

# 2025 ANNUAL REPORT



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Dear Friends of Cara Collective,

It's an honor to share our Fiscal Year 2025 Annual Report with you, covering our impact from July 1, 2024 to June 30, 2025. In this report, we celebrate the incredible progress we've made together and the pathways we've built for thousands of individuals seeking a way forward.

At Cara Collective, we know that the journey out of poverty looks different for everyone. That's why our approach is deeply personal, tailored to meet each individual where they are and help them take the next step toward stability and success. You can read more about the journey through Cara on pages 8 and 9.

This year, we closed out our three-year strategic plan – a bold roadmap that challenged us to rethink what is possible in our work as we navigated the other side of the COVID-19 pandemic. You can see a number of the ways we expanded our reach, deepened our impact, and innovated in ways that truly transform lives on pages 4 and 5. From launching programs to strengthening our infrastructure to securing record-breaking support, every achievement reflects the power of our collective community.

One of the many highlights of this past year was partnering with the City of Chicago on the Neighborhood Clean-Up Initiative. This effort did more than beautify our streets – it created Cleanslate crew jobs, restored pride in communities, and demonstrated the power of collaboration. It's a perfect example of how building pathways isn't just about employment; it's about dignity, safety, and belonging.

And Cara Plus continues to work with companies and nonprofits nationwide to rethink what inclusive hiring can look like. These efforts amplify our impact far beyond our local footprint, proving that the principles of access, equity, and opportunity can transform hiring practices everywhere.

Behind every accomplishment are the people who make this work possible: our job seekers, who inspire us with their resilience; our partners and donors, whose belief in our mission fuels our progress; and our dedicated staff and volunteers, who bring compassion and expertise to every interaction. **Together, we are proving that when we invest in people, we invest in stronger families, neighborhoods, and economies.**

As we look ahead to the next chapter of Cara Collective, we know the need remains great. But we also know the pathways we've built – and the ones we will continue to create – are changing lives every day. We are excited about our current transition in leadership and the opportunity it presents to build on Cara Collective's strong foundation as we continue to pursue our mission of advancing transformative individual and community success.

Thank you for walking this journey with us, for believing in the power of work, and for helping us ensure that opportunity is not a privilege, but a promise.

With gratitude,



*Kathleen S. Caliento*

**KATHLEEN S. LOUIS CALIENTO**

PRESIDENT & CEO

\* As of June 30, 2025



*J. Todd*

**J. TODD PHILLIPS**

CHAIR, BOARD OF DIRECTORS

# FY23-FY25 Strategic Plan

Three years ago, as we emerged from the unprecedented challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic, we found ourselves at a pivotal moment. The world changed and so did the needs of the people we serve. It was clear that we needed to pause, reflect, and realign – to reground ourselves in our mission, recenter our priorities, and regroup as a team to ensure we could meet those evolving needs with clarity and purpose.

Built on four key pillars – **Deepen Participant Experience, Strengthen Team Purpose & Value, Champion Equity, and Catalyze Systemic Impact** – our Strategic Plan was designed to elevate and deepen the impact of our work. It aimed to drive equitable and systemic change through our influence and experience, while fostering growth for both participants and staff to promote real and lasting success.

On the following pages, we celebrate just a few of the accomplishments and key outcomes from this ambitious three-year journey.

## PRIORITY 1

### Deepen Participant Experience



Improved the  
**Send Out Eligibility ratio**  
(the point at which a Cara participant  
has demonstrated our program's  
workplace competencies) by

**10x**

Expanded our  
recruitment referral  
partners to  
**reach more  
job seekers**

Launched the  
**Cara Accelerator  
Program**

designed to offer paid  
training and immediate  
access to short-term work

Added vision, legal,  
mental health,  
disability, housing, and  
document recovery  
services to our  
wraparound supports

**90% of  
participants**  
stated they are satisfied with  
their experience at Cara

#### PRIORITY 2

##### Strengthen Team Purpose & Value



##### Deployed new employee benefits

from holiday closure to sabbatical to new 401k and healthcare

##### Designed and implemented a Career Pathing framework

##### Increased focus on professional development and growth

launching an annual stipend for trainings, memberships, etc.

Improved goal setting and performance management to better connect staff and their role to the broader goals of the organization

Grew full-time staff by **25%**

#### PRIORITY 3

##### Champion Racial Equity



##### 90% of participants

rated Cara Collective as an organization that advances equity

##### Codified Cara Collective's equity statement

Engaged the Center for the Study of Social Policy to assess equitable internal processes at Cara Collective

#### PRIORITY 4

##### Catalyze Systemic Impact



##### Received the three largest investments

in our history

**116%** increase in Cleanslate jobs

Expanded Cara Plus's reach, engaging

**140+**

companies and organizations over three years

**39%** increase in our overall budget

**41%** increase in total jobs over three years

Grew our digital presence by **76%**

# Who We Are

We are people who believe in opportunity. We are a community that builds success. We are made up of motivated job seekers, passionate donors, active volunteers, corporations with a conscience, and organizations united in our work. Together, we are fueling a courageous national movement to eradicate relational and financial poverty. **We are Cara Collective.**

## OUR MISSION

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

## OUR VISION

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

## OUR BELIEF IN EQUITY

Cara Collective commits to taking an inclusive approach in all we do: in our program design, representation in our staff, partnerships we choose to enter, and our external and internal communications and policies. We leverage our individuality and differences as a way of deepening community and expanding opportunity in and around our organization.

