



Bronzeville Fencing Academy



As a young Black woman, I struggled with finding my voice. It's confusing when I must be assertive but not aggressive; ambitious but humble, strong and beautiful. Fencing is my space to put that down and show up as myself. I can be strategic and play an important part of a team and shine as an individual."



2025 Year-In-Review

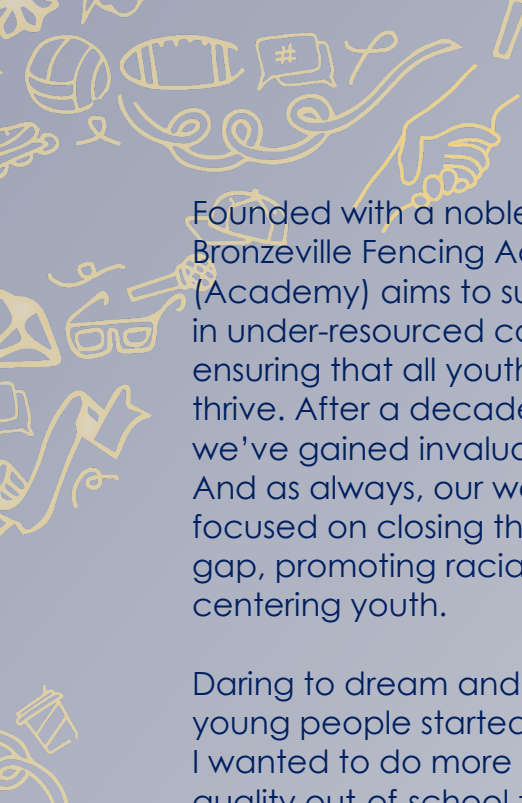
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Founded with a noble objective, Bronzeville Fencing Academy (Academy) aims to support students in under-resourced communities, ensuring that all youth in Chicago thrive. After a decade of operations, we've gained invaluable insights. And as always, our work remains focused on closing the achievement gap, promoting racial equity, and centering youth.

Daring to dream and a drive to help young people started the Academy. I wanted to do more to ensure that quality out-of-school time programming was accessible, and I knew how to do it; I just needed to secure the resources and support to make it happen. We've made many sacrifices because youth deserve quality programming in the communities where they live.

As a youth-centric organization, we must be flexible and reliable. This is reflected in the way we involve young people in our operations. Over the past year, we completed a significant amount of work outlined in our strategic plan, helping over 700 youth and collaborating with communities in desperate need. To meet the needs of young people in a rapidly changing world, our program continues to adapt to each new generation and the communities they call home.

More than fifty families attended the Academy's annual Season Kick-Off and Open House. Our community ambassadors showcased our programming and services to new

and old audiences. This event has been a key driver in attracting more people to our main campus and community sites. We are gratified that the Academy draws youth from across the Chicagoland area and is the most racially and ethnically diverse youth fencing program in the region.

Our digital fundraiser provided vital resources to support the youth in our program. Looking ahead, the Academy is uniquely positioned to seize new opportunities that enhance our ability to serve young people more effectively. While we didn't quite reach our fundraising goal, don't worry; you can still [donate!](#)

We continue our partnerships with the Chicago Park District and District 299, Chicago Public Schools, to offer healthy activities to youth. While we are proud of the progress we have made, there is still much ahead of us. We aim to build on our success and make an even greater mark.

The impact report is a transparent overview of our work. We've expanded services and, in doing so, helped more young people unlock their full potential. We hope you enjoy reading about the progress we've made and our plans. We extend our deepest appreciation and thanks to the volunteers, donors, and partners who make this work possible. ~ [Malcolm](#)

FOCUS.FORTITUDE.FAMILY

Youth Participation Citywide

The Academy reaches across the city*, bringing youth together from diverse communities.

COMMUNITY AREA	PERCENTAGE
Lawndale	16.3
Kenwood	10.5
Douglas	5.8
Grand Boulevard	5.8
Austin	5.3
Humboldt Park	4.2
Pilsen	4.2
East Garfield Park	3.7
Skokie	3.7
West Englewood	3.7
New City	3.2
West Town	3.2
Hermosa	2.6
Woodlawn	2.6
Auburn Gresham	2.1
Calumet Heights	1.6
Lakeview	1.6
Loop	1.6
South Lawndale	1.6
Albany Park	1.1
Beverly	1.1
Bridgeport	1.1
Chatham	1.1
Chicago Lawn	1.1
Edgewater	1.1

*Suburbs Included

COMMUNITY AREA	PERCENTAGE
Logan Square	1.1
Maywood	1.1
North Center	1.1
Washington Park	1.1
West Garfield Park	1.1
Arlington Heights	0.5
Ashburn	0.5
Avalon Park	0.5
Clearing	0.5
Crete	0.5
Grand Crossing	0.5
Jefferson Park	0.5
Justice	0.5
Little Village	0.5
McKinley Park	0.5
Oak Park	0.5
Palos Hills	0.5
Pullman	0.5
Rogers Park	0.5
Roseland	0.5
South Chicago	0.5
South Loop	0.5
South Shore	0.5
Tinley Park	0.5
West Lawn	0.5
West Pullman	0.5

DIVERSITY IN ACTION

Using fencing as a tool to capture young people's interest creates opportunities to help them develop essential life skills, such as goal setting, communication, self-control, time management, and teamwork. Academic concepts can also be introduced, taught, and reinforced through activities relevant to the sport they love. Each year, more youth benefit from Academy programming in the Chicagoland area. Our program serves a diverse demographic, reaching more at-risk youth annually and deepening their application of skills while broadening their life experiences. The number of young people participating in programming has increased, and the Academy has consistently raised its overall capacity each year, growing from 608 youth in 2024 to 724 in 2025, a 19% increase.

The Chicago Park District (Park) manages over 28,000 programs across more than 600 parks, divided into three diverse regions: North, Central, and South. District 299, Chicago Public Schools (CPS), is organized into 18 distinct networks that provide administrative support, strategic guidance, leadership, and professional development for over 630 schools. Both organizations serve more than 316,000 students, 86% of whom identify as Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC).

