

# THE POWER OF CONNECTION

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TRANSFORMING LIVES  
THROUGH CHARACTER  
& COMPASSION



IMPACT REPORT 2024

U p L i f t

# GENERATIONS OF **THRIVING** LEADERS

**“We are called to build a movement to mend the social fabric of our nation. It will take all of us—individuals and families, schools and workplaces, health care and public health systems, technology companies, governments, faith organizations, and communities ... It will require reimagining the structures, policies, and programs that shape a community to best support the development of healthy relationships.”**

**— U.S. Surgeon General Dr. Vivek Murthy**

## About This Report

This report is part of Colorado UpLift’s annual evaluation. It relies on findings from internal measurement methods as well as assessments collected by third-party firms, including the Thriving Youth Scorecard (Excellence in Giving) which engages students at multiple junctures in the program.

Our BEFORE and AFTER surveys enable us to see the transformation in students from their first semester to their most recent. What sets our data apart is that it measures significantly more than grades, on-track to graduate rates and educational impact. It also measures character, community and social-emotional impact - which together comprise the key indicators of thriving. The following pages illustrate how the Colorado UpLift program facilitates transformational and holistic growth among its students, propelled by the transformational mentoring it delivers to underserved youth across the nation.



# A MESSAGE FROM DR. JOE SANDERS



Dear Supporters and Stakeholders,

As we prepare to share Colorado UpLift's 2024 Impact Report, I am filled with optimism. Each year, we eagerly await the culmination of our evaluation reports. While we anticipate the data's insights, they always bring a mix of excitement and affirmation.

Our confidence in the UpLift program is unwavering. We understand its effectiveness and the profound transformation it brings to our city's youth. Central to this transformation are the enduring, positive relationships between Teacher/Mentors and students—relationships that consistently catalyze change and growth.

This year, despite our deep belief in the program, we were struck by the profound impact of human connection in fostering communities of character and compassion. The data underscored what we know: genuine connections are pivotal in building supportive, empathetic communities.

These connections extend beyond academic and professional achievements. They foster belonging, instill values, and nurture emotional and social well-being among our youth. The ripple effect of these relationships creates a network of individuals equipped to face challenges and support others.

In this year's report, you'll find examples of these connections manifesting in tangible, inspiring ways. Behind each data point are stories of students overcoming obstacles, finding their voice, and becoming leaders. These stories reflect the dedication of our Teacher/Mentors and the resilience of our students.

While we refine our programs based on rigorous evaluations, we value the human element driving our success. The power of connection, community, and compassion is at the heart of Colorado UpLift, guiding our mission to uplift and transform lives.

Thank you for your steadfast support and belief in our cause. Together, we are making a lasting impact.

With gratitude,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Joe Sanders". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Dr. Joe Sanders  
CEO, Colorado UpLift

# THE PROBLEM: RELATIONAL INSECURITY

In economically disadvantaged neighborhoods, children are negatively impacted by higher levels of trauma, violence, negative peer pressure, and relational insecurity. As a result of these economic and relational instabilities, youth in underserved communities often exhibit higher levels of social and emotional illness and struggle academically, dramatically impacting their ability to thrive as children and, ultimately, as adults.

**61%** of young people agree with the statement... *The adults in my life don't truly know how much I am struggling with my mental health.*