## OUR CORE VALUES



### 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.



### 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.



### Community

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



### 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.



### Equity

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

## WHO WE SERVE

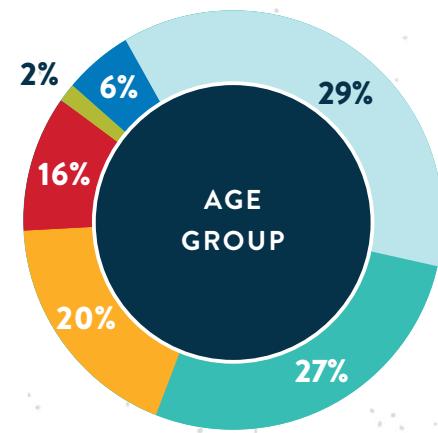
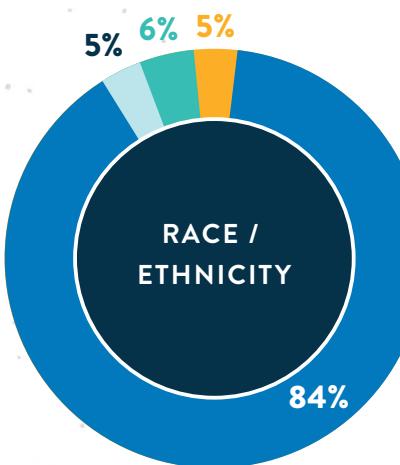
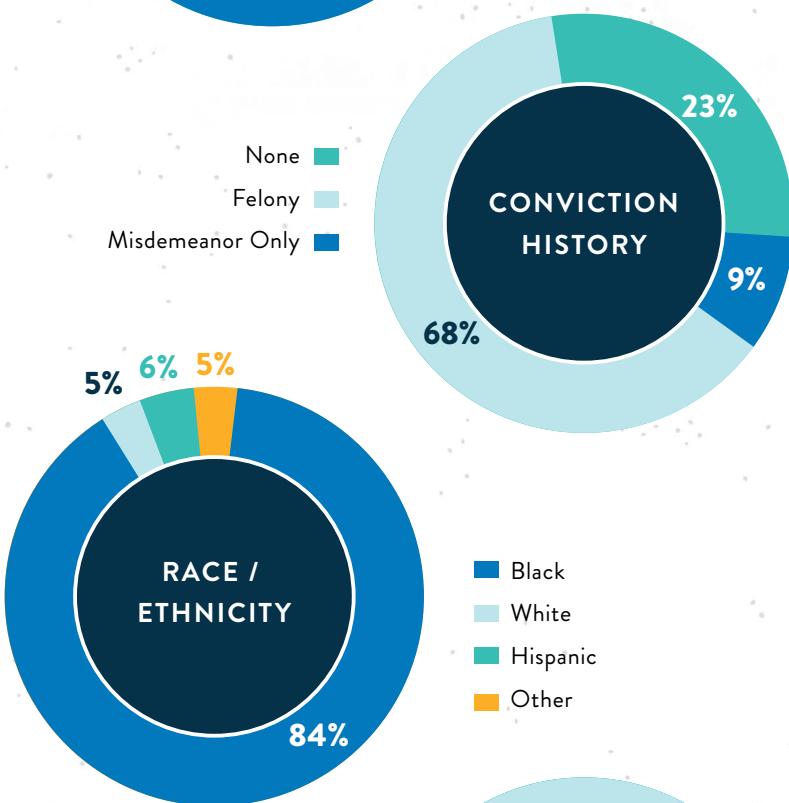
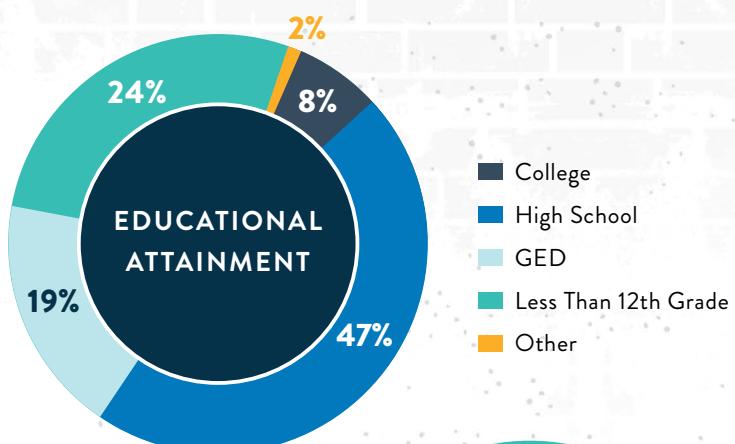
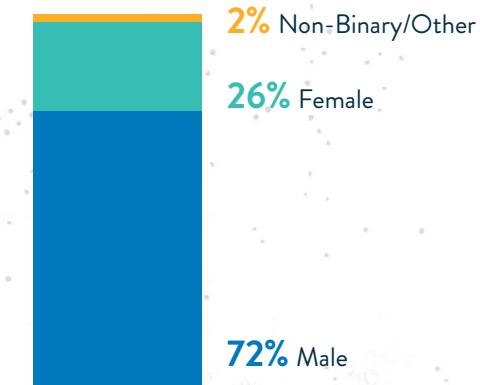
Our participants aren't just looking for a job – they're striving to break the cycle of poverty and homelessness by securing meaningful, life-changing employment. They seek work that not only meets their basic living needs, but also offers dignity, purpose, and a path forward.

Gainful employment means more than a paycheck. It builds confidence, drives personal growth, and lays the foundation for long-term careers. And once our job seekers get a glimpse of what's possible, they're inspired to keep going – transforming their lives, uplifting their families, and strengthening their communities.

41

AVERAGE AGE OF CARA PARTICIPANTS

### GENDER BREAKDOWN



## THE JOURNEY THROUGH CARA

No one's journey out of poverty looks the same, and neither should the support they receive. That's why Cara Collective offers a continuum of services tailored to every individual, meeting them where they are and walking alongside them every step of the way. We focus on unlocking potential, building skills, and expanding opportunity, so every job seeker can forge a path toward real and lasting success.



### Recruitment

We work closely with prospective participants to understand their needs and goals. We also partner with social service agencies, shelters, and community organizations to help find untapped talent and start them on their journey.



### Transformation Training

Our signature trainings take a holistic, trauma-informed approach. By focusing on both workforce readiness and socio-emotional skills, we ensure we are developing the whole person, while building the workplace competencies needed for real and lasting success.



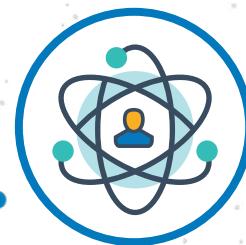
### Coaching & Retention

Throughout the entire Cara journey, from day one to one year on the job, our participants work with a coach to address any personal or professional hurdles and celebrate every milestone achieved.



## Transitional Work

Alongside our trainings, we create short-term employment opportunities. These allow our job seekers to gain hands-on experience, strengthen their resumes, and earn income while they continue to work with our team on their long-term job opportunity.



## Supportive Services

Many of our job seekers face significant barriers on their path out of poverty. Through decades of collaboration with supportive service partners – from housing and childcare to legal aid and beyond – we refer them to services to help empower them along their journey.