This year, our expansion efforts within these organizations successfully delivered social-emotional learning (SEL) aimed at improving students'

mental and physical health. The Out-of-School Time (OST) program supports students during periods when they are at a greater probability of becoming involved in delinquent or other high-risk behaviors, especially when no structured enrichment programming is available.

A significant number of young people enrolled in the program come from communities on Chicago's West Side. These largely Black neighborhoods have a rich cultural legacy. Still, they also face significant challenges, including a lack of economic investment, limited access to quality enrichment and educational services, and high rates of crime and poverty. Many young people have a complicated history with institutional systems. For these youth, discontent starts at birth, and their well-being is significantly affected by ongoing socio-economic barriers that hinder their growth and progress. Our program looks to support the needs of these young people as they work to succeed in school.

Internships offer valuable leadership opportunities and provide students with avenues to give back to their local communities. Junior and Cadet interns join in service learning at Academy program sites around the Chicagoland area. Completed hours count toward graduation, the National Honor Society, and scholarships. Students who volunteer collect credit on their official high school transcript. These service hours

plant the seeds of commitment to helping others and make a positive impact on society. This leaves a lasting impression on the communities they serve and nurtures a spirit of service in the younger generation.

This has been an exciting year for the Academy as we continue to implement our strategic plan to expand the impact of our programming. These have been challenging economic times, but we continue to demonstrate success and increased demand for our program.

Private Sector

Specialized preparatory institute endorsements are essential to the growth of our youth and enable us to provide a range of comprehensive options, offering exceptional educational opportunities that support them throughout their academic journeys. We believe in a strong public school system that meets the needs of every student; however, we also recognize that some students seek more specialized curricula. Our ability grouping process is designed to address the needs of these students, offering a more robust framework with additional resources. For some, attending a private school is the best option for their long-term success. Every year, several of our students have the incredible opportunity to attend *Interlochen Center for the Arts*, the top-ranked boarding arts high school in the United States, which is reviewed later in this report.

Scouting America

Our students remain actively engaged in the Explorer program, preparing them for college and career readiness. The training focuses on exploratory experiences and instruction in life skills, leadership, financial literacy, and workforce development. Several of our youth are currently working towards Level I Certification.

Media Coverage

Since 2022, media attention to our program has increased twofold. Coverage is from a variety of sources, including podcasts, radio broadcasts, and television network news programs. Catch the Academy's latest feature on CBS Chicago's *Eye on Chicago*, which aired on July 4, 2025, Independence Day. Viewers are welcomed into our world and learn about the Academy's history, mission, and strategic vision. They discover how our values complement over 20 years of experience in youth development and enrichment.

Social Media

The Academy is on the World Wide Web. Collectively, over the past 365 days, nearly 2,000 new visitors have accessed our pages. This marks a 21.63% increase in visitor activity! Don't forget to follow us on Facebook and Instagram. Tag us in your posts and check our website and social media for the latest updates!

[@bronzevillefencing](https://www.facebook.com/bronzevillefencing)

[@bfafencing](https://www.instagram.com/bfafencing)

www.bfafencing.org



BY THE NUMBERS 2025

\$149,040

community benefit

connected with

723

young people in the
Chicagoland area

100%
graduates

most racially diverse

73.5 %

club in Chicago

2500+

volunteer hours

373

mentor hours

at-risk youth

51%

\$5,000

grants

6,493

travel miles

77%

grown in self-confidence

5

sites

Youth Development

We believe that all students deserve an excellent foundation that meets their individual learning styles. As with every new season, we assess the needs of community stakeholders and youth development partners, and we're proud to have had another year of great success.

As the number of young people facing various trials continues to grow, addressing the complex and significant disparities in poverty, limited access to essential services, education, employment, social and environmental factors, health, and community safety is necessary for the well-being of all youth. We adopt a collaborative and multifaceted approach to address the longstanding marginalization in the communities we serve.

We prioritize innovation, strong leadership, and a value-based culture in our decision-making. Collaborating with our partners, community stakeholders, and young people is crucial to achieving good results for these youth.



Our dedicated mentors inspire students to make positive decisions, take responsibility for their lives, and realize that they are the compass on their chosen paths.

The program is specifically designed to meet the needs of our communities and curated to address the unique struggles of every student. We level-set and work with parents and guardians to create personalized learning paths. Access to social-emotional learning helps students build resilience and ensures that they feel valued, important, and secure. Through our curriculum, students develop cognitive and behavioral practices, social, and self-regulatory capacities that promote optimal change.

We are proud to announce that at the end of the 2025 school year, our students achieved outstanding results. They all advanced to the next grade, and seniors graduated from high school with honors, matriculating at universities in the fall. We hold a strong view on academic progress, and we believe that integrating life skills into education stimulates personal improvement and creates a well-balanced life for our young people.

This past season, several of our students received scholarships from various organizations. One local organization, *Youth Fencing Chicago*, awarded scholarships and full fencing kits to recipients who demonstrated financial need,

academic success, extracurricular achievements, leadership, and a commitment to their communities. Good job, Hafsa!

Collectively, more than 30 student-athletes qualified for the 2025 Junior Olympics and Summer Nationals Championships. For most, these tournaments are a humbling experience. The puzzle lies in balancing the sense of accomplishment that comes from qualifying for such an event with the harsh reality that the competition is intense and requires a dedicated mindset to reach the final top eight. We acknowledge your hard work!

We have passionate teammates who make a meaningful impact on our programming. Academy interns and volunteers contributed more than 2,500 hours of service, advocating on behalf of our youth, and were vital to fulfilling our mission in the communities we serve on Chicago's South and West Sides.

Lastly, to continue our dedication to providing essential services to those in need, the Academy received grants and in-kind gifts from our donors to support general operating costs and development efforts at additional sites in the Chicagoland area. One targeted area is the "Toxic Doughnut," which is known for having one of the highest concentrations of hazardous waste in the nation.



Black History Month

Highlights

As a 2025 *Fencing the Gap* recipient, Ben is a model student-athlete who represents the best of the Academy. We are proud of Ben and this commendation of excellence. His growth in the sport this past year demonstrates conviction and dedication, and we are encouraged by his commitment to the training process. Regardless of a student's socio-economic background, our mission of equity and inclusion requires providing every young person with equal access while honoring the uniqueness of every youth. Our students consistently show up in arenas not designed for them, where the most exceptional of them are seldom fully represented. So, we are steadfast in our efforts to be present every day and ensure that we never give up on the greatness bubbling beneath the surface of our youth.

