



## Looking Back on 2023, Looking Forward to 2024



Some people think it is cruel that we are still working this week. Most offices are closed, a lot of our friends are using the last of their PTO to be home with family right about now, but we are still in the office. It is relatively quiet here, most of us clicking away on our computers and using this time to finish projects and think and plan for the coming year.

I am not a good celebrator. Often, by the time something that we've planned is happening, my mind is already looking forward to the next project, the next thing, the next event or initiative. Looking back is important, especially when evaluating how to move forward.

I wanted to share with you some real wins from this past year. Then, maybe next week or the week after we'll talk about the future. But for now, celebrate some milestones with us and we'll talk about the future in the future.

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## Lets Talk Numbers

|        |   |
|--------|---|
| 50+    | Kids participated in our summer programs                        |
| 8      | Students were hired through our summer youth employment program |
| \$20k+ | Spent on Housing or Utility Assistance                          |
| 8,000  | Pounds of produce grown   |
| 10,000 | Seedlings started in our new greenhouse                         |
| 500+   | Community Service Hours for teens and moms with kids            |
| 727    | Pairs of shoes given away for back-to-school                    |
| 1356   | Kids received Christmas toys                                    |
| 487    | Coats given away before winter                                  |
| 4      | Neighborhood kids went with us to camp in Northern Minnesota    |
| 60+    | Home improvement projects on Waldo and Liberty Street           |



Add to that, countless miles of rides, hours of conversation, time spent helping families navigate job applications, insurance, social security paperwork, and more. We forgot to count how many alleys we have cleaned up, pounds of trash we've bagged, cars we've helped dig out of the snow, and folks who we've helped get to court on time.

Oh, and we finished fundraising for our [Webster Community Center Project](#) and set a groundbreaking date for late January!



### Summer Youth Employment Program

When I think of "wins" our SYEP has to be near the top for 2023. Eight Pontiac high schoolers, with all of the barriers and struggles that our teens have, spent time with some amazing organizations and businesses learning about conversation,

### Gardens Continue to Grow

This year we have continued to grow our amazing group of garden volunteers from inside and outside of the neighborhood. We even had a volunteer move to the neighborhood to be closer to the garden!

wildlife, park management, pond biomes, and natural resources.

Those students have since gone off and are all working other jobs. However, each of them is just waiting to come back and do the program again next summer.

This, along with opening our new four-season greenhouse, has been a real game changer for us and our growing partners whom we shared space with: Growing Pontiac and the Farm at Trinity Health.



## End of Year Support

We're in the last few days of 2023 and we've accomplished a lot of good. One of the best parts of neighborhood work is that you see the progress you're making: crime dropping, people staying longer, the physical appearance of the neighborhood change, and hearing people say "this used to be a pretty rough neighborhood."

That change is only possible through the support of so many folks, like you, who see it, believe in it, and support it. If you're looking for a place to make that last donation of the year, please consider Micah 6 Community and all the good it can do for the quality of life of people in my neighborhood.

Thank you.

[Donate Here](#)

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## More Short Stories

### Mary

Mary is well known to people around our neighborhood for being the "crazy" lady who walks around the neighborhood talking to herself and screaming at others. She can sometimes be found at the Marathon gas station mumbling about people following her. Recently she began coming to us for help with her social security, clothing, etc. She uses our main house now as a mailing address for her important paperwork and we are slowly getting her enrolled in the programs she is going to need for food, housing, and mental health support.

Recently, the police came to our house and while we were inside speaking, they saw her mail on our desk. "How do y'all know Mary?" they asked. We explained what all we were helping her with and they were glad to hear she was getting support.

### Chuck

Chuck is one of our regular neighborhood homeless folks. He has been in the neighborhood for about five years. He comes and goes and likes to greet visitors at Micah 6 because, "y'all bring around good people." At Santa's Workshop this year Chuck jumped in to help hand out toys. At the end, Chuck told me he was trying to get off drugs so that one day he could work for Micah 6 at Webster Community Center. I told him he should get clean for himself, not for a job. He shook his head and said, "Doing it for myself hasn't been going so good. But doing it for a bigger purpose might get me there." We're rooting for him.

### Deon and Veronica

This summer, we took four of our kids to camp. I'll admit, we probably did not prepare them very well. We went to a summer youth camp on the boundary waters in Minnesota. The camp

has a no technology rule, which wouldn't matter much anyway because there is no cellphone service. At several point throughout the week the facial expressions they gave us when we told them different things like, "We are awake at 7:30" or "no technology also means no vape pens," or "yes, that's a wolf howling," were quite hilarious. At the end of the week, they had made some friends, had some good times and memories, but we weren't sure how the week actually went for them.

About two weeks later Deon and Veronica called me and said, "We want to take you to breakfast." I clarified, "You want to take me to breakfast?" "Yeah, but the kind where you pay."

We sat across the table from each other at Oakland Diner and they said, "We've been thinking and we've decided we want to go back."

## **Belinda**

If you've been around Micah 6 much or listened to enough Micah 6 stories. You know Belinda. She is a feisty, latino grandmother who doesn't mince her words. She'll let you know what she thinks about anything that comes to mind. However, she often has an annoyingly big heart and when the lady with a big heart knows the organization that helps people, it can be quite the match up.

Belinda is alway bringing someone to us, "Coleman, they need help with a car." or "Coleman, John needs \$200 and Ms Eva over here needs help with their lawn, so how about you pay John to clean up her lawn, two birds!"

So, it was no shocker when Belinda came over a month ago and said, "I am letting fifteen undocumented people live with me and we are going to get their immigration stuff worked out so they can work while they are waiting." This week, she got the last of them cleared to work and they are all now successfully employed and rehoused elsewhere.

## **Jessica**

Not all stories are fun or funny or have happy endings. Jessica is a mother in our neighborhood with a lot of struggles, largely her temper. Last year she was charged with assault after hitting her baby's daddy during an argument. This was enough to trigger a custody battle that has gone on for more than a year. We've spent a lot of hours and late nights helping her prepare for hearings, uploading evidence, practicing what she needs to say to a judge. We drive her to those hearings and because she can't afford a sitter, we are often outside the courtroom holding her sleeping baby. After more than ten court dates this year, the final determination was handed down that her rights would be eliminated. However, because we fought, because we worked the process, Jessica was able to spend another year with her daughter.

## **Red**

We started the year with the passing of our friend Red. Red was a friend and a long-time "resident" at Micah 6 Community. We always say that no one benefitted more or tested the bounds of our programs more than Red. Red was as regular as the sun; he'd show up every morning and leave every evening. He was a mainstay. So when he passed away, we knew we were going to need to host a service. We considered having it at Sprout, but as people reached out with condolences we got the sense that we were going to need more space so we reserved the Pontiac Little Art Theatre. On the evening, close to 100 people came to celebrate his life. It was a great outpouring of love and support.