residents of a community, primarily impacts people of color and is a further obstacle to citizens' full participation in society.

Disparities in internet access have been an issue for decades, but COVID revealed the depth of the systematic deprivation of much of inner-city Cleveland's access to information technology. In 2021, partners at Neighborhood Connections, Cleveland Central Promise Neighborhood, Cleveland Owns and Shine Your Light On the World Collective proposed ConnectedNEO, an initiative to achieve digital justice in Cleveland.

Through ConnectedNEO's partnership with SOCF Cleveland and Cleveland Central Promise, the organization put forward a plan to use mesh networking technology to build a community-owned wireless internet service provider in the Central neighborhood, with opportunities for shared, community-based ownership of the network.

"Nothing truly changes while folks are beholden to companies' whims," said Adam King, digital justice advocate and leader at ConnectedNEO. "ConnectedNEO asserts that flipping the traditional model on its head provides better outcomes for the users, the neighborhood and the company doing the work, because the folks traditionally ignored are in a position to demand what they deserve and need."

The need in Central is monumental: The absence of high-speed broadband service availability in the neighborhood prevents residents from effective remote learning, applying for jobs or filing for unemployment, participating in telehealth, registering to vote and participating as informed citizens.

Because of this, Central is the pilot neighborhood for this project. ConnectedNEO received seed grant support from SOCF Cleveland, and the foundation is helping to leverage resources and forge partnerships to ensure the cooperative-ownership model might be tested and evaluated for sustainability and potential as a community wealth-building strategy.



*Sisters of Charity was the very first organization to believe in what we're doing. In an ecosystem that's not friendly to new ideas, especially those looking to shift paradigms, they helped legitimize the work.*

### ADAM KING

Digital Justice Advocate and Leader at ConnectedNEO

**ConnectedNEO** will provide residents in the Central neighborhood with the critical tools of economic development through universal, equitable access to high-speed broadband internet, whether in their homes or in the community, and the opportunity for resident and worker ownership.

Visit the link below to learn more:

[CONNECTEDNEO.COM](https://CONNECTEDNEO.COM)





## SECTION II

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# LIVED EXPERTISE *in* GRANTMAKING PROCESSES

*While lived expertise has been an important part of strategy development at Sisters of Charity Foundation of Cleveland, we are also looking toward more accessible, transparent practices in our responsive grantmaking process.*

Health Equity Program Officer Joseph Black is leading the conversation and building the model for community members to review grants, make presentations and weigh in on what truly matters in our neighborhoods.



STORY

# *Moving Beyond Feedback*

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BRINGING COMMUNITY  
MEMBERS  
INTO GRANTMAKING

**In 2021, the foundation created a new program area focused on health equity and tapped longtime Promise Neighborhood engagement manager Joseph Black to be program officer.**

Black's connections in the Central community were essential to the new program area, which intends to involve Central residents as partners in SOCF's grantmaking process.



**The Good Samaritan Grants Program**, SOCF Cleveland's responsive grant program for basic needs, served as a launch pad for community involvement in grant review.

Initiated in 1996, the Good Samaritan Grants Program supports nonprofit organizations for which a modest grant would make a difference in continuing to provide necessary and immediate goods and services to individuals living in poverty. As the pandemic persisted, we saw the need for basic-needs support grow and narrowed the focus of the Good Samaritan program to prioritize organizations within the Central community. In April 2020, the foundation established a Fast Response Team of board members to review grant applications on a weekly basis to ensure resources were rapidly distributed to the community.

*When it comes to providing essential resources, trying to be both rapid and responsive requires ground-level voices. The Promise Ambassador program helped connect me to individuals who were deeply involved in the community and could help us better understand the needs and priorities of residents.*

**JOSEPH BLACK**

**Program Officer, Health Equity**

Sisters of Charity Foundation of Cleveland

Black set out to establish the first-ever Community Response Team at SOCF. Three Promise ambassadors, two of whom already gained some grant writing and review experience through Neighborhood Connections, were invited to review Good Samaritan applications and provide feedback to help SOCF's board make more informed funding decisions.

The Community Response Team reads and ranks applications and submits recommendations to the Fast Response Team, who make a final decision. Community Response Team members develop experience in sharing presentations, reviewing grants—and in turn, understanding different and better ways to write applications—and collaborating with leaders and strategic thinkers from across greater Cleveland.

For the board, the Community Response Team provided significant insight on how to prioritize the needs of Central and which organizations are doing work that the community values. Their recommendations are weighed heavily, especially in circumstances of comparable applications.

