WHAT'S YOUR FORTÉ
FOUNDATION

IMPACT REPORT

"Service brings clarity to purpose"

MATT FORTÉ

2024-2025





MATT
FORTÉ

FROM THE FOUNDER

FOUNDED ON A CALLING TO DISRUPT CYCLES OF VIOLENCE AND EXPAND ACCESS TO OPPORTUNITY

As we reflect on the work accomplished in 2024 and the momentum carrying us into 2025, I am reminded that real change is not driven by programs alone, but by people, relationships, and purpose. What's Your Forté Foundation was founded on a calling to disrupt cycles of violence, expand access to opportunity, and help young people and families recognize their inherent worth and potential.

My personal journey continues to shape this mission. It has altered my understanding of responsibility and leadership and the foundation furthers my commitment to prevention, healing, and economic empowerment—especially for communities that have historically been underinvested and overlooked. Over the past 12 years, my team has worked intentionally to meet young people where they are, while consistently exposing them to what is possible beyond their immediate circumstances.

In 2024, we deepened our violence prevention and wellness strategies, expanded career exploration opportunities, and strengthened institutional partnerships. As we move through 2025, we are scaling this work with greater intentionality—expanding faith formation, service, and futures while expanding the populations we serve. This report reflects not just outcomes, but transformation: trauma reframed as purpose, exposure leading to aspiration, and community becoming the catalyst for lasting change.

— MATT FORTÉ

FROM OUR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

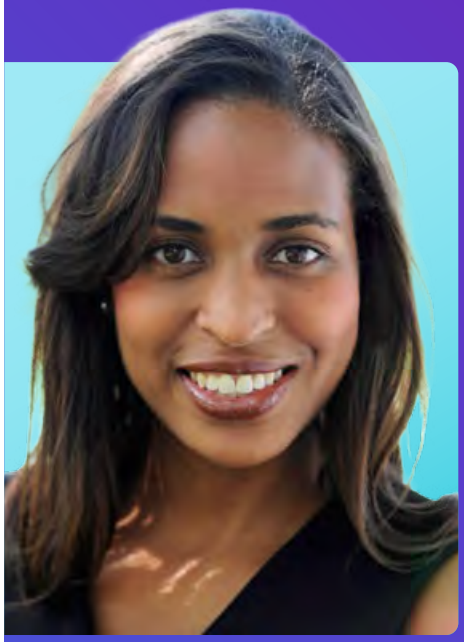
A MODEL THAT ADDRESSES THE FULL ECOSYSTEM SURROUNDING YOUTH AND FAMILIES

What's Your Forté Foundation continues to operate at the intersection of community trust, data-informed strategy, and cross-sector collaboration. While many organizations focus on singular outcomes, our model addresses the full ecosystem surrounding youth and families—economic equity, wellness, education, career access, and justice.

Throughout 2024, we reached several inflection points that positioned the organization for a strong and impactful 2025. We expanded our flagship Finding Your Forté program to engage 80 young people each week, strengthened our leadership role in gun violence prevention efforts, and earned recognition from local, state, and national partners. These milestones resulted in increased funding, expanded partnerships, and new pathways to serve court-involved youth.

As we move forward, our focus remains clear: deepen impact, broaden access, and remain responsive to the lived realities of Chicago's South and West Side families. This report captures a year of meaningful progress and a future defined by opportunity, healing, and sustained community investment.

