



Dear friends,

We embarked on United Way of Southwestern Pennsylvania's Welcome Back Summer initiative in 2020 with an important mission: to provide our region's children with safe places to learn, grow and, of course, have fun. To give them space to experience. To build friendships. To be kids.

In the initiative's fourth summer, we went even further. We grew the program, funding 49 dynamic partner agencies across the five-county region, benefiting 9,016 children – more than double the number of children last year – who spent their summer in unique, innovative programs that furthered their education, and supported social and emotional learning.

Welcome Back Summer 2023 focused on making sure all children had enriching opportunities to learn and grow. Whether at camps in rural communities or those serving refugee and immigrant children or supporting young people with disabilities, the options for campers to be seen and heard while enjoying their summer were nearly endless.

We're excited to highlight how many teens found meaningful employment as camp counselors. At camps across southwestern Pennsylvania, 507 teens were employed as camp staffers. They gained leadership skills, balanced their responsibilities and made us proud. We also organized gatherings where small, community-based providers were able to network, engage in professional development and share ideas for making their programs even more enriching.

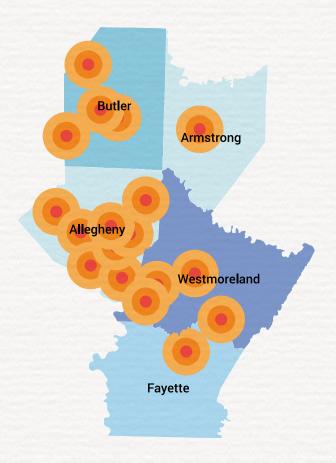
Thanks to the hard work of United Way's partners and support from generous funders, I can say without hesitation that this year's Welcome Back Summer was our best yet.

Please enjoy this brief peek into the joy, learning and connection that made this summer so special.

Bobbi Watt Geer, Ph.D. President and CEO

Born: Watt Heen

United Way of Southwestern Pennsylvania



WELCOME BACK SUMMER 2023

The need for safe, affordable summer programs, where kids could learn and have fun while their grownups went to work, was made glaringly apparent during the COVID-19 pandemic. Now, thanks to increased funding, Welcome Back Summer has grown into a program that makes space for providers to innovate and develop best practices that continue to transform the lives of children and their families. This year, United Way hosted a convening at summer's end, bringing dozens of providers together to connect and build community. They also shared ideas about hosting outstanding field trips, finding the best healthy and affordable food suppliers and creating camp activities to drive young imaginations and create a space for dialog. All of this was done while allowing grownups to go to work knowing their kids are safe, joyful and engaged.

Thanks to generous funders, led by United Way of Southwestern Pennsylvania and McElhattan Foundation, more than \$996,000 was raised to support dozens of agencies and thousands of children and families during Welcome Back Summer 2023.

Now, with the kids back in school using their new skills, the community is already looking forward to what next year will bring.

FUNDING



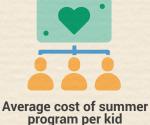
Total funding \$996,300



Programs 49

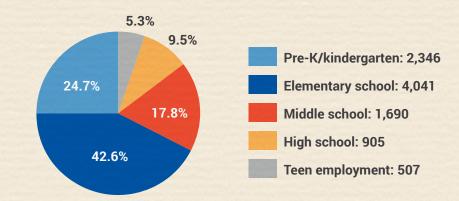


Kids 9,016

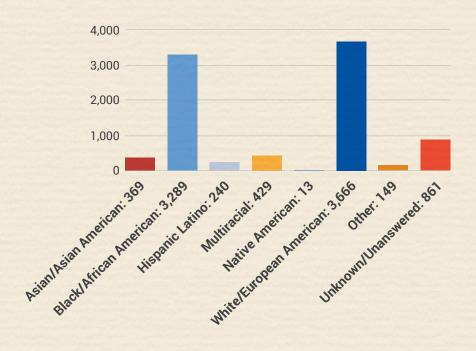


\$110

STUDENTS PARTICIPATING BY GRADE



STUDENTS PARTICIPATING BY ETHNICITY



SUMMER MAKES A BIG DIFFERENCE



"If this program did not exist, I would not be able to work to provide for my family. Having a safe and fun place for my children to go during the day so that I can work is very helpful, and a necessity."

- Karleigh Maide, parent



"Our program is dedicated to preparing youth for the challenges ahead by nurturing their talents and fostering personal growth. Together with passionate instructors and a supportive environment, we're committed to helping every participant unlock their full potential!"

