# Annual Report





helping children thrive and families flourish since 1897



There is nothing more important than supporting the hopes, dreams, and development of children.

> Jason Patenaude Chief Executive Officer Hephzibah Children's Association

### **Dear Friends,**

We are delighted to present our annual report for the 2024–2025 fiscal year! Inside, you'll find stories about the innovative programs we've developed to transform lives—and a community coming together to help children heal and families thrive.

These highlights from our year are part of a larger story of connection and **continuity**—a story that spans 128 years and six generations of families finding help in times of need and reaching out to help other families when they can.

Our first story is about healing. The children at Hephzibah Home, who



Board President Donna Rolf and Chief Executive Officer Jason Patenaude



1,607 Number of **children** served by all Hephzibah programs

have experienced profound physical and emotional trauma from abuse and neglect, often struggle to form friendships because they see the world as a dangerous place. On page 4, you'll learn about the new relational therapy program that is helping these children form healthy friendships that foster a sense of safety and connection so they can continue their healing journeys and develop a healthier foundation for future well-being.

Our second story is about **empowerment.** Teens in foster care often feel powerless due to the many disruptions in their lives. But—when given the chance to shine as junior

continued on page 2



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Number of **foster children** who found safe and loving homes with Hephzibah foster families

counselors at our annual sibling camp for brothers and sisters living in different group, foster, or adoptive homes—six Hephzibah foster teens tapped into hidden talents and realized their true potential as leaders, mentors, and positive role models for younger campers. On page 6, you'll find out more about Camp HepSIBah and the Junior Counselor Program, which helps foster teens gain valuable life and vocational skills to prepare them for successful and fulfilling lives after foster care.

Our third story? It's about 50 years of

helping Oak Park families flourish through Hephzibah Day Care. On page 8, you'll learn about the origins of this program in the 1970s, when women entered the workforce in unprecedented numbers and Hephzibah quickly pivoted to provide nurturing, enriching, and affordable care for their children. You'll also meet Amy Lutz, who lost her mom to cancer at the age of two and found a second family at Hephzibah Day Care in the 1990s. Now a single mother of two, she relies on Hephzibah Day Care to nurture her own children while she works full-time and completes her master's degree in business administration.

In September 2024, Amy Lutz and 200 other members of our Day Care community joined us for our **50th anniversary Day Care Celebration and Reunion**. As we gazed out at the children, parents, and grandparents who stopped by to share their "Hephzibah stories" and express their gratitude, it was mind-blowing to see that we have lifted up three generations of Oak Parkers—from the children who attended our original day care program in the 1970s to their children, and now their children's children.

And this, ultimately, is the true power of our Hephzibah community. We are families helping families—recognizing unmet needs in Oak Park and throughout Illinois, and



Number of **benefactors** who contributed 3,185 gifts totaling more than \$2.7 million to support our mission



then working together to meet those needs.

Hephzibah has been building this chain of commitment and care since 1897, and we add another link to the chain with every child we serve, every family we lift up, and every community member we engage. This chain connects us to one another, across generations, and anchors us firmly to our community.

248

Number of **intact families** that received the support and services they needed to stay together

With this in mind, we want to **thank you all for your contributions** to this chain of commitment. When you support our mission, you are not only helping children and families today, but throughout their lives, and for generations to come.

Your generosity makes that possible, and we are deeply grateful.

Jason Patenaude
Chief Executive Officer

Donna Rolf Board President

Nonna Rolf

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### Finding Happiness in Friendship

Through a new relational therapy program, the children at Hephzibah Home are learning how to form friendships that will help them thrive.

WHAT DOES IT TAKE to live a happy, fulfilling life? The answer is surprisingly simple: good relationships.

No one needs the comforts of friendship more than the children at Hephzibah Home.

Supportive friendships foster a sense of belonging and self-worth and built emotional resilience by providing a safe place to process feelings of sadness or disappointment. But relationships don't come easily to these young survivors of neglect and abuse.

