

LINK

Unlimited Scholars

ANNUAL IMPACT REPORT

2023 - 2024



LINK
Unlimited
Scholars

**Building tomorrow's
Black leaders** *today!*

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To Our LINK *Community*

As we reflect on the 2023-2024 program year, we are filled with immense pride in the strides we've made and gratitude for the unwavering support of our LINK community. **Thank You!** This year, we successfully built upon our legacy of delivering transformative programs, supporting Black Excellence, and fostering pathways to college and career success for our Scholars.

We proudly served over 300 Scholars through enriching programs and events, including our revitalized Saturday Academy, expanded Scholar retreats, and innovative Summer Learning experiences. New initiatives such as the job shadow program for sophomores and enhanced college counseling are just a few examples of how we continue to elevate our programming to meet Scholars' evolving needs. Organizationally, we welcomed new team & Board members, developed organizational values, decreased bad debt, raised significant dollars to support future years' operations, hosted our most successful golf outing ever, and ended our fiscal year with a surplus. Also, in our quest to remain supportive of team members' growth, development, and life balance, we introduced our first employee engagement survey and empowered our team to lead the work in engineering solutions for the challenges identified in that survey.

Yes, we accomplished a lot! But we also grappled with challenges that tested our resilience. However, we demonstrated our organizational value of **Excellence**, operated with a growth mindset, and embraced mistakes and failures because we know in those moments we learn and grow the most. Scholar engagement and attendance continue to require ongoing strategies to foster deeper connections, while Mentor recruitment and sustained engagement remain areas for growth. Additionally, balancing the development of new systems and processes with program delivery stretched our capacity but never broke our determination.

As we approach our 60th anniversary, we remain steadfast in our mission and ambitious in our goals. We are determined to expand our reach, deepen Scholar impact, and strengthen the infrastructure needed for sustained growth. The resilience, adaptability, and dedication of our team and community will continue to drive us full speed ahead.

Thank you for your belief in our mission and your continued investment in our Scholars and our team. Together, we are shaping leaders and transforming lives and communities.



A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Dr. Gunn'.

DR. TOINETTE GUNN
President & CEO



A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Ken Johnson'.

KEN JOHNSON
Board Chair

Our Mission

To connect Black students with resources and opportunities that strengthen the necessary skills to succeed as they advance to, through, and beyond college.

Our Vision

Through our programming, we aim to increase the economic mobility and stability of Black students and cultivate a diverse leadership pipeline in our city and nation.

