

# Belle Haven Action's Social Impact Report

7 years providing outreach and support for  
a stronger community (2017 - 2024)



## Mission:

Belle Haven Action partners with residents to amplify the voices of community leaders. We advocate for inclusion, equitable distribution of shared resources, and acknowledgment of the diversity that makes our neighborhood unique.

# Overview Letter from the Executive Director



For nearly four decades, the Belle Haven Neighborhood has grappled with systemic neglect, underinvestment, and marginalization. As the only historically redlined community in Menlo Park, Belle Haven endured a lack of representation, exemplified by its absence from the Menlo Park City Council until recent years.

Belle Haven Action emerged as a response to this urgent need for advocacy and service provision, driven by a core team deeply rooted in the community. Our mission encompasses not only addressing immediate needs but also advocating for systemic change at the local and county levels. Central to our approach is the recognition of each individual's unique needs within our community, guided by principles of love, compassion, trust, and respect.

Since our inception in 2017, we have focused on amplifying community voices and nurturing local leadership. Our work spans a broad spectrum, including housing, transportation, education, nutrition, health, environmental justice, racial equity, and leadership development.

We have become a trusted resource, known for our discretion and innovative problem-solving. Our initial strategic plan, spanning from 2018 to 2023, targeted exclusion in housing, education, food access, and transportation. While progress has been made, the ongoing challenges necessitate continued attention and dedication.

As we evolve and mature, sustainability becomes paramount. Our future endeavors will prioritize building resilience and ensuring our organization's longevity. We recognize our role in influencing critical issues such as climate justice, housing, transportation, disaster preparedness, community resilience, and the preservation of Black culture and history.

In the words of Dr. K Rhoads, "Nothing About Us, Without Us, Is For Us." This ethos guides our commitment to inclusive and community-led solutions, ensuring that our efforts uplift and empower Belle Haven residents for generations to come.

*Cecilia Taylor*





# Introduction to Belle Haven



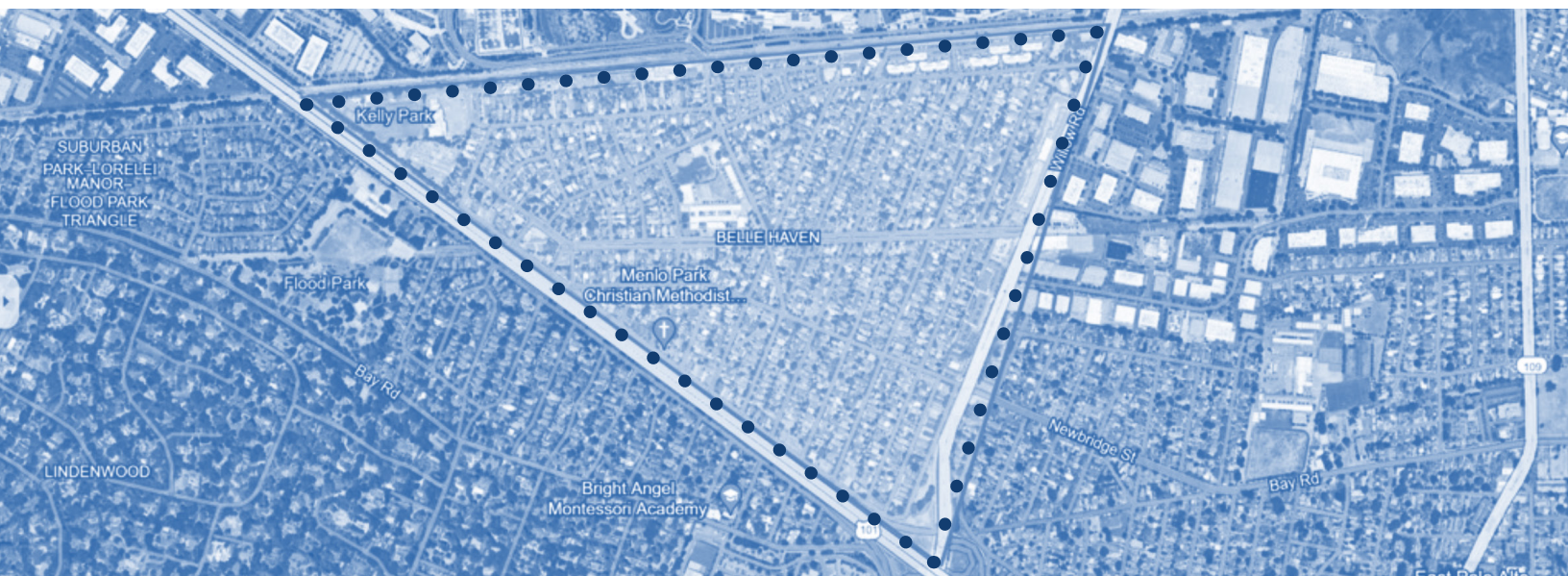
Belle Haven is a diverse neighborhood in Menlo Park, established in response to the discriminatory 20th-century practices of redlining and blockbusting. In the 1950s, the practice of redlining restricted the areas where people of color could buy homes and limited their ability to secure home loans. This systemically barred Black families from purchasing homes in Menlo Park and the adjacent white suburbs. Later, real estate agents increased segregation through block-busting. This practice involved convincing white homeowners that Black families were moving into their neighborhoods, scaring them into selling homes at a discount, only for agents to turn around and sell to Black families at inflated prices. The systemic inequality that formed the basis of the founding of Belle Haven continues to this day.

