



Climb! jump! laugh!
brinca! salta! rie!

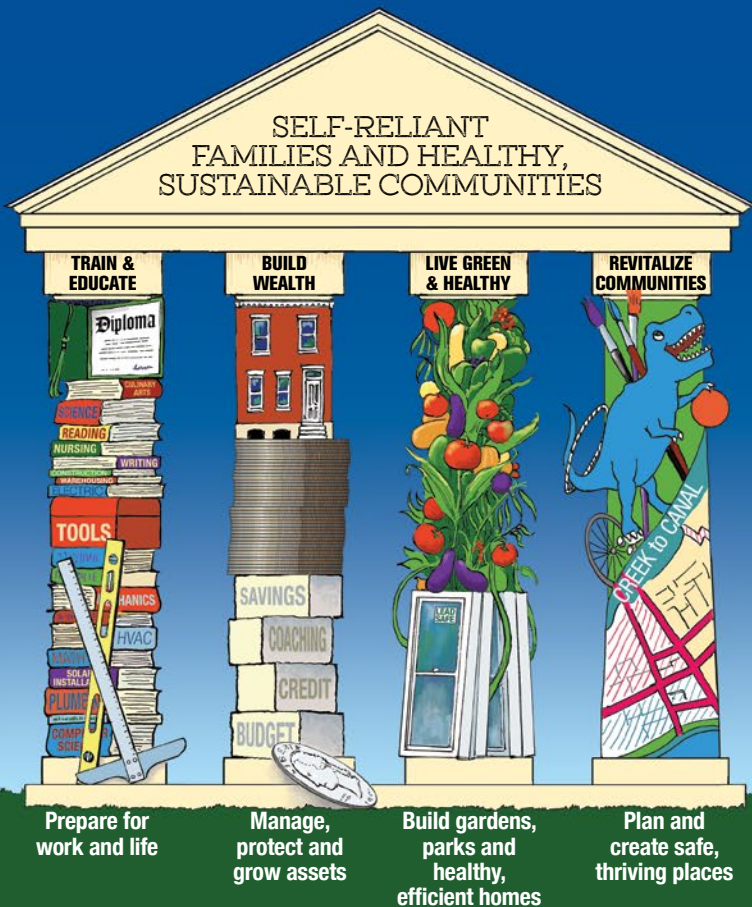
isles
WORKS
2023
Annual
Report



Founded in 1981, Isles, Inc. is a community development and environmental organization based in Trenton, New Jersey. With a mission to foster self-reliant families and healthy, sustainable communities, we design and develop effective services that support this mission and share what we learn with others who can make a difference.

