

isles

Healthy environments.
Thriving communities.

2025

Annual Report



isles

Founded in 1981, Isles is a nonprofit organization rooted in Trenton with statewide reach that provides a wide range of interconnected and evolving services with a single aim: to create the environment necessary for people and communities to grow and thrive. That means healthy homes; safe and flourishing neighborhoods; green spaces; nutritious food; education and job training; convenient transportation; and financial security. By developing innovative and lasting solutions that address gaps created by an inequitable system, and sharing what we learn, Isles is challenging and changing the system itself.

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The Impact Accelerator Fellows joined by mentors and guest speakers during one of their sessions at Mill One.

WHAT'S NEW IN 2025!

Isles Launches Impact Accelerator Fellowship

This year, Isles launched the Impact Accelerator, an eight-month fellowship designed to cultivate emerging leaders from within our organization. The program was created by the Johnson Center for Learning & Policy team and is led by COO Laura Fenster Rothschild, Educational Manager Dante Alston, and Isles Founder Marty Johnson. It reflects Isles' long-standing commitment to investing in the people who carry our mission forward every day.

Sixteen staff members from across the organization kicked off the program with an intensive four-day retreat focused on advocacy, communication, and innovative problem-solving. The inaugural cohort represents four of our core program areas: the Isles Center for Energy and Environmental Training (CEET), the Isles Trenton Community Street Team, the Financial Opportunity Center (FOC), and the Johnson Center for Learning & Policy. Together, these fellows bring the perspective of staff working directly with Trenton residents on workforce training, neighborhood safety, financial coaching, and policy advocacy, grounding the fellowship in the realities of our interconnected services.

Throughout the program, fellows will develop passion projects that strengthen Isles' mission and drive community impact. With workshops, coaching, and peer collaboration, they'll turn bold ideas into actionable plans, building the skills and networks needed to lead change both within Isles and across the broader community.

This inaugural cohort is internal, but our next cohort will pull from the greater community, opening the Impact Accelerator to emerging leaders from across the region. Stay tuned for details!



MESSAGE FROM THE CEO

2025 was a challenging year. It started in early February when our AmeriCorps Community Corps program was suddenly eliminated by the federal government. Funding was halted. After two rounds of legal and bureaucratic battles, the operation is running again. But in the process, we lost half our Community Corps staff and our City-wide garden network was compromised.

A similar experience impacted our weatherization service. However, with the help of our community of supporters and friends like you, we overcame those obstacles and delivered another year of impact in Trenton and beyond.

In 2025, we connected almost 66,000 riders to jobs, counseling, and training appointments, as well as doctors' offices and supermarkets, using our all-electric *GO Trenton!* vehicles, while saving 55 metric tons of unhealthy greenhouse gas emissions. Each day, more than 4,000 Trenton high school students were safely guided to and from school. 63 families and individuals reached their dream of homeownership. 300 homes were inspected for lead paint and other hazards and then made healthier and safer. 25 young people — who had dropped out of traditional schooling once and sometimes twice — earned their high school diplomas and were placed in real-world jobs. Despite the cuts to our garden-Community Corps staff, 250 local residents gardened in Isles' community plots, growing their own fresh produce and contributing over 800 pounds of it back into the community and emergency food distribution centers. These are just some of the remarkable outcomes you'll read about in this year's Annual Report.

There's even more data to read inside. But the data only tells part of the story. Behind these numbers are real people: families, people of all ages moving forward and creating healthy, thriving communities.

And while uncertainty loomed over work this year, what this report really shows is resilience and our ability to adapt, pivot, and keep pushing progress forward despite these challenging circumstances. That's because of you.

As you read through these pages, remember: every student who graduated, every community member served this year exists because you stood with us. Your investment in our community made the difference.

There's still much work ahead, but with the help of supporters like you, we'll continue creating environments where people can grow and thrive.