"Trauma often disrupts a child's ability to trust, which makes it challenging for the children here to form deep, meaningful friendships," explains Hephzibah therapist Jennifer Wise. "A lot of the children talk about wanting friendship in their lives, but don't have any friends. They expect people not to like them, so they withdraw socially to avoid more hurt and rejection. Their inability to form friendships becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy."

To help the children break out of this pattern, Wise initiated a new relational therapy program in September 2024.

It was a slow go at first.

"They had so much fear and mistrust," she recalls. "So I started small, with two children at a time. We met weekly and engaged in a shared activity of the children's choice. During these activities—which

ranged from gardening to art and science projects—the children practiced prosocial behaviors such as speaking up and listening to one another. We also worked on patience, empathy, and self-control, which made problemsolving possible when the children experienced



Number of children who found a safe haven and a place to heal at Hephzibah Home

strong emotions or differences of opinion."

Little by little, as Wise helped them recognize and practice the building blocks of healthy relationships, the children began to feel less vulnerable. As their trust and confidence grew, friendships began to blossom.

"The children have benefited immeasurably from these positive connections," says Wise, who plans to increase the size of the groups as the children build

Meanwhile, the children are already experiencing the healing power of friendship.

Relationships keep us happier and healthier throughout our life spans.... Even small investments today in our relationships with others can create long-term ripples of well-being.

> "What the Longest Study on Human Happiness Found is the Key to a Good Life" (The Atlantic, January 19, 2023)

"Many have started to use the word 'happy' when they talk about reconnecting with their partners each week," she reports. "They look forward to the sessions so much that we count down the days to each session together. After we engage in an activity and the children find common ground in their experiences, I often hear them saying things like, 'I found out I could be friends with someone I didn't get along

with before' or 'When I realized my therapy partner had some of the same feelings I did, I felt less

But perhaps most gratifying for Wise was this child's comment at the end of a recent session: "Having a friend makes me feel so much better about myself!"



Scan to find out more about rebuilding trust after trauma with relational therapy.



### The Gift of Togetherness

Who knew that a week in the woods could be life-changing? For the foster children who reunited with their siblings at Camp HepSIBah and the foster teens who gained valuable life and vocational skills as junior counselors, our Summer 2025 sibling camp session was transformative!

IN JULY 2025, SCORES OF EXCITED FOSTER CHILDREN PACKED UP their camping gear and headed north to Wisconsin for a wilderness adventure.

Their destination? Camp HepSIBah, a rustic woodland retreat where siblings living in different foster, group, or adoptive homes can get to know one another again while creating shared childhood memories that will last a lifetime.

It was the first time that many of these children had left their urban environs behind to experience the peace of natural places. The week was filled with other firsts, from canoeing, rock climbing, and ziplining to gathering around the campfire for songs and s'mores.

"I would describe Camp HepSIBah as a 'slice of **normal' for these kids**," says Hephzibah caseworker and sibling camp coordinator Brianna Lane, who was separated from four of her own siblings in foster care. "Many children in foster care only see their siblings for about four hours a month, usually at a child welfare office or a McDonald's. At camp, they are eating together, engaging in activities together, and sleeping and waking up in the same place.

"Our sib campers don't see this experience as therapeutic; they are just having fun at camp," she points out. "But we can see how positive the experience is for them, and how happy they are to have the extended time





The junior counselors came to see themselves in a new light: as leaders, mentors, innovators, and problem-solvers.

they need to build deep and enduring sibling bonds."

For the six foster teens who served as junior counselors during our 2025 camp session, it was also a week of personal growth and empowerment.

"The Junior Counselor Program gives foster teens an opportunity to gain experience interviewing for a job and getting a stipend," explains Lane. "They participate in training sessions, brainstorm activities for the kids, and then facilitate those activities at camp. When they return home, they can put the junior counselor job on their resumes and use our camp staff as references."

According to Lane, the Junior Counselor Program—which is funded by The Oak Park **River Forest Community Foundation's Future** Philanthropists Program—also boosts foster teens' confidence, raises their self-esteem, and gives them a sense of agency and control.

