



# A Path Forward FY26





# Overview

In 1910, the Baltimore City Council passed Ordinance 610—the West Plan—which segregated the city block-by-block. Though ruled unconstitutional by the Supreme Court just seven years later, the ordinance laid the groundwork for decades of housing discrimination in Baltimore. Banks, landlords, and realtors picked up where the city government left off, drawing firm lines between Black and white Baltimore, which remain relatively intact today.

In 2004, Thread was founded and began to bridge some of those divides by simply building unconventional relationships. Over the past two decades, we have learned that radical human connection can drive academic success, transform lives, and unite a community regardless of where you live or the color of your skin.

This document outlines a bold vision for Thread. By building lasting relationships between underperforming high school students and a diverse network of volunteers and collaborators, we are striving to create a deeply united city where even

our most marginalized neighbors have the social connections needed to sustain them as they build a pathway to economic mobility.

Our strategic priorities for the coming years include maximizing the effectiveness and reach of our direct impact model while also affirming Thread as a thought leader and influencer in the national conversation on social capital and economic mobility. We will continue to build on our proven success, leveraging new strategies such as the Community Engagement Specialist (CES) model, to facilitate stronger student-volunteer relationships and a place-based approach to volunteer engagement that creates a more connected and resilient community. By doing so, we aim to systematically enhance our programming, strengthen outcomes, and ultimately, create a more equitable Baltimore where all young people can reach their full potential.

# Our Mission, Vision, and Model

## Mission:

Thread harnesses the power of relationships to create a new social fabric of diverse individuals deeply engaged with young people facing the most significant opportunity and achievement gaps. Our community is committed to ending social isolation and building a more equitable culture in which everyone thrives.

## Vision:

Thread's North Star has always been our young people. The goal is for them to possess the skills and connections needed to succeed in a world that realizes their worth and values their contributions. By building relationships across lines of difference, Thread is weaving a new social fabric that can support this objective. The intimate networks that form inside of Thread Families, the larger webs that exist within Thread's site schools, and the broader circle of support that includes the entire Thread community, all offer young people and their volunteers the opportunity to build the cross-class friendships (economic connectedness) that lead to economic mobility.

A growing body of evidence has reinforced Thread's understanding that communities thrive when there are mechanisms in place that support the creation of social capital. This requires the opportunity for people to **bond** with others—strengthening connections with individuals who share similar characteristics - while also making space for community members to **bridge**—strengthening connections with people from different backgrounds. James Coleman's, Robert Putnam's, and most recently Raj Chetty's work with Opportunity Insights points to economic connectedness, the degree of connectedness between high-income and low-income individuals, as a key determinant of breaking the cycle of poverty.



## Community Model:

Thread's Community Model has always supported bonding and bridging across various lines of difference, including socio-economic. Ultimately, Thread is developing a deeply connected network that will create opportunities for Baltimore's most marginalized young people to reach their full potential and thrive.

Thread enrolls ninth graders who are the lowest performing students at seven of the lowest performing high schools in Baltimore City Public Schools (City Schools). Through our 10-year commitment, Thread young people work to graduate high school, define a post-high school pathway, and become employed or enrolled in a post-high school pathway that allows them to demonstrate self-efficacy and attain their goals throughout life.

Through the Thread Community Model, each Thread student is matched with up to four caring adult volunteers 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 bond and bridge 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.

### The Thread Engagement Process



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



## STUDENTS

At the core is a single strand, a vibrant 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.



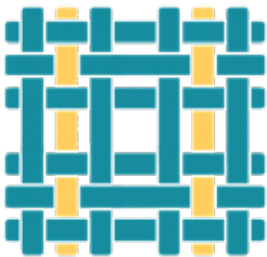
## FAMILIES

This core strand is woven together with up to four volunteer strands—their Thread Family. Thread Family Members are a diverse group of adults who are committed to supporting young people as they set goals and work through barriers. They become 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 even greater support and facilitate meaningful relationships across our community, eight individual Thread Families are woven together into an extended family of support called *threads*. *Threads* facilitate peer-to-peer support among students and volunteers and are managed by an experienced volunteer GrandParent (GP) who guides the Heads of Family (HOFs) and facilitates the sharing of resources and practices among Thread Families.



## 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 communities 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 the Thread community.