- Jordan Allen Sr., camp counselor



"With United Way's funding, we've improved the nutritional quality of meals and snacks provided during the program. This directly impacts the children's overall health and well-being, helping them stay energized and focused throughout the day."

- Veronica Lozada, deputy director



"Although I'm in a position where I make above the poverty guidelines, I also have a tremendous amount of college debt. We live in an underserved community. The last thing I want is for my son to have easy access to the streets. This summer program was truly a blessing and I'm thankful for him to be given the opportunity."

- Dominique Thompson, parent



"These kids have opened my eyes to the students in my community and the needs that they have. It has made me more empathetic to their individual needs."

- Kim McClellan, camp staff



"This funding allowed us to have increased training for staff, more field trips and gave us the ability to provide youth with experiences that they otherwise would not have had."

- Sterling Stone, activity coordinator



"This program helped my disabled child stay on track, preparing her for what to expect at a job."

- Melissa McCrory, parent



"It has been phenomenal. As a result of United Way's funding, we have been able to bring in quality programming from experts in various fields of study."

- Jeffrey Nash, program director



"I'm a single mother, and this program enabled me to continue working to provide for my child, while giving him a stable life and opportunities for personal growth."

- Ashley Wright, parent



"I have learned how to guide children to problemsolve independently, learned how to assist campers in activities without overstepping, learned how to work alongside peers and have better communication skills from working as a team."

- Paris Brown, camp counselor



REFUGEE AND IMMIGRANT FOCUS South Hills Interfaith Movement

Created in 1968 by-no kidding-a priest, a rabbi and a minister, South Hills Interfaith Movement (SHIM) has been providing food, clothing and services to people in need in Pittsburgh's southern suburban neighborhoods ever since.

With teams of dedicated volunteers, donors and partners, SHIM works to reduce the devastating effects of poverty among the working poor, unemployed, families, single parents, senior citizens, women and the high concentration of refugee families in the South Hills.

According to the Pennsylvania State Refugee Program, 40% of refugees resettled in

Pennsylvania live in the South Hills. Many arrived with uncertain futures but thanks to agencies like SHIM, someone is there to help. From basic needs to financial wellness and family support to community building, SHIM is there every step of the way.

For 227 kids in grades 1-8, SHIM provides eight weeks of summer camp. Most campers live close enough to walk but others are dropped off by 9 a.m. and all grab something to eat before the morning meeting. Campers are then divided by grade and cycle through five activity stations that include various sports and academic activities.



With funding from United Way of Southwestern Pennsylvania's Welcome Back Summer initiative, SHIM provides these kids with experiences they wouldn't have otherwise, including field trips to the Pittsburgh Botanic Garden and demonstrations with the Carnegie Science Center. Teens from Upper St. Clair High School's BotsBurgh hosted a robotics workshop, the Allegheny County Health Department provided dental health services, the Whitehall Police Department visited to talk about community safety and much more.

After the day's activities, campers are served lunch by Baldwin United Methodist Church before camp ends at 1 p.m. While shorter than an average school day, this gives parents the valuable opportunity to take a morning shift or manage other responsibilities while knowing

their kids are safe. For campers, it's meaningful time spent with their peers and an opportunity to practice their English language skills and stay on track academically during the summer months.

"We are happy they're here where they are safe and exploring new interests," says Ashley Bajkowski, SHIM's After School and Summer Camp Director. "One of our kids was recently resettled and came to camp without knowing anyone. She was anxious and I was worried about her. By the end of the first week, she had a little crew of friends and they have been doing everything together. It's amazing to see their growth and connection."

If this summer is about finding community and connection, the kids at SHIM's Summer Camp are knocking it out of the park.

EMBRACING CHILDHOOD AT CASA SAN JOSÉ

REFUGEE AND IMMIGRANT FOCUS

Casa San José



"The families at Casa
San José are tied
together like a giant
net. We know each
other's struggles, so
our summer program is
really tailored to each
specific child's needs."

- Veronica Jenkins, deputy director of Community Programs

The echoes of laughter and music bounce off the walls of Casa San José as 30 kids surround a colorful mat for another game of Ninja, a one-toone version of flag football. As the children clap along to the beat, their friends in the center aren't just trying to grab the other's flag. They're building trust, gaining confidence and letting go of fear.

Coming from low-income, undocumented and often single-parent households, this time to be 'just kids' has become absolutely vital for the children at Campemento Sonrisa, Casa San José's summer program. Ninja is just one of many activities, like tending to the community garden, photography workshops and team building exercises, that the 7- to 11-year-olds experience five days a week. For the past month, the elementary school students have been creating elaborate art pieces inspired by community, family and dreams of the future.