"I learned how to be a leader and let my creative skills shine while planning activities for the kids," notes Taron, a junior counselor. "I also got to know my little brother, who has cerebral palsy, on a deeper level. He had never been in a forest before, so it was nice to be able to take him

outside and let him experience nature. It was a a great life experience for both of us."

By the last night, Camp HepSIBah had worked its magic. The children's feelings of disconnection had dissipated and been replaced by camaraderie and closeness.

Buoyed up by their newly forged family connections, the campers were inspired to nurture their sibling relationships by staying in touch in the months to come. And the junior counselors? They had come to see themselves in a new light: as leaders, mentors, innovators, and problem-solvers.

"The end of our camp session was pretty emotional," Lane confides. "We were exhausted, sunburned, and mosquito bitten, but the campers—and especially our junior counselors—were all saying, 'I really want to come back next year!""

"I just want to thank Hephzibah for creating opportunities for us to grow and be together," reflects Anyla, a junior counselor who attended camp with her little sister. "What you are doing here is changing lives."



Scan to learn more about our life-changing Junior Counselor Program.





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### 50 Years of Hephzibah Day Care

For more than half a century, Hephzibah's pioneering Day Care **Program** has nurtured and enriched Oak Park elementary schoolers while providing peace of mind for working parents.

OUR DAY CARE STORY BEGAN IN THE 1970s. midway through a decade of social change and economic instability. Women's roles were changing, the post-WWII economic boom was ending, and inflation had surged to 13.3%, eroding the purchasing power of American households. Women began entering the workforce in unprecedented numbers to help support their families.

But who would care for the children? In 1971, a bipartisan Congress passed the Comprehensive Child Development Act, which would have established a national network of federally funded, locally run centers to provide affordable childcare for American families. When the bill was vetoed, working parents with young children were left to fend for themselves.

As Oak Park families struggled to find childcare, Hephzibah launched a pioneering day care program to do what the government could not: provide **nurturing**, enriching, and affordable day care services on a sliding scale for families of all income levels.

Word spread quickly about the fledgling program serving 20 children on the first floor of Hephzibah Home. As applications flooded in and waitlists grew, Hephzibah entered into an innovative partnership with the Oak Park School District in 1976 to operate additional day care sites at Oak Park elementary schools.

Over the next five decades, three generations of children, their families, and Hephzibah's passionately committed day care staff formed a tight-knit community that remains closely connected to this day.

Our first Day Care program (below) served 20 children at Hephzibah Home in the 1970s. Today, Hephzibah provides year-round day care for more than 800 children annually at eight Oak Park elementary schools and one summer camp location.



### **Three Generations** of Joy and Connection

In September 2024, more than 200 Hephzibah Day Care children, parents, alumni, and former staff members joined us for a **50th anniversary celebration and reunion**, which included a pancake breakfast, activities, games, and a lot of reminiscing.

Some community members recalled how grateful they were as young, cash-strapped parents to have access to high-quality, affordable day care. Others—like Amy Lutz—shared their "Hephzibah stories" with smiles on their faces and gratitude in their hearts. A living example of the multigenerational impact of Hephzibah Day Care, Amy was just a toddler when she lost her mother to cancer. Her brother died a year later, leaving Amy and her father in desperate need of support.

"My dad would not have made it through without all of the hours and flexibility Hephzibah had to offer," Lutz shared at the reunion. "Hephzibah Day Care was our second family and my second home."

After college, Amy returned to Hephzibah. "I was looking for part-time work, and they found a spot for me."

Amy is now a single mom, raising two young children while working full-time and attending graduate school. It's a lot to juggle. But, like her father before her, she counts on Hephzibah Day Care to make it through.

"Whenever I'm at school or work, I know that my children are being nurtured, and they are having a good time," she says today. "I see them making the same connections in the Day Care community that have supported and sustained me as a child, as a young adult in need of employment to make ends meet, and, now, as a single, working parent."



Above, top to bottom: Amy Lutz and her children at Hephzibah Day Care's 50th anniversary celebration; Hephzibah Day Care staff members marking the occasion in matching 50th anniversary t-shirts; the latest generation of "Hephzibah kids" from our 2024–2025 Day Care program enjoying pancakes and 50th anniversary festivities

### Hephzibah Day Care is more than just a job for us.

It's a place where people come to belong, to be part of a supportive community, and to have fun together.

