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April 25, 2025

The Kaleidoscope Project Interim Report

Year 2: Northeast Community Coalition and Faith Tabernacle United Holy Church

In 2024, the Kaleidoscope Project, funded by the John Rex Endowment (JRE), continued its partnership with the Northeast Community Coalition (NECC) and Faith Tabernacle United Holy Church (Faith Tabernacle UHC) in Wake Forest, North Carolina. [Details of this project's first year leading up to the partnership with the Faith Tabernacle UHC are detailed in an earlier report available on Partners for Impact's website.](#) This report chronicles the events of the second year, including processes and decisions made by Resident Leaders participating in the project. The work in Wake Forest and Partners for Impact's evaluation is continuing into year three.

Since its inception in 2016, the Kaleidoscope Project has built its work on two big ideas:

1. The places where young children (0 – 8) spend time can have a lifelong impact on their social and emotional well-being.
2. The relationships children have with each other and adults can build their resilience, give them the tools they need when times are difficult and arm them with confidence as they grow into adulthood.

While this foundation has endured, the Kaleidoscope Project's approach has shifted based on its ongoing commitment to learning and the continual evolution of JRE's investment in racial equity. In its earliest iteration, the Kaleidoscope Project worked with established nonprofits and government agencies to improve spaces for children, using a set of best practices developed through JRE-funded research. With lessons from this first phase, the Kaleidoscope Project moved to provide small, flexible grants and technical assistance to organisations, allowing them to decide for themselves how best to improve their space and/or services for children.

At the request of and in partnership with John Rex Endowment staff, the Kaleidoscope Project evolved further with the aim of “turning philanthropy on its head.” The explicit goal became shifting power over funding for interventions away from JRE and the Kaleidoscope Project to community members. Working with DHIC, a large nonprofit housing agency, the Kaleidoscope Project supported a group of Resident Ambassadors at Beacon Ridge to create a project for the children and families in their apartment complex. The Kaleidoscope Project’s work included building the Ambassadors’ capacity to identify an opportunity, design an intervention, and advocate for their priorities. At the same time, the partnership catalyzed shifts in the DHIC’s work, increasing their intention and practices to center the voices of their residents as the organisation planned and implemented their housing properties. More information about the Kaleidoscope Project’s shift in focus with DHIC and Beacon Ridge is provided in a [case study](#) on the Partners for Impact website.

In this current phase, the Kaleidoscope Project is collaborating more directly with community members through the Northeast Community Coalition (NECC), a volunteer-led grassroots effort focused on an historically African American neighborhood in Wake Forest. NECC helped bring together members of the community to work with the Kaleidoscope Project. In the first year, this team of Resident Leaders brainstormed, collected data from their neighbors, and decided that bullying in middle school was a problem for youth in their community. Together they decided that creating an afterschool program for middle-school students could support the social and emotional wellbeing of youth, as well as provide opportunities for tutoring, leadership development, and family engagement within the neighborhood.

This partnership with NECC provided the opportunity for the Kaleidoscope Project to work with community members without the structural limitations associated with navigating the policies and priorities of a large nonprofit. This model gives community members more power to make decisions about how JRE’s money is used and builds their capacity for organizing and leadership. At the same time, it presented the challenge of developing a program without having a physical space in which to implement it. This barrier was resolved at the end of year one through a partnership with a faith organization that was embedded in the community. The Faith Tabernacle United Holy Church is centrally-situated within the Northeast Wake Forest neighborhood and its members have strong community and familial ties with NECC leaders. The congregation recognized the potential of this collaboration to serve not only the young people in their own church but also to provide much-needed programming for the youth in the greater community. After discerning that the church was a good match for what the NECC Resident Leaders had identified, the Kaleidoscope Project and Faith Tabernacle UHC formally entered into a partnership. Five members of the church joined the 13 Resident Leaders from NECC, and visioning for this afterschool program shifted from ambitious ideas to concrete plans. A leader from NECC described the impact that the Faith Tabernacle UHC members have had in shaping the project:

The other team coming in with Faith Tabernacle...that really just helped shape the answers. We have more younger people [who are] active in the community, and parents with young children and their grandkids. They’ve been coming and they know what the need is. They’ve added so much ... and even more, when the crew came in with Faith Tabernacle - those two youth, teenagers and the parents that

know the needs of their children that are in school and their children that are in this community. It just put another dose of ammunition to what we are trying to do. It's just all good.