In community,

Sean Jackson, CEO



Urban Agriculture

Isles currently supports dozens of community and school gardens throughout Trenton. In 2025, we:

- Hosted weekly open garden hours every Wednesday and seasonal special events at the Tucker Street site and Roberto Clemente Children's Garden from April through October
- Supported more than 250 community gardeners throughout Trenton who maintained dozens of gardens, and trained 12 new gardeners through hands-on workshops
- Donated over 800 pounds of fresh produce to community members and emergency food providers and distributed approximately 12,000 vegetable seedlings and hundreds of seed packets to school and community gardens citywide
- Operated beehives that produced over 150 pounds of honey and led twice-monthly cooking workshops and "Dinner & A Movie" series using Tucker Street produce
- Facilitated workshops in gardening, composting, rain-barrel installation, garden construction, light landscaping, farm-to-table cooking, medicinal herbs, and food preservation
- Partnered with Tito's Handmade Vodka's Block to Block program to construct raised beds and improve Tucker Garden infrastructure, and collaborated with three schools including Carroll Robbins Elementary, Christina Seix Academy, and East Trenton Collaborative after-school program
- Supported Union Baptist Church with garden maintenance, orchard tree plantings, and Thanksgiving grocery distribution



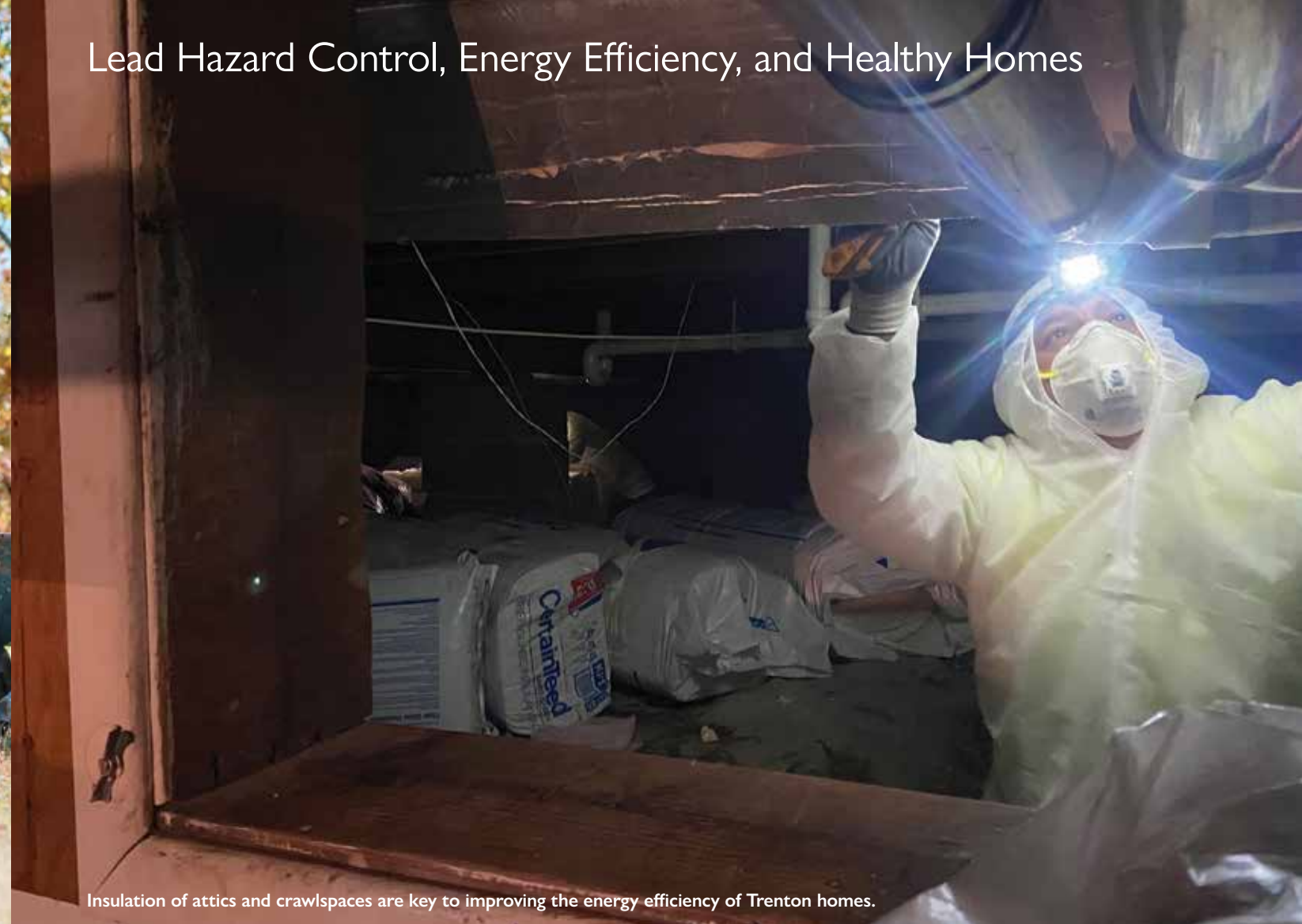
Trenton Community Corps

Trenton Community Corps is part of the AmeriCorps program and provides training and employment in climate resilience and green infrastructure careers. Projects include tree planting, watershed improvements, education in sustainability and sustainable practices, food system resilience, and urban reforestation. The Corps 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 exposing them to career paths for their futures.

In 2025, we:

- Developed professional skills in community beautification and urban landscaping for AmeriCorps members through hands-on service and management by Isles Urban Agriculture staff
- Planted more than 250 trees across Trenton to advance climate resilience, shade equity, and neighborhood beautification
- Supported three Isles staff members and three AmeriCorps members in volunteering at the Pennsylvania Horticultural Society Flower Show

Lead Hazard Control, Energy Efficiency, and Healthy Homes



Insulation of attics and crawlspaces are key to improving the energy efficiency of Trenton homes.

