

ANNUAL REPORT

2025 →

THE HOUSE OF DARLA

Champions Adjust™

Youth Development · Workforce Readiness · Community

Serving Youth & Families in Bridgeport & Fairfield County, CT

"Creating spaces where young people feel seen, safe, and empowered."

125+

Youth in Workforce

200+

Community Reached

100

Families Assisted

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Presented By

April N. Jackson, Executive Director

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LETTER FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

April N. Jackson | Executive Director & Founder

As I reflect on this past year, the words that continue to come to mind are **impact, faith, gratitude, and growth.**

This year reminded us that meaningful work is often built through faith, adaptability, consistency, stewardship, and the willingness to continue showing up with purpose. Throughout this year, we were grateful to experience increased support, strengthened partnerships, and expanded belief in the work we are building throughout the community.

At The House of Darla, we often say "**Champions Adjust™**" — and throughout this year, that mindset became more than a phrase. It became our reality.

We adjusted. We trusted. We leaned into faith. And we continued building.

I am incredibly proud of what our organization has been able to accomplish, while also recognizing how much more is possible through continued support, partnership, and investment. I am proud of myself, Mo, our Youth Leaders, volunteers, mentors, and community supporters who poured into this work.

Most importantly, I am proud of our youth.

One of the most powerful moments this year was watching young people speak publicly at the Bridgeport City Council for the very first time. To witness their courage, hear their voices, and see the joy and confidence on their faces was immeasurable.

Throughout the year, we challenged our youth to think beyond limitations. Youth participated in DMV study groups, learned how to change tires and check oil, explored cooking and entrepreneurship, engaged in workforce readiness activities, and strengthened their leadership abilities through experiential learning opportunities designed to prepare them for both life and work.

We also continued strengthening partnerships that helped deepen our impact. We were grateful for continued collaboration with University of Bridgeport, The WorkPlace, Fairfield University, the City of Bridgeport, the City of Norwalk, Universal Healthcare, Fairfield County Community Foundation, and United Way of Coastal and Western Connecticut. Beyond financial support, these relationships provided encouragement, guidance, opportunities for connection, and continued belief in the work we are building.

As support and belief in our work continued to grow, so did our understanding of the importance of scaling intentionally and sustainably.

LETTER FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR (CONTINUED)

April N. Jackson | Executive Director & Founder

Our 3-Day Job Readiness Training engaged **94 youth participants** across two training groups through a focused, high-impact **virtual** program. Workshops covered work preparedness, communication, conflict resolution, time management, confidence and coaching, financial wellness and saving, dress for success, leadership development, and personal growth.

Our 6-Week Workforce Cohort gave participants the opportunity to earn while they learned — building meaningful connections and gaining exposure to skills and conversations designed to support both their present and future success. **28 out of 31 participants in the cohort earned industry-recognized credentials** connected to workforce and leadership opportunities.

One of the most affirming pieces of feedback we received was that **100% of participants** in our six-week cohort shared that this was a place they genuinely wanted to come to and felt connected to. That sentiment means everything to us.

Because at its core, **The House of Darla is about more than programming.**

It is about creating spaces where people feel seen, safe, encouraged, connected, and reminded that they belong — because they do.

We never wanted to simply create another program or organization. We wanted to create a culture, an essence, a way of life rooted in humanity, connection, opportunity, grace, accountability, and belief. We wanted to create something people could feel.

We wanted, and continue to aspire, to equip young people not only with skills, tools, resources, and opportunities, but also to help nurture the resilience, ingenuity, confidence, leadership, kindness, and already-blooming greatness that already exists within them.

Beyond the certifications, workshops, and experiences are the intangibles — confidence, belief, self-worth, resilience, kindness, connection, and hope — the things they can carry with them wherever they go.

We do not believe in presenting ourselves as perfect people. We believe in being authentic, accountable, and human. In many ways, we strive to be real models more than role models — people who continue growing, learning, adjusting, and showing up with character, compassion, integrity, humility, and faith.

