

Just A Start Financial Empowerment Collaborative

FOUNDED: 1968

CURRENT ORGANIZATION BUDGET: \$311,692

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Cambridge is known as the center of innovation and home to prestigious universities. But not all Cambridge residents are thriving in Cambridge. In fact, 13.8 % of Cambridge residents have incomes below the poverty line. That is 24.7 % higher than Massachusetts' poverty rate of 10.4%. The cost of living in Cambridge is 73% higher than the national average and housing costs are 212% of the national average.

Just A Start (JAS), founded in 1968, is a Cambridge-based community development corporation dedicated to promoting equity by creating access to stable housing and building pathways to economic opportunity. JAS creates and preserves affordable housing, provides housing resources and services, offers financial education and workforce training for youth and adults, and builds community engagement. Now in our 55th year, Just A Start serves approximately 2,600 low- to moderate-income residents of Cambridge and surrounding communities annually.

Two-Year Goals

- Expand access to financial and career coaching by hiring program staff and building case management support services at the new Financial Empowerment Collaborative at 55 Norfolk Street in Central Square.
- Secure Families Moving Forward (FMF) funding to provide multiyear wraparound services for Cambridge families beyond the pilot program.

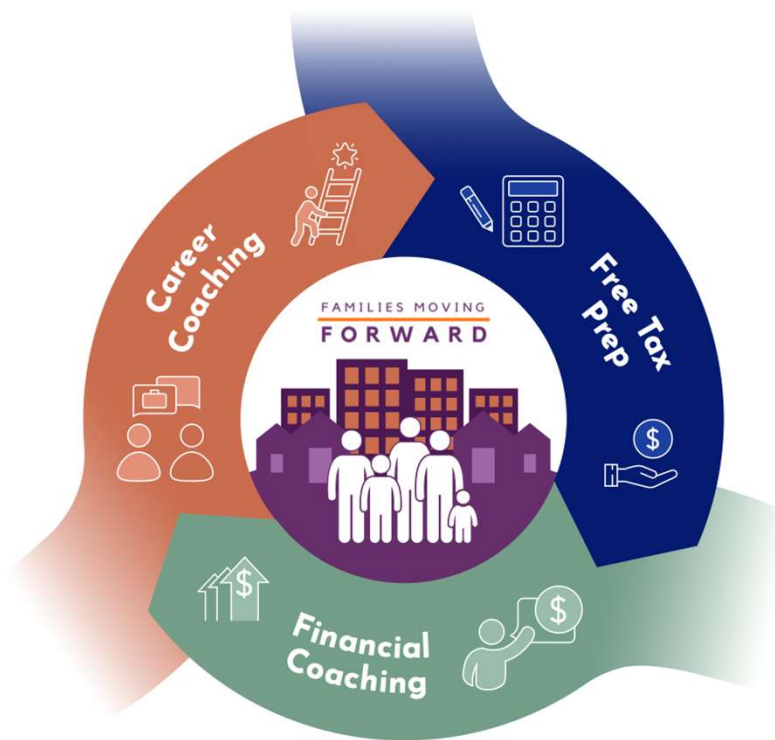
Investment Opportunity

Just A Start's Financial Empowerment Collaborative seeks a \$708,000 investment over the next two years to support the next cohort of the Families Moving Forward program. Just A Start's vision is an equitable community where Cambridge residents can secure a solid economic foundation. For 55 years, JAS has supported economic resiliency and mobility in Cambridge, but demand for its services is increasing. Its goal is to make the programs financially self-sufficient, to further its reach, and increase the number of people served.

Ways to Invest

- \$200,000 to fund 20 additional families in Families Moving Forward program
- \$20,000 to provide financial incentives
- \$10,000 for community meetings and flexible spending
- \$10,000 to provide FMF matched savings per year

Financial Empowerment Collaborative Model



Families Moving Forward

Families Moving Forward was created in 2019, in partnership with five Cambridge agencies, in order to offer families with incomes at or below 50% of AMI (area median income) multiyear, individualized, wrap-around services. The Families Moving Forward program provides a comprehensive and focused approach to link parents of minor children to knowledge, resources, and tools with which they can overcome their challenges.

In addition to the services offered by the Financial Empowerment Collaborative, the twenty families enrolled in the Families Moving Forward program receive case management from a Mobility Mentor who meets monthly with participants to evaluate their specific needs and set goals to improve their situation. Upon accomplishing their goals, participants receive a financial incentive. Just A Start maintains a matched savings account for each family. Additionally, Families Moving Forward participants gather for small group and bimonthly community meetings where they learn together and share experiences through guided discussion.

The Families Moving Forward pilot program was originally funded by the Cambridge Community Benefits Advisory Committee (CBAC) and was designed to address the top needs identified in a Cambridge community needs assessment: housing stability, financial stability, and mental and behavioral health support. A class of 20 families graduated in March of 2024 at the end of the pilot program (photo below).

Just A Start structured the Financial Empowerment Collaborative to incorporate Families Moving Forward with its other services in a more integrated holistic model. Just A Start is looking to secure funding so that it can offer Families Moving Forward to another 20 families in 2025 and 2026.



Coaching and Tax Preparation

While Families Moving Forward is a comprehensive model with wraparound services, some participants are not yet in a place for such intensive work. The Financial Empowerment Collaborative offers pieces of the model as individual services. While FMF may be the whole buffet of services, the Collaborative has an à la carte menu as well:

- **Financial Coaching:** The certified financial coaches assist participants in establishing a budget, creating a net worth statement, credit building, among other topics as needed.
- **Career Coaching:** The career coach works with participants to write a resume, search for jobs, and develop interviewing skills.
- **Free Tax Prep:** The IRS-certified preparers offer free tax preparation to maximize taxpayer refunds as well as expert advice and education.