— AMY O'ROURKE, Day Care Director



our 50th anniversary

### A Caring Community



The mighty moms behind our Spring 2025 Kids Resale Event

### **Mighty Moms**

Our Kids Resale co-chairs, managers, and volunteers were a force to be reckoned with as they sorted, tagged, and sold more than 30,000 gently used children's clothing items, toys, books, and games for our Fall and Spring Kids Resale **Events**. Thanks to these hardworking moms and their high-energy kids, we shattered our previous fundraising record and raised more than \$63,000 to support our After-School and Summer Camp programs.

### **Comforting Companions**

Ien Dean founded The **Lovey Project** to provide soft toys called "Loveys" for children in need of love and support. When Jen learned about our mission, she began collecting Loveys and donations for the children we serve. In 2024, The Lovey Project also donated Halloween costumes and treats for the children at Hephzibah Home. We're grateful to Jen for

them thrive.



Jen Dean and Lovey

### **Ready for School, Ready to Learn!**

STUDIES SHOW THAT CHILDREN who start the school year with the recommended supplies are more motivated to attend school, complete their assignments, and participate in classroom activities. Yet, with the cost of supplies and other items averaging \$586 per child, one in three families must go into debt to cover back-to-school expenses.

In Summer 2024, hundreds of benefactors, corporate and community partners, and volunteers joined together to provide essential learning tools for Hephzibah's kids while reducing the financial burden of backto-school supply lists on the families served by our Foster Care, Intact Family Services, and Family Support programs.

The Fair Oaks Presbyterian **Church Youth Group** and other community members collected and donated items for our Back-to-School Supply Drive.

J.A. Watts Inc. donated more than 100 backpacks.

The Lovey Project donated soft toys for every backpack.

Volunteers from Capstone Financial Advisors, Deloitte, and **Jackson National** organized the supplies and stocked the backpacks.

Calvary Memorial Church hosted the event.

Dozens of volunteers helped 114 children from 45 families select their free backpacks, winter coats, and other items.

After the event, our caseworkers delivered backpacks with school supplies to more than 250 other families in need.



### **Birthday Buddies**

Kids in residential care often feel the absence of their birth families and childhood pals most keenly on their birthdays. To put the "happy" back into birthdays for the children at Hephzibah Home, some tender-hearted St. Giles parishioners assembled birthday kits with cake mix and icing, party supplies, and hand-written cards with birthday wishes from the St. Giles faith community.

### Clutter **Busters**

Employee volunteers from WellSky demonstrated their willingness to do just about anything for our kids by tackling an ambitious basement reorganization project at our administrative offices.

### **Holiday Heroes**

A VERITABLE ARMY OF CHRISTMAS ELVES mobilized in December 2024 to bring a little holiday magic into the lives of children and families in need. Although we don't have room to list all of these holiday heroes, we've

**KBC Advisors** made generous donations to cover the cost of Christmas presents for hundreds of children in our residential, foster care, and intact family services programs and dispatched teams of KBC employees to wrap those gifts.

included some highlights below:



Holiday stocking stuffer

The Paramount Group helped make

Christmas happen for 175 struggling families by donating gifts and ingredients for holiday meals.

Northwestern Medicine employees decorated Hephzibah Home for the holidays and organized a roomful of gift donations for our kids.

Strategex donated \$10,000 to cover the cost of a holiday party and gifts for 400 children served by our Family Based Services Program.



Northwestern Medicine volunteers transformed chaos into



Santa's helpers from Strategex

finding creative ways to comfort our kids and help

### Philanthropy

### **Heart of Gold Ball**

A community steps out to bring hope and healing to Hephzibah's kids

ON MARCH 7, HUNDREDS OF HEPHZIBAH SUPPORTER'S suited up in tuxes, slipped on party frocks, and flocked to Rockwell on the River for our annual Heart of Gold Ball. They danced, dined, outbid their fellow revelers during our live auction, and waved their paddles with enthusiastic abandon during our Helping Hearts Paddle Raise.