In 2024, action moved forward simultaneously on two fronts. The first focused on renovating Faith Tabernacle UHC's unfinished basement to create a fully-functional space for the afterschool program, including finding additional financial resources to supplement the Kaleidoscope Project's investment. Because of past community work and existing connections, the leader of NECC facilitated a meeting with the Mayor of the Town of Wake Forest. The Mayor shared the Resident Leaders' vision for their community's youth with her staff, returning with a pledge of \$250,000 in funding from the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 (ARPA) to renovate the church building. The NECC leader viewed this as an assurance that the project was on the correct path, saying, "When [the Mayor] came and listened and said she would take it back, and when she came back with a figure, you know that really just let us know that we had not been meeting and working and planning in vain....that stands out to me because that lets us know that our town is behind the project. Our town is supportive. Our town is listening to the needs of the youth and the parents, and they are trying to help make a difference."

Early in the year, the Kaleidoscope Project staff also met with the owner of a local design firm who believed so strongly in the mission of the project that she donated her design services to support the work. The Kaleidoscope Project staff worked with the Resident Leadership team and the designer to finalize plans for the space, and develop a request for proposals (RFP) to seek bids for the renovation work. This process is continuing in the project's third year. The Town government also agreed to facilitate the permitting process to ensure that the construction could move forward smoothly.

Concurrent with plans for the physical space, the Resident Leaders began planning the programming that would take place there. The Kaleidoscope Project staff facilitated the development of a theory of change, beginning with the Residents Leaders articulating in detail the impact that they wanted to create for middle-school students in the Northeast Wake Forest community. They brainstormed their long-term goals, identifying priorities that fell roughly into three categories: to ensure post-high school success; to develop future leaders; and to support youth wellbeing. Each of these goals included more specific focus areas such as life skills, career readiness, civic engagement, mentorship, and positive mindset. The group continued by identifying the medium-term changes required to reach the long-term goals. This layer of the theory of change increased in specificity, naming for example, outcomes such as family engagement, learning to take appropriate risks, financial literacy, time-management skills, and community awareness. From there, the Resident Leaders were able to specify more concrete skills and experiences that middle school students should have as a result of their participation in the program. This became the list of short-term goals and included, for example, skills in budgeting, public speaking, and social media literacy. The short and medium-term outcomes included factors of social-emotional wellbeing, including promoting a positive body image, healthy physical activity, a supportive environment, and connection to something greater than one's self.

Moving through this goal-setting exercise from a broad scope and to more focused outcomes enabled Resident Leaders to clearly articulate the types of activities an afterschool program would need to deliver to support the social-emotional wellbeing of middle-school students. They envisioned on-site tutoring, book clubs, and other academic support; games and role-playing to foster self-confidence, public speaking skills, and financial literacy; field trips and guest speakers to build civic engagement; and other on-site options including space to just hang out with friends. The Resident Leaders then identified the inputs required to implement the programming, including people, materials, technology, supplies, curricula, etc. The resulting [logic model](#) set the stage for crafting an initial budget and plan for next steps.

In their planning, the Resident Leaders returned repeatedly to a discussion of values: not just *what* the programming will be but *how* it will be done. The Resident Leaders are committed to creating a safe and welcoming space for every child who wants to attend. The program will be open to youth with diverse characteristics, e.g. race, gender, family make-up, religion, country of birth, ability, and experience. The Resident Leaders acknowledged that building self-esteem and confidence is tied to respecting and supporting every young person as they are within an inclusive, accepting environment. They recognized that ensuring adherence to this vision and these values would require maintaining independent control over the program keeping “ownership” of the project within the community.

Roots of Wisdom Scholars

In addition to maintaining the vision and values, the group needed an entity that could accept and account for public funding, hire staff, and manage operations. As a community organization with limited capacity using a fiscal agent, the Resident Leaders recognized that NECC was not a good long-term option for administering the afterschool program. The Resident Leaders then considered Faith Tabernacle UHC to not just provide space but also manage the program. While the members of Faith Tabernacle UHC participating as Resident Leaders were interested in this approach, they acknowledged that the values of the larger church membership could heavily influence any programming under their management with potentially conflicting values. Having outside agencies, such as Wake Forest Parks and Recreation or 4-H operate the program within the church space was also considered, but similar concerns were raised about the future of the project if control was given to a government agency or other outside entity.