Isles conducts home health assessments and improvements for low-income households to increase energy efficiency, eliminate lead-based paint hazards, and enhance indoor health and safety.

In 2025 we:

- Provided 300 Healthy Homes assessments to residents in the community
- Completed 70 lead hazard control projects (abatement and remediation)
- Weatherized or provided heating system repairs or replacement to 65 homes
- Isles improvements kept more than 300 kids and adults warm, dry, and safe

Making Homes Healthier, One Family at a Time

When Isles completed work at Charrisse's home through her township's Housing Rehabilitation Program, the improvements transformed her home. Her furnace and air-conditioner weren't working. She needed a safer electrical system. A functioning bathroom with new vanities and toilet. Critical repairs that addressed both comfort and safety.

"Over all this was a great experience and really took a lot of stress off my body," Charrisse wrote in her satisfaction statement.

The work itself mattered, but so did how it was done. Charrisse noted that the team was helpful and transparent from start to finish, showing up on time and responding quickly when needed. "The job was well done," she wrote. "All contractors and staff involved were professional and pleasant."

This is the impact of Isles' comprehensive approach to lead, energy efficiency, and healthy homes work: making essential housing improvements that families need while treating them with dignity throughout the process. Through partnerships with townships like Hamilton, Isles transforms homes into safer, healthier, and more affordable places to live, and turns worry into relief for residents like Charrisse.



Empowering families to achieve financial stability and home-ownership through personalized homebuyer, foreclosure, and employment counseling, financial coaching, and connections to essential resources and benefits. In 2025:

- Our team supported 160 customers with housing or foreclosure advice and assistance
- We provided financial coaching and education services to 234 individuals
- 29 families were given guidance in accessing needed public benefits
- Our employment coaches worked with 158 people to improve job prospects
- 47 educational workshops were held on financial literacy and wealth building
- Isles helped 63 people realize their dream of purchasing their first home
- In 2025, Isles served as an administrator for the NJ Department of Labor's Fund My Future (FMF) program. Through FMF, Isles provided coaching services and funding to over 120 participants, leading to certifications in high-demand fields, new jobs, and greater earnings.