Each week, new elements are added to the canvas as the campers learn and grow. Thanks to funding from United Way's Welcome Back Summer initiative, they have the art supplies to put their ideas on paper, healthy food for two meals a day and gas for the church vans that have taken

them to a new and exciting destination every Friday. The goal at Campamento Sonrisa is to send each child home tired, happy and calm and full of nutritious food. Because of United Way's dedication to helping kids build for success in school and life, that goal is accomplished every single day.





REFUGEE AND IMMIGRANT FOCUS **Bhutanese Community Association of Pittsburgh**

When summer began, the 36 kids in the Bhutanese Community Association of Pittsburgh (BCAP) Summer Program were strangers. Though, coming from immigrant and refugee families, they shared similar experiences, their different school districts and grade levels meant many had never met before. The kids, mostly from Brentwood and Baldwin, range from first to sixth graders. For a portion of the day, the group is broken up into three classrooms, each equipped with two teen counselors who are excited and ready to get the day's lesson plan under way. For the teens, volunteering at BCAP is not just an addition to their resume, but a chance to give back and be role models to the younger generations of Bhutanese kids.

Thanks to United Way's funding, BCAP was able to sign up extra counselors and campers, acquire supplies for their lesson plans and transport the students to an exciting field trip each week. After a summer full of art and STEAM projects, reading and math tutoring, and discussions about identity, the kids of BCAP gained best friends, a new appreciation for their community and pride in themselves.



"My hope is that this program instills a sense of pride in their community and allows the children to be more open with who they are."

- Katie Mirt, youth and families coordinator



CAREER READINESS FOCUS

Helping Ourselves Produce Excellence (HOPE) For Tomorrow, Inc.

Every morning at Helping Ourselves Produce Excellence for Tomorrow, Inc. (HOPE for Tomorrow) begins with an energizing group chant: "I'm alive, alert, awake and enthusiastic!" The chorus of voices consists of students in grades 1-8 and gets louder and louder as their teenage counselors lead them through a quick dance-off.

After everyone's blood is pumping and faces are smiling, Executive Director Keysha Gomez goes over the day's plan and addresses any questions. Groups split into categories – art, dance, sports, math/reading – each excited to return to the projects they left in progress the day before. For Keysha, this is a dream come true. For her campers, it's a safe space they know and love.

Born to a young, determined immigrant mother, Keysha learned the value of hard work and community early in life. When she became a mother, it was her daughter K'aijha who inspired HOPE For Tomorrow. "I saw the need with my own eyes," says Keysha.
"Here in the West End, we don't have a community center. There's nowhere for these kids to go so I decided I was the person who needed to create something for them. That's how HOPE for Tomorrow was born."

Today, K'aijha is in her 20s and, in addition to her own dance and entrepreneurial endeavors, works at HOPE alongside her mom. K'aijha's not the only young person dedicated to making HOPE the best it can be. Counselors, including DJ, Mya, Shaniya, Ky'lere and Amajah, are all employed through the Allegheny County and Partner4Work's Learn and Earn Summer Youth Employment program.

DJ, soon to turn 18, is mostly in charge of the sports group but moonlights in the arts group so he can work on his Eagle Scout project, a community mural. "I was 12 when I first came to HOPE and I have grown a lot here," he shares. "That's why I stayed as a camper and why I came back to work here. It helped me become a leader."



Ky'lere is leading an art tech session as Shaniya sets up a reading circle down the hall. Amajah, a senior at Howard University, gathers a group for dance and Mya preps for a math lesson. Since many of them are previous HOPE campers, they understand that keeping the kids moving and engaged is key to a successful day.

"The consistency we provide is also really important," Keysha explains. "Many of these students are in our after-school program and look up to the counselors – they're the cool older kids."

With support from United Way of Southwestern Pennsylvania's Welcome Back Summer initiative, HOPE was able to employ administrative help for the first time and provide additional resources like field trips and activities.

By maintaining relationships with kids, their families and the community, HOPE for Tomorrow is building roots throughout the West End and inspiring dozens of young people to think about their bright futures.