Following extensive discussions about multiple options, the Resident Leaders decided to create a new nonprofit to operate the programming in conjunction with NECC at Faith Tabernacle UHC. Within a short period, the Resident Leaders formed a new entity called Roots of Wisdom Scholars, incorporated, created bylaws, and applied for nonprofit status with the Internal Revenue Service. Resident Leaders representing both NECC and Faith Tabernacle UHC, including middle and high-school students who have been attending meetings regularly, volunteered to serve as the Board of Directors. The group agreed that a Resident Leader from the church would serve as Executive Director and begin to take a larger role in planning and fundraising. Resident Leaders celebrated this significant milestone that would facilitate grant applications and allow the group to seek additional funding toward making their vision a reality.

Reflecting on the importance of the community's decision to create the Roots of Wisdom Scholars nonprofit to uphold their values, one of the Kaleidoscope Project staff remarked, "The formation of the nonprofit speaks to the fact that ... [the Resident Leaders] wanted to make sure that they could have control over inclusivity in the program ... it can continue to have an inclusive nature in its programming and in its intent that is not circumvented by the outside people who would come in and run a program." The other staff member described the decision to create the nonprofit as the best next step as the group focused on keeping power in the community for the long-term rather than settling for short-term solutions. Speaking about the program's future, the member considered, "Who's sitting on the Board and continuing that mentality of 'for our community, within our community, by our community?'"

While the Resident Leaders only meet every other week for one hour, a great deal of work has also happened in between meetings. The commitment from NECC and Faith Tabernacle, the Resident Leaders, and the Kaleidoscope Project staff moved the project forward from a general idea to a specific plan. In year three, the project is focusing on completing the renovations of the church and securing more funding for programming. The Resident Leaders are also exploring the full range of values by which they want to operate and learning about the roles and responsibilities expected of a Board of Directors.

The Resident Leaders are also looking beyond Northeast Wake Forest to share what they have learned as a model for other communities. As one Leader described, "This is a pilot program. This is a project for other churches and different communities to take a look at and say, You know what? We can utilize our space too. After we leave out Sunday and Wednesday night Bible studies, Sunday services, we can use our space for our youth in the community where we are. So we are hoping this is a pilot, a project that other churches will say, Okay, we would like to do something like that in our community."

THE KALEIDOSCOPE PROJECT INTERVENTION

As the Kaleidoscope Project has evolved since its inception, the staff have adjusted their approach to creating places and spaces that support the social-emotional wellbeing of children. The most recent shifts keep the Kaleidoscope Project in alignment with JRE's new 20-year Strategic Roadmap to create systemic change in Wake County. The work of the Kaleidoscope Project allows JRE to live into its mission of strengthening organizations that center racial equity and to learn what is needed to authentically and sustainably shift power over decision-making to people in communities most impacted by systemic racism. The Kaleidoscope Project is determining what facilitates this shift and what prevents community members assuming these types of roles. It is also identifying the systems that need to be involved for community members to participate as leaders in creating change. The Kaleidoscope Project is revealing where change, disruption, shift, and support is needed to create more equitable systems for children.

In its current iteration, the Kaleidoscope Project's approach comprises three elements:

- 1) Building the capacity of community members to advocate for and create results for themselves and their families;
- 2) Strengthening networks among agencies to create more equitable systems; and
- 3) Supporting movement-building that builds an ecosystem around children's social-emotional wellbeing focused on racial equity and justice in places and spaces.

In the Northeast Wake Forest community, the Kaleidoscope Project's work is moving forward in all three areas at different paces, as expected. The individual level work supports new and stronger connections among agencies which in turn builds a movement and ecosystem with common goals. As has been learned in past projects, building capacity and changing systems requires fostering mutual trust over a significant period of time. Shifting power to communities requires working in relationship with and at the pace of the community's members as they deepen their understanding, develop their vision, and strengthen their capacity to create sustainable solutions.

Building on the Foundation of Authentic Relationships

These components of the Kaleidoscope Project's intervention all start from building strong relationships with community members and showing up authentically week after week to do the work. One Resident Leader identified the Kaleidoscope Project's presence, the commitment to their goal, and the friendship that they bring as key to the success of this collaboration. A Kaleidoscope Project staff member agreed, emphasizing the importance of building not just relationships but friendships with community members to really understand their motivations and concerns. This requires a willingness to share one's own life, be vulnerable, and to show up as one's true self.

