If you could reflect back on your life and pinpoint a moment in time when a specific person or event caused you to turn one way instead of the other, or move forward instead of turning back, what would it be? Would you remember a teacher? A mentor? A neighbor or trusted friend? How often do we get the chance to reflect on those paths taken, or not, and consider how different our journey might have been?

The people we profiled in this year’s Portland Children’s Levy Community Report did just that. All participated in Levy-supported programs, some as long as a decade ago. They shared their reflections on how participating in those programs made a lasting impact on their lives: We hope reading these stories may prompt you to reflect as well.

P.S.: As part of the Levy’s “reflection” we have revamped our logo to signify our solid foundation since 2002 and clear direction as we move forward.

Ted Wheeler, Portland Mayor
Chair, Portland Children’s Levy Allocation Committee
MayorWheeler@portlandoregon.gov
**MAKING CHILDREN A PRIORITY**

In the inherent right of all children to have educational and economic opportunities so they can thrive.

**OUR GOALS**
- Prepare children for school
- Support their success in and out of the classroom
- Reduce racial and ethnic disparities in their well-being and school success

**WE SUPPORT**
- Positive early development
- School engagement and academic achievement
- High school graduation
- Family safety and stability

### Stewards of Your Tax Dollars

The Portland Children’s Levy is overseen by a five-member Allocation Committee that meets publicly at Portland City Hall Council Chambers to make funding decisions. It is composed of the Mayor, one Multnomah County Commissioner and three citizen members appointed by the city and county.

The Levy has annual audits by an independent firm with results published on our website at www.portlandchildrenslevy.org. An administrative cap of 5 percent means that proven Levy programs receive 95 cents of every dollar. City homeowners support the Levy through a property tax of about $60 a year for a home with an assessed value of $150,000.

**ALLOCATION COMMITTEE CURRENT MEMBERS**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Position</th>
<th>Name</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Portland City Mayor</td>
<td>Ted Wheeler</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multnomah County Commissioner</td>
<td>Jessica Vega Pederson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Director</td>
<td>Felicia Tripp Folsom</td>
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<tr>
<td>Deputy Director</td>
<td>Mitch Hornecker</td>
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**2019 PROGRAM INVESTMENTS**

- **Early Childhood** $3,780,867
- **After-School** $3,379,186
- **Child Abuse Prevention & Intervention** $1,588,644
- **Hunger** $1,526,867
- **Foster Care** $1,475,515

**WE PROVIDE OPPORTUNITIES**

Since 2002, our programs have strengthened the Portland community by supporting thousands of children from birth through age 24 to reach their potential.

**WE HELP OVERCOME**

Historical and institutional barriers, economic instability and systemic racism that are key factors that explain disparities in our community.

**WE PARTNER**

Parents and caregivers to become more confident and skilled at advocating for their children in the classroom and in life.

**Who and Where We Serve**

*These charts represent the majority of Levy-funded programs which annually serve more than 12,200 children. They do not include Hunger Relief services that annually provide food to more than 14,000 children, 52 percent who were children of color; 45 percent who spoke a first language other than English; and 66 percent who resided in East Portland.

**PRIMARY LANGUAGE SPOKEN AT HOME**

- **English** 67.4%
- **Spanish** 17.5%
- **Other** 8.0%
- **Not Given** 8.6%

**RACE / ETHNICITY**

- **White** 25%
- **African American** 17%
- **Latino/Hispanic** 22%
- **Native American/Native Alaskan** 2.4%
- **Not Given** 8.6%
- **Asian** 7%  
- **Middle Eastern** 0.7%  
- **Slavic** 12%
- **Multiracial** 15%
- **Not Given** 6.5%
- **Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander** 1.2%

**PORTLAND NEIGHBORHOOD**

- **North** 16.3%
- **Northwest** 9.0%
- **Northeast** 10.1%
- **Southwest** 2.9%
- **South** 17.5%
- **East** 46.2%
- **Swamp** 2.9%
- **Central** 0.8%
- **South Central** 8.5%
- **Not Given** 4.9%
- **Other 5.7%**
- **Homeless** 0.8%

**WE BELIEVE**

In the inherent right of all children to have educational and economic opportunities so they can thrive.