From Settling to Thriving

Tykira Evans had the training. She'd finished dental assistant school and earned her credentials. But the jobs weren't coming, and a CNA certification, the next logical step, wasn't covered by financial aid.

"You can't get financial aid for a CNA, you have to pay out of pocket," the 23-year-old Trenton resident says. "So I was just going to settle." She was delivering packages for Amazon when someone mentioned the Isles Financial Opportunity Center.

One week from her first call to her first appointment, she had a plan: CNA certification stacked with phlebotomy and EKG credentials. When her training provider couldn't place her for the required externship, Isles found an alternative site and covered childcare, bus passes, and transportation.

Today, Evans works as a CNA at a nearby assisted living facility, earning 50% more than she would have as a dental assistant. In May 2026, she started nursing school, a goal that once felt impossible.

Preserving Generational Wealth

When Thaddeus Pearson's father died without a will, grief was only the beginning. Ahead lay probate court and the home his father had left him.

With help from the Mercer County Clerk's office, Thaddeus probated the estate and became a homeowner for the first time. Then came the harder part. Between jobs and stretched thin, he fell behind on the mortgage. A foreclosure notice arrived, followed by investors offering to buy the house for a fraction of its worth.

He refused. The home wasn't just a home. It was his family's legacy.

A legal services partner referred him to Isles' Housing Services, where Elena Hung-Shum, HUD-certified Housing Counselor, built a plan around what Thaddeus wanted: to keep the house. He secured two jobs. Together they built a budget. Isles pressed the lender for assistance.

Months of persistence paid off. Thaddeus completed a trial payment plan, earned a permanent loan modification, and now holds the mortgage in his own name. His father's legacy is preserved for the next generation.



Thaddeus Pearson on the front porch of his late father's Trenton home, which he saved from foreclosure with help from Isles' Housing Services.



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 2025 academic year, IYI achieved significant milestones:

- 25 IYI students participated in graduation, earning their high school diplomas
- 17 students earned Pre-Apprentice Construction Training (PACT) certificates
- 5 students earned Microsoft Office Specialist certificates
- 38 youth participated in meaningful community service projects
- 20 students earned CPR/First Aid Certification
- 22 students received OSHA Certification
- 48 students, community members and alumni participated in various internal and external job training internship opportunities
- 38 students participated in the Leadership Academy: weekly training sessions and workshops on key leadership skills, field trips to local businesses and city leaders
- 32 youth were placed in paid internships, trade school, or college
- 112 youth participated in OTARY (Extended Evening Program)

A Story of Resilience: One Graduate's Journey to a New Beginning

Some journeys to success are not straight lines, and that makes them no less remarkable.

One Isles Youth Institute student first joined our program in late 2023, but when ongoing struggles with substance use required her full attention, she stepped away to focus on her recovery. When she was ready to return, we welcomed her back, because at IYI, we know that healing and growth rarely follow a tidy path.

Rejoining the program in 2025, she arrived with something different about her: a quiet determination and a genuine readiness for change. About three months in, she shared that she was expecting a baby, a revelation that deepened her resolve rather than diminishing it. Despite significant academic hurdles and moments of real self-doubt ("I can't read," she would sometimes say, or "I'm no good at math"), staff walked alongside her every step of the way, consistently reflecting back the potential they saw in her.

Slowly, she began to believe it herself. She accepted homework assignments. She brought books home to read. She put in quiet hours of study outside the classroom. Those small steps became strides, and those strides became leaps. Knowing she was working not just for herself but for the little one on the way, she tackled assignments with growing confidence and threw herself into academic discussions with new energy.

