

HEROES OF HOPE

FALL 2026



The Child is the Center of it All.

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From the CEO's Desk

Dear Friends,

As summer comes to a close, I find myself reflecting on the moments of connection, growth, and joy we've shared at The Children's Center—and on all that you made possible for children and families in our community.

This summer, your support created opportunities for children to learn, grow, and simply be kids. Nearly 40 children spent four weeks at our summer camp, at no cost to their families, building friendships and confidence through social-emotional learning, swim lessons, arts and crafts, and plenty of memory-making. At our Health & Wellness Fair, 861 children and caregivers connected with more than 30 community organizations and obtained valuable resources. And through our Back-to-School Backpack Bazaar, presented by the Detroit Tigers Foundation and Meijer, 2,000 children received backpacks filled with school supplies to help them begin the school year ready to learn.

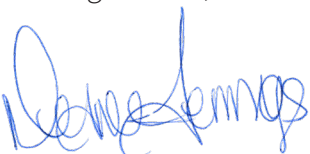
Throughout the summer, we also saw generosity take shape in many ways. Families honored loved ones by organizing donation drives that brought new books and shoes to the children we serve. Volunteer groups gave their time to organize our Boutique and prepare resources for families. Partners, donors, and community members continued to step forward in ways both large and small, each one helping create moments of comfort, joy, and opportunity.

You also helped us reach an incredible milestone for the future of our mission. Together, we surpassed our \$1.5 million goal for the Michigan Central Station Children's Endowment Initiative, creating a lasting source of support for children and families for generations to come. We are now building on that momentum as we work toward reaching 313 unique donors, growing this legacy even further.

What stands out most to me is that there is no single way to make a difference here. Whether you give your time, collect needed items, support an event, make a gift, or share our mission with someone new, you help create the community that every child deserves to have around them.

As we welcome fall and look toward another meaningful season at The Children's Center, I am reminded of all we have accomplished together and inspired by the possibilities still ahead. Your unwavering commitment to being present, listening to the voices of the children we serve, and opening doors to opportunity makes a lasting difference. Together, we help children grow, thrive, and confidently shape their own futures.

With gratitude,



Desiree Jennings



Community Support in Action

What does community support look like? This year, it looked like 861 children, families and community members coming together for a very busy, very special afternoon!

For the first time, we brought our annual Health & Wellness Fair and Backpack Bazaar together on the same day, creating an afternoon filled with resources, fun, laughter and plenty of backpacks. It was a big undertaking, but thanks to our incredible community partners, volunteers and supporters, it was a huge success!

Throughout the Health & Wellness Fair, families connected with valuable community resources, accessed vision services and enjoyed plenty of fun, including face painting, bubbles, a bounce house and Italian ice. Our community vendors generously shared their services and resources, helping families make important connections and find support as they head into the fall.

And, of course, no event is complete without a little fun and a few shenanigans! One of the biggest highlights of the afternoon was a visit from PAWS, the Detroit Tigers mascot. PAWS brought his usual energy and silliness, keeping kids laughing and making the day even more memorable. A special thank you to Savvy Sliders for generously providing food for the event and to each of our community vendors for helping make the afternoon so special.

The fun continued with our Back-to-School Backpack Bazaar, presented by the Detroit Tigers Foundation and Meijer. A new school year starts with feeling prepared, and this year, 2,000 children in our community received backpacks filled with school supplies and other essentials.

From packing and organizing to distributing backpacks and sharing smiles with PAWS, the Detroit Tigers Foundation continues to be a hands-on partner in making this day possible. Over the past three years, their support has helped put 5,500 backpacks into the hands of local students.

Thank you to everyone who joined us, volunteered, donated, provided resources and helped make our first combined Health & Wellness Fair and Backpack Bazaar such a tremendous success. Your support helps Detroit's children and families head into the fall feeling connected, supported and ready for what's ahead.



Turning Heartbreak into Hope

Sometimes, a small idea can grow into something far more meaningful than anyone imagined. For the Soenen family, that idea began with a desire to honor someone who spent her life caring for children. It became a heartfelt way to keep Shannon's memory alive while bringing comfort and joy to children in her community.