“As a young Black woman, I struggled with finding my voice. Fencing is my space to put that down and show up as myself.”

Before adolescence, depression rates are about equal in boys and girls, but during this period, adolescent girls become twice as likely as boys to experience depression. Zaria likely doesn't realize it, but she's helping shape the elite world of fencing for young girls. She's taken the less-traveled road, boldly defying societal norms and operating in spaces historically reserved for those more privileged. And, truth be told, 90% of girls drop out of sports by age 13. This is why we support programs like *Girls P.L.A.Y.* to help boost sports participation. This season, 87 girls gathered at our newest program site in the North Lawndale area for their first introduction to fencing class. Sports are unquestionably fundamental to building positive self-esteem and confidence. These traits are crucial to character and among the key reasons we actively promote inclusion in this sport.

“Of all the sports I have played, no other has captivated me like Fencing.”



Case Story

Zavier and Addison dare to be different

Every year, Academy students attend *Interlochen Center for the Arts*, a beautiful 1,200-acre oasis in Interlochen, Michigan. Explore the stories of some of our creative geniuses.

Zavier, a rising junior with a penchant for both theater and writing, was accepted into the Creative Writing division. His submission portfolio of two plays, two short stories, and two monologues was impressive in scope, defying conventional genres and incorporating visual and auditory elements. One of the stories he recently shared with us revolves around a young man of Native American heritage who is on a quest to track down those responsible for and avenge the unjust and heinous murder of his father. It's a tale as old as time, but with a twist of modern magic after decades of exploration and angst.

Addison, a rising 7th grader, was accepted into the Acting Company Production division. Her submission portfolio, which included a monologue from the stage musical *Promedy*, an excerpt from the original *Hamilton* soundtrack, an excerpt from *13 the Musical*, and a short dance sequence from *SpongeBob SquarePants: The*

Broadway Musical, showcases her artistry.

Camp Recap

Addison reflected that the focus on performing arts through private lessons and solo work centered her collaboration with her fellow actors. In her previous experiences, she was accustomed to performing monologues with minimal input from others. She's finally found her people!

Zavier shared that attending Interlochen was one of the most inspiring experiences he's had as a young writer. Being surrounded by his amazing peers and instructors, and the creative energy and passion for words, was inspiring and motivated him to perfect his craft. He is applying for full admission and hopes to return for his senior year of high school.

The Academy partners with reputable organizations dedicated to closing the achievement gap, offering programs and mentorship that support our youth both in and beyond the classroom. Our focus on enrichment and growth is essential to helping young people reach their full capacity and develop strong leadership qualities.

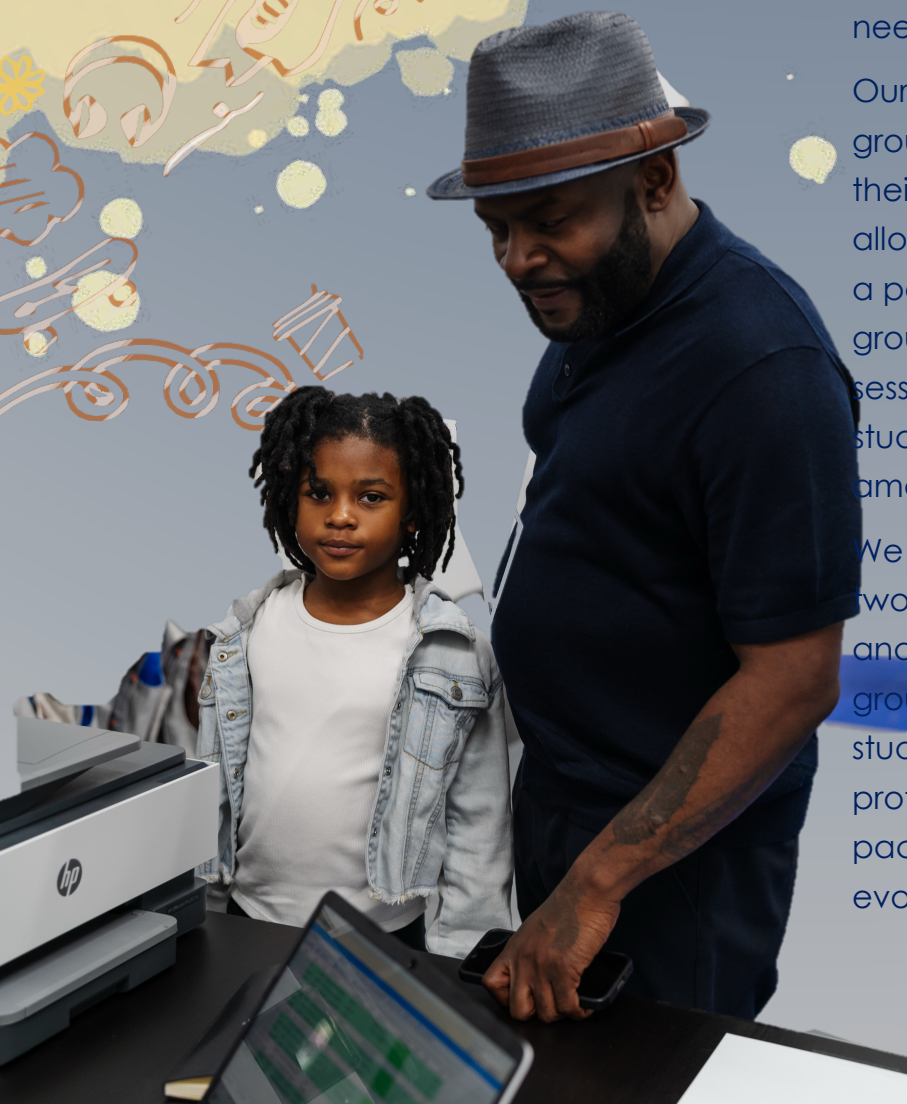
Holistic Outreach

Our collaboration with the Office of Student Support and Engagement (OSSE) extended our reach across eighteen CPS networks. This exposed Academy programming to youth in under-resourced areas who face challenges accessing high-quality, out-of-school time programs.