The results spoke for themselves. After months of consistent, courageous effort, she passed all four GED subject tests and walked across the graduation stage. Her writing had grown so dramatically that she was honored with a special writing award at the IYI 2025 Graduation ceremony. Shortly after, she welcomed a beautiful baby girl into the world and kept going. She enrolled at Fortis Institute in a certified nursing assistant program and is on track to graduate this year with a clear career path ahead of her.

"Her story is a testament to what becomes possible when someone is met with patience, encouragement, and unwavering belief in their potential," said Chantea Hobson, Director of Isles Youth Institute. "We are so proud of everything she has accomplished and everything still to come."

Isles' Center for Energy and Environmental Training (CEET) is a green-collar job training facility, targeting careers in energy efficiency and environmental health. CEET is a Building Performance Institute (BPI) certified testing center, an EPA lead Renovation, Repair and Painting provider and credentials lead abatement workers through a State of New Jersey Department of Health approved training. Since 2009, CEET has trained more than 6,500 people, generating jobs and economic opportunity while making homes safe, healthy, and building on energy infrastructure.

This year, CEET trained approximately 555 individuals in lead safety, energy efficiency, and healthy homes:

- Provided Lead-Safe Renovation, Repair, and Paint (RRP) training and certification for 229 workers
- Provided Lead Abatement Worker training and certification for 36 workers
- Provided the Healthy Homes for Community Health Workers course to 152 community health advocates
- Provided Building Performance Institute (BPI) Building Analyst training to 37 workers, with a 95% success rate
- Offered "The Eight Keys to a Healthy Home" to 101 community members

From Childhood Home to Community Builder: Venice's Story

At 32, Venice Lluen is already five years into running Peace of Mind Construction Group, but her connection to Isles began long before she became a licensed contractor. When Venice was a child, her mother purchased their family home through an Isles first-time homebuyer assistance program.

"She explained this to me later, that Isles was the program that helped her."



Venice and her "helper" with materials for the Isles Wood Street renovation.

Years later, while working for the Trenton Housing Authority, Venice was referred to Isles' Center for Energy and Environmental Training (CEET) to earn her EPA Lead Renovator certification. She connected with Andre Thomas, CEET's Training Manager, and a powerful partnership was born.

Venice quickly upgraded her credentials and those of her workers, obtaining the abatement training required for lead remediation work. Today, Peace of Mind is a certified EPA lead remediation firm, taking on projects for Isles, United Way, the Mercer County Hispanic Association, Garden State Homes, and others — and is even renovating Isles' own space on Wood Street.

The partnership deepened when Venice became an employer through Isles' Workforce Development program, hiring three apprentices to date, with a fourth on the way. As a single mother, her approach is deeply personal.

"Every time Isles presents someone looking for a job, I always think of my son — how I would want someone to treat my child when he's starting his career. I believe people deserve a second chance if they're willing and serious. Someone has to be there to give them that chance."

Looking ahead, Venice plans to purchase a headquarters in Trenton, hire local residents, and develop housing for a city that needs it.

"I look at what I'm doing as bigger than me. Lifting them lifts me too. That's how we rise, by raising each other up."

Andre Thomas echoes this sentiment: "Together we provide employment opportunities for the underserved while remediating homes, making them lead-safe and healthier."



Members of the Trenton Community Street Team participate in a team training session.

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.

In 2025, TCST:

- Trenton Community Street Team (TCST) escorted 4,000+ Trenton high school and IYI students to and from school through the Safe Passage initiative

- Since the Street Team began their safe passage work in 2022, the schools they serve have seen a 96% drop in violence
- The Community Care/Outreach team at TCST provided 351 Trentonians with diapers and other household needs, working to build community and help counter retaliatory crime
- TCST responded to 56 incidents of violence
- Hosted, supported, or sponsored 92 community events
- Offered free, gently used clothing and items to 190 Families through the Toddler's Closet Program

Building Safety Through Presence: The Trenton Community Street Team



TCST's high-visibility vests are a familiar sight on Safe Passage routes around Trenton schools.

