For two weeks in July, the Cincinnati Health Department utilized the CityLink parking lot to perform rapid COVID-19

“Every crisis has both its dangers and its opportunities. Each can spell either salvation or doom.”

MARTIN LUTHER KING JR.
Letter from the Executive Director

Early in 2020, as the impact of COVID-19 and its ramifications began to unfold, our team gathered to make resolutions on our course for the remainder of the year. The summer highlighted the on-going issues of racial injustice with the killings of unarmed African Americans at the hands of police. Despite factors outside our control, we determined we would prayerfully seek to fulfill our mission, live according to our values, maintain our promises to our stakeholders, and endeavor to emerge stronger on the other side of the crises.

You are reading more of a reflection of our journey than an annual report. If 2020 taught us nothing else, it was to hold loosely to our plans and tightly to our mission.

First a word of deep gratitude to:

• Our clients and friends, who continued to persevere through tremendous difficulty and inspire us with their resiliency
• Our volunteers, who sought new ways to connect, serve, and live out their calling
• Our partners, who navigated this difficult year with open hands
• Our donors, who did not play it safe but poured into our mission
• Our team, who stewarded the organization, working with diligence, grit, and faith of better days ahead

“I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound. In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need. I can do all things through him who strengthens me.”
- Philippians 4:12-13

We are grateful to be a part of a community and calling that sees beyond the hardship of the moment, to the promise of the future.

— Johnmark Oudersluys & the CityLink Team
Our Mission

While our mission remained unchanged in 2020, how we executed against it looked new in many ways.

“In order for you to succeed, you must first believe. One of the greatest things in the world is to have your family believe in you, and CityLink is like family. They already believe in you.”

**ANDRE, Cornerstone Construction Client, February 2020 Class**

Prior to the shutdown in March, we graduated two Per Scholas classes, one Findlay Culinary Training class, and one Cornerstone Construction class. The Center was bustling with so much energy and full of momentum; at the time, we were eagerly anticipating the rest of the year.
In the face of remarkable challenges, our clients, volunteers, partners, and staff worked together in new and beautiful ways to make strides towards their goals. Since our doors opened in 2012, CityLink had experienced growth, year over year. While the difficulties of the pandemic dramatically reduced the total number of individuals served through the Center compared to prior years, we are so proud of all the amazing milestones still achieved in the midst of difficult circumstances.

**New Programs launched in 2020!**
- 13 clients onboarded through Roots Staffing for employment
- 13 clients enrolled in PelotonU to begin college courses

**Supporting Services**
- 54 clients outfitted with professional attire through Clothing Connection
- 67 individuals able to purchase discounted Christmas gifts for their children through the Holiday Market

**Paused Programs**
Our hands-on industry trainings were paused due to health concerns and a dubious job market. Prior to the pause, Culinary ran 2 of 10 planned courses, Construction ran 1 of 5, and Network Infrastructure ran 1 of 2.

- Cornerstone Construction students
- Findlay Culinary Training students in training or interning in the restaurant
- Per Scholas Network Infrastructure students

**2020 by the Numbers**

- 1,231 clients served in 2020
- 475 clients on board

**Financial Highlights**
- 88 Per Scholas students. While other industry training programs were paused in March due to the pandemic, Per Scholas was able to transition their courses online through the end of the year.
- 110 Center for Employment Opportunities (CEO) participants on Work Crew. CEO was able to transition their front-end onboarding process online and continue running work crews throughout the year.
- 180 individuals engaged in SmartMoney one-on-one financial counseling
- 468 financial counseling appointments
- $122,141 put into savings by SmartMoney clients
- $48,613 of debt paid off by SmartMoney clients
- 8 applicants approved for a home; four for a Habitat Humanity Home and four for a traditional home loan

**Others**
- 13 clients purchased cars
- 47 clients received services from ChangingGears
- 25 clients received car repairs through the Repair Program
- 14 clients purchased cars
- 8 clients leased a car through the Bridge Program
While so much of daily life and operations in the center looked different in 2020, our values remained the same.

In February 2020, we gathered to celebrate the milestones our clients had reached in the previous six months. Over loud cheers and rattling maracas, clients shared their stories: what they had accomplished, what they had learned, and what they were looking forward to. We sang, laughed, cried, and hugged a lot. None of us knew it then, but it was one of the last experiences of the vibrant, connected community in 2020, and it was certainly missed!
"This place feels different" is one of our favorite comments to hear from clients walking through our doors the first time. We want every individual who comes into CityLink to feel seen, heard, and known. Fueling that sentiment within our walls is our value of relationships.