“With the guidance of my mentor, I was able to achieve important goals, including a safe, stable home, schooling, and a job that I wanted.”

— Families Moving Forward participant

Leadership & Governance

Following his service with the Peace Corps, Ian Davis, Program Manager, moved to Boston and worked at East End House, a local community center. From there, he had the opportunity to join the Just A Start team and build its new Financial Opportunity program. Just A Start is led by Executive Director Carl Nagy-Koechlin and the Board of Directors, which includes current and former participants of Just A Start’s programs, including tenants of our properties, workforce development alumni, and housing improvement program participants.

Financial Sustainability

The Financial Empowerment Collaborative and FMF are funded by private foundations and corporations and a few local government contracts. The organization’s goal is to make the programs financially self-sufficient as it increases the number of people served. Philanthropic support provides JAS with the flexibility to innovate and to meet immediate needs of participants as well as providing the opportunity to expand its reach.

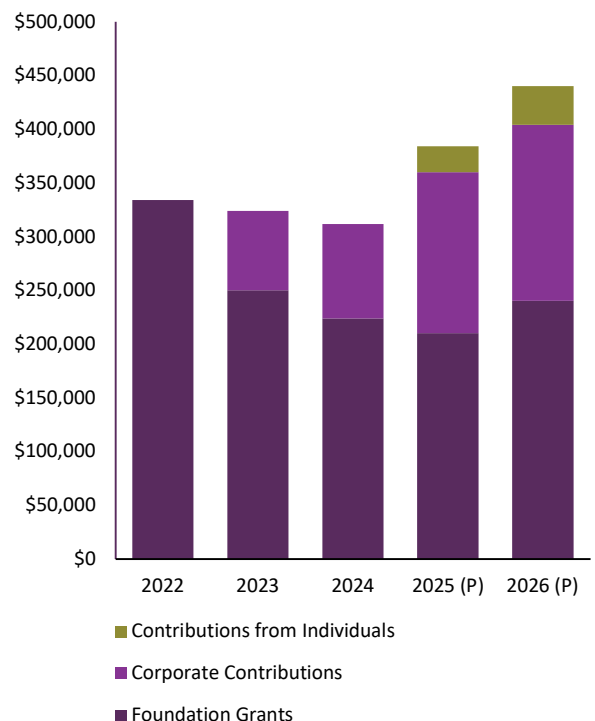
KEY INVESTORS

- Ameriprise Financial
- Berkshire Bank
- Capital One
- The Charlotte Foundation
- Santander Bank

KEY PARTNERS

- Bridges Homeward
- Cambridge Housing Authority
- Cambridge Health Alliance
- Community Action Agency of Somerville (CAAS)
- Institute for Health and Recovery
- Cambridge Redevelopment Authority

Revenue by Source





Success Story

Rae and John*

When Rae arrived for a JAS monthly Families Moving Forward (FMF) meeting, she was worried that she would have to quit her job, because she hadn't been able to find childcare for her son, John, who has special needs. Ellen and Joan, other FMF participants, voiced their desire to help. They had obtained certifications as childcare providers while working with their Mobility Mentor. Ellen was underemployed, and Joan was unemployed; both were looking for work. Bridges Homeward identified a Federal program that would pay Ellen and Joan to care for John, and JAS staff facilitated the application process. Thanks to Families Moving Forward, two Cambridge community members are now gainfully employed, one young boy is being cared for by them, and another community member is moving forward with her own financial empowerment goals.

*all names have been changed with respect to the participants

Program Performance and Organizational Health

Below is a summary of the key measures that Just A Start will track to assess progress for both the Families Moving Forward and the Financial Empowerment Collaborative programs.

	FY 2024	FY 2025(P)	FY 2026(P)
Program Performance			
Families Moving Forward : number of families engaged in individualized support as they work through family goals	20	25	30
Financial Coaching: individuals receiving one-on-one financial coaching	73	100	150
Tax Preparation: Households receiving free tax preparation from an IRS-certified tax preparation professional	300	400	500
Organizational Health/Capacity-Building			
Number of staff members	2	4	6
Total Revenue	\$311,692	\$384,000	\$440,000

Social Impact

Just A Start is committed to building pathways to economic opportunity for Cambridge residents in order to lessen the wealth disparity. The inaugural Families Moving Forward cohort boosted their collective savings by \$110,000 and increased their aggregate salary by 126%. JAS acknowledges that there are no one-size-fits-all solutions. Every family is unique and deserves individualized support from trusted mentors, coaches, and community members. Often, the most helpful advice comes through a community member who has been through a similar challenge. Building community is an integral component of the work of JAS. Although JAS acknowledges that some residents may only need assistance through a specific crisis, JAS is committed to offering the more intensive support that FMF provides to as many families as possible in the coming years.

Indicator	Current Numbers	2026(P)
Families Moving Forward: Goal Completion Rate	57%	75%
FMF Incentives Earned (per participant per year)	\$525	\$750
FMF Matched Savings Contributions (per participant per year)	\$500	\$1,000
Financial Coaching Budgets Completed	75	125
Tax Returns Completed	300	350
Total Tax Refunds Received	\$580,000	\$640,000
Resumes Reviewed	0	40
Career Prospectuses Written	0	40