On any given school day, members of the Isles Trenton Community Street Team stand outside Trenton Central High School, 9th Grade Academy, Capital City High School, and Isles Youth Institute. They're not crossing guards or police officers. They're a presence, a safe space, the first and last face students see each day.

"We're interacting with those young people, seeing them every single day and letting them know that we are a safe space within the areas they walk in," said Perry Shaw, TCST director.

The impact is undeniable. Since the Street Team began its work in 2022, these schools have seen a 96% drop in violence. Police used to be called to the schools daily; now it's a rare occurrence.

The team's 26 members, including educators, coaches, parents, and justice-impacted individuals, nearly all live in or grew up in Trenton. This connection to the community is essential to their effectiveness.

"How can you be effective if when you go to a community, they don't know who you are?" Shaw asks. "For us that's the secret sauce, being recognizable, people knowing us, people seeing us do the same things every single day."

At the core of their work is seeing humanity in everyone. "We have to understand that a lot of times people are traumatized," Shaw said. "Once you're able to see their trauma, you'll be able to see the human being behind the trauma."

Community Planning & Development



Trenton residents capture the moment at the unveiling of the new Perry & Montgomery mural by local artist Rasaan Parker.

Arts & Creative Placemaking

- Annual participation in Art All Day at Roberto Clemente Park and support for Art All Night programming
- Coordination of signature events including Art on Warren Street and the Downtown Holiday Storefront Contest
- Support for more than 80 sidewalk musical performances (busking)
- Sponsorship of local arts initiatives, including an exhibit benefit for a local artist undergoing cancer treatment and Capital City Open Mic (launched in 2023), a monthly showcase at a downtown business
- A Double Dutch Competition in partnership with the City of Trenton, drawing 175 attendees and celebrating cultural tradition
- Launch of Storefront Canvas, an interior mural initiative, with the first installation at Sunrise Luncheonette celebrating Haitian culture



Community Engagement & Civic Life

- More than 500 community events supported across all Isles programs
- Bi-monthly T-Recs Mobile Recreation provides free sports and games in partnership with community organizations
- Monthly downtown resident meetings in collaboration with HelpSelf
- Ongoing partnership with the City of Trenton, Trenton Downtown Association, and other community stakeholders



Fabio's Pizza shows off its holiday spirit as part of the Downtown Trenton Holiday Storefront Contest, one of the signature events bringing creative energy to downtown businesses.

Isles leads city-wide research and initiatives focused on neighborhood stabilization, creative placemaking, small business vitality, and food systems — centering community voice and supporting implementation.

Neighborhood Stabilization & Resident Support

- 22 home repair grants awarded to East Trenton residents to address urgent health and safety needs
- Four weekend clean-ups at Roberto Clemente Park, tied to a youth-led public art project
- Ongoing collaboration with neighborhood associations and civic groups to implement community-driven priorities

Small Business & Economic Development

- \$127,000 awarded in grants to downtown businesses, grassroots organizations, and community members
- Creative business support including signage upgrades, interior build-outs, and repairs for local entrepreneurs (including a soap company, salon/wig business, and fashion designer)
- Support for café courtyard development, now hosting rotating murals, performances, and vendors
- \$10,000 Spring Small Grants Program supporting creative businesses and artists

Community members, Isles interns, the Trenton Community Street Team, and the Isles Community Planning and Development team came together for a cleanup day at Roberto Clemente Park, supported by the Creek to Canal Grant Initiative.



The Johnson Center is leveraging decades of Isles' expertise in community development and environmental work to effect 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 goal of fostering healthy, thriving communities.

