



Opening Doors To What's Possible

FY20 and FY21 Impact Report



North Lawndale Employment Network
Creating a Community That Works



North Lawndale Employment Network

Creating a Community That Works



Photo: Erik Unger

NLEN was founded in 1999 by the North Lawndale community with leadership support from the Steans Family Foundation to address a vital community need: access to employment opportunities that provide family-sustaining wages. Today, **NLEN serves over 2,000 people annually**, helping them to gain new skills, improve their self-worth, secure jobs, and become financially secure. Through its neighborhood-focused employment initiatives that address root causes of poverty, we work to bridge the racial wealth gap and serves as a driving force for social equity and racial healing on Chicago's West Side.

Dear Friends,

I often refer to the North Lawndale Employment Network's new workforce campus as my love letter to the community. When embarking on our \$11.5MM capital campaign, I envisioned a workforce campus that would serve as a beacon of hope for those looking to better their life situation. Whether it be preparing for and obtaining employment, improving one's financial health, opening up a checking account, or seeking the restoration of hope - it was important to me that we created a place where everyone who walked through the door was treated with dignity and respect.

I must admit, NLEN's new workforce campus exceeded my vision. With the support of our donors, funders, and friends, alongside some brilliant architects and skillful construction workers, we have created a beautiful state of the art community wealth building sanctuary, that houses Wintrust Bank, two social enterprises, Sweet Beginnings LLC., and our beelove café; infused with talented and compassionate staff who are also dedicated public servants committed to making an impact on the lives of those we serve.

While approximately 45% of North Lawndale households live below the federal poverty level and 57% of the adults in our community have been justice-involved, we are determined to change this narrative. North Lawndale is a community rich with talented, innovative residents, servant leaders, and generations of families who are resilient and committed to overcoming obstacles and glaring inequities that disproportionately impact our community.

Living in poverty and a pandemic creates more challenges than many of us can ever imagine. Yet, we remain steadfast in our commitment to reducing North Lawndale's unemployment rate of 15.9% by 10% by 2025 as we know

that it is key to addressing the persistent and chronic high rates of unemployment, underemployment, and violence in North Lawndale.

NLEN's workforce campus is a cumulation of the dedication and commitment of most loyal and generous supporters enabling us to double our capacity and serve up to 5,000 residents annually providing them with effective, client-centered, job training and placement leading them to financial liberation. In partnership with the North Lawndale Community Coordinating Council and our amazing employment partners, we will reach our goal!

We do not take for granted that with your support not only did we open the doors to our new workforce campus, but we've also opened doors to what's possible!

On behalf of NLEN's Board of Directors, staff, and the individuals we serve, I offer my sincerest gratitude to all of you for joining us on this journey as we work to revitalize our community and take a stand for social and economic justice.

With gratitude,



Brenda Palms Barber

Brenda Palms Barber
President & CEO, NLEN and
CEO, Sweet Beginnings, LLC

Impact by the Numbers



**7,000 Individual Coaching Hours
3,000 Job Readiness Training Hours**



Photo courtesy of READI Chicago, North Lawndale

Better Together

We are proud to work with companies, organizations and institutions that share our commitment to improving the quality of life for our most vulnerable yet hopeful job seekers. Our strategic partners like the North Lawndale Community Coordinating Council, Lincoln Park Zoo, Skills for Chicago-land's Futures, and CEDA are just a few of our high-impact partners that help to elevate and advance our mission.

U-TURN Permitted: NLEN's award winning job readiness program that helps returning citizens to reintegrate back into the community and secure employment.

Path to Prosperity: a condensed version of the U-Turn Permitted program for individuals who face barriers to employment but who do not have a criminal background.

READI Chicago: engages men most impacted by gun violence in paid transitional jobs, cognitive behavioral therapy, and support services.

Moving Forward: provides middle-skills training and job placement within the growing Transportation, Distribution, and Logistics (TDL) sector.

Sweet Beginnings, LLC: NLEN's wholly owned subsidiary social enterprise, offers 3-month, full-time transitional jobs in the green industry to citizens returning from incarceration.

LISC CHICAGO Financial Opportunity Center: helps individuals and families reach their economic goals by offering financial and credit-building coaching, self-directed job searches, and access to affordable banking products.

City of Chicago COVID-19 Contact Tracing Corps: an "Earn & Learn" career development program in healthcare occupations for permanent employment upon completion of tracing corps.



Fredrick Schroeder (right), first-time homebuyer

Building Wealth & Financial Security

NLEN participants' monthly income increased by \$2,739.