"It has been enlightening to collaborate with the Community Response Team in the grantmaking process," said Woodrow Whitlow, Jr., Ph.D, SOCF Cleveland board chair. "The team members have the most knowledge about the needs of community and provide valuable advice on those grants that will have the greatest impact. Their insights and influence have made the foundation's grantmaking a much more effective tool in addressing the needs of those we serve."

Before the Community Response Team, SOCF staff reviewed Good Samaritan submissions and considered funding needs based on quantitative evidence like reports and evaluations, which are important factors but don't always tell an entire story. With the Community Response Team in place, residents can share their perspective of organizations and services they witness in the neighborhood. This builds trust and accountability among the foundation and its neighbors in a meaningful new way.



## COMMUNITY RESPONSE IN ACTION

In the Central neighborhood, Friendly Inn Settlement House has been a community hub since the mid-19th century. It houses childcare, neighborhood services, a recreation center, computer lab, meal programs and more. Over the last several years, SOCF Cleveland has supported Friendly Inn only through discretionary funding for annual activities like the Back to School Rally. In 2021, a member of the Community Response Team connected with Friendly Inn's executive director and encouraged her to apply for the Good Samaritan grant. SOCF Cleveland awarded Friendly Inn funds to support its food pantry, which has grown exponentially in service since the start of the pandemic.

Though established in part to respond to COVID-related needs, the Community Response Team will be a fixture of the Good Samaritan Grant Program into the future. Black has outlined succession planning for resident involvement, with terms of service and opportunities for new participants. Black selected the first members of the team based on his deep connections in Central, and he hopes that participants will continue to nominate peers and partners to serve in the years ahead.

In fact, the Community Response Team served as a pilot of sorts for resident involvement in grantmaking across the entire health equity program area. In 2022, Black will propose a **Resident Advisory Committee** to operate much in the same way for strategic grants as the Community Response Team does for responsive grants. Black said that between these teams, there will be anywhere from 10 to 15 residents informing and influencing grantmaking decisions within the health equity program area at any given time.

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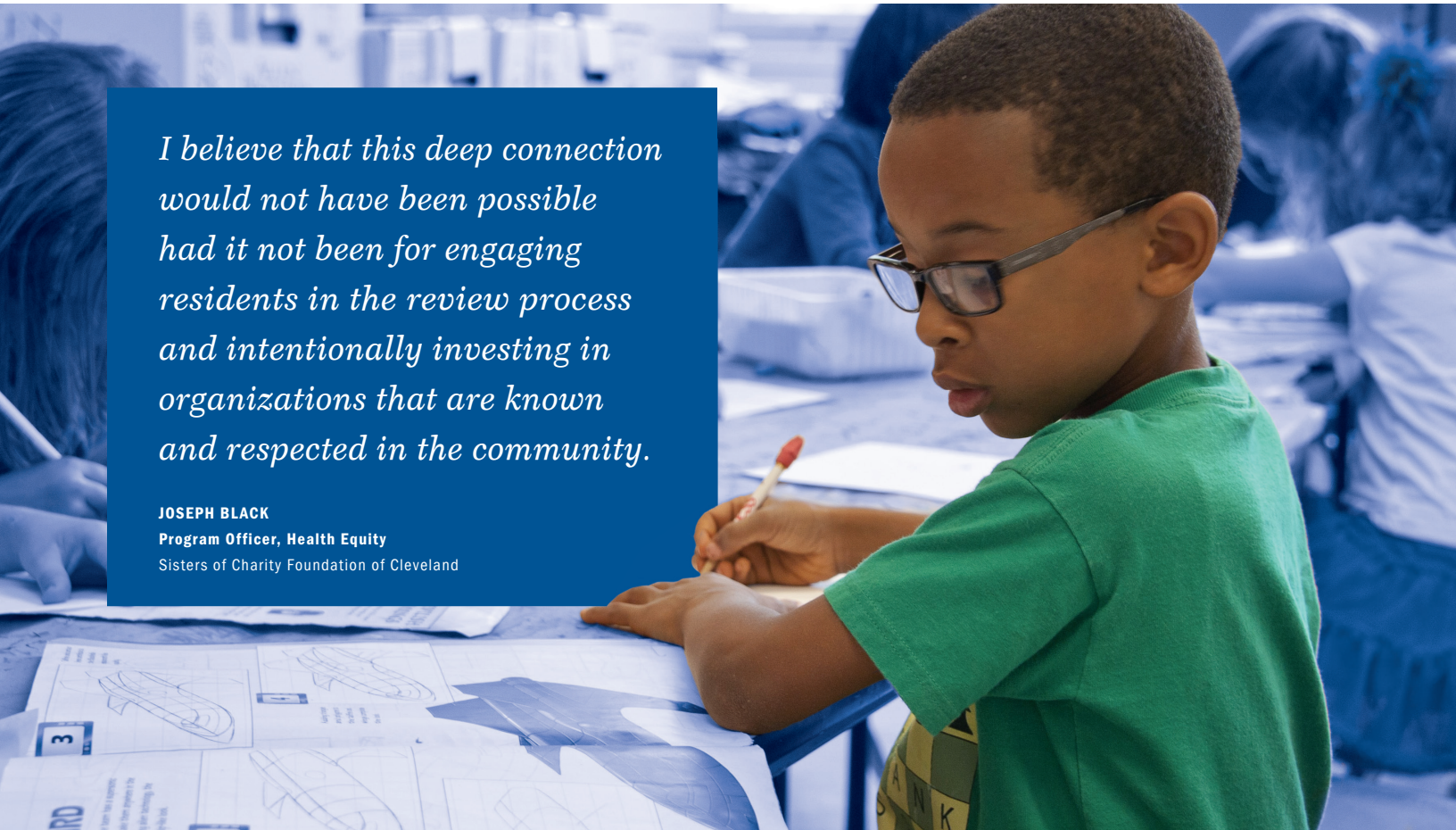
*To be effective partners in the community, we need to solidify trust. While the needs are vastly complicated, the Community Response Team has been an invaluable first step in connecting with our community in a deeper, authentic way.*

