



# 2022-2023 ANNUAL REPORT



THE CHILDREN'S HOUSE  
Montessori School



COMPASS  
Montessori Junior High





## LETTER FROM MICHELE

Dear Children’s House and Compass Montessori Supporters,

I was talking with Steve Maas recently, reflecting on our many years at The Children’s House, Steve 32 years and I, 25. We reminisced about the founders who built our community and have since retired. We recognize now there are just a handful of us who are in the “20 years plus club” who carry stories and institutional history in our minds and hearts. And, how amazing it is to have welcomed so many incredible people since then, who bring fresh knowledge, enthusiasm, and perspective, which serve to strengthen our school.

Each of you plays a unique role in the perpetuation of our community. Parents, staff, alumni, donors, grandparents, friends, and of course, the children. Every person contributes. Every person belongs.

A recent example of the power of community became visible when our new Compass Junior High campus experienced a major flood in March 2023. Without prompting, people immediately reached out to me to say “How can I help?” Dozens of you stepped up to pack and move boxes, disassemble furniture, and clean the temporary space so our Junior High learners didn’t experience significant disruption in their learning. We couldn’t have done it without you.

Over our 39 years, countless stories like this have tested us all. Through the difficulties, we have become stronger. The beneficiaries of it all have been and continue to be our children. Thank you for the countless ways you give of your time, resources, and talent to root us so solidly among the finest montessori schools in the country.

With Gratitude,

*Michele Shane*

Michele Shane,  
Head of School



### Board of Directors

2022–2023 school year

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# PARK STREET CAMPUS: RENOVATION TURNED RESTORATION

When we decided to purchase our Park Street Campus, we knew that it had great potential to become a Montessori environment for our adolescent learners. The square footage, downtown location, and well-maintained building were a solid foundation to build upon.

In December 2022, the Board of Directors voted to accept a proposal from the Neidorfler Group to create an architectural and interior design plan for the renovation of our Park Street Campus that would “reflect the values of the school and fully support the Montessori educational philosophy, processes, tools, teaching methods, and culture.”

The design process launched in February 2023 with discovery meetings, focus groups with the students, and observations of the school day. Misha and Jeff Neidorfler, parents of two Junior High graduates, were excited to be involved in our school again, this time to create a thoughtful and lasting design that Compass Junior High families and the community at large can appreciate and be proud of.

Through their process, the Neidorflers discovered that the students needed a more grown-up space with a designated place to gather as a full group where they didn't have to sit on the floor. They also found that the students worked best in small groups of four, that they wanted options for cozy places to sit, and they wanted an organized and tidy kitchen.

Luckily, this first step in the design process was completed in early March because on March 18, an estimated 16,000 gallons of water poured through the ceiling, flooding our Junior High.

Due to the flood, the remaining design and development steps were fast-tracked and unveiled to the community at the Bright Futures Gala on April 21. With Hallmark Construction on board and insurance claims in process, the renovation turned restoration project began with demolition in early May. In November 2023, Compass Junior High will move back into a reimagined environment, distinctly prepared to support our adolescent program and Montessori approach to learning.



COMPASS  
Montessori Junior High



## YOUR IMPACT: BRIGHT FUTURES FUND & GALA

The 2023 Bright Futures Gala: Roots & Wings, presented by Highstreet Insurance Partners and Deviate, was a beautiful celebration of our school's history and dedication to the Montessori prepared environment. A video about the history of our school was premiered [watch it here: [traversechildrenshouse.org/history.asp](https://traversechildrenshouse.org/history.asp)] and a paddle raise boosted our Bright Futures Fund total for the year to a record \$188,000 net of expenses.

Sincere thanks to everyone who helped create this exceptional evening, especially Brittany Luea, Summer Hennessy, Abby Taylor, Emily Kolassa, Jessica Sullivan, Ashley Bailey, and Stacey Feeley. Roger Amundsen created the school-wide art project "Wings of Independence," Jen Lake and Ryan Sullivan were co-emcees, and special remarks were made by Peter Starkel, President of the Board of Directors, and Michele Shane, Head of School. The Cathedral Barn, The Jack Pine Band, and Modern Bird catering made the evening memorable. Special thanks to all of the event sponsors and everyone who made a gift toward our Bright Futures Fund.

