



FY15-FY17 Strategic Plan

FY 15 Update



thread

MISSION

Thread engages underperforming high school students confronting significant barriers outside of the classroom by providing each one with a family of committed volunteers and increased access to community resources. We foster students' academic advancement and personal growth into self-motivated, resilient, and responsible citizens.



FY15 PROGRESS TOWARDS STRATEGIC GOALS

Eleven years ago, Thread had a bold idea. We saw that no matter how many resources agencies channeled into programs aimed at improving learning and test scores, programs using a single approach failed to reach all students. Thread considered these circumstances and had a new vision: "What if we designed a program that could adapt to the needs of each student? What if we could replicate the bonds shared by close-knit families to nurture students so that they can grow to support themselves? And, what if these close-knit bonds could also transform the lives of those working with students and, in turn, transform the fabric of our community?" These "What ifs" became the foundation for Thread.

So we built a network. Starting in East Baltimore, we encouraged connection and caring between volunteers from the Johns Hopkins University (JHU) and underperforming high school students at Paul Laurence Dunbar High School (Dunbar) who were at risk of failing to graduate. In 2010 and 2014, Thread expanded to the Academy for College and Career Exploration (ACCE) and the Academies at Frederick Douglass (Douglass) High School. Since its inception, Thread has grown responsibly from two volunteer founders working with 15 students at one high school site in 2004 to over 800 volunteers working with 207 students and alumni at three high school sites in FY15.

Throughout our growth, Thread has maintained exemplary outcomes, including 100% high school graduation of the 47 students who have been in Thread for five years. This past year, Thread built on our track record of excellence and made significant progress towards our goal of eventually reaching an annual enrollment of 300 students (5% of every freshman class), thereby drastically moving the needle on the citywide high school graduation rate. This audacious vision will take tenacious effort rooted in achieving unmatched outcomes while working to support as many students as possible, as quickly as possible. Thread's FY15-FY17 Strategic Plan charted the course and FY15 marked tremendous progress.

THE PLANNING PROCESS

An eight-member committee of Thread students, volunteers, collaborators, staff, and members of the Board of Directors engaged in a 12-month planning process.

THE LONG-RANGE PLAN COMMITTEE

DEBBIE CAMERON
Chairman of the Board, Thread

TYLER CASH-PADGETT
Volunteer, Thread

SOPHIE DAGENAIS
Director, The Annie E. Casey Foundation

RONALD J. DANIELS
President, The Johns Hopkins University

ROBERT C. EMBRY, JR.
President, The Abell Foundation

SARAH HEMMINGER
Chief Executive Officer, Thread

ALEX RHEE
Volunteer, Thread

TONG ZHANG
Chief Operating Officer, Thread



METHODOLOGY

FINANCIAL AND HUMAN RESOURCE CAPACITY INITIATIVES

- Student Enrollment
- Volunteer Capacity
- Collaborator Capacity
- Board Member Recruitment
- Fundraising

KEY PLANNING INITIATIVES

- Baltimore High School Site Identification
- Thread Community Model Codification
- Evaluation
- Technology
- Alumni Services

MARKET RESEARCH

- Local Competitive Scan
- National Best Practices
- Brand and Identity Surveys
- Marketing and Communications

THE PROMISE

Thread embraces students, volunteers, and collaborators as exceptional individuals in extraordinary situations who are able to contribute to the lives of others and to the community as a whole. Thread understands that children growing up in concentrated poverty need more than just improved financial resources or better classrooms; they need the same unassailable support and deep interpersonal bonds that we all need. The Long-Range Plan reinforces Thread's commitment to building these bonds for students, volunteers, and collaborators and replacing the cycle of poverty with a new cycle of learning, service, and social well-being.

CENTRAL TO THREAD'S SUCCESS IS OUR FOCUS ON:

- COMPELLING STUDENT SUCCESS
- CULTIVATING VOLUNTEERS AS AGENTS OF CHANGE
- CREATIVELY LINKING COMMUNITY



COMPELLING STUDENT SUCCESS

Thread's approach is unprecedented, beginning with the students we engage: the most academically underperforming high school freshmen who, since birth, have known only what it means to live within the bottom quartile of many statistical scales. Once students are enrolled, Thread radically and permanently reconfigures their social support structure by matching each student with a group of up to eight volunteers committed to doing whatever it takes to customize support. In addition to providing mentorship, rides to school, and morning wake up calls, volunteers help connect students and their families to existing community resources by coordinating clothing, furniture and appliance donations, home renovations, and public assistance enrollment. Thread's commitment is also unprecedented in terms of its duration; we provide consistent support for students for almost a decade.