CAREER READINESS FOCUS Urban Impact Foundation

At Urban Impact Foundation's Summer Day Camp, young adult counselors run the show. It takes a village to guide 160 campers in grades one to six during eight weeks of programming, so Urban Impact employs 42 interns and 20 high school staff members for teaching, tutoring and administrative positions. Many staffers attended Summer Day Camp as children and are glad to give back now. Counselors like Cocoa and Dre, who have been with Urban Impact for more than a decade, have enjoyed various extracurricular activities including Urban Impact's Options program, which provides career-readiness training

and helps students plan for the transition to life after high school. With United Way funding, Urban Impact is paying counselors and providing free career-readiness programming, scholarships and tutoring for teens, all of which are key components for building successful lives and careers. The loving and family-like environment helps these young adults feel supported as they take the next step in their careers and education. As Urban Impact's mission states, they're changing youth's lives "one person, one family, one block at a time."

In 2022, 94% of Options students successfully transitioned into their next academic or career journey.



CREATING REAL-WORLD EXPERIENCE FOR FUTURE CAREERS

CAREER READINESS FOCUS Neighborhood Learning Alliance

Hunched over his microscope, David carefully places another petri dish on the device and prepares his tweezers. By practicing these moves, David's honing his fine motor skills, something he's going to need when he becomes a surgeon. The West Sheraden resident and recent graduate from Pittsburgh CAPA school is eager to learn all he can before he heads to Pennsylvania State University's main campus in the fall to start his pre-med degree. David was connected to Dr. Judith Yanowitz's lab at Magee-Womens Research Institute through the Neighborhood Learning Alliance's High School U program, which has placed 103 high schoolers at places like West Penn Hospital, the Northside Chronicle and the University of Pittsburgh. They're shadowing health care workers, solving problems with technology, enhancing their writing skills and much more.

With United Way of Southwestern Pennsylvania's Welcome Back Summer funding, students like David can take part in these life-changing opportunities. Through these placements in professional work environments, high school students are learning valuable skills that will help them build successful careers and lives.

"It's been a journey and an experience. I've never been introduced to research and that sort of stuff because I'm one of the kids that was limited because of the pandemic and wasn't exposed to resources and stuff like that. So, this was definitely a cool experience for me to learn."

- David Bayode, student





SUMMER LEARNING WITH A SIDE OF FUN

RURAL COMMUNITIES FOCUS **Butler County YMCA**

For nearly 300 kids, Butler County YMCA's Summer Day Camp is the highlight of their year. On weekday mornings from June to August, campers clamber to the YMCA from all around the county and get started with a nutritious breakfast. Then the fun begins.

Thanks to funding from United Way of Southwestern Pennsylvania's Welcome Back Summer initiative. the YMCA buses campers to sites in Butler, South Butler and Karns City, where they dive into a full day of activities. Students, in kindergarten through sixth grade, are grouped by grade and cycle through four blocks: music, art, STEM (Science, Technology, **Engineering and Math)** and games.

"We are here to help keep their brains and bodies moving. We practice math skills, improve handwriting, spelling and even learn new vocabulary. How we talk to them helps prevent the learning gaps that can grow over the summer vacation," shares Christina Braden, Butler County YMCA's schoolage site Director. "School

is a kid's job and three months off is a lot."

As the sun shines on ARMCO Park, one group is working on a science project (involving balloons, pop and baking soda) while a second group competes in an egg relay. Across the field, a third group is enjoying the playground, a fourth is

splashing in the pool and a fifth group can be heard enjoying music class up the hill in ARMCO Hall.

A state licensed program, YMCA's Summer Day Camp prioritizes employing teachers, classroom aides and others who routinely work with children throughout the year. This takes the support the

camp provides to a deeper level and makes a significant difference in how much the kids are growing every day.

"This is a rich learning environment in a beautiful park," Christina beams, "It's so much more than day care. We are building relationships, teaching skills and giving these kids experiences that will help them excel. Every member of the staff is dedicated to child care. It's why they're here."

Because camp counselors are already attuned to the needs of kids and how to connect with them, campers bloom and trust develops quickly and easily. Christina recalls several kids who arrived shy and timid on their first day but opened up thanks to special attention from a counselor or a kind word from an older camper.





Since many kids also attend YMCA's schoolyear programming, they see camp as a fun-filled summer with some of their best friends. While some campers live close to friends, for kids in Butler's more rural communities, it's a dream come true to laugh, swim and learn together all summer long.



