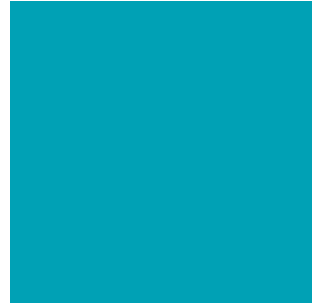


# THREAD STRATEGIC PLAN

**FY23-25**



## OVERVIEW

The prevalence of social isolation in our communities has increased dramatically over the past several years. COVID-19 and racial reckoning have exacerbated feelings of disconnectedness and people are becoming more likely to search for happiness within. According to author Ruth Whippman, “**Americans in general are spending less and less time actually connecting with other people.** Nearly half of all meals eaten in this country are now eaten alone. Teenagers and young millennials are ... replacing real-world interaction with smartphones.”<sup>1</sup>

This growing tendency to look inward, whether forced or chosen, is having detrimental effects on our neighborhoods and our health. A significant association has been identified linking social isolation and loneliness to worse cardiovascular and mental health outcomes.<sup>2</sup> The impact is even more pronounced for historically marginalized communities. Exacerbated by decades of both white and middle-class Black families fleeing to the suburbs, the landscapes of cities such as Baltimore are now even more divided by both race and class.

Additionally, there is a growing national political divide that has seeped into every community and created profound intolerance for those who don't look the same or espouse similar views and values. This has led to a pervasive unwillingness and/or inability for neighbors to see why each other matter, why they should care about one another, and how their success is inextricably linked.

“When I was in the 9th grade, I just wanted someone to be there for me and support the good things I do. When I joined Thread, that's what I got.”

- Tyna, Thread Young Person

Thread believes that intentionally building relationships across lines of difference can break down these walls of separation. By connecting people who wouldn't otherwise be connected, and teaching them the skills needed to bridge and bond with one another, we are creating a community of individuals that is woven together in meaningful ways. Growing communities like this in Baltimore and beyond will lead to more equitable individual and collective outcomes, including educational and economic attainment, where everyone can thrive.

Thread commits to the young people we enroll for 10 years and has never unenrolled a student since our founding in 2004. Historically, first-year high school students in Baltimore with GPAs below 1.0 graduate at a rate of 6%. **Despite having an average incoming GPA of 0.76 Thread's students outperform their peers, with 57% graduating in four years and an overall graduation rate of 77%.\*** Fifty-seven percent of our post-high school students have completed a two- or four-year degree or certification.

<sup>1</sup> Whippman, R. (2017). “Happiness Is Other People”, The New York Times.

<sup>2</sup> N.Leigh-Hunt, D.Bagguley, BashbV.Turne, S.Turnbull, N.Valtorta, W.Caan. (2017). “An overview of systematic reviews on the public health consequences of social isolation and loneliness”, sciencedirect.com.

\* Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, Thread young people graduated at an all-time rate of 84%. Thread continues to support students in academically advancing and recovering credits impacted by the pandemic.



In 2017, Thread launched an ambitious strategic plan to expand our community and enroll ~7.5% of first-year high school students at traditional high schools, nearly 60% of the highest needs students in Baltimore City Public Schools (City Schools). Since then, Thread has doubled our footprint and expanded to six high schools. We also grew annual student enrollment from 48 to 128 students at the onset of the pandemic, our largest cohort to date and ~3% of the ninth grade class across the district. **Overall, the Thread community has grown by more than 200%, now supporting 719 students and alumni and more than 3,000 volunteers and collaborators.**

Additionally, we further defined and codified the Thread Engagement Process for building relationships across lines of difference: connect, set goals, identify and remove barriers, and achieve the goals. To support this process at scale, we created, deployed, and refined tools, namely our mobile app and curriculum, to drive repeatable behaviors that result in replicable outcomes. The result is a multi-cultural, multi-identity community rooted in belonging and affirmation where our young people thrive.

The Thread Engagement Process, supported by our mobile app and curriculum, has been essential to our community's success. While unprecedented challenges tied to the COVID-19 pandemic tested the strength of the Thread community, we leaned in and achieved record-high engagement and retention of Thread young people, volunteers, and collaborators.

Thread aims to build on this momentum by continuing to grow our direct services and scale our influence in Baltimore and beyond in FY23-25. By expanding enrollment in our current high schools, deepening and broadening volunteer recruitment at universities and other institutions, and implementing Thread's curriculum throughout the community, we have the ability to achieve direct, widespread and even systemic impact that will help construct a more equitable culture where everyone can thrive.



## THREAD COMMUNITY MODEL

At the core of Thread is our young people. Thread enrolls students who are academically performing in the bottom 25% of their ninth grade class and attend one of Thread's six partner high schools. **Thread commits to every young person we enroll for 10 years and never gives up on them.** The intended objectives for our students in their first four years are to complete high school and select a post-high school pathway: entrepreneurship, straight to workforce, a certification program, or two- or four-year college degree. Critical mile markers within the Thread Community Model include school attendance, credit completion, and summer school enrollment and/or employment. During their final six years, the intended objectives are for young people to be employed or enrolled in a post-high school pathway and demonstrate self-efficacy to attain their goals throughout life.

Through the Thread Community Model, **each Thread student is matched with up to four caring adults to form a Thread Family that represents a diverse cross-section of the community** – from university students to small business owners, empty nesters to retirees. Volunteers work with trained volunteer coaches on how to connect with their young people, their families, and fellow volunteers to deploy the Thread Engagement Process of connecting, setting goals, identifying and removing barriers, and achieving goals. The intended objective for all volunteers is to build the skills necessary to bridge and bond across lines of difference. This includes a deeper understanding of one's bias, active listening, and how to overcome barriers.