## Our Students...

**47%** don't live with their biological father

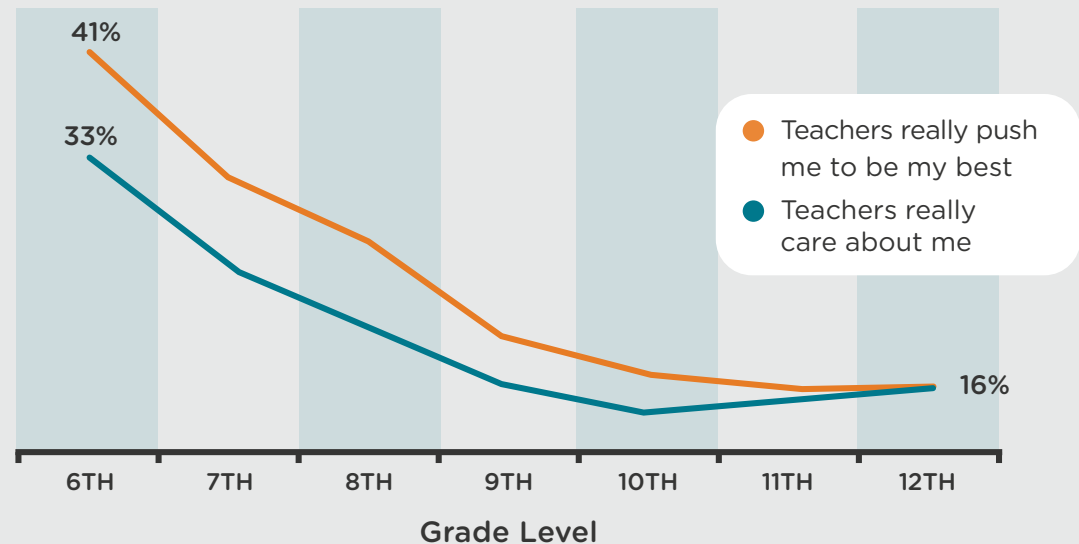
**21%** moved homes during the last 12 months

**26%** did not go to school 1+ times per month because they felt unsafe

# THE GAP IN ADULT SUPPORT

As students progress from 6th to 12th grade, there is a significant decline in young people reporting that their teachers care about them and challenge them.

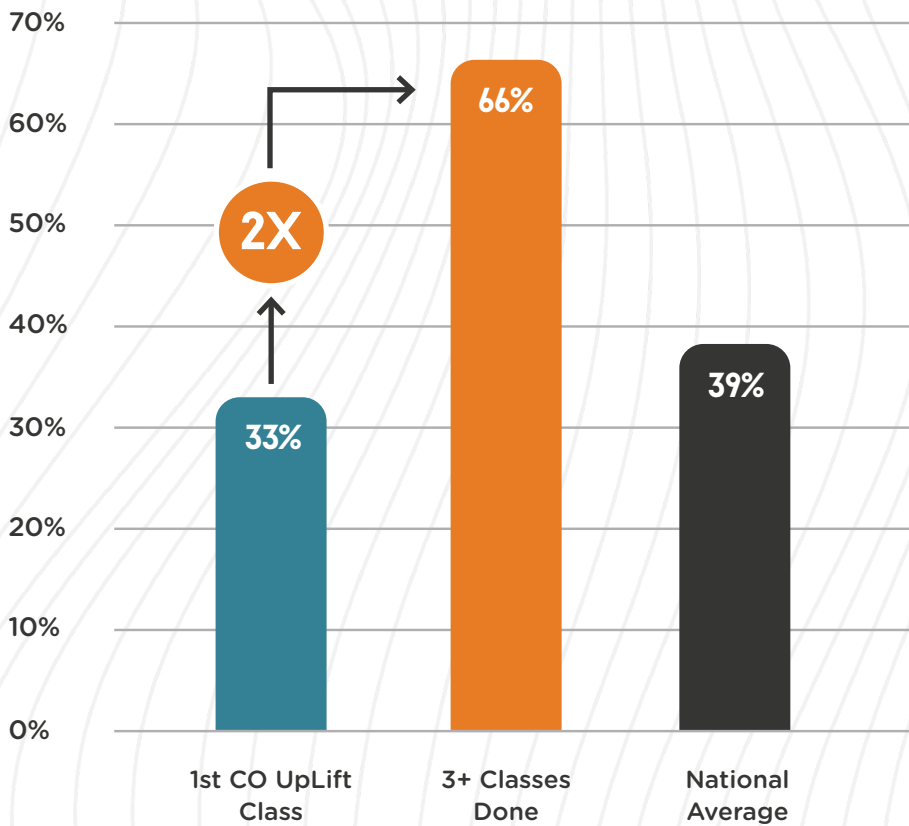
DATA SOURCE: Search Institute surveys from 2012-2015 of 122,269 U.S. youth in grades 6-12



# REVERSING THE TREND

Studies consistently highlight the tremendous impact relationships can have in the lives of our students. Simply stated, the addition of one positive, long-term adult relationship can transform the lives of our city's youth. The Colorado UpLift model is centered on building these life-changing relationships to help kids overcome life obstacles and thrive - both during and after the school years.

