



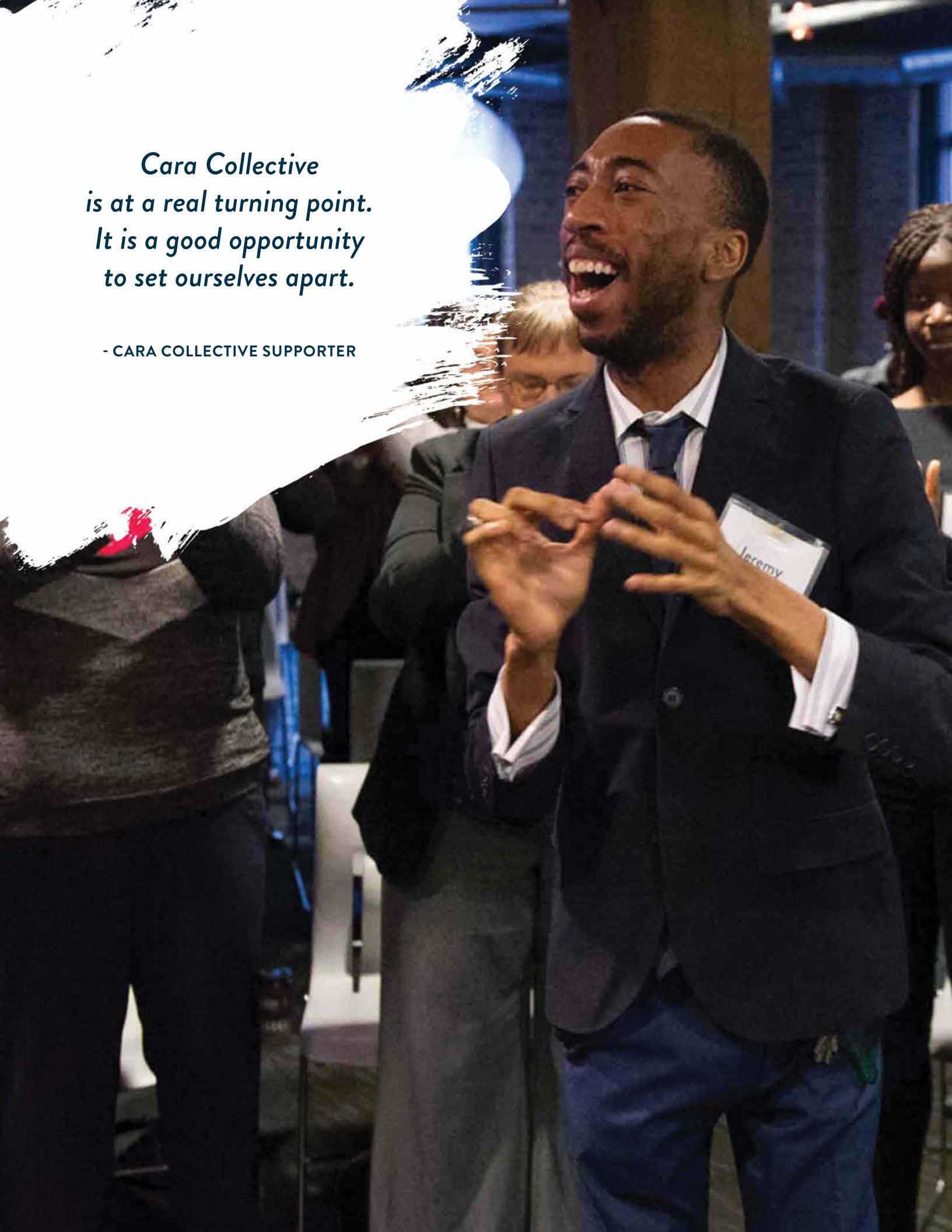
STRATEGIC PLAN FY23 – FY25



Access. Equity. Opportunity.

*Cara Collective
is at a real turning point.
It is a good opportunity
to set ourselves apart.*

- CARA COLLECTIVE SUPPORTER



Letter from the President & CEO

Hello Cara Collective Community,

It is an incredible honor to present our FY23-FY25 Strategic Plan, **Access. Equity. Opportunity.**

This plan is the culmination of months of meetings, conversations, interviews, and self-reflection with our community – including participants, staff, alumni, board members, partners, and supporters. We drew influence and inspiration from what we were seeing in our world today – and how it was impacting the people we serve. We also worked with our new friends from Open Door Advisors, who led us through a comprehensive human-centered planning process.