The Academy team faced some difficult decisions and conducted a review of its program, leading to changes in its operations. Instruction is better tailored to offer greater flexibility and responsiveness to the needs of the young people we serve.

Our analysis concluded that by grouping students according to their true capabilities, we can allocate our attention and teach at a pace that works best for each group. For example, tailoring sessions based on whether a student is ready for recreational, amateur, or competitive activities.

We value equity, recognizing that no two students possess the same skills, and so we've adopted ability grouping as this standard allows students with similar levels of proficiency to progress at the same pace. This change reflects a central evolution in the Academy process.



The Academy is committed to promoting events that support our students in and out of school by advocating for more familial and community connections. Our goal is to relate with young people through activities that enhance both behavioral and cognitive flexibility, while also encouraging free play.

The End of Season celebration is the perfect way for our families to fellowship and share their adventures and insights from the past season. This year's event was held at *Altitude Trampoline Park*. The jumping, bouncing, and screaming heard around the park were infectious. The coaches even joined the extreme dodgeball game! Today's youth are experiencing alienation from the broader community, and these gatherings provide a fun way to release negative energy, connect across class boundaries, and meet and bond with each other. It was also an opportunity for youth and parents to learn, grow, and play together.

Twenty-seven student-athletes competed at the *2025 USA Fencing Summer Nationals and July Challenge*, the largest fencing tournament in the world. Over 6,124 athletes with an estimated 11,000 total attendees from across the USA and 45 different countries converged on Milwaukee, Wisconsin, to compete for the title of US National Champion in their respective weapons and age categories. This is a substantial

achievement that reflects pure dedication throughout the season. Unlike the Junior Olympics, which is only for Junior and Cadet athletes, Summer Nationals is the final Championship tournament of the season and arguably the most challenging due to the number of athletes and the length of each event. This year, we had our largest crew to ever qualify across multiple age categories and weapons: Foil (F) and Epee (E). They achieved notable results and are already focused on securing qualification for the next season—special recognition to our Academy fencers who competed in their first national tournament. We see you!

Results Recap

Rising Academy Cadets Ben and Heaven, who competed in five and six events, respectively, had the best performances of their competitive careers. Ben led a trio of team members in the DV2MF and DV3MF categories. He placed 55th out of a field of 223 competitors, including an 8-1 run through direct elimination. He made it into the tableau of 64 before falling to the eventual 3rd Place winner. Heaven posted eight wins in Div2WE, including an 8-1 run through the direct elimination rounds. She placed 19th in a field of 170 competitors and made it to the tableau of 32 before falling to a top-16 opponent. These results are noteworthy in that they show significant growth and key milestones for these students.

FULL SUMMER NATIONALS RESULTS

DV2WE (170)

19. Heaven

156. Salma

DV3WE (99)

55. Trinity

JNRWE (303)

203. Heaven

282. Hafsa

296. Zaria

302. Salma

CDTWE (242)

176. Hafsa

183. Zaria

231. Salma

Y14WE (266)

206. Zaria

DVIAWF (85)

64. Heaven

DV3WF (175)

66. Heaven

JNRWF (261)

139. Heaven

CDTWF (263)

201. Heaven

Y12WF (250)

243. Sophia

JNRME (462)

442. Armand

460. Rocco

CDTME (315)

264. Rocco

296. Armand

Y14ME (324)

203. Damien

Y12ME (253)

134. Rocco

DVIAMF (184)

176. Ben

DV2MF (276)

170. Ben

210. Hanson

DV3MF (223)

56. Ben

132. Hanson

JNRMF (363)

316. Tristan

334. Ben

359. William

CDTMF (311)

194. Ben

252. Tristan

293. William

Y14MF (351)

285. Hanson

294. William

335. Gavin

351. Edan

Y12MF (274)

190. Justin

236. Ezra

250. Edan

262. Aadi

Y10MF (176)

107. Justin

Coaches Malcolm and Auset regularly gather with colleagues at the high school and college levels to strategize and analyze the current state of youth development in the sport. Our strong relationships provide us with valuable insights into future recruitment trends and predictions. Feedback from our colleagues confirms that the program is both challenging and enjoyable for students, thanks to our dedicated team of coaches. We extend our deepest appreciation to our specialty coaches, Kenny Rogers and Jason Burns, for their vital contributions to our youth's overall well-being.

Lastly, the Open House is structured to introduce the program to a wider community that often lacks access to high-quality programs and to youth who may never have the opportunity to step onto a fencing piste. Our wonderful Parent Advisory

Committee (PAC) warmly welcomed guests. After brief introductions, a delicious lunch of ideas led to a spirited conversation and a look at Academy projects. The stories our parents shared featured breakthrough discussions that reflected our team's commitment to the young people we serve. By providing consistency to these youth, we help immunize them from setbacks and cultivate stronger relationships that improve their long-term outcomes. Through our annual Clinics and Masterclass Workshops, staffed by experienced professionals and coaches, our program prepares students for college and career readiness. We're excited for another year of helping young people connect at their peak abilities and navigate the changes as they go through life. Thank you to our families for taking advantage of the opportunities we provide.

Making Positive Choices

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Early intervention and rehabilitation are crucial for youth in crisis, particularly those in under-resourced communities.

The Academy largely focuses its efforts on marginalized neighborhoods throughout the Chicagoland area and allies itself with stakeholders in these targeted communities to boost outreach. These areas face multiple threats, including systemic and structural racial bias, economic disparities, and limited access to quality education and enrichment services.

Research suggests that youth are more likely to engage in risky behaviors or become victims of crime during certain hours. After school is a critical period when young people tend to participate in delinquent activities. Therefore, it is essential to connect with youth after formal school programs end for the day.

Our partnership with the Chicago Park District is important for several reasons. As an Athletic Use, Resident, Contractor, and Service (ARCS) partner, we provide youth outreach activities at park district sites. These activities are free to youth and offer structured enrichment activities during after-school hours. All youth enrolled in the *ParkKids* after-school program at their local park are eligible to attend.

This platform helps young people access our services and other forms of cultural and practical support. Our quality programming and dedicated staff positively influence and transform the culture in ways that align with community needs.