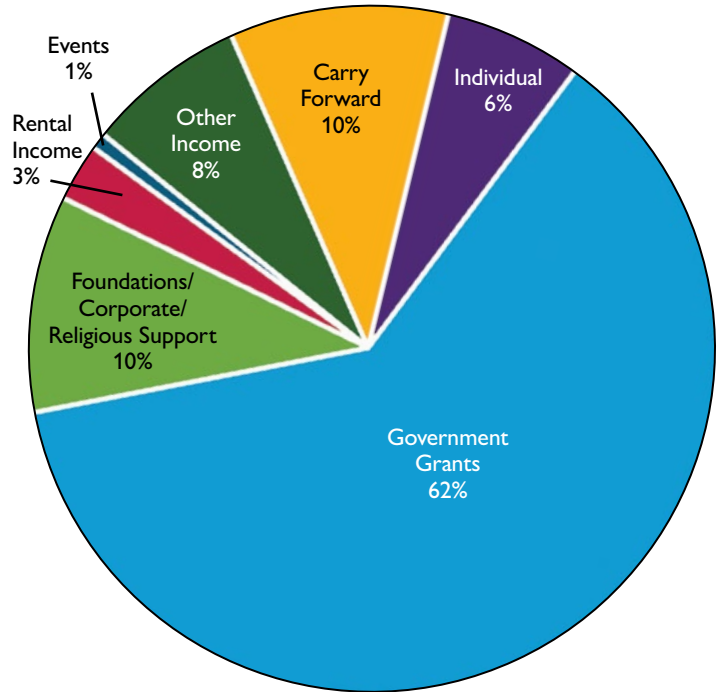
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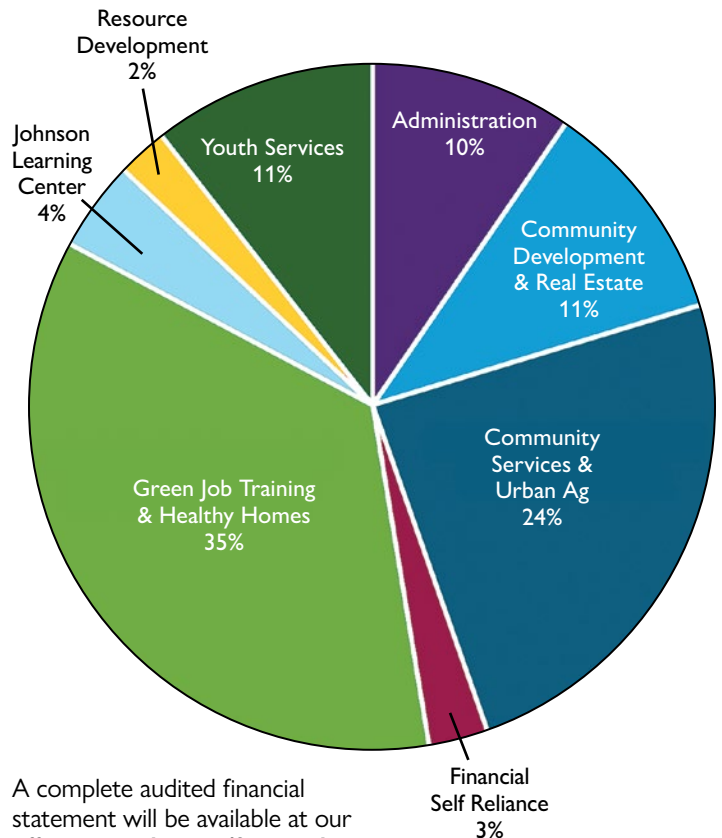


FINANCIAL SUMMARY 2023

2023 Actual Revenue
\$12,363,710



2023 Actual Expenses
\$12,363,710



A complete audited financial statement will be available at our office or at isles.org/financials.

MESSAGE FROM THE CEO

Innovation and creativity are core components of what we're about at Isles. Starting in 1981, Liz and Marty Johnson looked at vacant city lots and saw a future of blooming flowers and thriving vegetable gardens. Today the garden network serves hundreds of families at 70 locations in Trenton. That level of innovation has never stopped. We continue to create new ways to think about community development, and new ways to equip our customers with the tools they need to thrive.

In 2023, our *GOtrenton!* electric-vehicle micro-transit service launched. It was born out of the challenge for Trenton residents to find a safe, clean and affordable way to get where they need to go. Sounds simple, but thirty percent of Trenton residents don't have access to a car, which makes getting to work and other necessary services difficult. We developed the *GOtrenton!* shuttle service with the community, to give residents a way to easily access jobs, healthcare, nutritious food, and more.


Soon, we will expand to provide electric workforce vans to drive workers to jobs in locations outside the city, opening up even more opportunities for our community-members. *GOtrenton!* is a one of a kind, cutting edge project that doesn't exist anywhere else in the country. Although we just launched in September, we're proud to report we now have over 2,800 riders a month.

Developing new services like *GOtrenton!* is only possible through the help and support of our donors. Researching a new concept, planning and piloting the service requires a lot of staff time and collaboration that government and foundation grants typically do not support.

As you read this report, including information about *GOtrenton!* and the other vital work we have done this year, notice how your support makes our impact possible. Whether it is expanding the Trenton Community Street Team and improving community-based connections, or launching our Financial Opportunity Center, these innovations and improvements rely on donations from friends like you.

It's in Isles' DNA to innovate and improve, and then share our learning in New Jersey and beyond. Thanks for standing with us as we continue to foster family self-reliance and healthy, sustainable communities.