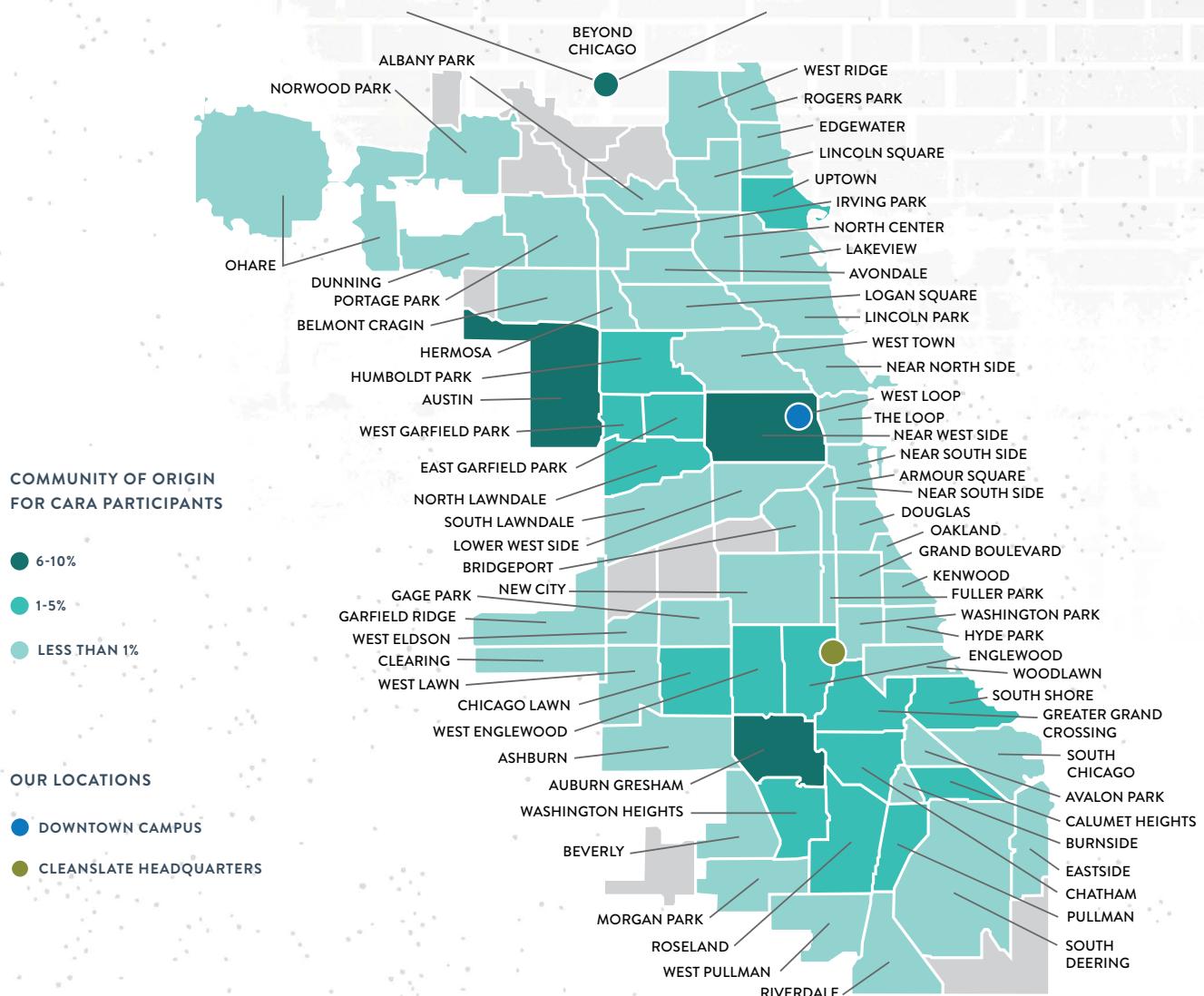
## Employment Services

We believe every job seeker deserves the dignity of choice in their career. By building trusted partnerships with top Chicago companies across 13 different industries, we help open doors to long-term employment opportunities that might otherwise be out of reach.

## One Year of Employment

Once a Cara participant successfully completes one year on the job, they graduate from our program and become a proud Cara Alumni!





## ***“Cara has shown me that transformation is possible.”***

“I was in a dark place. My son was murdered on Thanksgiving and the pain of that shattered my family.

“I was stuck in a cycle of grief and resentment. I blamed my job as a truck driver for taking me away from my family when I should’ve been there. I couldn’t see a way forward.

“It felt like I lost everything – my family, my home, my job, my purpose...the life I once knew.

“I first heard of Cara Collective through a flyer I saw at the shelter I was living in. At that time, I still didn’t think anyone could help me, but I decided to call, and that’s when everything began to change.

“From that first day, I felt how the people there truly saw me, not just for my struggles, but for who I could become. The staff at Cara weren’t just giving me advice or telling me what to do; they were showing me love in a way I hadn’t felt in a long time.

“I began to see myself differently – more positively, and with a sense of possibility. Instead of just existing, I began to live again.

“Cara also opened doors for me professionally. Through Cara, I connected with the Greater Chicago Food Depository, who was impressed with my background. Not long after, I was offered a position as an Operations Worker.

“After my son died, I couldn’t see a path forward. Cara helped me relocate my purpose, and now I’m moving forward with hope, determination, and my eyes set on a bright future.”



**KELVIN S.**  
CARA GRADUATE

## Program Outcomes



At Cara Collective, placing people into gainful employment is just one part of the journey. True success requires more than a job – it requires stability, confidence, and the skills to thrive both personally and professionally. That's why our approach is holistic, blending workforce readiness with socio-emotional development to equip job seekers for long-term success.

Through our training, transitional job opportunities, and access to wraparound supports, participants build the core competencies needed to succeed – not just in the workplace, but in life. Once ready, they begin working with our Employment Services team and a network of trusted employer partners to find the right job fit. Throughout it all, they are supported by a dedicated coach who walks alongside them from day one through their first year on the job – helping them navigate challenges, celebrate wins, and stay on the path to lasting transformation.

**1,165**

PARTICIPANTS SERVED

**1,229**

TOTAL JOBS PLACED  
(see breakdown on next page)

**\$5.97**

SOCIAL RETURN BACK TO SOCIETY  
FOR EVERY \$1 INVESTED



## EMPLOYMENT SERVICES

We believe no one should ever have to settle for less than their dreams; that every job seeker should have the dignity of choice in their career. To help them achieve this, we have spent more than three decades building deep, trusted partnerships with dozens of Chicago's leading companies in industries ranging from healthcare to manufacturing to hospitality and beyond. This opens the door for our job seekers to find their best-fit career opportunity they may have otherwise been unable to secure on their own.

**1,229** TOTAL JOBS

**258** PERMANENT & LONG-TERM JOBS

**754** CLEANSlate JOBS

**79** SHORT-TERM JOBS

**138** CARA PLUS AFFILIATE JOBS

**\$13.9M**

ANNUAL EARNINGS OF EMPLOYED PARTICIPANTS

**64%**

ONE-YEAR, SAME-FIRM RETENTION RATE FOR PERMANENT AND LONG-TERM PLACEMENTS

**94%**

PARTICIPANTS SATISFIED WITH THE OUTCOMES OF OUR PROGRAMS

### TOP EMPLOYERS

 AdvocateAuroraHealth



**GRAINGER**



**GREATER  
CHICAGO  
FOOD  
DEPOSITORY**

 Ann & Robert H. Lurie Children's Hospital of Chicago

 Northwestern Medicine

 RUSH

Shirley Ryan AbilityLab

## SPRING FORWARD

Over the past two years, Cara Collective partnered with the City of Chicago's Department of Family and Support Services and Lawndale Christian Legal Center on SPRING Forward – a bold reentry initiative designed to support individuals transitioning from incarceration. SPRING Forward (Selected Pre-Release for Intensive Navigation support Going Forward) took a two-pronged approach to reentry success: stable employment and secure housing. While the program formally concluded this year, its impact lives on. The insights gained – from strengthening how we recruit and serve justice-impacted individuals to deepening cross-sector partnerships – continue to shape our work today.