Belle Haven is less affluent, more racially diverse, more densely populated, and more vulnerable to the effects of extreme weather and climate change than the rest of Menlo Park. Of the city's five districts, Belle Haven is the most diverse, with a population that is 69% Hispanic, 18% Black, 4% White and 3% Asian/Pacific Islander. It is also home to the most vulnerable Menlo Park population in terms of environmental quality, economic mobility, and threats to public health.

In response to the historical lack of representation for the largely underrepresented local population, in the spring of 2017, Cecilia Taylor established Belle Haven Action (BHA) as a means to advocate for the residents of the Belle Haven neighborhood of Menlo Park. After decades of residents feeling overlooked, Belle Haven Action inspires and supports local community engagement, giving a much-needed voice to oppressed community members and ensuring residents are involved in local decisions.

In Belle Haven Action's first months of existence, the team began focusing on civic engagement, both encouraging residents to participate in local government and encouraging local commissions to change their operating practices. As a result of our actions, commissions reduced overlapping meetings, began to record proceedings, and set regular schedules for more frequent and regular meetings with agendas published far in advance. BHA brought over 20 residents to a Parks and Recreation Commission meeting to petition for and convince the city to name a local park for an African-American neighborhood leader, decorated veteran, and author who had not been adequately recognized for his service due to racism in the Navy, Mr. Karl E. Clark.

▼ Aerial view of the Belle Haven neighborhood, often described as the "lonely triangle," because of the neighborhood's physical and political separation from the City of Menlo Park.



# Community Testimonies

“

I am grateful that there's an organization from our neighborhood that advocates and educates to the needs of the residents of Belle Haven neighborhood... Belle Haven Action has been an amazing connection between the neighborhood and local government who shape and change the policies that affect all in the City of Menlo Park and Belle Haven.”

– BELLE HAVEN RESIDENT OF 10+ YEARS

“

What we need is getting a voice in city government and Belle Haven Action helps provide that voice.”

– BELLE HAVEN RESIDENT OF 10+ YEARS

# Impact by the Numbers

70%

of surveyed Belle Haven residents felt Belle Haven Action increased their knowledge of city planning processes that affect residents.

57%

of surveyed Belle Haven residents felt Belle Haven Action increased their knowledge of:

- ▶ air quality & health
- ▶ COVID-19 impacts

78%

of surveyed Belle Haven residents found Belle Haven Action helpful in advocating and elevating their needs with local government officials.

73%

of surveyed Belle Haven residents found Belle Haven Action helpful in improving their quality of life.



# Belle Haven Action Timeline

**Letter writing campaign on behalf of local residents left out of the City senior housing application process.**

An affordable housing project was constructed without any outreach actually conducted in the neighborhood. BHA advocated on behalf of a group of unhoused elders and successfully helped house several elders.

**Black History Month Celebration at the Onetta Harris Community Center.**

BHA also hosted the BSU Students from Menlo Atherton for a screening and discussion of "Harriet" at the Redwood City Movie Theatre.

## Air Purifier Project

BHA provided 70 air filtration units for one of Belle Haven's most vulnerable populations – elders. This project helped ensure that seniors had good air quality in their homes.

**Grand opening to the first Belle Haven Action office.**

BHA held the open house for the first office on October 23, 2023.

## Belle Haven Community Campus Grand Opening

BHA led the effort to spread the word about the brand new Belle Haven Community Center. This Community Campus provides swim classes, adult classes, a youth summer camp, and youth classes.

