

# 2024 Community Impact Report



## HIGHER UP 2024 PILOT PROGRAM SUCCESS

Higher Up, a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization, was established in October 2023 to create career and education pathways for students and graduates of East Windsor Regional School District's Hightstown High School. We are a nonprofit that coordinates meaningful paid summer jobs and internships to ensure that all students, regardless of background, have access to strong career development opportunities.

In 2024, through strategic partnerships with 24 local businesses, skilled trade groups and the Mercer County Summer Youth Jobs Connection Program, we placed 30 students in summer jobs tailored to their interests. These jobs brought substantial financial resources to Hightstown and East Windsor in the form of wages earned, and students gained invaluable benefits of real-world experience, professional exploration and personal growth.

Contributing to the effectiveness of the 2024 program were the robust Readiness and Support Programs we delivered, equipping students with the skills and confidence they needed and then seeing them through the full course of their employment. We also worked to remove barriers to success such as lack of transportation and professional attire, enabling every student to put their best self forward.

Many of our 2024 Higher Up students and partners have already signed up to return in 2025 – we hope you'll join us in our exciting second year!

Wendy McDade,  
Co-Founder, Executive Director

Rosa Prada-Rodriguez,  
Co-Founder, Director of Program Development

## 2024 Higher Up Business Partners

Allen & Stults  
Capital Health  
Cornerstone Music Studios  
Cranbury Inn  
Dcruz Agency  
DFG Financial Group  
East Windsor Regional School District  
Gittings Associates  
Green House Graphics  
Hair Plus West Windsor  
Higher Up  
HomeFront  
Kindly Creative  
Kynice Designs  
\*Modway  
Plainsboro Preserve  
Princeton Animal Hospital  
Reflections Hair & Nail  
School Business Office  
State Farm  
TSG  
Turp, Coates, Diggers & White  
Ulta Beauty  
Westerberg Law

## THE HIGHER UP READINESS & SUPPORT PROGRAMS

Our **Readiness Program** consists of five interactive workshops designed to develop essential professional and personal skills for students while preparing them for their individualized job placements. 2024 Session Topics:

- **Navigating the Workplace:** Understanding expectations, workplace cultures and strategies for professional success.
- **Building Your Personal Brand:** Exploring personal finance, self-presentation and the power of a strong professional identity.
- **Career Readiness:** Crafting impactful résumés, practicing mock interviews and learning about workplace practices.
- **Professional Networking & Communication:** Mastering business and dining etiquette to build confidence in professional settings.
- **Wellness & Self-Empowerment:** Emphasizing self-care, cultivating personal growth and embracing individuality as a strength in the workplace.

Our **Support Program** assigns each placement a dedicated student/partner coordinator who conducts regular check-ins to assess fit, address needs, note progress and facilitate evaluations.

## 2024 ACCOMPLISHMENTS

- **30 students served** (17 Hightstown High School, 4 Mercer County Technical School/HHS, 8 college, 1 post-college)
- **5 job readiness sessions** designed and delivered, earning a 90% “good” or “very good” rating by students
- **24 business partnerships** established, with 90% saying they would rehire Higher Up students
- **5 students hired** by their partners to extend their employment beyond the program
- **Collaboration** formed with Mercer County Summer Youth Jobs Connection
- **8 weeks of paid summer employment** for Higher Up students via Mercer County funding
- **\$96,000 in wages** brought to Hightstown and East Windsor students



### LET'S GO! STUDENT TRANSPORTATION FUND

The “Let's Go!” Student Transportation Fund literally – and crucially – gets Higher Up students to work. Students who experience transportation challenges to and from their summer placements receive vouchers for taxi services or stipends for gas.

- 8 students benefitted from the fund in 2024.
- Round-trip voucher costs between \$12 and \$60 for each day, with locations ranging from Lawrenceville to Millstone.
- 2024 Student Transportation Program totaled \$3,900.00 over 8 weeks.



### SHINE BRIGHT! STUDENT SUCCESS FUND

The “Shine Bright!” Student Success Fund boosts readiness for Higher Up students on an individual basis by providing access to technology, stipends for professional attire and scholarships for transformative classes, training and materials.

- 3 students benefitted from the fund in 2024.
- Fund covered tuition of MCCC class, capital purchase of laptop and stipends for professional attire.
- 2024 Student Success Program totaled \$600.

## 2025 PROGRAM GOALS

- Increase number of students served to 40
- 25 student salaries paid by Mercer County Summer Youth Jobs Connection/NJ Department of Labor Grant (age 16-24)
- 15 student salaries paid by Higher Up business partners (age 15+)
- Strive to increase the number of under-resourced students served
- Maintain students' 90% rating of Readiness Program as “Good” or “Very Good”
- Maintain partners' 92% student evaluation average and 90% “Would Rehire” rate
- Transition from primarily self-funded pilot program to financially sustainable nonprofit

## Are you ready to make an impact?

Learn how you can engage with Higher Up by visiting [higherupnj.org](https://higherupnj.org) or emailing [info@higherupnj.org](mailto:info@higherupnj.org)