Our 6-year Fellowship Model

MIDDLE SCHOOL



Academic Enrichment



Leadership Development



High School Options



College Exposure

HIGH SCHOOL



Academic Enrichment & Scholarships



Leadership Development



Career Exposure



College Access

LINK Class of 2024, *by the numbers*

A+
3.37%
Average GPA

100%
High School Graduation Rate

91%
College Acceptance

100%
College Matriculation*



ALEXANDRIA CUMMINGS
VP, Programs & Evaluations



CAMIELLE TAYLOR
Managing Director, Scholar Support

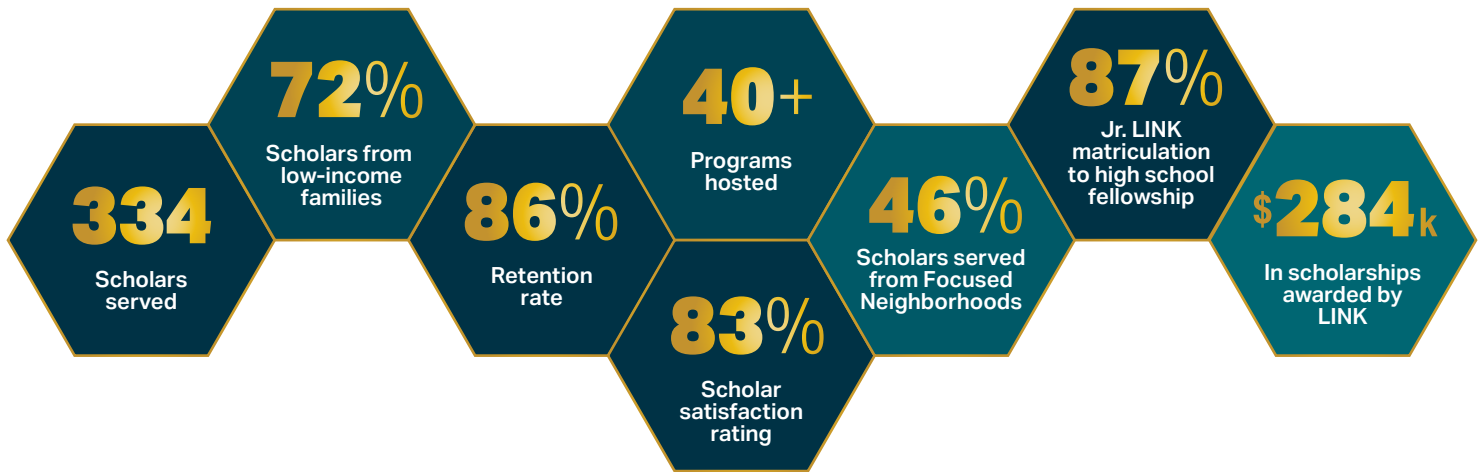
1 THE GATES SCHOLARSHIP

1 POSSE FOUNDATION SCHOLARSHIP

2 JORDAN WINGS SCHOLARSHIP

*Represents 88% of Class of 2024 Scholars

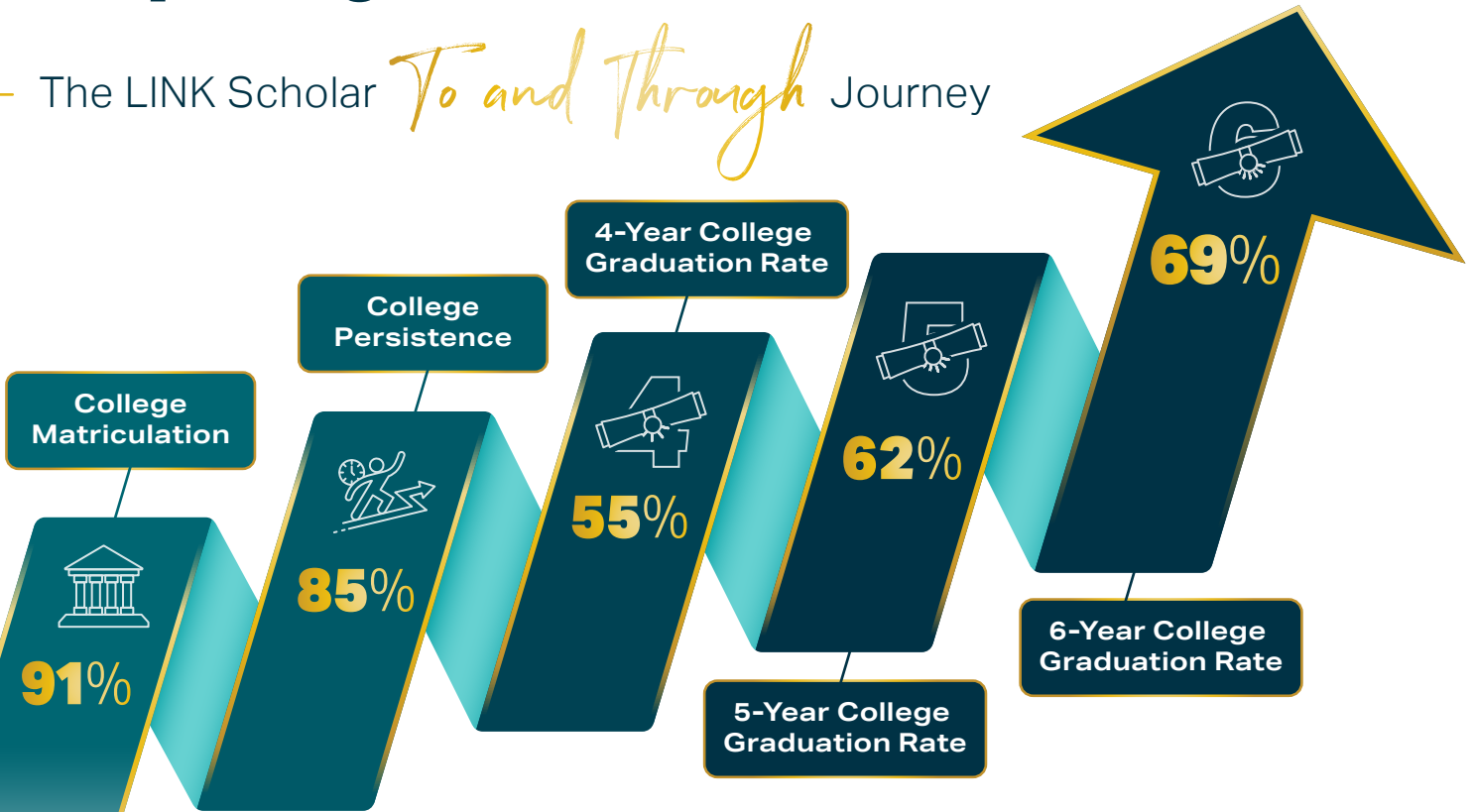
Programming: Year in *Review*



Academic Enrichment	Leadership Development	College Exposure & Access	Career Exposure
<p>Summer Learning: academic accelerator with new curricula, including job shadowing & dual enrollment with City Colleges of Chicago.</p>	<p>Saturday Academy: culturally relevant curricula focused on personal growth, career exploration, & college readiness, culminating in a reflective capstone.</p> <p>Scholar Retreats: cohort-based to build community, explore identity, & strengthen socioemotional skills.</p>	<p>College Information Sessions: exploration of college opportunities through admissions representative sessions & campus tours.</p> <p>College Counseling: individual support to guide seniors through the college application process.</p>	<p>Career Panels: Scholars engage with professionals across many disciplines to learn about their roles, careers, & paths.</p> <p>Job Shadows: real-world career exposure through workplace tours & networking.</p>