Relationships are incredibly important to doing the work...and to showing up in community and to the success of projects. It's not enough to come into a space and try to do work differently, to want to show up and follow a different method; to want to do co-governance and collaborate. So much of that only works with the foundation of building relationships and taking time to get to know people and build trust. And there's a very, very human piece to that that is very real and needs time to develop. When you take that time, relationships and friendships do develop, because it's hard not to when you're in a space of people and you're being authentic, and you're taking time to know who they are and to understand what motivates them. What are the things that they care about, and what do they want to see? Those things are very personal. It's not just showing up and [asking], Oh, how do you work best? No, it's like, I want to know everything about you, and I want to understand what you care about most in your community, because I want to be here to support that, and I can't support you if I don't know those things. And in those pieces, you're also sharing, reflecting about yourself too. Because again, relationships go both ways, and in order for people to build trust, it can't be this one way street where I'm asking of you all these things and I want to know you, but I'm not going to share and be vulnerable either. Because when you're not vulnerable, you're not sharing, and then you're not really showing up authentically, and you're not creating a true relationship. A lot of that just comes down to a commitment from both parties, not just Kaleidoscope, but community and NECC and the church, and everyone to just show up. And when they show up, they're showing up as themselves, and they're not trying to hide

behind any kind of facade. We're all just showing up trying to do something together, collaboratively. And I think there's something beautiful in that when you do work in that way.

Showing up, forming relationships, getting to know members of the community, and building trust takes time and intention. Relationship among the community members also facilitates the work. In-person meetings with time to socialize as everyone fills their plate with the dinner the Kaleidoscope Project provides as well as group field trips, e.g. for a walking tour of the Northeast Wake Forest Community and to the Poe Center for Health Education, help build group cohesion. These aspects of the Kaleidoscope Project's work contribute to lowering barriers to participating and increasing knowledge, while also strengthening the important foundation of relationships with and among the Resident Leaders.

Building Community Capacity

Through these strong relationships, the Kaleidoscope Project is strengthening the skills of **individual community members** to effect change and building their confidence to share their various forms of expertise. Skill-building includes guiding community members through brainstorming ideas, collecting data from their neighbors, synthesizing information, and formulating long-term goals for their community. They have learned to use tools such as logic models to build programming focused on outcomes and to draft an organizational budget. The staff of the Kaleidoscope Project has used their past project management experience to guide Resident Leaders through the process of renovating the church space, including working with a designer to create a floor plan based on the programming needs, writing a request for proposals, accepting bids, submitting permits, and managing the budget.

In addition to increasing skills related to project design and implementation, the Kaleidoscope Project staff is building leadership and engagement among the Resident Leaders. By listening to and acting on the ideas and input from all participants, the Kaleidoscope Project staff actively demonstrates their respect for the Resident Leaders and their intention to support rather than to lead. The Resident Leaders have continued their commitment to the work and to participating fully in making the afterschool program a reality. By providing support and being flexible, Kaleidoscope Project staff have encouraged the Resident Leaders to remain involved as their own responsibilities outside of the project shift and change. The unwavering and nonjudgmental support for Resident Leaders has fostered strong commitments from them and pride in what they have been able to contribute. One Resident Leader expressed her appreciation for being continually welcomed even when her work schedule has made it difficult to attend meetings consistently. Another member who has been with the project from its beginning shared, "I'm excited seeing the program grow and seeing where it can lead. I can say that I was part of that and know I was in on the ground floor."

Reflecting on the past 12 months, a Kaleidoscope Project staff member described the progression of change in Resident Leaders,

When we first got together, there was this group of passionate people and the passion never died. There's a group that's passionate, people trying to figure out what needs to happen, because they knew something needed to happen in the community. As we move down the road, I think that passion has stayed. And then people brought energy, and now they're bringing their expertise. And I think in the beginning they were trying to figure out, where does my expertise lie, what do I bring to the table? And I think now we're starting to see people starting to see their niche, their expertise, how they can get involved and be impactful in this project.