Thanks to the generosity of these high-spirited humanitarians, our 2025 Heart of Gold Ball was one of the most successful in Hephzibah's history, raising nearly \$495,000 to help children and families in need. During the evening, we presented our 2025 Heart of Gold Award to Northwestern

Medicine, our Heart of the Home Award to our Kids Resale Event Managers, and our first-ever Community Partner Award to Oak Park School District 97.

Hephzibah CEO Jason Patenaude also honored Day Care Director Amy O'Rourke and Residential Coordinator Regina Harbor for 25 years of dedication to the children

"All children deserve to feel a sense of hope," he reflected. "But the truth is that too many children don't feel hopeful, don't feel safe, and don't have opportunities to thrive. I can't express how grateful we are for the work of Amy, Regina, and so many others at Hephzibah. There is nothing more important than supporting the hopes, dreams, and development of children—and folks like Amy and Regina do that every single day."

Generous benefactors Ken and Patty Hunt matched all first-time donations dollar for dollar throughout the evening!

Kids Resale Event managers (below, I-r) Emma Draves, Samantha Behensky, Noemi Mata, Jill Stanchfield, Jenny Lang, Elizabeth Koppula, Caroline TeDesco, and Michelle Galindo received our Heart of the Home Award for exceptional volunteerism in support of Hephzibah projects and programs.



In one of the evening's most playful and endearing moments, saxophonist, composer, and arranger Rocky Yera donned a curly wig and impersonated saxophone sensation Kenny G. while serenading our auction winners.

Board member Jennifer Ellis-Jackson (left) and CEO Jason **Patenaude** honored **Northwestern** Medicine with Hephzibah's Heart of Gold Award. Lisa Azu-Popow. a Hephzibah board member and Director of Community Health at Northwestern Medicine (center), accepted the award.

CEO Jason Patenaude presented Hephzibah's first Community Partner Award to Oak Park School District 97 Superintendent Dr. Ushma Shah (right) and School Board President Cheree Moore in honor of the district's 50-year collaboration with Hephzibah to provide nurturing, enriching, and affordable day care for Oak Park families of all income levels.



CEO Jason Patenaude and Hephzibah board members welcomed guests as the evening commenced. Above (l-r): Pete Senechalle, Donna Rolf, Jennifer Ierardi, Jason Patenaude, Jennifer Ellis-Jackson, Amy Muran Felton, and Jon Yates



Mary DiSomma, a longtime benefactor and friend, found more ways to support our mission during our live auction and Helping Hearts Paddle Raise



### Philanthropy continued

### **Good-Hearted Ghouls**

ON OCTOBER 27. HORDES OF COSTUMED CREATURES headed over to Constitution Park in River Forest for our Oak **Park Auxiliary Board**'s third annual Halloween

Fun Run/Walk. Thanks to

our pint-sized participants and their family members, as well as our generous sponsors and volunteers, the Sunday morning event raised \$9,000 to support our Intact Family Services and Positive Parenting programs and strengthen and stabilize Illinois' most fragile families.

### **Rocking to Reunite Siblings**

hzibah Children's Association

IN JANUARY, MUSIC LOVERS rocked the night away at our Western Auxiliary Board's 2025 Rock 'N' Roll for Your Heart & Soul fundraiser, which raised more than \$62,000 to reunite children living in different foster, group, or adoptive homes for a shared summer camp experience at Camp HepSIBah. Our "Westies" also

> raised funds in memory of their beloved fellow auxiliary board member, Julie Bozcowski, to support therapeutic programming and a backyard butterfly house for the children at Hephzibah Home.