Scholar Social & Emotional Support		...Through College	
<p>Monthly Check-Ins: nearly 400 hours of individualized support from a dedicated Associate.</p> <p>Mentoring: through Mentor & Scholar events & 1:1 interactions, Scholars receive guidance & build social capital, equipping them with insights & guidance needed for academic, career, & life success.</p>		<p>Collegiate Scholar Support: ongoing counseling, financial assistance, & coaching, in partnership with UtmostU.</p>	

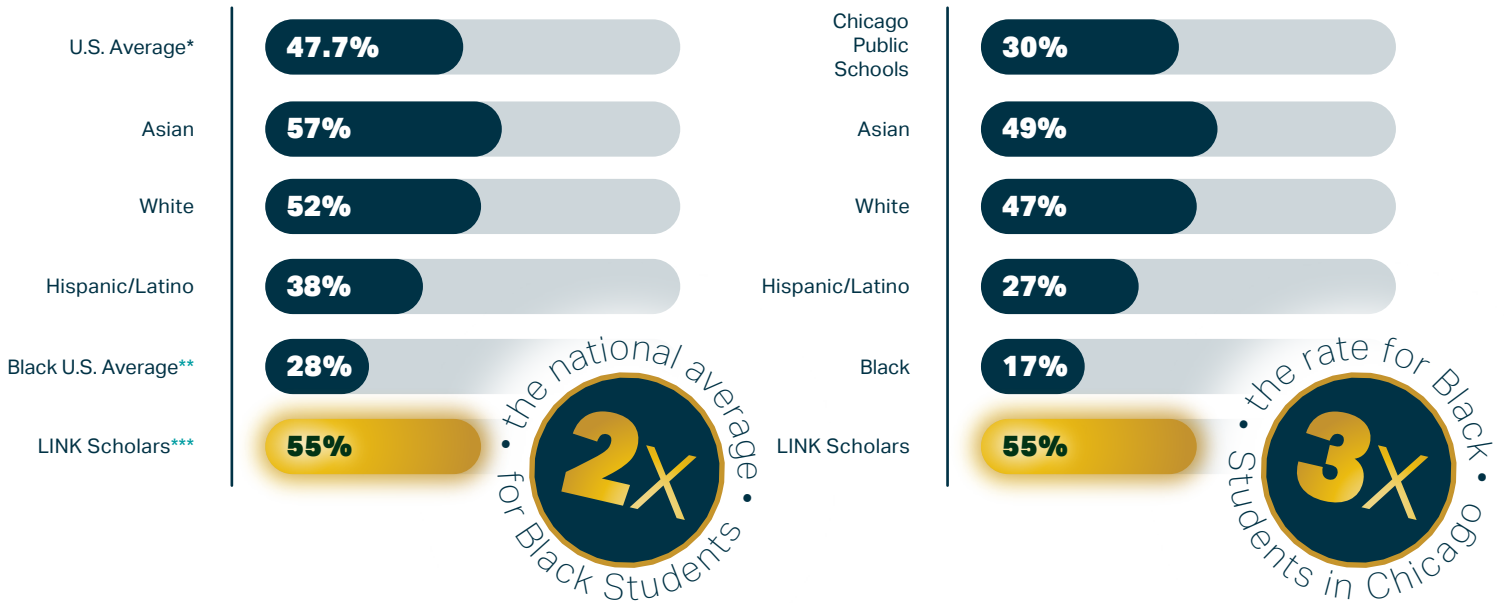
Our Impact: LINK Scholars are Outpacing Their Peers

The LINK Scholar *To and Through* Journey



College Graduation Outcomes

**NCES Digest of Education Statistics 2022 Tables & Figures, Table 326.10
 ***LINK Scholars Cumulative College Graduation Rate, 2011-2016, 2018-2019



Empowering Our Scholars on the Path to Success

For **Maverick Griffin** and **Jamari Pitchford**, LINK Unlimited Scholars has been more than just a scholarship program - it has been a transformative journey filled with life-changing opportunities, personal growth, and lifelong connections. Both members of the Class of 2024, Jamari and Maverick have leveraged LINK's resources and guidance to accomplish the remarkable, positioning themselves for bright futures.