**422**

PEOPLE ENROLLED  
IN SPRING FORWARD

**166**

PEOPLE PLACED IN LONG-TERM /  
SUBSIDIZED JOBS

**200**

HOUSING REFERRALS  
MADE

**65**

CERTIFICATIONS  
RECEIVED

*"It was hard trying to start over at 61 years old. But SPRING Forward changed my life. Now I've had a job for a full year. I have my own apartment. I've bought a car. I am excited to pay bills. I feel like I finally belong."*

**CURTIS B.**

CARA GRADUATE, JULY 2024 COHORT  
SPRING FORWARD PARTICIPANT

## PARTNER Q&A

Through their nationally recognized Second Chance Program, the CTA has become one of Cara's most prolific hiring partners – placing our job seekers into more than 370 jobs in our nearly 20 years of partnership.

### What is the CTA's Second Chance Program?

The Second Chance Program provides opportunities to Chicago residents who often face some of the highest barriers to employment. We are preparing individuals for self-sufficiency through professional development, workforce training, and mentoring. But it's more than just a job, it's about creating a pathway for success. Approximately 3,400 people have participated in the Second Chance Program since it was established in 2011.

### How has partnering with Cara contributed to the success of this program?

We are only able to achieve our annual goals for this program thanks to the support of our partner agencies, like Cara Collective. Our partners are developing talent, while also offering the wraparound supports that our participants need but we often cannot provide. Because of this, Second Chance participants come into this program with the job skills and competencies needed to be successful.

### Is there a story of a Cara – Second Chance participant that inspires you?

I started overseeing this program in June, and one Cara participant I met around that time is Alonzo. I had the opportunity to follow Alonzo alongside his journey through this program – from his first day of orientation to getting hired permanently by CTA within two months. That was very exciting to witness. Stories like Alonzo inspire other Second Chance participants to stay focused and set themselves up for success.

### What is your hope for the future of the Second Chance Program?

We want to see permanent hiring opportunities continue to grow – whether that is with CTA or elsewhere. So, we want to continue to evolve how we work with our partners to achieve those outcomes together and create even more success stories.



**DILAUN WHITE**  
DIRECTOR, WORKFORCE  
PARTNERSHIPS, CTA

## SUPPORTIVE SERVICES

Our job seekers face numerous challenges on their journey out of poverty that go beyond needing employment. That's why we lean on the power of partnerships. Over the past 35 years, we have cultivated a network of supportive service partners dedicated to providing resources such as housing assistance, furniture, childcare, legal support, and more. We are deeply grateful to all our partners for helping empower our job seekers and ensure they achieve real and lasting success.

**43**

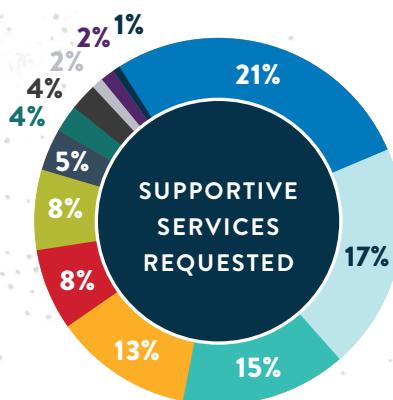
SUPPORTIVE SERVICES PARTNERS

**621**

SUPPORTIVE SERVICES REQUESTS

**563**

ACTIVE PARTICIPANTS WHO ENGAGED WITH MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORTS



- Finance / Budgeting
- Housing
- Dental / Vision
- Clothing
- Haircuts
- ID / Document Recovery
- Public Benefits
- Family / Child Support
- Legal
- Furniture
- Other
- Utilities

## HEALTH & WELLNESS FAIR

In 2023, we proudly launched our first Health & Wellness Fair, a meaningful step in our ongoing commitment to providing accessible supportive services to the communities we serve. This event annually connects Cara participants and Englewood residents to complimentary resources from our service partners—from mental and physical health services to food and housing support, financial assistance, and more. Now in its third year, the Fair continues to grow, with more neighbors attending and more partners joining us. To meet this increased demand, we were deeply grateful to partner with the Salvation Army Adele and Robert Stern Red Shield Center, which generously hosted the 2025 event, allowing us to welcome a record number of attendees and vendors.

**140**

ATTENDEES

**34**

PARTNER ORGANIZATIONS



## Social Enterprise Outcomes

For more than 20 years, Cleanslate – our flagship social enterprise – has been a cornerstone of Cara Collective’s mission, offering more than 700 short-term positions each year on exterior maintenance crews. But these roles are more than just jobs – they are an important step to long-term success for individuals facing some of the toughest barriers to employment.

Cleanslate provides the practical, experiential learning environment that many job seekers need to rebuild confidence, apply newly learned skills, and prove their readiness for the workplace. These opportunities allow participants to strengthen their resumes, earn income, and develop the professional habits that lay the foundation for lasting employment. At the same time, Cleanslate generates a reliable revenue stream that helps power the broader work of Cara Collective – ensuring we can continue opening doors for those ready to transform their lives.