— JAMIA JOWERS



JAMIA JOWERS

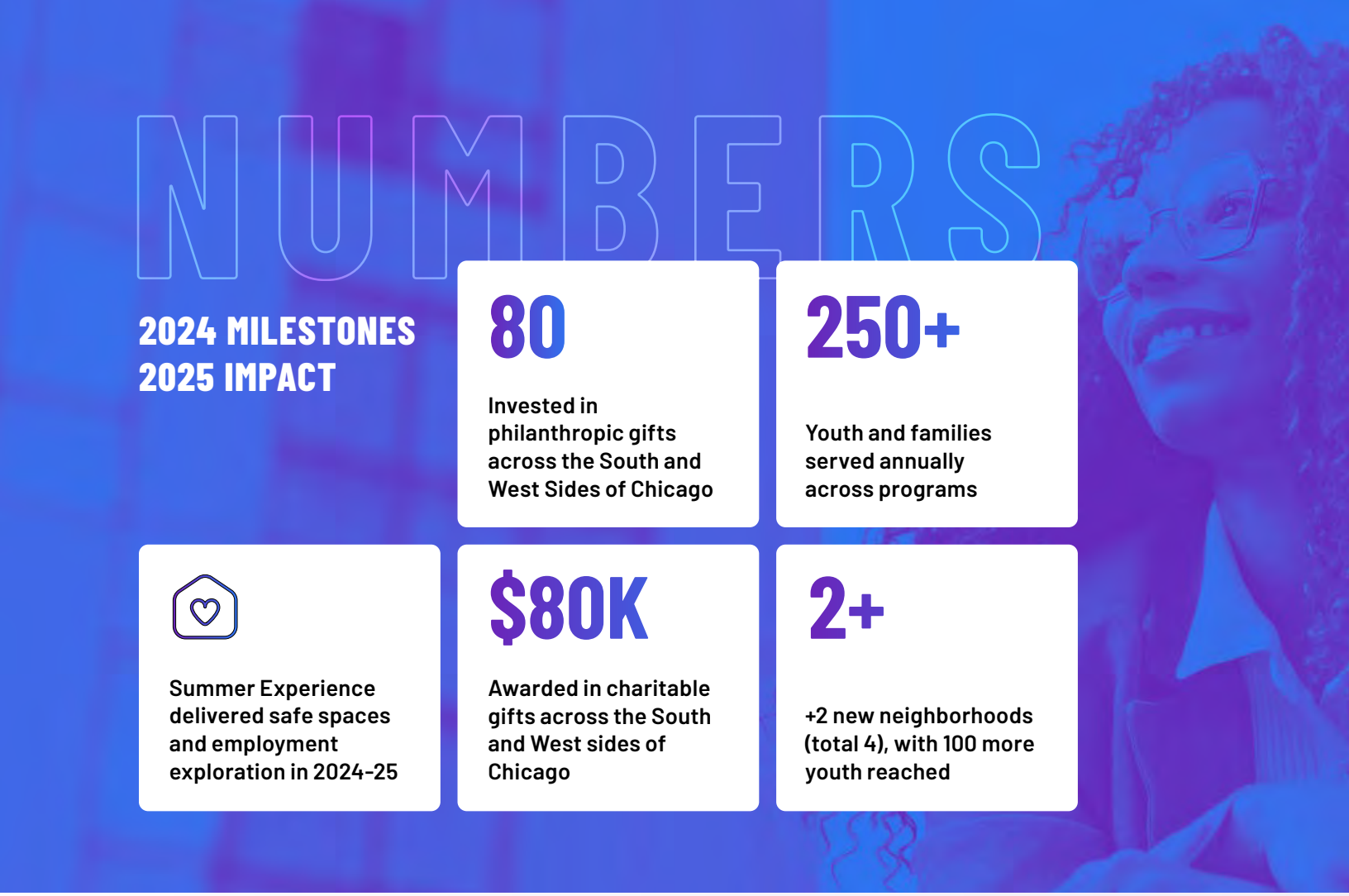
THE WHAT'S YOUR FORTÉ FOUNDATION'S MISSION IS TO INVEST IN THE EQUITABLE ECONOMIC ADVANCEMENT OF YOUTH AND FAMILIES THROUGH PARTNERSHIP AND PURPOSEFUL RELATIONSHIPS.

LEARN MORE

WAYS TO GIVE


Wilson
NIKE

NUMBERS



2024 MILESTONES
2025 IMPACT

80

Invested in philanthropic gifts across the South and West Sides of Chicago

250+

Youth and families served annually across programs

Summer Experience delivered safe spaces and employment exploration in 2024-25

$80K

Awarded in charitable gifts across the South and West sides of Chicago

2+

+2 new neighborhoods (total 4), with 100 more youth reached

FLAGSHIP PROGRAM

FINDING YOUR FORTÉ

Finding Your Forté remains the cornerstone of our youth programming and a central pillar of our violence prevention strategy. This weekly, trauma-informed program blends a speaker series, physical activity, mentoring, and exposure to nontraditional and high-growth careers. Each Saturday session creates a safe, consistent space where young people build trust, discipline, and explore pathways they may not otherwise encounter. Speakers represent the communities we serve, and students have often come away with internships.

In 2024, the program engaged an average of 80 youth each week, introducing them to professionals in stable, creative careers, including contractors, architects, painters, firefighters, EMTs, barbers, athletic directors, and local service personnel, through real-world application, storytelling, and practical guidance that helps youth see themselves in positions of skill and power.

Physical wellness is woven into every session through sports, movement, and team-based activities, reinforcing accountability, emotional regulation, and confidence, skills that support academic success and positive decision-making beyond the program.



MENTORSHIP



GLASS BLOWING



FOOTBALL+



PAINTERS





CAREERS & SPEAKER SERIES

SUMMER



OUR STUDENTS LEARNED, CREATED, AND EXPLORED A DIFFERENT SIDE OF SUMMERTIME CHI!

2024-25

SUMMER EXPERIENCE

Our Summer Experience gives teens structure, safety, and opportunity during the most critical months of the year. Evening programs run 5 to 10 pm, during peak hours for youth violence, and combine career exposure, wellness, mentoring, and field trips across Chicago and beyond. Each year, teens from Chicago's most under-resourced neighborhoods find consistent engagement, trusted adults, and new environments that expand their worldview and inspire them to reach for more.