In community,


Sean Jackson, CEO



Isles.org
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609.341.4700

Johnson Center for Learning & Impact



CEET Training Manager Andre Thomas is joined by Johnson Center staff Laura Fenster Rothschild, Amisha Mukhopadhyay, Elise Pivnick, Stacy Heading, Ben Haygood, and Melanie McKiver to advocate for clean energy at the statehouse.

The Johnson Center is leveraging decades of Isles' expertise in community development and environmental work to affect systems change. The Johnson Center seeks to advance research and evaluation of existing public policies while also exploring projects that investigate new solutions to the long-standing structural issues that pose the greatest challenges to our ultimate goals of fostering self-reliant families and healthy, sustainable communities.

In 2023, the Johnson Center:

- Ensured *YouthBuild* programs would be available to youth who are at risk of dropping out of high school by securing \$6 million annually in the state budget to support these programs in NJ, and launched a statewide taskforce aimed at addressing the needs of disengaged youth.
- Worked with the State Assembly and Senate to develop Micro-transit Legislation to improve mobility, through the use of electric vehicles in low- and moderate-income communities to ensure access to work, health care and other essential services while expanding electric vehicle access.
- Implemented a robust internship program providing learning and development opportunities to 15 college students who are future social entrepreneurs and leaders in social change.

Stacy Heading, Melanie McKiver, Amisha Mukhopadhyay, and Ben Haygood prepare for the inaugural ride in a *GOtrenton!* vehicle.



Urban Agriculture

Isles currently supports approximately 250 gardeners at dozens of gardens throughout Trenton and at nearly all public schools. In 2023, we:

- Held open garden hours three times a week and various special events at our Tucker St. location and Roberto Clemente children's garden from April through October.
- Donated more than 700 pounds of produce to emergency food suppliers and visitors to the Tucker Street Garden.
- Held monthly cooking workshops featuring produce from Tucker Street and local farms.
- Distributed approximately 10,000 vegetable seedlings and hundreds of pounds of seeds to school and community gardens.
- Trained 12 new gardeners and held 20 workshops in gardening, composting, foraging, raised-bed building, and preserving produce.
- Sponsored 14 people to attend the annual Black Urban Growers conference in Philadelphia.

Urban Agriculture and Trenton Climate Corps staff prepare beds for native plants in the new sensory garden.



Trenton Climate Corps (TCC) is part of the AmeriCorps program and provides training and employment in climate resilience and green infrastructure careers. Projects include tree planting, watershed improvements, sustainability education, food system resilience, and urban reforestation. TCC empowers people to build successful futures and communities by improving the local environment; developing skills to ensure future success; growing pride in Trenton's assets; and providing alternatives to street life.



Trenton Climate Corps

- Over 9000 hours of service
- 14 current members, 18 alum

“During my time with the Trenton Climate Corps, I have had amazing opportunities like learning how to make a proper pile of compost and working on fields of vegetables. I’ve grown hundreds of fresh vegetables and planted well over 250 trees. Never in my life did I think I would be able to do those things. I have been able to take my first steps in learning how to grow and maintain plants be more conscious about soil and water health.” — Fabio

Trenton Climate Corps members Momo Sonii and Costello Adams are joined by Matthew Farrell of the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection to hang cigarette butt collectors in a local park for a new recycling program with Terracycle.

GO*Trenton!* Electric Vehicle Ride Share

Jacqueline Carrera Fay from Assemblyman Anthony Verelli's office, NJ State Treasurer Elizabeth Muoio, NJ Commissioner of the Department of Environmental Protection Shawn LaTourette, Mercer County Executive Dan Benson, and Isles CEO Sean Jackson celebrate the launch of *GO*Trenton!**



*GO*Trenton!** launched in 2023 as the first and only all-electric, community-driven transportation project in New Jersey. *GO*Trenton!** provides EV rideshare and van services to the public with an effort to improve mobility for low-income residents in Trenton and increase access to jobs, healthcare, services, shopping, and recreation. After the launch phase of the project where rides are free, *GO*Trenton!** will charge only \$2 per ride.