In 2025, the Johnson Center:

- Led a successful advocacy coalition resulting in the passage of A4848/S3616 (P.L. 2025 c.193), requiring lead screening during pregnancy to protect pregnant people and address maternal-infant health disparities
- Successfully advocated for \$750,000 in state funding for YouthBuild programs through the New Jersey Opportunity Youth Coalition—the first direct state appropriation of its kind
- Worked with DCA and partners to increase access to lead remediation services in overburdened communities, making more homes automatically eligible for lead hazard control work under ARPA funds
- Two members of the Isles leadership team appointed to Governor-elect Mikie Sherrill's Transition Team to shape policies on child mental health, online safety, and key interdisciplinary priorities
- Successfully reversed the CDC Reduction in Force (RIF) through congressional advocacy, including a press conference

with Congresswoman Bonnie Watson-Coleman and meetings with ten congressional districts

- Led statewide coalition advocacy for energy affordability, resulting in multiple Executive Orders prioritizing ratepayer protection and clean energy by the new governor
- Hosted Fall Forum: Cities for the Future with over 200 attendees, local leaders, and policymakers, featuring impactful conversations on extreme heat, microtransit and safe streets, and lead and healthy homes
- Staff presented research and policy insights at over 15 conferences in multiple states, including Rutgers Climate Change Conference, National Environmental Health Conference, and statewide policy forums
- Led Perry Street Crossing project with fifteen key stakeholders to address complex safety and mobility concerns, securing a federal DOT grant and school zone improvements
- Hosted 15 interns from 8 colleges and 2 high schools who gained practical experience in research, policy, community engagement, advocacy, and presentations
- Launched eight-month Impact Accelerator fellowship with 16 staff to develop social entrepreneurship skills and strengthen community impact projects
- Secured over \$2M in additional *GOtrenton!* funding and worked with a coalition to shepherd microtransit legislation and statewide funding



Isles Youth Institute students, alumni, and educators joined YouthBuild peers from across New Jersey to advocate for state investment in young people. Their efforts helped secure funding for IYI and other YouthBuild programs.



GOtrenton!

In 2025, *GOtrenton!* Electric Vehicle Rideshare solidified its role as a vital pillar of the Trenton community, bridging the gap between transportation and opportunity. The year was defined by a major milestone in November when we proudly welcomed our 100,000th microtransit passenger in just two years since the program's inception, representing thousands of successful commutes to work, essential trips to healthcare providers, and increased access to local resources.

In 2025, we:

- Provided 50,216 rides and transported 65,826 passengers across 59,227 miles, saving 55 metric tons of CO2 (equivalent to 6,185 gallons of gas)
- Transitioned our fleet from GEM vehicles to EV Kia Niro SUVs in April, providing enhanced safety features, climate control, and highway capability

Isles summer interns took *GOtrenton!* to their volunteer shift at the Trenton Area Soup Kitchen, putting the all-electric rideshare to work for community service.



- Expanded citywide coverage area by 2.5 times and introduced curb-to-curb service, bilingual customer service hotline, and new Sunday operating hours for seven-day-a-week service
- Maintained four fare-free hotspots at Trenton Area Soup Kitchen, The Rescue Mission, Medina Health Clinic, and Children's Home Society, ensuring residents can always access essential services at no cost
- Opened new Operations Headquarters at 256 Allen St. in May, featuring secure parking, integrated charging infrastructure with Level 2 and High-Speed EV chargers, and dedicated office space for drivers and administrative staff
- Launched strategic partnership with the New Jersey Maternal Infant Health Innovation Authority in December to provide free transportation for expecting mothers and perinatal workers in Trenton
- Provided dedicated van transportation for 24 local community events and continued partnership with Isles Youth Institute to ensure students have reliable daily transit to school
- Achieved 72% shared rides (carpooled with other passengers) and excellent driver rating of 4.81 stars (out of 5)

Looking ahead to 2026, Isles is poised to expand the *GOtrenton!* footprint beyond city limits by mid-year, with plans to significantly increase our electric fleet size and recruit additional local drivers to meet rising demand. By scaling our operations and exploring regional coverage in areas surrounding Trenton, we aim to create a more connected and sustainable Mercer County, ensuring that clean, affordable transportation remains an accessible reality for all.