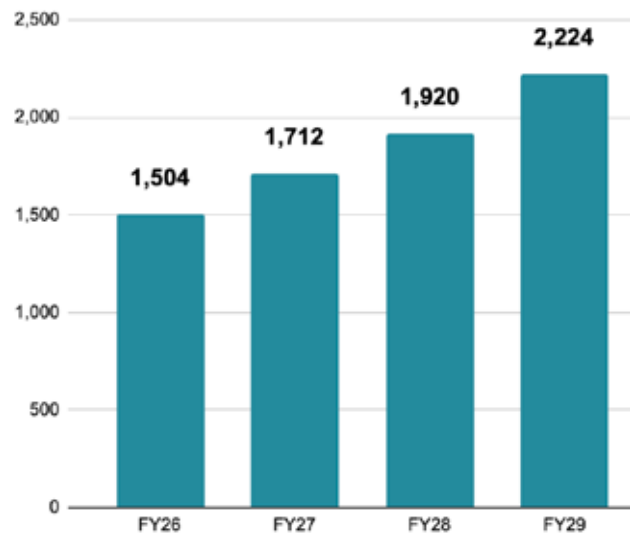


# The Thread Community

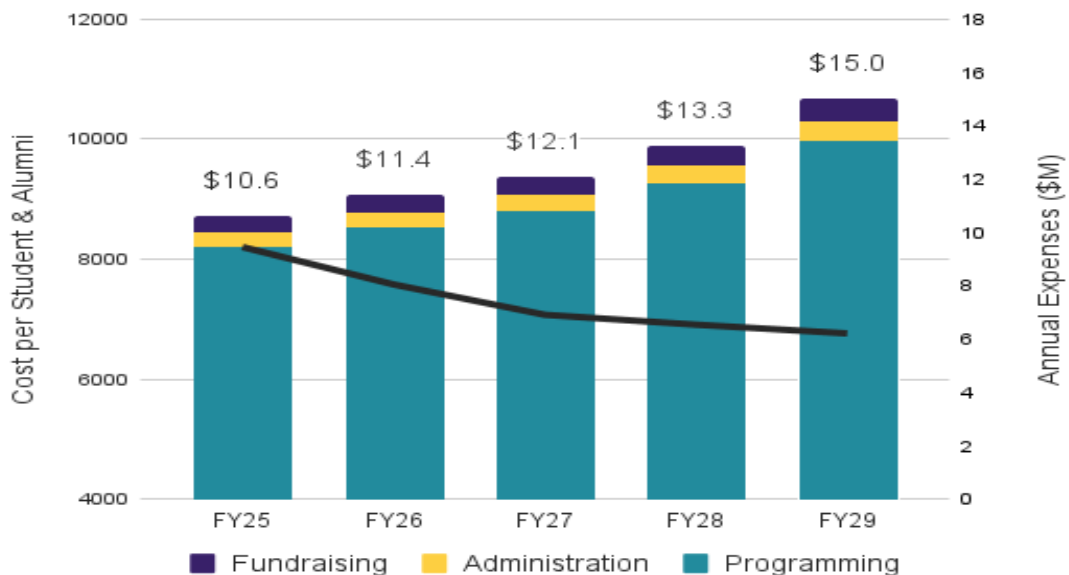
The heart of Thread’s community is our almost 1,300 students and alumni. Thread enrolls the lowest academically performing students from seven City Schools: Academy for College and Career Exploration (ACCE), Carver Vocational-Technical High School, Digital Harbor High School, Frederick Douglass High School, Mergenthaler Vocational-Technical High School (Mervo), Patterson High School, and Paul Laurence Dunbar High School.

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. The Thread Family works together to support one another on their personal journeys of growth and change. If you would do something for your own child, niece, cousin, parent, or neighbor, the Thread Family does it for one another.

**Student and Alumni Growth (Projected)**



**Annual Expenses and Cost Per Student (Projected)**



# Proven Impact and Key Achievements

For the past 22 years, Thread has made an unwavering commitment to the **most** underperforming high school students in City Schools. Thread enrolls students based on academic performance in their ninth grade year, makes a 10-year commitment to them, and **never** unenrolls a young person.

In 2015, data from City Schools confirmed that academic performance in the ninth grade year is a strong predictor of on-time high school completion. In Baltimore City, only 6% of students with GPAs of less than 1.0 during their ninth grade year completed high school in four years. At that time, with young people enrolled at Dunbar and ACCE, 65% of Thread students with GPAs of less than 1.0 during their 9th grade year completed high school in four years<sup>1</sup>—ten times more than their peers. For students with GPAs of greater than 2.0 during their ninth grade year, enrollment in Thread translated to 100% high school completion for our students compared to 93% for their peers. While an impressive accomplishment, the difference between these two groups was not as pronounced as that found with lower performing students.