### CLEANSLATE BY cara

**754**

SHORT-TERM JOBS

**83%**

CUSTOMER CONTRACT RENEWALS

**2,488**

TONS OF TRASH COLLECTED

**456**

TONS OF RECYCLABLES COLLECTED

**\$3,943,641**

ANNUAL REVENUE EARNED BY CLEANSLATE

**\$1,924,292**

ANNUAL EARNINGS OF CREW MEMBERS



## WHERE WE SERVE

- CLEANSLATE HEADQUARTERS
- CLEANSLATE OPERATIONAL AREA

**93**

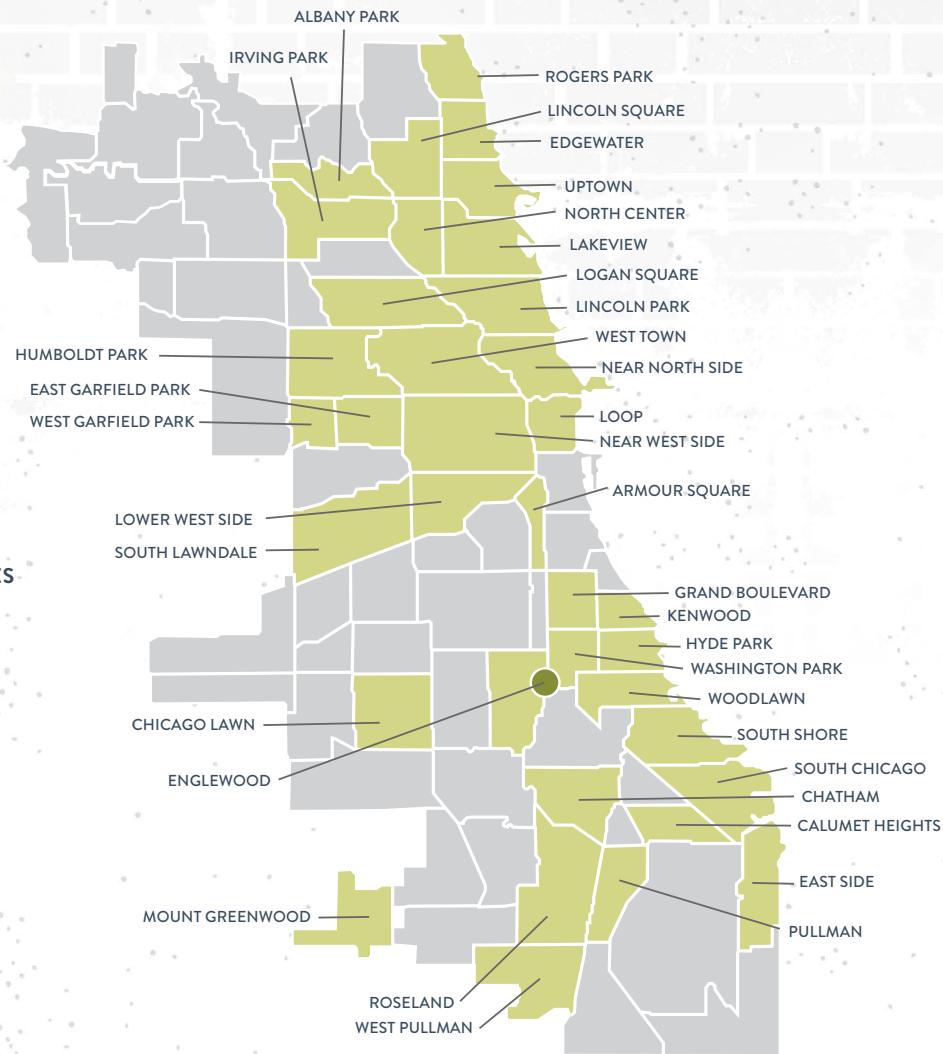
UNIQUE CLEANSLATE  
CUSTOMERS

**36**

CHICAGO  
COMMUNITIES

## BEYOND CHICAGO

BENSENVILLE  
EVERGREEN PARK  
GARY, IN  
MUNSTER, IN  
OAK PARK



***“Cleanslate was a jumpstart for my career!”***

“I first came to Cara Collective as a referral from the halfway house I was living in. At the time, I was really broken down. I had just finished serving a three-year federal prison sentence that cost me everything. I made one mistake that, if I could go back, I never would have done.

“I was ready to rediscover myself, but I needed help figuring out where to start.

“Cara helped me in so many ways. It helped me move on. It put structure back in my life. It helped me redeem myself. I learned to let go of those things from my past and to see a new way of life.

“I also started working on a Cleanslate crew. Being out of the workforce for years, I saw Cleanslate as a jumpstart for my career. I was dedicated. I never missed a day and was never late for a route. Plus, I needed to earn money and Cleanslate provided that for me.

“I gave Cleanslate my all every day on the routes. I loved being out in the different communities and working with the other crew members. Every day, I was the first guy on the truck always giving 110%.

“When, I was voted Cleanslater of the Month by my teammates, that meant a lot to me. It meant my hard work was paying off. It showed me that I still had a lot to offer as an employee. I was very proud of that.

“Cara and Cleanslate really took me to another level. Now, I am excited about what’s next for me. It’s been a long journey, but I am ready to start my future.”



**JAMES J.**  
CARA PARTICIPANT

## NEW CUSTOMERS

Caton Property Management  
Cushman & Wakefield - 709 W Grand  
E.G. Woode  
Frontline Real Estate Partners  
Green City Market - Lincoln Park  
Guest House Chicago  
Illinois Medical District  
Lincoln Park Chamber of Commerce  
Metro Edge Development Partners  
Neighborhood Housing Services of Chicago (NHS)  
P3 Markets, LLC  
Raw Holdings, LLC  
Remet Corporation  
Rogers Park Business Alliance - Howard Street SSA 19  
South Chicago Commercial Ave - SSA 5  
SSA #81 - 87th Street Business Corridor

## PARTNER Q&A

For more than a decade, Cleanslate has been proud to partner with the Little Village Chamber of Commerce. Through their work, the Chamber supports, promotes, and protects local business owners with programs and services designed to drive sustainable growth and celebrate the vibrant cultural identity of Little Village (“La Villita”).

### **How does the Little Village Chamber of Commerce and Cleanslate work together to improve our community?**

Cleanslate is responsible for the regular maintenance of Little Village, including litter removal, landscaping, and sidewalk cleanup. They also work to maintain clean streets during and after our annual Mexican Independence Parade. Our mission is to make the Little Village a world-class destination and attract visitors from all over the world; Cleanslate is crucial in preserving the visual appeal and vibrancy of our community.

### **Why are Cleanslate's services so important to the Chamber of Commerce?**

Little Village is one of Chicago's most significant commercial corridors, generating the second-highest tax revenue in the city, second only to Michigan Avenue, and ranking among the top in Illinois. On weekdays 17,000 cars pass through the Little Village Arch; on weekends that number goes up to 24,000. With such high traffic, maintaining cleanliness and beautification is critical to attracting visitors and supporting local businesses. Cleanslate's work ensures that our district remains inviting and vibrant for residents and tourists alike.

### **What is a favorite memory of working with Cleanslate?**

When I first started, I walked past a Cleanslate crew struggling with limited truck space for trash collection. New to the job, I was determined to solve this problem and so was the Cleanslate crew. We started brainstorming together right there in the middle of the corridor. We realized that we needed to add five dumpsters with Little Village and figured out the best place for these dumpsters. We solved a real problem that day and 11 years later, Cleanslate still utilizes those five locations to help keep Little Village clean and beautiful.



**BLANCA SOTO**

CHIEF OPERATING OFFICER, LITTLE VILLAGE CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

## NEIGHBORHOOD CLEAN-UP

In 2025, we proudly launched a new partnership with the City of Chicago's Department of Streets and Sanitation and Department of Family and Support Services through the **Neighborhood Clean-Up** (NCU) initiative.

Through this effort, our Cleanslate crews deliver lot clean-up and sanitation services across the city. The initiative enabled us to rapidly expand our workforce – creating more than 100 additional transitional job opportunities – while boosting our visibility citywide. We look forward to deepening this partnership over the coming years as we continue this vital work together.

**231**

CREW POSITIONS  
FOR NCU

**4,870**

SITES SERVICED

**\$2.3M**

FUNDING RECEIVED  
THROUGH NCU



# Practice Change Outcomes

## Cara PLUS

Cara Plus, our national expansion arm, builds upon our 35 years of workforce development experience by working with both employers and organizations at the regional and national level. We accomplish this through a combination of strategies, including our two portfolios – **Inclusive Employment** and **Workforce Development** – and thought leadership opportunities designed to open more employment pathways and ensure untapped talent is best prepared to meet the needs of employers.

