



# 2024 ANNUAL REPORT

## VISION

We envision abundant pathways and strong villages for liberated youth to grow, thrive and achieve lifelong success

## MISSION

We are building a school to success pipeline by dismantling barriers for youth, connecting them to community resources and creating safe, culturally centered spaces and events to cultivate joy and purpose

## DEAR COMMUNITY,

From UniDale Mall to Carty Park, from Hallie O. Brown Community Center to the Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Memorial in Washington, D.C., Love First was out in community like never before in 2024. While we continued proven and popular programs like our tour of Historic Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) and Black Joy events like UnityFest, we also created new programming to expand our innovative, culturally specific model to meet the needs of Black youth 11 to 24 years old. For instance, in 2024, we launched monthly Community Dinners, creating nourishing and educational opportunities for young people to connect with others, heal from trauma and gain meaningful skills for their daily lives. Learn more about our 2024 efforts and how we're building a school to success pipeline in this annual report.

In solidarity,

Satara Strong-Allen, Executive Director

Chauntyll Allen, Founder

# HOW WE'RE BUILDING THE SCHOOL TO SUCCESS PIPELINE



## COMMUNITY DINNERS

We believe deeply in the strength and solidarity of the village. By coming together in joy and fellowship, we can cultivate the intergenerational connections and shared knowledge we need to create lasting social change. In 2024, we debuted our Community Dinner series, a monthly convening with free food and programming for all ages. **In just 10 months, more than 500 people attended 15 community dinners**, not just enjoying healthy foods from local experts and entrepreneurs, but also watching and discussing films, learning about mental health and legal rights, painting and karaoke, and more!



## BLACK JOY EVENTS

To bring joy and hope to our young people, we hold free community events focused on art, activism and healing, bringing our community together. We partner with Black and BIPOC vendors and entrepreneurs to invest in our economic development and integrate local healers and organizations. **In 2024, we hosted or co-hosted 25+ events, including our largest annual UnityFest yet** – a celebration filled with mental health resources, free food, local performers, dancing and more.



## STREET OUTREACH

We recognize that community safety work must be holistic and comprehensive, involving our ancestor's teachings, restorative practices, healing, community response, and youth mentorship. In 2024, we hosted **10 pop-up engagements** in outdoor spaces, offering free food, hygiene supplies, clothing and training in overdose prevention to more than **150 folks experiencing housing instability or chemical dependency**.

# HOW WE'RE BUILDING THE SCHOOL TO SUCCESS PIPELINE



## DIRECT SUPPORT

We know that Black youth possess hidden or emerging skills and abilities that have been buried or actively undermined by the stress and trauma of being immersed in systems of structural and institutional racism. We provide direct financial assistance to disrupt poverty and displacement, specifically around food security, emergency housing assistance for the household, bus passes and IDs, and clothing and shoes. **In 2024, we distributed more than \$84,000 in direct financial assistance to 75 households.**



## PATHWAYS TO SUCCESS

Unlike other programs that are focused solely on higher education, the Akoma Cohort visits Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) that are inclusive of scholars with lower GPAs and provides access to opportunities, cultural pride and relationship bonds for Black youth who are often left behind. The trip integrates Black history and culture, relationship building among participants and proactive support before and after the excursion to provide ongoing assistance and connection. **Since 2022, we've taken more than 75 Black youth from the Twin Cities to HBCUs nationwide.**



## BLACK GIRL BRILLIANCE

Glow & Grow creates intentional space for Black girls to embrace and be affirmed in their unapologetic Black brilliance, joy and resiliency. Through connection, education and healing activities, we build networks among Black girls and bridges to opportunities in the community for them to step into their full power and chart successful futures. **In 2024, we hosted 50+ Black girls at our day-long Glow Up Conference and dozens of girls attended our monthly programming over the course of the year.**

## YOUTH LEADER SPOTLIGHT: SAHARA JONES

Love First met Sahara on its inaugural HBCU tour and immediately saw her leadership shining through. Born and raised in North Minneapolis, Sahara had seen that, on Broadway Avenue drug overdoses and traumatic bleeds are common. So when Love First started working with the Wellness Collaborative in North Minneapolis, we went to Sahara first. Youth are often left out of conversations about what to do to help someone, she said, and there are so few public spaces for people to gather to gain skills and discuss solutions. So we followed her leadership. With friends, Sahara scripted and filmed a short movie that showed a drug overdose – and how to administer Narcan to reverse it. And then she connected with other community leaders to put together a workshop on overdose prevention and traumatic bleeds. Thanks to Sahara's leadership, we trained more than 60 young people in North Minneapolis on overdose prevention and stopping traumatic bleeds. In 2024, we brought these critical resources to Saint Paul, with pop-up outreach events to provide on-the-spot training and supplies to community members in hot spots across the city. Sahara has shared how grateful she is for the support – and approach – of Love First leaders, including Executive Director Satara Strong-Allen. "Getting mentoring from other people has always felt like them being in charge," she said. "Satara gave me a lot of creative freedom – but with support. I'd run ideas by her and she'd say "Dope! Do it!" I felt like she doesn't look down on me but acts like I'm equal to her."



## HBCU TOUR TESTIMONIALS

"I didn't even want to go to college, but I thought, if I do, I want to go somewhere I can be with Black people. The moment I stepped foot on the campus at Central State it felt like home. [The trip] was the best thing that ever happened to me."

"I learned that there are dozens of communities and spaces for us Black girls, and we can be just as, if not more, successful than the majority. I made tons of new friends and every day was something new and fun."

## STAFF & BOARD

### 2024 STAFF

Chauntyll Allen, Founder  
Satara Strong-Allen, Executive Director  
Tahnea Brown, Programming Lead  
Angelica Chanslor, Operations

### 2024 BOARD

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## THANK YOU TO OUR FUNDERS

*Our work wouldn't be possible without the financial support of:*

Pohlad Family Foundation  
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Restorative Actions  
MN Black Collective  
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## THANK YOU TO OUR PARTNERS

*And we can't do this work without the support and collaboration of community partners like Indigenous Roots Cultural Center, Hallie Q. Brown Community Center, the Black Youth Healing Center; We Win Institute; Guns Down, Love Up; Twin Cities Skaters; and Racial Justice Network.*

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