## Students Who Feel They Have Supportive Adults at School



After just **THREE SEMESTERS**, CO UpLift greatly outperforms the national trend!



# THE CATALYST: TRANSFORMATIONAL RELATIONSHIPS



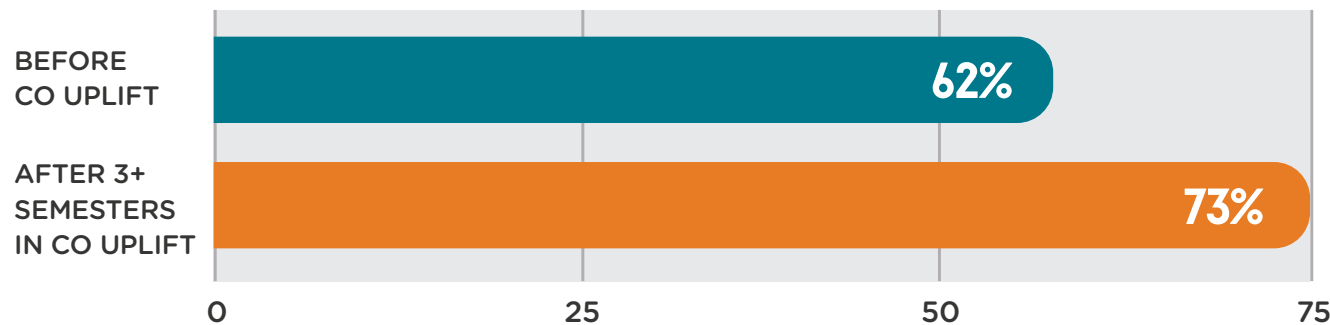
Colorado UpLift measures **four key outcomes** that make up thriving:

>> Education >> Community >> Character >> Social-Emotional Health

We track multiple indicators of growth across these four growth domains. Below are some of those indicators, which draw strong correlations to mental health, graduation rates, academic performance, college attendance, and career earnings.

## How Students Improve After 3+ Semesters In CO UpLift When They Develop Close Relationships With Their Teacher Mentor

### Students Who Think About Their Future When Making Decisions



**19%**  
INCREASE

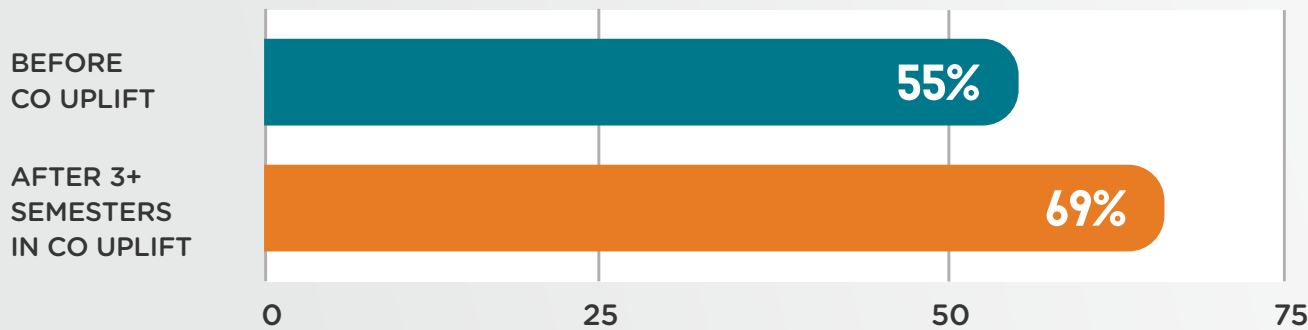
(Note: a 11-point difference between these two percentages represents a 19% change)

### Why Does This Matter?

>> Research suggests that individuals who think far into the future better invest in their future, and avoid future harms.

(Thorstad R, Wolff P. A big data analysis of the relationship between future thinking and decision-making. Proc Natl Acad Sci. 2018;115:E1740-8.)