2017



In BHA's first year alone, they had eleven advocacy activities for housing access, transportation improvement, and community empowerment.

## Breakfast at the Bus Stop

BHA packed 350 grab-and-go breakfasts for children during the span of 3 weeks. Because of this direct action, schools that receive Belle Haven transfer students began consistently providing morning snacks for students.

## Naming of Karl E. Clark Park.

BHA led the effort to rename a park in Belle Haven after Karl E. Clark, a longtime resident, decorated WWII veteran, activist, and mentor.

2018

## Held Stakeholder Meetings to Address Traffic & Pedestrian Safety Issues

BHA hosted local and state government representatives to advocate for students' safety in their daily walk to school, which involved crossing a busy highway overpass.

2019

## COVID-19 Testing Project

BHA began a COVID-19 testing project that administered over 4,300 COVID tests to Belle Haven residents. In addition, BHA provided outreach, COVID-19 resources, the first vaccinations, and information on how residents could protect themselves during those uncertain times.

2020

## Serenading the Seniors

For Memorial Day 2020, BHA hired a local family band to bring joy through music at the Sequoia Belle Haven Senior Apartments.

2021

## Held first annual unity walk in celebration of Martin Luther King, Jr.

Community members gathered to commemorate MLK, Jr. and reflect on the importance of giving back to one's community.

2022

## BHA hosts two Community Health Fairs

BHA's community health fairs allowed residents to obtain COVID-19 testing, blood pressure and blood sugar screening, and offered educational information on diabetes, nutrition, mental health, hygiene, and CPR.

2023

## First Juneteenth Celebration

BHA partnered with the City of Menlo Park to hold the first Juneteenth Celebration in Menlo Park. As part of that day, BHA documented and recorded the oral histories of Black elders in Menlo Park.

## Creation of Belle Haven Community Climate Change Team

Partnering with Climate Resilient Communities, BHA helped spearhead the creation of a Belle Haven Community Climate Change Team. The Team is made up of community members and ensures that the city and county incorporate community voices in its climate change-related planning.

2024





# Providing Breakfast at the Bus Stop (2018)

Our response to cuts in school meals was to initiate a Breakfast at the Bus Stop to ensure Belle Haven children arrive at school fed each morning—something we know leads to improved academic outcomes. The May 2018 pilot program, Breakfast at the Bus Stop, delivered meals to kids riding the Tinsley bus from Belle Haven Elementary School to La Entrada Middle School. These efforts led to a change in how the school addressed feeding hungry kids. BHA joined the San Mateo County Working Group on School Breakfast and presented to all San Mateo County public school superintendents in November 2018 in the hope of expanding efforts in 2019.

Each year, **about 1200 students across 9 grades** in the Belle Haven neighborhood commute to schools in neighboring districts through the Tinsley Voluntary Transfer program. The program allows these students to obtain a higher quality education that is unavailable in the closest school district, Ravenswood. Because of the local traffic, students can be on the bus for up to 90 minutes each way.

However, **a power outage in the fall of 2017 left kids on the bus for nearly four hours on the way home** without food, water or access to restrooms. While the Ravenswood district feeds its students three hot meals

a day, the neighboring districts do not provide breakfast or lunch to all students on a consistent basis and some do not serve morning meals at all. Recognizing students' needs, Belle Haven Action partnered with Community Equity Collaborative and piloted Breakfast at the Bus Stop. For three weeks, Belle Haven Action packed and served a total of **350 brownbag breakfasts**.

Students were able to take the breakfast at the bus stop and were appreciative of the nutritious food. In the meantime, Belle Haven Action also lobbied at the county level for schools to address food access issue for transferred students.

After persistent efforts, in the following fall, schools in neighboring districts began consistently providing snack shacks at school sites.

## 60%

of residents found Belle Haven Action helpful in improving their access to nutritious food.



## 350

BREAKFAST PROVIDED



## 3 weeks

WEEKS SERVED

# Supporting Covid Outreach (2020-2022)

In an effort to meet our community's health-related needs during the pandemic, BHA provided COVID-19 resources such as vaccine clinics, testing sites, and outreach. We have worked with Umoja Health San Mateo County, the County of San Mateo, and the Ravenswood Family Health Clinic on transparency, equity, data and access to healthcare. We promoted and hosted two health fairs, and presented at multiple regional and county-wide conferences.

