

FY2020 & FY2021  
JOINT REPORT

# IMPACT REPORT

**50 YEARS**  
OF COLLECTIVE IMPACT





Dear Friends,

Imagine, if you will —

**Young people, free.**

**Free from oppression, free in their identities, and free to pursue their wildest ambitions.**

Alternatives' vision encapsulates perfectly why Alternatives exists. For 50 years, Alternatives has served as a refuge and resource for young people to effect change—a place where creativity and healing create more just communities in Chicago. Last year, our work took on a new and urgent focus when we publicized our commitment to racial equity.

We are uplifting the work we're doing around this critical issue because it is at the root of so many other challenges facing young people. Violence, houselessness, health disparities, and other social and economic issues stem from systemic racism that has gone unaddressed for too long.

Alternatives cannot achieve our vision without living by values that demonstrate the importance of our approach. We believe in liberation and freedom for all people. We believe in equity regardless of social identities or circumstances. We root our decisions and our actions in evidence and facts. We are honest about what we know and what we don't know. We are open with our successes and our challenges.

If this pandemic has shown us anything, it's the importance of continuing to uplift the time honored practices that have been proven to **heal individuals, restore communities, and transform systems.**

We thank you for continuing to believe in and partner with us. Together as a community, we will achieve our vision of young people, free.

Sincerely,

Bessie Alcantara  
Executive Director

Jeff Becker  
FY21 Board President



**OUR VISION FOR THE FUTURE**

**YOUNG  
PEOPLE,  
FREE.**

***Our mission is to inspire young people to create a just future — through healing practices that heal individuals, restore communities, and transform systems.***

## BEGINNINGS

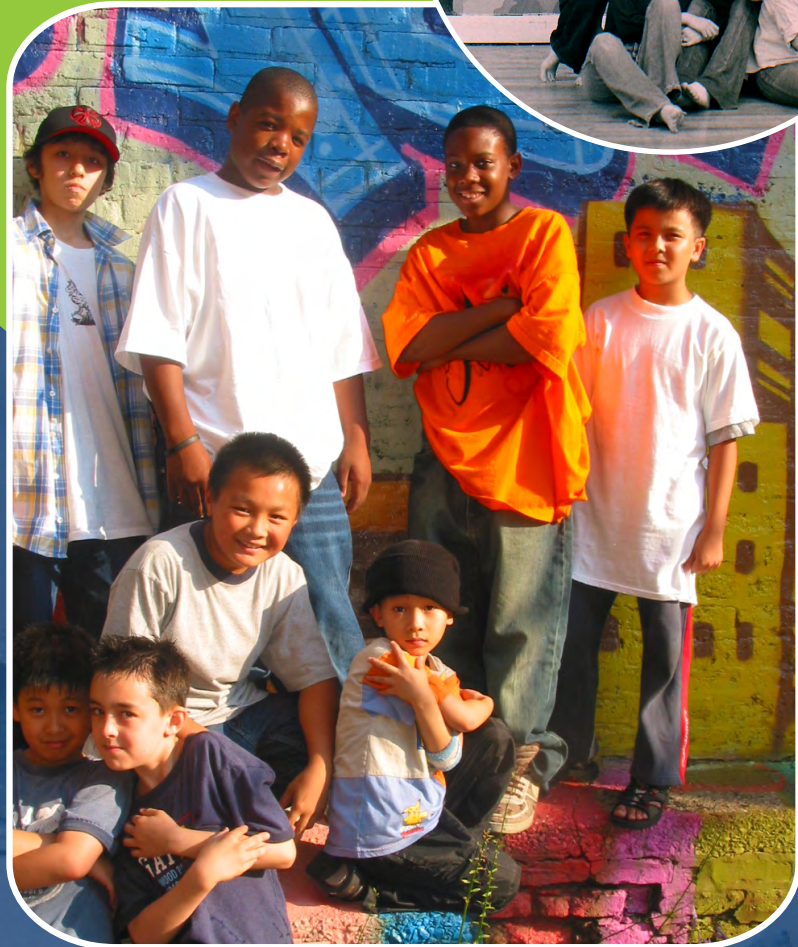
50 years ago, Alternatives was founded by community members with the purpose of engaging young people in the process of building the necessary skills to deal with peer pressure; communication and “causal” issues for substance use. Rooted in principles of social justice, young people at Alternatives advocated for self expression and rallied against capitalism, systemic racism, and the Vietnam war. In the 5 decades since, Alternatives has developed programs to **support individual and family healing, self-advocacy, and community building**. Alternatives remains ever adaptive to the changing needs of the young people we have supported for the last half century.



