

**FR1ENDS of the
CH1LDREN**

Tampa Bay

2024 IMPACT REPORT



The Power of One, The Power of Us!

HISTORY OF FRIENDS TAMPA BAY



2014

- ▶ Friends Tampa Bay launches as an affiliate of a local lead agency providing foster care services due to the alarming number of youth in care in Hillsborough, Pinellas and Pasco counties.
- ▶ 8 Friends began serving our first cohorts of 64 children with open dependency cases.

2018

- ▶ Friends Tampa Bay made the strategic decision to launch a stand-alone chapter to allow the organization to operate independently and increase the number of children served in the Tampa Bay area.

2020

- ▶ Despite challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, remote services continued.
- ▶ A new cohort was added in partnership with Hillsborough County Schools at Foster Elementary.

2024

- ▶ Our first cohort of youth reached the 10-year milestone with our program.
- ▶ A new cohort was added in partnership with Pinellas County Schools at Lealman Elementary.

ABOUT US

Friends of the Children—Tampa Bay is part of a national network of Friends of the Children chapters across the United States. Friends of the Children connects children – all of whom have unique talents – to a paid, professional mentor called a Friend. We hire and train Friends whose full-time jobs are to support our youth to succeed, despite the extremely challenging situations most experience, from as early as age 4 through high school graduation – *12+ years, no matter what.*

Our model is distinct, courageous and proven. We redefined youth mentoring by creating the first and only long-term professional mentoring program in the country. Friends are experts in building sustained and nurturing relationships with youth. Our model is evidence-informed and research-based, and we have proven long-term outcomes to show it works.

This is at the core of what we do. Each day, our Friends advocate and help amplify the voices of our youth and their families who often become voiceless in the midst of the systemic failures. By challenging the status quo, we also help shift the way institutions and systems view and treat our youth and their families. Friends also create meaningful experiences that teach youth to build life skills and make informed decisions while exploring the child's diverse talents and interests.

Our model is unique, and it works.



OUR VALUES

Our values guide us to achieve our mission. Each value applies not only to our youth, Friends and program teams, but also applies to all Friends of the Children employees, volunteers and partners. We use our values to make informed decisions; to hire, coach, manage; and most importantly, we use our values to change the way the world treats and views the youth and families we serve.

OUR MISSION

Impacting generational change by empowering youth who are facing the greatest obstacles through relationships with professional mentors – *12+ years, no matter what.*

OUR YOUTH AND FRIENDS

Our strength lies in our intentional, relationship-driven approach—ensuring each youth receives dedicated, long-term support from kindergarten through high school, for 12+ years, no matter what.

This commitment allows us to build deep, lasting connections that create meaningful impact, fostering a sense of stability and belonging. By standing alongside them through every challenge and milestone, we empower young people to realize their full potential and confidently shape their future.

Our 9 Core Assets



Growth Mindset



Belonging



Hope



Perseverance & Grit



Self Management



Problem Solving



Self Determination



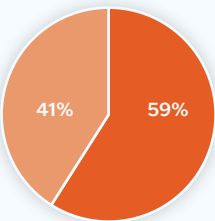
Find Your Spark



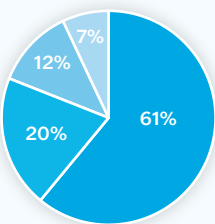
Positive Relationship Building

Youth Statistics

In 2024, we served **59 youth**—27 in elementary school and 32 in high school.

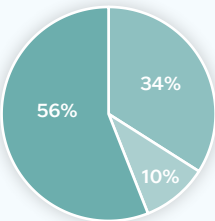


- ▶ **59%** Female
- ▶ **41%** Male



- ▶ **61%** Black
- ▶ **20%** White
- ▶ **12%** Latinx/Hispanic
- ▶ **7%** Multiracial

We serve youth across **three counties** and collaborate with Pinellas and Hillsborough County Schools to identify new cohorts.



- ▶ **56%** Hillsborough
- ▶ **34%** Pinellas
- ▶ **10%** Pasco

In 2024, our paid professional mentors devoted **11,500 hours** to supporting youth and shaping a brighter future.

Each Friend dedicates an **average of 4-6 hours per week**, year-round, to each youth, providing consistent and meaningful support.

OUR PROFESSIONAL MENTORS



Byron Pressley

Program Director
10 Years

We call our professional mentors **Friends** because they go beyond a job—they form lasting, meaningful relationships with youth. These Friends empower and support youth by advocating for their academic success, encouraging exploration of new interests, and connecting them to life-changing opportunities.