The Thread Family provides individualized support to students and their families in the form of personal goal-setting; rides to school and/or work; tutoring; coaching around Thread's norms; self-advocacy in school, work, health and legal systems; applying to jobs; and much more. Thread complements this individualized support and coaching with programs, including after-school tutoring, trips outside of Baltimore, and community service outings where young people and caring adults hone their skills, explore their passions, practice setting goals, and learn how to apply these lessons in the world. To ensure efficient and effective barrier identification and removal, Thread Families are connected with community collaborators who provide pro-bono resources and services in the legal, health, and employment sectors.





To understand the Thread Community Model, imagine a beautifully woven piece of fabric...



## STUDENTS

At the core is a single strand, a brilliant young person who is full of potential despite living within the bottom quartile of many statistical scales – income, GPA, opportunity - due to structural barriers beyond their control.



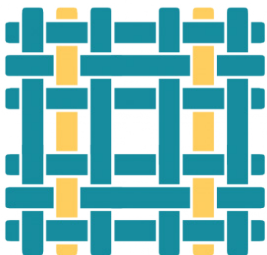
## FAMILIES

This core strand is woven together with up to four volunteer strands – their Thread Family. Family Members are a diverse group of kind, open-minded adults who are committed to supporting young people as they set goals and work through barriers. They become deeply interwoven with a young person's family and existing social network. Thread Families also extend and broaden one another's social networks, facilitating opportunities for each other to build new skills and identify opportunities throughout life.



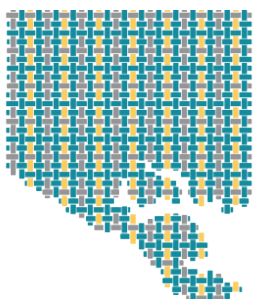
## THREADS

To provide students and volunteers with additional support, and facilitate meaningful relationships across the community, eight Thread Families are woven together into an extended family called a *thread*. *Threads*, which are managed by an experienced volunteer GrandParent (GP) who mentors the Heads of Family (HOFs), facilitate peer-to-peer support among students and volunteer and the sharing of resources.



## COLLABORATORS

Thread collaborators provide pro bono resources and expertise to young people, volunteers, and the organization. Thread collaborators come from Baltimore's civic, corporate, non-profit, religious, and neighborhood groups and help remove barriers for young people and their families by providing legal, health, and housing support, in-kind donations, employment opportunities, and other vital resources.

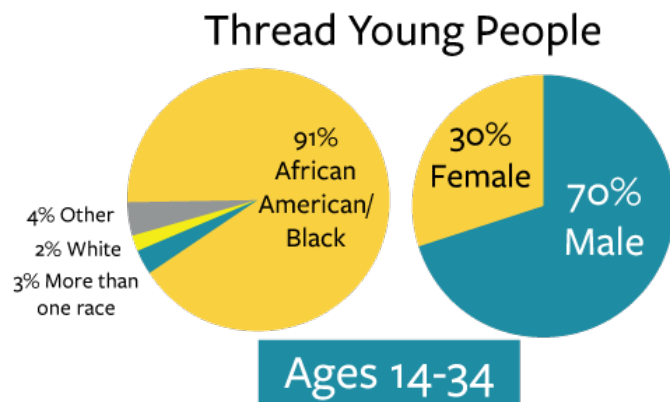


## COMMUNITY

Now imagine all of the strands woven together to form a new social fabric. That's Thread!

## OUR YOUNG PEOPLE AND VOLUNTEERS

Thread currently engages 719 students and alumni within a community of more than 3,000 volunteers and collaborators. Students are enrolled from one of six City Schools high schools: Paul Laurence Dunbar High School, The Academy for College and Career Exploration, Frederick Douglass High School, Digital Harbor High School, Patterson High School, and Mergenthaler Vocational-Technical High School (Mervo). However, Thread does not unenroll students who transfer to another City Schools high school or out of the district. For this reason, Thread students are currently enrolled at 28 high schools and live in every quadrant of Baltimore City.



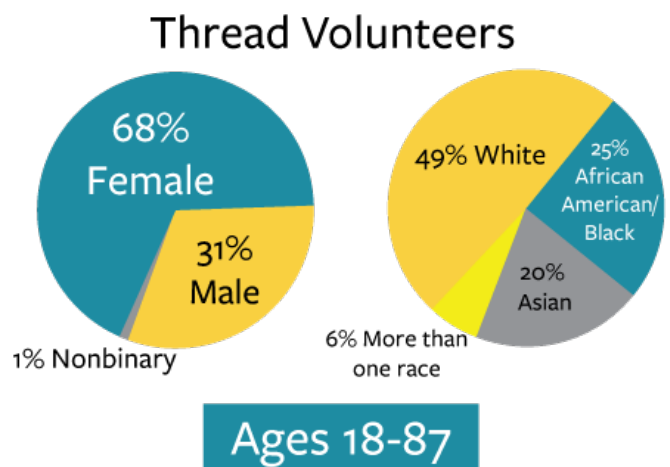
**Our students are capable, extraordinary people who are disproportionately affected by structural barriers outside of school**, such as housing and food insecurity, inadequate access to transportation and healthcare, and/or inconsistent employment for family members. These barriers make it challenging for young people to focus on academic success and achieve the milestones necessary to build the lives they want for themselves.

Thread is uniquely positioned to provide support for the lowest performing students at the lowest performing schools because the Thread Community

Model and Thread Engagement Process equip volunteers with the skills and practice necessary to form long-term, trusting relationships with young people. While other academic support or mentoring programs shy away from first-year high school students with an average GPA below 1.0, Thread knows this cohort has great potential and is where we have the most significant impact.

Critical to Thread's success is a diverse cross-section of volunteers who, together with our young people, represent a multi-cultural, multi-identity community. Volunteers are recruited from partner institutions, such as universities, corporations, and community-based organizations, as well as through general community outreach. Partnerships are formed based on the size of the potential volunteer pool, the diversity of the pool, the geographic proximity to current and potential Thread high school sites, and strategic alignment with Thread's mission and vision.