Case Story

Hanson found his space to breathe

Hanson joined the program at age seven as a member of the Academy's first park district program, and we've watched him blossom into one of its most dynamic young stars.

Hanson came to this largely unknown sport on Chicago's Southside in the Bronzeville community with a sense of anxiety and curiosity, after finding the class listed on the park district's website.

At that time, the program at Samuel Ellis Park served as a recreational outlet offering an immersive introduction to the Olympic sport of fencing. It provided excitement and fun while challenging both body and mind, fostering a competitive spirit, discipline, and good sportsmanship. Tactical games, athletic fundamentals, isometric and plyometric agility work, and physical velocity exercises, with technical basics, were all included. Children ages 6 and older attended the weekly classes.

Eventually, Hanson transitioned to the main campus program post-COVID for the competitive class. Students at this level actively compete in regional and national events. Their training schedule includes advanced individual lessons, drills, tactical exercises, strategic scenarios, mental preparation, and intensive conditioning. They commit to a minimum of 8-10 hours of weekly

practice, all while balancing school and other responsibilities.

An outstanding student-athlete, Hanson demonstrates academic dedication and athletic talent, underscoring his growth in the program. He was the first Academy student to reach the tableau of 64, an incredibly difficult feat at a national championship, and became a regionally certified referee in the sport. Largely through his own initiative, he also developed and implemented the structure for a fencing team at his local public high school. The ultimate goal is for the team to qualify to compete as a member of the *Great Lakes High School Fencing Conference* – the Midwest's charter organization for high school fencing teams. Hanson is learning to navigate the bureaucracy that often accompanies the establishment of anything new within the Chicago Public School system.

We are proud to be an active partner in shaping this young man's character as he successfully navigates his teenage years.



Social Impact

Each year, more than seven hundred youth participate in the Academy program throughout the Chicagoland area. We employ a scientific approach, and community needs assessments to improve overall well-being. We believe that meaningful change is rooted in our shared humanity and fuels growth.

Our team is dedicated to achieving a shared vision for young people and the communities we serve. As public servants, we must truly understand that every neighborhood has its own unique challenges; economic disinvestment, health inequity, harmful environmental factors, and educational disparities affect these populations. Our practices and policies ensure that the program remains accessible to all youth.

Strong bonds cultivate a sense of belonging, increase civic engagement, and lead to more positive outcomes for neighborhood youth. We strive to be a useful resource in the areas where we operate. We take pride in the opportunities we deliver to youth, while also seeking ways to relate with our communities directly as a civic partner. The Academy works to be a contributing factor in a shared vision of the future in the communities we serve.



We provided programming to young people from more than fifty-50 communities in the Chicagoland area, with in-kind services valued at over \$149,000. This support significantly increased access to enriching experiences for 51% of the youth participating in the program. Through our virtual fundraising campaign and the generosity of 137 donors, we ensured that our program remained accessible to those who need it most.

The Parent Advisory Committee continues to play a crucial role in advocating for resources and opportunities for our youth that will ensure a more equitable future. They establish strong connections with parents and are actively involved in Academy operations. They organize educational sessions and team-building initiatives for the parent community, remaining strong advocates for our youth while chaperoning and coordinating student travel and lodging to safeguard their well-being during enrichment activities. From our subject-matter experts on all things STEM and Fencing 101, as well as our fundraising gurus, the PAC remains a cornerstone of our pledge to provide exceptional community programming.

The past year has presented its share of struggles and difficulties. The Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) Lead Coordinator unexpectedly left the Academy, creating a leadership vacuum

and affecting our ability to offer more instruction in this area.

Our STEM collab is designed to help students understand basic concepts in these subjects while aligning with their current in-school studies. It emphasizes hands-on experimentation and scenario-based analysis, allowing students to thoughtfully deduce the intended outcomes. This approach promotes responsibility and leadership in decision-making, which is why service learning, as a central tenet of the program, helps provide our youth with a strong foundation in core values.

The void of STEM leadership created glitches in our high-impact tutoring initiative. Tutoring is completely free and aims to provide structured academic support for students after regular school hours. All students are eligible to join. Online tutors from academia and corporate backgrounds work directly with students on various subjects, including Science, Mathematics, English/Language Arts, and Social Studies. Our program offers homework support, practice, and real-world application to help students effectively manage the demands that often come with a student-athlete committed to sports specialization. Thanks to a generous donation of digital equipment, our students can access tutoring instruction and services in a sheltered environment.

Our wraparound services helped at-risk youth enrolled in the program enjoy creative outlets, while feeling supported and fostering a more hopeful future.

This past year, our youth tackled the following SEL activities.

- ⇒ Daily discussions about future goals and personal difficulties.
- ⇒ Practiced conflict resolution strategies.
- ⇒ Took part in role-playing exercises.
- ⇒ Built capacity through leadership opportunities.

These activities led to several developmental outcomes.

- ⇒ Improved conflict resolution skills.
- ⇒ Greater respect for self and others.
- ⇒ Increased ability to analyze personal and social issues.
- ⇒ Better aptitude to articulate personal and societal concerns.

We're also exploring the formation of a new concept, "*Putting Down Guns and Picking Up Swords*." This enterprise, aimed at combating youth gun violence, seeks to fill a void in communities that lack quality enrichment activities. The principal target is middle and high school students aged 11-17. Youth gun violence is a serious public health issue in the communities we serve, and the child welfare system is overwhelmed, with limited resources to combat these rising statistics.

Life-skill activities and guidance help stimulate healthy, supportive environments that boost academic achievement. A fundamental component of the plan design, shadow board mentoring, is a research-based practice aimed at preventing youth violence and shows that consistent interaction with a trusted role model—providing direction and awareness—nurtures positive attitudes and behaviors in young people. These mentoring relationships significantly influence youth, helping to reduce and deter dysfunctional behaviors. Our new process for engaging volunteer mentors, explored later in this report, plays a key role in this initiative.

Academy mentorship is rooted in foundational traditions that embrace and promote a shared sense of communal responsibility to affected peoples. Our wrap-around module employs a team-based support strategy to enhance the well-being of young people and help them achieve their life-long plans. A personalized approach that addresses every aspect of a young person's life. By building essential life skills and nurturing their particular needs, we empower youth to become successful leaders among their peers and in the world. The resources that make this possible depend heavily on community support and the awesome generosity of our donors and sponsors.