Our Bright Futures Fund supports our cash reserves for future improvements – so that we are always able to plan for and respond to the needs of the future. Since our Bright Futures Fund launched in 2020, the fund has raised \$570,000. During the summer of 2023, the largest project supported by our Bright Futures Fund was added to our campus – a new climber for the Primary playground. Visit our website for a full list of projects supported by the Bright Futures Fund. [traversechildrenshouse.org/giving.asp](https://traversechildrenshouse.org/giving.asp)







# 2022-2023 SCHOOL YEAR ENROLLMENT SNAPSHOT



**143** 3 MONTHS  
— TO —  
STUDENTS 6 YEARS



**118** 1ST GRADE  
— TO —  
STUDENTS 8TH GRADE



**\$419,745**  
TUITION  
ASSISTANCE  
FOR **49**  
STUDENTS



Student Body



# OUR ALUMNI: 2023 GRADUATING HIGH SCHOOL SENIORS

These former students graduated our Junior High in 2019. We are proud of our alumni and the independence they are exhibiting through the choices they are making, their confidence in knowing who they are, and what inspires them to keep learning and growing.



**Ivery Libby** is attending Warren Wilson College for Conservation Biology with a minor in Visual Arts. Ivery is interested in environmental policy and hopes to work in an animal rescue or species conservation field, helping save critical and endangered species. “The Children’s House made me realize how much I value hands-on and interest-based learning. When choosing a college, my main priority was that I would be able to work hands-on and in the outdoors to prepare myself for the conservation field I am pursuing.”



**Josh Klug** is playing collegiate baseball at the University of Louisville. Josh is working toward a Bachelor’s in Business Administration with a focus on entrepreneurship. He credits his time at The Children’s House with learning “people” skills. “We presented a lot in class and even at the Veteran’s Memorial Wall in Washington D.C. I took a public speaking class this summer at the U of L and was glad to have already had experience talking in front of people prior to that class.”



**Mack Shane** is currently a student at Michigan State University and plans to apply to the Broad College of Business at the beginning of his sophomore year. “The Children’s House prepared me for my future by instilling curiosity. Curiosity is such an important trait to have throughout life because I believe that in order to be successful in any aspect of life, you must be curious to find new opportunities.”



**Mia Smyka** has completed 120 hours of coursework toward a Child Development Associate (CDA) certificate since graduating high school. She is currently working at Pathways Preschool as a resource teacher in addition to attending Northwestern Michigan College. In the future, she plans to earn a Bachelors in Early Childhood Education. “The Children’s House gave me the confidence to explore what the world has to offer without judgment or the fear of making mistakes.”



**Mateo Thelen** is living in Denmark and attending Roskilde University. Mateo is currently studying social sciences and international business. He plans to do entrepreneurial internships and eventually earn a Masters degree. “In Montessori, I was able to pursue my interests like political science and geography, which will help me in my future career in international business. Also, I’ve developed a strong independence and I love living overseas.”



**Miles Neidorfler** is attending the University of The Arts as a film major and is currently pursuing a BFA with the hope of working in the industry as a Director of Photography and Steadicam operator. “The Children’s House prepared me for my future by fostering my creative endeavors and allowing me to try new things.”



**Sterling Wade**, recipient of the 2023 Braiden Voss Memorial Scholarship, is studying criminal justice and psychology at Northern Michigan University. “The Children’s House has taught me how to be independent from just choosing what I want to do throughout my day to planning week-long trips. Without The Children’s House, I would not have been as prepared for college as I am now.”





# FEATURED ALUMNI: MADISON DUENSING



Madison Duensing attended The Children's House from 1998 through 2006 and graduated from Michigan Technological University with a bachelor's degree in Mechanical Engineering in December 2017. We recently heard she was doing innovative work and decided to reach out to share her story.

