



BUILDING BRIGHTER FUTURES

2025  **Chicago
Lights**
ANNUAL REPORT



OUR MISSION, VISION, AND HISTORY

OUR MISSION AND VISION

Chicago Lights builds brighter futures for Chicago's youth and adults through supportive relationships and life-changing programs.

We believe every person deserves access to the resources they need to overcome systemic barriers and achieve their ambitions.

Chicago Lights provides creative youth development and social services that help people build the skills they need to lead fulfilling lives. We partner with Chicago's youth and adults in mentoring, supportive services, academic enrichment, career development, and arts education.

OUR HISTORY

Chicago Lights grew from Fourth Presbyterian Church's commitment to social justice and compassionate service. In 1991, that commitment gave rise to a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization, which in 2004 was renamed Chicago Lights and significantly expanded to bring together under one banner several programs that continue to partner with nearly 3,000 individuals each year. Today, Fourth Church continues to be a vital source of support for Chicago Lights, including providing volunteers and covering a majority of our overhead costs. Because of this partnership, our team of professional staff and dedicated volunteers can continue to build brighter futures for Chicago's youth and adults.

Thank you to the Fourth Church community for your faithful support of Chicago Lights and the hope it brings to our neighbors.



**Chicago
Lights**



**FOURTH
PRESBYTERIAN
CHURCH**
A Light in the City

CHICAGO LIGHTS | BUILDING BRIGHTER FUTURES.



2025 YEAR IN REVIEW



Justin Epps
Board President



Stacy Jackson
Executive Director

At Chicago Lights, we begin each year with hope and purpose. In 2025, we embraced a simple but powerful challenge: **expect the great.**

And great things happened.

At the **Social Service Center**, adults navigating housing instability and economic hardship found practical support, compassionate listening, and pathways toward greater stability. Over the course of the year, the SSC provided **more than 21,000 service interactions**, helping neighbors access clothing, food, case management, housing support, and vital resources.

Through **Tutoring and Summer Day**, young people received consistent academic guidance, mentorship, and joyful opportunities to learn and grow. In 2025, **every Chicago Lights Tutoring senior graduated from high school and was accepted to college.** This is a milestone that reflects years of steady encouragement, partnership, and belief in what young people can achieve.

And at the **Urban Farm**, a vibrant green space in the heart of the city, fresh food and community connection flourished together. This past year, the Farm harvested **more than 5,000 pounds of produce**, with the majority shared with neighbors through community distribution and the Social Service Center's food pantry.

While these programs serve different needs, they share a common purpose: **to meet people where they are and walk alongside them toward brighter futures.**

Looking ahead, we continue working toward an important next chapter—developing **permanent supportive housing** in partnership with Fourth Presbyterian Church and the Interfaith Housing Development Corporation. This vision reflects what Chicago Lights has always sought to do: listen carefully, respond thoughtfully, and grow alongside the needs of our city.

None of this work happens alone.

It is made possible by a dedicated staff. It is strengthened by volunteers who show up week after week. And it is sustained by a community of supporters that believes in the power of steady presence, opportunity, and hope.

Because of this community, Chicago Lights continues to be a place where neighbors are welcomed, relationships are built, and brighter futures take root.

Thank you for making this work possible. Together, we continue to **expect the great.**



PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS



"My experience with my tutor is good because he teaches me about stuff that I don't learn in school."



"The Social Service Center makes me feel great. I know that the people here really care and try to help the people who want help with their problems."

"[Urban] Farm does so many good things for people in need and they always put others first. It's important for me to be a part of the Farm because I feel like I'm a part of a team that's helping other people."



"I would absolutely recommend [SUMMER DAY]. My child, in their regular school, is not exposed to art, singing, dancing, peace, or an acting program. It was great to see my child excited to go to summer school."



SOCIAL SERVICE CENTER



The Chicago Lights Social Service Center provides essential resources and care for neighbors who are unhoused while supporting them as they take meaningful steps toward stability. Each day, participants have access to immediate-needs resources, which are provided with dignity and care.

Participants may engage in individualized case management. Short-term case management connects individuals to critical resources such as state IDs, birth certificates, and eyeglasses, items that are often important first steps toward rebuilding independence. Long-term case management supports progress toward housing, employment, and greater stability.

Through its partnership with Northwestern Medicine, the Social Service Center continues the afternoon Living Room program, offering a warm and welcoming space during Chicago's coldest months where participants can find connection, community, and a place of rest.