**Thread volunteers are committed to Baltimore and our young people, who they recognize as the city's emerging leaders.** They see what our young people have to offer and are willing to walk alongside them on a journey of growth. Most importantly, they realize that they, too, have a lot to learn and gain from building relationships with young people who have very different lived experiences.





When Thread matches incoming ninth graders with their Thread Family Members, the responsibility to connect and build trusting relationships initially falls to the volunteers. As people with more societal power and privilege, they need to demonstrate sincerity, competence and reliability. If a volunteer says they will drive a young person to school, they need to show up and do it. Not only does this build trust, but it also removes a significant barrier in the young person's life. At this point, the volunteers act as an "engine" in the young person's life that helps to propel them forward, while also acting as a "safety net" to support them when they face extraordinary obstacles. Thread's support is high-intensity, with each volunteer engaging with their student at least once each week. During this initial period, the volunteer-student ratio is at its highest, up to 4:1 for each student.

As our young people reach years five to eight, Thread Family Members continue to serve as a safety net, providing additional support as young people set individual goals and work towards attainment, but the young person is more proactive in operating as their own engine and demonstrating self-motivation in many decisions. Young people are also beginning to realize that their volunteers are on their own journeys of goal setting and barrier removal. As a result, their relationships start becoming more bi-directional and they begin to serve as an engine for them as well.

In years nine and ten, Thread Family Members and their young people are allies. The young people and volunteers now have access to a more diverse network and can act as their own engine and safety net. By this stage, young people have developed the skills necessary to pursue their goals and have incorporated the resources accessed via Thread into their personal networks. They use their expanded networks to find jobs, develop careers, and support themselves and their Thread Family Members as they do the same. Most young people will have a single Thread Family Member during their final years in Thread.

		Type of Thread Support	Thread	Student	# of Volunteers/Students
Community Model	Years 1-4	High intensity	Engine + Safety Net	Participant	4:1
	Years 5-8	Moderate intensity	Safety Net	Engine	2:1
	Years 8-10	Light intensity	Ally	Engine + Safety Net	1:1
Alumni	Year 12 (i.e. 2 years post formal enrollment)	Alumni access Thread community and network resources but no longer receive formal Thread Family support.			

## THREAD'S UNIQUE CAPABILITY

Through 19 years of experience, Thread has shown how building relationships across lines of difference, in a way that makes each individual feel seen, known, loved and profoundly aware of our interconnectedness, can lead to strong educational outcomes. Yet our young people continue to live in a society that implicitly and explicitly tells them they don't belong and reinforces structural barriers in education, healthcare, criminal justice and economic systems. We also understand that our young people need more than high school and post-high school completion to build the lives they see for themselves. They need their families, schools, workplaces, neighborhoods, and communities to truly value them.

**The Social-Ecological Model is a framework that helps us to understand the intricate layers of influence that exist within society and how people and the environment act reciprocally within a social system.**

To drive this broader climate and culture shift in Baltimore, change must occur at multiple societal levels. Bronfenbrenner's social-ecological model<sup>3</sup> provides evidence that **just outcomes require sustained shifts across five domains: the intrapersonal, interpersonal, institutional, community, and policy**. While most movements have historically focused on the latter three domains, it is individuals who control institutions, make up communities, and write policies. Thread's **unique capability** is training, coaching and modeling how to better understand one's own attitudes, knowledge and behaviors in the intrapersonal domain while also developing the skills to bridge and bond across lines of difference in the interpersonal domain.

**“Anyone who is involved with Thread is going to learn a lot about themselves.”**

- Susan, Thread Volunteer



3 Adapted from: Bronfenbrenner, U. (1977). Toward an experimental ecology of human development. American Psychologist, 32(7), 513-531.



# OUR HOW

## The Thread Engagement Process

Thread guides young people and volunteers on a journey of personal growth by leveraging the Thread Engagement Process: connect, set bi-directional goals, identify and remove barriers, and achieve goals. Importantly, the strength of the relationship is determined by both the quantity and quality of connection. It is about *showing up and how you show up*.



The first step of the Thread Engagement Process facilitates connection and provides an opportunity for volunteers to demonstrate their reliability, sincerity and competence to a young person. As trust builds, relationships move into a phase of bi-directional goal setting, identifying barriers, working through barriers and achieving goals, each of which strengthens the relationship further.

For example, a young person might have a goal to complete their federal student aid application and a volunteer who is a university student might have a goal to complete an engineering design lab project. The barrier for the young person might be access to a computer. The barrier for the volunteer might be maintaining focus. The solution for removing both barriers might be the young person working on their application in the design lab where there is access to computers, while the volunteer works on their project alongside the student who is holding them accountable. Both are able to attain their goal in a way that engenders self-confidence and builds a healthy interdependence.

## Thread's Core Competencies

Our behavioral norms for engaging one another, Thread's core competencies©, have been defined and refined by our young people, volunteers, collaborators and staff over nearly two decades. They provide a framework within which community members can support one another respectfully and deliberately.