Ultimately, we want young people to know that good people still exist, and if they do not yet know one, we hope they become one. *That is the soul of this work.*

As we look ahead, we look forward to expanding our student store and social enterprise initiatives, developing "The Shed" as an immersive learning and retail experience, exploring future mobile commerce opportunities, and creating additional space and infrastructure that allows us to continue bringing our You(th)[™] Led-Social Enterprise model to life.

We also look forward to bringing to life a signature HOD Gala — a curated experience designed to celebrate where we started, how far we have come, and where we are going. A moment where youth leaders are not just in the room, but leading the room — helping to shape, plan, and present the experience alongside our community,

partners, funders, and supporters. A space where growth is celebrated, stories are shared, and the village that has made this work possible gets to witness firsthand the young people they have invested in. We believe that moment is coming, and we are already looking forward to it.

Most importantly, we look forward to continuing to create spaces where young people can dream, heal, grow, lead, learn, and believe in themselves.

To every youth participant, family, volunteer, mentor, supporter, donor, partner, and community member — thank you for believing in The House of Darla and helping us continue this journey.

The work continues. The vision continues. And we are only getting started.

With Gratitude,

April N. Jackson

Executive Director | The House of Darla, Inc.

april@houseofdarla.org

“Ohana means family. And family means no one gets left behind or forgotten.”

— Lilo & Stitch

ABOUT THE HOUSE OF DARLA

Who We Are | Mission | Values

About Our Organization

The House of Darla (HOD) is a youth-centered nonprofit organization with its flagship space located in Bridgeport, CT, serving youth and families throughout Fairfield County through mentorship, workforce readiness, wellness, creativity, leadership development, and community engagement.

Through immersive programs, hands-on experiences, and meaningful connections, HOD creates supportive spaces where young people are empowered to grow, lead, build confidence, make an impact, and give back to their communities while becoming the best version of themselves.

Our Tagline

Champions Adjust



HOD Youth Leaders — Summer 2025

Our Mission

To equip young people with the skills, tools, resources, and opportunities they need — while nurturing the resilience, ingenuity, confidence, and already-blooming greatness within them.

Our Framework

■ Exposure	■ Skill Building	■ Application	■ Leadership
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Core Values

Integrity Honesty, accountability, and authenticity in everything we do.	Innovation Creating new pathways that meet young people where they are.	Collaboration Building together — with partners, families, and community.	Humanity Grace, compassion, and belief in the worth of every person.
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Our People

Leadership

April N. Jackson

Executive Director & Founder

The visionary behind The House of Darla — leading programming, partnerships, and organizational growth with unwavering commitment to youth and community.

Monique (Mo) Chappell

Senior Program Support Lead

Mo is central to HOD's daily operations — managing, organizing, delegating, and leading both behind and in front of the scenes. She keeps everything and everyone moving forward.

Youth Leaders

HOD Youth Leadership Corps

Planners, Contributors & Emerging Leaders

Our Youth Leaders are not just recipients of programming — they are an essential part of the team. They lead from both the front end and the back end, participating in the planning, execution, and delivery of HOD's work. They run the Student Store, speak at city councils, contribute to civic engagement, and help shape what HOD looks and feels like. Empowering them to lead, give back, and become the boss of themselves is central to everything we do.

Volunteers & Mentors

Our Volunteer & Mentor Network*Community Champions*

HOD's programs are strengthened by the generous time and dedication of volunteers and mentors who show up, pour in, and help young people see possibility. We are grateful for every person who chooses to invest in this work alongside us.