## Students Who Ask Others for Forgiveness



**24%**  
INCREASE

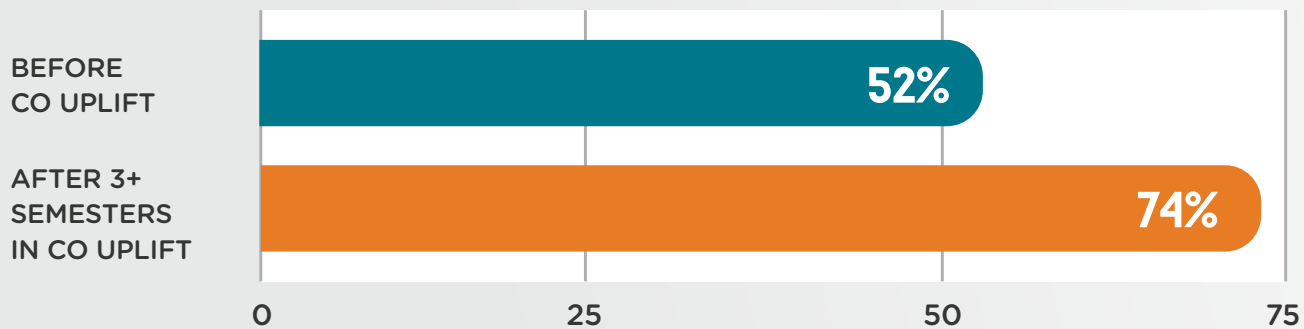
(Note: a 14-point difference between these two percentages represents a 24% change)

### Why Does This Matter?

>> Studies suggest that forgiveness is associated with decreased levels of depression, anxiety, hostility and substance abuse; plus higher self-esteem and greater life satisfaction.

(VanderWeele, T.J. 2018. "Is forgiveness a public health issue?" American Journal of Public Health, 108:189-190.)

## Students Who End Unhealthy Relationships



**41%**  
INCREASE

(Note: a 22-point difference between these two percentages represents a 41% change)

### Why Does This Matter?

>> Individuals in toxic relationships have a higher risk of developing anxiety, depression, suicidal ideation, PTSD and substance abuse disorders.

(Forth, A., Sezlik, S., Lee, S., Ritchie, M., Logan, J., & Ellingwood, H. (2022). Toxic relationships: The experiences and effects of psychopathy in romantic relationships.)

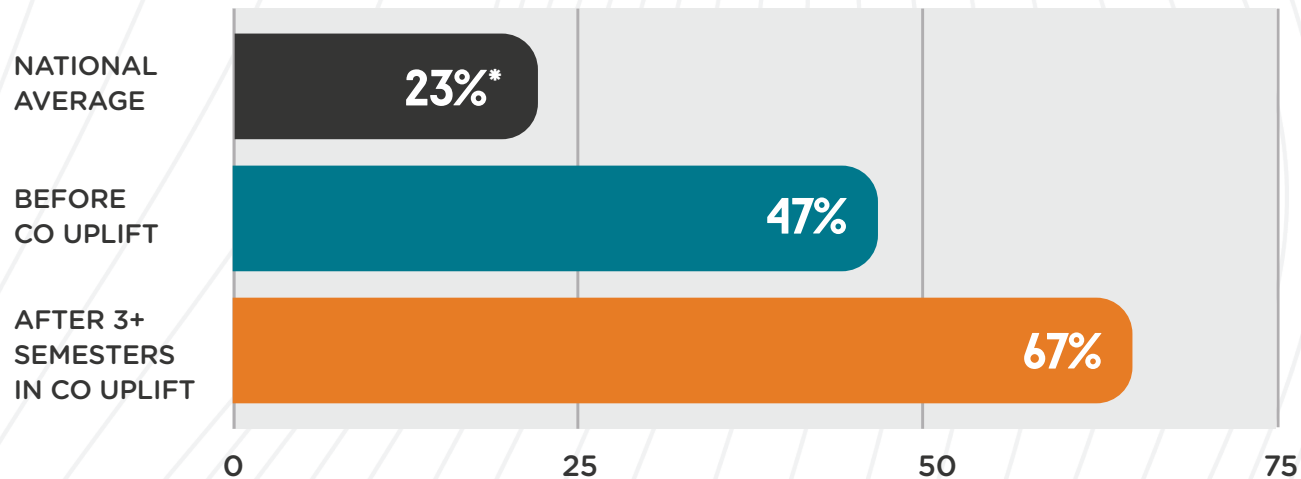
# THE RIPPLE EFFECT

As a result of introducing a positive, caring, long-term relationship with a Teacher Mentor, Colorado UpLift students are not only thriving and improving their own behavior and mental health, they are turning around and leading the people around them. They are actively taking part in restoring their communities.