Jamari Pitchford, now a freshman at Cornell University and Posse Scholar, attributes much of his success on his college journey to LINK. **"LINK made a difference for me by connecting me to opportunities that otherwise wouldn't have been available,"** he shares. Through LINK's nomination, Jamari received the Posse Scholarship, allowing him to attend Cornell on a full-tuition scholarship, where he is pursuing an Economics degree.



Jamari's relationship with his Mentors, **David & Jenny Jones**, has also been incredibly impactful. One of his favorite memories with them was a day spent playing golf before heading to Cornell. **"It was a time to genuinely connect,"** he recalls. **"They've been there every step of the way, and supported me through all of my decisions."**

Although now a college student, Jamari's LINK journey continues. The support provided in partnership with **UtmostU**, a program that continues LINK's legacy into college, helps guide Jamari through his time at Cornell. **"UtmostU ensures I have mentors and resources all through college,"** he explains, reinforcing that LINK continues to support Scholars beyond high school.

For Maverick Griffin, now attending Paul Quinn College as a Jordan Wings Scholar, LINK's impact has been equally life-changing. **"LINK connected me to the Jordan Wings program which may make my college process easier,"** Maverick shares, noting the support he received.

One of the most meaningful aspects of Maverick's LINK journey has been his relationship with his Mentor, **Daniel Perlman**. **"I'm close with Mr. Perlman and his family,"** he says. **"He's there whenever I need advice, and he always checks in on me."** Their relationship has provided Maverick with career insights, motivation, and lasting guidance. **"He taught me to seize every opportunity and to work hard, no matter what."**

LINK has also opened doors to transformative experiences that have shaped Maverick's perspective. At a career exposure experience hosted in partnership with Deloitte, Maverick spent the day learning from industry professionals about critical thinking and innovation. **"They taught us to think outside the box,"** Maverick explains. **"I approach everything differently now - it changed how I solve problems and view challenges."** This new perspective on creative thinking is something Maverick employs as an Entrepreneurship major at Paul Quinn College.



Maverick's self-assuredness stems from his experiences at LINK, where he learned to feel comfortable in any room. **"I was always confident, but LINK took me to that next level,"** he says. **"I was confident in myself but now people can see my confidence."**

"LINK gave me the *confidence* to stand out and be vocal. I want people to remember my name."

- Maverick Griffin -

LINK Unlimited Scholars & Holy Trinity High School

A Partnership That Powers Scholar *Success*



The partnership between LINK Unlimited Scholars and Holy Trinity High School is a bridge to opportunity, growth, and lasting impact for students. **Matt Swanson, Holy Trinity's Scholarships and Financial Assistance Officer**, shared his enthusiasm about the fruitful alliance, which continues to expand the horizons for our Scholars. **"LINK Unlimited doesn't just help families afford a private education,"** Swanson explains. **"It's an extra layer of support that creates a higher degree of success for both students and their families."**

Holy Trinity, with a diverse student body of 320, including 30-35% Black students, shares a mission with LINK: to uplift students and families through education. For many the financial support from LINK is essential, covering about 20-25% of tuition, and making a Holy Trinity education more accessible. **"The average family here is spending \$2,500 on tuition [after scholarships], so every bit counts."**

Swanson also notes that LINK Scholars tend to stand out on campus. **"You see it in their involvement. The students and their families are more engaged,"** he says, describing the accountability LINK fosters through its program requirements.

Swanson also notes that LINK Scholars tend to stand out on Holy Trinity's campus. **"You see it in their involvement. The students and their families are more engaged,"** he says, describing the accountability LINK fosters through its program requirements. This active involvement pays off, creating an environment where LINK Scholars thrive, both academically and personally. The data speaks volumes: of the 15 LINK Scholars who graduated from Holy Trinity in the last six years, 80% are either still in college or have already graduated. **"There's a clear upward trajectory,"** Swanson shared with pride.

The benefits of LINK's support go beyond high school tuition assistance, with mentorship and career exposure opportunities that help Scholars picture futures they might not have considered.