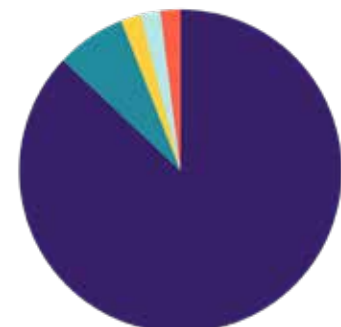
Based on these findings, Thread made a strategic decision to **optimize impact** and support those students who could benefit the most from our unique model and long-term commitment. Beginning in 2016, we directed organizational expansion to even lower performing high schools where the lowest performing students were more likely to have 9th grade GPAs of less than 1.0. In that moment, we intentionally committed to an approach that would result in the decline of our overall graduation rate. As a result, the pre-COVID average incoming GPA of newly enrolled Thread students decreased from 0.98 to 0.86 and Thread's 4-, 5- and 6-year high school completion rates dropped, respectively, from 76%, 84%, and 85% (87% all time) to 63%, 65%, and 68% (71% all time) respectively. This performance aligned with our projections as we explored enrolling even lower performing students at even lower performing schools such as Frederick Douglass High School.

## Student and Volunteer Self-Reported Demographics

### Volunteers

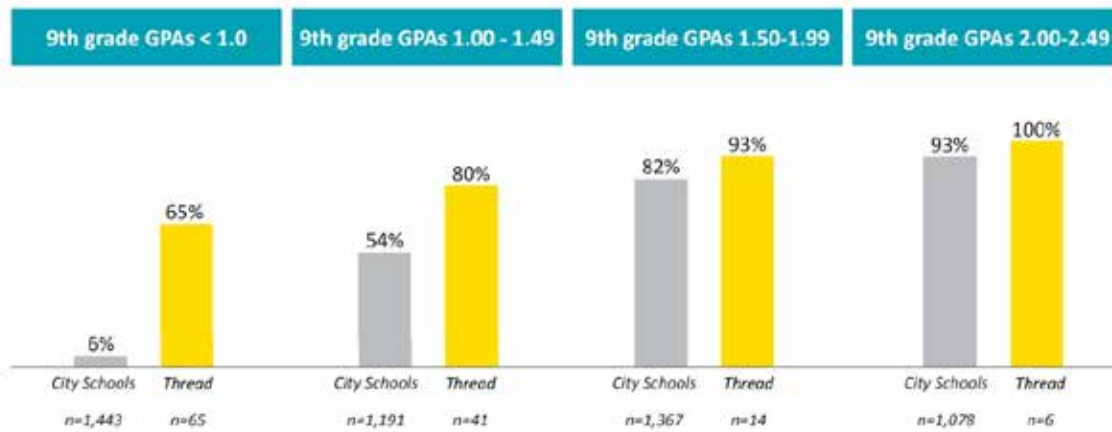


### Young People



<sup>1</sup> Thread data as of 3/31/17. Predicting High School Outcomes in the Baltimore City Public Schools (2012, the Council of Great City Schools).

