



**More than
a moment!**

Philly Friendship Circle / 2025-2026 Impact Report

Impact multiplies

Impact isn't measured by the number of programs we offer or events we host.

At Philly Friendship Circle, one friendship leads to another. One invitation creates a new connection. One act of kindness inspires the next.

We call it the Ripple Effect.

When people feel seen, accepted, and like they belong, they naturally create that same experience for someone else. Each person welcomed into the Circle makes room for another.

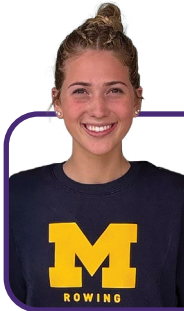
That's how impact multiplies.



Solvej recruits her friend **Zach** to take her place, ensuring **Ezra** continues to have a meaningful connection.



In 2023, it's time for **Solvej** to leave for the University of Michigan. But, she doesn't want Ezra's friendship to end.



In 2018, **Solvej** joins Friends@Home after completing MVP. She is matched with **Ezra**. Through weekly visits, shared fun, and countless memories their five year friendship blossoms.



ONE RIPPLE IN ACTION

Following in Solvej's footsteps, **Tobey** leaves for the University of Michigan, but not before he introduces his younger brother, **Charlie**, to Aldo. The friendship cycles forward anew.



"Tobey is literally the best human on the planet. We love Tobey!"
– Aldo's Family

The ripple grows when Zach, inspired by his experience, encourages his friend **Tobey** to join Friends@Home. Tobey is matched with **Aldo** and, just like that, the Circle has expanded to create another life-changing friendship.



THE IMPACT
KEEPS GROWING
for friends with and without disabilities.

59

NEW FRIENDS OF ALL AGES
joined our community this year.

Together, our programs reached:

277

TOTAL FRIENDS

206

CHILDREN & TEENS

71

YOUNG ADULTS

Impact returns

Some ripples keep moving forward. Others come full Circle.

Benjamin first experienced Philly Friendship Circle at a young age. Years later, he returned with fresh ideas, renewed energy, and a **love of play** that is creating opportunities for others to connect.

START HERE!

1

In the Beginning



Benjamin's family gets involved with Philly Friendship Circle during the pilot phase.

2

Finding Connection



As a teen, Benjamin is matched with Josh through Friends@Home. Games connect the pair, sparking conversations and laughter.

3

Giving Back



As an adult, Benjamin continues to be involved in Sunday Circle, the Walk, the Art Show, and other Philly Friendship Circle events.

4

Inspired By Passion



Believing in the power of play, Benjamin rescues more than 100 board games when a local game café closes. He donates many to us and his inclusive vision takes shape.

5

Impact in Action



Today, the Sunday Circle Game Room brings together about 10 pairs of friends each session. Benjamin curates games so everyone can find joy, confidence, and connection.

6

The Idea Blossoms



Benjamin's passion for bringing people together extends beyond the Game Room. He helped launch Young Adult Game Night, creating a place where friendships can grow.



"I always have a great time at Philly Friendship Circle Game Night. It's awesome to play board games together and just have fun with everyone."

- Robert, Game Night participant

It's beautiful to see the next generation finding friendship, in part because of the opportunities Benjamin has created at Philly Friendship Circle.

That's one way we measure impact.



**GIVING BACK,
MOVING FORWARD**

70

ALUMNI GAVE BACK through direct involvement this year—volunteering, mentoring, and strengthening the community that once shaped them.

Impact endures

A PATH TO LOVE

First Connection

Avery joins Philly Friendship Circle as a teen.

1





2

A New Chapter

College and life take her in a new direction.

3



Coming Home

After moving back to Philadelphia, Avery reconnects with us.



Her Happy Place

Avery becomes a consistent Sunday Circle adult volunteer.

4

★ Today, Avery helps create the same welcoming community she experienced as a young teenager.

