

N Her Footsteps

# FY2025 Annual Impact Report



# Note from the Executive Director

Dear friends and supporters,

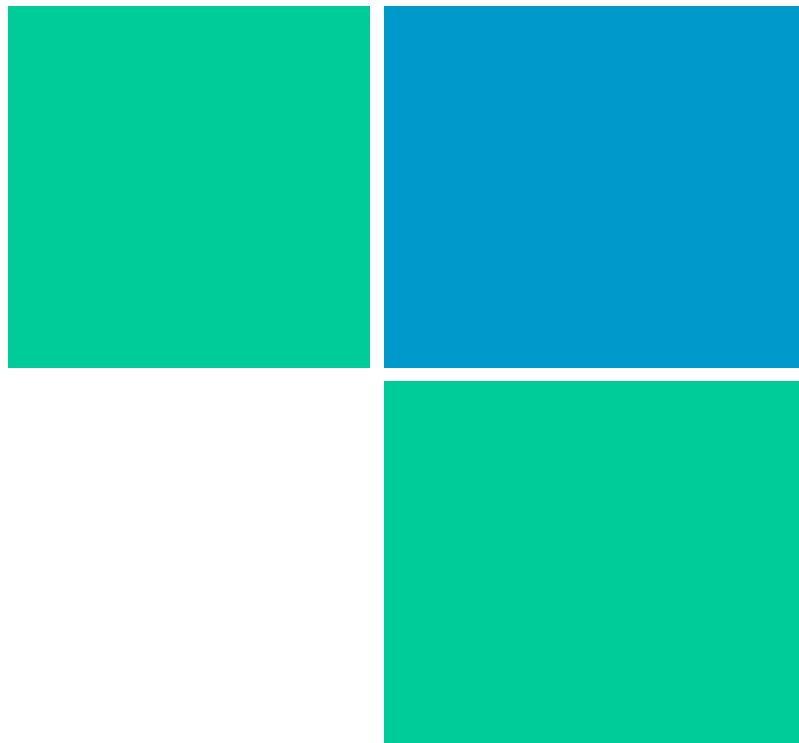
This past year has been a powerful reminder of what a community can accomplish when we move with purpose, compassion, and a shared belief in our students and teachers. Month after month, N Her Footsteps has grown not only in programs and partnerships, but in the depth of connection we feel with the families, educators, volunteers, and supporters who make this work possible.

This year we worked together for students and teachers launching our first Teacher Steering Committee and establishing Teacher Supply Stations; serving families and students with our first Bundle Up and Pack Up where we provided school supplies, warm clothing and food boxes to students and families in Jefferson County; and delivering hundreds of snack bags for a summer camp. Every milestone reflects generosity, partnership, and shared purpose. Grants, local business support, and dedicated volunteers have strengthened our ability to meet needs with dignity and care. I'm grateful for every person who has walked alongside us, and I'm excited for the continued growth and collaboration ahead as we work to ensure every child and educator in Jefferson County feels supported and seen.



**Keisha Gillis**

Founder and Executive Director



# Introduction

Completing our second year, I am filled with gratitude for the way our community has continued to strengthen and sustain the mission of N Her Footsteps. This year brought meaningful growth—expanding teacher support, deepening partnerships, and reaching more students and families with dignity-centered care. We saw volunteers step forward in new ways, local businesses and foundations invest in our work, and educators lend their voices to shape programs that truly meet their needs. Each milestone reflects a shared belief that our students and teachers deserve consistent, compassionate support. Standing on this strong two-year foundation, we are energized for the year ahead and committed to building an even greater impact together.

*Operating with purpose, one step at a time.*



# Who We Are

N Her Footsteps was co-founded by Karen and Keisha Gillis, a mother-daughter team inspired by the life and legacy of Barbara Jean Sheets—beloved mother, grandmother, community servant, and former Jefferson County Commissioner. Barbara devoted her life to service. She poured into her church as a school teacher, usher, deaconess, trustee, and the creator of Sunday Youth Messages, and she extended that same spirit of care into her community. Helping others was simply who she was, and running for office became a natural extension of her lifelong commitment to serving those around her.