This was a long, but fulfilling process. From it, it was evident that nearly 32 years into this work, Cara Collective still stands on an incredible foundation, envisioned by our founder Tom Owens and built by this devoted community. We wanted this plan to honor where we've been, while recognizing where we can go, what it will take to get there, and how can we do more for the people we serve.

We are at an incredible turning point. We are not just entering a new chapter for this storied organization, we are asking ourselves what is possible. Since joining Cara Collective nearly two years ago, I have been constantly inspired by the power of what is possible. I see that power firsthand in our participants as they build new beginnings for themselves. I see it in our partners, who are working alongside us to create more opportunities for employment. And I see it in our staff, whose commitment and passion for this mission is what truly brings it all to life.

With this plan, we are making a commitment to what is possible. We are expanding **access** to our services by working with our participants to evolve our program design, centering it in what they say they need for success in our ever-changing workforce. We are going deeper, both within ourselves and with our partners, to examine what it means to truly frame our work and practices in **equity**. And we are creating more **opportunity** for our job seekers, their families, and communities as we live out our vision of eradicating relational and financial poverty.

Whether you are new to Cara or a long-time friend, my hope is that you too feel excited and motivated by what is possible. I thank you for being a part of this beautiful community, for being our *cara* – our friend, and for your commitment to **access, equity, and opportunity**.

In friendship,



KATHLEEN ST. LOUIS CALIENTO
PRESIDENT & CEO, CARA COLLECTIVE

MESSAGE FROM THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Cara Collective's Board of Directors is proud to support the FY23-FY25 Strategic Plan, **Access. Equity. Opportunity.** Over the past seven months, our goal was to work with staff and leadership to help craft a three-year plan that is comprehensive, bold, and allows flexibility as Cara Collective enters a new chapter.

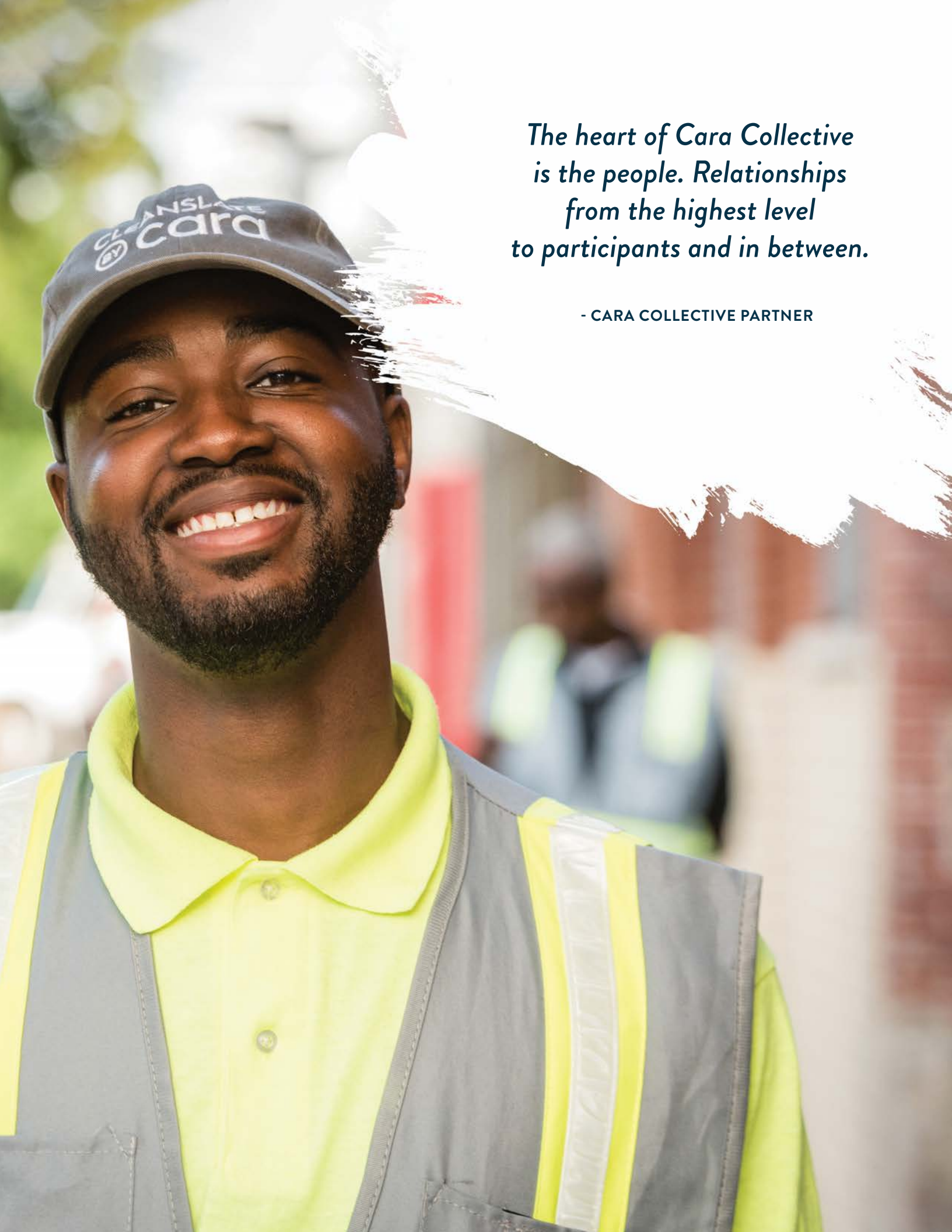
One of the greatest strengths of Cara Collective is the ability to innovate and re-think our approach to the issues surrounding this work. This has been key to how we continue to expand our reach and impact year over year – from the early foresight to codify our trainings to launching our own social enterprises to taking this methodology to new markets through our expansion model. More than 8,000 lives have been transformed as a result of this.