They provide emotional support, teach coping skills, and offer the stability of a consistent adult presence. For over 12+ years, no matter what, every youth in our program has had a Friend dedicated to spending 4 hours a week helping them navigate life’s challenges and reach their full potential.

Every child, no matter who they are or where they live, has dreams of doing big things. They have unique talents, and they face obstacles—sometimes, a lot more obstacles. Any child in any situation can succeed, even those facing the most obstacles. Our youth go on to become leaders in their communities and successful in their careers. This has ripple effects on their siblings, peers, neighbors, and their children, breaking the cycle of generational poverty.



Ken Baker

Professional Mentor
10 Years



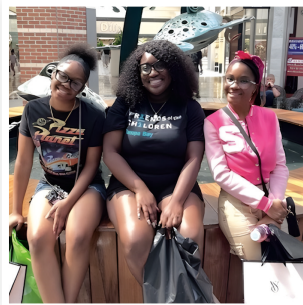
Greg Harvey

Professional Mentor
10 Years



Tatiyanna Henry

Professional Mentor
1 Year



Maya Ellis

Professional Mentor
2 Years



Tre Lawson

Professional Mentor
3 Years



Briana Robinson

Professional Mentor
5 Years



April Schmit

Professional Mentor
9 Years



Markus-Derek White

Professional Mentor
3 Years

KEN & DONOVAN



Donovan's journey with Friends of the Children—Tampa Bay is a testament to resilience and the profound impact of mentorship.

Introduced to the program at age 5, Donovan faced immense challenges early in life, growing up without knowing his parents and losing vision in one eye as a baby. After being taken in by his grandmother, Donovan met his Friend, Ken Baker, who would become a steadfast source of guidance and encouragement.

Tragically, a year later, Donovan's grandmother passed away in a car accident, leaving him and his sister in the care of their young aunt, whom they call "Titi," who was just starting her own life in college.

Through these hardships, Ken remained a constant in Donovan's life, providing stability and support. Ken's mentorship inspired Donovan's passion for fitness and athletics, encouraging him to explore weight training and later wrestling. Visits to Gold's Gym with Ken ignited Donovan's determination to "get swole," and his dedication caught the attention of Pasco High School's wrestling coach. Donovan never missed a practice, advanced to Regionals in the 106-pound weight class as a freshman, and now, as a junior, has set his sights on becoming first in State in the 126-pound weight class. His love for wrestling, coupled with his commitment to academics, consistently earning Honor Roll with a goal of straight A's, showcases his relentless drive to succeed.



Donovan's aspirations extend beyond high school. He dreams of attending college, possibly majoring in Psychology, and one day becoming a mentor for Friends of the Children to give back and inspire other kids facing adversity. His story exemplifies the transformative power of consistent, long-term mentorship. Ken's unwavering support has

helped Donovan overcome immense obstacles, build resilience, and believe in a brighter future. Together, they demonstrate the heart of Friends of the Children's mission: empowering youth to achieve greatness through enduring relationships grounded in trust, love, and encouragement.



Scan here to watch Donovan share his story.

CORE ASSETS



Lauren's Tenacity and Talent: Lauren always had a passion for the arts, but her self-confidence wavered. With the constant encouragement from her Friend, she began participating in local art competitions and community events. Her Friend helped her to see the value of her talent, and through persistence, Lauren became a regular exhibitor at local shows. Her artistic development is a testament to the power of mentorship in nurturing a child's innate talents and dreams.

Delanie's Growth: Delanie's journey illustrates the profound impact of fostering self-awareness, self-management, and self-determination. During an outing to the Nature Center, Delanie's Friend encouraged her to embrace challenges, and she responded with a maturity that showcased her emotional growth. This experience highlights how exposure to new environments, paired with mentorship, allows children to develop resilience and an appreciation for nature while reinforcing life skills that will help them succeed in the future.



83%

Graduate High School

98%

Waiting to Start a Family

93%

Avoid the Juvenile
Justice System

Investing in the Community

- ▶ **\$1 Invested** in Friends Tampa = **\$7 Returned** to the Tampa Bay Community
- ▶ Total annual **cost** of supporting one child in the Friends of the Children Tampa Bay program for our 12+ year commitment: **\$10,000**
- ▶ Total amount **saved** per child annually by the Tampa community **\$70,000**



Growth Mindset • Belonging • Hope • Problem Solving • Perseverance & Grit
Self-Management • Self-Determination • Find Your Spark • Positive Relationship Building

EDUCATION



LJ's Transformation: LJ started in the program as a second grader struggling with math and confidence. Over time, with the consistent support of his Friend, LJ not only excelled academically but also learned essential coping strategies to manage stress and frustration. His growth in both his math and spelling skills exemplifies the power of long-term mentoring, helping him gain the self-assurance to thrive in his academic environment.