Some people join for a season. Others discover a community they never want to leave.

Whether they return years later like **Avery** or continue growing together like **Aidan**, **Dani**, and **their mom**, their **distinct journeys** show that Philly Friendship Circle isn't simply a program to participate in; it's a community that becomes part of who they are.

A FAMILY TRADITION



1

It Starts with One

Aidan joins Philly Friendship Circle's MVP for his Bar Mitzvah project.

2

One sibling Becomes Two

Aidan's sister Dani joins the Circle. The family keeps coming back.

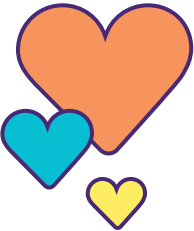




3

Leadership Grows

Dani rises through MVP to Teen Leadership Board to become Teen Board Liaison.



BELONGING BECOMES FAMILY

113

parents of children and teens actively engaged in programming this year. When one person finds belonging, the impact often reaches an entire family.

4

Mom Joins In

Following her children's lead, Lynda gives back by becoming an adult volunteer.



★ Today, the family tradition continues with mother and daughter strengthening the community side by side.

Impact expands

Behind every friendship is a commitment to keep growing.

This year, we introduced **new programs** and initiatives that helped more friends connect, participate, and thrive.



Inclusive Birthright Israel

Experiencing Israel during a period of uncertainty made the journey especially meaningful. Participants felt fortunate to explore the Golan Heights and the breathtaking beauty of northern Israel, forging deep friendships with one another and the Israeli peers who joined the trip. A dance party aboard a boat on the Kinneret was an unforgettable highlight.

Growing Through Word of Mouth

Our Moms' Pampering Night reached a new milestone, welcoming a record number of attendees. Many were new to Philly Friendship Circle, having been encouraged to come by other parents of children with disabilities. Those personal recommendations often lead families to a community where they can connect with others who truly understand what they're experiencing.



Strengthening Our Team

Inclusion Program Coordinator Jackie and Friendship Expert Josh brought fresh ideas and enthusiasm to our Circle. From hands-on sensory activities to the individualized support that participants receive each week, their invaluable contributions strengthened every program.



Bolstering Leadership

As we grow, so does the leadership that guides us. Our Board of Directors and Teen Leadership Board work together, combining strategic vision with firsthand program experience. Teens shape organizational decisions through feedback, while Board members support programs and fundraising. Together, these leaders provide the insight, stability, and commitment that drive our growth.



Building for the Future

We launched Foundational Friend this year, our new multi-year giving initiative inviting supporters to make a lasting investment in Philly Friendship Circle.



These three-year commitments provide greater stability, strengthening the foundation that allows our programs and community to grow.



For more information or to join, please email impact@phillyfriendship.com

We gratefully acknowledge our partners in the inaugural year of our new multi-year giving Circle.

Foundational Friends*

Pillar Partners: \$25,000+
Vicki & Gary Erlbaum

Belonging Builders: \$10,000+
The Rudoler Family

Connection Cultivators: \$5,400+
Beth & David Joseph
Sharon & Jonathan Levin
Rebecca Stein & Steven Matthews

Kindness Keepers: \$3,600+
Holly Cohen & Leib Meadvin
Judi & Mark Goldstein
Hadassa & Emanuel Korn
Ellen & Peter Livingston
Freda Pepper & Howard Bernstein
Gail Simon
Alison & Lee Sussman

Joy Guardians: \$1,800+
Julie & Rob Axelrod
Karen & Richard Banner
Dotty & Lawrence Brown
Bonnie & Michael Coplon
Darien Finder
Shana & Jeffrey Goldstein
Melissa Lerman & Eric Berger
Sammi Levin
Deborah & Mark Livingston
Deborah Siegel
Jill & Brian Rosen
The Gabe Tayar Memorial Fund

Impact made possible

Friendship doesn't end after one program. It grows stronger with every connection.