When Barbara passed, Karen and Keisha felt called to continue the work they had long supported alongside her. N Her Footsteps was created to honor her legacy of compassion, dignity, and unwavering community care. What began with four dedicated board members has grown into a fully volunteer-run organization with nine board members and an expanding network of partners and supporters. This growth has strengthened our ability to serve students, support teachers, and deepen our outreach across Jefferson County.

Today, N Her Footsteps stands as a living tribute to Barbara’s belief that every act of service—big or small—can change a life. We continue walking in her footsteps by showing up for our community with purpose, love, and a commitment to meeting needs with dignity.





## VISION

Our vision is a community where every neighbor has the support, dignity, and resources they need to thrive.

## MISSION

Our mission is to provide essential resources and community support to our neighbors.



# Program Outcomes

## Community Care and Community

N Her Footsteps strengthened its role as a rapid-response partner for Jefferson County schools this year, using our first Walmart Spark Good Grant to restock care closets and meet urgent needs quickly. From providing snacks, underwear, and bottoms to Jefferson Elementary to delivering more than 1,100 baby wipes within one business day, we remained committed to ensuring no child went without essential items.

Our first EmpowerHer Kits Assembly was another major milestone, bringing together 11 volunteers to assemble 276 hygiene kits, plus additional clothing and lice kits requested by the district's Nursing Supervisor. These resources supported students at Jefferson Elementary, Jefferson Middle, Jefferson County High School, and Patriot Academy. We also delivered 390 weekend snack bags to Bridge Camp students and were honored with a thank-you banner signed by every camper. Together, these efforts reflect our growing impact and the power of community support.



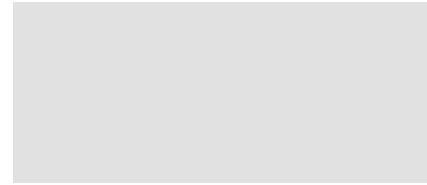
# Program Outcomes

## **Bundle Up & Pack Up Initiative:**

The first annual Bundle Up and Pack Up became one of our most meaningful accomplishments. Partnering with Martha Davis Baptist Church, we hosted a multi-day event providing warm clothing, school supplies, and grocery boxes to families across Jefferson County. Supported by a \$10,000 grant, three new sponsors, and major in-kind gifts—including 950 pounds of beans from Bush Brothers and \$250 in Publix cards—we exceeded our goal and served 195 students and 88 families. More than 30 volunteers contributed across the 2 days of distribution. We distributed materials in January and February 2025.

## **Teacher Support & School Engagement:**

This year brought significant growth in our support for educators. We secured \$5,000 from United Way of Greater Knoxville and \$2,000 from the Mirani Foundation to expand our Teacher Supply Cabinet program. With this support, we established the first Teacher Supply Cabinet at Patriot Academy. We also collected teacher surveys providing valuable insight to guide programming and future grant applications. We established a Teachers Steering Committee lead by Our Teacher Engagement Chair and Teachers' Board Liaison ensuring educators have a strong voice in shaping our work. These efforts reflect our belief that supporting teachers is essential to supporting students.



# Program Outcomes

## **Adopt-A-School & Business Engagement:**

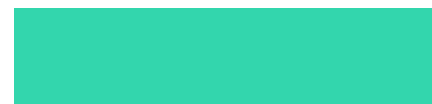
We launched the Adopt-A-School program to deepen relationships between local businesses and Jefferson County schools. This initiative invites businesses to sponsor a school and help meet ongoing needs throughout the year. Our presence at County-Wide Teachers Day helped raise awareness of the program and build momentum for future partnerships. As this initiative grows, it will create a sustainable network of support that strengthens classrooms across the district.

# Expanding our Presence

## **Communications & Outreach:**

To expand our visibility and connect more deeply with supporters, we launched a blog and increased our presence at community events. We also celebrated several successful Facebook birthday fundraisers.

These efforts, combined with our growing partnerships and media exposure—including a feature on Living East Tennessee’s “Tell Me Something Good” segment—continue to elevate our mission and broaden our reach.



# Financial Highlights

In our first full year, we were awarded a \$10,000 grant from the East Tennessee Foundation, multiple Spark Good Awards from Walmart, and a generous gift from the Mirani Foundation. We also secured new sponsors for our Bundle Up and Pack Up Program and stewarded our resources wisely. Through this support, we distributed more than \$19,000 in retail value at the Bundle Up and Pack Up event, and our total donations and grants exceeded \$30,000.