2025 IMPACT SNAPSHOT

By the Numbers — A Year in Review

Workforce & Youth Programming

125+ Youth Reached Through Workforce	31 Participants 6-Week Cohort	94% Program Completion Rate	85% Earned Industry Credentials	100% Said "I Want To Be Here"
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Satisfaction & Growth

4.75/5 Overall Satisfaction Score	4.65/5 Pre-Program Motivation	94% Improved Financial Literacy Skills	90% Youth Leaders Reported Growth	83% Trainees Reported Growth
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Community & Outreach Impact

128+ Summer of Success Youth Served	200+ Community Members Reached	150+ At Christmas Event	35+ Fit & Fun / Wellness Participants	100 Families Assisted With Aid Access
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ALICE Household Emergency Fund — HOD as Referral Agency

In 2025, The House of Darla served as a **referral agency and community partner**, connecting individuals and families in need to **United Way of Western Coastal Connecticut's** emergency financial assistance program. HOD provided access to the application process and navigated families through available resources, helping community members access support they may not have known was available.

Who We Helped Connect

- 100 total applications / 96 unique applicants
- 166 total dependents (avg 1.66 per household)
- 66 households had children
- 91% from Bridgeport or Fairfield County
- 84 female, 16 male applicants

Demographics

- 78% Black/African American
- 14% Hispanic/Latino
- 6% Multiracial
- 94 English-speaking, 5 Spanish-speaking

Top Hardships

- Utilities: 61 households
- Rent/Housing: 55 households
- Food/Groceries: 53 households
- Transportation: 29 households
- Childcare: 14 households

Outcomes

- 98% open to follow-up support
- 92% had never previously accessed HOD or United Way
- Follow-up responses: relief, gratitude, and hope

WORKFORCE READINESS & YOUTH LEADERSHIP

Building Champions From the Inside Out

At HOD, workforce readiness goes beyond job skills. We equip young people with credentials, confidence, communication skills, financial literacy, and the belief in their own potential.

6-Week Workforce Cohort

HOD designed, led, and delivered all credentialing and career readiness programming. The WorkPlace (CYEP) provided the paid stipend framework that allowed participants to earn while they learned.

- 31 total participants enrolled
- 94% completion rate
- 28 of 31 (85%) earned HOD-facilitated industry credentials
- Participants earned a **stipend** through The WorkPlace partnership
- 100% said they genuinely wanted to attend

Credentials Earned (Facilitated by HOD)

✓ CPR	✓ First Aid	✓ AED
✓ Babysitting	✓ Customer Service	✓ Food Handler

6-Week Cohort Satisfaction Survey

Category	Excellent	Very Good
Work Experience	53%	40%
Learning Experience	40%	47%
Welcoming Environment	50%	38%
Overall Experience	47%	53%

3-Day Job Readiness Training

A separate, focused **virtual** three-day program where HOD reached **94 youth** across **2 training groups** through dynamic, engaging workforce skill building. This program is distinct from the 6-week cohort and serves a broader youth audience in a high-impact, condensed format.

● Work Preparedness

● Communication Skills

● Conflict Resolution

● Time Management	● Financial Wellness & Saving	● Dress for Success
● Confidence & Coaching	● Leadership Development	● Personal Growth

Youth Leadership Moments

City Council Youth Leaders spoke before the Bridgeport City Council — presenting a formal CDBG funding request and demonstrating civic courage in a landmark moment.	Norwalk City Hall HOD youth were exposed to Norwalk City Hall — connecting Bridgeport youth to civic professionals and institutional leaders in Norwalk, while HOD received support to carry out our initiatives there. Reflecting our commitment to serving both cities as a true bridge organization.
Business & Brunch Youth Leaders gathered for Business & Brunch — professional development built around real conversation, community warmth, and leadership growth.	Life Skills DMV study groups, changing tires, checking oil, cooking, and entrepreneurship — practical skills that prepare youth for real life, not just the workforce.



HOD Youth Leaders & Team Members at Norwalk City Hall — 2025

SIGNATURE PROGRAMS

Our Core Initiatives | 2025

Art of the Heart / SOS

Our flagship social-emotional learning and youth development program. SOS (Summer of Success) is the summer expansion of this work.