With this next step, we ask how can we continue to innovate and meet our job seekers where they need us most. We ask how can we best use our influence and experience to work with partners on dismantling the social and racial inequities that create barriers to employment for so many of our black and brown communities. And we ask what does it take to be a truly equitable organization for staff, the people we serve, and the people we partner with in this work.

The Board of Directors is committed to the vision of this plan and will continue uplifting and advancing the critical work of Cara Collective. We thank our amazing community and Open Door Advisors for the tireless work that went into getting us to this moment. We look forward to working together as we make the priorities laid out in **Access. Equity. Opportunity.** a reality.

Sincerely,

ANDREA O'LEARY
INTERIM BOARD CHAIR



*The heart of Cara Collective
is the people. Relationships
from the highest level
to participants and in between.*

- CARA COLLECTIVE PARTNER

Since our humble beginnings of one man going from shelter to shelter to connect people experiencing poverty with quality employment, the work of Cara Collective has always focused on the notion of building access, equity, and opportunity.

Today, more than three decades and 13,000 jobs later, we are proud to share the blueprint for the next chapter of this organization. In this report, you will get an overview of how we will elevate and deepen the impact of our work, drive equitable and systemic change through our influence and experience, and foster and grow our participants and staff to promote real and lasting success.

Process

Our Strategic Plan is a result of an inclusive, seven-month process that engaged a broad set of the Cara Collective community including staff, participants, partners, board members, and supporters.

A cornerstone of this strategy development is the SOAR (Strengths, Opportunities, Aspirations, and Results) analysis process. The SOAR analysis process is an alternative to traditional SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats) analysis, which centers on an asset-based (vs. deficit-focused) approach to inquiry and engagement, yielding deeper and more useful information about an organization and the environment in which it operates.

The aim of the SOAR process is to gather meaningful insights from key constituent groups and partners to inform Cara Collective's strategy development.

Cara Collective is known for its effective model and is sought out as a thought leader. How do we leverage this legacy to have greater impact, at greater scale, and move the needle through systems change?

- CARA COLLECTIVE SUPPORTER

IN DOING SO, WE ENGAGED

ALL

**CARA COLLECTIVE
STAFF AND
DEPARTMENTS**

including 12
Staff Ambassadors

25

**CARA
PARTICIPANTS
AND ALUMNI**

15

**COMMUNITY
AND BUSINESS
PARTNERS**

25

**FUNDERS
AND KEY
SUPPORTERS**

ALL

**BOARD
MEMBERS**

including 7 Board
Strategic Planning
Committee Members

Timeline

FEBRUARY

Launch: Begin Weekly Board Strategic Plan Roles and Responsibilities, Project Management Meetings

1

2

MARCH

First Meeting of Inclusion Groups*
Staff Ambassadors, Board Strategic Planning Committee, Executive Team

3

APRIL

SOAR Interviews, Emerging Strategy Themes, Monthly Virtual Board Briefings Begin, Vision and Mission Design

4

MAY

Participant SOAR Focus Groups, SOAR Report, Core Values Refresh, Retreat, Strategic Priorities Finalized

5

JUNE

Board Votes Unanimous Approval, Funder Call, Financial Sustainability and Risk Assessment, Three-Year Goal Setting

6

JULY

Action Planning Begins, Final Inclusion Group Meetings

7

AUGUST

Board Summit, FY23 Annual Action Plan Completed

**See our full list of Inclusion Group members in our Appendix*

Strategic Direction

OUR NEW MISSION

Build an inclusive economy by developing employment pathways to advance transformative individual and community success.