220  **INDIVIDUALS** were met where they were during **OUTREACH SERVICES** and received **561 SERVICES**.

1,752 **INDIVIDUALS** participated in SSC programming in 2025. **769** of those were **NEW PARTICIPANTS**.

1,481  **GOALS** were created during case management appointments. 92% of those goals were achieved.


971 

INDIVIDUALS WERE NOURISHED through **2,827 FOOD PANTRY APPOINTMENTS**.

More than **21,000**  **SERVICES** were provided. This is a 31% increase over 2024.

615 **INDIVIDUALS** stayed warm and created community in the Living Room.

 **1,760** **CASE MANAGEMENT APPOINTMENTS** served **561 INDIVIDUALS**.

 The **SOCIAL SERVICE CENTER** extends gratitude to the 375 individuals and corporate groups that volunteered with us in 2025. Volunteers worked alongside staff in the food pantry and Share Shop, offered community outreach, processed donations, and assisted with unloading food trucks.



TUTORING AND SUMMER DAY



The young people of Chicago Lights Tutoring and Summer Day bring curiosity, creativity, and tremendous potential with them to these programs. Yet many attend schools that have experienced decades of systemic disinvestment, limiting access to the academic support and resources needed to fully nurture their abilities. Research shows that high-quality out-of-school-time programs that combine mentoring, academic support, and enrichment activities help close persistent achievement gaps between students from families with low incomes and their more resourced peers.

Chicago Lights responds by providing consistent relationships, structured learning, and opportunities that support the development of the whole child. Through Tutoring and Summer Day, students strengthen academic skills while building resilience, confidence, and strong

social connections. Social and emotional learning is central to both programs through Peace Club, where students practice mindfulness, meditation, and restorative justice.

This year marked the 44th summer of Summer Day. Students explored African Empires while reinforcing

reading and math through activity-based learning, engaging in arts and enrichment classes, participating in career exploration and coding workshops, and enjoying weekly field trips across Chicago—experiences that broaden their horizons and help them imagine new possibilities for their futures.

Each TUTORING student received an average of

36 HOURS of academic support and

24 HOURS of enrichment activities, together totaling nearly

9,000 HOURS of additional engaged learning outside of school.

Each SUMMER DAY student received an average of

45 HOURS of academic support and

67 HOURS of arts and enrichment programming— together totaling more than

12,900 HOURS of engaged learning across the program.

145 STUDENTS in grades 1-12 were matched one-to-one with volunteer TUTOR/MENTORS. Pairs met weekly to support students' social & academic growth.

13 HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS completed the 8-month CAREER DEVELOPMENT program which included an 8-week, paid summer internship with a local business.

100%

of HIGH SCHOOL SENIORS graduated & were accepted into post-secondary institutions.

26 TUTORING STUDENTS received high school & college scholarships to support college and career success.

105 STUDENTS participated in SUMMER DAY.

78% OF STUDENTS learned how to meditate and be mindful at PEACE CLUB.

100% OF STUDENTS in SUMMER DAY maintained or increased their skills in language arts and math over the summer.



URBAN FARM



In the heart of the Near North community, the Chicago Lights Urban Farm serves as both a source of fresh food and a vibrant neighborhood gathering space. As many Chicagoans continue to face economic insecurity and food instability, the Farm helps ensure that neighbors have access to nutritious produce while also offering a welcoming green oasis in the city.

In 2025, the Urban Farm harvested more than 5,000 pounds of produce, distributing food through its farmstand and Market Voucher Program (MVP), which now reaches more than half of the Cabrini Green rowhouses. The Farm also continues to be a place

where young people learn, lead, and grow. Through programs such as Harvesting Futures and Farm Camp, youth gain hands-on experience planting, harvesting, maintaining the Farm, and building confidence and leadership skills.

Community connection is central to the Farm's work. Volunteers help sustain the space and deepen neighborhood relationships, while partnerships expand opportunities for learning and wellness. Cooking demonstrations brought neighbors together to learn new recipes and cooking techniques, and a grant from Whole Foods will allow these classes to expand in 2026.

157 

YOUTH ages 5-24 engaged in programming and field trips at the **URBAN FARM**.

176 **SOCIAL SERVICE CENTER PARTICIPANTS** received fresh Farm produce during their food pantry visits.