Show All The Way Up	Fail Forward	Treat Relationships as Wealth	Learn from All Voices
<i>Be physically and authentically present</i>	<i>Be willing to engage in an iterative change process, appreciating the small wins that occur on the journey</i>	<i>Recognize the inherent value of ALL people, we all bring something to the table</i>	<i>Start with the assumption that people have the best intentions</i>
<i>Recognize your own inherent value</i>	<i>Give and receive constructive feedback (telling the truth with kindness; call a thing a thing)</i>	<i>Understand that your ability to thrive is bound up in others' ability to thrive</i>	<i>Make the table accessible</i>
<i>Understand, embody, and communicate that you understand you have room for growth</i>	<i>Utilize feedback to grow</i>	<i>Meet ALL people where they are</i>	<i>Actively listen to all voices while letting your voice be heard</i>
<i>Challenge yourself and push through discomfort to connect deeply with others</i>	<i>Share with others how you are changing and how you have changed</i>	<i>Intentionally build relationships across lines of difference</i>	<i>Identify the value added by yourself and others, looking for unique capabilities</i>

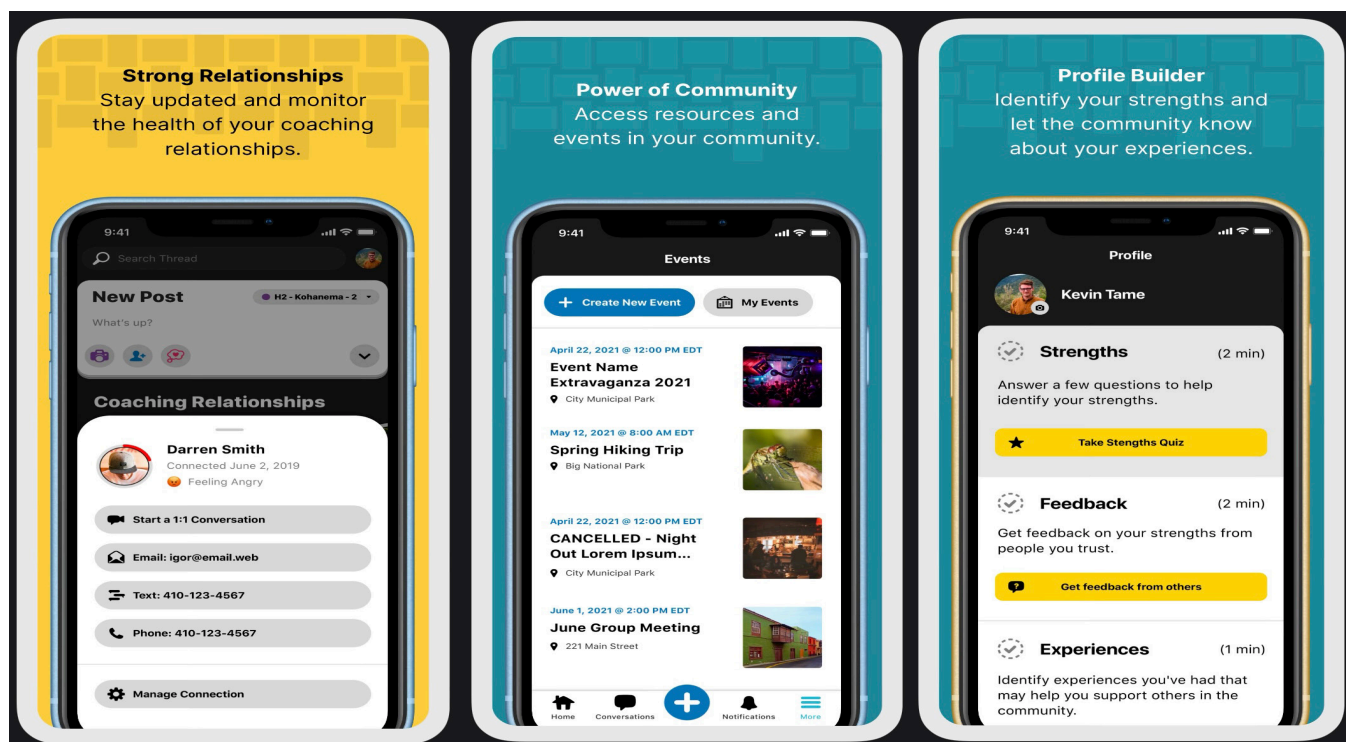
# QUANTITY OF CONNECTION

## The Thread App

Almost two decades of Thread data show that touchpoints – contact between a young person and their volunteer – are the strongest predictor of success in school and in life. Significant data from the Elements of Effective Practice (National Mentoring Standards) and the Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning (CASEL) framework support this premise that consistent connection with a caring adult is key for a young person to excel. Harvard economist Raj Chetty’s research concludes that, “Growing up in a community connected across class lines improves kids’ outcomes and gives them a better shot at rising out of poverty.”<sup>4</sup>

Thread uses a data-driven practice to drive day-to-day community connection, goal setting and barrier identification and removal, as well as track continuous improvement of student outcomes. In Thread, touchpoints represent any points of contact or interactions between people, including calls, meals, or academic tutoring sessions. Consistent touchpoints demonstrate the strength of our community’s relationships, and the development of a diverse network of social capital.

Thread’s mobile app is a user-friendly, front-end platform for capturing touchpoints between Thread community members in our customer relationship management system, allowing us to perform real-time analysis of connections between touchpoints and key outcomes. Over time, this analysis has allowed Thread to more precisely evaluate how the quality and quantity of different interactions drive community achievement and growth. Additionally, the app now not only automates much of the process of capturing touchpoints in real time, but also supports the strengthening of relationships through guided activities that follow the Thread Engagement Process.



4 Leonhardt, D. (2022). “A large new study offers clues about how lower-income children can rise up the economic ladder”, The New York Times.



# QUALITY OF CONNECTION

## The Thread Curriculum

Consistent connection is only as meaningful as the quality of the interactions themselves. Thread has used our findings about what creates lasting relationships across lines of difference to develop a curriculum that drives replicable and repeatable behaviors. This curriculum content ensures a true focus on intentional learning experiences that both move people through intra- and interpersonal development as they progress through the stages of the Thread Engagement Process.

Curriculum modules were created based on two decades of facilitating relationships across lines of difference and the repurposing of highly regarded, existing scientific tools and frameworks. Each can be experienced as part of a training workshop or individual shared experiences depending on the learner's unique needs. This structure allows the content to be tailored to nearly any context, inside and outside of the Thread community.