Alicia's Academic Journey: Virtual schooling presented many challenges for Alicia, but with the guidance of her Friend, she set goals to return to in-person learning. Alicia's perseverance paid off as she began to see progress not just academically but also in her social behavior. By the end of the school year, Alicia had significantly improved her attendance, engagement, and academic performance, proving that her determination, combined with a Friend's consistent support, could overcome even the toughest barriers.



THE A, B, C, Ds OF SCHOOL SUCCESS AND OPPORTUNITY

Through 1:1 support, Friends are bridgebuilders to school success. They focus on key indicators of school engagement for every child: **Attendance**, **Behavior** and **Course Progression**. They also remove barriers and provide tangible support for youth to **Dream and Plan for their Futures**.

A

ATTENDANCE

- ▶ Friends foster belonging, safety, and motivation to stay in school.
- ▶ Friends help caregivers access community resources and mitigate barriers to school attendance.
- ▶ Friends work with school professionals to create personalized learning strategies for each youth.

B

BEHAVIOR

- ▶ Friends support identity development, promote youth voice, and build skills including self-regulation, problem-solving, and critical thinking.
- ▶ Friends work in classrooms, helping youth positively engage within the school environment.
- ▶ Friends promote positive peer development, connect youth to extracurricular activities, and integrate learning into peer-based outings.

C

COURSE PROGRESSION

- ▶ Friends work in and outside the classroom with youth and education specialists to advance proven trauma-informed strategies for literacy.
- ▶ Friends support caregivers to positively engage in their child's learning process.
- ▶ Friends communicate with teachers and staff to ensure youth have needed services including special education and mental health resources.

D

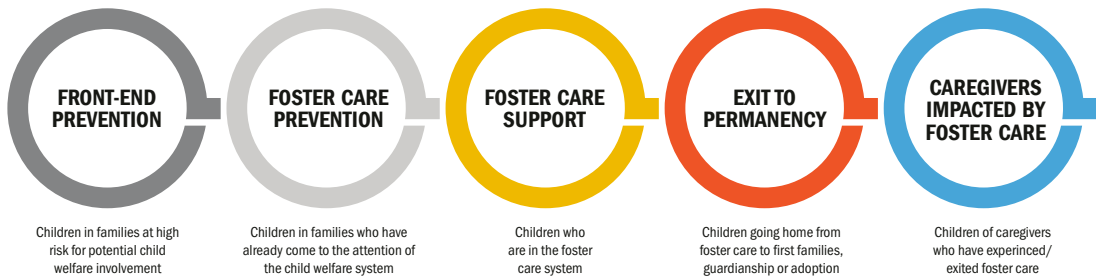
DREAM AND PLAN FOR THE FUTURE

- ▶ Friends provide youth opportunities for volunteering, career path exploration, college preparedness, employment opportunities, and military options.
- ▶ Friends work with youth to strive for the futures they envision, supporting them to apply for colleges and scholarships, build resumes, prepare for interviews—anything needed to advance their personal goals.

FOSTER CARE SUPPORT AND PREVENTION

OUR MODEL

We work with partners to identify families along the child and family well-being continuum to ensure that our model is serving the children and families who need us most.



Malachi's story is one of resilience, determination, and the transformative power of mentorship. From a young age, he faced the instability of foster care, moving between group homes and navigating challenges that could have easily derailed his potential. Yet, with the unwavering support of his Friend and Friend, Greg, through Friends of the Children—Tampa Bay, Malachi has not only persevered but thrived.

Greg's journey with Malachi began before their official mentorship. As a teacher's and bus assistant at Southern Oak Elementary, Greg's first task each morning was helping five-year-old Malachi into his harness in the front seat, sitting with him to ensure he arrived safely. Their bond grew in the classroom, where Greg often helped Malachi calm down or complete tasks.

Years later, when Greg joined Friends of the Children, he had the opportunity to select the final youth on his roster. Scrolling through a long list of children in foster care, he saw a familiar name—Malachi. In that moment, their story had a brand-new beginning.