593 **FREE PRODUCE BAGS** were distributed to Cabrini rowhouse residents, volunteers, and youth program participants. **82 CABRINI RESIDENTS** received Thanksgiving food bags.

5,264 

POUNDS OF PRODUCE was grown on our $\frac{3}{4}$ -acre land, and more than 80% of that produce was distributed to community members with low incomes.



228 **VOLUNTEERS** supported the growth of the Urban Farm through **970 HOURS** of service.



129 **WELL-STOCKED BACKPACKS** were distributed to Cabrini youth.

25 **COMMUNITY RESIDENTS** grew their own garden on Urban Farm plots.



TOM PRENZNO: MAKING A LOCAL DIFFERENCE



"I'm amazed at how many pairs of pants the Social Service Center uses," says SSC donor and volunteer Tom Prenzno with a laugh. "They go through them like water."

This is true, Theresa Thornburg, director of the Social Service Center, confirms. Men's clothing in general, and pants in particular, are always in demand among those visiting the SSC Share Shop, and there are times when it is impossible to keep them on the shelves.

But those times have been fewer and farther between in the last few years, largely because of Tom Prenzno.

"For as long as I have worked at the SSC, Tom has mailed us in-kind donations—pants, underwear, backpacks, paper bags, the list goes on and on," Theresa says. And one of the best things about Tom? "He almost always says, 'What do you need?' or, 'What is the greatest need?'" she says. "It is such a wonderful thing when someone asks, and I can translate frequent participant requests into tangible results. Basically, thanks to Tom we have had sweatpants available and on our shelves for the past three months."

A retired project manager for GE Healthcare, Tom says he learned about the work of Chicago Lights when he joined Fourth Church in 2018, and he did a little research and liked what he found. "I discovered that when Chicago Lights gets donations, they clean them up and give them to people," he explains. "They're not

reselling them for money. My main goal when I give is to be locally focused and to give as close to the people in need as possible. That's the key thing that impressed me about Chicago Lights."

Tom likes to keep busy—taking adult education classes at Northwestern, going to the theater, doing some glasswork, among other things—and he says he had long considered becoming a volunteer as well as a donor to Chicago Lights. But he was focused on caring for his wife until her passing in April 2025. "After she died, I had more time on my hands, and I think around June or July I started volunteering twice a month," he says. "That's when I really came to appreciate what Theresa and her team do, and I'm drawn to the Share Shop. It's a clothing store for people who need clothes." He says one of his favorite things is that "every month or so someone comes in and says they need a nicer outfit for a job interview. It feels good to facilitate someone getting ahead."

Now that he's a volunteer, Tom is also "making even more targeted donations," Theresa reports. "He will volunteer on a Wednesday, and then later that night send me an email along the lines of, 'I can't sleep knowing the pants shelves are empty. New jeans should arrive tomorrow from Amazon.'"

Wherever he lands for a given volunteering shift, though, Tom is a problem solver. In December he worked in the SSC's food pantry one day when they had mostly just canned goods in stock. "Several people came in and wouldn't take the food because they had no can openers," he recalls. "So, I went home and bought a case of can openers."

Theresa says Tom has also made monetary donations that allow her to purchase pants in bulk, as well as donating electronics that the SSC can then provide to participants moving into a home for the first time or who are doing remote job training and wouldn't have the needed equipment otherwise. "To have a donor like Tom in our corner is a gift to the program and its participants," she says.

And Tom says being involved with Chicago Lights is a gift to him as well. "It took me a while to understand that I was having an impact," he says. But once he started spending time at the SSC in person, "I was amazed at the depth of need. Chicago Lights is really doing God's work in taking care of our neighbors."



PLANTING A BRIGHTER FUTURE: CLAIRE YOUNG AND KIMLEY-HORN

Just a few years ago, Claire Young was a college student in Madison, Wisconsin, who managed to fit in 40 unpaid hours a week as co-director of Slow Food UW—a nonprofit dedicated to making quality, healthy food equitably available to the community—on top of her school workload. “I am passionate about food insecurity,” she explains.

In 2022, she graduated and moved to Chicago to work on the solar team at Kimley-Horn, a civil engineering and design firm. She enjoys her work there, but “when you go from forty hours of volunteering to forty hours of corporate America each week, it can be a bit draining,” she says. So, she was eager to get involved in something that would help her feel more balanced and ensure she was a meaningful part of her new community. A walk through her neighborhood one day took her by the Chicago Lights Urban Farm, and she was immediately intrigued. “It’s like the secret garden,” she says. “All of the produce is so pretty.”