12=

The average number of people in the groups that **CO UpLift students ARE LEADING**

## Students Who Serve Their Community Regularly Because Of Their Teacher Mentor



40%  
INCREASE

(Note: a 20-point difference between these two percentages represents a 40% increase)

## Why Does This Matter?

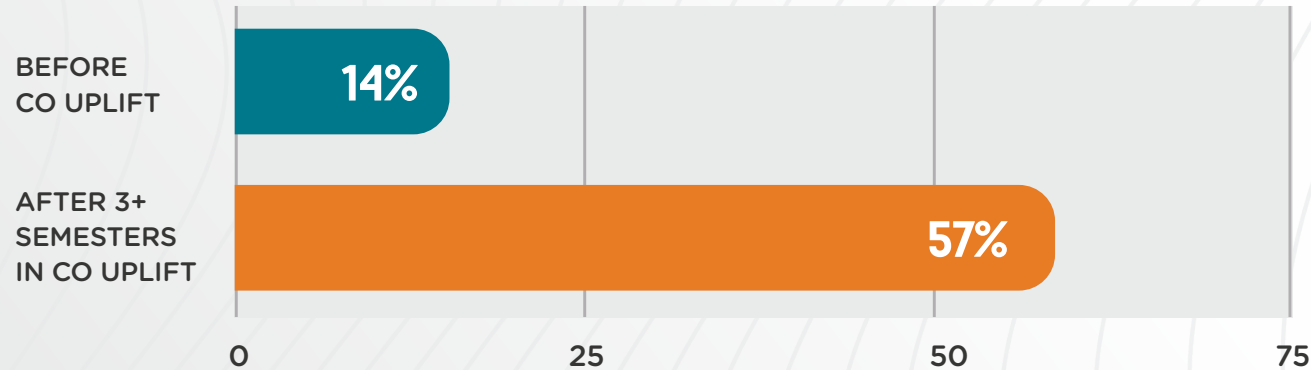
Because youth who volunteer...

- >> Are more likely to feel connected to their communities, do better in school, and are less likely to engage in risky behavior.<sup>1</sup>
- >> Are 19% more likely to graduate from college than those who did not volunteer.<sup>2</sup>
- >> Have 27% higher odds of employment.<sup>3</sup>

\*Data Source: AmeriCorps' Volunteering and Civic Life in America report; percentage represents those 16 and older who formally volunteer.



## Students Who Say Peers Select Them to Lead



**261%**  
INCREASE

(Note: a 43-point difference between these two percentages represents a 261% change)

## Why Does This Matter?

Because youth who are in leadership...

- >> Exhibit increased self-esteem, teamwork and communication skills, and obtain higher pay after graduation (up to 33% more!).<sup>4</sup>
- >> Show increased self-efficacy, decision-making and interpersonal skills that support success in the workforce and in adulthood.<sup>5</sup>
- >> Have lower dropout rates than their peers.<sup>6</sup>
- >> Have 27% higher odds of employment.<sup>7</sup>



1. Americorps | 2. Davila & Mora, 2007 | 3. Troppe & Michel, 2002 | 4. 2017 Harvard Business Review  
5. National Collaborative on Workforce and Disability, 2005 | 6. Brockman, Tepper & MacNeil, n.d.  
7. Martin, Neal, Kielsmeier & Crossley, 2006

# STUDENT STORY

## MONIQUE JOSE

Growing up was a tough journey for me. My family faced the harsh realities of gangs, drugs, violence, and financial poverty. My parents had limited education, only reaching sixth and eighth grade levels, with their own histories of trauma and pain. The cycle of struggle seemed never-ending, impacting my older siblings and eventually setting me on the same troubled path.