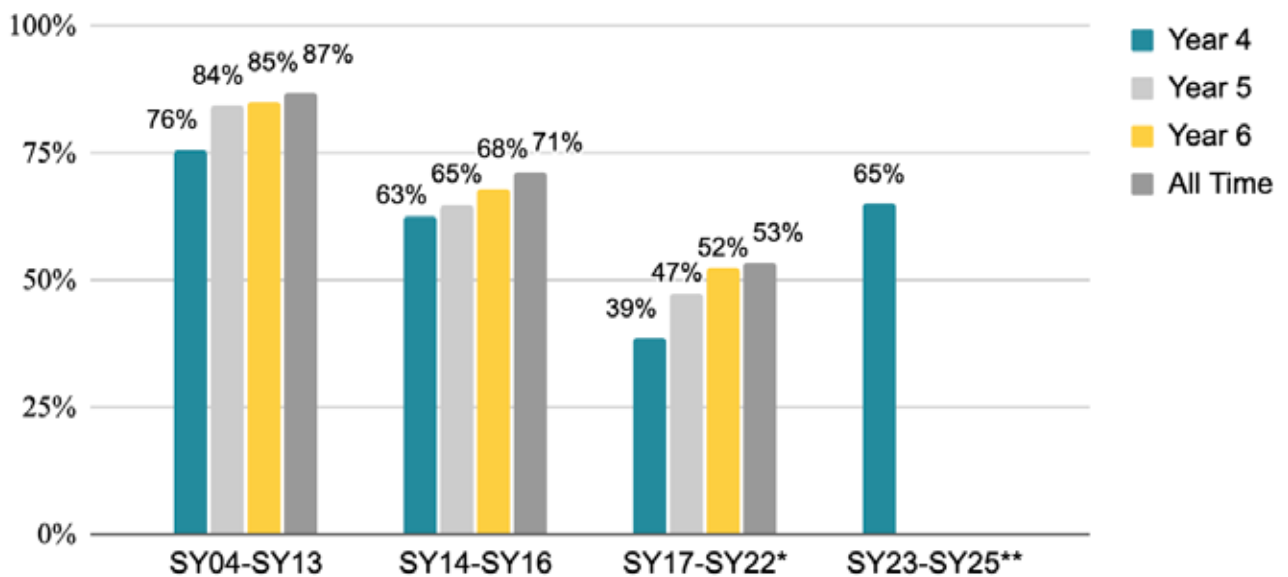
## Graduation Outcomes by GPA



Sources: Thread data as of 3/31/17. Predicting High School Outcomes in the Baltimore City Public Schools (2012, the Council of Great City Schools).

Five years later, the COVID-19 pandemic had an outsized impact on young people facing structural barriers. Thread students spent a significant amount of time overcoming increased food insecurity, housing instability, inconsistent public transportation, household unemployment, and virtual learning. At the time, Thread had grown to serve six high schools<sup>2</sup>, and the average incoming GPA dropped to 0.70, while the 4-, 5- and 6-year high school completion rates were 39%, 47%, and 52% (53% all time). Even with the impact of a global pandemic and unprecedented barriers, Thread young people still graduated from high school at a rate five times that of their pre-COVID peers.

## Thread High School Completion Rates



\*Recent school year data to still be verified by BCPSS

\*\*Projection based on credit completion of current sophomores, juniors, and seniors

Today, with students enrolled at seven high schools in Baltimore City, Thread young people continue to defy the odds. **Thread's all-time high school completion rate is 65%** and the average projected high school completion rate for our current sophomores, juniors and seniors is 65%.

As we continue to build on this momentum, two things have become clear:

### **1. Early enrollment into Thread for ninth graders is critical to early success.**

Launching new student enrollment as soon as possible within the school year allows more time to build a strong foundation of connection and engagement, which contributes to improvement in academic outcomes.

Immediate outreach to eligible students as soon as first quarter grades are finalized facilitates:

- proactive building of trust and rapport within the students' families and personal networks;
- targeted, high-impact academic support through enhanced boot camps for credit recovery, strategically offered during key academic times;
- carefully planned experiential learning trips that expose students to a wide range of post-high school academic and career paths; and
- preparation for summer employment and summer school credit recovery.

This engagement also fosters increased early opportunities for:

1. bonding within the new cohort of students;
2. bridging with staff, volunteers, and collaborators; and
3. support for barrier navigation that better positions students to attend and participate in school.

Over the next three years, we will continue to work with City Schools to drive early enrollment and fast track improved academic outcomes.

### **2. Minimizing the transfer of Thread students to a different high school is game changing.**

Working with almost 1,300 Thread students has shown us that transferring to another high school negatively correlates with high school completion. Thread students who transfer have a much lower four-year graduation rate than those who remain at their original high school. Lower-performing schools typically experience higher transfer rates due to issues such as chronic absenteeism and suspensions. Consequently, as Thread expanded to include lower performing schools, the number of transfer students increased, which has impacted overall graduation rates. As we scale, our tactics and strategies for beginning student enrollment earlier in the academic year and supporting retention at original high school sites continue to strengthen.

High school graduation is an essential, foundational milestone along a young person's Thread journey. Initially it serves as a common, measurable goal that unites students and volunteers as they bridge to form relationships. It is also an early achievement that reminds young people they are smart, capable, and able to succeed.



# Strategic Priorities and Goals

## Direct Impact: Maximizing Program Effectiveness and Reach

**Goal:** By FY28, Thread aims to systematically enhance the effectiveness, expand the scope, and strengthen the outcomes of Thread's direct service model to meaningfully support more than 2,000 young people and alumni across Baltimore, representing 7% of all incoming ninth graders enrolled in Baltimore City high schools that meet Thread's selection criteria.<sup>3</sup>

Thread's Community Model was challenged by COVID-19. Nationwide, volunteering reached historic lows<sup>4</sup> as the pandemic transformed every aspect of our society. College students left campuses, professionals started working virtually, and many retirees withdrew to their homes for health and safety reasons. As Thread wrestled with a new normal, we looked to the past to reimagine the future. Building on successes from Thread's early years, we are implementing several strategies that will improve outcomes by:

- making **bonding** within community easier to facilitate;
- creating more efficient access to volunteering to encourage **bridging**; and
- ensuring **consistency** of implementation within our growing community.