RURAL COMMUNITIES FOCUS Glade Run Lutheran Services

No student should fall between the cracks, yet many do. At Glade Run Lutheran Services' Summer Enrichment Program, the mission is to ensure participants stay on a positive path. Ages 12-18 and referred by Children and Youth Services or involved in Juvenile Court Services, each of these 12 young people has unique life experiences and requires personalized support. Some youth are serving in detention centers and separated from their families. Glade Run believes in the power of keeping kids at home. From working on community service projects to attending counseling sessions or practicing life skills, every day is an opportunity for progress. Thanks to funding from United Way of Southwestern Pennsylvania's Welcome Back Summer initiative, Glade Run Lutheran Services was able to provide transportation to communities throughout Butler County like Saxonburg, Cranberry and Moniteau.



"The kids we work with have a lot of uncertainty in their lives. We can offer the respect and consistency they need to reach the next steppingstone."

- Steven Green, Glade Run Lutheran Services

FRIENDSHIP COMES FIRST AT TEEN CAMP APPLE

RURAL COMMUNITIES FOCUS Community Care Connections

Community Care Connections' Camp Apple program has been in operation for nearly 40 years. Originally designed as a space for children with disabilities to improve life skills, the program opened its doors to all Butler County children in 2016. The camp's focus is on friendship and inclusion. Campers are grouped by age and spend their days enjoying funfilled activities like field trips and special projects. At Teen Camp Apple, 13- to 18-year-olds work on building strong social competency skills, such as making friends, responding appropriately in social settings, self-advocating and more. Above all else, Teen Camp Apple aims to show campers that friendship and kindness know no boundaries.

Supported by United Way of Southwestern Pennsylvania's Welcome Back Summer initiative, Teen Camp Apple was extended for an additional week and included a two-night, three-day camping trip at Yogi Bear's Jellystone Park, where teens practice their independence.

"My son, who has a speech delay, made new friends and now he has play dates with them. My teen daughters look forward to the overnight camp at Yogi Bear every year and they come back home with exciting stories about their experiences, the staff are wonderful!!"

- Ramona Parsons, parent





GROWING FOOD AND LIFE SKILLS

INNOVATIVE SUMMER EXPERIENCES **Grow Pittsburgh**

On a sunny morning in Braddock, teens are teasing each other. But this isn't coming-ofage bullying... it's friendly competition. The tomatoes are ripe and there are hundreds of pounds to be harvested, so a little rivalry goes a long way toward keeping everyone focused. All working with care and gentle footwork, the teens employed in Grow Pittsburgh's Youth Urban Farmers in Training (UFIT) program are learning exactly how much work it takes to go from seed to shelf.

Though this urban farm spans just an acre, with careful planning and crop rotation, it has the capacity to produce 30,000 pounds of food annually. For six weeks this summer, teens from Braddock Youth Project get their hands in the dirt (literally) and are responsible for planting, tending, watering, harvesting, washing - and even pickling - produce before packaging and selling it in Grow Pittsburgh's farm markets.

Focused on sustenance farming, crops include broccoli, squash, tomatoes, potatoes, celery, onions, carrots, greens, okra, eggplant, raspberries. strawberries and so much more. Each year, feedback from the community and input from the teens

helps shape what's grown.

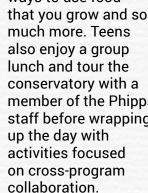
"The teens grow here, too," says Ean Dauer, program staff. "At first, they're overwhelmed with everything we have to do in a day, but it doesn't take long for them to feel ownership for the crops they're working with. Once that happens, they come in excited and ready to go."

Field trips to restaurants, regional farms and food distribution factories also help the teens understand where the food goes next and expose them to other career opportunities in urban agriculture.

"Food is such a great way to connect to your community and growing food is deeply connected to self-sufficiency," said Vee Bleiweiss, Grow Pittsburgh's development coordinator. "Real job and life skills are being developed here but it's so much deeper than that."

As the summer winds down, the teens are also preparing for Grow Pittsburgh's annual Youth Garden Summit at Phipps Conservatory. Serving as the program-end celebration for teen urban agriculture interns across the region, youth from 10 organizations present the skills and knowledge that they have learned through the gardening season. Topics cover beneficial and harmful insects, herbs and their culinary and medicinal uses, beginner gardening tips, unique

> ways to use food that you grow and so member of the Phipps staff before wrapping collaboration.



Support from United Way of Southwestern

Pennsylvania's Welcome Back Summer initiative provided supplies and tools needed around the farm, made field trips possible and funded farm market salaries.

Just take it from Q'von, a young farmer in training, the experience was worth every hardworking moment: "I knew farming wasn't easy, but I had no idea how much work it really is! I've never grown my own food and it has made me really proud of myself."





INNOVATIVE SUMMER EXPERIENCES Jada House International, Inc.