### INCLUSIVE EMPLOYMENT

Inclusive employment is not just who an employer recruits, but how they reduce or remove barriers that prevent untapped talent from accessing meaningful employment. Through Cara Plus' inclusive employment work, we partner with companies to support their ability to grow and retain their talent pipelines and create more pathways to employment.

17

COMPANIES TRAINED IN  
INCLUSIVE EMPLOYMENT

75%

COMPANIES REPORTED  
CHANGING THEIR TALENT  
PRACTICES / APPROACH



### PARTNER Q&A

Founded in 2012, the Chicagoland Workforce Funder Alliance (CWFA) is a collaboration of foundations and corporations investing in workforce development through their own philanthropic portfolios. CWFA creates a space for these funders to come together, learn from each other, and work on systems change collectively.

**How has partnering with Cara Plus contributed to your efforts to enhance our workforce ecosystem?**  
Cara Plus' depth of knowledge and expertise in workforce development is inspiring. You help participants grow and heal, and similarly, companies going through inclusive hiring experience deeper change – shifting hearts and minds about their relationship to talent and workers. At its best, this work transforms not just policies but people.

**We've facilitated multiple training cohorts together. How do these contribute to building a more inclusive economy?**

Along with the Corporate Coalition, we've collaborated on employer practice change models (see next page). These initiatives have gained traction in Chicago and are becoming a permanent part of the workforce system. By working intensively with companies, we change their practices and policies, making them better partners to the workforce system.

**What is the one takeaway you want from companies participating in these cohorts?**

That there are real, concrete solutions to workforce challenges. Companies can take actionable steps to improve outcomes – partnering with workforce organizations and tapping into talent pools they've struggled to access before. This work isn't just theoretical; it leads to measurable improvements for both employers and job seekers.

**What is your hope for the future of this work?**

We hope to build a movement where inclusive employment and employer practice change become the norm. We want a critical mass of companies to embrace these practices so that it becomes standard for Chicago businesses to engage deeply with workforce partners and source talent from local communities. It's not easy, but companies working with Cara are showing the way.



**MATTHEW BRUCE**  
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR,  
CHICAGOLAND WORKFORCE  
FUNDER ALLIANCE

## INCLUSIVE EMPLOYMENT COHORT PROGRAMS

Through cohort-based initiatives like the **Fair Chance Hiring Cohort** and **Generation Work Challenge**, Cara Plus partners with organizations including the **Corporate Coalition of Chicago**, **Chicagoland Workforce Funder Alliance**, and **Chicago Resiliency Network**, among others, to help employers access overlooked talent and strengthen workforce resiliency. Participating companies receive tailored guidance to remove hiring barriers for individuals with criminal records and improve retention strategies for young adults facing systemic challenges. These programs blend peer learning, expert insights, and hands-on coaching, enabling cross-functional teams to design actionable plans that expand access, reduce turnover, and build inclusive pathways for a stronger, more equitable workforce.

7

COHORTS COMPLETED  
SINCE LAUNCH

40

COMPANIES  
IMPACTED

170+

HR PROFESSIONALS  
ENGAGED

## COMPANIES TRAINED IN OUR INCLUSIVE EMPLOYMENT COHORTS INCLUDE

Alinea Group	ITW
Allstate	JLL
Aon	Loyola Medicine
Aramark	Medix
Boka Restaurant Group	Metropolitan Family Services
City of Chicago	Northwestern Medicine
ComEd/Exelon	RB Global
Fitness Formula Clubs	Rush University Medical Center
Freedman Seating	University of Chicago
Harris & Harris	YWCA of Metropolitan Chicago

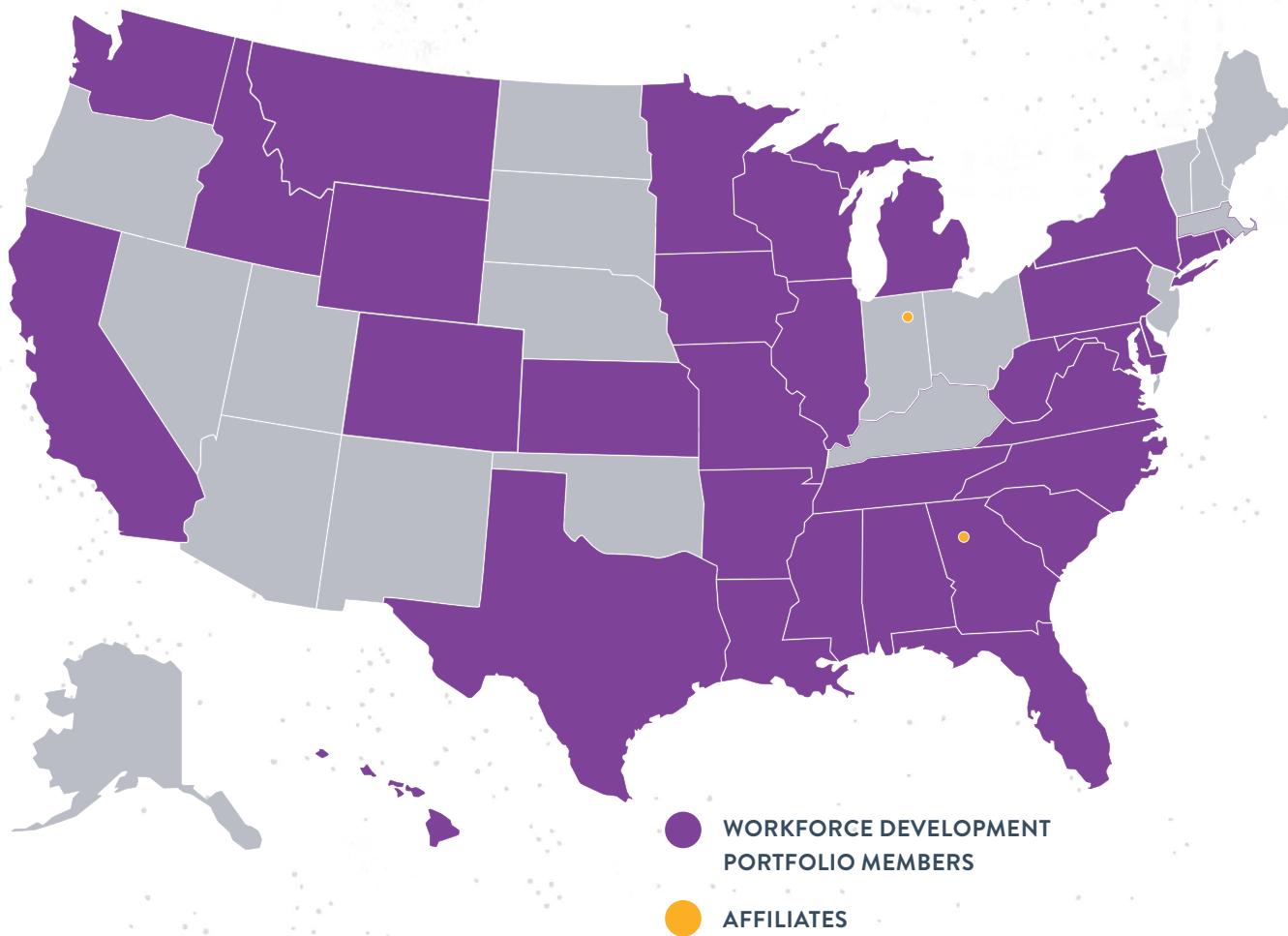
*“Our learnings in Fair Chance Hiring has infiltrated how we review all background checks for everyone in our organization. More than 750+ people have already been impacted and the impact to come is countless.”*

**NORC AT THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO**  
2025 FAIR CHANCE HIRING COHORT PARTICIPANT



## WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

Building effective workforce development solutions requires deep experience, strategic partnerships, and a commitment to equity. By sharing our proven methodologies and insights, we empower other practitioners across the country to create sustainable, community-driven impact through a combination of strategies focused on driving real practice change – including cohort-based trainings, an affiliate model, and targeted technical support.