**JOSEPH BLACK**

**Program Officer, Health Equity**

Sisters of Charity Foundation of Cleveland

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*I believe that this deep connection would not have been possible had it not been for engaging residents in the review process and intentionally investing in organizations that are known and respected in the community.*

**JOSEPH BLACK**

**Program Officer, Health Equity**

Sisters of Charity Foundation of Cleveland

I VALUE THE KNOWLEDGE  
GAINED BY BEING PART  
OF THE SISTERS OF CHARITY  
FOUNDATION FAMILY.

*Its focus on ensuring an equitable and inclusive  
community resonates with me.*

I quickly learned that the **leaders and staff are passionate** about the work they do, which contributes to my joy in serving.



**DEBRA GREEN**

**Medical Mutual of Ohio (retired)**

Board member, Sisters of Charity Foundation of Cleveland





## SECTION III

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# LIVED EXPERTISE *in* LEARNING

*As a strategic grantmaker, Sisters of Charity Foundation of Cleveland values the practice of learning and evaluation in its program areas.*

We grow by asking questions: How are grantees using resources? How is the landscape of a program area changing, and how should we respond? Are we directing resources to get the best outcomes? Are we seeking unreasonable outcomes? Are we asking the right questions to drive the change we want to see? As we recognize the complexity and layers in the work of our grantees, we have begun to see the importance of inviting those with lived expertise to help devise our evaluation practices.



STORY

# *Asking the Right Questions*

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EQUITY AND  
PARTNERSHIP IN  
EVALUATION

In 2021, SOCF Cleveland worked to shift our knowledge, evaluation and learning practices to be in service of equity and better reflect the context of the communities we aim to uplift.

Christine Baker, Ph.D, the foundation's senior director of evaluation and learning, sought to embrace a more complex understanding of how these efforts furthered our value of justice and supported our mission. By advancing the **Equitable Evaluation Framework™**, we committed to aligning our evaluation practices with the structural conditions and context shaping the daily experiences of the populations we aim to serve.

"Historically at foundations, program staff or leadership define what success looks like, whether it's who is making the 'best' use of foundation resources or who is making choices that align with that foundation's values, as examples," Baker said. "This perpetuates the power dynamic between funder and grantee, and often doesn't account for patterns of oppression and systemic discrimination."

*We do our best work when we are among community leaders, those families, young people or Catholic sisters we seek to support.*

**We hear their questions, concerns and desires**, and we realized they don't always match the approaches we used, the data we collected or the results we assumed we would find.

Through critical conversations and learning about how the EEF™ can be integrated into our practices, **three entry points have surfaced:**

- *Our evaluative work must account for the cultural contexts and structural conditions that surround our interventions, initiatives and partnerships.*
- *We can only define success when we define it with those affected.*
- *We use approaches and methods that result in different forms of knowledge.*



#### **FINDING SUCCESS IN FAMILY PARTNERS**

Family Partners is an initiative that utilizes a network of experts in early childhood development, family health and social connections to build relationships with families in Cleveland's Central neighborhood, affirm their strengths and areas for growth, and help them build the support systems necessary for positive, stable outcomes for children and caregivers alike. Several partners comprise the initiative, and each has specific roles related to education of children and caregivers, as well as behavioral health and wellness outcomes. A key element of the Family Partners model is to incorporate resident and family voices into the growth of the program.