Our refreshed Mission supports our Vision by uplifting what we do and what that achieves

OUR VISION

Fuel a courageous national movement to eradicate relational and financial poverty.

OUR VALUES

At Cara Collective, we believe in the idea of “one band, one sound,” meaning we are at our best and strongest when we work together as a community. Born out of the concepts we consistently saw when evaluating what we do and why we see results, our refreshed values honor the foundation that has gotten us to this point and ensures that equity is rooted in all we do.



Motivation

Motivation propels. We identify, instill, and hold onto it. Where there is a desire to succeed, there is an opportunity to transform thought into action.



Intentionality

Intentionality aims. We focus on the endgame during planning and design. In doing so, we build roadmaps to real, lasting success and avoid deriving validation from a quick win.



Affirmation

Affirmation reinforces. We celebrate instances of progress, understanding that the journey in the right direction is just as, if not more, important than the final destination.



Equity

Equity informs. We commit to taking an antiracist approach in all we do. We leverage our individuality and differences as a way of deepening community and expanding opportunity.



Community

Community connects. We actively build networks that strengthen us all. If we can get each other, we can serve each other best.

OUR STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

The overall goal of our plan is to build new pathways for the people we serve – in our service offerings we will co-create with our participants, in the inclusive job market we will build with our partners, and in our country as we work to dismantle the social inequities our community faces. To live out our Values, realize the purpose of our Mission, and achieve our Vision, we identified four strategic priorities to guide our work over the next three years and beyond:



**Deepen
Participant Experience**



**Strengthen
Team Purpose & Value**

**Champion
Racial Equity**

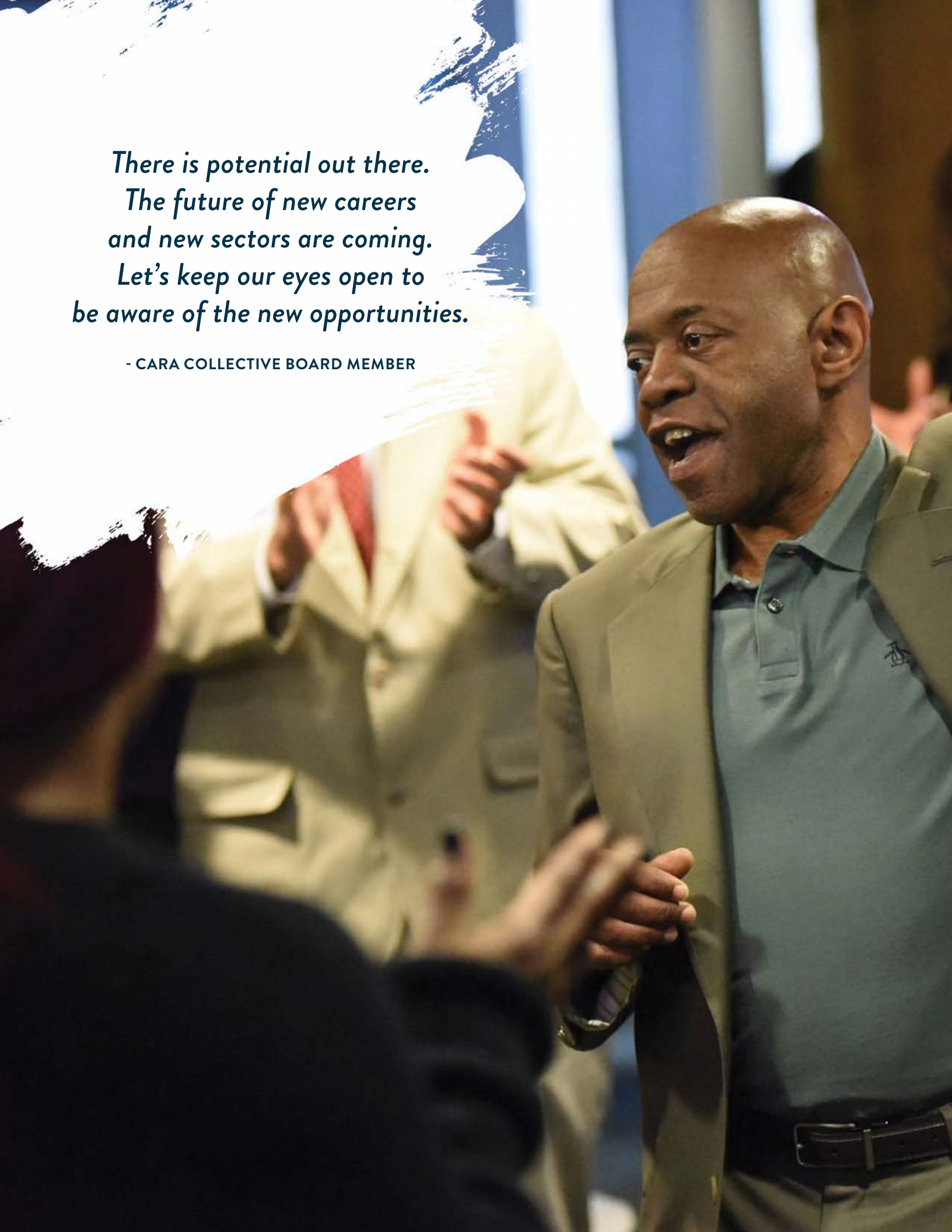


**Catalyze
Systemic Impact**



*There is potential out there.
The future of new careers
and new sectors are coming.
Let's keep our eyes open to
be aware of the new opportunities.*

- CARA COLLECTIVE BOARD MEMBER





PRIORITY 1

Deepen Participant Experience

At the center of everything we do is our participants. Over the years, we have augmented our service delivery to best reach job seekers where they were at – but ultimately, our participants are what guide us in our work and in our decision making. As we look to the next chapter of this organization, we recognize that our needs and our challenges will change as our programming becomes more nimble, accessible, and effective. As we adapt, we want to ensure that at the heart of this work we are first and foremost in service to our participants.

In this priority, we seek to elevate the voice of our participants to drive job seeker-informed programming that fosters enthusiastic interest, sustained engagement, and long-term success through three primary goals:

- 1 **Involve participants and alumni in program design, strategy, and governance**
- 2 **Re-energize and innovate programs and culture to reach and retain more participant**
- 3 **Cultivate self-determination and financial stability**

OUTCOME

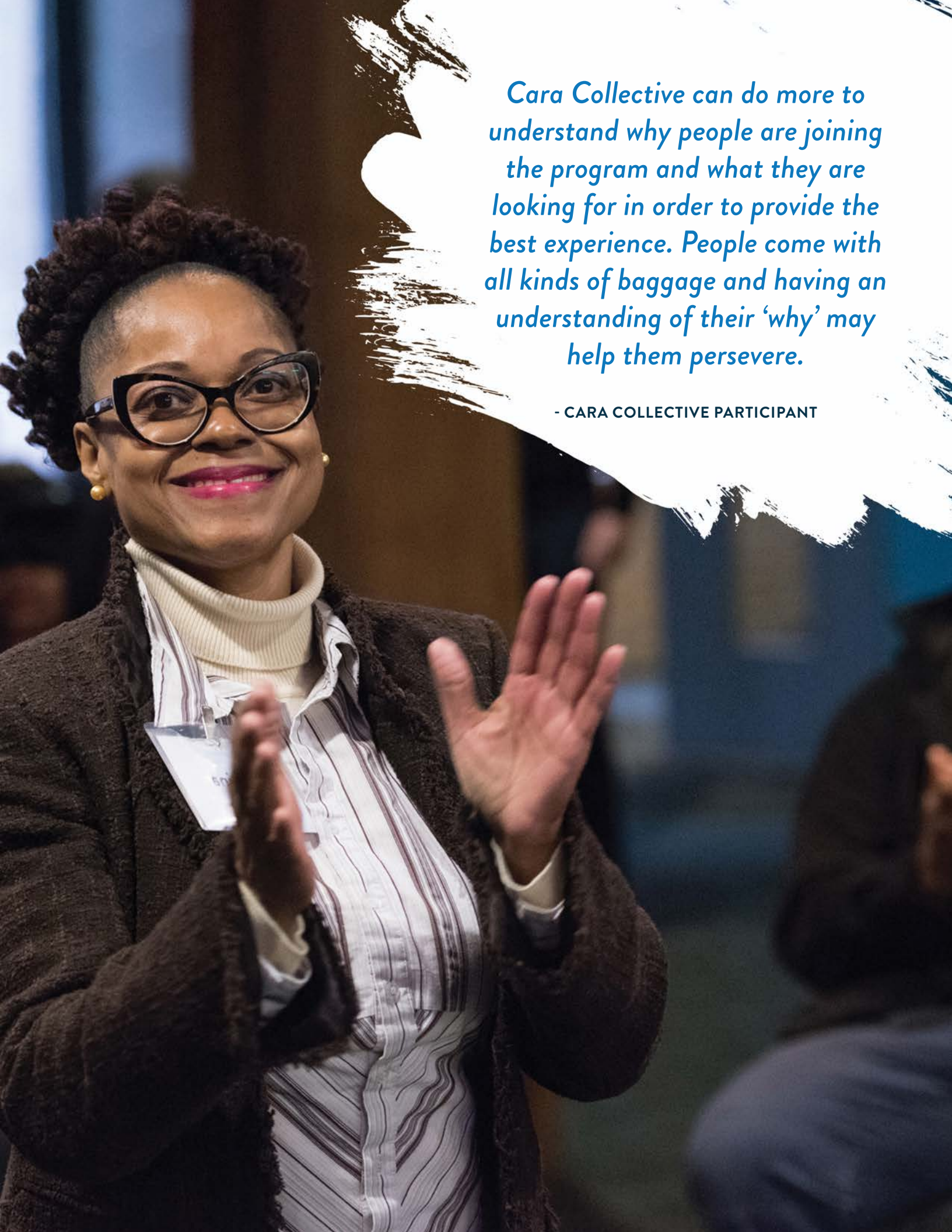
By FY25, 70% of participants in Cara Collective's services will meet Send Out Eligibility status (the point at which they've demonstrated our program's workplace competencies) **within one month from our measured point of traction.**