# CELEBRATE 50 YEARS OF ALTERNATIVES

## RESPONSIVE TO THE COMMUNITY

What started as a gathering space for coffee, music, and photography, evolved into “outward bound” activities, a drug hotline, and an employment program. Eventually in the 80s, Behavioral Health, and collaborative prevention services and in the 90s, programs like **YouthNet**, **EdgeUp**, and **Girl World** flourished. In 1996 we started the first **Restorative Justice Peer Jury** at Senn High School. In 2000, we purchased our building in Uptown and began the **Connect Force Hip Hop** Program and the **Community Tech Center**. In 2005 we started providing **Behavioral Health services** in schools and made the bricolage/ mosaic on the front of the building.



## ALTERNATIVES PUT ME ON THE RIGHT TRACK

Dr. Belle Rose Ragins was there when Alternatives first opened on Peterson Avenue 50 years ago. A sophomore at Mather High school, she simply just wandered in and met the director and other staff. They trained me and I became the first coordinator of the youth hotline. “I was 15 yrs old -- headed in the wrong direction - but Alternatives put me on the right track”, notes Dr. Ragins.

**“They believed in me - so I was able to believe in myself. I did things I never thought I could do.”**

Dr. Ragins credits Alternatives for her chosen career as an Industrial-Organizational psychologist. Our values on social justice and equity planted the early seeds that now have bloomed into a thriving research practice on diversity and allyship in the workplace.

**“This organization made a difference in my life - and the lives of so many other youth who wandered into the outposts (we called them outposts back then). I am a living testament for its efficacy and impact.”**

**DR. BELLE ROSE RAGINS**  
Sheldon B. Lubar Professor of Management  
Lubar School of Business  
University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee

## NAVIGATING UNCERTAINTY

2020 was a year unlike any other. While nothing felt certain, we knew that the need for our services would only grow as the pandemic continued. We **immediately pivoted our in-person programming** so we could continue providing services remotely.

While most cities across the country canceled summer jobs altogether, **we worked with the City to “Save Summer” by organizing virtual summer programming for 76 youth**. Our Family Relief Fund provided \$30,000 in assistance to families impacted by the pandemic and Case Workers oversaw our remote learning pods for young people in Washington Park to keep up with their schooling.



**\$30,000**  
Provided to families from our  
Family Relief Fund

## Disrupting the Cycle of Trauma

We've learned that healing begins at the individual level and ripples outward to impact family relationships, strengthen and restore communities, and ultimately has the power to transform systems.

This past year, two Alternatives Case Managers worked closely with siblings in our **Washington Park** remote learning pod. Close connections and conversations with the parent revealed distress in the family relationship despite a desire to keep the young people in the home.

When the Department of Child & Family Services temporarily removed the siblings from the home, our relationships with the department and our work inside those systems of care provided a seed of hope that things could turn around.

Alternatives provided one-on-one support to the parent, with a focus on effective communication skills and worked with the Department to connect the parent to additional resources to support the reunification process.

Additionally, the siblings received mentoring, skill-building, and tutoring. They were even connected to job opportunities and are now back in their home enjoying a renewed relationship and new tools for interacting as a family unit.

## A Collective Approach to Healing

For many years, schools have reached out to Alternatives as they faced compounding issues of interpersonal, race, gender, and class tensions.