Shannon Soenen was an elementary school teacher who loved children, shoes and all things sparkly. Sadly, Shannon passed away in August of 2025. In her memory, the Soenen family decided to do something simple: collect new shoes for children in their community. They began their collection, which they called "Shannon's Shoe Closet," on the anniversary of Shannon's passing, intentionally reframing a difficult day with hope, generosity and love.

What started as a "small donation drive" quickly became something much bigger. Together with countless friends, family members and community supporters, the Soenens collected an incredible 423 pairs of brand-new children's shoes and more than 300 pairs of socks for kids at The Children's Center.

For Sherry Soenen, the response has been deeply meaningful. "This truly has taken a tragic day in my family's life and turned it into something good for others, and it is helping to heal my broken heart."

Because of Shannon's Shoe Closet and the generosity of everyone who contributed, hundreds of children headed into the new school year with new shoes, socks, and perhaps a little extra confidence in their step. For some families, receiving a brand-new pair of shoes means one less expense to worry about. For a child, it can simply mean the excitement of wearing something new to school and feeling ready for the year ahead. Most importantly, every pair of shoes carries a little piece of Shannon's legacy: a reminder of her love for children, her joyful spirit and the kindness she shared with others.

We are incredibly grateful to the Soenen family and everyone who helped bring Shannon's Shoe Closet to life. Their generosity transformed a painful moment into an opportunity to lift up hundreds of children and families.

Because of Shannon, hundreds of children are stepping into the new school year with a little more comfort and confidence – and a sparkle in their step.





Holiday Shop

A Free Holiday Shop Bringing Joy to The Children's Center Families

Help 1,500 children celebrate this holiday season!
View sponsorship opportunities, amazon wish lists, and ways to get involved







Meet Renee Pompi, Chief Philanthropy Officer

We're excited to introduce Renee Pompi, our new Chief Philanthropy Officer!

Renee leads The Children's Center's philanthropy efforts, building meaningful relationships with donors, partners, and community members who believe in creating brighter futures for children and families.

With a strong background in nonprofit development and community engagement, Renee brings extensive experience in fundraising, major gifts, endowment and capital campaigns, corporate and foundation partnerships, and donor stewardship. She is passionate about connecting people to the causes they care about and creating opportunities for generosity to make a lasting difference.



Renee holds a Master of Arts in Education from Wayne State University and a Bachelor of Arts in Communication Management from the University of Dayton. She is excited to build new partnerships, strengthen existing relationships, and help advance The Children's Center's mission of helping children and families shape their own futures.

Renee would love to connect with you! If you'd like to learn more about The Children's Center or explore ways to get involved, please reach out to her at rpompi@thechildrenscenter.com or 313-262-0938.

Digitas Invests in Moments That Matter

For the past two years, volunteers from our valued corporate partner, Digitas, have brought their time, energy, and caring spirit to Summer Camp at The Children's Center. They don't just volunteer. They jump right in and become part of the camp experience, creating moments of joy, connection, and belonging for the children we serve.



From serving breakfast and joining morning circle to creating colorful art projects, including African masks, and playing games alongside campers, Digitas volunteers have helped make summer a time for children to play, create, explore, and simply be kids.

And the connection didn't stop when camp ended. After spending time with the children and seeing the work of The Children's Center firsthand, the Digitas team found another way to make a difference. Inspired by their experience, they donated gifts to our Holiday Shop, helping bring extra joy to children and families during the holiday season.