The energy can be chaotic when a group of 16 teenagers gather in the summertime, but at JADA House International, Inc.'s Evolution of Empowerment program, the concentration, creativity and dedication are palpable. JADA House is a safe space for young Black women ages 13-15 to hear from guest speakers working in the community, be vulnerable and expand their horizons. Each week, they learn about and use advanced technology through photography, videography and drone piloting to create promotional content for local businesses in Hazelwood. Thanks to a partnership with Allegheny County's Learn and Earn program, program participants are paid for their work. Funding from United Way's Welcome Back Summer initiative allows JADA to make sure the teens are equipped with all the tools they need to execute these projects.

From notebooks and pens used for their reflection journals to water and snacks to fuel the days of creativity to transportation for their Friday learning excursions, United Way has provided the young women at JADA House a chance to have fun, build relationships with new friends and learn at the same time.



"By showing up every day and creating, these young women are able to learn to respect each other's time, build relationships with local businesses and discover what aspects of technology interest them."

- Terri Lynee Shields, founder

MERAKEY'S FUN WITH FRIENDS CAMPERS: HEAR THEM ROAR!

INNOVATIVE SUMMER EXPERIENCES Merakey Autism Center

Structure and summer fun. Education and excitement. There's a delicate balance that must be mastered, especially for a summer camp serving kids on the autism spectrum. Keeping a routine while staying active and engaged is essential for children with autism. At Merakey Autism Center in Mt. Pleasant, there's the perfect balance. "We are the dinosaurs marching, marching. We are the dinosaurs. Whaddaya think of that?" The lyrics play on a loop each morning among a symphony of ROARS and screeches and stomps. But there aren't any extinct species in sight... it is the eight campers at Merakey's Fun with Friends Summer Camp practicing their dinosaur marches and giving their best pterodactyl impressions. After embracing their inner dinosaur and doing a 'mood check' to start the day off right, one small group of kids

discovers what it means to be a paleontologist as they dig for fossils to show off to their friends. At a separate table, other students are building motorized dinosaurs that will be tested on their marching skills. Thanks to United Way's funding, the campers have the supplies they need to carry out their lessons each day and create exciting art and STEM projects while expanding their skills in the process.

Through a diverse range of projects, from becoming a master soap maker to discovering the power of moon shoes to practicing soft skills like sharing and taking turns, the campers at Merakey spend their summer of fun building new friendships and setting themselves up for success in the upcoming school year.



"Even the educational stuff was fun.
Because they made it fun with an activity.
I don't know why all schools don't do that.
Not everyone learns the same."

- Matt, camper

TOGETHER, WE MADE THIS THE BEST SUMMER YET.

Thank you to our community's philanthropic leaders.

BNY Mellon Foundation The Buhl Foundation The Grable Foundation The Heinz Endowments Highmark Health Jefferson Regional Foundation McAuley Ministries McElhattan Foundation The Pittsburgh Foundation Pittsburgh Steelers

High-quality summer programming is only possible with high-quality partners.

ACH Clear Pathways Amachi Pittsburgh

Best of the Batch Foundation Beulah Presbyterian Church

Bhutanese Community Association

of Pittsburgh (BCAP) Bible Center Church, Inc.

Big Brothers Big Sisters of the Laurel Region

Brothers and Sisters Emerging Butler County Family YMCA

Casa San Jose Center of Life

Center that C.A.R.E.S.

Community Care Connections, Inc.

Dragon's Den

Earthen Vessels Outreach Glade Run Lutheran Services

Greensburg YMCA Grow Pittsburgh

Helping All Victims in Need HAVIN

Helping Ourselves Produce Excellence

Hosanna House Inc.

Industrial Arts Workshop

JADA House International Inc

Kid's Innovation Playground

Melting Pot Ministries

Merakey Foundation

Mooncrest Neighborhood Programs/

Hopebound Ministries

Mt. Ararat Community Activity Center

Neighborhood Learning Alliance

Ozanam Inc.

Peoples Library

Propel Schools Foundation

Rankin Christian Center

Sewickley Township Public Library

Shady Lane

Sonward Youth Programs

South Hills Interfaith Movement

Stoneybrook Foundation

The Arc of Butler County

The Learning Lamp

Urban Impact Foundation

Voices Against Violence

Waypoint Youth & Community Center Inc.

Will Allen Foundation

YMCA of Greater Pittsburgh

Young Black Motivated Kings and Queens

Youth Opportunities Development

YouthPlaces

Zelienople Area Public Library