Alternatives designed and facilitated an intensive series of restorative interventions as a starting point for healing the collective grief that comes from racial trauma and violence. This year, after the release of the video of the police killing of Adam Toledo and the intra-community violence that resulted in the death of 7 year old Jaslyn Adams, we were ready to respond with **two weeks of healing circles** in a school in that Chicago neighborhood. The healing spaces that we facilitate are rare and much needed for both young people and adults. Schools are now looking to our staff to **facilitate racial equity professional development** learning opportunities for next school year.

## Holding Systems Accountable

**We're not just going to sit in a circle every time a young Black or Brown person is murdered by police.**

We know that the barriers our young people face are not their fault and should not be their responsibility to overcome. This is why we have added our voice to advocacy initiatives that impact our young people and taking a more prominent position on tough issues is a practice that will transform our systems for the better. We officially endorsed the citywide youth-led campaign to **remove School Resource Officers** (SRO)s from CPS, **#CopsOutCPS**, the campaign to **defund CPD**, and the **Final 5 Campaign** to close youth prisons in Illinois. We are committed to seeing it through.



## JULIA'S STORY

Julia,\* a high schooler living in Little Village, was referred to therapy with one of Alternatives' Behavioral Health therapists after her grades had been dropping and she'd missed multiple classes. Julia was experiencing passive suicidal ideation, self-harm behaviors, disordered eating, and other symptoms of depression that made it difficult for her to manage her many responsibilities including finishing her senior year of high school and maintaining her job to help support her family.

In sessions with her therapist, Julia **learned and practiced coping skills and developed tools for implementing mindfulness and gratitude practices**

in her daily life, as well as learning to manage intrusive thoughts related to self-harm or bingeing and purging. Through therapy, she learned to develop a more nurturing inner voice to counteract negative thoughts and was able to successfully graduate from high school.

After seeing an Alternatives therapist, Julia has **established healthier boundaries with family members in order to focus on her own goals, ambitions, and self-care**. She has since started college and has been able to build her confidence in working towards her long-term goal of becoming an early childhood educator.

*\*Name changed for privacy and protection*

## JOSEPH'S STORY

Joseph is a Peace Ambassador who has been involved with Alternatives for almost 10 years. Though he was timid to join when his grandmother first signed him up for our summer camp, that summer experience inspired him to get involved with the Urban Arts program where he explored parts of Chicago he'd never been to through a photography project. Eventually, Joseph decided to join a Talking Circle and that's where his experience really began to transform.

**"I didn't expect to cry in this experience, but I thought it was a good thing because it taught me how to be myself and express myself more."**

The deep connections he developed through this program have provided him with a network of friends to walk through life with and unlocked his own skills as a Circles and restorative justice training facilitator. Joseph enjoys inspiring hope in other young people and knows he is on the right track to make an impact in his Chicago community and beyond.

