



Kalamazoo  
Foundation for  
Excellence

Annual Newsletter | 2022

FFE helps empower neighborhood entrepreneurs like DeMargeo White, owner of Huey D's Goodies. Learn more on page 6.

## FIVE YEARS

The Foundation for Excellence (FFE) has accomplished many ambitious milestones since its creation in 2016, like investing \$150 million in the prosperity of all residents and creation of a \$500 million endowment to ensure it can permanently support our community's vision. Learn more inside about how the FFE is helping everyone in Kalamazoo live the lives they want for themselves and their families.

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# Foundation for Excellence Board of Directors

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## Dear Neighbors,

In just five years and despite a global pandemic, the Foundation for Excellence has taken shape as a trusted and indispensable institution that helps Kalamazoo strive for a better tomorrow.

Before the FFE no one dreamed we could produce nearly 100 new affordable housing units per year on average or create a whole new sector of small business supports and fund more than 500 entrepreneurs in just three years. Before the FFE who could have dreamed Kalamazoo could invest \$1-million per year on sidewalks left neglected for generations for want of resources? Before FFE no one was able to ask what free Metro bus access might contribute to the educational careers of high school students.

Kalamazoo can now act assertively on improving our shared community for everyone, with particular focus on countering the effects that historical disinvestment and marginalization have had and continue to have.

I hope you read this newsletter and share what you read with those in the community you hold dear. Together, we really can empower residents to achieve the lives they want for themselves and their families.



Sandra Calderon-Huezo  
FFE Board President

## Community Members Lead

The FFE is a nonprofit organization governed by an independent Board of 16 diverse Directors representing elected officials and community sectors such as healthcare, education, and business.

Each year, proposed projects are evaluated to ensure they align with Imagine Kalamazoo 2025 goals and are positioned for success. These projects are proposed to the FFE Board of Directors and City Commission in alternating public meetings for review, discussion, and approval.

## Guiding Principles

**Listening:** The FFE board is guided by resident input through Imagine Kalamazoo 2025.

**Transparency:** All board meetings are conducted under the Open Meetings Act, welcome the public, and include an opportunity to comment.

**Representation:** The board intentionally reflects the community it serves. The Director application and selection process prioritizes diversity of abilities, perspectives, and sectors.

**Mission-Driven:** FFE has a single focus on serving the people of the City of Kalamazoo.

## JOIN US!

FFE meetings are open to the public and welcome community comments. Learn more about upcoming meetings, events, and projects at [kalamazoooffe.org](http://kalamazoooffe.org).

## How does FFE work?

Donations to the Foundation for Excellence are invested in an endowment to ensure it will last for generations to come. Every year, the endowment earnings provide millions of dollars to fund projects and programs to realize our community's vision, stabilize the city budget, and reduce taxes. Annual grants are approved by the FFE Board of Directors before final approval by Kalamazoo's elected representatives, the City Commission.

### Our Community

Impact begins and ends with Kalamazoo residents.

### Vision & Master Plan

Our community vision guides our work and shapes the future.

### Community Philanthropy

Donations support the community's vision for Kalamazoo's future.

### FFE Endowment

Funds are invested to ensure FFE will support Kalamazoo for generations to come.

### Annual Grant

The FFE Board of Directors and City Commission approve a grant to the City for aspirational projects, property tax reduction, and to stabilize the budget.



## Timeline: From Vision to Institution

### 2016

- The 51st City Commission approves creation of FFE

### 2017

- The FFE is incorporated as a 501c3 Type III charitable foundation

### 2018

- The first full Board of Directors is constituted
- All policies and administrative agreements are adopted to operate FFE

### 2019

- The investment subcommittee is created to manage the endowment
- The first major gift of \$100 million is received and invested

### 2020

- FFE proves nimble and necessary in helping fight COVID-19

### 2021

- A \$400 million gift over 10 years to the FFE endowment is announced

### 2022

- FFE investments reach \$150 million
- FFE appoints first Executive Director

### 2023

- The first grants to the City of Kalamazoo from the endowment will be made
- Endowment growth and stewardship of funds are the top priorities to secure FFE for generations to come

## Board, City Commission Unanimously Appoint First Executive Director

The FFE Board and City Commission both voted unanimously to appoint FFE Manager Steve Brown as the foundation's first Executive Director.