CULTIVATING VOLUNTEERS AS AGENTS OF CHANGE

Thread believes that, in the relationships we facilitate, everyone has something to teach and everyone has something to learn. The benefits of our student/volunteer relationships flow both ways and are designed to leave a lasting imprint not only on the students we serve, but also on our volunteers. In addition, we invest significant resources in our volunteers' development into self-motivated, resilient, responsible citizens by training them in the Thread Core Competencies and providing ongoing support for the challenges they encounter, both within the Thread context and outside of it. Thread fosters a culture in which students and volunteers have fierce commitments to one another and the community.



CREATIVELY LINKING COMMUNITY

Thread creatively links students and university- and community-based volunteers to the larger Baltimore community, creating a broader, more inclusive social fabric – a “neighborhood” no longer defined by a map. Thread resource teams forge relationships with collaborators, maximizing the support available to our students and volunteers and laying a foundation for systemic and sustainable change.

By making us all “neighbors” and by engaging with leaders in the community, Thread enables both students and volunteers to access resources and form lasting relationships with a diverse cross-section of decision makers. All participants benefit from these relationships; when collaborators interact with our students and volunteers, they are building connections with the next generation of leaders.

FY15 PROGRESS

Updates on the 10 strategic initiatives that are critical to Thread accomplishing our mission and realizing our vision.



1. CODIFICATION

Codify, meaning to systematize the implementation of, the *Thread Community Model* into a road map for future site and city replication.

Progress Point #1: Thread Core Curriculum

To ensure we maintain program quality and fidelity to the model as we grow, we collaborated with pro-bono consultants from the Harvard Graduate School of Education along with Thread's Tong Zhang Innovation Fellows (TZIF) to further refine our *Thread Community Model*. As part of this effort, we integrated our student, volunteer, and volunteer leadership development programs into the *Thread Core Curriculum* (TCC), a single cohesive and aligned system that focuses on building relationships.

Progress Point #2: Thread Guide for Replication

Thread compiled over a decade of experience, knowledge and best practices into the *Thread Guide for Replication*, (*Thread Guide*) a 300-page handbook that serves as a road map for replication. *The Thread Guide* includes:

- An operational plan describing student, volunteer, volunteer leader, and staff activities
- Detailed explanation of how activities drive outputs
- Detailed explanation of how outputs lead to our desired short and long-term student outcomes
- Detailed checklists and trainings to support systematizing implementation of the operational plan

2. OUTCOMES EVALUATION

Strategic Goal: Build on Thread's history of exemplary student outcomes and our commitment to a transparent, data-driven approach to assessing program effectiveness.

Progress Point: Process Evaluation

In preparation for an outcomes and impact evaluation, Thread underwent a process evaluation to assess program fidelity to our codified model. Our evaluation:

- Analyzed the *Thread Core Curriculum*, *Thread Guide*, and other key organizational documents
- Conducted more than 65 initial in-person interviews and 18 follow-up on-camera interviews of students, volunteers, and volunteer leaders to learn about their Thread experience
- Observed student and volunteer program activities
- Performed a high school site assessment to review if each site was conforming to the logic model



THREAD INNOVATION: TOUCHPOINTS

TouchPoints (points of contact and interaction) measure the consistent and persistent effort to build relationships upon which we can build individual and community success. Our process evaluation surfaced that the key driver of student success was TouchPoints between students and volunteers. Importantly, it also uncovered that the key driver for TouchPoints between students and volunteers was TouchPoints between volunteers and volunteer leaders. As a result, Thread also revised our volunteer and volunteer leader trainings to focus on building healthy, authentic relationships with students and with one another.

3. VOLUNTEER LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM

Strategic Goal: Recruit, train, develop, and retain sufficient numbers of volunteer leaders to transform the energy and ambition of volunteers into sustained actions that meet the needs of Thread students and lead to measurable outcomes.

Progress Point #1: World-class Training

Sylvan Learning training specialists partnered with Thread staff to better integrate our focus on relationship building into our volunteer and volunteer leader trainings. This training program will immerse our volunteers in the spirit of our core philosophy: empathetic and enduring relationships are society's most essential form of wealth. Our volunteers will carry this spirit into their TouchPoints with students, their fellow volunteers, and collaborators, and, ultimately, out into Baltimore.