<sup>3</sup> Excluded schools include charter, transformation, contract, alternative, separate public day, and three traditional high schools with academic entrance criteria (Baltimore Polytechnic Institute, Baltimore City College, & Western High School). Though Dunbar High School has academic entrance criteria, it is included because it was Thread's founding partner school.

<sup>4</sup> Laura Hanson Schlachter and Tim Marshall, "U.S. Volunteerism Rebounding After COVID-19 Pandemic," America Counts: Stories, U.S. Census Bureau, Washington, DC, 2024, <<https://www.census.gov/library/stories/2024/11/civic-engagement-and-volunteerism.html>>.

## Bonding: A New Staff Position

The Community Engagement Specialist (CES) staff position supports the initial bonding of new cohorts of young people in Thread. Embedded in each of Thread's in-school staff teams, CES staff work directly with newly enrolled students at our seven site schools to ensure a smooth transition into the Thread community.

Piloted in the 2021/2022 school year, this model more closely resembles student support during the first decade of Thread. Young people learn about Thread from their CES through a series of targeted home visits, in-school information sessions, and additional sessions for parents and guardians that allow them to ask questions, understand Thread's 10-year commitment, and further explore the Thread Community Model.

CES staff members are at the center of Thread's on-the-ground work with Year 1 Thread students, supporting them with rides to school, weekly dinners, and recreational outings in the same way that Thread's co-founders did as volunteers. CES staff conduct home visits to reach chronically absent young people. They also work in collaboration with Thread's Programming and Resources & Opportunities staff teams to engage students in programmed group spaces where they set goals, identify barriers, and leverage collaborators that can allocate resources to remove those barriers. When volunteers are recruited and placed into Thread Families, CES staff members then begin to guide the bridging process between students and volunteers.

The COVID-19 pandemic had drastic and long-lasting effects on all students in Thread, further exacerbating the academic, professional, and personal challenges our students were already facing. Adding the CES staff position during COVID and then continuing the model with subsequent cohorts has improved our ability to locate students during and after enrollment and more quickly reinforce bonding among students and the broader community.

The addition of CES staff is a critical component of our early enrollment strategy that has led to stronger engagement, support, and credit recovery for young people. The first cohort of students connected to CES staff in the first year with Thread are slated to graduate in the spring of 2026. Data currently show that this CES-led cohort is highly engaged and active in the Thread community and making significant academic progress. Year 1 students have consistently been active at rates of 95% or above since the introduction of the CES role.

*“My impact as a CES is massive and it means everything to me. I get to be a trusted adult for young people. I also try to be for them what I needed as a young person in the world and in Thread.”*

*-Leroy, CES and Thread Alumni*



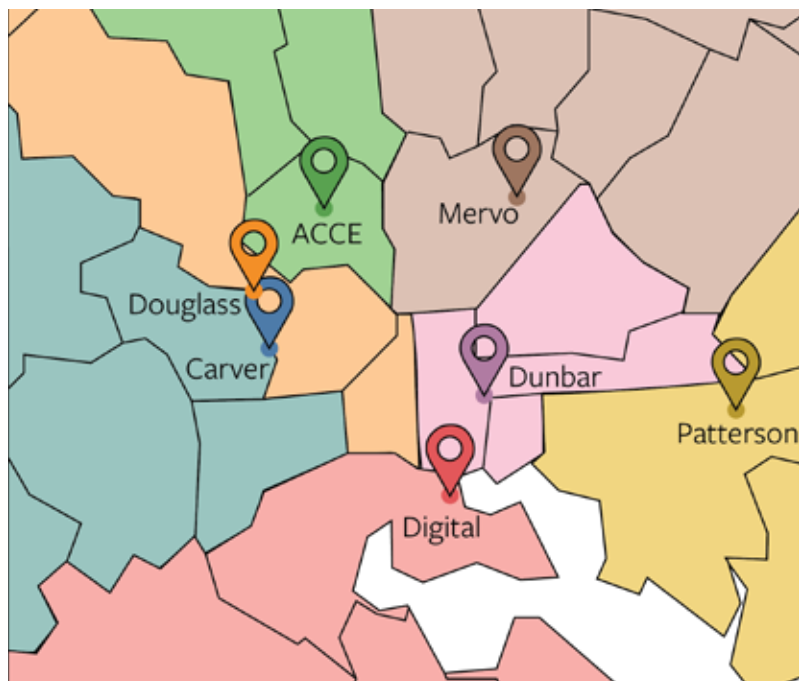
## Bridging: A Place-Based Formation

When founded in 2004, Thread was a student-led organization powered by graduate students from Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine. These volunteers were deeply connected—they went to school together and lived near each other. Supporting Thread students became another meaningful shared experience, easily integrating the work and relationships into their existing community. As Thread has grown and added additional high schools, the volunteer base has diversified, creating a richness of skills, passions, resources, and opportunities that benefit young people every day.