By the time I entered high school, my anger and aggression grew. I'd been in and out of juvenile detention and had resorted to violence. The turning point in my life arrived when I was introduced to Colorado UpLift, in January 1994. My options were to join the class or get kicked out of school.

I asked my Teacher Mentor, Joe, to meet at the coffee shop across the street from Lincoln High School. I had no intention of showing up - I just wanted to see if he would. No one ever showed up in my life. I hid behind a hill and watched, and sure enough, he showed up. I always tell people, "my entire life changed for the price of a cup of coffee."

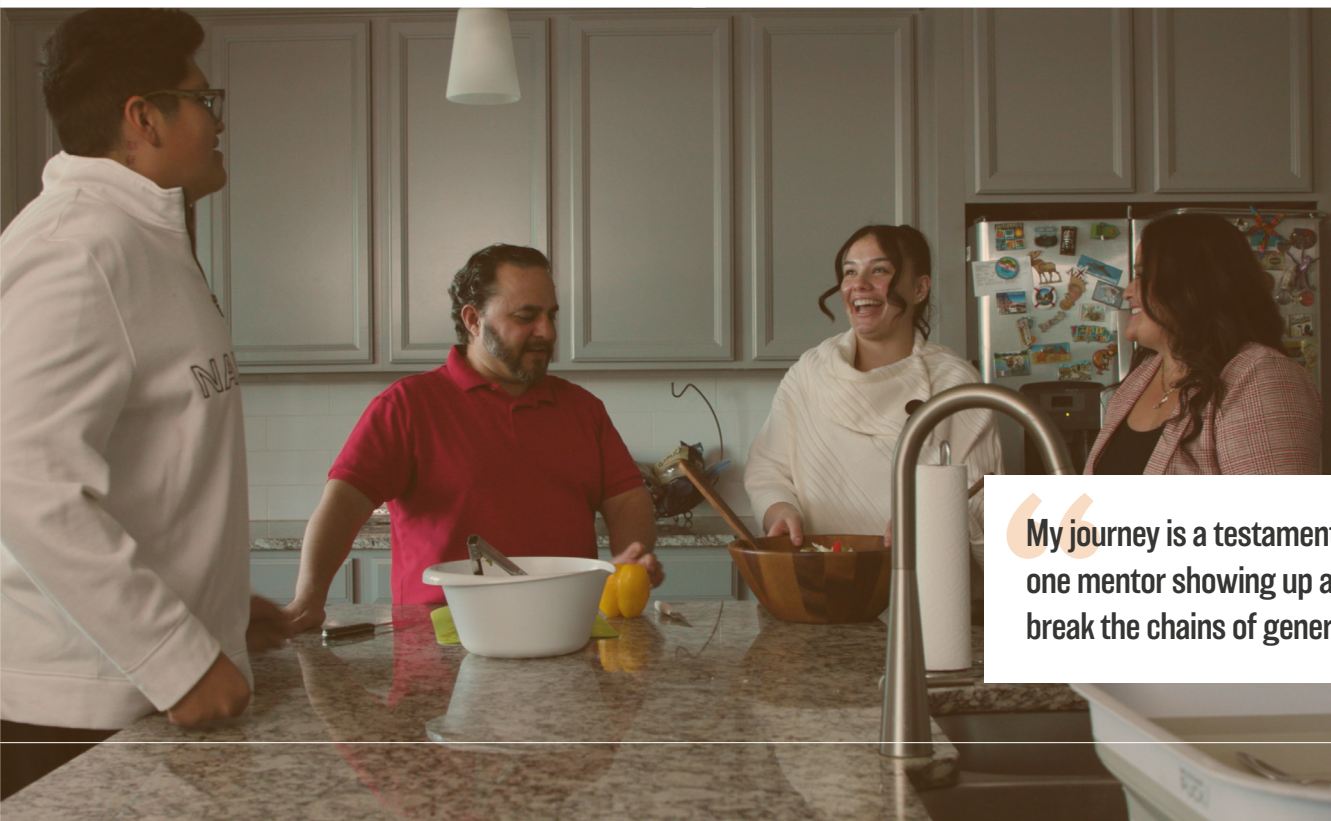
Joe consistently showed up, proving that someone cared for me, and I began to trust him. He guided me away from negative influences and slowly changed my outlook on life. Thanks to Joe and the character qualities and life skills he taught, I learned the tools I needed to leave behind my old destructive habits.