> > Rock 'N' Roll co-chairs Tami Wanless (left) and Mona Erter

### **A Night of Affirmation and Accolades**

IT WOULDN'T BE GALA SEASON without our Kids Gala! Hosted annually by our Oak Park Auxiliary Board, this "black-tie" event celebrates the young

> survivors of neglect and abuse at Hephzibah Home. After a delicious catered dinner courtesy of Paramount **Events**, our tuxedoclad CEO recognized the children's unique talents and positive character traits with awards such as Creative Designer, Fashionista, Best Singer, Soccer Champ, and House Gentleman. We're

grateful to our Oak Park Auxiliary for encouraging our kids to believe in themselves and pursue their dreams as they continue their healing

The kindhearted crew behind our Kids Gala: Oak Park Auxiliary Board members (I-r) Amy Moriarta, Sally Berger Ness, Jane Saedi, Beth Cannon, Amy Udell, and Dorota Szerszenowicz-Olweny



### Lownship

for caring about our kids!

### Because all gifts—large and small—are essential to our mission, we list our benefactors in alphabetical order.

Kim Becker and Deborah Levine

Charles and Samantha Behensky

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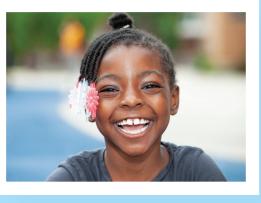
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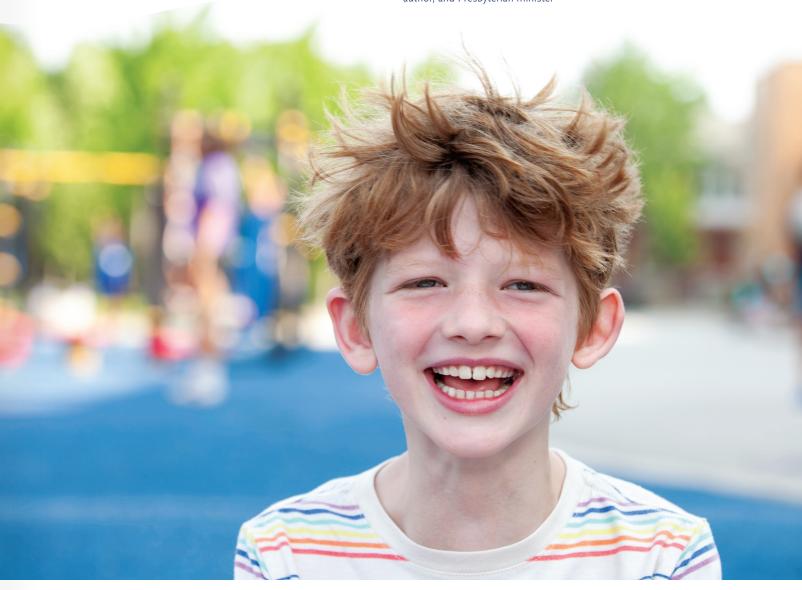
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### Anyone who does anything to help a child is a **hero** to me.

- Fred Rogers Host of the preschool television series, Mister Rogers' Neighborhood, author, and Presbyterian minister



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In Memory of Elaine Yapelli Jacob and Rachel Lorber Kathleen Whitney Frederick Yapelli

Hephzibah would like to thank all of the individuals, businesses, and organizations that provided in-kind gifts in FY 2024-25. Your generosity, compassion, and commitment played a vital role in helping us fulfill our mission Thank you for your support!

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To err is human, to forgive, divine... Have we erred? Please contact Barbara Krause in the Development Office at 708.649.7160. We sincerely regret any errors or omissions.

24 Hephzibah Children's Association

## roots wings

"There are only two lasting bequests we can hope to give to our children. One of these is roots—the other, wings."

HODDING CARTER

Hephzibah Children's Association thanks the members of our Roots and Wings Society for their generous contributions of \$1,000 or more within the past two fiscal years.