"Any time students can see someone who looks like them in a professional role, it's eye-opening," Swanson says. **"It helps them imagine new possibilities and think, 'That could be me'."**

This exposure to role models who mirror their own experiences fuels Scholars' aspirations, helping them set ambitious goals for college and careers.

Looking to the future, Holy Trinity aims to expand the partnership even further. This year, Holy Trinity will host LINK Unlimited's Saturday Academy.

"Having students in the building - especially the younger ones - builds familiarity and connection with Holy Trinity," Swanson says. **"We hope it keeps growing so that more LINK Scholars apply to Holy Trinity and remain connected with LINK."**

Reflecting on the success of the decades-long partnership, Swanson is optimistic about the future. Emphasizing donor support he says, **"If you want to have an impact on the world, I think education is the best way to do it."**

"You're not only going to affect this generation of students, you're also going to affect their families for future generations," he says and noted the broadest way to help people is to, **"give them an education so they can help themselves."**

LINK/Holy Trinity Scholars College Persistence & Graduation Rate



80%

Since 2019

Mentor Highlight

Building Strong *Mentoring* Relationships

LINK Mentors provide more than just guidance—they build lasting relationships that empower young people to unlock their full potential. For Mentor **Osei Andrews-Hutchinson**, an engineer and proud member of the Rotary Club, mentorship is more than just a one-way street.

He views his role as a *Jegna*—an African term for a keeper of tradition or a warrior for the next generation. **“The sky is the limit [for my mentee],”** Osei shared. **“Part of my responsibility is finding the resources to help him learn about what he wants to learn about. I envision a continual process of providing resources, providing exposure, and then hopefully he will take ‘the bull by the horns’ and...it will help him make better, informed decisions.”**

For his mentee Chace, a junior at De La Salle Institute, their connection is an ongoing journey that shapes Chace’s college aspirations and personal development. Through Osei’s connections with Rotary Club, Chace was able to participate in a youth exchange program and study abroad for a year in Colombia.

It was this unique experience that has given him a new perspective. **“LINK has provided me more direction and more clarity,”** said Chace. **“I knew I wanted to try and expand my bubble and pop that bubble... I did the applications, interviews, and training and went to another country. That was probably the most important and most life-changing thing I’ve had in my life.”**

Additionally, Chace attended the NAMWOLF convention (an event focused on diversity in the law profession) as an ambassador, where LINK students were the only young attendees. **“We got an opportunity that no other program had. And it was really enlightening,”** he shared. The sense of community LINK fosters has helped Chace build lasting connections and networks. He values the way the program fosters connections between students from different backgrounds, helping them build relationships that go beyond surface-level interactions. **“I appreciate all the friends I have made. It feels like you’re naturally meeting people. It’s a very open and welcoming environment.”**

Osei stressed the importance of investing in youth development and mentorship programs. Referring to a Frederick Douglas quote, he commented, **“It is easier to prepare young people instead of fixing adults. If you start now, it’s easier to build in all the tools for young people to survive and analyze the world. We need to be serious about transforming ourselves as Mentors and donors.”**

Osei had one last powerful thought on mentorship, **“Look at this as a learning experience for you. Getting a youth perspective of the world and things around you is actually educational and sincere. It can enhance your life. It has enhanced mine. We can all learn something from young people.”**



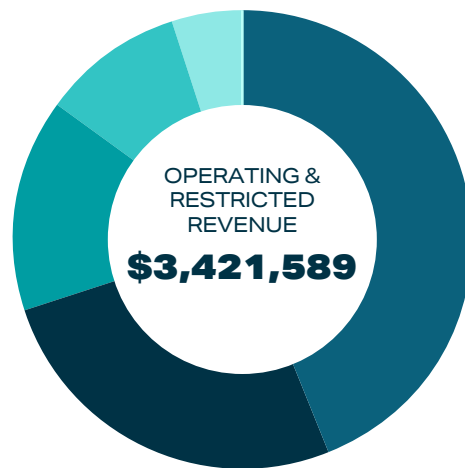
Financial *Overview*

FY2024 REVENUE

Investment Summary

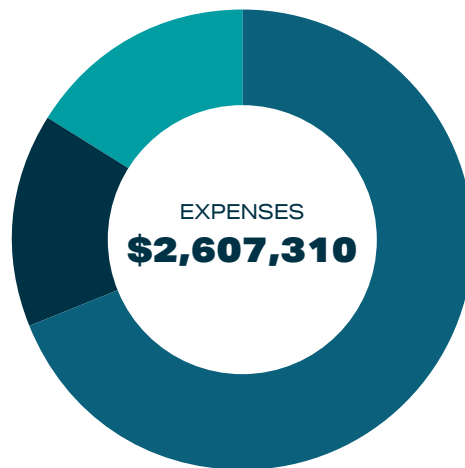
Generous partners invested in LINK Scholars with one-time and multi-year commitments to support our current and future operations . Here's a snapshot of the impact your gifts are making collectively for LINK Scholars:

● Foundations	45%
● Individuals	28%
● Corporations	15%
● Government	4%
● Special Events	7%
● Misc.	1%



FY2024 EXPENSES

● Program Services	67%
● Advancement	15%
● Administration	18%



Our Donors

**We are grateful for each donor that supported the success of our incredible Scholars.
Thank you to all of our donors.**

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Michael Happ
Michael Wheeler
Michelle Kittrell
Microsoft Matching Gifts Program
MIGMIR

Miriam Peguero Medrano
 Miron Washington
 Modern Executive Solutions
 Molly M Bench
 Morgan Group
 Morgan Stanley
 Nadine Moultaali
 Natalie Brown
 Nathan Dancy
 NBA Foundation
 Nicholas Freeman
 Nicolas Tamborrel
 Nnenna Uzodi
 Norman James & Marsha Brazley
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 Velma Harris
 Veradigm Inc.
 Victoria Moss
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Donor Highlight

A Legacy of Impact: An Ongoing Commitment to LINK



For nearly two decades, **Jerry Kane** has been a committed supporter of Link Unlimited Scholars. In 2007, having retired from a successful career in finance, Jerry was searching for meaningful ways to make an impact. The opportunity to mentor future generations motivated him to join LINK as both a Mentor and a donor.

Throughout his time with LINK, Jerry has mentored several Scholars, building long-lasting, impactful relationships. Though never a LINK Board member, his commitment, involvement, and advice are always valued to the organization's leaders. **"It's fun to be a friend and go to the movies but being a LINK Mentor enabled me to do something more valuable - to teach these Scholars how to do the work, to help them get a great education and move into a great career, to one day (I hope) complete the cycle and become Mentors themselves."** he mentions.

After leaving the Chicago area, Jerry's in-person mentorship has lessened, but his financial support has only grown. Understanding the importance that LINK plays in shaping young lives, he says, **"Because I can't give as much time at this stage of my life as I have been able to previously, I make sure to make up for it with gifts, so I can still support the work and enable others to carry out the mission."**

One of Jerry's most cherished memories was hosting a Scholar in his home for a semester, providing guidance in balancing life, work, and school. Watching that student, as well as other mentees, grow into successful adults is a source of lasting fulfillment. He describes LINK as a program that offers young people a pathway to professional and social success, providing them a network to which they might not have had access.

Donor Highlight

Unlocking

Youth Potential:

In Partnership with **David & Suzu Neithercut**

For nearly two decades, David and Suzu Neithercut have been steadfast supporters of LINK Unlimited Scholars. David recently reflected on their journey with LINK, their motivations for giving, and their hopes for LINK's future. David and Suzu were initially introduced to LINK through David's professional network within Chicago's real estate sector. **"Chicago is a great city, but not for everyone,"** he remarked. **"We have a duty to make it a place where every young person has an opportunity to thrive."** Recognizing this, David and Suzu have long been committed to supporting organizations that aim to provide young adults of color across Chicago with the guidance, skills and opportunities necessary to succeed in school and work. **"Motivated, capable young adults of color often just need a little help—an internship, a connection, a Mentor or some direction—to unlock their full potential. Through LINK and other programs, we've encountered dozens of these young adults who, with just a little help or guidance, have significantly changed the trajectory of their lives,"** he shared.

David is optimistic about LINK's growth and believes there is tremendous potential to further strengthen the support provided to Scholars beyond high school. He emphasized the value of not only guiding students into college but also ensuring they graduate and successfully embark on meaningful careers. **"Providing these kids with the networks and opportunities that many of us take for granted will help them fulfill their potential and we have a duty to help them maximize that potential. It's not enough to get students into college. We need to see them through and ensure they're equipped to succeed beyond graduation,"** he asserted. His inspiring vision highlights the critical need for continuous innovation and an unwavering commitment to providing Scholars with access, resources, and opportunities to achieve lifelong success.

Reflecting on his own mentoring experiences, David stressed the importance of students understanding how to fully utilize the Mentor network. **"The LINK network of Mentors spans leadership across every sector of Chicago's business and civic community. Scholars need to understand that it is their responsibility to leverage their access to this wealth of knowledge and support available to them,"** he emphasized. **"By doing so, Scholars can create their personal network of caring professionals ready, willing and able to help them achieve their academic and career goals."**

In alignment with David's advice on enhancing the mentoring experience for both Mentors and Scholars, LINK rolled out a new Mentor model this year, that includes Peer Mentoring for freshmen Scholars in an effort to better educate and prepare them for their adult mentoring relationships that will now begin in their sophomore year.