Connecting with those around us helps to create a greater future for all.

Fencing the Gap

Highlight

USA Fencing is the National Governing Body (NGB) for the sport of fencing in the United States. Over the last five years, the organization has faced significant criticism related to its culture, rising costs, ethics, and disciplinary issues. In response, it implemented several initiatives aimed at increasing access to the Olympic sport of fencing.

Fencing the Gap is one such initiative that provides scholarships, grants, and other incentives to athletes, coaches, and clubs. Its goal is to raise awareness of the challenges that Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) communities face in accessing the sport of fencing, which is often perceived as elitist and exclusive due to its high costs. Targeted cities for these initiatives include Chicago.

Individual grants are awarded to BIPOC youth, and mini-grants are available to clubs to support expansion of the sport in underserved communities. The Grace program also provides fee waivers for national tournaments to athletes who face a sudden loss of income or suffer an injury.

Creating cultural awareness and appreciating cultural differences in BIPOC communities addresses the need for transformation around the exorbitant costs of participation and its operations. This approach demonstrates a sincere effort to shift the atmosphere surrounding this sport and will build trust and transparency around the NGB. *“Sunlight is always the best disinfectant.”* Justice Louis Brandeis

Case Story

Before his world unraveled, life had already been hard for Byron*

With challenging home and socio-economic factors, Byron grew up in an environment filled with trauma and unpredictability, making it difficult for him to feel safe at home. School didn't offer much solace either; he was often left largely unsupervised, and the lack of structure made him a target for delinquent activity. He struggled to keep up with his classes, and when tragedy struck, he was left to pick up the pieces on his own.

Fortunately, our team became aware of his circumstances and stepped in to help. Despite limited family support, little education, and financial assistance, he eventually made his way to the Academy.

Byron actively takes part in the program, which serves as a safe harbor from the daily poverty and illness faced by children like him. The program adds a degree of stability in his life, and he regularly attends classes. He is resilient despite his struggles. Many students of similar backgrounds lack emotional and social support

outside of home due to various factors, such as poor parenting, housing insecurity, and economic instability. Without adequate support, these children are at significant risk of becoming either victims or perpetrators of violence if they do not receive proper guidance and life skills education.

Three pillars of community building that help define the impact the Academy strives to achieve each day: well-being, civic responsibility, and youth progress. These actionable strategies are formidable tasks and integral to the work we do daily and the efforts we made to grow throughout 2025.

Byron has faced more tragedy and hardship than most people do in a lifetime. That's why the Academy advocates a healthy diary of educational and extracurricular activities and is a haven from the troubled streets. These activities help at-risk youth avoid harm and elevate and educate them to their highest level.