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RASHARD IS A SUCCESSFUL SOPHOMORE AT ROOSEVELT HIGH SCHOOL, who likes to cook, paint and shop for clothes. His mom, Serenity, looks back at the years he spent as an infant and toddler in Albina Early Head Start and Head Start as laying a solid foundation for what has been, at times, a challenging journey for him and their family.

“Head Start helped ground us. It helped us to be comfortable leaving him with other people and paved the way for elementary school, middle school and then high school. It taught me how to advocate for him.”

When Serenity was five months pregnant with Rashard injuries she suffered from a random drive-by shooting led to his being born with cerebral palsy. Crucial early intervention led the family to Albina when Rashard was 2, and for the past 15 years he has defied medical expectations.

The program helped her and Rashard’s dad with high-quality early learning childcare as they both worked, and especially with meeting his special needs.

“It helped us as a family to support Rashard and his diagnosis.”

Serenity was so impressed with Albina that she joined the staff nine years ago and is now a lead home visitor.

“It’s kind of a way to give back what was given to me,” she says, “My hope for Rashard is for him to have some type of independence and continue to know he is a gift to the world, and a blessing to everyone he meets.”

Rashard says, “I want to live independently one day,” as he communicates with a keyboard panel attached to his power device chair, which he also controls.
Lisa joined Village Market with lots of experience and was able to dive in and continue to learn new tasks and take on more responsibility. In charge of ordering, she is always thinking about what the store is missing, and what customers would be excited to see on our shelves. But the thing that makes Lisa a truly amazing person to be around is her thoughtfulness and kindness. She is always looking out for co-workers and customers and can be counted on to bake a special treat for someone’s birthday or just to show her appreciation.

Kris Soebroto, Director
Village Gardens Program

THE VILLAGE MARKET AT NEW COLUMBIA IS MORE THAN JUST A PLACE WHERE LISA BUYS FOOD FOR HER CHILDREN. It’s providing her with employment, job skill development and a place to live right upstairs.

As shift manager of the store, operated by Village Gardens, a program of Janus Youth Programs, she’s seen first-hand how it’s changed the community – the state’s largest affordable housing neighborhood – for the better. It offers fresh healthy produce, culturally relevant items, whole grains and dairy, and other household items typically found at a full-scale grocery store. And it’s located in a neighborhood where other grocery stores are nearly two miles away and a third of the residents live without vehicles.

For Lisa, who had been living in New Columbia before she became manager of Village Market, it was a welcome respite from taking the bus to and from the grocery store with two children. She was also delighted to be able to stretch her WIC and SNAP dollars through its Good Food program, which offers discounts and incentives on fresh produce and bulk items.

“It’s healthy and it helps your purse and pocketbook,” she says. “It gives you the ability to add fruits and vegetables because budgets are tight.”

She is a big believer in the mission of Village Market, which exists to address food and economic inequities that disproportionately impact low-income communities of color in North Portland.

She loves seeing the children come in for the Free Fruit for Kids program, where they get an apple, banana or orange any time of the day, as well as when they stop by for the Oatmeal for Kids program where they get a free serving of freshly cooked oatmeal before the school day begins.

“I think it’s amazing. I love the community. I love living here and working here.”

Lisa loves being able to provide healthy food for her children.
KARSTIN WANTS TO BE THERE FOR OTHERS, IN THE SAME WAY THAT WOMEN HELPED ADVOCATE FOR HER WHEN SHE NEEDED IT.

Now 28, and the mother to two sons, ages 11 and 8, Kristin has a home, and a job she enjoys in the nonprofit sector. But she remembers her struggles as a teen mom with a newborn. The Insights/SEEDS program run by Janus Youth Programs was there for her, providing home visits, child development classes and parent education and support.

When her first child was 2 her situation became dire: she was pregnant and in an abusive relationship. When the violence led to her being hospitalized, she had the strength to leave her abuser, although DHS took custody of her toddler. Determined to get her son back, she enrolled in Insights’ ECHO program for parents whose children are in foster care, as well as additional programs to prove to the court that she was a responsible parent for her 2-year-old and the one on the way.