- 128+ youth served in 2025
- Social-emotional & life skills focus
- Foundation for all HOD programming

Summer of Success (SOS)

HOD's summer programming initiative — combining workforce readiness, wellness, and enrichment for youth during summer months.

- Multi-week summer experience
- Workforce, wellness & enrichment combined
- Part of the Art of the Heart framework

Boss Up Challenge

A youth leadership and personal development challenge pushing participants to rise to their potential — personally, academically, and professionally.

- Ongoing throughout the year
- Accountability and leadership-focused
- Tied to Champions Adjust™ framework

HOD Workforce Cohort

HOD designs and delivers all credentialing and career readiness curriculum. The WorkPlace (CYEP) provides the paid stipend experience framework for the 6-week program.

- 31 participants in 2025
- 85% credential attainment (HOD-facilitated)
- Students earn stipends while building skills

Student Store & Social Enterprise

Our youth-run store inside HOD's space — where participants gain real hands-on experience in customer service, POS systems, inventory, and retail operations. Youth sell snacks and other items, directly applying their Food Handler credentials in a real-world setting. A living classroom and social enterprise.

- Hands-on customer service & POS skills
- Youth apply Food Handler & other credentials
- Grand Reopening planned for 2026

Fit & Fun / Wellness

Wellness programming promoting physical health, mental wellbeing, and community connection through fitness, nutrition, and holistic health conversations.

- 35+ participants in 2025
- Physical & mental wellness integration
- Whole-person development approach

HOD Referral — ALICE Emergency Fund

HOD served as a referral agency helping families in crisis access United Way of Western Coastal CT's emergency financial assistance program.

- 100 families assisted with access to emergency aid resources
- 92% first-time HOD clients
- 98% open to continued support

Youth Executive Council & PDC

HOD's growing youth governance and professional development initiative. Youth leaders shape programming and develop civic leadership skills.

- Youth-led decision making
- Professional Development Cohort (PDC)
- Civic engagement & community leadership

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT & EVENTS

Showing Up Where It Matters | 2025

In 2025, The House of Darla showed up — at parades, city halls, panels, fairs, games, and celebrations. Community engagement is not a side activity. It is the work.

■ Christmas Event

150+ people served — youth, families, and community members came together for HOD's annual holiday celebration filled with joy, connection, and community spirit.

■ Puerto Rican Day Parade

HOD was present with community outreach and the Student Store, connecting with the Bridgeport community and celebrating cultural pride.

■ Bridgeport City Council

Youth Leaders spoke before the Bridgeport City Council in a formal CDBG funding request — a landmark moment of civic courage and youth voice.

■ Norwalk City Hall

HOD youth were exposed to civic professionals and institutional leaders at Norwalk City Hall — bridging Bridgeport youth to Norwalk opportunities while HOD carried out its initiatives across both cities.

■ FCCF Soul Fund Panel

Executive Director April N. Jackson was a featured panelist at the Fairfield County Community Foundation's Soul Fund Panel Discussion on Youth Mental Health.

■ College & Career Fair

HOD youth attended a college and career fair, gaining exposure to post-secondary pathways, career options, and future opportunities.

■ Business & Brunch

Youth Leaders gathered for Business & Brunch — a professional development experience built around real conversation, community warmth, and leadership growth.

■ Supporting Youth at Events

HOD showed up to support Youth Leaders at their volleyball, football, and basketball games and other special moments — because community means celebrating each other in every arena, on and off the court.



HOD at the Puerto Rican Day Parade — Bridgeport, 2025

PARTNERSHIPS & COLLABORATORS

Stronger Together | Our 2025 Network of Support

The House of Darla does not build alone. Our partnerships span funders, educational institutions, city government, civic organizations, and community services.