The Board created the Executive Director position in September after conversations in early 2022 about the ongoing development of the FFE. The position will conduct endowment development, ensure exceptional service and strategic focus, and eliminate the possibility for conflicts of interest for staff serving both the City and FFE.

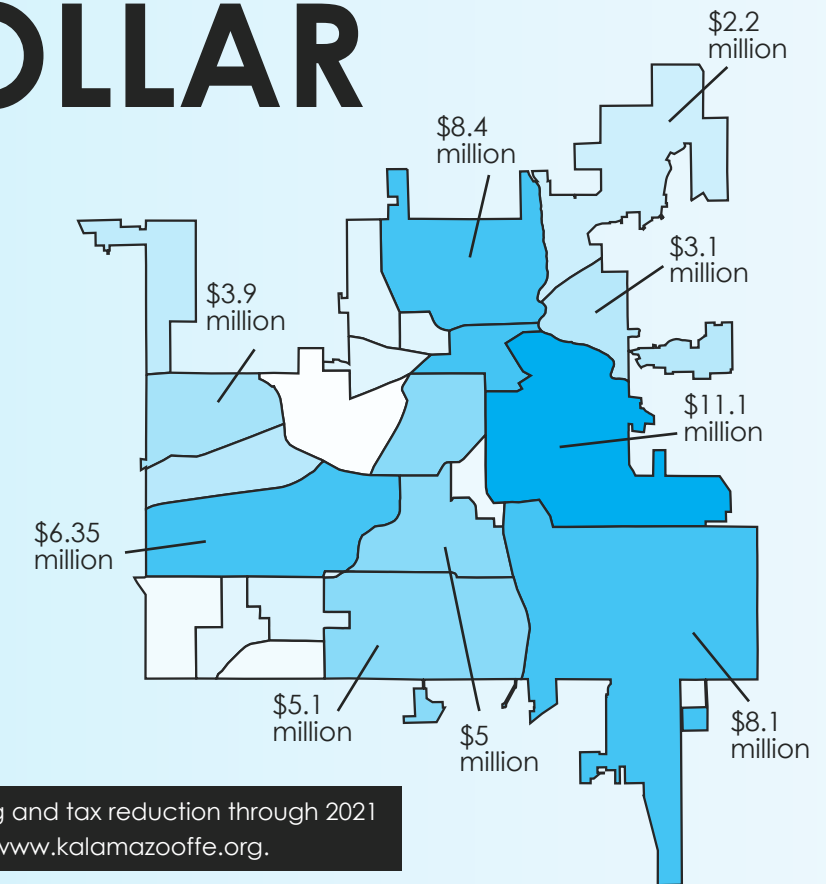
A Michigan native and resident of the Vine Neighborhood, Brown began his work with the City as a Grant Specialist in 2016 before being tapped to co-found the new FFE organization in 2017 due to his experience directing nonprofits. He was subsequently promoted to the position of Coordinator in 2018 and Manager in 2020 with continually growing responsibilities and a record of success serving the board and City.

In her remarks, President Calderon-Huezo was clear that this appointment was a recognition of hard work as well as an investment in moving this project into the next stages. "I consider it an honor," said Brown in response, "to continue making the unique vision of FFE into a powerful new reality in Kalamazoo."

# EVERY DOLLAR INVESTED

Transparency is a core value of FFE. It provides an interactive map online that shows what FFE is funding and where those investments are made. The dashboard shows all funding that has been expended for aspirational projects and the impact of property tax reduction.