Leveraging two decades of lessons learned, Thread currently relies on a place-based strategy within our seven site school communities that facilitates individual and institutional relationships and creates long-term opportunities for our young people and volunteers.

Thread's place-based approach to staffing optimizes volunteer recruitment, engagement, and retention to ensure lasting support for our young people and their families. Each place-based staff team includes:

- **Director of Communities:** a generalist who ensures strong communication and coordination of each site unit and all four functional areas: community management, programs, resources & opportunities, and resource recruitment;
- **Community Manager:** coaches the volunteers and volunteer leaders who provide individualized support to our young people;
- **Program Manager:** partners closely with the high school and facilitates after school group programs, monthly community service outings, and annual camping trips;
- **Resource and Opportunities Manager:** partners with pro bono collaborators to remove barriers and create equitable access to opportunities for our young people and their families;
- **Community Engagement Specialist:** coordinates new student enrollment at their assigned school, and promotes bonding and bridging within the cohort itself and the broader Thread community;
- **Partnership and Recruitment Manager:** partners with resource hubs (an institution that provides multiple assets to Thread) to recruit volunteers and provide in-kind resources, including space, employment for young people, and pro bono experts;



This structure benefits individual relationships in two ways. First, volunteers are placed in a community near where they live, work, or go to school. This has dramatically removed barriers to participation by making Thread's programmed spaces more convenient and accessible. Second, we know that human nature makes it easier to bridge with others if you have already done some bonding. Building Thread Family cohesion is more efficient when volunteers feel they have some connection as they are starting to engage with their young person. Volunteer participation at afterschool programming is the highest we have seen since before COVID, and our overall attendance at threadHOURS (includes at TouchPoint) is the best we've seen in terms of raw volunteer numbers.

By formally partnering university, corporate, faith-based, and neighborhood resource hubs with the Thread high school in closest geographic proximity, it also enables us to knit together institutions that are currently disconnected neighbors. Additionally, when we encourage bridging between younger volunteers from a university and older volunteers who may be mid-career or retired empty nesters, we are creating a broader array of opportunities for all. Individuals at different stages of life often have access to differing resources, connections, and skills that can benefit everyone in a Thread Family.

Place-based recruitment strategies that reinforce cross-institutional and cross-generational pairings are designed to deepen relationships and reduce barriers to participation. To enhance bonding and bridging, Thread provides volunteers with curriculum content, coaching tools, and structured feedback loops so that volunteers are equipped to support young people through the Thread Engagement Process—connecting, setting goals, identifying barriers, and achieving success.

Volunteers are the backbone of Thread's model. Investing in their development ensures long-term sustainability and multiplies impact through social capital. Strong volunteer retention also reflects consistency of relationships between adults and young people. **Thread has exceeded our 60% volunteer retention target six of the last seven years. This past year, our cohort volunteer retention rate reached 70% as volunteer numbers continue to rebound from COVID.**



## Codification: Ensuring Consistency and Quality

As Thread grows, we are investing in a codification process that will define a replicable, high-quality service model that can be scaled across Baltimore and beyond. Thread content experts have begun designing playbooks that establish best practices across all functional areas that directly serve students and volunteers. These playbooks are supported by quality assurance and evaluation processes that promise long-term sustainability and high-quality delivery of our program model through training, support, and knowledge-sharing.



## Evaluation: Our Commitment to Evidence-Based Practice

Thread is deeply committed to rigorous measurement and strategic evaluation. These are fundamental to ensuring accountability and fostering continuous program improvement.

In 2021, Thread was selected to complete a **Randomized Control Trial (RCT) with the Wilson Sheehan Lab for Economic Opportunities (LEO)** at the University of Notre Dame. Student enrollment in 2023, 2024, and 2025 was guided by our partnership with a team of their researchers who are collecting ten years of outcomes data for these three cohorts, as well as a control group of students not receiving Thread's intervention. The study will compare outcomes such as school attendance, graduation rates, post-secondary attainment, enrollment and matriculation, household income, and incarceration rates for both sets of students over the ten-year period.