For example, if a member of our community is wanting to initiate connection, our Privilege of Relationships© module can help them understand how their own bias, knowledge, attitudes and beliefs in the intrapersonal domain might impact their ability to successfully connect. Questions to Open Up can then help them develop an authentic bond across a line of difference. Similarly, if someone is struggling to work through barriers, our Overcoming Barriers module can be used to help them cultivate a healthy interdependent approach to problem solving.



## VISION FOR GROWTH

Thread's highest priority has been and always will be supporting our young people and the volunteers who support them. To do so, we have implemented the Thread Engagement Process to connect thousands of individuals across lines of race, age, class, religion, and ZIP code and provided them with training, coaching and modeling of how to Show All the Way Up, Treat Relationships As Wealth, Fail Forward and Learn From All Voices. As a result, we have laid a foundation for more comprehensive change.

We seek to harness the power of relationships to transform lives, neighborhoods, and Baltimore City, ultimately connecting thousands of individuals - students, alumni, volunteers, collaborators, and their families, who include community, corporate and institutional influencers and policymakers. Together these individuals represent the early adopters of a movement that will weave a social fabric integrated not by laws, but by mutual care and sincere investment in one another's lives. We believe that growing a movement of community members who have done the intrapersonal and interpersonal work to see the inherent value in themselves and others will begin to impact the way they engage in and with their institutions and communities and shape the evolution of policy - creating an intentional and sustained ripple effect that erodes systemic inequities.

Over the next three years, Thread plans to continue to expand our work with young people in Baltimore, as well as deepen our impact to drive a broader culture and climate shift.

**“Imagine what opportunity would look like if we all felt seen, heard and loved. I don’t have to imagine because I know: we would change the world.”**

- Kendall Jamison,  
Thread Alumnus & Staff  
Member



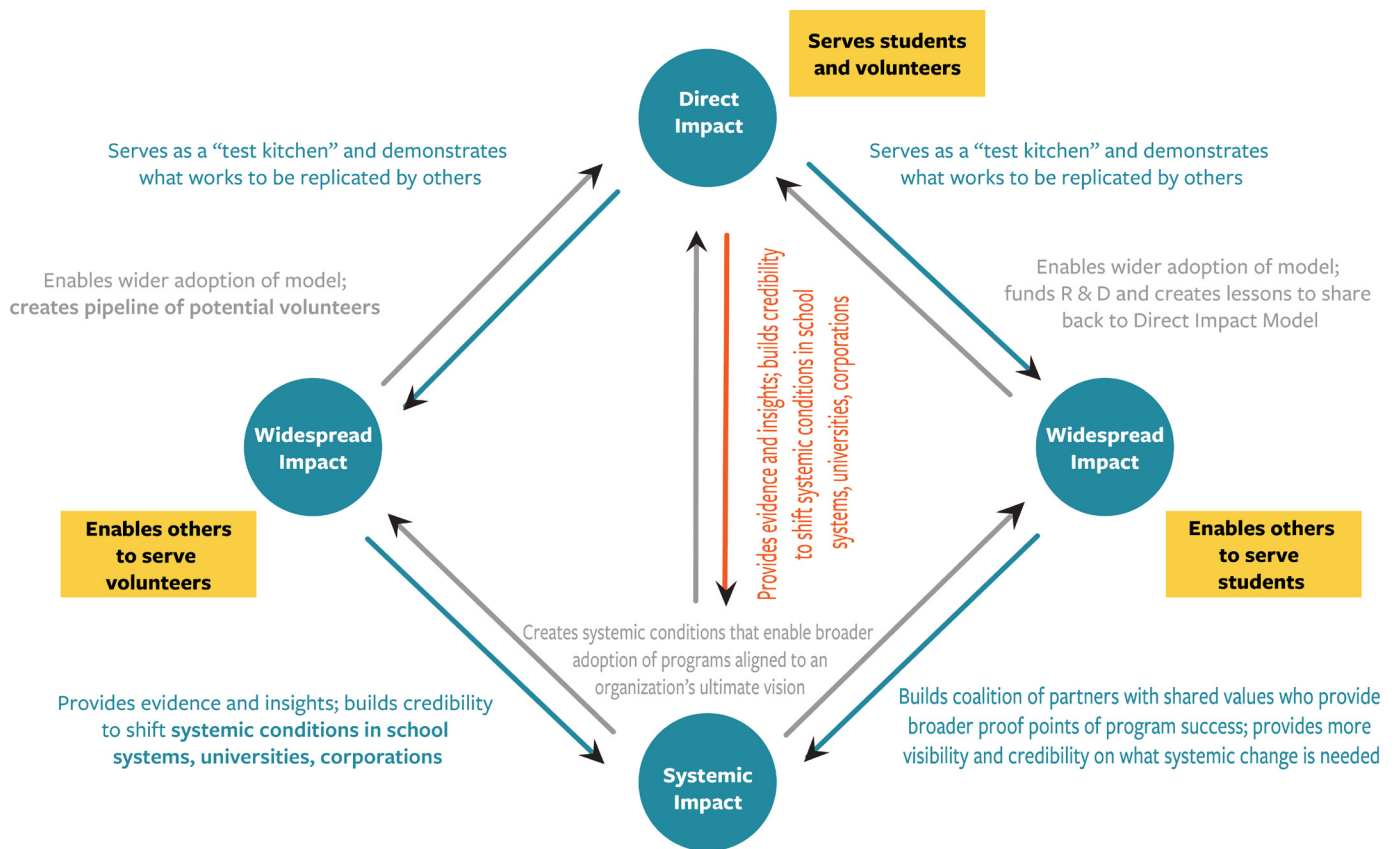


# GROWTH PLAN

In planning our growth for FY23-25, we used Bellwether Education Partners' Pragmatic Playbook for Impact<sup>5</sup> as a guide to explore three impact strategies:

- **Direct Impact:** How an organization provides programming directly to its target beneficiaries.
- **Widespread Impact:** How an organization builds the capacity of partner organizations to replicate elements of its program model.
- **Systemic Impact:** How an organization shifts mindsets, relationships, and power to, in turn, shift the policies, practices, and resource flows that create stronger conditions for adoption of an organization's values, program model, and its ultimate vision for change.