*“It was encouraging to learn from an organization that is doing incredible work at scale. We are a small organization and the concepts we learned from Cara Plus are going to help us be more successful.”*

**BDC MEMPHIS**



## WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT SOLUTIONS LAB

Our **Workforce Development Solutions Lab** provides an immersive, multi-day experience to equip practitioners from across the country with actionable approaches, tools, and resources to strengthen their reach and impact. This cohort model offers a deep dive into our service delivery model through workshops, problem solving, and one-on-one time with peer organizations.

To date, we've led more than 20 Solutions Lab cohorts, collaborating with organizations in more than 30 states – all working together to create stronger, more effective pathways back to work.

**25**

ORGANIZATIONS TRAINED  
THROUGH WORKFORCE  
DEVELOPMENT SOLUTIONS  
LAB IN FY25

**89%**

ORGANIZATIONS  
COMMITTED TO  
PRACTICE CHANGE

### ORGANIZATIONS TRAINED IN OUR WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT SOLUTIONS LAB

AlliedUP Co-Op	Institute for Nonviolence Chicago
A Safe Haven	JPMorgan Chase
BDC Memphis	Kitchens for Good
Chicago Center for Arts and Technology	Los Angeles LGBT Center
CitySeed / Sanctuary Kitchen	Lumity
Civic Committee	Missoula Works
Emma's Torch	Our House Shelter
Empowerment Plan	Project Joy USA
Greater Chicago Food Depository	SEAT Center
Good Soil Industries	Touch a Heart Hawaii
GRID Alternatives	Uplift Northwest
Hope Center Foundation	Wilmington Alliance
InnerCity Weightlifting	



## AFFILIATION

Our affiliation model offers organizations hands-on support, tools, and guidance to build workforce development programs rooted in our proven methodology – while adapting to their unique context and community needs. We're proud to partner with **Lutheran Social Services of Indiana** in Fort Wayne and **Atlanta Mission** in Georgia. Together, these affiliates are expanding our reach and helping to bring Cara's impact to new communities across the country.



**138**

TOTAL  
AFFILIATE JOBS

**49%**

ONE-YEAR SAME-FIRM RETENTION  
FOR AFFILIATE JOBS

*“Partnering with Cara Plus to co-create LSSI Works has been an incredible experience. Their collaborative approach and deep expertise helped us design a workforce program that truly meets the needs of our community and empowers individuals.”*

**TOBY TAYLOR**  
DIRECTOR, LSSI WORKS



**PATRICIA M.**

ATLANTA MISSION GRADUATE

*“This wasn’t the end of my story – it was the beginning.”*

“Before Atlanta Mission, I was living from couch to couch. I had just moved back to Georgia from California. I was a single mother, and I didn’t have much support. I relapsed into depression, stopped taking care of myself, and even had suicidal thoughts.

“I realized I needed a fresh start.

“My dad and I decided my son would stay with him while I focused on healing and becoming a better mother. That decision led me to Atlanta Mission. I liked the idea of their holistic approach – helping us heal from trauma and triggers before moving on to their job programs.

“At first, it took time to settle in. Once I did, I gained confidence in my identity, my story, and who I’m becoming. It wasn’t one big change; it was a series of changes that shaped me. It was truly a growing experience.

“Today, I’m a Business Office Manager at The Retreat at Sandy Springs, a senior living facility. I handle billing, payroll, and office operations. I love the residents and staff. It’s not just a job; it’s caring for people.

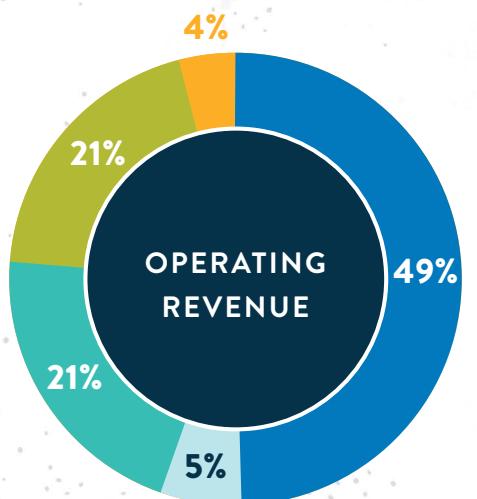
“I even returned to Atlanta Mission to run a career fair table and helped others from the shelter get hired at The Retreat. That was a proud moment.

“I recently moved into my own apartment, close to my dad, so I can see my son often. He stays with me on weekends, and we’re adjusting slowly.

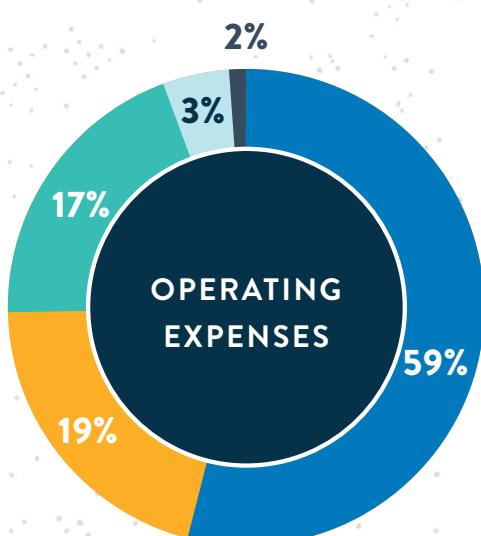
“Today I am confident. I am courageous. And I am achieving my goals. Atlanta Mission showed me this wasn’t the end of my story – it was the beginning!”