Because Thread was founded by scientists, student selection was randomized for over ten years to allow for future evaluation. This randomization now creates the possibility for LEO to conduct a retrospective study on students who have been enrolled in previous Thread cohorts, in addition to the prospective study.

While it will take approximately five years to receive a full prospective study report on students enrolled since the RCT began, we anticipate a preliminary report with initial findings in 2026. These initial findings will include some early insights from our prospective cohort, as well as data gathered as part of the retrospective portion of the study, which covers students who were enrolled prior to Spring 2023. The findings from both samples will be used to expand our community and improve our impact.

A photograph of three people smiling. On the left is a man with a beard wearing a white jacket. In the center is a woman with curly hair wearing a patterned top. On the right is a woman with long hair wearing a red floral top and a name tag that says "Esther".

## Widespread Impact: Building a Pathway From Economic Connectedness to Economic Mobility

**Goal:** Solidify Thread as a thought leader and practitioner in bridging social divides to inspire and influence national programming that advances economic connectedness and leads to sustained economic mobility.

Baltimore, like many urban centers, stands at a pivotal crossroads. The stark economic and racial divides that have long defined the city present both a challenge and an opportunity for transformative change.

More than twenty years ago, Thread volunteers began to understand the detrimental effects of social isolation and how these factors were disproportionately impacting marginalized communities in Baltimore. It was clear that living in siloed neighborhoods with virtually no connection across lines of difference was perpetuating a city of “haves” and “have nots” for our students. The Thread Community Model reinforces the understanding that without greater connectedness, Thread young people would struggle to overcome the substantial barriers that limit academic and professional success.

Over the past two decades, an expanding sector of experts has clearly defined the symptoms and the diagnosis of the social isolation epidemic. What has been missing from their work are practitioners, like Thread, who have a tested, data-driven treatment plan. Thread’s extensive experience working with almost 1,300 young people and alumni from marginalized communities who are deeply engaged with more than 3,500 volunteers and collaborators, offers a unique set of successive strategies, proven solutions, and measured effectiveness. For the past several years, Thread has shared our insights about how to create economic connectedness through bonding and bridging on a global stage within a series of widespread impact strategies, including convenings, training, experiential learning opportunities, and storytelling. As more than 30 years of research from political scientists and economists have shown, the amount of economic connections across lines of difference experienced as a child is the number one driver of economic mobility as an adult. The question then becomes: How do we and others build consensus around the milestones needed to get from one to the other?

Together with an international group of organizations, institutions, and thought leaders, Thread is participating in a groundbreaking effort that is working to develop a roadmap that defines the critical factors and milestones that lead from economic connectedness as a child to economic mobility as an adult.

**Baltimore A-Z**, where economic connectedness (A) is the starting point and economic mobility (Z) is the culmination, aims to create vibrant, thriving communities where strong relationships and social connections drive economic prosperity and more just education and health outcomes for young people and their families. This group will answer the following questions:

1. If “A” is economic connectedness and “Z” is economic mobility, what are the milestones in between?
2. How does one know if they are on the right track from “A” to Z”?
3. How does a community create activities and offer resources that drive towards “Z” AND help ease the transitions from “A to B”, “B to C”, etc.

To support this work, Baltimore has been selected to participate in two national initiatives with Thread’s Baltimore A-Z initiative serving as the representative for the city. As a thought leader and practitioner in bridging social divides and influencing nationwide programming, our work has the ability to go beyond local impact and influence a national movement that redefines how communities support youth throughout life to expand their networks and in turn their possibilities.

- **Social Capital Frameworks for Structural Investments**, led by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and the Foundation for Social Connection (F4SC), aims to develop a comprehensive framework for assessing structural social capital and to create a set of evaluation measures for local governments and communities that will, in turn, define and highlight best practices while enhancing the understanding and practical application of social capital research.
- **Connected Places** is a collaboration with The Royal Society for the Arts (RSA), F4SC, Opportunity Insights, and The American Academy of Arts and Sciences. The Economic Connectedness Task Force aims to develop, test, and define a framework that culminates in a comprehensive report and implementation of strategies.

Each initiative set out to select two to six cities as pilots for their initiatives. Baltimore is the only city that has been selected for both initiatives. This provides Thread with a unique opportunity to leverage the expertise of world-class social scientists and policymakers, aligning with local and state leadership, to advance economic mobility and bridge Baltimore’s divides. The goal of these cumulative efforts is to create a structure that reinforces Thread’s ability to sustain our 10-year commitment to our young people—supporting them to and through life.



# Systemic Impact: Driving Economic Connection and Opportunity

**Goal:** To become a national model for equipping academically underperforming young people with the essential skills and vital social networks needed to pursue meaningful career paths and create sustainable economic independence.