Progress Point #2: Impact Leadership

Thread developed the Impact Leadership lecture series to support Thread volunteer leaders in cultivating transferrable leadership and communication skills. The series targeted Thread volunteers in the medical fields to apply medical problem solving to their volunteer experiences, and conversely to apply their lessons learned in volunteering to their medical careers. World-class instruction was provided by guest professors from the Johns Hopkins School of Medicine and Thread staff.

4. PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT

Complete our transition from a hero-powered organization to a process-powered organization by using technology to improve performance management.

Progress Point: TouchPoint Customer Relations Management (CRM)

Thread volunteers and staff perform well when TouchPoints lead to healthy, authentic, mutually supportive relationships. With the generous support of The Abell Foundation and the France-Merrick Foundation, Thread launched a three-phase process to build technology infrastructure to track and manage TouchPoints in real-time to support case management of students and performance management of volunteers, volunteer leaders, and staff.

- Phase I: The Salesforce CRM back-end that tracks student data is complete and all historical data has been migrated to the new system.
- Phase II: The Salesforce CRM back-end that organizes volunteer, volunteer leader, and staff management is in beta testing and will be completed by December 2015.
- Phase III: Thread will develop a user-friendly front-end application with dashboards that will allow students, volunteers, volunteer leaders, collaborators, and staff to track progress towards individual goals and performance metrics, build social capital by connecting to others working towards similar goals, and provide them with just-in-time access to resources and services.

This new system will connect Thread's expanding student, volunteer, volunteer leader, and collaborator base in a way that reinforces our new social fabric and improves student outcomes and resource recruitment.

5. EXPANSION

Strategic Goal: Maintain exemplary outcomes, while serving as many students as possible, as quickly as possible.

Progress Point #1: Expansion to Third High School Site

For more than a decade, Thread has grown responsibly while systemically building capacity to support organizational growth. During our all-volunteer phase (2004-2009), Thread's rate of student enrollment was ~5 students per year, enrolling one cohort of 16 students at Dunbar every three years. In 2010, we expanded to our second site at the ACCE and began enrolling ~30 students per year (one cohort of 16 students at two sites). In FY15, Thread expanded to Douglass and increased our rate of student enrollment by 50% to ~50 students per year (one cohort of 16 students at three sites).

Progress Point #2: The Blueprint Group

Thread recruited a team of students, volunteers, staff, and Board members to form The Blueprint Group (BPG) who made preliminary recommendations that scaling to 3,000 students in Baltimore would require six to seven high school sites, each with an annual enrollment of 30-80 students supported by more than 7,000 volunteers. The BPG mapped our plan for high school site and volunteer hub recruitment, with a focus on alignment with our broad vision for change: connecting the city's civic, economic, and educational sectors through strong individual relationships to create a community where everyone thrives.

THREAD INNOVATION: A CITY AS A UNIT OF CHANGE

While Thread has been invited to expand to other cities, we recognize that going deep in Baltimore in FY15-FY17 is how we can have the most profound impact. We aim to ultimately reach 5% of each freshman class (annual enrollment of 300 students, total enrollment of 3,000 students) across the Baltimore City Public School System (BCPSS).

6. COLLABORATORS

Strategic Goal: Expand and deepen our relationships with key partner institutions.

Progress Point #1: Johns Hopkins University Partnership

This year, we deepened and expanded our long-standing partnership the Diversity and Academic Advancement Summer Institute (DAASI), a collaboration between Thread and the JHU School of Medicine (JHUSOM) Office of Student Diversity. DAASI enrolls Thread high school students and recent graduates in 5-week long paid summer internships in laboratories, clinics, and offices at the JHUSOM and other local non-profit and for-profit Baltimore businesses including the MICA Center for Social Design, Greater Baltimore Urban League, and Creative Alliance. When students are not at work, they attend DAASI professional development workshops, complete academic coursework and, once a summer, the DAASI Symposium, where they present posters about their internship experiences. This year's symposium was generously hosted by Under Armour.

Progress Point #2: Corporate Partnerships

This year, Thread expanded the diverse network of relationships that drives our success. We are thrilled to have formed new collaborations with Exelon to support volunteer recruitment and McCormick to support staff through professional executive coaching.

7. RESOURCES

Strategic Goal: Secure the necessary financial and in-kind resources required to invest in the capacity building that will sustain and grow the organization.

Progress Point #1: A Good Steward

Thread has continued to be a good steward of our resources, maintaining a low cost per student and allocating over 90% of funds to programming.