In the meetings, the Kaleidoscope Project staff is intentional about supporting and guiding rather than leading and directing the actions of the group. The staff ensures that the Resident Leaders are collectively making decisions about the direction of the project and holding the power to shape the vision and the execution of the work. One Resident Leader described the essential role that the Kaleidoscope Project has played by saying,

You - your facilitation - really does make a difference to help guide us on what we are trying to do. Because when [the Kaleidoscope Project staff] contacted me, and we met, I had no clue about, okay, what are we going to do? You know, what are we doing? And it just began to blossom....I don't think we could have done that or could do it on our own. By you all being present and helping to lead us and guide us, and especially to stay on track on what we're trying to do - all that makes a big difference.

At the individual level, the Kaleidoscope Project staff is also helping Resident Leaders discern what is needed to create a space that will be welcoming to all children and families. Multiple times, discussions have touched on religion and faith, sexuality and gender identity, and family and housing status. Together with the Resident Leaders the Kaleidoscope Project staff have built an atmosphere of trust and open communication that allows for exploration of these topics and encourages consideration of diverse experiences. As a result, planning and language have become much more intentional to ensure a more inclusive setting in theory and practice.

As the meetings focus on the details of establishing a nonprofit and organizational structures, engaging the teenaged Resident Leaders has become more challenging. The technical aspects of the discussions provide fewer opportunities to tap their knowledge and experience. The Kaleidoscope Project staff acknowledge the decreased engagement and are thoughtful about ways to increase their participation. One staff member asked, "How do we as a group of adults ... figure out ways to then engage youth in ways that they want to be engaged in, that's going to speak to the things that they're interested in, or speak to their communication styles?" As the planning moves back towards programming and focuses less on the nonprofit infrastructure, the discussions may become more interesting to the youth again. By that time, additional personnel may be identified to meet separately with the young people to encourage sharing of their ideas and to build their capacity for participation and leadership in the project.

In a year-end review of the project, multiple Resident Leaders remarked on the amount that had been accomplished since their first meeting in 2023, and since creating the partnership between NECC and Faith Tabernacle UHC. They are proud of what they have done to move from an identified need and possible

solution to having the Roots of Wisdom Scholars nonprofit, a program plan, space, and leadership. One Resident Leader said, “I appreciate that the group has had a vision, has been consistently building on that vision to create something that has not existed before. This will be one of three afterschool programs in this area and we want to be the premier program.” They recognized their new skills in planning and program design, and identified additional areas for growth and training. The Resident Leaders also expressed gratitude for the Kaleidoscope Project staff, their supportive guidance, their encouragement, and for the money they are able to invest in making an idea a reality. One Resident Leader lifted up the willingness of the Kaleidoscope Project staff to work alongside community members saying, “You make a big difference. At NECC, we have not had a partner come in like you all have; we have partners, but not to just really get their hands in it.... Your presence ... your hands-on makes a difference. You don’t just tell us. ... You’re involved. “

Building Capacity as a Coalition of Community

In addition to the individual capacity building, the Kaleidoscope Project staff have been guiding **NECC and the Faith Tabernacle UHC as they develop a collaborative community effort**. The project has been built on existing relationships and resources within Northeast Wake Forest, among organizations and individuals. A Kaleidoscope Project staff member described the importance of this foundation, saying,

The relationships that existed in the community were very much essential to making sure that this project continued on. So essentially, without those existing relationships with the Mayor and such, we would not have been able to secure the ARPA funding; without the existing relationship with the church, we wouldn't have been able to have a place. So all these things weren't necessarily Kaleidoscope, but it was more just recognizing through asset mapping and other conversations that the resources existed in the community. It was just a matter of having a backbone [organization] to put all the pieces together. And I think that's more of where Kaleidoscope came in. We helped facilitate and kind of create the space for the brainstorm. But as far as the outreach and the actual connections within the community, that was all within the community. That really spurred that movement.

The other staff member agreed,

The effort was all community-led effort. They did the work. They had the resources. From a Kaleidoscope point of view, we were maybe a conduit, maybe a facilitator, of structure, of how to go about getting it; but all of the work, all the effort, all of the sweat equity, came from within the group.