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For the fiscal year beginning July 1, 2024, and ending June 30, 2025

### **Financial Statement**

\$ 14,276,613

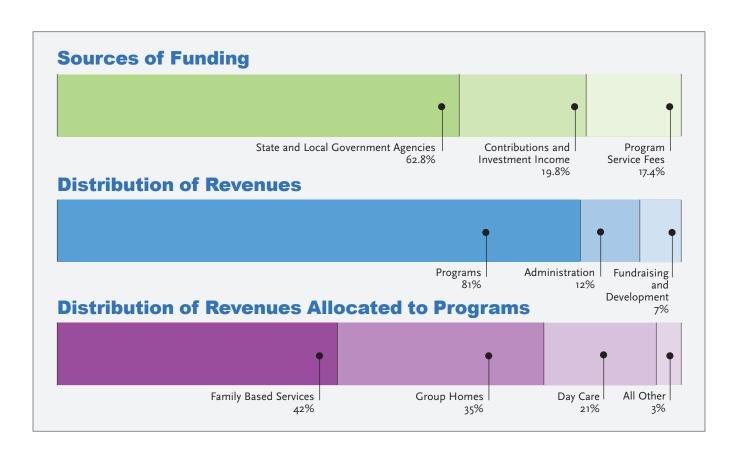
#### Revenues

TOTAL REVENUES	\$	14,276,613
Investment and Other Income*	\$	60,879
Other Revenue: Program Service Fees and Grants	\$	2,480,365
Local Government Agencies	\$	53,859
Fees and Grants: State Government Agencies	\$	8,917,344
Contributions and Grants	\$	2,764,166
Individual, Corporate, and Foundation	n	

### **Expenses**

Programs	\$ 11,169,549
Administration	\$ 1,656,262
Fundraising and Development	\$ 994,637
TOTAL EXPENSES	\$ 13,820,448
Increase in Net Assets	
Due to Operations*	\$ 456,165
Total Increase in Net Assets	\$ 1,219,691
Net Assets, End of Year	\$ 14,702,226

<sup>\*</sup> Excludes unrealized gains on investments and change in beneficial interests of \$763,526





### **Grants Awarded**

The A. Montgomery Ward Foundation

ADJLM Foundation

Anonymous

Byline Bank

Chicago White Sox Community Fund,

a fund of the Robert R. McCormick Foundation

Christopher L. and M. Susan Gust Foundation

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Community Foundation

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Future Philanthropists Program

Paul M. Angell Family Foundation

Sidley Austin Foundation

Terri Race Educational Technology Fund

Ticket to Dream Foundation

United Way of Metropolitan Chicago

Village of Oak Park Community Development Block Grant

The Ward Foundation

Westlake Health Foundation

### **Hephzibah helps** children thrive and families flourish

through a continuum of community-based programs that include residential services for neglected and abused children at Hephzibah Home, foster care and adoption services, comprehensive services for children and families in crisis, and after-school and summer camp services on a sliding scale for families of all income levels.

#### Accreditation

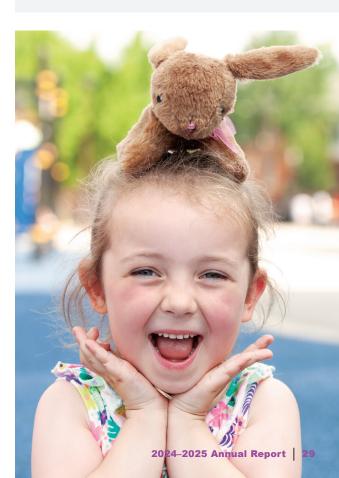
Hephzibah is accredited by the Council on Accreditation (COA) and the American Camp Association (ACA).

#### Licensing

Hephzibah is licensed by the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services as a Child Welfare Agency, Group Home, and Child Care Institution.

#### Funding

Hephzibah receives Illinois state funding from the Department of Children and Family Services, the Department of Human Services, the Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity, and the State Board of Education. Local funding sources include the Village of Oak Park, Oak Park School District 97, and Oak Park Township. Hephzibah programs and services are also supported by funding from foundations, corporations, and our own fundraising activities.



### The People **Behind Hephzibah**

July 1, 2024, through June 30, 2025

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Amy O'Rourke Director of Day Care

Debbie Pontrelli Assistant Director of Residential Services

James Woywod Director of Residential Services

Iuliet Yera Director of Development and Communications

\* Deceased \*\* Since June, 2025



THANK YOU for helping children thrive and families flourish with your generous support!

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