Challenged to live out this value while physically apart, Service Coordinators reached out to clients to hear how they were being affected by the pandemic and if there was a way CityLink could support. We found that emergency relief was a massive need.

Simultaneously, a volunteer-led grassroots initiative raised over $18,000 to support CityLink families in need due to the pandemic. This allowed CityLink to support clients with emergency relief, covering items such as groceries and rent. In addition, dozens volunteered to grocery shop on behalf of clients with transportation issues or health concerns. New relationships between volunteers and clients were able to emerge outside our walls in beautiful ways.

We will foster an environment where the lives of our clients, service providers, & volunteers will be profoundly changed by knowing others & being known.
OUTCOME-DRIVEN

We will monitor and report on our results to continually improve our services and break the cycle of poverty.

“What gets measured gets managed” holds particularly true for the social service sector. Simply measuring attendance and program completions may show us the level of activity in the center, but it does not enable us to understand actual client progression. As an organization, we are committed to stewarding our resources towards efforts that yield results for our clients and our community. We are outcome-driven.

As the economic shutdown halted hiring in some sectors, we made the difficult decision to cancel training programs that would not lead to desired results: jobs for clients participating. In March, we put the Cornerstone Construction Training program and the Findlay Culinary Training program on hold, as well as Per Scholas’s Network Infrastructure class. Running programs to demonstrate activity with no job placements on the other end would have been a poor use of clients’ time, donors’ resources, and staff’s energy. While we greatly missed having the center full of clients, we are committed to driving outcomes over generating activity.

SPIRIT-LED

We will seek God’s guidance in all that we do. We will help clients experience God’s love in practical ways through the work of programs, partners, staff and volunteers.

We believe that God, out of tremendous love, created each and everyone one of us in his likeness, with immeasurable worth, for a life of purpose, freedom, and joy! This belief is core to who we are and fuels everything we do. We love because He loved us first.

Our mission is to help our neighbors experience this love, and remind them that their soul is of value beyond measure! We believe God has called us to this work and is the one who sustains it. As a result, as a team, we seek His guidance through the Holy Spirit in all our work. If He is not behind it, we don’t want to pursue it.

While we had a rhythm of weekly prayer together pre-COVID, when the doors of the center closed between mid-March and early May, and our team was working remotely, we increased time together in prayer. Monday through Friday, we started the day with prayer over Zoom. Weekly, pastors from our Church Advisory Council joined our call to pray for our staff, clients and volunteers, and also shared how God was at work in their church community. We were so thankful to be surrounded by such a large community of faith that we could lean on for truth and encouragement. In slowing ourselves down, we received God’s generous gifts of peace, provision, and direction this past year.
With a loss of physical connectivity with our clients, where possible, we made our services available online. Service Coordinator appointments, financial counseling, and counseling sessions all became available to clients either by video or phone. In addition, Per Scholas moved their IT training courses to live remote instruction, and Center for Employment Opportunities did the same with their onboarding course.

We found that by giving remote-engagement as an option, show rates for 1-on-1 Goal Sessions went up from 82% to 95%. This led us to drive more of our upfront processes to remote capabilities. We are grateful to work with a team and partners who are willing and eager to adapt in order to serve our clients with excellence.
We live in an era of prediction. We gather data about the past and present, construct implicit or explicit models that seek to explain those data, and project events in the future... But prediction itself, as we are all now viscerally aware, is a very fragile way to live. There is another, very different orientation to the future — another way to answer the questions, “What is going to happen? What is our future?” It is the way of promise.

— Designing for a Different Future: Prediction & Promise, Praxis

Our Promises

In the heart of the pandemic and struggle for racial justice this year, leading the center felt overwhelming. Planning for the next day, week, or month in the midst of a dynamically changing and never-before seen set of external circumstances seemed futile. 2020 shattered the illusions of control and predictability.

With the road ahead being so unclear, we turned to our promises as our compass. Predictions can be wrong, plans can change, but our promises are what define us.
OUR PROMISES
TO OUR STAKEHOLDERS

Our Clients

• Respect and value their effort, time, and confidentiality
• Provide a safe and caring environment
• Walk with them for the duration of their journey
• Bring best-in-class services to support their journey

OUR RESPONSE
We halted training programs that did not have clear job opportunities. We value our clients’ time too much to bring them through a training that isn’t going to lead to employment.