This transformation led me to Colorado College, where I saw a world beyond my inner-city environment and realized I could build a better life. When I got married and had kids of my own, I was so determined to provide them with a different upbringing. I refused to perpetuate the generational cycle of pain. Instead, I aimed to break it for my own children.

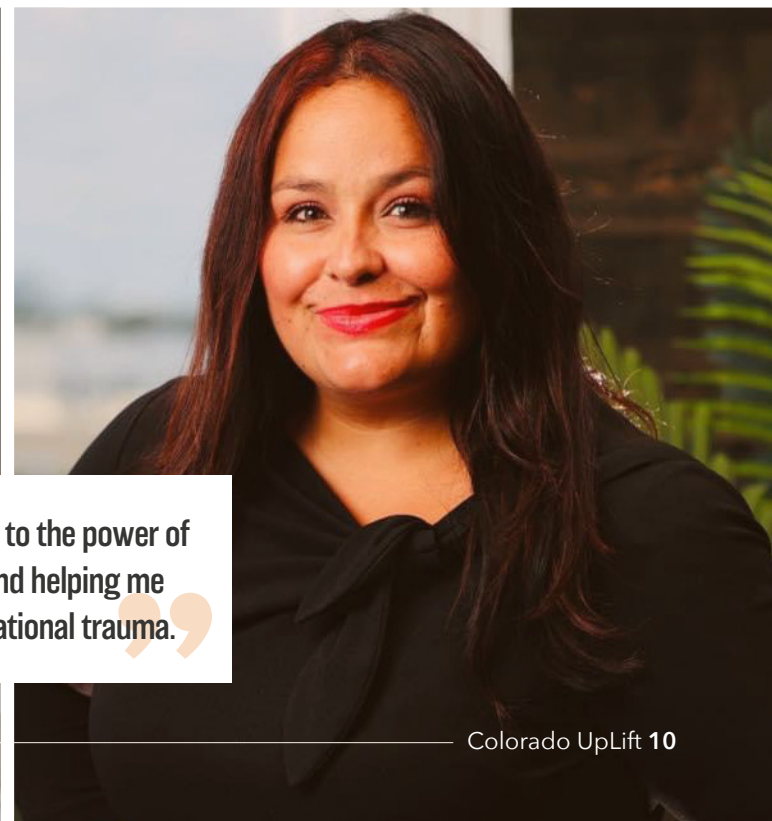
I'm proud of how far I've come. I've become a successful business owner and a leader in my community, constantly working to serve those who face challenges like the ones I overcame. My journey is a testament to the power of one mentor showing up and helping me break the chains of generational trauma.



“The cycle of struggle seemed never-ending, impacting my older siblings and eventually setting me on the same troubled path.”



“My journey is a testament to the power of one mentor showing up and helping me break the chains of generational trauma.”





# ANNOTATIONS

The data and insights in this report have been pulled from the following reputable organizations:



**Dr. Paul Penley, Excellence in Giving Managing Director, Research Division** // Dr. Penley manages the company's research division and leads projects to inform effective grantmaking strategies. He has refined methods for nonprofit due diligence and tracking post-grant impact. He has completed on-site evaluations in a dozen countries around the world. Dr. Penley specializes in creating outcome measurement systems for internal and external reporting of program effectiveness. He has presented his approach at community foundations, Philanthropy Roundtable meetings, and Yale Philanthropy Conference. He has published research insights in Alliance magazine, Planned Giving Today, and OUTCOMES magazine. Dr. Penley's ability to identify predictive indicators of mission failure or success allows those he advises to support high-performing charities making the difference they want to fund.



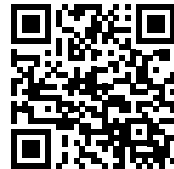
**Search Institute** // The Search Institute promotes positive youth development and advances equity through research and practical solutions. Search Institute is a nonprofit organization with a sixty-plus-year history of collaboration with partners to conduct and apply research that promotes positive youth development and advances equity. Their tools build connections that help all young people learn and grow. [searchinstitute.org](http://searchinstitute.org)



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