The Belle Haven neighborhood **holds only 19%** of the Menlo Park total population, with a population of 5,405. Despite being a smaller neighborhood within Menlo Park, **Belle Haven had approximately 51% of the total COVID-19 cases in Menlo Park.** These health disparities grow more grave when looking at Belle Haven's demographic makeup compared to Menlo Park. Belle Haven is a predominately Latinx community, while Menlo Park is a predominantly white community.

Belle Haven Action recognized that their community bore the brunt of the COVID-19 impacts and sought to ensure the safety and health of Belle Haven. Belle Haven Action partnered with the County of San Mateo **to set up more than 30 testing sites and distribute over 4,300 tests** to the residents of Belle Haven over a year long period. Additionally, Belle Haven Action conducted outreach to provide residents with information about testing, as well as vaccine safety and efficacy, by helping sign community members up for vaccines and providing information about the safety and efficacy of the vaccines.

“

BHA has provided many important useful resources for our community. I have volunteered for Covid testing and community healthcare for our residence. It is a tremendously important organization.”

– BELLE HAVEN RESIDENT



**4,394**  
TESTS GIVEN



**47**  
TESTING DAYS



**69%**

of Belle Haven residents surveyed found that Belle Haven Action was helpful in increasing their access to health-related services.



# Improving Air Filtration (2021-2022)



Ultimately, a survey of Belle Haven residents found 100% of the air filtration units helpful.

**90%** of Belle Haven residents reported better breathing and cleaner air in their homes.

One of the biggest concerns for Belle Haven residents is poor air quality. Belle Haven is surrounded by highway 84/Willow Road, the Bayfront Expressway, the Dumbarton Bridge, and the 101 freeway. **81,000 cars cross the Dumbarton Bridge on the weekdays and 80% of commuters** neither originate nor end in Menlo Park; consequently, the community is continually blockaded by weekday traffic barring both entry and exit, with the morning traffic lasting until 10:30 AM and the afternoon traffic beginning at 2:30 PM - a scant 4-hour relief period.

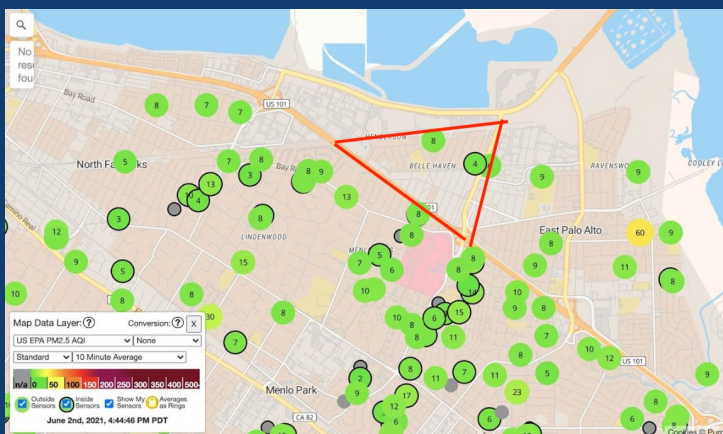
This has major implications for air quality, with data showing that Belle Haven's general air quality is significantly worse than neighboring communities. **76% of Belle Haven residents surveyed** indicated that they were concerned about poor air quality, with the elderly residents particularly susceptible to related medical problems.

Air quality monitors located in Belle Haven (in red) to justify a development moratorium.



In 2016, the City of Menlo Park upzoned flood-risk areas without updating the Safety Element and Hazard Mitigation plan, expediting development in Belle Haven and worsening air quality. To address this, Belle Haven Action pursued two projects: creating an environmental impact report by advocating for the installation of monitors and collecting data from air quality monitors to justify a development moratorium and prevent further air quality deterioration, and providing air purifiers to seniors throughout Belle Haven to mitigate current air quality issues. Approximately 51% of Belle Haven Households have at least one person with asthma, four times higher than in other Menlo Park neighborhoods.

Through this initiative, Belle Haven Action successfully delivered Winex air filtration units to seventy elderly residents over a four-month period from October 2021 to January 2022 to ensure the seniors had access to clean air in their homes to alleviate air quality-related health complications. The air purifiers were not only effective, but life-saving; one resident with asthma found relief from mold issues, while another with allergies no longer needed medication to live comfortably and safely.





# Meet the team



## Cecilia Taylor

BA, Mathematics, San Francisco  
State University Certificate, Early  
Childhood Education

Cecilia Taylor is the Executive Director and CEO of Belle Haven Action. A second-generation member and resident of the Belle Haven neighborhood, she is passionate about the rightful involvement, agency, and acknowledgment of the Belle Haven community within every emergent level of government.

