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**Children First Fund**  
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***Chicago Philanthropic Community Expands Evidence-Based Youth Violence Intervention Program Supporting Students Facing Trauma***

*Contribution from Ken Griffin Helps Bring Choose to Change to North Lawndale High Schools, Doubling-down on Meaningful Interventions to Help Students Thrive*

**CHICAGO** – Last Fall, Mayor Lori E. Lightfoot and CPS CEO Pedro Martinez announced a bold and aggressive investment of public and private funds to support youth grappling with high-risk situations. Today, Children First Fund announced a \$2 million donation from Citadel Founder and CEO Ken Griffin to expand Choose to Change (C2C), a core component of Chicago Public Schools’ comprehensive violence prevention efforts, to five additional high schools. The funding will support an additional 200 students over the next two years in the North Lawndale neighborhood, helping to address trauma and prevent further violence in the city’s southwest side and beyond.

This significant contribution brings public and private funding of these efforts to a total of \$12.6 million for the current school year and next, including a nearly \$5 million investment from Mayor Lightfoot and CPS and more than \$7.5 million in philanthropic support.

“Too many children in our city live with violence as part of their everyday life,” said Ken Griffin. “Choose to Change provides students in the most challenging circumstances with the support needed to help combat this tragic reality. I hope our city and community leaders continue to support programs like Choose to Change so that every child in Chicago has the best possible chance to thrive.”

Mr. Griffin’s donation builds on previous support from Crown Family Philanthropies, CME Group Foundation, Salesforce Foundation and others who have provided significant resources to expand Choose to Change’s proven model. This new gift also complements broader violence

reduction work underway in North Lawndale, focused on adults at elevated risk of violence involvement, with support from Crown Family Philanthropies and other local donors.

Now in its sixth year, C2C helps to reduce the impact of trauma on Chicago's youth who have experienced high levels of violence through intensive youth and family support, and weekly behavioral health sessions. The program currently serves 1,000 students and is part of the District's commitment to ensure all students have access to safe environments at school and in their communities. Participants are students who may struggle to consistently attend school, have had some involvement with the justice system, and have been exposed to violence and trauma.

"Addressing multiple childhood traumas requires professional skills, time, dedication - and resources," said CPS CEO Pedro Martinez. "The effort is well worth the investment as every child deserves the support to overcome adversity and realign their life's trajectory."

"We are so grateful for this commitment to our community and to Chicago's children, and inspired by what collective support can make possible for CPS students," says Sadie Stockdale Jefferson, Executive Director of Children First Fund, the Chicago Public Schools Foundation.

Earlier this school year, CPS and the City of Chicago expanded their partnership with C2C program providers, Youth Advocate Programs, Inc. (YAP) and Children's Home & Aid, training four additional community-based organizations to implement a new, hyperlocal version of the Choose to Change program.

Carmen, a CPS 2021 graduate, is among those who benefitted from Choose to Change. As a junior in high school, Carmen was skipping school and failing most of her classes. Her guidance counselor referred her to C2C and she was paired with Nicole Alleyne, a Choose to Change YAP Advocate who met with both Carmen and her mom to start their journey.

"I remember my first day at Choose to Change. There was a meeting during lunch with kids who were already in the program. It was a great vibe - different," Carmen recalls. "It didn't take long for me to know this was something for me."

The weekly group sessions led by a Children's Home & Aid clinical therapist help students understand their responses to situations, moderate their reactions, and improve their decision-making skills. The trauma-informed sessions, coupled with the support from her Advocate, gave Carmen the foundation she needed.

“Nicole (Alleyne) was there for me constantly, including for weekly Children’s Home & Aid sessions where I was able to understand that a lot of my issues came from my own trauma – I lost friends to violence and, as a little girl, was a victim of it,” Carmen said.

Alleyne checked in with Carmen regularly to make sure she was on track: “Nicole told me [that] not graduating was not an option,” Carmen said.

As a result, Carmen started going to class. She realized how much she loved subjects like science, math, and agriculture, and she began to see her own strengths. Through her year in the program, Carmen made it to graduation with her family and Alleyne cheering her on from the sidelines. Now Carmen is majoring in nursing at the University of Illinois-Chicago.

“I’m extremely proud of Carmen’s accomplishments,” Alleyne said. “Not only is she in college, she’s working, volunteers with other youth, and has a very bright future.”

With this investment from Mr. Griffin, the program will help more students like Alleyne see and realize their potential.

#### **About Children First Fund: The Chicago Public Schools Foundation**

The Children First Fund is the philanthropic and partnership arm of Chicago Public School (CPS). It serves as a knowledge hub and liaison between CPS and its community of partners, securing and organizing resources that advance CPS’ mission to provide a high-quality public education that prepares every child in every neighborhood for success in college, career, and civic life. For more information, please visit <https://www.childrenfirstfund.org> or find us on social @ChiFirstFund.