Since then, Greg has been a steady presence in Malachi's life, building a relationship rooted in trust and shared passions. Despite frequent moves, Malachi has maintained all A's and B's, demonstrating remarkable academic achievement. Greg has also nurtured Malachi's creativity and confidence by introducing him to DJ'ing—a shared passion that has become a meaningful outlet. Practicing together twice a month, they have bonded over the craft, and last Christmas, Greg gifted Malachi a DJ board to encourage his growth.

- ▶ 46% of our youth live with an adoptive or non-biological parent.
- ▶ There are approximately 6,000 youth in foster care.

That encouragement paid off. Malachi's dedication and talent recently led to an exciting milestone—his first DJ gig at his new group home. Beyond music, he has embraced new challenges, joining his first organized basketball season at the YMCA. In his debut game, he scored six points, grabbed multiple rebounds, and helped his team secure a 35-33 victory.

Greg's commitment to Malachi embodies the heart of Friends of the Children's mission: providing long-term, stable mentorship to youth facing significant obstacles and empowering them to achieve their goals. Through Greg's guidance and the program's consistent support, Malachi continues to break barriers and build a future full of promise. His journey is a testament to the power of mentorship, proving that with resilience, encouragement, and opportunity, even the most daunting challenges can be overcome.

EVENTS

Huddle Up for Kids!

In 2024, we launched our **First Annual Huddle Up for Kids! event**, bringing together supporters for an unforgettable evening at House of Athlete—a premier training facility for elite athletes across the NFL, NBA, NHL, and MLB. Guests enjoyed game-day favorites, exclusive auction items, and the opportunity to connect, all while championing our mission. This exciting new tradition helps ensure we can continue making a lasting impact on the youth we serve.



Achievement Ceremony

To close out the school year, we hosted a celebratory event at **Dave & Buster's**, honoring the hard work and accomplishments of our youth. In partnership with Frameworks, we also facilitated a family-focused social and emotional learning activity, fostering connection and growth. With 110 youth, caregivers, and family members in attendance, it was a meaningful way to recognize achievements and strengthen our community.



PROGRAM PARTNERS

A Heartfelt Thank You

We are deeply grateful to our dedicated program partners, whose unwavering support strengthens our mission at Friends of the Children—Tampa Bay. Their generosity and commitment help ensure that the children and families we serve receive the resources, mentorship, and opportunities they need to thrive.

By standing with us, they empower our youth with essential tools, encouragement, and meaningful experiences that foster growth and resilience. Together, we are making a lasting impact, proving that when a community comes together, we can help every child reach their full potential—no matter what.



Angels Against Abuse has been a steadfast supporter of Friends of the Children—Tampa Bay, providing essential back-to-school supplies and holiday sponsorships for our youth. Their generosity ensures children in our community feel supported, empowered, and celebrated year-round.



Frameworks provided both Social and Emotional Learning training to our professional mentors, equipping them with essential tools to guide our youth. We also hosted a family-focused session, fostering connection and growth.



Kind Mouse supports our families by providing fresh and canned food, which we deliver weekly, ensuring barriers to food insecurity are removed.



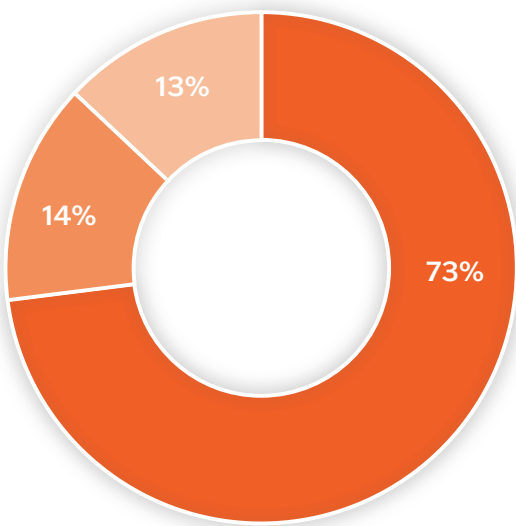
The Ryan Nece Foundation's Student Service Leaders offer literacy and math tutoring sessions, incorporating fun activities to make learning engaging.