## THREAD PRAGMATIC PLAYBOOK FOR IMPACT





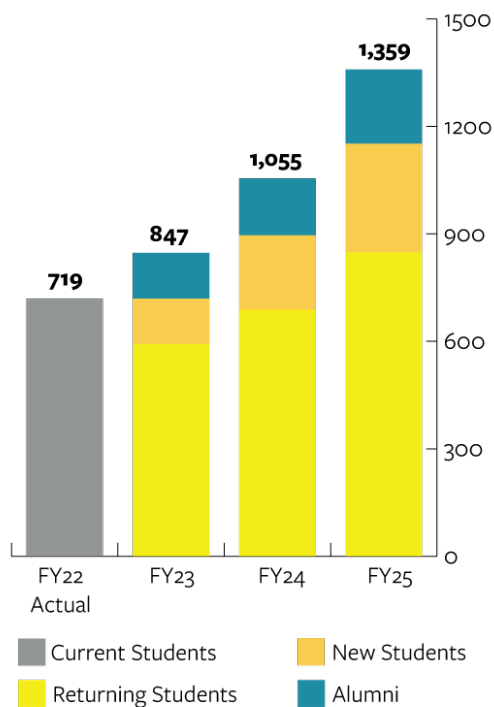
## DIRECT IMPACT

Thread successfully enrolled a record number of students, ~3% of the City Schools freshman class, in the early weeks of the pandemic. However, subsequent school closures, shelter in place mandates, and other COVID-19 restrictions meant we were unable to accurately determine which students were performing in the bottom quartile. As a result, for the first time in more than a decade Thread did not enroll a new cohort of students in 2021. With a loosening of restrictions and a return to “normal,” Thread was thrilled to welcome cohorts of young people across three school sites in 2022.



Thread plans to support our currently enrolled young people by continuing to provide individualized and programmed support, as well as expand our direct impact by developing additional connections with 640 newly-enrolled ninth graders over a three-year period. With continued partnership, Thread will work to ensure that first-year high school students who rank academically in the bottom 25% of their class get back on track to graduate. Early credit achievements enhance a students’ self-efficacy and maximize the likelihood they will stay on track and accomplish future goals. With the right balance of volunteers, staff and revenue, planned enrollment would progress along the following sequence:

### Student Growth (Projected)



- During the 2022-2023 academic year, enroll 128 new 9th grade students from our six partner high schools across the city: Dunbar, ACCE, Frederick Douglass, Digital Harbor, Mervo, and Patterson.
- During the 2023-2024 academic year, enroll 208 new 9th grade students from our six partner high schools across the city.
- During the 2024-2025 academic year, enroll 304 new 9th grade students from our six partner high schools across the city.

Planned enrollment by academic year in total new enrollees and percentage of 9th grade student population in City Schools:

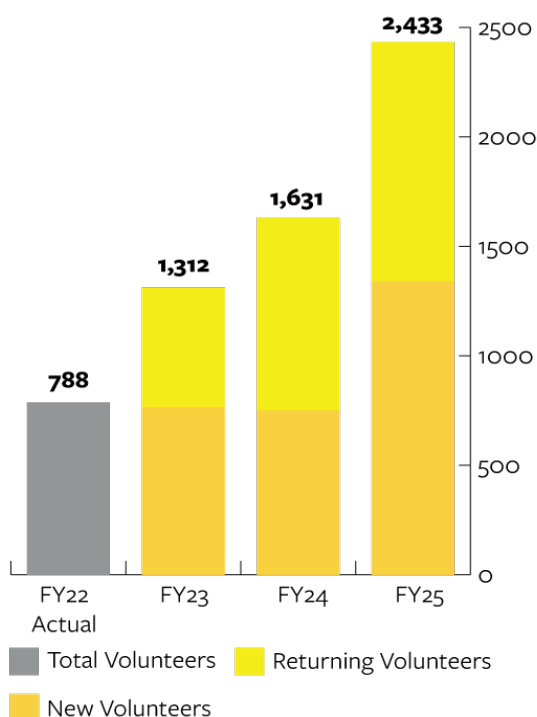
- **2022-2023: 128/~3%**
- **2023-2024: 208/~5%**
- **2024-2025: 304/~7%**

In order to achieve our ambitious growth plan to enroll 304 students annually, Thread's Direct Impact strategy does not focus solely on the journey of our young people. Our ability to scale in Baltimore and beyond, while protecting our mission and still obtaining exemplary outcomes, relies heavily on also envisioning volunteers as targeted beneficiaries of a Direct Impact strategy. Most education and mentoring organizations only see themselves as in service to students. Thread supports volunteers with a detailed journey map that allows them to bridge and bond across lines of difference, growing and thriving side-by-side with our young people.