“

Most programs don't help people understand that they have a part in this process. Cara's approach is not paternalistic, and the participants have a say and a stake in the process.

- CARA COLLECTIVE PARTNER





Cara Collective can do more to understand why people are joining the program and what they are looking for in order to provide the best experience. People come with all kinds of baggage and having an understanding of their 'why' may help them persevere.

- CARA COLLECTIVE PARTICIPANT



PRIORITY 2

Strengthen Team Purpose & Value

None of this work we do is possible without our staff – who we often refer to as the best and brightest in social purpose. While our goal has always been to be an equitable employer of choice that offers career depth and mobility, Cara Collective has not been immune to “The Great Resignation” most industries have seen over the past year. As we continue to evolve as an organization, we want to do so while guaranteeing an employee experience that excites, invigorates, and prepares everyone for the career they hope for over the long-term.

In this priority, we will invest in the holistic wellness and economic mobility of our staff, to uplift the essential role our team plays in our mission and community through three primary goals:

- 1 Ensure our leadership, culture, and policies promote and support staff health, wellness, and belonging
- 2 Facilitate workplace practices that enrich pay mobility, job satisfaction, and foster retention
- 3 Encourage team learning and development opportunities

OUTCOME

By FY25, 80% of staff will rate Cara Collective a great place to work and grow in unbiased, independent surveys.