FINANCIALS

2024 Financial Overview

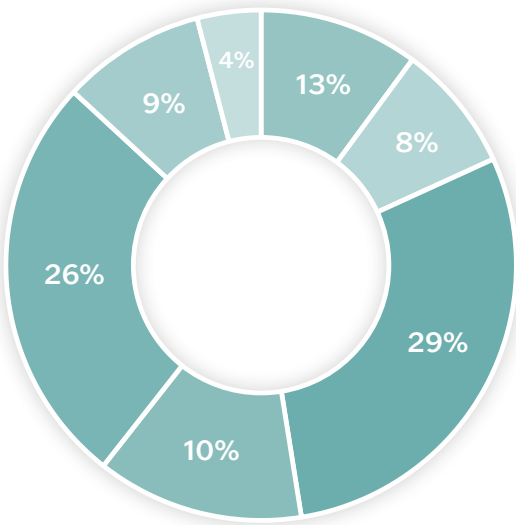
At Friends of the Children—Tampa Bay, we are committed to being responsible stewards of the resources entrusted to us. Every dollar we receive directly supports our mission of building lasting, professional mentoring relationships that empower youth facing the greatest obstacles. By prioritizing sustainability and impact, we ensure that our investments lead to meaningful, long-term change for the children and families we serve.

Our financial approach reflects our dedication to transparency and efficiency. With careful allocation of funds, we continue to expand our reach, strengthen our programming, and provide critical support to our youth—no matter what. The following financial breakdown demonstrates how we leverage funding to create life-changing opportunities and build a brighter future for the children of our communities.



EXPENSES TOTAL: \$1,224,071

- ▶ **73%** Program
- ▶ **14%** Development
- ▶ **13%** Administrative



REVENUE TOTAL: \$1,355,889

- ▶ **29%** Corporate Donors: \$391,938
- ▶ **26%** Public Funding: \$355,992
- ▶ **10%** Individual Donors: \$133,872
- ▶ **13%** National Grants: \$182,050
- ▶ **9%** Fundraising Events: \$127,152
- ▶ **8%** Foundations: \$111,278
- ▶ **4%** In-Kind/Other: \$53,608

LETTER FROM OUR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR AND SUPPORT STAFF

As we reflect on another year of dedication and growth at Friends of the Children – Tampa Bay, we are incredibly grateful for the support of our donors, partners, and volunteers. Your commitment has enabled us to continue empowering the youth who face the greatest obstacles through the strong, long-term relationships we build with our professional mentors, or Friends.

Over the past year, our chapter has made significant strides in fulfilling our mission of creating lasting generational change. We have expanded our reach, deepened our partnerships, and continued to prioritize the well-being and development of the children we serve. Despite the challenges of the ongoing post-pandemic recovery, we have adapted, ensuring our youth and families receive the support they need to thrive.

Looking ahead, our strategic goals remain ambitious. We aim to grow our programming, strengthen our community partnerships, and increase the number of youth we serve in Hillsborough, Pasco, and Pinellas counties. Together, we are shaping a brighter future for the children of Tampa Bay, one relationship at a time.

We thank you for your unwavering belief in our mission. The impact we make is only possible because of your dedication and generosity. As we continue this journey, we invite you to stay with us, as we empower more youth to reach their fullest potential—no matter what.

Warm regards,



Jessica Heck
Executive Director



Rachel Orth
Operations Manager



Eleni Sakis
Resource Development Manager

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

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Put Children First

We intentionally serve youth who are facing the greatest obstacles. To help our youth discover their limitless potential, we foster their internal resiliency. We listen to our youth and base decisions on each youth's needs and dreams. We prioritize self-care so that we bring our best selves to our work and focus on our youth.



Build Relationships on Love

We nurture long-term relationships from a foundation of love, acceptance and culturally-informed practice. We don't give up easily and take a no matter what approach to our work. We commit for the long-term. We intentionally develop collaborative relationships over time with trust, empathy and healthy communication. We believe that we build community through one-on-one connections that are authentic, respectful and meaningful.



Commit to Empowerment

We leverage personal strengths to take ownership of our futures. We build relationships within the communities of our youth and families to strengthen social networks and provide bridges to new opportunities. We consistently inspire possibility through empathy, hard work and fun. We model all of this for our youth, families and each other.



Pursue Goals Relentlessly

We celebrate all achievements, big and small. We are disciplined in our commitment to goals, while innovative in how we reach them. We believe that the definition of success requires intentional reflection and adjustment over time. We work together and hold ourselves accountable with data to achieve short and long-term outcomes.



Demand Equity

We acknowledge the historical and present injustices impacting marginalized communities. We demand equity from ourselves and from our community. We insist that all people have the necessary support to achieve all of their hopes and dreams. We amplify the voices of our children, families and communities. We bring together different experiences, skills and backgrounds to provide opportunities to overcome personal, systemic and institutional barriers.

OUR KIND DONORS

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FR1ENDS of the
CH1LDREN
Tampa Bay

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