This new model aims to better educate students on the value of mentoring and networking and to foster stronger Mentor and Scholar relationships.

Looking ahead, David remains interested in LINK's future and has expressed his desire to continue his support as the organization builds on its success and creates lasting and measurable impact.

"If we want to help these young adults achieve their full potential and become leaders in the community, we need to ensure that our programs are impactful," he said. He called on the community to support initiatives that not only provide access but also build lasting, measurable success. LINK remains dedicated to deepening our impact to help Scholars thrive academically, professionally, and as future leaders.



Collegiate Scholars

Advancing Through College

For **Zachary Tobias** (Class of 2023, Brother Rice High School) and **Charity Alfred** (Class of 2022, UIC College Prep), LINK was a foundation of support, mentorship, and personal growth that continues to shape their experiences and aspirations. The transformative journey of LINK Unlimited Scholars alumni reflects the program's mission to academically and professionally guide Black Students to, through, and beyond college.

Zachary Tobias, a sophomore majoring in Public Relations at Southern Illinois University-Edwardsville, reflects on the role LINK played in his life. Growing up on the South Side of Chicago in a single-parent household, Zachary found LINK to be a lifeline that connected him to a network of peers, Mentors, and invaluable resources. Initially hesitant about the program's demands, Zachary quickly recognized LINK as **"a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity"** that offered more than academic guidance—it gave him a sense of belonging. **"LINK felt like another home... where you were welcomed and where you should be,"** he recalls.



ZACHARY TOBIAS
SIU-Edwardsville
LINK Alum, Class of 2023

Through LINK, Zachary developed a strong sense of accountability, a skill he considers essential in college. **"They didn't just tell me what to do—they showed me how to own my decisions, speak up for myself, and stay true to who I am."** This foundation became crucial as he transitioned to college life, a space where self-advocacy and independence are key. **"In college, you have to advocate for yourself, and LINK prepared me for that,"** he explains.

LINK's mentorship program also played a pivotal role in Zachary's development beyond academics. Through his Mentor, he gained insight into professional pathways and the confidence to dream big. **"My Mentor didn't just inspire me—he showed me what's possible,"** Zachary reflects. **"Those connections and lessons continue to guide me as I grow."** Zachary's story exemplifies the power of mentorship, community and helping students to unlock their potential.



CHARITY ALFRED
UW-Madison
LINK Alum, Class of 2022

For Charity, a junior marketing major at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, LINK Unlimited Scholars was an impactful experience that reshaped her perception of identity, success, and community. Growing up on Chicago's West Side, she initially believed success meant leaving her community behind. But LINK changed that narrative for her, teaching her to take pride in her identity. **"LINK taught me how to be unapologetically Black. It gave me a space to be around African-American peers and Mentors from across the city, showing me that success doesn't mean abandoning your roots—it means embracing them."**

Through LINK, Charity gained a powerful network of Mentors and peers who helped her navigate the challenges of college and life. **"The connections I made were life-changing. I even received my first internship through someone I met at LINK,"** she shares. Workshops on time management, writing, and professionalism equipped her to excel academically, despite the rigorous demands of college.

The stories of Zachary and Charity illustrate LINK's enduring commitment to helping Scholars succeed not just academically but as confident and empowered individuals. From mentorship and career preparation to personal growth and community-building, LINK continues to create pathways for its alumni to excel beyond the fellowship program.

"LINK believed in me and shaped me into who I am today.
I'll always be *grateful.*"

- Charity Alfred -

A Legacy of Success: The Newton Family's Journey with LINK Unlimited Scholars

"LINK is the best program out there; they give you the tools to succeed."

For the Newton family, LINK Unlimited Scholars is more than a program—it's a life-changing legacy. With her daughter Monique excelling as a junior at the University of Illinois and her son Chad growing in Jr. LINK, Consuela Newton is filled with pride and gratitude for the impact LINK has made.

Consuela first learned about LINK through a family friend years ago. This recommendation led her to apply for her daughter Monique, who went on to thrive in the program. Today, Monique is not only excelling academically but is already contemplating pursuing a PhD. **"I attribute so much of Monique's success to LINK. The program truly gave her the tools to succeed,"** Consuela proudly shares. For her son Chad, enrolling in Jr. LINK was a natural progression.