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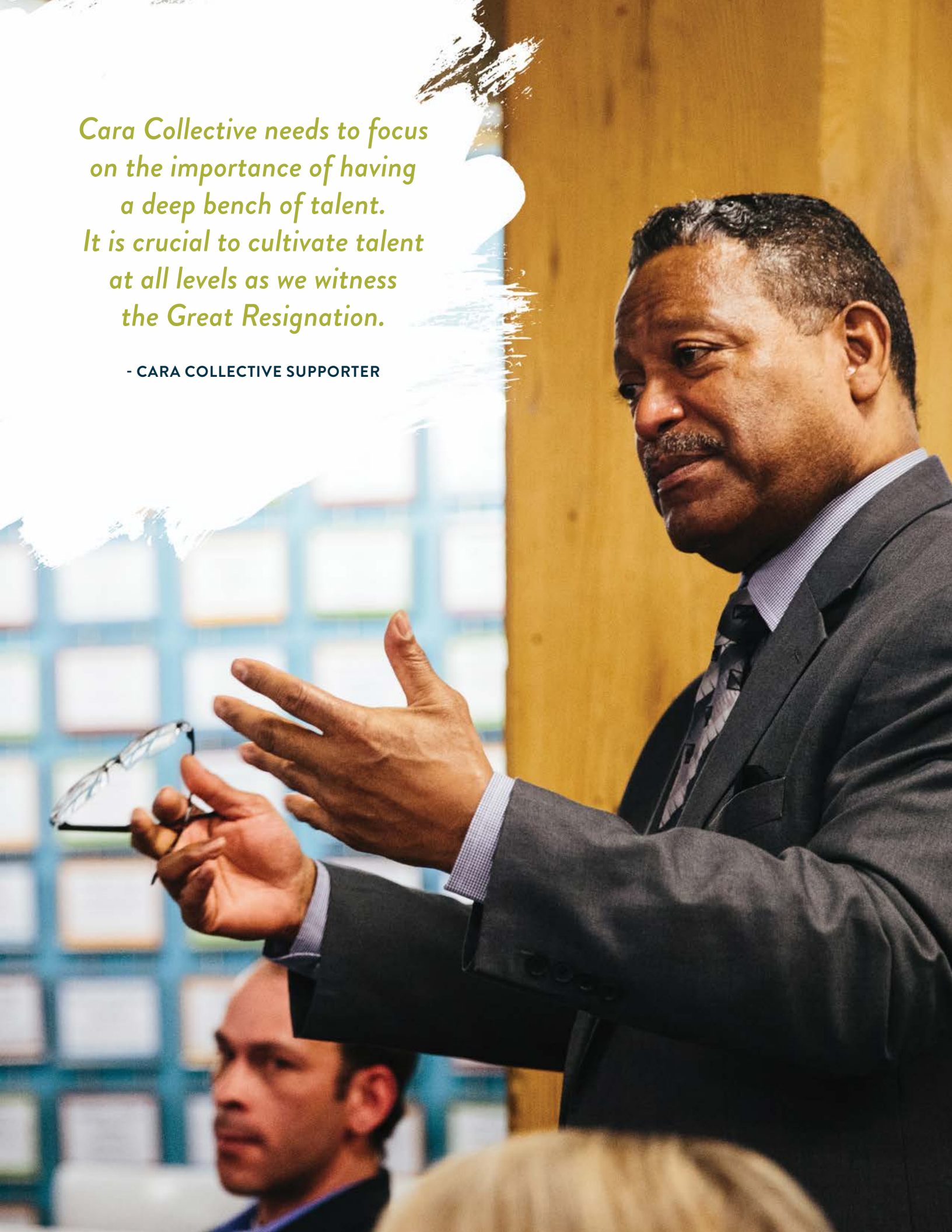
Talent satisfaction and retention will lead to more cohesion, innovation, and goal focus for the organization.

- CARA COLLECTIVE STAFF MEMBER



*Cara Collective needs to focus
on the importance of having
a deep bench of talent.
It is crucial to cultivate talent
at all levels as we witness
the Great Resignation.*

- CARA COLLECTIVE SUPPORTER





PRIORITY 3

Champion Racial Equity

For more than 30 years, the work of Cara Collective has been steeped in racial equity. The majority of the community we serve is black and brown and we recognize the societal challenges they face, and how those challenges contribute to barriers to employment. We know we cannot do this work without talking about our commitment to racial equity explicitly and we want to hold ourselves and our partners accountable.

In this priority, we seek to identify and dismantle racial inequities in all aspects of our work through three primary goals:

- 1 Build upon Cara Collective's equity platform and define organizational practices that unite us
- 2 Increase intentionality in internal hiring and advancement for/related to staff in key identity areas
- 3 Root racial equity in our external partnerships

OUTCOME


By FY25, 90% of staff and participants rate Cara Collective as an organization that advances racial equity, and Cara Collective's racial equity platform will be applied to 100% of our partnerships.

“

Cara Collective's greatest strength is the understanding they have of the population they serve. Their understanding of the worker has so many levels of nuance that they can think through all of the services that surround each worker.

- CARA COLLECTIVE SUPPORTER



A close-up portrait of a smiling Black man with a grey beard, wearing a white lab coat over a light blue shirt. The background is a blurred indoor setting with warm, bokeh-style lights. A white, brush-stroke-like graphic element is positioned in the upper right corner, containing a quote in orange text and the attribution in dark blue text.