Increasing monthly net income can be achieved several ways including: access to income-boosting benefits like SNAP, utility assistance, retaining a job over the long-term, and credit building.

NLEN had 5,000 visits to the Financial Opportunity Center Resource Room in FY 2021 and FY 2022.

Our staff remains committed to helping individuals reach their lifelong goals. We strive to cultivate career paths, improve wages and increase net worth for the residents of North Lawndale.

NLEN participants saw a cumulative 56-point average increase in their credit score.

NLEN distributed over 300 Health and PPE Kits in partnership with the NLCCC in FY21.

NLEN distributed \$11,850 in Emergency Funds during FY 2021.

NLEN quickly responded to the critical needs of our clients and provided emergency cash assistance including rent, utilities, and transportation support for those most in need.

Creating Paths to Employment through Sweet Beginnings, LLC

NLEN's Social Enterprises are rooted in an asset-based approach to resident wealth creation in the North Lawndale neighborhood. Our Social Enterprise Sweet Beginnings, LLC and our beelove® brand of honey products are creating pathways to employment for participants in transitional jobs.

Our beelove café opened in August 2021 and serves delicious meals and beverages featuring our beelove® honey, and is now a cherished community hub. The most popular items in the café are the Honey Butter Biscuit, 12 or 16 oz. drip coffee and the Maple Praline Biscuit. The most popular beelove® products are the 6 oz. honey jar and the Pure Necessities Collection. Both Sweet Beginnings, LLC and beelove® products were featured in the Block Club Chicago Shop Local 2021 Holiday Gift Guide.



beelove® pure necessities collection



Natashee Scott,
first beelove
customer of
the month!

Opening Doors to What's Possible



Our Social Enterprise Changes Lives and Delivers Quality Products

- 31,314 jars of beelove® honey sold in FY 2021 and 2022
- 100% of participants who completed Sweet Beginnings' transitional jobs program obtained permanent employment between 2016-2021
- NLEN and Sweet Beginnings have placed over 5,400 job seekers in employment since 2003!

- **Harrison I. Steans Peace Garden:** A beautiful, tranquil garden that provides respite for staff, clients, and community residents. The Peace Garden features memorial bricks in tribute to loved ones.

- **Michael Scott Sr. Event Center:** A contemporary event space offering flexible seating, and a state of the art audio, visual and mood lighting system.

- **Digital Resource Center:** Provides free digital education and training to equip jobseekers with the digital skills needed for life and work. We offer free internet access as well as computers, printers, and fax machines for community use.

- **Wifi Towers:** Provides community residents within a 1.5 mile radius of our campus access to free broadband.

- **LISC Chicago Financial Opportunity Center:** Provides financial education and services for North Lawndale Community.



Main Entrance Lobby Concierge Desk



Harrison I. Steans Peace Garden



Michael Scott Sr. Event Center

Photos: Tom Harris



Bank of America Sweet Beginnings LLC Operations Center



Wintrust Bank - North Lawndale



beelove café

Photos: Tom Harris

- **Bank of America Sweet Beginnings LLC Operations Center:** 3300 sq. ft. state of the art production facility, representing more than 50% increase in production capacity to expand our transitional jobs program.

- **Wintrust Bank - North Lawndale:** A full service financial institution providing fair and just financial services.

- **beelove café:** A place for community to gather and elevate local food & beverage entrepreneurs.

Campus Construction Vendors by the Numbers: MBE: 60% / WBE: 10

Supporting diverse businesses is a priority for North Lawndale Employment Network, and a key pillar of creating a more equitable Chicago. The construction of our new workforce campus created 84 jobs.

- **Robert R. McCormick Foundation Public Plaza:** Fully designed and landscaped plaza, featuring honeybee friendly native plants sponsored by Lincoln Park Zoo.

- **Robert R. McCormick Rooftop Apiary:** Sweet Beginnings LLC's worker bees live in uniquely designed beehives.

- **Campus Training Rooms:** NLEN offers three training rooms that include top of the line audio and visual equipment to provide full video conferencing.

NLEN is grateful to our experienced team of partners who helped develop our new campus, including IFF, Wheeler Kearns Architects, Ujamaa Construction, Barack Ferrazzano Kirschbaum & Nagelberg LLP, Taft, Open Door Advisors, and the 24th Ward Aldermanic Office.