“I am going to do whatever it takes to make sure I am a safe person for my child … I am motivated and empowering myself and other women.”

She was reunited with her oldest son two weeks before his little brother was born, and has since gone on to earn an associate degree in general studies and is working toward a BA in psychology at Portland State University.

Kristin is proud of herself for having done the “hard work” necessary to reclaim the life she wanted to lead for herself, and her sons.

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Jimmy was 8 years old, a fourth grader at James John Elementary and his life was upside down. Raised by his grandparents after his dad’s murder when he was 2 and abandoned by his mom who couldn’t shake her drug addiction, his life was punctuated by his family’s mental health issues, and their substance and physical abuse.

He credits a Department of Human Services case worker for referring him to Friends of the Children – Portland where he was paired with his “friend” John who immediately made a huge difference in his life through his teen years: helping him with homework, taking him to Blazers games and community events, and just being a constant presence as his home life imploded.

“He’s the normalcy in my life of dysfunction. He tried to keep me on track…I was not going to be a statistic.”

In his junior year at Roosevelt High School and his grandparents both dead, John was there when no relatives stepped in to raise him. After a few years of self-destructive behavior where he was involved with drugs and alcohol, the Friends program helped him get his high school diploma, along with an internship at a legal firm, and eventually Jimmy obtained an associate degree in criminal justice.

Married with two children and working as a court clerk, Jimmy says his life would have turned out much different had it not been for his “friend” who gave him the structure and stability that his biological family couldn’t.

“That’s the most important thing – that consistency from someone who can make you feel safe and secure. If I won the lottery I would use the money to open a Friends for other kids who were like me.”
As first-year teacher David Cortes Ortiz walks the halls of Roosevelt High School, students shout his name and stop to chat and joke. It’s easy for him to imagine being in their shoes 10 or so years ago; in fact, he was. And he credits the stability, structure and encouragement he received from Open School Step Up to help him eventually return to his roots.

The 25-year-old Roosevelt graduate was an eighth grader at Portsmouth Middle School when he first encountered Step Up, as a staffer volunteered to assist his Spanish-speaking mom translate during a parent-teacher conference. Soon he was attending Step Up after-school classes where he found help with homework and a quiet place to study. He still recalls the importance of a summer leadership camp for incoming 9th graders that included a rope and challenge course.

“I was letting go of my fear and self-doubt. That gave me momentum to keep pushing myself.”

As the oldest child in a family whose parents emigrated from Mexico, Step Up staff helped him focus on academics and “fill the gaps that my family couldn’t.” That included applying for college, resulting in him being selected as a prestigious Gates Millennium Scholar which paid for his undergraduate degree at University of Miami, and graduate program at University of Portland.

“Step Up made the impossible possible,” he says. “That want and desire came out of what Step Up gave to me – I felt really cared for, like being in a community. And it made me want to come to Portland and give back. I’m modeling what Step Up taught me…these are my people. This is where I came from.”

Robin Eisenbach, former Roosevelt HS counselor and former Step Up Program Manager

He is now a popular teacher at Roosevelt

“A safe place for students to learn and have fun. Students gain self-esteem, confidence and leadership skills with caring adults who provide academic support and fun activities.”

I first met David when he was a freshman at Roosevelt High School. He was incredible, kind and respectful, and also a little bit shy. He’s a role model for others when it comes to academic discipline and success. I am so proud of his accomplishments here, but I am more moved by his willingness to give back to others in his own community. He has worked hard on his own healing, and then he immediately turns around and works to offer that same healing to others. It’s a beautiful thing.

David’s high school graduation
Fama is such an inspiring student to work with, rarely needing support, yet always making time to catch me up on what's going on in her life, be it the joys and struggles of being the president of the Muslim Student Association or progress on her dream of going into public service after she graduates to give back to the community.

She is driven and passionate about making a positive impact on the world so no matter where she ends up, I'm sure her warm heart and compassion for others will brighten the lives of those around her.

Tess Hills, College Possible Coach
REFLECTIONS

THANK YOU PORTLAND!