As a coalition of individuals from different organizations, the Resident Leaders are learning what is required to ensure that this afterschool program remains an effort of, for, and by the community. Several other sites, including one owned by Wake Forest Parks and Recreation, were considered as locations for the afterschool program, but the Kaleidoscope Project staff and Resident Leaders recognized that this risked taking ownership of the project away from community members. Incorporation as a nonprofit, Roots of Wisdom Scholars, emerged as the solution, keeping the program independent from other entities and within the community’s

control. One Kaleidoscope Project staff member emphasized the significance of the decision to create a new nonprofit being made by the Resident Leaders,

I think that was really powerful, especially on the nonprofit piece, because you saw the entire team being like, we'll meet as many times as we need to meet to get this done. And it became less about, 'We only have this amount of resources for this amount of time,' to be, 'No, we need to get this work done. So anyone who's available, please come and we're going to be meeting this, this and this time. And if it's extra time, it's extra time, and that's just what it's going to be.' Again it speaks to, when community is in the driver's seat, and they are the ones in control, and they're the ones making decisions, so much happens, even in those moments when we don't think anything's happening.

With this independent organization established, the Kaleidoscope Project staff are helping to build the nonprofit's infrastructure, strengthening their ability to function as an organization, distinct from the individuals operating the program. A solid organizational foundation with clear values and intention will allow Roots of Wisdom Scholars to evolve and adapt their programming as community conditions, funding, and neighborhood needs change. While the Resident Leaders have a variety of experience working with and serving on boards of nonprofits, the Kaleidoscope Project staff is supporting an increased understanding of roles and functions within the nonprofit framework. They are also mindful not to recreate harmful hierarchies that minimize the power of community members to shape the vision, mission, and programming of the organization.

While the Kaleidoscope Project has provided guidance and direction, much of their investment in the Northeast Wake Forest community has been in the form of facilitating space and time for community members from these different organizations to meet, build trust, dream, communicate, and strategize. They have brought together multiple entities and agencies to create a program with a stronger foundation and broader reach than a single organization could achieve. The Kaleidoscope Project ensures the availability of the meeting space, brings dinner, and provides stipends to each Resident Leader for their time and input. These components lower the barriers to participation and provide tangible incentives beyond wanting to make a difference in the community. One Resident Leader expressed her appreciation for the Kaleidoscope Project's care and support saying, "It is so amazing to rush in from work and know there is a meal waiting at the meeting."

As the Roots of Wisdom Scholars has found its footing, interest is building in the wider Wake Forest community. More neighbors have inquired about how they might contribute. The daughter of a Resident Leader has volunteered to teach baking classes for the students in her free time, for example. Other organizations are also looking for ways to support the project. A Resident Leader shared, "This just goes to show the effect that this is having not only on Faith Tabernacle, but the community just like how our church asked, How can we volunteer to help you?"

Network Building

The collaboration and capacity building do not just encompass NECC and Faith Tabernacle UHC. Drawing on the connections of NECC leadership, Faith Tabernacle UHC members, and the Kaleidoscope Project staff, this project is **building and strengthening a network of agencies within the town and the county**. The Town of Wake Forest and its Mayor have stepped up to partner in multiple ways, including with funding and permitting. Town staff have begun attending NECC meetings and events more regularly. Local nonprofits such as Hope House and the Poe Center have provided space and guidance as the Resident Leaders developed their vision. Other connections to government agencies, including Wake County Human Services, Wake Forest Parks and Recreation, and the Wake County Public School System, seek to address accessibility and sustainability for Roots of Wisdom Scholars. In an effort to contract locally for services, the project is also garnering support from private individuals and businesses, including designers, building contractors, and other community members. In this work, the Kaleidoscope Project staff is using its own connections but also helping others recognize where their connections may fit and provide benefit to the project. This networking will benefit the Roots of Wisdom Scholars while also strengthening the capacity of the community to collaborate on other endeavors. It also builds the resilience of the program to continue on its own once the Kaleidoscope Project steps back and reduces its role in developing the project.

Shifting the Status Quo

By investing the John Rex Endowment's funding in building the capacity of individual leaders, of organizations, and of a network, the Kaleidoscope Project will make a difference for the children and families of Northeast Wake Forest. Rather than using philanthropic dollars to decide for and provide a service to a target population, the Kaleidoscope Project is providing a platform for individuals to create programming that supports the social-emotional wellbeing of their children. The approach strengthens the capabilities of community members to identify possibilities and use expertise gained from their lived experience to construct their own solutions. With funding, technical assistance, time, and unwavering enthusiasm, the Kaleidoscope Project has helped the Resident Leaders recognize their power to address a need of their community, rather than waiting for the town, the school system, Parks and Rec, or another agency to provide a service. In doing so, the Resident Leaders are able to center the children in their own neighborhood as they design the best possible program to achieve their vision.