Robert R. McCormick Foundation Public Plaza



Robert R. McCormick Rooftop Apiary



Campus Training Rooms

2020 Awards and Recongitions:

Founding President, Brenda Palms Barber named one of five inaugural Elevate Prize Fellows

NLEN selected one of six Pritzker Traubert Foundation Chicago Prize Finalists

NLEN received the Federal Home Loan Bank of Chicago's Community First® Award for Economic Development

2021 Awards and Recongitions:

NLEN received Chicago Jobs Council Field Builder Award

Founding President, Brenda Palms Barber received Mercy Housing Spirit of Mercy Award

Founding President, Brenda Palms Barber named Chicago Crain's 2021 Notable Black Leaders and Executives

NLEN FY20 Financial Statements

2020 Statement of Activities (Year ended June 30, 2020)

REVENUE:	Without Donor Restrictions	With Donor Restrictions	Total
Grants and Contributions	1,874,216	2,506,504	4,380,720
Government-funded programs	403,739		403,739
Special Events	486,889		486,889
Other Revenue	399,512		399,512
Net Assets Released from restrictions	2,136,033	(2,136,033)	-
TOTAL REVENUE	5,300,389	370,471	5,670,860

EXPENSES:

Program Expenses	3,862,278	3,862,278
Management and General	722,165	722,165
Fundraising	969,678	969,678
TOTAL EXPENSES	5,554,121	5,554,121
Change in net assets before non-operating	(253,732)	370,471
Excess of Revenue over expenses	(253,732)	370,471
		116,739

2020 Statement of Financial Position (Year ended June 30, 2020)

ASSETS:	LIABILITIES & NET ASSETS
Cash and cash equivalents	2,632,241
Receivables	1,677,011
Other Assets	47,029
Fixed Assets	1,578,413
TOTAL ASSETS	5,934,694
	TOTAL LIABILITIES
	1,511,976
	NET ASSETS
Without donor restrictions	(129,199)
With donor restrictions	4,551,917
TOTAL NET ASSETS	4,422,718
TOTAL LIABILITIES AND NET ASSETS	5,934,694

NLEN FY21 Financial Statements

2021 Statement of Activities (Year ended June 30, 2021)*

REVENUE:	Without Donor Restrictions	With Donor Restrictions	Total
Grants and Contributions	1,686,811	4,638,345	6,325,156
Government-funded programs	1,713,161		1,713,161
Special Events	300,905		300,905
Other Revenue	322,824		322,824
Net Assets Released from restrictions	2,242,593	(2,242,593)	-
TOTAL REVENUE	6,266,294	2,395,752	8,662,046

EXPENSES:

Program Expenses	7,768,588	7,768,588
Management and General	784,525	784,525
Fundraising	81,898	81,898
TOTAL EXPENSES	8,635,011	5,554,121
Change in net assets before non-operating	(2,368,717)	2,395,752
Excess of Revenue over expenses	(2,368,717)	2,395,752
		27,035

2021 Statement of Financial Position (Year ended June 30, 2021)*

ASSETS:	LIABILITIES & NET ASSETS
Cash and cash equivalents	5,521,178
Receivables	1,646,916
Other Assets	114,467
Fixed Assets	1,590,789
TOTAL ASSETS	8,873,350
	TOTAL LIABILITIES
	7,639,532
	NET ASSETS
Without donor restrictions	266,553
With donor restrictions	967,265
TOTAL NET ASSETS	1,233,818
TOTAL LIABILITIES AND NET ASSETS	8,873,350

*Actuals are unaudited and subject to change.

3/3/2022

FY20 and FY21 Donors

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We are grateful for our corporate and foundation investors who generously provide much needed and dependable, ongoing support

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Photo: Tom Harris

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We are grateful for the individuals who invest in North Lawndale Employment Network. Your support strengthens our community by transforming the lives of our most vulnerable and hopeful jobseekers. Every effort has been made to list donors and respect anonymous contributions as requested. Please forgive any errors and notify NLEN with changes by calling 773.265.7944.

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About

The North Lawndale Employment Network (NLEN) is a workforce development organization bridging the racial wealth gap for our under- and unemployed residents of the North Lawndale neighborhood and surrounding communities.

Our clients include citizens returning from incarceration and others who face the day-to-day hardships of living without enough income to support themselves and their families. To create jobs, and build community wealth, NLEN launched, NLEN launched two social impact enterprises, Sweet Beginnings and the beelove café.

Mission

The North Lawndale Employment Network's mission is to improve the earnings potential of North Lawndale residents through innovative employment initiatives that lead to economic advancement and an improved quality of life.



"Those who are the happiest, are those who do the most for others."

Booker T. Washington





NLEN Staff Outing at Douglass 18
Mini Golf Course in North Lawndale.

North Lawndale Employment Network

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