Isles is partnering with Circuit, which operates similar programs in other cities, to provide vehicles, manage daily operations, and hire and train local residents as drivers. With this service, we see an opportunity to promote economic revitalization, job creation and transportation equity while addressing air quality issues caused by gas powered vehicles.

In its first three months of operation, *GO*Trenton!** served 3,396 riders with ridership growing exponentially from October to December. Ridership outpaced expectations in 2023 and with expanded funding, *GO*Trenton!** expects to serve more than 3,000 riders per month in 2024.



Hytha started her work with Isles as a member of the Climate Corps and became recognizable in her sunflower costume to interest kids to learn more about gardening. When *GO*Trenton!** was being launched, Hytha was trained as a driver and trainer so that she could help train new drivers. As a driver, Hytha had lots of daily contact with the students at Isles Youth Institute, and soon transitioned into a role there. She loves working with the students and reminds them that we are there to help take care of them. She says, "All of them have a story. It's intense. It's a lot. You can't save everyone, but you can be kind. You can help where you can."

As spring unfolds, Hytha will be managing a community garden, working at IYI, and continuing to spread the word about all that Isles offers. Because of her love of connecting people and services, a friend of hers calls her "The Plug", a moniker that suits her well.

Training Manager Andre Thomas teaching an Air Leakage Control Installer class



Isles' Center for Energy and Environmental Training (CEET) is a green collar job training facility, targeting careers in energy efficiency and environmental health. CEET provides nationally recognized certifications for lead and energy efficiency workers and courses in lead and healthy housing.

“We are very appreciative of Andre (Thomas) because over and above all the training we received to become certified in lead safe renovation, repair, and painting, he has been able to plug us into different things that Isles offers. We were able to broaden our understanding of the work, train in supervision, and start our own family business focusing on lead abatement. We recognize how difficult it can be, especially in a field dominated by men. Now, we have a minority-owned and women-led family business to help build financial security and a family legacy. Since my three older children had lead poisoning when they were young, I really understand the importance of this work. It's gratifying to know that we can help other families.”

— Dawn Lovett, owner
A+ Environmental Contractor

This year, CEET:

- Provided Healthy Homes for Community Health Workers courses to 49 participants.
- 43 workers earned certification in Lead-Safe Renovation, Repair, and Paint training.
- Ran five Lead Worker/Lead Supervision trainings for 18 lead workers.
- Offered “The Eight Keys to a Healthy Home” training three times to reach a total of 41 community members.
- Provided 5 Air Leakage Control Installer courses to 18 incumbent workers and on-the-job training candidates.
- Distributed 6,111 educational door hangers to residents in Trenton about lead safety.

