Building Stability

Winter 2024 Newsletter

+ 2023 Annual Report

A Message from the Director:

We accomplished a lot at Cornerstone in 2023, advancing our efforts to build stability and change lives in Over-the-Rhine. We hired new Family Coaches who have been instrumental in increasing Renter Equity Club enrollment, maximizing member earnings, and organizing community events. We formed new partnerships with Social Venture Partners, the Greater Cincinnati Foundation, and the City that have helped raise awareness and funding for our programs. We welcomed new board members that have given their time and talents to help us succeed. We also celebrated meaningful milestones, such as the total (cumulative) savings of our members reaching more than $100,000.

Our progress continues in 2024. In just the first two months of the year, we received new grant funding from Buckeye Health, Union & Guardian Savings, and the Ohio Commission's Serve Ohio initiative. We are in the process of enrolling several new members into the Renter Equity Club, and one of our current members just purchased a car with funds from their Matched Savings.

Our success is a direct result of those who continue to advocate for and invest in this community. Your support makes all the difference, not only in building stability, but by paving a path to a better future.

Thank you very much for your advocacy and support. We look forward to achieving more great things with you in 2024!

Sincerely,

Executive Director

Member Spotlight:

Markeshia Smith

While attending a Cornerstone community event in 2022, Markeshia Smith learned about the Renter Equity Club, and how members can earn equity (money) by investing in the community. Having been involved in the community for years, Markeshia saw this as a no-brainer, and enrolled immediately.

“Being able to earn equity for doing things I love is a beautiful thing,” she says.

To say Markeshia is involved in her community is an understatement. The mother of 15 and 18 year old boys, Markeshia is part of the Local Decision Making Committee and PTA at Taft High School, as well as the Urban Cohort at Miami University. She is an Over-the-Rhine Community Council member and regularly volunteers at Cornerstone events. Since joining the Renter Equity Club, she became a certified Community Health Worker & Mental Health Advocate, and completed additional certifications in Family Peer Recovery Support, Trauma Informed Training, Chemical Dependency & Suicide Prevention, Adult & Youth Mental Health First Aid, Seizure Recognition & First Aid, Naloxone (Narcan) Training, CPR, and First Aid & AED.

During the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, Markeshia decided to pursue a degree in Human Services and Counseling, and will eventually pursue a Masters in Mental Health.

“I have seen a lot of people coping with trauma and mental health issues, and I want to do something - to be the change that’s needed,” she says. Through Project Lift, Cornerstone was able to help pay for school fees, books, and supplies to support her education. When asked about her overall experience in the program, Markeshia praised her Family Coach, Abiona Lunsford, saying, “Abiona is a great coach and one of my biggest cheerleaders.”

Holiday Kids Skate

Thank you to all who supported and volunteered at our Holiday Kids Skate!

We received more than 300 donations of new toys and items for children and families. Many of these donations came from the employees at Staffmark and Ms. Esceleta Gray, to whom we are very grateful. In addition to gifts, our community enjoyed roller skating, crafting, food, music, and visiting with Santa and Mrs. Claus.

We appreciate everyone who made this a wonderful holiday for families in Over-the-Rhine, and look forward to celebrating again this year!

To learn more about how you can get involved in Cornerstone events, email cornerstone@csequity.org or call 513-369-0114.

2023 REPORT

Thanks to the support and advocacy of our community partners and donors, 2023 was milestone year at Cornerstone. Our members collectively earned and saved more than ever. We saw an increase in program engagement, a reduction in member unemployment, and new opportunities become new beginnings for Renter Equity families. All of this furthering our mission to be a community-oriented partner providing a customized, family-centered approach to asset building and personal growth.

Removing Barriers

Every year, Cornerstone provides direct assistance to support short-term needs and life-changing pursuits.

Direct Assistance in 2023: $30,295

$19,560 for rent, moving expenses, utility bills, bus passes, groceries, clothes and shoes

$10,735 for continuing education, job training, school and business supplies

Last year, 8 members enrolled in post-secondary schools and job training programs

Building Assets

Every year, the Renter Equity Club and Matched Savings Program help members to achieve long-term savings goals.

Equity Earned in 2023: $73,550

Equity Paid Out in 2023: $50,218

Savings Matched in 2023: $5,657

Last year, matched savings helped...

3 members purchase cars

2 members expand their businesses

1 member purchase a house

Renter Equity Member Snapshot from 2023

89 Members

80% Women
20% Men
97% African American
3% White

Renter Equity serves more than individual members, it serves entire households. Last year, these households were comprised of 163 people, 32% of whom are children and 17% of whom are over the age of 60.

$100,059 Saved

Cumulatively, member savings reached a total of $100,059, the largest amount saved since the program began.

On average, members have $1,000 saved, which is key when considering that 4 in 10 Americans do not have enough savings to cover a $400 emergency (Federal Reserve).

What did members use Renter Equity funds for?

Partnerships are crucial to helping us make a meaningful impact on marginalized families in Over-the-Rhine. We are grateful for the new partners we made in 2023, which include Social Venture Partners, Greater Cincinnati Foundation Boots on the Ground, and the City of Cincinnati Human Services Fund.

Bob Maly Equity Fund Donors

Thank you for continuing Bob's legacy of uplifting and empowering families in Over-the-Rhine!

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Donate

Donations directly support families in the Renter Equity Club, providing one-on-one coaching, financial counseling, healthy activities, community events, and other opportunities to earn money and build savings.

Scan QR code or visit renterequity.org/donate