In 2024, we kicked off two weeks of fun and workforce exposure with visits to Fox News and Navy Pier. Youth played in a basketball clinic with NBA pro Alando Tucker and joined a panel with corporate executives at Halas Hall. At the House of Hope, they explored fashion design and music production alongside football, games, and more.

In 2025, we added four new experiences, with each day bringing students joy, connection, purpose, and new career possibilities. Relive it here!

Activities included:

- BIG TEN DAY
- CODING & ROBOTICS
- BASKETBALL CLINIC WITH ALANDOTUCKER
- FASHION DESIGN WORKSHOPS
- EVERYTHING DOPE IN AMERICAN COMES FROM CHICAGO TOUR WITH DILLA
- ARTISTRY THROUGH MUSIC PRODUCTION WITH GRAMMY NOMINATED PRODUCER BERRIS BOLTON AND GUITARS OVER GUNS' ANDRE DANIELS
- HIP HOP YOGA
- NAVY PIER EXPLORATION
- SOLDIER FIELD TOUR
- POTTERY CLASSES
- E-SPORTS GAMING TOURNAMENT
- ACTING 101
- HORSEBACK RIDING
- EMPOWERMENT SESSIONS
- BOARD GAME NIGHTS

TUSKEGEE NEXT



A highlight of the year was our trip to Tuskegee Next, where youth explored a living legacy of Black excellence in aviation, met working pilots, and learned about careers in the field. Then every student and guardian got to fly. See how takeoff went for Ethan! For many, it was their first flight and first time outside Chicago. Thank you to Will Davis and The Tuskegee Next Foundation.

TECHNOLOGY & INNOVATION



Each year, Innovation remains a key component of our career exploration. Through Status Pro, youth participated in immersive VR experiences using NFL-backed technology, exploring performance and decision-making under pressure while learning about emerging careers in sports technology, digital media, and experiential design.

MOMOTARO: CULINARY ARTS



A standout Finding Your Forté excursion in 2025 brought students to Momotaro for an immersive look into fine dining and entrepreneurship. Led by Boka Group's Michelle Herndon and GM Merissa White, youth explored restaurant operations and culinary careers, made sushi, toured event spaces, and learned about Japanese culture. Relive the day here!

PROGRAM EXPANSION

CAREERS WITHOUT LIMITS



In 2025, Finding Your Forté expanded to include emerging, creative, and high-growth careers. Youth explored digital marketing, AI platforms with Reach Pathways, digital forensics, beatmaking, percussion, glass blowing, commercial real estate, entertainment law, and hedge fund architecture.

They also joined career demonstrations with security firm P4 and closed the year with an archery introduction through the Chicago Archery Club. These experiences broadened exposure beyond traditional career tracks, reinforcing that talent, discipline, and curiosity can translate into many forms of economic prosperity.

CAREER CAMP 2024-25



While our 2024 Career Camp focused on youth and adults, in 2025 we focused on youth and the growing tech scene. We joined Google for a day of education and recruiting hosted by Winton Steward, Head of Government Affairs and Public Policy, and his colleagues. Teens toured Google and joined a panel with staff exploring various career tracks, continuing our long-term workforce development goals. Watch the highlights!

JOY & BELONGING

ECONOMIC EQUITY



Economic equity is deeply connected to wellness, dignity, and belonging. In 2025, we partnered with the Arcitec Foundation for Back to School Kicks, providing youth with shoes, backpacks, and supplies to return to school prepared and confident.

We also visited Bears Training Camp, learning what it takes to condition, joining drills, snagging autographs, and enjoying lunch from Chicago's finest. Take a look at the day in Lake Forest. Joy-centered engagement continued with our Youth & Family movie night, previewing *Now You See Me, Now You Don't* courtesy of Lionsgate, with free tickets, popcorn, and drinks for our neighbors. These moments of joy reinforcs connection and normalcy in communities defined by crisis. Relive the twist and turns of this magical thriller.

WELLNESS

WELLNESS

MENTAL HEALTH



Wellness is foundational to our approach, across physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual health. Physical activity is built into every Saturday session, and a fall 2024 retreat to the Morton Arboretum gave youth and staff time to reflect. Therapy is woven into our summer experiences, and our partnership with the University of Chicago's TRAP Violence Reduction Program helps youth channel trauma into leadership. We launched a Peace and Purpose Wellness Series in 2025, blending yoga and breathwork to build resilience, and community healing continued through peace marches with CHAMPS and Lurie's Violence Prevention Initiatives in their Strengthening Chicago's Youth department.

SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL LEARNING (SEL) & TRAUMA INFORMED PROGRAMMING

Social-emotional learning is at the heart of our approach. Many of our youth face chronic stress, violence, and loss, which can make it hard to focus and manage emotions. Through year-round therapy and trauma-responsive programming, including yoga and 1:1 sessions, youth build resilience and self-awareness. They also report increased confidence.







WEALTH BUILDING

FINANCIAL LITERACY

Financial empowerment remains a core violence prevention strategy for the Foundation. In 2025, we launched a new partnership with Chase Bank to deliver community-based wealth building and financial literacy workshops. Our future sessions will equip youth with practical tools related to saving, investing, and long-term economic planning—reinforcing the link between financial stability and community safety. As the host of our next Career Camp, we can't wait to have specialized sessions for adults and youth.

CIVIC & COMMUNITY

ENGAGEMENT







What's Your Forté Foundation plays an active role in civic engagement and policy-informed violence prevention. In 2024, Matt Forté joined the **White House Initiative on Advancing Educational Excellence, Equity, and Economic Opportunity for Black Americans**, and the Foundation partnered with Discovery Education's *Power Up* Series to address educational and economic barriers in Black communities. That year, the Foundation was invited to the **Community Violence Awareness Week Ceremony** hosted by VP Kamala Harris, and our Executive Director now mentors leaders through the University of Chicago's CVI Leadership Academy. The Foundation also contributed to **Congresswoman Robin Kelly's** *The Kelly Report: A Vision For A Safer America*, featuring Founder Matt Forté's voice (pg. 22).

As an official partner of the Obama Foundation's My Brother's Keeper Alliance, Chicago's focus is Milestone 6: All Youth Remain Safe From Violent Crime. We've also taken part in The Gun Violence Expo, No Cap Summit, and other community events.

In 2025, we partnered with Cook County Juvenile Services to reach court-involved youth. We also joined **Lurie Children's Hospital's Strengthening Chicago's Youth initiative**, focusing on its **Juvenile Justice Collaborative and Hospital-Based Trauma-Informed Care for Youth and Families**.

HONORS & RECOGNITION



Throughout 2024 and 2025, the Foundation was recognized for impact and innovation, including Matt Forté's **40 Under 40 Gamechangers Award** from Ariel Investments and a grant from the Partnership for Safe and Peaceful Communities and Southland RISE supporting proven violence reduction efforts.

We also received the **Born to Win Community Award from CHAMPS** Male Mentoring and closed the year with the **Power of Hope Award** from Care for Friends. We don't do this for recognition, but it means a lot to be seen this way.

In 2025, we received the Power of Purpose Award from Alderwoman Wilson, and our Executive Director spoke at Our Power, Our Voice alongside Minyon Moore and Dr. Ngozi Ezike.

FEATURED AWARD

TENX10 FAITH & SERVICE GRANT

In 2025, What's Your Forté Foundation received the Tenx10 Faith & Service Grant, a $25,000 investment supporting our vision to make faith matter more for 10,000 youth over 10 years. The award affirms our commitment to integrating faith, service, and justice into youth development. We celebrated on social media and were invited to be profiled in a short documentary. Watch our youth speak about their faith formation here.

LOOKING AHEAD



AS WE MOVE FORWARD TO 2026, WHAT'S YOUR FORTÉ FOUNDATION REMAINS DEEPLY ROOTED IN COMMUNITY-BASED SOLUTIONS TO GUN VIOLENCE PREVENTION, ECONOMIC EQUITY, AND WELLNESS. IN THE COMING YEARS, WE WILL EXPAND GIRLS-SPECIFIC PROGRAMMING, DEEPEN THE INTEGRATION OF FAITH AND SERVICE, AND SERVE A BROADER POPULATION OF YOUTH, INCLUDING COURT-INVOLVED YOUNG PEOPLE. OUR WORK IS GROUNDED IN RELATIONSHIPS, DRIVEN BY COLLABORATION, AND SUSTAINED BY HOPE. TOGETHER WITH OUR PARTNERS, FAMILIES, AND SUPPORTERS, WE ARE BUILDING SAFER NEIGHBORHOODS, STRONGER FAMILIES, AND BRIGHTER FUTURES.

WHAT'S YOUR FORTÉ
FOUNDATION

TO OUR DONORS AND SUPPORTERS

WITH GRATITUDE

WHAT'S YOUR FORTÉ FOUNDATION IS BEYOND GRATEFUL FOR YOUR PHILANTHROPY. YOUR GENEROSITY MAKES OUR MISSION POSSIBLE. YEAR AFTER YEAR, YOUR SUPPORT FUELS THE TRANSFORMATION OF YOUTH AND COMMUNITIES IN CHICAGO. WE ARE DEEPLY APPRECIATIVE OF YOUR CONTINUED BELIEF IN OUR WORK.

WAYS TO GIVE

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