# Goals for FY 2026



## **Empowering Students & Supporting Educators**

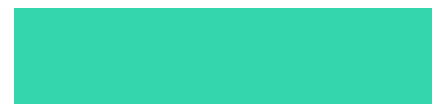
In FY26, we will expand our student and educator support by providing school supplies to Jefferson County summer camp programs and increasing the supplies we provide to school nurses— items not covered in school budgets or where funding isn't sufficient to meet all of the needs, such as small waters, Kleenex, lice kits, and disinfecting wipes. We will also grow our EmpowerHer and care kit outreach by partnering with additional nonprofits and community spaces, including the Boys & Girls Clubs and the local library where homeschool students gather.

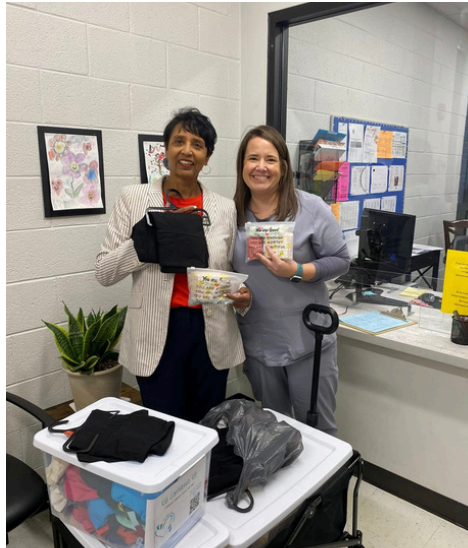
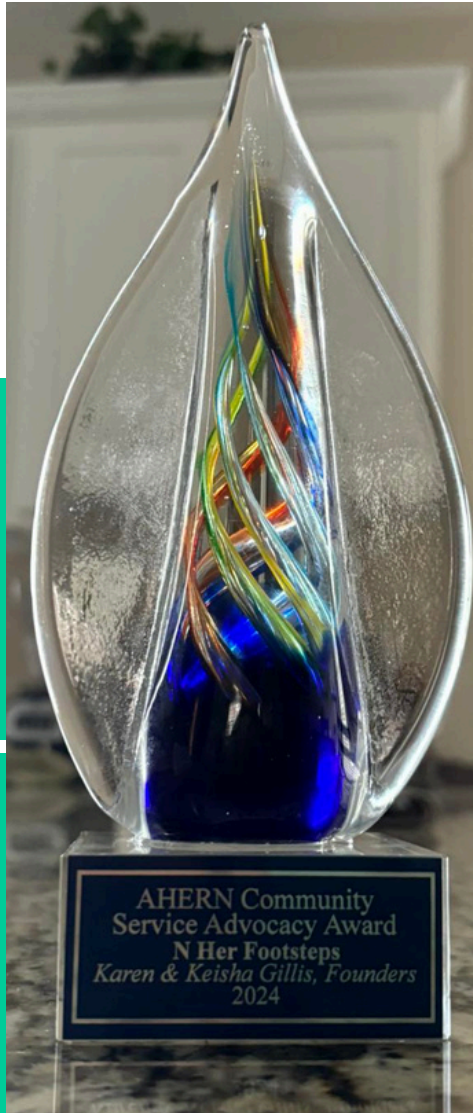
## **Expanding Teacher Support**

In 2026, our goal is to expand the Teacher Supply Cabinets to every school in Jefferson County, including the Jefferson County Alternative School. We will also establish a Teacher Steering Committee made up of representatives from each school and chaired by a member of our board. This team will identify teachers' most pressing needs and help guide the management and replenishment of each school's supply station.

## **Addressing Food Insecurity Through Community Partnerships**

In 2026, our goal is to place a stronger emphasis on addressing food insecurity in Jefferson County. We will partner with other nonprofits to better support underserved families who struggle to meet basic needs. This initiative will include providing food boxes and participating in local blessing box programs to ensure families have consistent access to essential items.





# Thank You

To our supporters, partners, and the Jefferson County community—thank you for standing with us and helping deepen our impact in our second year. Your generosity and belief in this mission continue to move us forward. We look ahead to FY26 with gratitude, purpose, and a shared commitment to serving even more students and families.



[www.nherfootsteps.org](http://www.nherfootsteps.org)