*Since our work itself is
entrenched in DEI conceptually,
it would be great if our time,
resource, and learning commitment
to DEI was extremely prevalent
and apparent in every undertaking,
decision, and piece of marketing.*

- CARA COLLECTIVE STAFF MEMBER



PRIORITY 4

Catalyze Systemic Impact

If we are going to be successful in our vision of eradicating relational and financial poverty, we must change the dynamic. Through the work of our social enterprises and expansion arm, we have demonstrated how spreading our reach and influence can increase opportunities for gainful employment. However, as this need is still great, we must ask ourselves how can we better leverage our partners (new and old) to close the wealth gap – in Chicago and beyond.

In this priority, we will develop employment pathways that help close the wealth gap for untapped talent by activating job seeker, employer, and organizational expertise through transformative partnerships that upend the workforce ecosystem through three primary goals:

- 1 Create more career pathways by developing new and deepening existing strategic partnerships with corporate partners
- 2 Expand national workforce development strategy to impact more job seekers' ability to obtain, retain, and advance in quality jobs
- 3 Explore investments in new enterprises and communities that provide sustainable earnings for participants

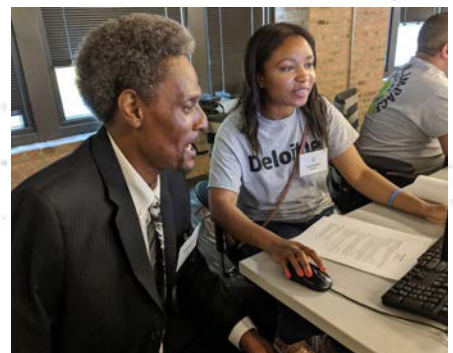
OUTCOME

By FY25, Cara Collective will see a 25% increase in the number of job opportunities for our participants, inclusive employers practicing our methodology, and revenue generated to fuel this work.

“

I want to see Cara as a motivational tool and support system in broader society (e.g., correctional facilities, large retail stores, and other community-based sites).

- CARA COLLECTIVE PARTICIPANT



*Cara Collective is known
for its effective model and is
sought out as a thought leader.
How do we leverage this legacy
to have greater impact
at greater scale, and move the
needle through systems change?*

- CARA COLLECTIVE SUPPORTER



Acknowledgments / Appendix

We would like to thank Lauri Alpern and Open Door Advisors for their incredible partnership in putting together our FY23-FY25 Strategic Plan and for their work with our community of staff, participants, alumni, board members, partners, and supporters in ensuring all voices were uplifted in our planning.

Thank you to our Cara Collective community for continuing to walk alongside us in our vision to eradicate poverty. We look forward to being on this journey with you as we build more pathways to access, equity, and opportunity.

BOARD OF DIRECTORS STRATEGIC PLANNING COMMITTEE

A Strategic Planning Committee of the Cara Collective Board of Directors was formed that included a chair and six members. The Committee provided stewardship and governance throughout the process through monthly meetings. Kathleen St. Louis Caliento, President and CEO participated in all meetings.

DeRondal Bevy

Julie Owens Burns

Andrea O’Leary

Steve Quirk

Brent Rasmussen

Wendy Raymer

**Doyoung Yong,
Committee Chair**

STAFF AMBASSADORS

Representing the full breadth and depth of Cara Collective, 12 Staff Ambassadors met monthly and facilitated discussions at their centers and workstreams to center the employee experience in the strategic plan.

Joycee Black

Enrique Borges

Liana Bran

Julie Chiu

Robyn El Kay, Lead

Lynnette Frazier

Cheryl Gavin

Aaron Jones

Gabriel Pachter

Lisa Peters

Elaine Ross

Nora Vail

EXECUTIVE TEAM*

The executive team guided the strategic planning process. Led by Kathleen St. Louis Caliento, the executive team represented Cara Collective’s enterprise and ensured alignment between strategy and organizational resources and values, inclusion and participation, and equity throughout.

**Kathleen St. Louis Caliento,
President & CEO**

Emily Billups

Brady Gott


Tara Harper

Joe Mutuc

Joel Pomerenk

Sara Wasserteil

**as of 9/1/2022*

A man with short dark hair and a beard, wearing a dark suit, white shirt, and pink tie, is seated at a desk. He is looking down and to his left. The background is an office with a green wall and a white ceiling. There are some papers and a computer monitor visible in the background.

*Before Cara,
I didn't have stable housing.
now I have a stable living situation
for myself and my children.*

Cara pushed me more.

*I am more motivated,
I am a better mentor,
and I know how to speak up
and advocate for myself better.*

- CARA COLLECTIVE PARTICIPANT



cara
COLLECTIVE

Learn more about this work and help fuel
our vision at www.caracollective.org