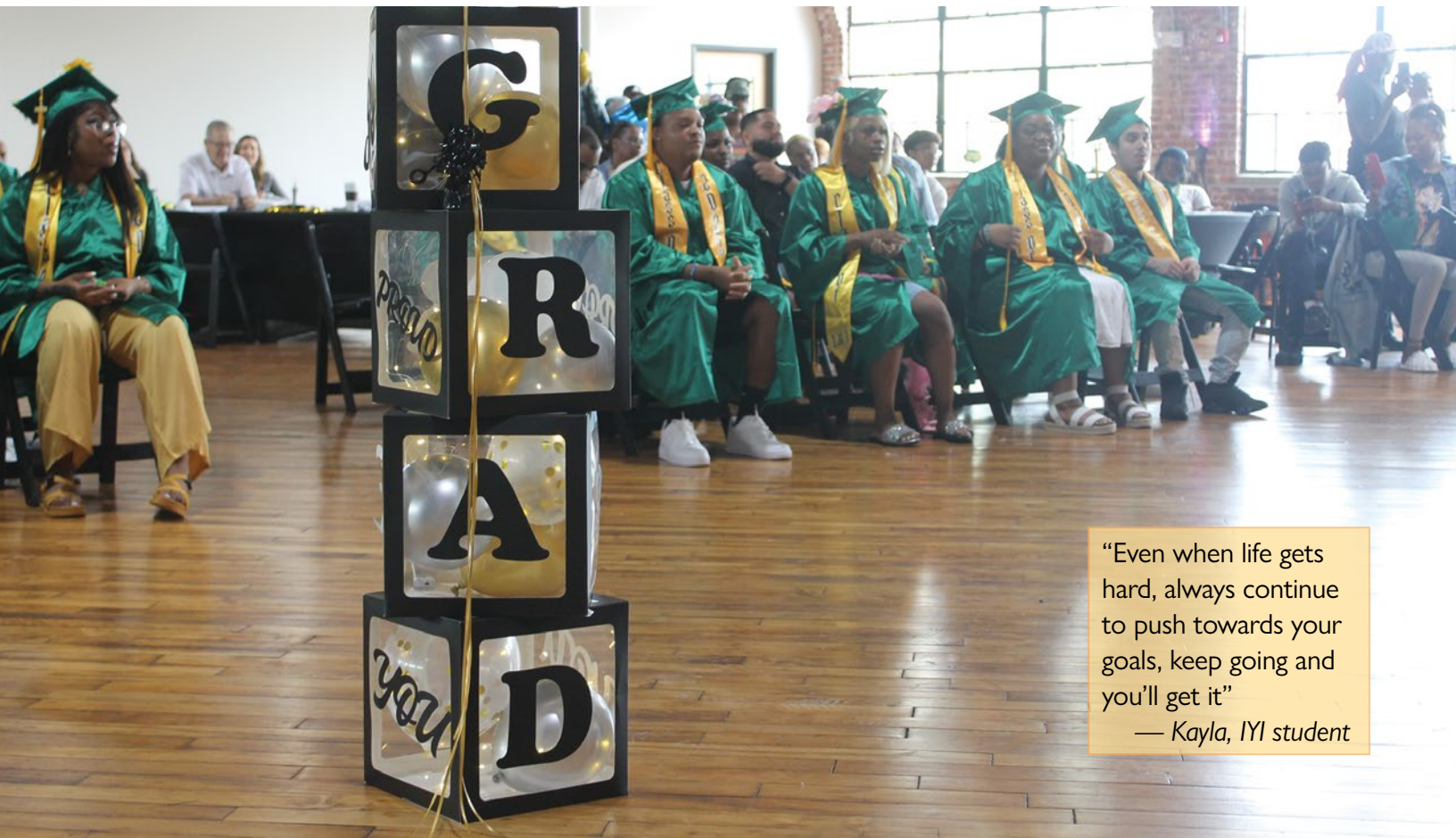


Isles Youth Institute

Isles Youth Institute (IYI) offers alternative education options for disengaged students seeking their high school equivalency diploma, vocational skills training, and life skills training. Isles has developed an effective peer-based approach for students ages 16 to 24, who have struggled in conventional school settings and/or have had encounters with the justice system. All IYI students learn basic construction skills and apply these skills to rehabilitate at least one abandoned home in Trenton each year.

During the 2023 academic year, IYI enrolled 32 students with an approximate retention rate of 60%. This year:

- 17 IYI students participated in graduation, earning their high school diplomas.
- 12 students earned Pre-Apprentice Construction Training (PACT) certificates.
- 4 students earned Certified Nurse Aide (CNA) certificates.
- 35 youth participated in meaningful community service projects
- 24 students earned CPR/First Aid Certification.
- 20 Students received OSHA Certification.
- 28 students, community members and alumni participated in various internal and external job training internship opportunities.
- 26 students participated in the Leadership Academy: weekly training sessions and workshops on key leadership skills, field trips to local businesses and city leaders.
- 26 youth were placed in paid internships, trade school, or college.



“Even when life gets hard, always continue to push towards your goals, keep going and you’ll get it”
— Kayla, IYI student

Trenton Community Street Team

Trenton Community Street Team (TCST) is a community-based violence intervention and prevention initiative designed to eliminate the cycle of violence in Trenton by providing conflict mediation, victim advocacy and support, safe passage around schools, community safety walks, and public safety roundtables.