The Kaleidoscope Project staff have also been strategic in building the capacity to ensure the resilience and sustainability of the Roots of Wisdom Scholars. Ensuring that the community owns the project now and in the future guided multiple discussions and decisions, including location, management, and leadership. This also undergirds the collaboration between NECC and Faith Tabernacle UHC, neither of which had the capacity alone to develop this program. NECC brings community leadership, trust, and buy-in from a wide constituency in the Northeast Wake Forest community. Faith Tabernacle UHC has its own space and an interest in using it to serve youth. Together, these entities form a strong foundation for a community-led, community-owned program for the children of Northeast Wake Forest.

The John Rex Endowment and the Kaleidoscope Project also aim to affect larger systems, including philanthropy. Starting with strong relationships and shifting power over decision-making impacts not just this particular intervention, but also presents a new model for communities working with grantmakers. One Kaleidoscope Project staff member described the shift,

People know we're bringing money to the table...What's different is that we're showing people that funders can be different and funder-community relationships can look different. And when you do that, you're creating a new standard. So now, when organizations go and seek funding, they expect more from their funders. ... We're actually now changing what is normal for our funders and that is really important. Because when you talk about systems change - that is our goal, right? - it's how people show up in community differently. It's kind of beautiful to see that manifest in this specific project, and see this is why we do it. This is actually the piece that's important, and people take note of that.

EVALUATING DIFFERENTLY

In traditional evaluations, the evaluators operate with some distance from an intervention with the intention of only observing and maintaining “neutrality.” In contrast, Partners for Impact has chosen to be part of this project in Northeast Wake Forest. We strive to add knowledge and capacity to the community rather than extract data from them for our own purposes. To this end, we have not just attended meetings with the Resident Leaders, we have intentionally built relationships with them and worked to earn their trust. When requested, we have shared our technical knowledge of nonprofits, logic models, fundraising, bylaws, and board roles. We have also listened and learned from the community members, stepping back to watch - and to be inspired - as they dreamed, brainstormed, gathered data, made choices, and created a vision for their children’s future. In conversations with the Resident Leaders and the Kaleidoscope Project staff, we compare our observations and interrogate our assumptions, recognize our privilege and look for our biases. By bringing our whole selves to this assignment, we seek to support the ongoing evolution and development of the Kaleidoscope Project and this work in the Northeast Wake Forest neighborhood more authentically and on a foundation of trust and strong relationships.

CONCLUSION

Going into the third year of this work in Northeast Wake Forest, the Kaleidoscope Project is working with the Roots of Wisdom Scholars, NECC, and Faith Tabernacle UHC to create a more explicit values framework to guide decision-making and program development. The Resident Leaders will learn more about putting their values into action as current and future board members. They are also focusing on additional fundraising for programming, both from grants and individual donors. As the building renovation moves forward, the team aims to have a strong curriculum, solid funding, and a well-informed board to open the program in late summer.

As the program continues to evolve, the evaluation team will be observing how power shifts and emerges as the Roots of Wisdom Scholars nonprofit takes the lead in operations. They will also be following what is needed for the organization to live into its values, particularly those of inclusion and equity. The developing network around the program, its connections to other community organizations, and its support from government agencies will also provide insight into what is needed to impact larger systems. These learnings will be provided to the Resident Leaders in Northeast Wake Forest and will provide guidance as the Kaleidoscope Project and JRE look to future projects in other communities.

Looking forward to 2025, a Kaleidoscope Project staff shared,

It was beautiful the way that everyone came together at the end of the year, and really acknowledged, wow, we did a lot this year, and we were very successful. And we all pitched in, and we all showed up, when we needed to show up, and we did this. And it was because of our efforts, collaborative efforts, that we got this done. So I'm excited for 2025 because that energy was definitely pulled into this year already. I'm excited to see, with that energy, what we'll accomplish now this year, having this foundation with the nonprofit setting the scene. Last year, setting the scene was our place. This year, setting the scene is the nonprofit, and what does that look like then for the end of the year?