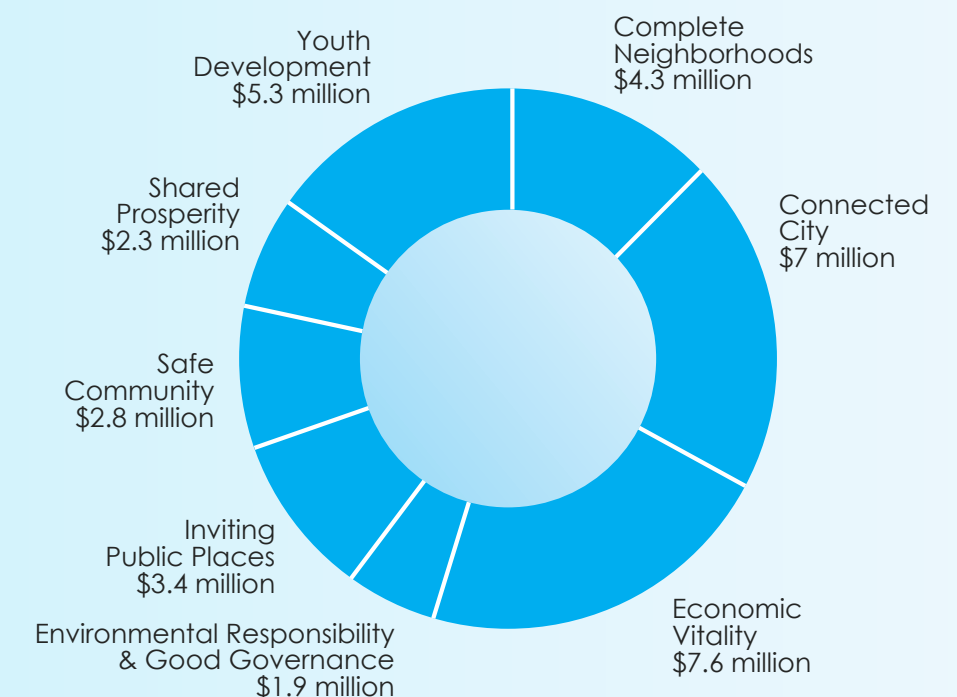
The dashboard is updated near the end of each year as data becomes available. Explore the dashboard at [www.kalamazooffe.org](http://www.kalamazooffe.org).



This map shows value of aspirational project spending and tax reduction through 2021 for selected neighborhoods. Full data is available at [www.kalamazooffe.org](http://www.kalamazooffe.org).

# TO REALIZE OUR VISION

FFE exists to empower the people of Kalamazoo. It invests to achieve our collective vision for the future, as outlined in the Imagine Kalamazoo Strategic Vision. You can use the dashboard to explore what goal areas FFE investments are supporting, and view a list of projects either by year or overall.



# EMPOWER ENTREPRENEURS

\$11 million invested to start or grow more than 500 businesses

\$1.25 million invested in microenterprises

\$2.5+ million invested to improve storefronts or build out commercial space

Minority tradesperson training & certification program

\$300,000 committed to mixed-use business incubator

Support for Black Entrepreneur Training Academy

\$2 million provided to small business during pandemic

The City of Kalamazoo has had a successful Brownfield Redevelopment program for decades. Until recently, however, a critical part of economic development was missing. No programs were in place to help **entrepreneurs, startups**, and small or **micro neighborhood businesses**.

This is one of several areas where the Foundation for Excellence has been a gamechanger. In a few short years the City of Kalamazoo has gone from offering no support at all to local businesses to investing hundreds of thousands of dollars per year into **entrepreneur education, technical support, storefront improvements**, and **0% loans and grants**. More residents have the help they need to turn their idea or passion into a sustainable business. Our community and local economy reap the benefits as more people prosper, families have greater financial security, and unique products, services, and retail spaces flourish in Kalamazoo's neighborhoods.

Neighborhood businesses can apply for grants from the Business Development Fund (BDF) for technical assistance, to improve their storefront, or to prepare interior space. BDF also provides **gap funding** to bridge the difference between available financing and what it takes to make a project successful.



Local contractors meet in the Core60 Program as they work towards certification.

## Curing a Sweet Tooth One Bite at a Time

After nine years in the food industry, DeMargeo White wanted to stand out. So with his godmother's cheesecake recipe he started Huey D's Goodies specializing in gourmet cheesecakes and cheesecake cupcakes. DeMargeo attended the FFE-supported Black Entrepreneurship Training Academy (BETA) through Black Wall Street, and received grant funding to invest in his business. His products are now available at locations like Twine Urban Winery, La Familia Cafe, Midtown Fresh, Park Street Market, and Wing Hut, to name a few. He continues to add retail locations and is looking to start shipping his desserts nationwide.

Find Huey D's Goodies on social media or at [www.hueydsgoodies.net](http://www.hueydsgoodies.net).

Demargeo White decorates a batch of cupcakes in the commercial kitchen at the Kalamazoo Non-profit Advocacy Coalition.