- TCST staff has engaged 779 community-members with their services
- Hosted or supported 81 community events
- Supported community-members after 32 violent incidents

Anesha has been working with Trenton Community Street Team (TCST) in their Safe Passage program since 2022. Safe passage places trained TCST members around schools and in places where youth congregate to be a steady presence to help keep the peace and interrupt potential violence before it happens.

The intensive training she's received has helped her to better understand people's differences and helped her to build relationships both within the team and with the youth. This ongoing training, along with her own experiences have helped her to notice when someone might be in a mental health crisis, when their shoes might be too small, or their clothes have gone unwashed, and how to address them in a way that leads with care and sensitivity so that they can hear where she's coming from.

Work on de-escalation and mediation has helped her to see how to bring people onto neutral ground so that they can communicate and understand each other better to work toward solutions. She and the other members of TCST have had a wealth of experiences that help them to relate to the community members they're working with. From financial stressors and housing instability, to returning from incarceration, addiction, domestic violence, and food insecurity, having people who can relate is essential to creating the relationships that help to build community. Working with the youth is really important to Anesha, and through this work, she is helping to build the peaceful and thriving communities that we all deserve.



Trenton Police Director Steve Wilson joins T-Recs lead Gulu Brewer and TCST staff Heather Johnson-Smith, Dante Alston, and intern Kyle Anderson at a summer event.

T-Recs

T-Recs is our mobile recreation unit, housed in a former bread truck. T-Recs helps to activate community spaces and events by providing interactive games, art activities, and toys from stilts to giant Connect 4, cornhole, and more for children – and adults! Each activity is supported by Isles staff. Thanks in part to funding by the Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Dream Mini Grant, in 2023, T-Recs participated in 20 large community events with over 2,500 attendees and held weekly play dates at the Academy St. playground from May through October. Without sufficient funding, T-Recs has to charge to attend these large events, but with additional funding from individuals and foundations, like in 2023, we can support these opportunities free of cost to the community.

Lead Hazard Control, Energy Efficiency, and Healthy Homes

Some of the homes we see need a lot of work; it can take significant effort to put funding together to handle all the needs. One unit on Barricklo St. was in particularly rough shape and needed a new heating system, lead hazard removal, and a roof replacement. After completing an emergency heating system repair and removing lead hazards, we hoped to do energy efficiency work, but a roofing issue stopped us from doing any more until a new roof was installed.

Luckily, a “Weatherization Readiness Fund” (WRF) grant allowed for completing work required to prepare homes for weatherization. Unfortunately, the roofers found the chimney was dangerously crumbling and had to be replaced before any roofing could be done. The large masonry expense exceeded the allowable costs from the WRF, but if it weren’t done, the home would be unsafe to live in.

Our staff identified another funding source from HUD to fix health and safety issues in homes in Mercer County. Without this money, the chimney and roof work would not have been possible and the family would have to move out.

Once the chimney work was completed, we were able to complete the roofing, and finally work on weatherization. The home received insulation, air sealing, window replacements, and other energy efficiency measures to decrease the homeowner’s energy bills.

Our guiding principle when working on homes is to address all health, safety, lead, and energy issues we find. That philosophy and our ability to seek out funding led to a success for this home. Unfortunately, the barriers to fixing this home exist in many that we see, and it is difficult and inefficient to piece together multiple government funding sources to make sure that all the needed work can be done. This is where flexible funding from individual donors and private foundations can really make a difference!

Lead remediation	\$ 1,150
Heating	\$ 10,490
Masonry work	\$ 5,250
Weatherization	\$ 29,272
Total cost	\$40,912
Cost to homeowner	\$ 0



Lead Hazard Construction Manager Ron Voorhees shows the windows, doors, and framing that we replaced on this home due to lead paint dust as compared with the stairs that tested negative for lead.

Isles provides home health assessments and retrofits to low-income homes to improve energy efficiency, remove lead-based paint hazards and improve indoor health and safety.