## What do you currently do for work?

I work as a Senior Medical Application Engineer for Stratasys. I get to work with Surgeons and Engineers within hospitals across the US to provide patient-specific solutions by utilizing 3D printing. Stratasys has five printing technologies and we can take DICOM images (these come from CT or MRI scans) from a patient and segment them into a 3D model. The model can then be printed and used for surgical preparation. We even have a technology that prints tissue-like and bone-like materials which allows the surgeons to physically practice the procedure beforehand on their patients' anatomy.

## What are your favorite memories of being a student at The Children's House?

One of my favorite memories is when I got banned from using scotch tape because I over-used it and ironically, eventually worked at 3M for 4.5 years. It was meant to be, I guess. Another favorite memory I have is of my upper elementary teacher, Patty Anton. She was incredible in the way she understood each student and their learning styles. She once took us on a camping trip near Sleeping Bear Dunes and we had to do a walk on a trail by OURSELVES at night. At the time, this seemed so scary but she and my classmates were waiting at the end and I had conquered one of my worst fears, darkness. It seemed like every activity she provided was a lesson, this one being that: there will always be a light at the end of every dark tunnel.

## How did our school prepare you for life?

Honestly, I don't think I would have become an engineer if I didn't attend TCH. Being an engineer requires a lot of 3D visualization and hands-on work. You can't be afraid to pick up a wrench or get dirty as an engineer. The hands-on lessons are the most real-world experience a kid can have (up until an internship). The school fosters creativity and never puts a child in a "box," which I believe is essential for a child and their thought process. No student is the same and TCH does exactly what a kid

needs to thrive at their current level of education and it also prepares them for the real world.

## What is the best part of your work?

The best part of my job is I get to work with the most cutting-edge technology and impact lives. I get to travel a lot and work with some of the most amazing minds in the world.

## Do you have any words of wisdom for current students?

Follow your heart, and passions, and never let anyone tell you otherwise. There will always be someone who will try to put you in a box but we all know, no individual is the same. You are good enough. You are smart enough. You are capable enough to do anything you want. Don't be afraid to be creative and break the status quo.

## What does your life look like now outside of work?

I live west of Minneapolis, MN near Lake Minnetonka. I have two dogs, Nala (pitbull) and Laddi (yellow lab). I play volleyball in the summertime and curl in the wintertime at the Saint Paul Curling Club. I love to run, bike, and go to CrossFit. I have a boyfriend of 2.5 years who is very supportive and truly a great partner. My parents and sister still live in Traverse City and I love to visit (mostly in the summertime, ha!).





# A COLLECTIVE GIFT: HELPING CHILDREN LIVE HEALTHY AND ACTIVE LIVES

Since 2005, women in our school community have come together to help children learn to live healthy and active lives. Inspired by Dr. Karen Gilhooly's involvement and promotion of healthy lifestyles, a group of mothers banded together in memory of Karen and the three children, Sierra Fetterolf, Anna Maas, and Rowan Sanford, who died tragically in November 2004. While the faces around the table have changed over the years, this group's desire to make our school the best it can be has been unwavering. Each year, they accomplish this by combining their gifts to make things happen that are outside of our school's general operating budget. The group's cumulative gift now totals \$307,000.



In November 2022, members of the Karen Circle awarded \$28,000 during their annual luncheon to the following projects:

- Gaga Ball Pit
- Community Room Table and Chairs
- Professional Development
- Stage Lighting
- Zen Garden and Labyrinth Landscaping
- Shelving for Outdoor Primary Classrooms
- Junior Great Books Sets
- Stainless Steel Cookware and Professional Cooktop





# STRATEGIC FINANCIAL DIRECTION

Throughout the fiscal year 2022-2023, the Board of Directors made substantial strides in the achievement of our strategic goals while ensuring the fiscal well-being of our school.

One of our notable accomplishments was the successful implementation of a key element of our strategic plan, which prioritizes enhancing staff compensation and benefits. As a result of our concerted efforts, the overall compensation for our dedicated staff saw an impressive increase of 13.6% on average, reflecting our commitment to recognizing their invaluable contributions to our community of young learners.