FFE funds also support the **Black Entrepreneur Training Academy (BETA)** program through Black Wall Street Kalamazoo. The five-month cohort-based training equips Black entrepreneurs with the skills and education they need to be successful. BETA also provides low-barrier access to funds to those who complete the program, with the opportunity to pitch for up to \$5,500.

**Tradespeople** are in demand, and FFE also invests in local contractors. The Core60 program works with contractors of color to help them achieve certification, which in turn unlocks larger jobs and the opportunity to bid on government projects. It's also a great networking opportunity for contractors to share advice, experiences, and real world projects.

The COVID-19 pandemic severely impacted businesses, and **small, local businesses** are least able to adapt. FFE support made it possible to almost immediately launch the Kalamazoo Small Business Loan Fund (KSBLF), which provided loans to small businesses in Kalamazoo on favorable terms. This funding helped support these businesses while larger federal support was created and made available. The KSBLF continues to offer bridge loans.

**Microbusinesses** with fewer than ten employees often have the most difficulty accessing funding. The Kalamazoo Microenterprise Grant (KMEG) program was created in 2020 to help these businesses, focusing on BIPOC (black, Indigenous and people of color)- and women-owned businesses, or businesses in core neighborhoods. 250 businesses have received \$1.25 million in support through KMEG. 73% of these businesses are BIPOC- or women-owned, representing 18 of Kalamazoo's 22 neighborhoods.

**Empowering and investing in entrepreneurs** helps revitalize neighborhoods, create job opportunities, and build wealth. In turn, these investments further our community goals more broadly. This is another area in which FFE makes it possible for the City of Kalamazoo to have a direct impact.



# CLOSE THE GAPS FOR NEW HOMES

380 new affordable homes

314 affordable homes  
rehabilitated or preserved

0 homeowner tax foreclosures  
in Kalamazoo since 2019

Dozens of new homes sold  
to lower income first-time  
homebuyers

\$500,000+ support for  
emergency housing and  
disaster relief

Before the Foundation for Excellence, the City of Kalamazoo was limited in what it could invest in housing. Only a small amount of federal funding was available, and it was mostly for maintenance and small repairs. Sometimes, grant requirements made it hard to help people.

The FFE dramatically changed the role the City of Kalamazoo can play in housing. With more investment possible, more opportunities to match and secure state and federal funding are available.

To get to work right away, the City of Kalamazoo entered a partnership with LISC in 2018. The City committed \$1.5 million per year over three years to the effort. These

funds ultimately resulted in \$30.8 million being invested in housing in Kalamazoo, delivering more than 300 new homes, more than 100 homes rehabilitated, and more than 200 units preserved.

Construction costs and the current housing market make it more expensive to build a new house than it can be sold for. Without additional funding to make up this difference, no new homes would be built. FFE makes it possible for the City to step in to cover the gap. By supporting the **Kalamazoo Attainable Homes Partnership** (KAHP), new infill homes continue to be built and sold to new homeowners. Qualifying homebuyers must complete an education program and be at or below 80% area median income. KAHP also buys and renovates homes, selling them to similarly qualified buyers.

The **Housing Development Fund (HDF)** is a new program entirely made possible by the FFE. The HDF provides financing for larger scale



Two new FFE-funded homes on Burdick Street that will be sold to new homeowners

housing projects at favorable terms. The HDF provided \$375,000 to the Lodge House Project, which created 60 new homes for people at 0-30% of the area's median income. HDF also provided a \$750,000 gap loan for a new senior living development in progress at 530 S Rose Street and a \$400,000 gap loan for a mixed-use development at 315 E Frank Street. These developments will create 77 new units for people at varying incomes, 64 of which are for seniors.

FFE support helps to make projects like these viable, but it has another subtle but important effect. By committing to support a project, FFE actually helps make a project's application for other funding more competitive and more likely to receive additional state or federal support. It's one more way that FFE has changed the landscape for housing development in Kalamazoo.

While housing continues to be built, FFE supports other programs to speed up future development and help people most in need. **Pre-permitted plans** are in development to make building new homes faster and cheaper, and FFE helped start a program that **eliminated tax foreclosures** in the city. It also provides support to the **Kalamazoo County Continuum of Care** and the **United Way Disaster Relief Fund** to ensure resources are there to help the people who need them the most.