This year, Isles:

- Provided 187 In-person and virtual Healthy Home Assessments.
- Completed 68 lead hazard control (abatement and remediation) projects.
- Weatherized or provided heating system repairs or replacement to more than 70 homes which affected more than 150 than low-income residents.
- Attended 16 community outreach events reaching hundreds of Trenton community members.

Community Planning & Development

Isles partners with residents, civic organizations, and neighborhood associations to identify community needs and interests, and support the implementation of recommendations that emerge from planning processes. In addition, Isles leads city-wide research and planning initiatives related to blight reduction, creative placemaking, and food systems. In 2023, this work included:

- Coordinated community engagement of a brownfield remediation project in the Bromley Neighborhood of Hamilton, in partnership with an environmental consultant and Hamilton Township.
- Coordinated business mentorship support for 13 downtown businesses, in partnership with a local business development company. Services include business plan development, financial projections, budgeting, bookkeeping, marketing, ecommerce, loan assistance, and back office support.
- Awarded over \$55,000 in small grants to 11 downtown businesses. These business grants supported interior repairs, equipment upgrades, merchandise display upgrades, and other improvements.

In 2023, we continued our work through the Downtown Trenton Neighborhood Preservation Program (NPP) in partnership with the Trenton Downtown Association, to help support the health and vibrancy of downtown residential properties and small businesses and create a shared sense of place. This work allowed us to:

- Provide over a dozen new signage improvements at downtown businesses
- Fund over 70 busking opportunities to support local musicians
- Coordinate pop-up market opportunities for over 35 local entrepreneurs
- Award over \$3,100 in business supplies and equipment to 14 pop-up businesses via the Entrepreneur Fund



Marcus Covington and Keisha Sonpon of Trenton Climate Corps install one of the 8 new trash cans designed and painted by local artist Nagiyd Ewell at a business downtown.



Signage improvements: before and after

“This grant has significantly impacted my business both aesthetically and in revenue. After buying one of the best fridges available on the market, I was able to get rid of the old fridges while stocking more items and using less space. Also, I was able to repair holes in the store walls and paint the inside.”

— Business Grant Recipient

Financial Opportunity Center

“I was always afraid of having a credit card and didn’t realize how that would help to build my credit score. After having to file for bankruptcy in 2017, I had the goal of improving my credit score so that I could eventually buy a home. The staff at Isles helped me to understand how the credit game works by using real world examples that made it easy for me to understand. With their help, I got a credit card that I use and regularly pay off and have seen my credit score improve by 54 points this year. I always recommend Isles’ services to family and friends because when people don’t have the information, they can’t make a change.”

— Angel, FOC customer

Income Support Center Coordinator Sharon Briggs explains the services we provide to a new customer



The Financial Opportunity Center (FOC) opened in 2023 as an expansion of our Financial Services Division (offered since 2009). In partnership with with the Local Initiative Support Corporation (LISC), the FOC at Isles is one of more than 80 FOCs across the country. The FOC at Isles takes a three-pronged approach to creating and maintaining financial wellness.

Services at the FOC include Financial Coaching, Employment Coaching and Income Support Assistance, all with the goal of increasing participants’ wealth. Financial Coaches work with participants to achieve their financial goals, including creating a sustainable budget, building savings, decreasing debt and improving credit. Through Employment Coaching, participants explore new opportunities for employment and job training. Job seekers receive assistance in creating targeted resumes and practicing effective interview skills. Our Income Support staff ensure that those accessing the FOC’s services are receiving the public benefits and other supports for which they qualify.

Homeownership and Foreclosure

Counseling: Isles provides one-on-one and group counseling to prepare low- and moderate-income individuals for homeownership and delivers intensive one-on-one counseling to help families avoid foreclosure. Isles is a US Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) certified housing counseling agency and an approved foreclosure counseling agency of New Jersey Housing Mortgage Finance Agency.

In 2023, the Financial Opportunity Center achieved the following outcomes.

- 276 customers received housing or foreclosure advice or assistance
- 432 people participated in financial coaching and education services
- Over 50 customers received Employment Coaching services (starting September 2023)
- We assisted 18 customers in accessing public benefits, including Affordable Housing (starting September 2023)

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