Funders & Institutional Partners

Fairfield County Community Foundation (FCCF)	Funder & Community Partnership
Universal Healthcare	Funder & Community Partner
United Way of Western Coastal CT	Funder & Community Partner ALICE Emergency Fund — HOD served as referral agency
City of Bridgeport (CDBG)	Community Development Block Grant
City of Norwalk	Civic Engagement & Youth Support

Educational & Workforce Partners

University of Bridgeport	Campus Home, Academic Partnership & Work Study
Fairfield University	Educational Collaboration & Internship Opportunities
Goodwin University	Institutional Support
The WorkPlace (CYEP)	Provided paid stipend framework for HOD's Workforce Cohort
Northwestern Mutual	Financial Literacy & Career Exposure

Community & Health Partners

M&T; Bank	Financial & Community Support
Planned Parenthood	Health & Wellness Education
Norwalk Fire Department	Community Safety & Engagement
The Carver Center Norwalk	Youth & Community Services
Norwalk Community Services	Social Services & Support

BUILDING THE SPACE & 2025 FINANCIALS

Infrastructure, Growth & Financial Stewardship

Building The Space

The House of Darla is committed to building sustainable physical infrastructure that matches the depth of its programming. In 2025, we continued developing our vision for spaces that inspire and support youth development.

The Shed

A future vision we are excited about — an immersive learning and retail experience still in its early stages of planning. When realized, it will serve as a hub for youth entrepreneurship and community connection.

Student Store

Our youth-run store where participants gain hands-on experience in customer service, point-of-sale (POS) systems, and retail operations. Youth sell snacks and other items — applying their Food Handler credentials and training in a real-world setting inside our space. A living classroom. Grand Reopening planned for 2026.

TheSpace™

The physical and conceptual framework for HOD programming — creating environments where youth feel safe, engaged, and empowered.

Mobile Commerce

A future opportunity to bring the HOD Student Store and social enterprise experience into the broader community through mobile retail.

2025 Financial Highlights

Source: Form 990-EZ, Fiscal Year 2025.

Revenue Summary

Revenue Source	Amount
Contributions & Grants	\$47,444
Program Service Revenue	\$21,550
Other Revenue	\$5,000
TOTAL REVENUE	\$73,994

Net Surplus: **\$2,012** — restricted for 2026 programming

FUTURE VISION

Where We Are Going | 2026 & Beyond

As we look ahead, we are guided by the same spirit that has carried us this far — faith, adaptability, and an unwavering commitment to young people.

Priority 1

Expand Student Store & Social Enterprise

Growing the HOD Student Store and You(th)[™] Led-Social Enterprise model — including the Grand Reopening, mobile commerce, and expanded merchandise initiatives.

Priority 2

Develop "The Shed"

Bringing The Shed to life as an immersive learning and retail experience — a flagship space for HOD youth entrepreneurship and community engagement.

Priority 3

Scale Workforce Programming

Expanding our workforce cohort, 3-day training program, and credential offerings — reaching more youth with paid, meaningful workforce readiness experiences.

Priority 4

Strengthen Infrastructure

Building the internal systems, staffing, mentorship, and structure needed to grow with integrity — preserving the culture and authenticity that makes HOD unique.

Priority 5

Deepen Community Partnerships

Expanding relationships with funders, institutions, and community organizations to deepen capacity and create more doors of opportunity for youth.

Priority 6

Continue Creating Spaces

Most importantly — continuing to create spaces where young people can dream, heal, grow, lead, learn, and believe in themselves.

Priority 7

Signature HOD Gala

A curated, youth-led gala experience celebrating HOD's journey — where we started, how far we've come, and where we're going. Youth leaders help plan and lead the event, and the community, partners, funders, and supporters get to witness the growth of the young people they've invested in firsthand.

Priority 8

Expand Year-Round Youth Leadership & Civic Engagement

Building a year-round youth leadership infrastructure that creates ongoing opportunities for training, credentialing, community impact, and self-efficacy. Youth Leaders will have continuous pathways to grow, lead, give back, and develop the confidence and skills to impact their communities — not just during summer, but throughout the entire year.