As the first Black American from Belle Haven to serve on the Menlo Park City Council since 1986, she served over 10 years on the Ad Hoc Advisory Board for the San Mateo County Housing Authority and as a CERT member. Taylor continued to make history as the first Black American woman to serve as mayor in 2020, and was named Senate District 13 Community Champion by Senator Josh Becker in 2021. Currently, Taylor holds board memberships in K-Star Productions, Job Train, SMC Community Project, and American Teachers Council, Inc.



## Julie Shanson

BA, English, Cornell University

Julie Shanson is the Strategic Partnerships Manager of Belle Haven Action. She has been a part of the organization since its inception, beginning her career in fundraising at Stanford University and holding customer-oriented positions at software companies before becoming a software services consulting practice owner. Shanson is a vital part of the orchestration of Belle Haven Action Projects, overseeing related execution and endorsement from beginning to end.



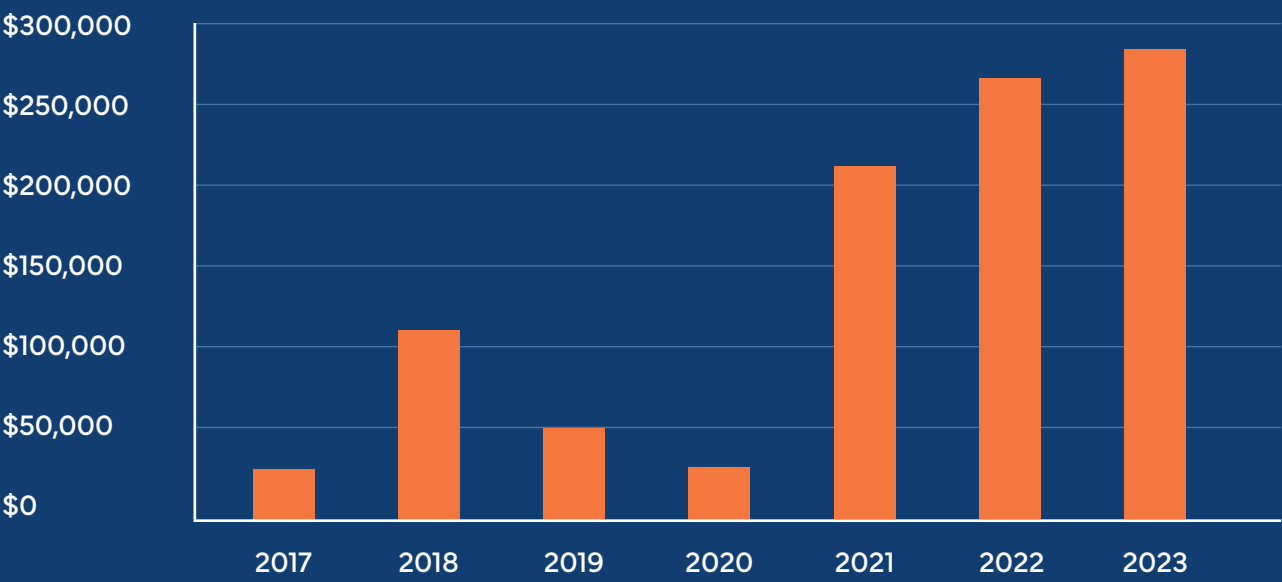
## Annielka Pérez

AA, Business Administration  
and Graphic Design

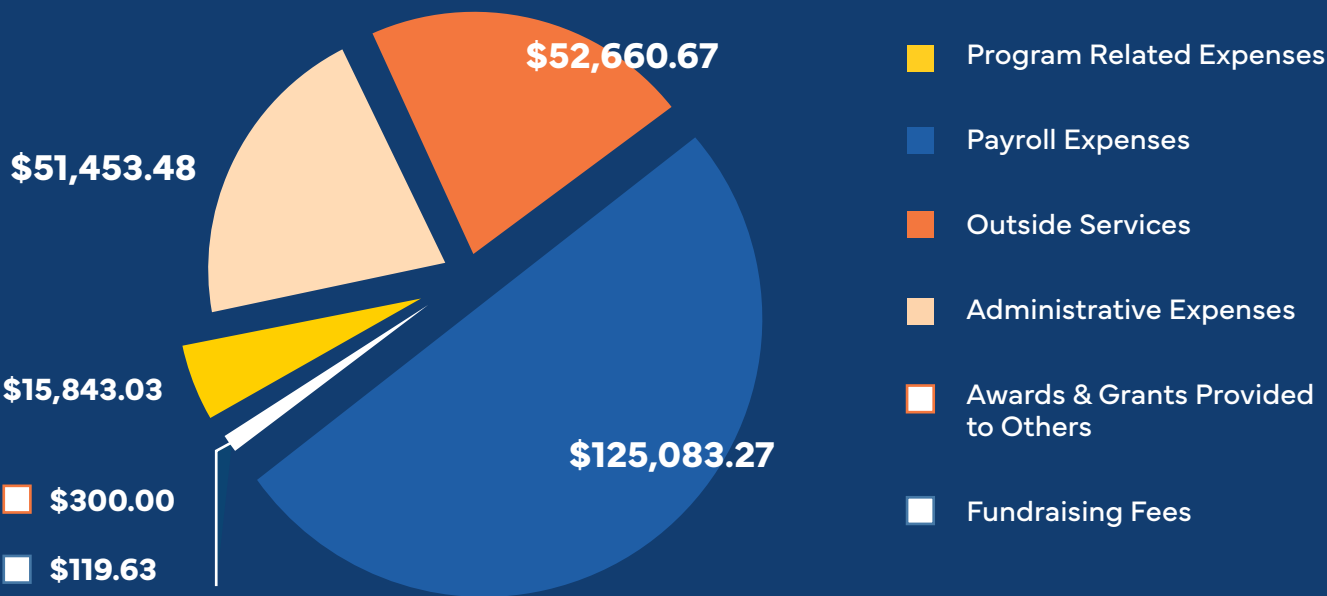
Annielka Pérez is the Digital Design and Communications Manager of Belle Haven Action. Inspired by Taylor during CERT training, Perez began her advocacy work with Faith in Action in 2015. A native Spanish speaker and Belle Haven Resident, she began her career in graphic design at the Hewlett-Packard Credit Union, bringing to fruition her passion for design and photography while holding customer-oriented service positions in Belle Haven Action.

# Financials

## Total Revenue 2017-2023



## 2023 Total Expenditures



# Funder Acknowledgments



We would like to thank our most generous funders, from whom Belle Haven Action acquires grants to perform substantive work for our community and communities like ours:

Bay Area Community Health Advisory Council  
Belle Haven Empowered  
Bruington, Nicole Wright  
California Black Freedom Fund  
Chan Zuckerberg Initiative  
Climate Resilient Communities  
Community Initiative  
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Henry Organ  
Ike Nizam Foundation  
Menlo Together

MidPeninsula Housing  