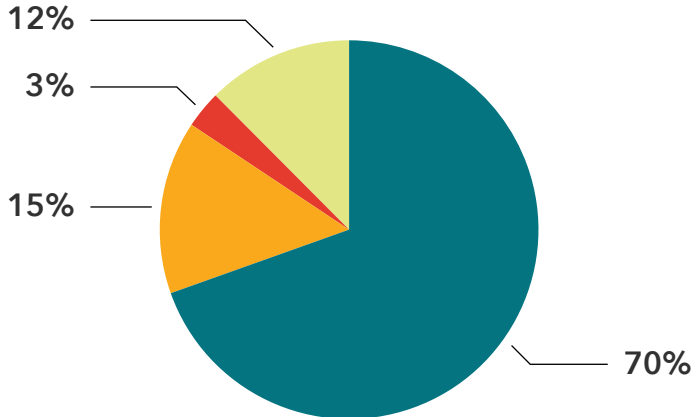
This progress in staff remuneration aligns with our ongoing commitment to foster an environment that values and supports the holistic development of both our students

and faculty. As spelled out in our recently adopted strategic plan, we remain dedicated to upholding the highest standards of education and employee satisfaction. Amidst our progress in this area, we encountered an unforeseen obstacle in the form of substantial damage to our newly acquired Compass Junior High campus. Despite this unanticipated expense, our robust cash reserves enabled us to address the issue swiftly and effectively, displaying our commitment to maintaining the school's infrastructure and ensuring the safety of our students and faculty.

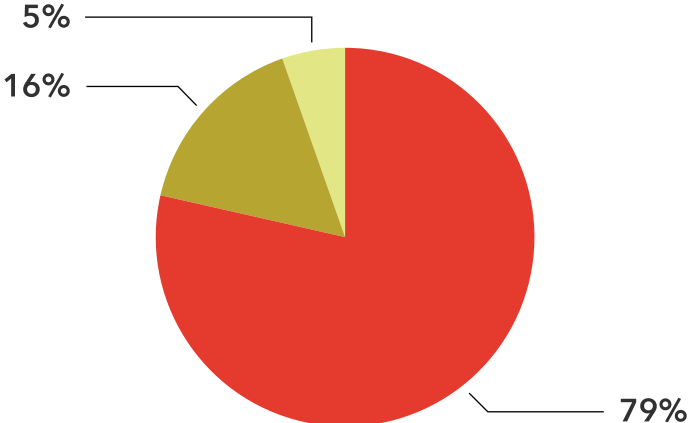
Thank you for your continued support and trust in our mission to provide a nurturing and enriching learning environment for our students, while also providing a supportive work environment for our faculty and staff. It is through your support that we can continue to uphold our mission and make a meaningful impact on the lives of our school community.

### Summary of the financials for fiscal year 2022-2023:

<b>Revenue Total</b>	<b>\$4,944,427</b>
● Tuition and Fees	\$3,438,813
● Contributions	\$731,573
● Lunch & Childcare	\$157,804
● Grants and Other Income	\$616,237



<b>Expense Total</b>	<b>\$4,406,833</b>
● Education Programs	\$3,461,526
● Administration	\$707,949
● Fundraising	\$237,358



Net Assets – Beginning of Year	\$2,892,496
Net Assets – End of Year	\$3,430,090
<b>Increase in Net Assets</b>	<b>\$537,594</b>



## OUR DONORS

With sincere thanks, we recognize those who give generously in support of The Children's House and Compass Junior High.

### **Bright Futures Fund Leadership Giving Levels**

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**THE CHILDREN'S HOUSE**  
Montessori Children's House, Grand Traverse

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## FAREWELL, NADINE!

Nadine Elmgren retired from The Children's House after 42 years of being a Montessori guide. Former and current students, families, and colleagues celebrated with us on Thursday, June 8, 2023. And, we will celebrate her for years to come on Nadine's Day, a special day each spring where the daily routine is surprisingly suspended and students play traditional games, enjoy a picnic lunch, and give back to the school community.