Historically, the City of Kalamazoo supported affordable housing through things like Payments in Lieu of Taxes (PILOTs) and by creating an environment to encourage development. Now, the City has a more active role creating partnerships, funding projects, and rising to meet one of our community's greatest needs. The opportunities that exist now wouldn't have been imaginable without FFE.



Rendering of Jamauri Bogan's 13-unit mixed-used project at 315 Frank Street

## Getting People Into Homes

Jamauri Bogan wants to get people into homes. He started Bogan Developments after his first attempt to restore a house in 2018. Although he didn't see a return on that investment, he was motivated to keep going. He realized that by taking more control of his projects he could create attainable homes for people and still make a profit.

"I really feel like we (the Kalamazoo Community) have the biggest heart around. People really care and they really give time, energy and money and resources to the things that they believe in, it's a really unique city."

He is currently developing a 13-unit mixed-use project on Frank Street in the Northside neighborhood. The project also plans to include a daycare and units for people at or below 80% area median income. FFE provided a \$400,000 gap loan to support the project.

"They have a mission and a vision, and that was aligned with what I was looking for."



# NEW PATHWAYS FOR YOUTH

Free summer programs in core neighborhoods

7 parks renovated

180,000+ free bus trips provided through Youth Mobility Fund

1,500+ youth earned \$1.5 million in summer employment

6,800 hours of training provided to counselors in training

1,250 wi-fi modems provided to students

14 learning hubs set up to help students during pandemic

The Foundation for Excellence has created several pathways for youth to succeed. Programs start in childhood to help young residents stay engaged, explore their passions, and eventually take advantage of the Kalamazoo Promise or start a career.

FFE funds the SuperRec program, an **entirely free, nine-week summer camp** for Kalamazoo

youth. Youth make friends and explore interests at one of several camp sites in core neighborhoods. They can explore their interests through hands on activities and field trips. Snacks and meals are provided through the Kalamazoo Public Schools Meet Up & Eat Up program. Parents have a safe and engaging place for their children to play during the summer without having to worry about daytime childcare.

When youth prepare to enter high school, All Things Possible (ATP) can help them continue exploring their interests, with an eye towards high school, college, and career options. **ATP keeps youth engaged with hands on activities and field trips to college campuses to expose them to new careers.** Youth that complete ATP earn free drivers training when they are old enough and meet academic requirements.



SuperRec youth learn about golf and try the sport at X-Golf during a free field trip

"There's different job opportunities and most of them require college," one student shared. "There's a lot I didn't know about."

In high school, the **MyCITY program provides an opportunity for paid summer employment.** Depending on the age group, the experience can vary from learning basic skills needed to maintain a job, to a more specialized career experience for older students. All students are paid for their participation.

Youth that are interested in teaching or working with youth themselves can become Counselors in Training. CITs earn a stipend working alongside Kzoo Parks youth development staff for the summer. They gain valuable experience and bring the perspective of having been in the programs themselves. Many CITs go on to work as program leaders for Kzoo Parks.

All of these programs are bolstered by the Youth Mobility Fund, which provides **free transportation** for youth on the Metro bus system. YMF has helped students take more than 180,000 trips to these FFE-supported programs or other after school activities.

FFE also helps our community rise to the challenge when the unexpected happens. During the COVID-19 pandemic, inequities were brought to light when much of our lives went virtual. FFE swiftly funded a program to bridge the "digital divide" by providing 1,250 free wi-fi modems for students with partners at the Kalamazoo Public Library and Kalamazoo Public Schools. FFE also funded 14 Virtual Learning Hubs- safe and quiet places for students to focus on their schoolwork with reliable internet access and support from adults.

Our community has long been committed to investing in our youth. FFE funding adds to this community effort that helps young people understand what their future could be and how they can achieve it.

## All Things Possible

When you walk into All Things Possible, you find young adults engaged in activities that cultivate their interests. Someone plays with a virtual reality set, aspiring artists draw with their peers, and budding musicians might pick up a guitar or sit at the drum set.

This exploration is amplified with field trips and guests like Artazijah Julian, owner of Julian Sweet Treats. The room lights up with curiosity as she shares her entrepreneurial journey. The students talk about their own goals and how they can achieve them.