** Names changed to protect the privacy of students.*

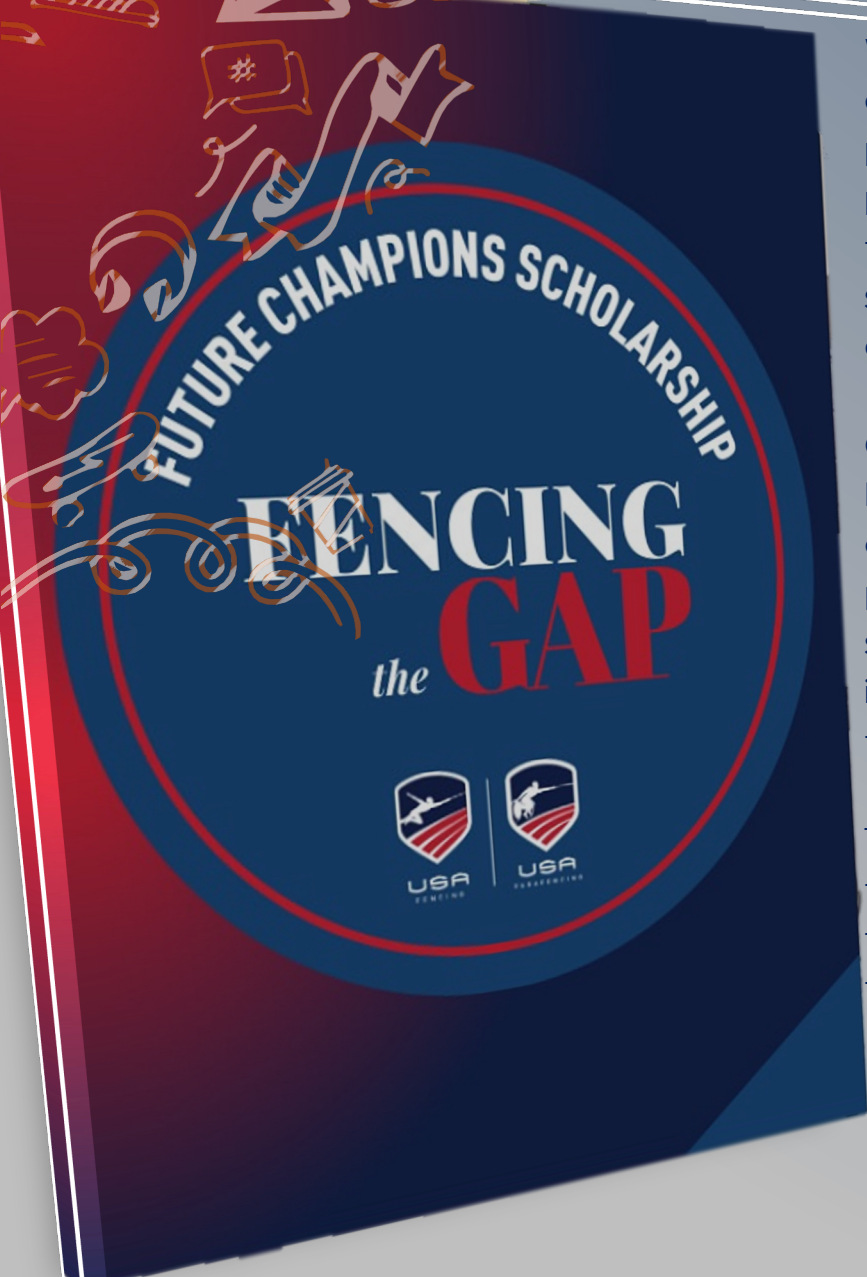
Community Investment

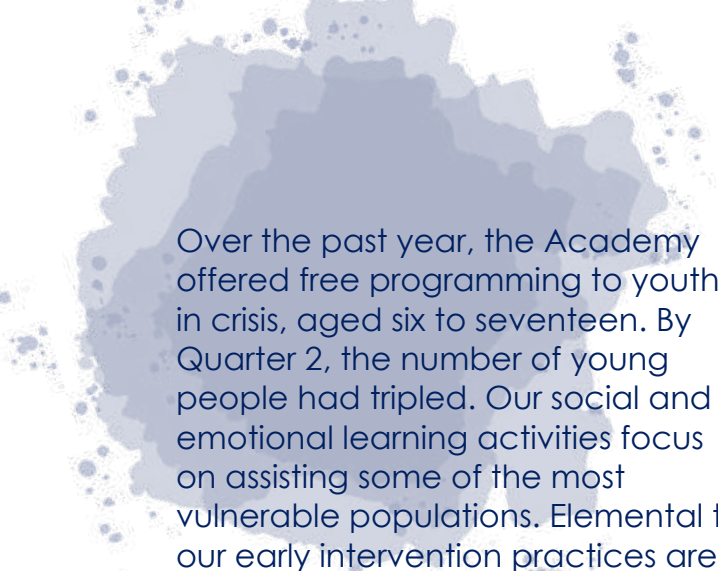
Our partnerships on the west side of Chicago, where in some areas 40% of residents live below the poverty line, aim to support at-risk youth through various activities and strategies.

It has been a privilege to work with the youth on the west side this year. We are on-site every week, engaging with the students. These partnership services for young people provide a safe harbor for those who often lack structured supervision for extended periods after school hours.

Challenging family dynamics create barriers to wrap-around services and affect a student's full participation in programming. Disruptions caused by school changes and housing instability impact the students' ability to achieve the intended program goals.

These factors highlight why we strive to enhance the quality and frequency of engagement with these affected households.





Over the past year, the Academy offered free programming to youth in crisis, aged six to seventeen. By Quarter 2, the number of young people had tripled. Our social and emotional learning activities focus on assisting some of the most vulnerable populations. Elemental to our early intervention practices are skill development activities, fostering respectful relationships, and outreach efforts.

Our program is unique in that we partner with local businesses, *Mettle Fitness*, and *Fresh Start Sports & Mentoring*, to embrace young people who are at risk of falling through the cracks. Our partners regularly counsel and connect with the neighborhood youth, offering a welcoming space for enrichment activities. These local entrepreneurs provide mentorship and guidance to youth, particularly young Black males ages 15 to 24, who face higher risks of negative outcomes than their peers. Most of their work is gratis, unscripted, and underfunded, but the impact is enormous. These dedicated men embody the hope of a community filled with incredible, untapped promise and potential. Coaches Jason and Kenny fill a vital void, guiding young people as they explore life and its vast possibilities, where any goal is

within reach. These men work in ways that help break the generational cycle of dysfunction while providing mentorship that encourages these young men to make positive life choices and behavioral practices around low-value pursuits and trauma. The upcoming year is filled with uncertainty as we seek more funding initiatives for the continued success of our programming. Although it's an exhaustive process, the work is essential to supporting the young people who are struggling in the communities we serve.

At a time when the terms marginalized, inner-city, and underserved are synonymous with increased rates of poverty, crime, and violence, our work has demonstrated a significant need for innovative strategies and quality of life enrichment programs in high-risk communities.

As circumstances persistently evolve for our youth, the Academy continues responding in unconventional ways. Our neighborhoods are filled with natural human dramedy unfolding daily with vulnerable youth seeking opportunities to shine. We are optimistic that our work in the community will help be part of the solution.

Volunteers

Highlights

At the Academy, we value our volunteers as a vital component of our success. This year, volunteers amassed more than 2,500 hours working alongside our team to provide the highest quality of service for young people. Our volunteers provide essential support by assisting with outreach efforts and mentoring youth to help them make positive and productive decisions. Our volunteers offer a constructive, mature presence and support programming with some day-to-day tasks. This enables our teams to focus more on engaging with youth to achieve meaningful results.

Like many small non-profits, recruiting volunteers can be difficult. Volunteer work, by definition, requires time and effort without financial compensation. Therefore, our mission must resonate with prospective volunteers. We highlight that the true value of volunteering lies in the lives we impact.

With that in mind, one important project for the upcoming season includes gaining 15% more new volunteers across our program. Additionally, we are developing a new mentor recruitment process to increase the number of mentors in our program. We are also creating a volunteer handbook to raise awareness about the various ways to get involved.

We thank all of our volunteers for their hard work; we couldn't do this without your support.

Case Story

We value the effort and time given to grow our impact

The Academy is an equal opportunity organization with a diverse cohort of people working and volunteering to meet the needs of our youth.

Natasha has dedicated over 700 hours in the last year to support the Academy as a parent volunteer and the newest member of our PAC. She has played a key role in numerous process improvements, operations management, and cost-saving initiatives implemented over the past year. Thanks to her efforts, parent involvement has reached its highest level since the Academy was founded.

Her sharp wit, stylish t-shirts, and can-do attitude helped establish the first-ever Parent Brigade—a group of parents dedicated to providing additional support to all youth to ensure their success at events. She has devoted hundreds of hours to an introductory course called *Fencing 101 with the Academy*, which plays a crucial role in onboarding new families into our program. She also dedicates numerous hours to chaperoning students at away events, so they won't miss out on enriching life experiences.

Natasha has held various volunteer

roles, including Local School Council President and Vice-Chair of a media company. She also formerly served as Board Chair of a universal faith cooperative. And as indicative of her dedication to service, she shouldered another PAC role to fill the gap of STEM leadership here at the Academy.

Volunteers like Natasha demonstrate how stakeholder perspectives can change lives, highlighting the need to be agents of change in support of young people and advancing measures for community transformation. Our volunteers are in the thick of everything we do. They're not just organizers, chaperones, and amateur shutterbugs; they are working to save youth. Their steadfast commitment enables the Academy to offer enriching activities that promote health and wellness for young people. They bring a level of non-judgmental empathy and compassion to the table that our youth need.