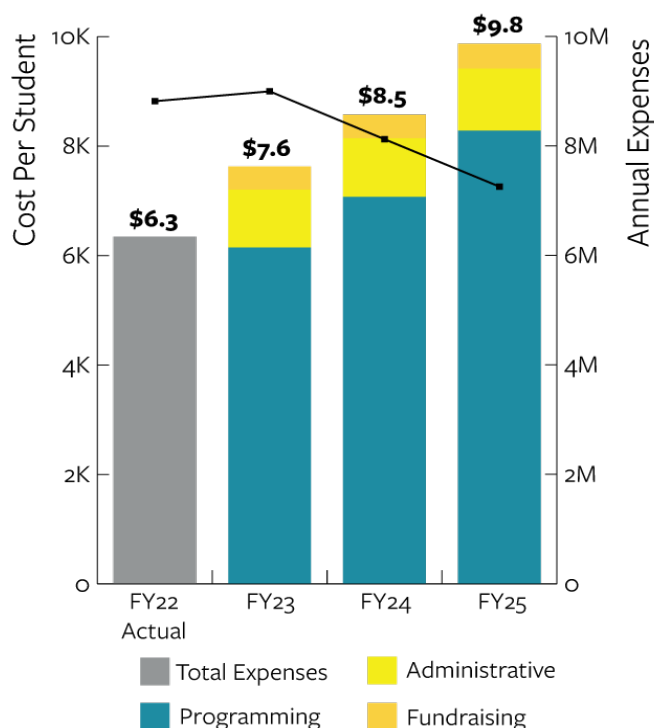
A critical factor in expanding direct services is our ability to recruit a sufficient number of volunteers. COVID-19 and our nation's racial reckoning created opportunities for us to pilot new ways of leveraging Thread's curriculum for volunteer recruitment, as many institutional leaders expressed to us that they felt ill-equipped to engage their constituents. These feelings of uncertainty have led to a material increase in requests from universities, corporations, houses of faith, and community-based organizations interested in leveraging Thread's curriculum to strengthen the relationships in their communities and progress on their diversity, equity and inclusion journey. To date, Thread has deployed its tools with partner organizations including Baltimore City YouthWorks, the Johns Hopkins University, Loyola University Maryland, Stanford University, and Legg Mason (prior to its acquisition).

We now understand that using our curriculum to educate and motivate adults, as well as the institutions with which they are associated, is essential to growing our volunteer base. Strengthening that base is a precondition for reaching scale and requires training adults on how to bridge, bond and grow so they can, in turn, do the same for our young people. In addition, we are creating conditions for our young people to be successful by engaging a broader population which sees their value and the inextricable link between one another.

### Volunteer Growth (Projected)



### Annual Expenses (Projected)



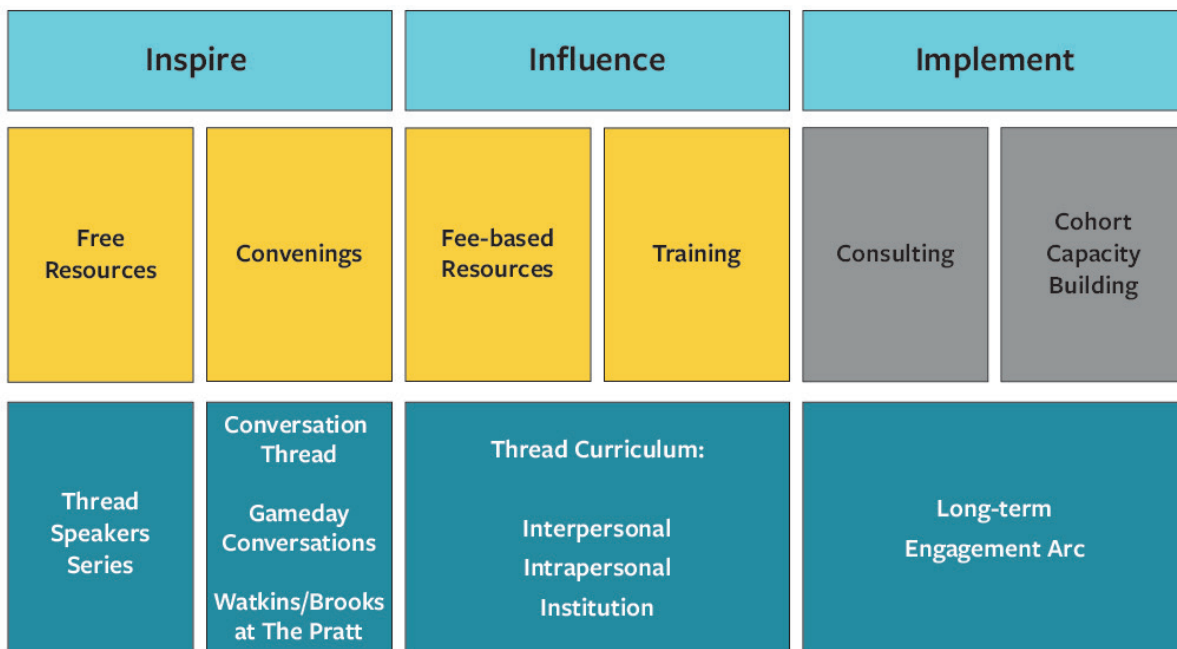
## WIDESPREAD IMPACT

Social isolation and diversity, equity and inclusion are now at the forefront of conversations within leading institutions across the country. Many organizational leaders are not yet able to begin and advance these discussions on their own in a thoughtful and instructive way. Thread has spent almost two decades learning how to bring people together and show them how to understand oneself and others in order to build meaningful connections. As a result, the demand for Thread to build the capacity of other institutions, leveraging our training, modeling and coaching, has never been greater.

We are pursuing multiple Widespread Impact models in order to go broader and deeper within communities and enhance our volunteer recruitment efforts. As we more aggressively pursue complementary Widespread Impact strategies, Thread has the ability to affect hundreds of thousands of people in Baltimore and across the country.

As an organic part of our methods for knitting together community, Thread has adopted a variety of Widespread Impact strategies that Bellwether defines as:

1. **Inspire:** inspiring partner organizations to rethink what is possible;
2. **Influence:** influencing change in programming; and
3. **Implement:** implementing long-term commitments for transformation.



As we broaden the breadth and depth of our interactions, we are keenly aware that each of these strategies serves as a vehicle for volunteer recruitment that would propel Direct Service expansion. In FY23-25, we will build on past successful initiatives with a more explicit focus on building our volunteer numbers.