She reached out to Deja Stout, director of the Urban Farm, and was soon volunteering there on Saturdays, weeding, harvesting, and prepping beds, as well as attending cookouts and community events. “When I moved to Chicago, I knew no one,” Claire says. “And when I walked in there, I felt like I knew Deja and Ryan [Stratton, farm manager] right away. They have great energy and make you feel welcome.”

As she settled in at Kimley-Horn, Claire got connected with their community service committee, which encourages employees to be involved local volunteers, and the Kimley-Horn Foundation, which allows Kimley-Horn employees to apply for grants for organizations they give their time to. “Kimley-Horn wants to support what their employees are passionate about,” Claire says. “Local organizations in particular—they love the Farm because it’s micro local and benefitting the community directly.”

Seeing an opportunity to multiply her impact in supporting the Farm, Claire set up a group volunteering day for Kimley-Horn employees—and that was so well-received that she did another one, and then another. Soon several employees were hooked and volunteering regularly as well. “The Farm is fun, and in the summer it’s a great place to get outside,” Claire says.

She also says many Kimley-Horn interns have reported their Farm volunteering day as the best part of their six months with the firm. “Technically it’s labor, but it’s things you don’t usually get to do in the city, so it’s fun to weed, which is crazy. A big group can really clean things up quickly,” she adds. “It’s like watching a sped-up video.” And with the Farm nestled in the heart of the Near North Side, “it’s a great way to experience Chicago while doing something that has real impact.”

Drawing on her nonprofit roots, Claire has also been strategic from the start. “I knew if there were more employees involved, the Farm would have a better chance of getting funds from the Kimley-Horn Foundation,” she explains.

And she was right. In addition to all the hands-on help, Claire’s efforts have gotten the Urban Farm a small grant a couple years in a row, and then in 2025, Kimley-Horn offered a \$20,000 grant, which with Claire’s assistance, the Urban Farm applied for and received.

“Claire really shows up for the Farm,” Deja says. “We are lucky to have her—and all of Kimley-Horn—as a partner and ally.”



A CHRISTMAS TRADITION OF GENEROSITY



With deep gratitude, we thank **Women at Fourth** for bringing the joy of Christmas to our Tutoring students year after year.

Your generosity, time, and care make this cherished tradition possible, reminding our students that they are surrounded by a community that believes in them.



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Bally's Chicago
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2025 FINANCIALS

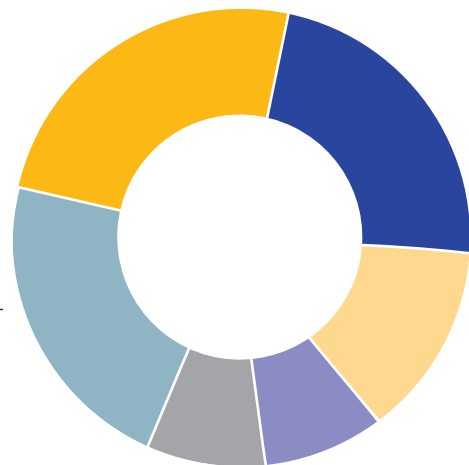
REVENUE

	Individual Contributions	\$1,338,752	48%
	Foundations/Corporations	\$569,074	21%
	Program Receipts	\$772,097	28%
	Draw from Invested Funds	\$96,643	3%
Total:		\$2,776,566	



DISBURSEMENTS

	Management and General	\$216,157	9%
	Fundraising	\$522,656	21%
	Tutoring	\$527,838	21%
	Summer Day	\$208,914	8%
	Social Service Center	\$563,243	23%
	Urban Farm	\$434,273	18%
Total:		\$2,473,081	



Net Surplus/(Deficit): \$303,485	
With Donor Restrictions:	\$725,176
Without Donor Restrictions	\$1,524,594
Total	\$2,249,770

Source: the Chicago Lights 2025 unaudited financial statement.
An audited statement is available after July 30, 2026.

SUPPORTERS

THANK YOU!

Chicago Lights is grateful for each and every supporter who made a donation in 2025.

With your generosity, our programs continue to partner with Chicago's youth and adults to build brighter futures.

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