Various volunteer opportunities are available with the Academy, allowing our team to concentrate on daily operations and community programming. Check us out today!

Leadership

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KASEY MUHAMMAD, VICE PRESIDENT

Assistant Director and Vice President

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IL Division, Region 2

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United States Fencing Association
IL Division, Region 2

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DAVID GAGE

Park Supervisor
Chicago Park District

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(OSSE)**

District 299, Chicago Public Schools

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Owner, Head Coach
Mettle Fitness, LLC

KENNETH ROGERS

Owner, Head Coach
Fresh Start Sports & Mentoring, Inc

Donors

Our program would not be possible without the support of our foundation and individual donors. Your generosity profoundly impacts the communities we serve by enhancing the experiences of students in economically disadvantaged areas on Chicago's South and West Sides and enabling them to fully participate in Academy programming.

Securing sufficient funding to maintain quality operations is a daily concern. Our strategy for addressing donor reluctance focuses on prioritizing authenticity and transparency in our communication. We recognize that hesitancy is inevitable, whether due to economic uncertainties or a saturated non-profit landscape; we strive to be effective in our messaging and marketing tactics.

Donors can optimize their gifts through estate planning, retirement accounts, trusts, and other avenues while contributing to the Academy's legacy.

FOUNDATION, INDIVIDUAL, AND CORPORATE DONORS

\$10,000 and below

Guy A. and N. Kay
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INDIVIDUAL DONORS

\$1,000 and below

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www.bfafencing.org

5000 S. Indiana Avenue - LL | Chicago, IL 60615 US
312.852.0622 | information@bfafencing.org

In Memoriam

The Academy is deeply saddened by the loss of our beloved friend and Advisory Board Member, Meredith Key Delgado. Her beautiful light and energy were a beacon in a world often lacking empathy and inclusion, and she will be sorely missed.

The Delgado Family entered our hearts and world when Coach Auset started fencing at age 8 at the *Illinois Fencers Club* under Coach Fernando. They became true friends and supporters of her fencing journey.

They were among the Academy's earliest and staunchest supporters, providing in-kind donations, mentorship, and direction in helping to build our youth program.

Meredith's unselfish guidance and comprehensive expertise in Bout Committee programming provided the qualified knowledge to navigate this arena securely.

We'll miss the wine exchanges and gab-fests, regional and high school meets, but more importantly, the friendship Meredith shared well beyond the strip.

We extend our deepest love and gratitude to the Delgado Family. Meredith, you are loved. Rest well, my friend.

"Wine is like love; it's just better with age."



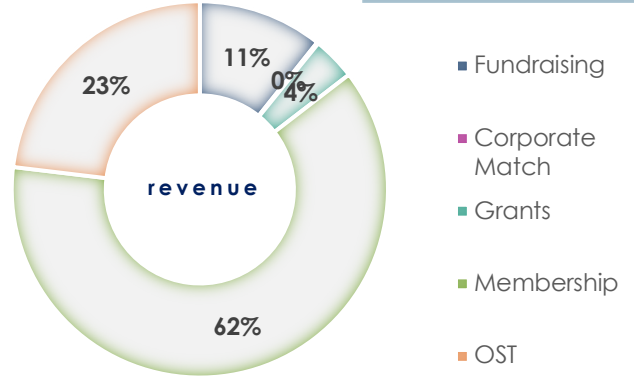
Platinum
Transparency
2025

Candid.

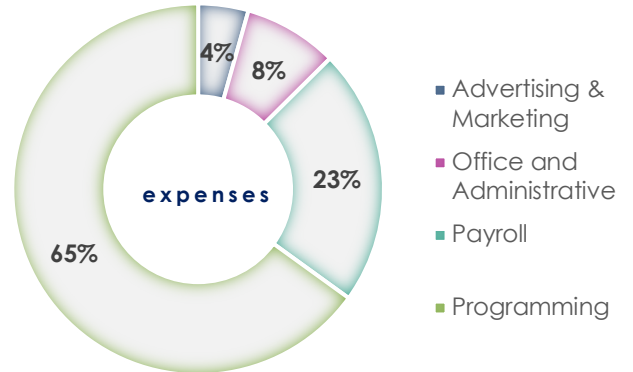
2025 Financials

YEAR ENDING DECEMBER 31, 2025

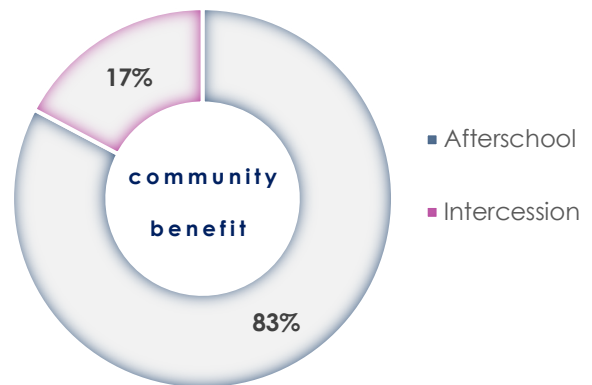
Revenue	2025	2024
Membership	\$84,041	\$62,998
OST	\$31,130	\$10,875
Corp Match & Fundraising	\$14,624	\$5,390
Grants	\$5,000	\$7,500
Total	\$134,796	\$86,764



Expenses	2025	2024
Payroll	\$30,000	--
Office/Administrative	\$10,971	\$21,217
Advertising/Marketing	\$5,855	\$5,245
Programming	\$87,110	\$58,345
Total	\$133,937	\$84,808



Community Benefit	2025	2024
Afterschool	\$123,320	\$81,200
Intercession	\$25,720	\$12,767
Total	\$149,040	\$93,967



The Bronzeville Fencing Academy is proud to have earned the Candid Platinum Seal, in keeping with standards of public transparency.

FY2025



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1111 North Dearborn Street

Fencing Center of Chicago
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1111 North Dearborn Street

Fencing Center of Chicago

Fencing Center of Chicago
Apizaco

EDGE! Academy
Character

Focus Fortitude Family Bronze Fencing

At its core,

***Bronzeville Fencing
Academy*** *invests in*
families.

*We invest early; we remain **focused**
& our fortitude yields results*