The **Thread Speaker Series** and large scale convenings such as **An Evening with D. Watkins and David Brooks**, Gameday Conversations and Conversation Thread brought together thousands of community members



around a common purpose of connecting across lines of difference. **Participants were inspired by Thread to imagine a more equitable Baltimore while confronting personal and systemic bias.** These types of engagements, which provide community members and organizations free access to Thread's curricular content, allow us to broaden our reach and shift the perceptions of more people and partner institutions.

For deeper adoption of Thread's relationship-building constructs and values, we have been teaching one-time and semester-long courses at colleges such as **Stanford University** and Loyola University Maryland. By providing these ongoing fee-for-service resources and learning opportunities, **Thread is influencing the overall narrative within divisions of prominent institutions** and creating unique volunteer recruitment opportunities with highly engaged and informed individuals.



The **Johns Hopkins University** has furthered its commitment to transformational change by seeking Thread's consultation on how to create an arc of targeted initiatives which includes diversifying the student body and faculty, ongoing coaching for faculty and staff, and executing a dinner series, **Thread is implementing a high-level strategy throughout departments at Hopkins that trains students, faculty and administrators** on how to build relationships across lines of difference. This long term investment by both organizations amplifies what is needed in communities to bring about widespread change.



**"I feel like this series really opened my eyes to the importance of acknowledging others during interpersonal conversation."**

- Loyola University Maryland  
Messina Participant

As we look towards the future, expansion is a natural and necessary progression to optimize our impact. It has become overwhelmingly clear that there is a market for our direct services, as well as our app and stand-alone curricular content. As these tools are being deployed to reach scale in Baltimore, we believe our engagement tools can be used to seed multiple growth strategies in additional cities.

For some programs, Widespread Impact demands a tradeoff between fidelity to the model and greater impact. Often organizations need to make a choice between increasing the breadth of outreach or maintaining the depth of impact. Thread is well positioned to avoid this due to the reciprocal nature of volunteer recruitment which increases capacity for new student enrollment and, in turn, the impact for both audiences.

Furthermore, our work in Baltimore can serve as a test kitchen for other cities, providing evidence and insights for expansion and demonstrating credibility of our Direct Service and Widespread Impact strategies.

In an effort to create just outcomes, Thread is exploring the benefits and challenges of expanding our impact strategies to include:

- Deploy a train-the-trainer, fee-for-service model of the Thread Community Model, curriculum and accompanying technical service to solidify relationships across lines of difference in high schools, Thread-like non-profits, and anchor institutions.
- Expanding the reach of Thread's app to include members of additional communities who can use it as a tool for ongoing training, coaching and modeling of the Thread Engagement Process.
- Designing a centralized location - think "Thread Institute" - where institutional decision-makers, community leaders and policymakers can come to learn best practices for building relationships across lines of difference.



To date, Thread's app and curriculum have been used primarily to scale Direct Impact within the Thread community among students and current and potential volunteers. Deployment of Thread's engagement tools to new and unique audiences will also lead to further refinement of our app and curriculum to meet the learning needs of broader populations. This process will assist in developing even more powerful content and generate additional demand for more in-depth partnerships. Most importantly, a diversification of our network through Widespread Impact can seed potential high school student, volunteer and collaborator bases in new cities that could also scale Direct Service Impact in those cities.

## SYSTEMIC IMPACT

Thread's mission is to weave a new social fabric that will end social isolation and build a more equitable culture in which everyone thrives. Regrettably, systems within Baltimore and beyond were created to marginalize Black and Brown communities and keep them separate from white power structures. This deliberate othering has exacerbated disconnectedness across communities and social isolation within all communities. By building intentional relationships across lines of difference, Thread believes we can break down the structural barriers that exist and build a society that recognizes the intrinsic value of each human being. This will require deep reflection, as well as a shift in knowledge, attitudes, beliefs and mindsets within all layers of communities. It will also necessitate skill building to learn how to connect as individuals and apply these learnings to institutional and community decisions and policy.

In line with Bellwether's playbook, Thread has many of the assets required to drive systemic change and will begin looking at how to leverage them responsibly beyond Baltimore. These include:

- **Research:** begun in FY22, participation in a ten year, seven stage randomized control trial through the Wilson Sheehan Lab for Economic Opportunities (LEO) at the University of Notre Dame; 18 years of qualitative and quantitative data supporting the efficacy of the Thread Community Model.
- **Active Engagement with Policymakers:** a proven history of building long-standing partnerships with City Schools and individual school administrators; extensive board and civic governance by Thread community members; national thought-leadership.
- **Movement Building:** broad-reaching community partnerships with anchor institutions, including corporate and university-based resource hubs.
- **Participation in Coalitions:** a founding partner of TouchPoint Baltimore, an innovative community collaboration center that uses social capital to develop meaningful personal connections across lines of difference throughout the city.
- **Media Engagement:** a national platform for sharing our work through social and traditional media, including the *New York Times*, *Forbes*, *Redbook*, *Chronicle of Philanthropy*, *Baltimore Sun* and speeches at the White House, Aspen Ideas Festival, and the Smithsonian.

## IN CONCLUSION

Thread believes that with equitable investment in our Direct Impact strategies for students and volunteers, as well as an attentiveness to leveraging our proprietary tools to grow our Widespread Impact strategies for students and volunteers, we can continue to transform Baltimore and other communities into ones in which everyone thrives. While COVID-19 necessitated a pause in enrollment of students and a slow down in recruitment of volunteers, it also provided time for Thread to leverage our tools, the app and curriculum, to ensure our community stayed connected and reached more students and volunteers. Ever committed to exceptional outcomes for our young people as we scale to enroll 60% of the highest needs students in the highest needs schools annually, we hope you will join us on this audacious journey.