Progress Point #2: A Strong Start

Thread launched a \$7.5M campaign to support our FY15-FY17 Strategic Plan, including \$4.4M in general operating, \$1.6M in capacity building, and \$1.5M in sustainability funds. In FY15, we received a total of over \$2M in these three key resource areas. First, the Harry and Jeanette Weinberg Foundation (\$240K), Robert E. Meyerhoff and Rheda Becker (\$125K), and the Kenneth S. Battye Charitable Trust (\$100K) made generous contributions to support our general operations. Second, The Abell Foundation gave Thread a critical gift of \$200K to support building further capacity to maintain exemplary outcomes while laying the foundation for further growth. Finally, Mark and Patricia Joseph, through the Shelter Foundation, made a game-changing gift of \$1M in sustainability funds to be used in FY18 to ensure we can sustain the FY15-FY17 growth.

THREAD INNOVATION: REDEFINING THE WORD THREAD

thread (verb \ˈθred\) - to work hard; to exert sustained effort to overcome obstacles and achieve an objective or result.

Everyone in Thread – families, volunteers, and collaborators – is encouraged to break down the artificial divide between “us” and “them” by working alongside one another towards a common goal. It is this unique code of unconditional love and never giving up that compels reciprocal accountability and produces an understanding that our ability to thrive is bound up in our neighbor’s ability to thrive.

8. SCALE IMPACT

Strategic Goal: Develop innovative mechanisms for expanding and quantifying Thread's impact not only to support our students in beating the odds, but also to improve the odds for all students.

Progress Point: We. Thread. Together

Thread launched the *We. Thread. Together.* Campaign to communicate the power of meaningful relationships and the impact of working hard alongside someone to reach a shared goal. As part of the campaign, we brought students, volunteers, staff, Board members, thought partners, and donors together for an event at the Hopkins Club. The event was followed by a social media campaign and an article in the Baltimore Sun, which launched a discourse on how creating meaningful relationships lays the foundation for true accountability to one another and, in turn, sustained action.



9. ALUMNI SERVICES

Strategic Goal: Ensure Thread students not only graduate from high school and complete a post- secondary program, but also thrive as contributing members of society.

Progress Point #1: Thread Student Alumni Association (SAA)

To fulfill our commitment to radically and permanently alter the social support structure of students, Thread created the SAA to strengthen the connections between members of the Thread community and retain a critical mass of adaptable and tenacious agents of change to Baltimore. This year, the SAA linked alumni to younger students, volunteers, and to Baltimore-based employment and housing opportunities.

Progress Point #2: Tong Zhang Innovation Fellowship (TZIF)

Thread developed the TZIF, a one-year leadership and professional development program for a team of student alumni, volunteers, and volunteer alumni. This elite team spent time learning from Thread staff and Board members about Thread strategic initiatives and industry experts on organizational best practices. Fellows integrated their on-the-ground experience with internal and external expertise to propose ways to improve student and volunteer engagement. TZIF proposals were then incorporated into the *Thread Core Curriculum*.

THREAD INNOVATION: BUILDING A HOMEGROWN LEADERSHIP PIPELINE

Derick Brown (enrolled in 2004) represents the vanguard of the diverse and inclusive community that Thread is building.

Through the Thread *Student Alumni Association (SAA)*, Derick connected with Sheryl Goldstein (The Harry and Jeannette Weinberg Foundation) and Bonnie Legro (The Abell Foundation) who spent time with him conducting mock job interviews. They then connected him with opportunities at Reading Partners and Higher Achievement where he accepted positions working with youth. Derick was also an inaugural member of the TZIF, where he and the team traveled to New York City to meet with senior non-profit executives. Derick is currently working as a Site Coordinator for City Year.

10. STAFF

Strategic Goal: Recruit, train, develop, and retain high-quality staff members that possess the professional competence and personal commitment to Thread's mission, vision, and values to implement rigorous and comprehensive support for students and volunteers.

Progress Point #1: Forward-looking Organizational Chart

Prior to FY15, Thread fundraising, communications, finance, risk-management, and human resources functions were executed by an expert and deeply committed group of volunteers. In FY15, we engaged three Baltimore Corps Fellows to provide transitional support while we developed a more forward-looking organizational chart to support future growth.

Progress Point #2: World-class Staff

Thread developed a comprehensive staff recruitment strategy with a focus on diversity, and refined our training to ensure all staff members can leverage their skills and passions to support Thread in accomplishing our mission and vision. Thread now has world-class staff, including a full-time senior-management team, with experience ranging from the White House to the World Bank, from the Baltimore City Public School System to the Maryland State House, and from large local non-profits to national community engagement campaigns.

**JOIN US IN MAKING MORE
MONUMENTAL PROGRESS
IN FY16!**