**Most importantly, they see someone who came from the same place as them succeeding by doing something she enjoys.**

After the presentation the students create sweet treats of their own. They form bonds and learn to communicate their needs. They'll be going to high school in the fall, so these skills are important for their social, educational, and career development.

Later the participants head to Western Michigan University's Esports Arena. They're eager to explore campus and the activity that is laid out for them. After they learn about the technology that operates the arena, they enjoy a friendly competition.





# MORE VIBRANT NEIGHBORHOODS

7 city parks renovated

1,000+ trees planted

12 miles of sidewalk repaired or built, connecting 24 miles of the network

20+ miles of traffic calming on city streets, reducing speeds and average of 2-5 mph

Tire recycling, vegetable gardening, and other programs

Downtown Ambassador Program

\$11 million invested in neighborhood businesses

FFE supports a vision where neighborhoods are **vibrant places** that offer much more than just a place to live. Investments in public spaces make these areas safer and more welcoming, with more to experience.

Seven significant **park renovations** have been funded by FFE across the city. Reed Street, Crane, Frays, Rockwell, and Upjohn Parks have all seen major improvements in recent years, as have the Farmer's Market and Henderson Tot

Lot. An extension of the Kalamazoo River Valley Trail also connects to the Farmer's Market for the first time, making it safer and easier for shoppers to access local products on a bike or walking.

More than 1,000 street trees have been planted throughout the city, focusing in core neighborhood areas where more canopy is needed. FFE also funded a tree inventory in 2021 to document the condition, age, and value of more than 22,000 trees to further guide planting and maintenance.

The streets that these trees shade and beautify have seen major improvements as well. Much of the investment to realize complete streets has been made by FFE. After years of investing \$0 to **improve sidewalks**, \$1 million has been invested every year since 2019 to repair and expand our sidewalk network. Bright new sections of sidewalk are visible in every



Reed Street Park was completely transformed with an investment by FFE in 2019



Placemaking and the Ambassadors program attract visitors to downtown Kalamazoo

neighborhood. Many of the crosswalks that connect them have been improved with new paint and signage.

**Traffic calming** projects have been undertaken on streets like Westnedge Avenue and Park Street, to make them safer for everyone. Speed humps and radar signs have been installed in neighborhoods to reduce speeds, too. On average, traffic calming has reduced speeds

by 2-5 miles per hour, which **makes streets safer for everyone**. New features are being piloted as well, like mini roundabouts and bumpouts.

Roadway space freed by traffic calming has been used to create more than 10 miles of new **bike lanes** this year alone, making it easier and safer for residents to get around on a bike.

For residents in Kalamazoo's neighborhoods, new programs to **beautify blocks** have provided flowers, painting, and power washing to people in need. Free tire recycling has been available since 2021 and has removed nearly 5,000 tires from yards and garages.

Facade improvement grants and other business investments funded by FFE have left commercial areas cleaner and more inviting, with more shopping and services available. The Downtown Ambassador program and placemaking investments like Bates Alley help make downtown Kalamazoo one of the region's best attractions.

## Keeping It Fresh

Fresh, healthy food isn't always easy to find for people in Kalamazoo's core neighborhoods. In partnership with Kalamazoo Valley Community College, the FFE funds **Kalamazoo Roots**, a program that teaches residents to grow their own food.

It's an easy introduction to gardening: after completing a self-paced course, gardeners receive a kit to grow fresh food at home. More than half of the new gardeners returned after the first year, adding to 150 new participants in 2022.

"The time I've spent learning through the container gardening class has left me with invaluable skills that I can pass along to my little ones someday," explained new gardener Rachel Hufnagel. "This class has allowed me to join a community of like-minded people who are in pursuit of living a greener, more mindful life."



Kalamazoo Roots helps residents grow fresh healthy food, and share the experience with their families



# SHARE THE OPPORTUNITIES

\$2 million for dedicated Shared Prosperity Kalamazoo 2-Generation programs

Partner in Kalamazoo's first-ever expungement clinic

Founding partner of Patient Care Academy

380 new affordable homes

Wealth building through clearing clouded titles

0 homeowner tax foreclosures since 2019

Free summer camp, career exploration, and transportation options for youth

Woven throughout everything the Foundation for Excellence funds is a commitment to **sharing opportunities and investments with everyone**. All work is aligned around this core value so everyone can succeed.