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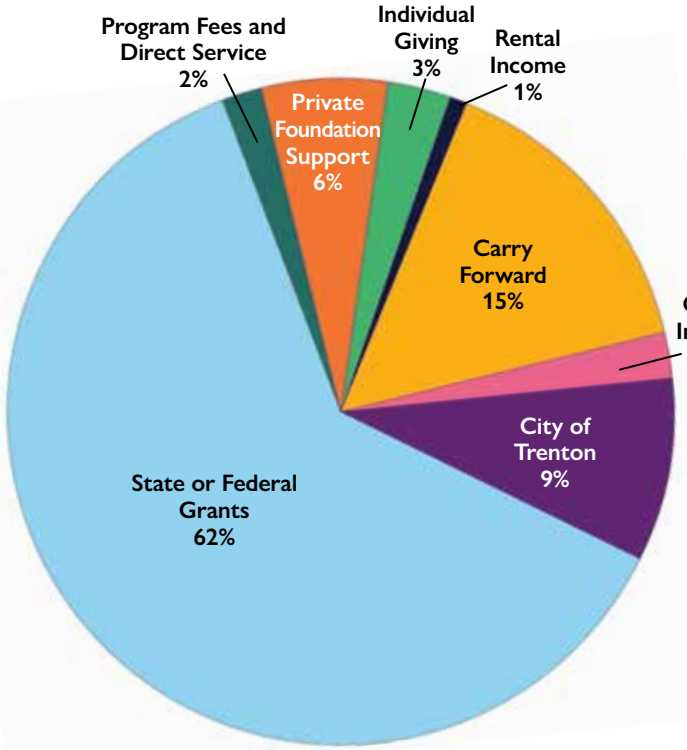
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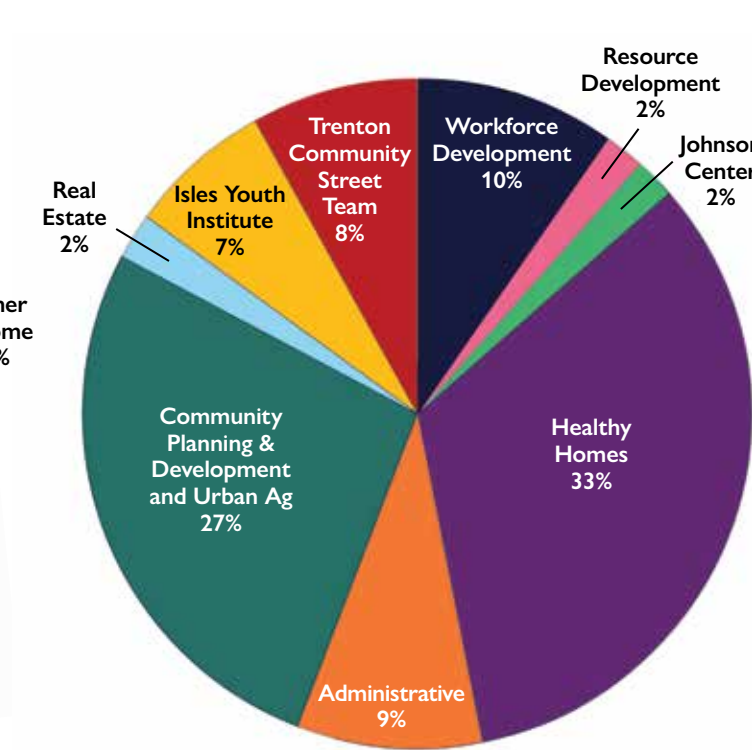


FINANCIAL SUMMARY 2025

2025 Actual Revenue
\$17,828,882



2025 Actual Expenses
\$17,328,047



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

At Isles, we believe everyone deserves a healthy community and an environment where they can grow and thrive!



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For more information on ways to give, visit isles.org/donate or contact Randi Orlow at 609.341.4722 or by emailing rorlow@isles.org.



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