Priority 9

Atlanta Civic Engagement & Cultural Leadership Experience

HOD is working toward facilitating an immersive civic engagement and cultural leadership experience in Atlanta — the first location in what we envision as an ongoing annual initiative. Youth will explore civil rights history, human rights, advocacy, social entrepreneurship, systems awareness, and community leadership. The experience is designed to expose youth to different communities, encourage critical thinking about how communities are built and sustained, and inspire them to return home and positively contribute to their own. This initiative also includes partnerships with local organizations to provide continuous opportunities for learning, workshops, and civic engagement — both in preparation for and in reflection after the Atlanta experience.

"We are only getting started."

— April N. Jackson, Executive Director

YOUTH VOICES & TESTIMONIALS

In Their Own Words | 6-Week Workforce Cohort 2025

The most powerful measure of our work is not found in numbers or credentials alone — it is found in the words of the young people themselves. These testimonials were shared by youth participants during and after the 2025 program year.

“Having the opportunity to come to a genuinely safe space, it makes me forget about everything going on outside of the space.”

— Youth Participant, 6-Week Cohort 2025

“I want to be here because not only do I enjoy it and the people I’m around, it pushes me out of my comfort zone and gives me a place to work. I’m held accountable for my actions and I’m trusted with responsibilities.”

— Youth Participant, 6-Week Cohort 2025

“The values that Mo and April have make me want to show up to work. I strive to do that too.”

— Youth Participant, 6-Week Cohort 2025

“I want genuine people in my life. I feel like I’m starting to find it when I come here.”

— Youth Participant, 6-Week Cohort 2025

“I want to continue to learn these life skills and learn how to be independent and take care of myself.”

— Youth Participant, 6-Week Cohort 2025

“I just want to say thank you to April for helping me learn new things and also allowing me to work with her for the 2nd year and even letting me help out outside of the summer program. I truly do appreciate the way you care for others and especially myself, and I would be happy if I have the opportunity to work with her some more.”

— Returning Youth Leader, 6-Week Cohort 2025

“I learned about life insurance and why savings accounts matter.”

— Youth Participant — Financial Literacy Workshop

“I wanna come back here.”

— Youth Participant, End of Program

“No, but I will miss The House of Darla.”

— Youth Participant, End of Program

GRATITUDE & CLOSING

Thank You for Believing in The House of Darla

To every person who poured into this work in 2025 — thank you. This report is a reflection of your belief, your investment, and your commitment to young people.

Board of Directors

April N. Jackson — Executive Director & Founder	Nikeisha Vazquez — Board Member
Shaynel Clough — Officer	Lloyd Nicholson — Board Member
Jeremy Ostrout — Board Member	Stephen Balkaran — Board Member
Jacqueline Cobbina-Boivin — Board Member	Jayana Mitchell — Treasurer

A Word of Thanks

Our Youth

For your courage, curiosity, energy, and trust. You are the reason we do this work. Champions Adjust™ — and you showed us exactly what that means.

The Families of Our Youth

Thank you for trusting us with your young people. It takes a village, and we do not take lightly the faith you place in the HOD to help support, guide, and pour into your children. Your belief in this work makes everything possible.

Our Funders & Partners

Fairfield County Community Foundation, Universal Healthcare, United Way of Western Coastal CT, City of Bridgeport, City of Norwalk, The WorkPlace, University of Bridgeport, Fairfield University, Goodwin University, Northwestern Mutual, M&T Bank, and every collaborating organization — thank you for believing in this work.

Our Volunteers & Mentors

To every person who gave their time, skill, presence, and heart — your contributions cannot be measured in numbers, but they are felt deeply by every young person you impacted.

Interns, Work Study & College Cohorts

To our interns, work study participants, and college cohort members — thank you for choosing to learn and grow alongside us. You are a team of college-age young people who chose to invest your time in a grassroots nonprofit, helping with programming, building career readiness skills, and showing up for our youth. The work you did here matters — and so do you.

Our Community

To Bridgeport, Fairfield County, and beyond — thank you for opening doors, showing up to our events, and continuing to believe that young people are worth investing in.

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