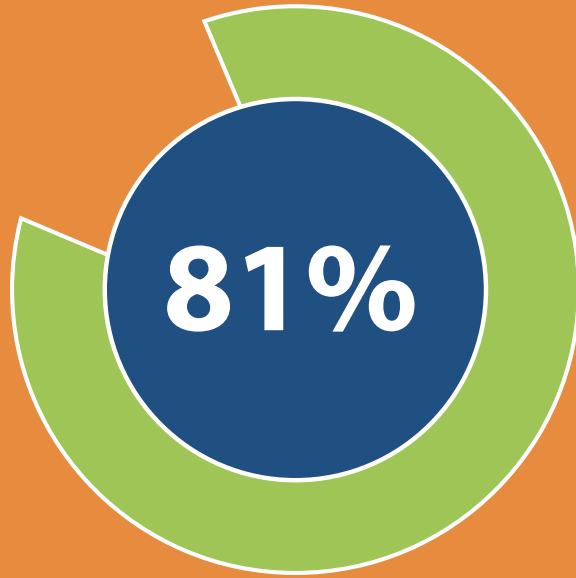


OUR REACH

1,468  
Young people served in FY21



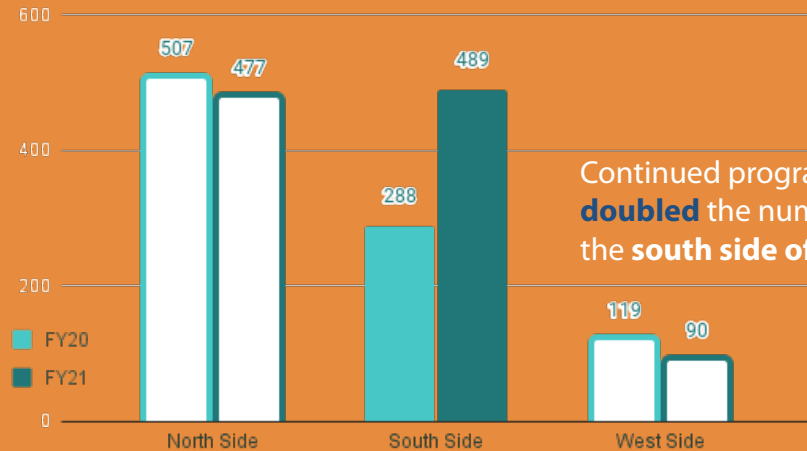
Your support helped us serve young people in **102 Chicago Public Schools** and **community locations**, through in-person and remote participation.



**HEALING INDIVIDUALS**  
Eighty one percent of our program participants report and **increase in their problem solving skills.**

More than 2/3 of Alternatives' Board of Directors and Staff represent systemically excluded populations.

RESTORING COMMUNITIES



Continued program expansion and **nearly doubled** the number of young people served on the **south side of Chicago.**

TRANSFORMING SYSTEMS

We trained **526** Chicago Public Schools staff in principles of Restorative Justice.

94%

Of staff participants found our training useful.

"I am so thankful that we took a workshop to talk about using restorative practices within ourselves. This is hard work and the only way we can do it well is to make sure we are checking in with our own emotions and taking care of ourselves."

July 1, 2019 - June 30, 2020

FINANCIALS FY20

REVENUE

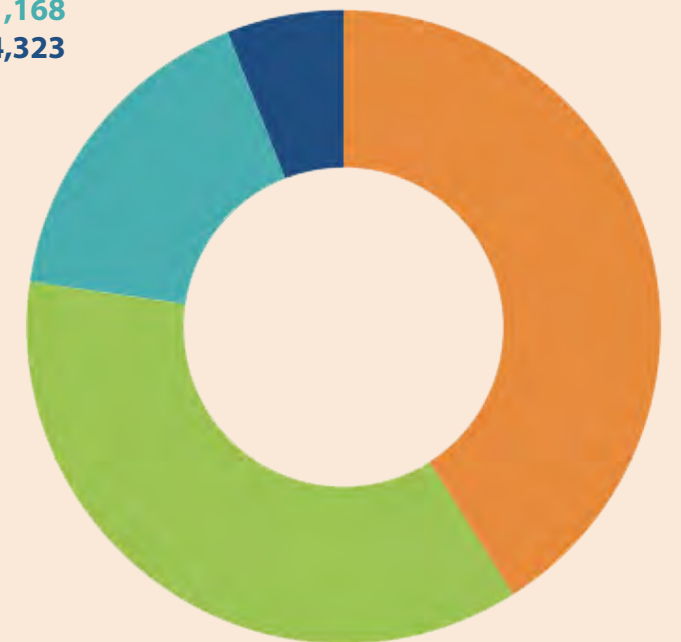
Total Revenue: **\$3,679,616**

Unrestricted Contributions & Private Grants	\$714,511
Restricted Contributions & Private Grants	\$390,000
State Funding	\$1,995,462
City Funding	\$170,278
Chicago Public Schools	\$268,511
Other Revenue	\$140,854

EXPENSES

Total Expenses: **\$3,589,794**

Clinical Services	\$1,472,497
Youth Development	\$1,314,806
Administration	\$601,168
Fundraising	\$214,323



YOUR SUPPORT ALLOWS US TO CREATE SPACES WHERE YOUNG PEOPLE THRIVE.

Thank you for showing up for our community.

Your work is changing lives and changing the world.

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