**In 2019, ahead of the Family Partners launch, staff developed the Family Partners evaluation plan using evidence-based indicators, outcomes and data collection tools aligned with the research-informed Protective Factors framework.**

When Ohio went into COVID-19 lockdown in March 2020, the program staff changed the program delivery model, canceling many in-person activities and shifting to virtual home-visits and therapy sessions. Richaun Bunton, managing director, Cleveland Central Promise Neighborhood, led the development of a Family Advisory Council to ensure family and caregiver voices could continue to inform program adjustments. The staff and families adjusted to a different program experience quickly, but the effects were significant.



The pandemic laid bare the impact of historical and structural racism on living and working conditions, stress and access to health care for communities of color. These disparities affected the Central Neighborhood and the families in the program, all of whom are black or brown. Through the Family Advisory Council, parents and caregivers emerged as community leaders even amid unprecedented neighborhood strife. Their leadership changed SOCF's thinking on how to measure many of the Family Partners outcomes.

For example, in terms of child academics, success was previously defined solely by scores on state-mandated assessments in math, reading, social-emotional and non-cognitive development. However, families recognized that they had better control over the educational factors in the home rather than individual academic outcomes.

**Instead of only looking to assessment scores, families on the advisory council agreed that they defined success as:**

- *Working hard*
- *Completing tasks or work they start*
- *They (and their children) feel they have well-established networks of resources and support.*

**We now use qualitative data from caregivers describing these factors along with assessment scores and results to more holistically measure child academic growth.**

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*Families shared that the realities of meeting their daily basic needs during the ongoing pandemic limited their capacity to engage in long-term program commitments.*

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This changed our perspective on how we should collectively provide educational, emotional and community resources. The family and community safety net must be strengthened before any educational shifts are possible. The partners are now working toward building an infrastructure for crisis management and resource distribution to ensure family needs are met.

Our original evaluation framework included an outcome measuring strengthened family relationships. Families indicated the programming shift from in-person to virtual, including a private Facebook page and virtual activities like family pizza-making nights and self-care workshops,

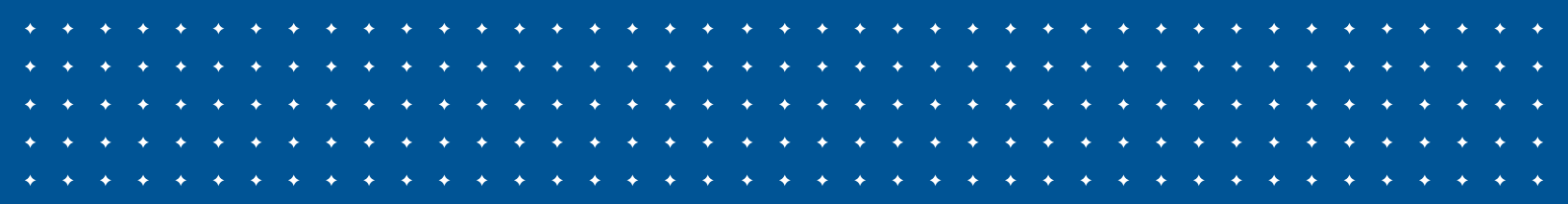
enabled them to continue to reach out to one another to share resources and offer support during a time of increased social isolation. Based on this, we chose to adapt the original staff-designed family relationship outcome to include measuring the benefit of peer-to-peer connections between program participants.

Over the three years of evaluating Family Partners, SOCF Cleveland has been able to shift thinking to respond to **needs we would not have recognized without the leadership and partnership of caregivers.** This creates deep connections and trusting relationships, which are essential to the well-being of each and every family.

*This program helped me become a better me, a better parent. This program has changed my life for the better.*

FAMILY ADVISORY COUNCIL MEMBER, FAMILY PARTNERS





*Since serving on the board I have developed  
greater insight into the multi-dimensional challenges  
facing the most vulnerable in our community.*

Meeting basic needs can be such a struggle. Yet these wonderful people often demonstrate herculean efforts to propel themselves and their families out of the cycle of poverty. The Sisters of Charity work very hard to lend guidance and a helping hand, which they have done in our community for over a century.



**KAREN KLEINHENZ**

**Principal and CEO, Kleinhenz and Associates**

Board Member, Sisters of Charity Foundation of Cleveland

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