The intended objectives for young people in Years 6-10 are to be employed or enrolled in a post-high school pathway and demonstrate self-efficacy to attain their short-term and long-term goals throughout life. Thread's model for ensuring the successful transition to independence includes:

- a comprehensive support structure for six post-high school pathways;
  - entrepreneurship,
  - straight-to-workforce,
  - trade and licensure,
  - two- or four-year academic degree, and
  - the military.
- defined, actionable, and industry-specific guidance tailored to each pathway; and
- proven assessment tools, such as the Predictive Index and StrengthsFinders, that are strategically integrated into pathway identification to match individual talents and passions with in-demand industries that support the local economy.



Over the next three years we will fortify the infrastructure needed at scale to diligently track and report on the progress of our clear and measurable short-term, intermediate, and long-term success metrics for each pathway.

Even with a precise process, skills and career advancement can be exceedingly difficult for young people pursuing trade and licensure, entrepreneurship, and straight to workforce pathways. While their peers who have chosen two- or four-year degrees are able to rely on grants and scholarships to cover basic needs like food and housing, this type of support does not exist for these other tracks. Many young people in Thread struggle to invest in their own career development because of financial obligations and the prevalence of unpaid training programs. This pressure forces them to prioritize immediate income to support themselves and their families, often hindering their ability to pursue meaningful opportunities for career growth.

# Maryland Service Year

In an effort to alleviate some of these barriers, Thread has launched a unique and innovative pilot partnership with Maryland Service Year to provide 40 Thread young people with paid professional development opportunities. Each individual will gain extensive skills, industry certifications, and career advancement that will lead to economic mobility, while also addressing community workforce needs.

Beginning with the Center for Urban Family's three-week STRIVE® Program, Thread young people will gain technical skills and behavioral training that prepare them for employment. STRIVE offers ongoing coaching and support beyond the Service Year term in addition to a Service Year coach who will provide monthly training, career coaching, and job seeking assistance for each member. Thread volunteers will play a key role, engaging in regular check-ins with their young people to help ensure a smooth start to the year and retention throughout their placement. Their assistance is likely to include developing and instituting a daily plan, tackling barriers as they arise, and problem-solving workplace issues.

Thread and The Maryland Department of Service and Civic Innovation have defined four unique job placement categories that are clearly aligned with our trade and licensure, entrepreneurship and straight to workforce post-high school pathways and tailored to the interests, aspirations, and needs of Thread's young people. They are also curated based on career interests, industry needs, and our expertise in supporting both young people and employers in developing trusting relationships.

We believe this multi-faceted public-private partnership will be a model for how governments can work within their communities to provide access to transformational skills and education. Without these broader initiatives, we will never find a way to create equity in the workforce that leads to improved economic outcomes for our cities and their citizens.





# Fortifying Organizational Strength and Long-Term Viability

**Goal:** To build a resilient, highly efficient, and well-resourced organizational structure capable of delivering sustained impact and supporting thoughtful future expansion.

As we work to secure the essential financial resources needed to achieve our strategic goals, Thread is developing and executing a sophisticated, multi-faceted fundraising strategy targeting a diverse range of funding sources including local, regional, and national foundations; individual donors; corporate partners; and government grants. Our intention is to:

- leverage the RCT data from our partnership with the Wilson Sheehan Lab for Economic Outcomes (LEO) at the University of Notre Dame to carefully evaluate outcomes and assess cost-effectiveness, informing our future strategic direction;
- conduct comprehensive reviews of academic and other long-term outcomes data for past cohorts of Thread young people to identify enduring trends and key successes that can improve impact;
- develop a strong, data-informed framework for potential direct service expansion into new geographic areas, drawing wisely on accumulated organizational learning and proven playbooks;
- articulate a compelling and data-driven return on investment for potential funders, using insights from our RCT and thorough internal evaluations; and
- leverage deep, lasting relationships with key stakeholders to inform strategic decisions and growth.

## Conclusion

Thread has long asked if it is possible to tip the culture and climate of Baltimore by building relationships across lines of difference at scale that can then drive improved outcomes citywide. The need to address the educational, economic, and health disparities through targeted, innovative solutions is more urgent and compelling than ever. Thread is an exciting position to leverage the expertise of world-class social scientists and policymakers with the alignment of local and state leadership to advance economic mobility and bridge Baltimore's divides.

Galvanized by our exceptional community members who make the decision to intentionally connect across lines of difference and continuously defy the odds, we look forward to continuing to scale our direct services to weave a more equitable community where everyone can thrive.