# Financials / Fundraising

## OPERATING REVENUE



## OPERATING EXPENSES



- Salary & Benefits
- Participant Supports & Incentives
- Transitional Worker Wages
- General & Admin Expenses
- Other

## STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL ACTIVITIES

### OPERATING REVENUE

Private Contributions	\$10,294,548
Special Events	\$1,446,331
Less Special Event Direct Costs	(\$350,424)
Government Grants	\$4,455,521
Social Enterprise Revenue	\$4,368,115
Non-Cash Contributions	\$209,108
Interest Income	\$622,742
Other	\$8,464
<b>Total Operating Revenue</b>	<b>\$21,054,405</b>

### OPERATING EXPENSES

Salaries & Benefits	\$9,576,471
Participant Supports & Incentives	\$520,468
Transitional Worker Wages	\$2,815,685
General & Admin Expenses	\$3,043,003
Other	\$209,108
<b>Total Operating Expenses</b>	<b>\$16,164,735</b>

### OPERATING SURPLUS

Depreciation	\$538,262
Unrealized Investment Income	\$137,484
<b>Total Change in Net Assets</b>	<b>\$4,351,408</b>

## STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL POSITION

### ASSETS

Cash & Cash Equivalents	\$13,026,499
Investments	\$2,079,430
Accounts Receivable, net	\$1,191,246
Government Receivable, net	\$2,311,850
Inventory	\$13,168
Prepaid Expense	\$355,927
<b>Current Assets</b>	<b>\$18,978,120</b>
Buildings & Improvements	\$8,547,497
Other Property & Equipment	\$2,714,309
<b>Total Property &amp; Equipment</b>	<b>\$11,261,806</b>
Accumulated Depreciation	(\$5,065,835)
Other Assets	\$1,347,996
<b>Total Assets</b>	<b>\$26,522,087</b>

### LIABILITIES

Current Portion of Long-Term Debt	\$352,795
Accounts Payable	\$409,090
Accrued Payroll & Related Costs	\$885,078
Refundable Grant Advances	\$450,765
Other Current Liabilities	\$4,119
<b>Total Current Liabilities</b>	<b>\$2,101,847</b>
Long-Term Debt (net)	\$2,255,829
<b>Total Liabilities</b>	<b>\$4,357,676</b>

### NET ASSETS

General Unrestricted	\$12,158,343
Net Investment in P&E	\$3,587,347
Operating Reserve	\$3,959,000
<b>Total Unrestricted</b>	<b>\$19,704,690</b>
Purpose Restricted	\$1,558,600
Perpetual Restricted	\$901,121
<b>Total Restricted</b>	<b>\$2,459,721</b>
<b>Total Net Assets</b>	<b>\$22,164,411</b>
<b>Total Liabilities + Net Assets</b>	<b>\$26,522,087</b>



Read our full  
FY25 Audited Financials



## FUNDRAISING EVENTS

We love a party with a purpose! Each year, Cara Collective hosts three signature events that rally hundreds of civic, philanthropic, and business leaders in support of our mission. Thanks to the incredible generosity of our attendees, sponsors, and supporters, we continued to break records in both fundraising and attendance – helping us extend our impact even further.

**\$1,454,163**

TOTAL DOLLARS RAISED

**1,180**

TOTAL ATTENDEES



Our signature event, the Cara Gala is an opportunity for our community to come together in celebration of our mission. This event brings together more than 650 leaders from the civic, philanthropic, nonprofit, and public sectors to recognize partners who are working to build a more inclusive economy for Chicago and beyond.



*“Cara’s events are the perfect blend of celebration and purpose. Every year, we’re proud to sponsor and attend these unforgettable gatherings that not only bring the party, but also deepen our connection to Cara’s powerful mission of transforming lives.”*

**MICHAEL NORDMAN**  
MOLSON COORS



Hosted by Cara Collective's Auxiliary Boards, Summer Social is our evening of small bites for a big cause. This event brings together more than 400 young professionals and tastemakers for an evening of culinary bites from some of Chicago's top chefs and premier restaurants.



## TRIBUTE TO THE STARS

Our most mission-focused event, Tribute to the Stars is a special breakfast reception and super-sized Motivations. This event gathers more than 300 civic and business leaders to celebrate our employed Cara graduates and the corporate and community partners who have been instrumental in their success.

## DONOR ROLL CALL

### INSTITUTIONAL DONORS

#### \$1,000,000+

New Profit

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## VOLUNTEERING

Volunteers play a vital role in helping Cara Collective job seekers succeed. Their time, talent, and energy show up in powerful ways – from conducting mock interviews and resume reviews to organizing clothing drives and sorting our clothing room.

By sharing their expertise and encouragement, volunteers help create a supportive space where job seekers can grow in confidence, sharpen their skills, and take meaningful steps toward employment. Their impact goes beyond individual moments – strengthening our programs, building community, and advancing the mission of Cara Collective every day.

**550**

INDIVIDUAL VOLUNTEERS

**2,075+**

VOLUNTEER HOURS WITH OUR JOB SEEKERS

**10,000+**

DONATED ITEMS FOR OUR CLOTHING ROOM

**50**

CORPORATE SERVICE DAYS

## CORPORATE SERVICE PARTNERS INCLUDE

5/3 Bank	<i>Kelly Mitchell</i>
Advocate	<i>Kimley-Horn</i>
Allstate	<i>LinkedIn</i>
Aon	<i>Marriott</i>
Bally's Chicago	<i>McDonald's</i>
BMO	<i>Molson Coors</i>
Boka	<i>Northern Trust</i>
CD One Price	<i>Northwestern Medicine</i>
Chicagoland Chamber of Commerce	<i>OpenX</i>
Clarity Partners	<i>WeWork</i>
Deloitte	<i>Women Investment Professionals</i>
Jackson International	<i>ZS Associates</i>



## Afterward

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**Thank you for being a true “cara” – a friend to this mission.**

When Tom Owens began this work 35 years ago, he believed in the power of community; that together, we can achieve far more than any one of us could alone.

That belief continues to guide us. This year’s data tells a powerful story: of more than 1,000 individuals taking steps toward lasting employment, of families gaining stability, and of communities growing stronger. Every number in this report represents a life transformed – and none of it would be possible without you.

To our supporters, stakeholders, partners, and friends, thank you for fueling this movement. We look forward to what we’ll build together in the year ahead.

Thank you for walking this path with us.

**YOUR FRIENDS AT CARA COLLECTIVE**

## Join Our Community

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### WORK WITH US

From volunteering to hiring our job seekers, we have a suite of ways for your company to engage with our community. To learn more, contact **Tim Loeffler** at **312.798.3321** or [tloeffler@carachicago.org](mailto:tloeffler@carachicago.org)

### LEARN WITH US

We help employers and nonprofits work more effectively with communities hit hardest by poverty. Ready to join us in building a more inclusive economy? Contact [learn@caraplus.org](mailto:learn@caraplus.org).

### INVEST IN US

Your donation gives a motivated job seeker the chance to transform their life thanks to a quality job. Contact **Sharla K. Nolte** at **312.628.5940** or [snolte@carachicago.org](mailto:snolte@carachicago.org)



# cara COLLECTIVE

cara

CLEANSLATE  
BY cara

cara  
PLUS

237 S. DESPLAINES      in f /CaraChicago  
CHICAGO, IL 60661      @CaraChicago

[WWW.CARACOLLECTIVE.ORG](http://WWW.CARACOLLECTIVE.ORG)