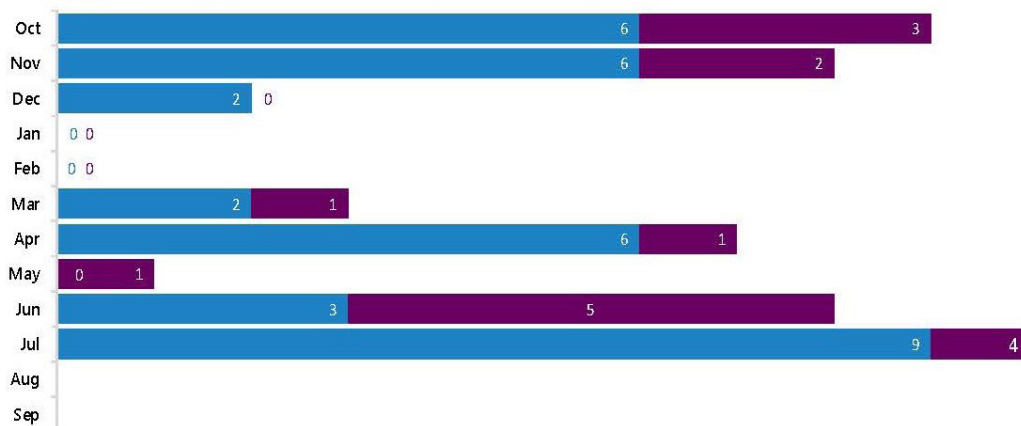
The Digitas team shared, "Volunteering at TCC was an incredibly rewarding experience that allowed us to directly support our community. Our team had an amazing time rolling up our sleeves and seeing the impact we're able to make. Partnering with organizations like TCC is vital for Digitas because giving back strengthens our community and allows us to invest in the health and happiness of those around us."

Thank you, Digitas, for helping create moments of joy, connection, and belonging for the children we serve. We are proud to have you as part of the TCC community!

Child Welfare



Adoptions and Reunifications that occurred per month during FY26.



51
Children have achieved
permanency,
fiscal year to date

17
Reunifications

34
Adoptions

Summer Camp: Retro Style

What do you get when you take 40 kids, two weeks of summer, and leave the devices at home? A whole lot of old-fashioned fun and memories that will last long after summer ends!

This July, we welcomed nearly 40 children and teens to our annual summer camp for two action-packed sessions of Retro Summer. The theme gave our campers a chance to unplug, try something new, and experience the kind of simple fun that brings kids together: games, crafts, laughter, friendship and plenty of time to just be kids.

Campers took a trip down memory lane as they discovered retro favorites like Lite-Brites, Fashion Plates and Cat's Cradle. They also got out into the community for exciting field trips, including swim lessons at Goldfish Swim School, a day at LEGOLAND, Dave & Buster's and bowling. For many of our campers, these experiences are about much more than having a fun day. They're opportunities to build confidence, practice social skills, try something unfamiliar and create positive memories with their peers.

Beyond a fun experience for our youth, camp provides something important for the entire family. When school is out, caregivers are often juggling work and other responsibilities while trying to find safe, affordable, quality care for their children. Our summer camp gives families peace of mind while providing children with a welcoming place where they can learn, play and feel supported.

For the children we serve, that support can be especially meaningful. Camp gives them a place where they are welcomed as they are and where they can experience success, connection and fun alongside their peers.

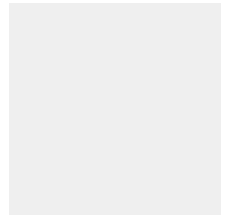
Grants and generous donors make it possible for us to offer summer camp and provide the staff, activities, field trips and individualized support our campers need. Every contribution helps create opportunities for children to laugh, make friends and discover something new.

Every child deserves a summer filled with fun, friendship and memories they can look back on with a smile. Thank you for helping make that possible. Your support doesn't just fund a program. It helps create a summer to remember.





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Detroit, MI 48201



The Children's Center of Wayne County, Inc. is a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization, IRS tax I.D. number 38-1359505.
No goods or services were provided in consideration of this contribution, which is tax-deductible as allowed by law.



The Children's Center | 79 West Alexandrine, Detroit, MI 48201 | 313.831.5535 | TheChildrensCenter.com

Future Events

October

Trunk or Treat

October 16, 2026

The Children's Center

January

Save the Date: AutoGlow 2027

January 15, 2027

Michigan Central Station

Scan the QR to Donate Today!

**Your fall gift helps
ensure children have
the support they need
to learn, grow, and
thrive.**



Events are subject to change.

If interested in Volunteer Opportunities, please contact the Volunteer Engagement team to sign up at Volunteer@thechildrenscenter.com.