Nash, Betsy and Horace  
Network for Good  
Richard Health and Associates Inc.  
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RSP Funds  
San Mateo County Health, Public Health  
San Mateo County Health, Public Health: Working Group  
Silicon Valley Community Foundation  
Thrive Alliance  
Una Mesa  
Weinstein, Barbara

**We thank these donors for their consistent involvement, commitment, and support to Belle Haven Action's endeavors. We appreciate their courage, magnanimity, kindness, and provision.**

## Why fund Belle Haven Action?

Our funders are paramount to Belle Haven Action's success, providing the means to achieve our goals for widespread community impact and the individual needs of every Belle Haven Resident. Our projects aim not only to elevate the facilities of the community but to raise them to the level that every resident deserves.

An integral component of Belle Haven Action's strategic execution, our funders ensure we can continue to deliver significant returns on investment. Since 2017, our impactful strides through initiatives like Breakfast at the Bus Stop, Air Filtration, and the annual Juneteenth Celebrations demonstrate that our projects belong on every emergent level of social and legislative action, with representation in cultural events and city council meetings alike. To our current funders and ardent supporters, we extend our heartfelt thanks, and we hope you continue to support our work as we exponentially grow.



# How You Can Help



## Support

Please donate to Belle Haven Action online or by mail. Bolster our endeavors by helping us strengthen our resources.



## Subscribe

Learn more about our work, our mission, and our events through the Belle Haven Action newsletter.



## Volunteer

Extend our impact by hosting drives, aiding team members in current projects, and spreading the word in your communities.



## Advocate

Change is made with the masses. Aid our visibility and our endeavors, and help contribute to influencing social and policy decisions that improve our residents' quality of life.



## Share

Follow us on our social media platforms - Facebook and Instagram - to stay informed about our events and goals.



## Get in touch:

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