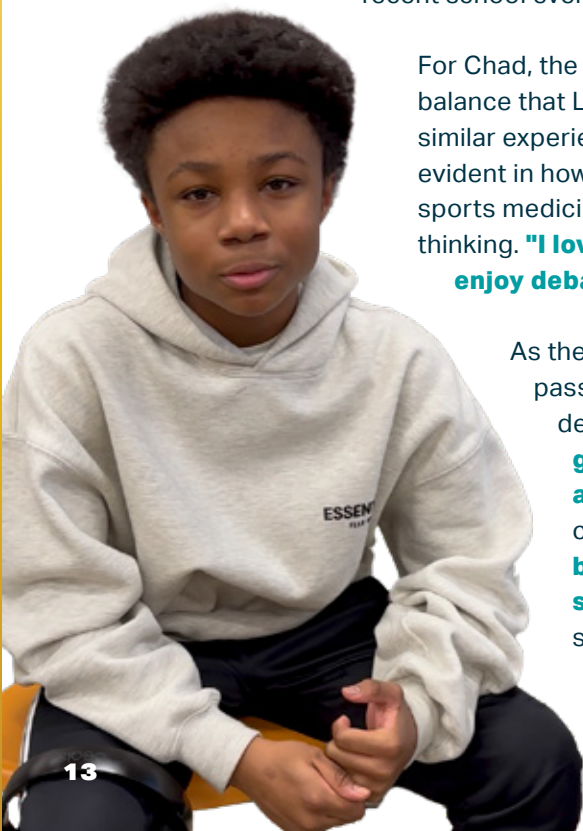


When asked why she chose LINK among the many programs in Chicago, Consuela's answer was clear: **"LINK had all the resources that I felt my son needed at this stage in his life. I knew LINK could help mold him into a young man, especially since I had already seen what it did for my daughter. LINK is the best program out there; they give you the tools to succeed."**

Chad's involvement in Jr. LINK has been equally transformative. Consuela shares she's seen him grow in confidence and responsibility; even taking bold steps like engaging with professional athletes at a recent school event. **"It was a huge step for him."**

For Chad, the program is more than just academic—it's a community. He values the balance that LINK provides, allowing him to maintain connections with peers who share similar experiences while gaining exposure to new environments. Chad's growth is also evident in how he approaches his future. He is interested in pursuing a career in either sports medicine or law, both fields that align with his passions for sports and critical thinking. **"I love sports and would like to help others through medicine. But I also enjoy debating and thinking critically, which is why I'm also considering law."**

As the Newton family continues their LINK journey, Consuela remains a passionate advocate for the program. Consuela believes every student deserves to know about LINK's opportunities. **"This program is a hidden gem and it needs to be out there for everyone to see. Thank you for all you've done for my family so far."** Her message to parents considering the program is simple: **"Give your child the opportunity. The benefits outweigh anything you can dream of. It warms my heart to see the growth in my kids because of LINK."** And to potential donors, she offers a heartfelt plea: **"This is a worthy cause. They are truly helping kids succeed."**





30th Annual Driving for a Difference Golf Outing

SAVE THE DATE • JULY 24, 2025



Ways to get *Involved*

Become a Mentor

LINK Mentors play an instrumental role in our Scholars' journey. Our Scholars' growth and future success is fueled by the unique relationship between LINK Mentors and Scholars. We match professionals across a wide range of industries—from education and business to finance and medicine—who all share one goal: to transform the lives of high-potential Black students in Chicago to, through, and beyond college. To learn more about becoming part of this transformative process email mentoring@linkunlimited.org.

Be a LINK Ambassador

Spread the word about LINK to your inner circle! You can also host a gathering at your home/a bar, a Game or Trivia Night, or other fun opportunities with a giving to LINK as the theme. Donations to LINK not only help us, but allow you and your friends to make a difference. If you'd like to coordinate one of these opportunities, contact our Development Team at advancement@linkunlimited.org.

Join Our Board



Are you looking for an opportunity where you can make a difference? Are you interested in connecting Black students with resources and opportunities that strengthen the necessary skills to succeed as they advance to, through, and beyond college? If so, consider joining the LINK Board. Scan the QR code to see our [Board Opportunity Guide](#).

Make a Donation



For nearly 60 years, the incredible achievements of LINK Scholars have been made possible by their hard work and the devotion and generosity of our dedicated community of supporters. A contribution of any amount helps us to provide life-changing opportunities to Black youth across Chicagoland. Invest in LINK Scholars with a DONATION today! Together we can increase the economic mobility and stability of Black students and cultivate a diverse leadership pipeline across our city and nation. <https://give.linkunlimited.org/donate>.

LINK

Unlimited Scholars

ANNUAL IMPACT REPORT

2023 - 2024

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Building tomorrow's
Black leaders *today!*

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