70%

OF FRIENDS attend three or more Philly Friendship Circle programs per year.

70%

OF FRIENDS who attended a program in the previous year chose to return again to experience friendship, community and belonging.



Our community is growing, too. We saw a:

38%

INCREASE IN PARTICIPATION from Center City Philadelphia

Every new friendship, every returning participant, and every expanding community begins with the generosity of people like you.

Your support becomes the programs, people, and infrastructure that make these connections possible.

Here's how we invested every dollar this year:

PROGRAMS: \$708,546

DEVELOPMENT: \$48,237

ADMINISTRATION: \$225,615

YOUR DOLLARS MAKE OUR WORK POSSIBLE!

Please consider supporting our community.



- \$1,000** Provides three massage therapists, dinner, and a gift for a Mom's Pampering Night, offering relaxation and care for our dedicated mothers.
- \$1,800** Covers an afternoon of bowling and lunch for 25 young adults, creating a fun social outing that fosters community and connection.
- \$3,600** Initiates five new tweens into our Circle through our comprehensive MVP experience, providing them with hands-on, impactful service learning.
- \$5,400** Funds two pairs of Friends@Home, where teens visit children with special needs weekly, facilitating our signature friendship-building experience.
- \$10,000** Supports three weeks of creative arts activities at Sunday Circle, including movement, music, and dramatic play. Picture over 50 friends guided by activity facilitators and supported by Friendship Experts—professionals in the special needs field.
- \$18,000** Enables over 25 high school teens on the Teen Leadership Board to gain meaningful leadership skills in a safe, nurturing environment where they are celebrated and supported.



EVERY GIFT MAKES A DIFFERENCE

Every hour makes a difference too! In addition to financial support, we're always looking for adults to share their time by:

Serving as consistent group leaders or activity helpers at Sunday Circle.

Spending time with our young adult community (ages 18–40), socializing, participating in activities, and building genuine friendships at programs and events.

Please join us in helping us reach our goal and make friendship available to everyone!



phillyfriendship.org/donate



Philly
Friendship
Circle

STAFF

Chani Baram, Chief Relationship Officer
Zev Baram, Chief Executive Officer
Meryl Sussman, Chief Operating Officer
Cait Gilmartin, Lead Behavioral Specialist
for our Team of Friendship Experts
Michael Bouchier, Outreach &
Engagement Coordinator
Alexa Hinds, Designer & Copywriter
Maria Phillips, Art Studio Host
Laurie Sked, Community Relations
& Member Support Coordinator
Jackie Weiss, Inclusion Program
Coordinator
Rochel Bayla Wener, Web & Design
Specialist

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Sharon P. Levin, President
Deborah Siegel, Secretary
Adam Illfelder, Treasurer
Melissa Glzman, Associate Treasurer
Julie Axelrod
Eric Berger
Seth Feldman
Sammi Levin
Deb Livingston
Freda Pepper
Claire Raab
Dani Bard Maizel, Teen Board Liaison

PO Box 25067 / Philadelphia, PA 19147
215-574-1765
phillyfriendship.org
info@phillyfriendship.com

    @phillyfriendship

In partnership with  Jewish Federation
of Greater Philadelphia
Founded by **Chabad-Lubavitch**

our mission —

inspired by the bedrock foundation of "love your fellow as yourself."

Philly Friendship Circle provides organized physical and social structures to support inclusive friendships, connections, respite, and fulfillment for children and teens of all abilities and their respective families, young adults of all abilities, and the Jewish community at large.

Through fun and interactive experiences, these relationships bring a sense of joy and meaning to the Philly Friendship Circle community and beyond.

From the wisdom of the Lubavitcher Rebbe:

Each of us is called to be a lamplighter. First, recognize the light within yourself—that you were created with immeasurable worth and entrusted with a purpose that only you can fulfill. Then carry that light into every place you go, seeking the goodness within every person and helping awaken the spark they may not yet see in themselves.