Our Partners

• Trust our partners as the resident experts
• Support their staff and clients to the best of our abilities
• Foster positive relationships through honest, respectful, and transparent collaboration
• Elevate the work of our partners to the community
• Actively seek ways to amplify their impact and mission

OUR RESPONSE
We pivoted with partners to transition client engagement to remote offerings, maintaining barrier removal services and supports.

Our Volunteers

• Honor time and talent through scheduling for meaningful opportunities to engage
• Build into volunteers while they build into our mission
• Transparently communicate our activities, wins, losses, and learnings along the journey

OUR RESPONSE
We leveraged our volunteers to dive into further development opportunities, serve our clients in new ways, and conduct important research for the organization.

Our Donors

• Invest in approaches with real life change (outcomes), not just activity
• Actively & continuously seek ways to maximize lives impacted per dollar expended
• Transparently communicate activities, wins, losses, & our learnings

OUR RESPONSE
We cut staffing expenses by $374,351 by not hiring open positions, team members stepping away, early retirement, suspending some benefits, and leadership reduction in hours. This was done not out of financial desperation, but as stewards of our donors’ dollars who invest not to perpetuate our organization but to impact lives.
At the forefront of 2020’s upheaval, together as a team, we determined to use this pause from “normal” to emerge stronger on the other side. As our operating reality rapidly changed, we were afforded the time and opportunity to improve our systems. We took steps to better position our organization for long-term success, including:

- A complete review and refresh of our client data, including implementation of some additional measures for greater understanding of the client experience
- A transition to a new volunteer management software which will provide increased functionality and lower ongoing costs
- An upgrade of hardware to help our systems run smoothly
- The creation of a temporary space to allow for a phased expansion of Learning Grove.
- A volunteer-led research report for future industry training programs

The largest and most tangible step forward was the advancement of our campus expansion plans, done in collaboration with our partners and Model Group. As we stepped forward in faith, laying the groundwork for more space to advance our mission, we continuously saw God’s hand guiding and providing for us. As we move forward, we eagerly anticipate these plans coming to fruition and look forward to helping more of our neighbors emerge stronger on the other side of this past year’s crisis.

“Reflect on your present blessings, of which every man has plenty, not on your past misfortunes, of which all men have some”

- CHARLES DICKENS
Financial Review

In 2020, our donors faithfully invested in our mission, and we took steps to cut expenses to best steward our community’s investment.

There were also extraordinary transactions as our organization unwound its first round of New Market Tax Credit financing after the first 7-year compliance period, received the Payroll Protection Program income, and then began fundraising for our campus expansion.

CityLink is privately funded, which means we are sustained by the gifts of our local community. We are so thankful for the incredible generosity from our church partners, corporations, foundations, and individuals that allows us to pursue our mission with speed and zeal.

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<tr>
<th>CHURCH PARTNERS</th>
<th>CORPORATIONS &amp; FOUNDATIONS</th>
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<td>Bright Star Community Church</td>
<td>Access Audio</td>
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<td>College Hill Presbyterian Church</td>
<td>Alpine Valley</td>
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<td>Compass Community Church</td>
<td>Cheviot Savings Bank</td>
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<td>First New Point Lighthouse Baptist Church</td>
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<td>Landmark Cincinnati Miracle Deliverance Worship Center</td>
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<td>New City Presbyterian Providence Baptist Church</td>
<td>Diversified Facility Solutions</td>
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<td>Southern Baptist Church</td>
<td>Frost Brown Todd LLC</td>
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<td>Wyoming Baptist Church</td>
<td>George and Mary Jo Budig Family Foundation</td>
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MAJOR CONTRIBUTORS

A&A Wall Systems
AbbVie
Austin E. Knowlton Foundation
Beshear Financial Group
Calvary Industries, Inc.
Elsa Heisel Sule Foundation
FC Cincinnati Foundation
Harry and Jeanette Weinberg Foundation
HiFive Development Services
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Kids & Community Partners
Model Group
Nehemiah Manufacturing
PM Foundation
Prasco
The Greater Cincinnati Foundation
The Michael and Dorothy Ziekel Fund
of the In Faith Community Foundation
Turner Construction
Western & Southern Financial Group
William H. Albers Foundation
Tide

Net assets in 2020 totaled $11,802,084; total income in 2020 totaled $3,717,190. Income in 2020 includes $2,409,978 in operating support and $1,307,212 in capital contributions to the campus expansion.
THANK YOU!

See, I am doing a new thing!
Now it springs up; do you not perceive it?
I am making a way in the wilderness
and streams in the wasteland.

ISAIAH 43:19