Some projects are focused directly on expanding opportunities. For example, the work of the **Shared Prosperity Kalamazoo** initiative seeks to invest in jobs, youth, and families

with a "2-Generation" approach (programs with a parent and child focus). In 2019, FFE allocated \$2 million directly to this initiative, funding programs for generational health, early childhood education, business development, and housing barrier removal. But projects in other areas often help achieve this goal as well.

By funding a pathway of youth development programs from childhood to young adulthood, FFE sets residents up for success at an early age. These programs are focused in core neighborhoods with the highest need. They prepare youth to enter the workforce or continue their education with the coming, state-of-the-art Career Technical Education Center and/or the Kalamazoo Promise. Programs include career exploration and summer employment so they then can explore careers in a field that interests them.

These programs can benefit the whole family as well. By offering free summer programming, parents have less of a challenge to find and pay for childcare, which makes it easier to fulfill other obligations, work, or further their education.

Major investments in housing have provided **hundreds of new homes in Kalamazoo**, increasing the availability of a safe and secure places to live. Housing is the foundation of success in so many areas, so the importance of these investments cannot be overstated.

FFE also initiated an effort to prevent tax



Certified Nursing Assistants graduate after completing a training program in the Northside neighborhood

foreclosures to keep people in their homes. This proactive investment has led to zero homeowner tax foreclosures since 2019, and prevented the cycle of negative consequences that follow for many families. Kalamazoo County has continued this work through the pandemic.

For some families, the title or ownership of their home is unclear, often due to a death in the family. FFE funds a program to help clear these "clouded" titles so that residents and families can secure the wealth of their home. This is another proactive investment that yields huge dividends for Kalamazoo families.

In 2019, FFE was a founding partner of a **Patient Care Academy** in Kalamazoo's Northside neighborhood. With several community partners, training was offered right in the neighborhood to graduate a class of Certified Nursing Assistants. The first class graduated just ahead of the COVID-19 pandemic, when they were needed more than ever.

People with criminal records are often haunted by them long after they have completed their sentence. Employment or education opportunities are limited, making it even more challenging to start anew. FFE was a key partner in organizing Kalamazoo's first **expungement**

**clinic**, helping people take advantage of their legal right to have certain offenses removed from their records. With this weight lifted, it is much easier to return to school or find a job.

FFE also helped fund the Walnut & Park Diner that recently opened near Washington Square. It's part of KPEP's innovative job training and job creation start up that provides vocational training to people who are completing probation requirements. They graduate with certifications in the hospitality and food service industries and are prepared to pursue careers in these fields.

For residents that have a business idea and entrepreneurial spirit, FFE funds the Business Development Fund, which invests in neighborhood businesses in Kalamazoo. BDF can fund technical assistance or more significant investments that are needed to prepare a storefront or business property. These investments are focused on Kalamazoo's core neighborhoods or for BIPOC- or women-owned businesses. FFE also funds microenterprise grants and small business loans in partnership with the United Way of South Central Michigan with a similar focus.

During the pandemic, FFE stepped up to fund 1,250 free wi-fi hot spots to help students learn remotely. It also funded learning hubs to ensure there were places to study and get help with schoolwork when needed.

Before FFE, none of this work would have been possible. We've seen a transformational change in just five years. FFE will fund this work so that everyone in Kalamazoo can succeed.



# Kalamazoo is stronger together

We invite everyone to be involved in Kalamazoo's success by participating in FFE's cycle of impact. Whether it's by voting in local elections, volunteering, looking out for neighbors, keeping public spaces safe and beautiful, or donating to FFE's endowment, we all have a role to play.



Consider a gift  
in support of FFE  
and a bold vision  
for Kalamazoo.



## LEARN

- Read about the FFE's impact in this newsletter
- Sign up for the City of Kalamazoo email list
- Follow @kalamazooconomy on social media
- Attend an FFE board meeting
- Visit [www.kalamazooffe.org](http://www.kalamazooffe.org)



## GIVE

- Make a gift of any size to support this work online or by mailing a check to the address above
- Volunteer your time for a cause that advances our community vision



## LEAD

- Apply to serve on the FFE Board of Directors or nominate someone you know
- Make your voice heard in a community or neighborhood planning meeting