



Annual Report | 2024-2025



Pa'lante Transformative Justice

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Dear Friends & Family,

This is the year we fully occupied 220 Linden Street: the thump-thump of a basketball on the blacktop. The smell of food cooking on the stovetop. The sound of young people offering to make one another a plate. The screams of delight at our seniors sharing their college admissions. The joyful cacophony of dozens of Peer Leaders arriving on Wednesday afternoons. The quiet of deep listening and connection. All three floors abuzz with the work of being in community, of a collective vision, of the trusting relationships that allow us to be vulnerable and brave enough to bring our dreams to life.

This year's rising attacks on our BIPOC, immigrant, and LGBTQ+ communities have only strengthened our resolve and deepened our commitment to each other and to our shared purpose. Despite the uncertainty of this political moment, we expanded our hours, grew our staff team, welcomed more young people into our space, forged new partnerships, and we continue to organize ourselves and our communities. We also took our first ever trip to Boriken (!!!) to learn about Taino culture and resistance to colonization, a profoundly important experience for our youth and staff team, almost all of whom have roots in the Caribbean.

We are honored that this is the work we get to do in the world, and we are fortified by what we are co-creating alongside the brilliant and committed young people of Pa'lante. We hope you draw inspiration from these pages. Thank you for all the ways you support our work, and the work you do in your own circles to bring about a more just and loving world. Now more than ever, we need to keep dreaming and building together.

with love and in solidarity,

Alicia Thomas & Luke Woodward
Co-Executive Directors



Our Start

Founded in 2015 by youth, parents, educators, counselors, and community leaders at Holyoke High School in response to racially unjust school disciplinary practices, Pa'lante Transformative Justice introduces Youth of Color to restorative/transformative justice and community organizing to transform the social conditions (violence, poverty, racism, educational inequity, etc.) that prevent them from thriving. Centering those harmed by the school-to-prison pipeline, Pa'lante is a by-youth-for-youth program.

Mission

Rooted in Holyoke, Pa'lante builds youth power to heal and transform interpersonal harm and systemic injustices.

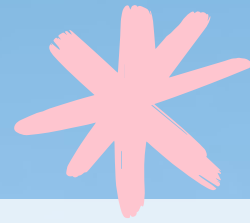
Vision

Pa'lante envisions a world where youth use their inherent power to create strong, healthy, intergenerational communities free from oppression and injustice.



Where there is harm, we strive to not only repair and restore interpersonal relationships, but also to name and transform the systemic problems that are often at the root. For this reason, we describe our work as **transformative justice.**

Our Work



Each year, we build power with a cohort of ~35 Peer Leaders (ages 13-19), welcome 200+ youth to our by-youth-for-youth drop in space, and reach 500+ educators, youth organizers, and community leaders of all ages through our trainings.

Open Monday - Friday, from 3 - 7 PM, Pa'lante is open to Holyoke youth looking for a safe and welcoming space to hang with friends, cook, connect, and learn. With time and a little encouragement, drop-in youth may choose to participate in skill-building workshops, work with a therapist or connect with a near-peer mentor. From there, youth can apply to become Pa'lante Peer Leaders and get involved in our leadership development and community organizing opportunities.

Pa'lante Peer Leaders learn indigenous circle practice and lead Youth Participatory Action (YPAR) projects to interrogate and transform systemic inequities. Young people are compensated because we value their time and work, and because we are interested in not just dismantling the school-to-prison pipeline, but creating viable alternatives!





Circle Practice

Pa'lante is one of the first places that didn't tell me to lower my voice, but to speak up.

Pa'lante Peer Leader, Age 15

We ground both our outward and inward facing work in Indigenous Circle Practice as learned from Dr. Sayra Pinto, José Lugo and others. Our youth, staff, and board all use circle to solve problems, celebrate victories, hold ourselves and each other accountable, grieve, and make decisions. Through this practice, we learn about who we are, and who our people are, while grounding how we work together to build a strong and healthy community.





Our Impact

Among this year's (24-25) cohort of Peer Leaders:

100%

of youth developed at least one Social Emotional Learning skill

91%

of youth increased their academic agency.

86%

gained the skills to be politically informed and actively engaged!

42↑

percentage point increase in youth's likelihood to voting!

Source: HelloInsight Youth Leadership & Action Survey (24-25)



When young people transfer the skills they've learned in YPAR into different settings and contexts, we take that as a win!

This school year, Pa'lante Peer Leaders have testified at the municipal and state level, on wide ranging issues such as:

- Building cultures of care and trust instead of surveillance at school
- Investing in mental health supports and youth employment as a critical violence prevention strategy
- Safe consumption sites as a harm reduction strategy for communities navigating the the opioid crisis
- The need for affordable housing
- Alternative to high-stakes standardized testing

This list is not random – young folks recognize the connections between school push out, housing instability, substance abuse, and street economies.

Pa'lante Peer Leaders understand how the social determinants of health can aid or obstruct their opportunities to thrive.

“
Before Pa'lante I would have handled this [conflict] way different, way different. I would have just walked over to his place, and fought them both.

Before I started coming here, the people I hung out with... they weren't talking things out. You know that had a big influence on me. But I've changed a lot since being here. A lot.

I've seen there are a lot of other ways to move. And when I've come here angry, I didn't leave angry.

Pa'lante Peer Leader, Age 14

“
Pa'lante's vision is a gift of hope for a hurting world.

Becca Neubardt
Board Member

“
A few years ago, working on a Master's degree felt like a dream. I thought about it in secret, and didn't talk to anyone about it. It felt so far for me, and I was scared to envision it for myself.

As a first generation college student, I was excited to get my Bachelor's degree. I felt like getting my hopes up for anything passed that felt risky. I didn't want to let myself down.

With the support of my family, my community at Pa'lante, and with my daughter looking up at me, I feel so empowered as I begin my Master's in Social Work program at Westfield State. My Pa'lante Community including life coaches, co-workers, youth, and community members have challenged me to think of the “what-ifs” of my future, and I feel truly grateful to have such amazing support systems.

Catch me studying, working on never ending papers, and dreaming of a PhD next...

Katelynn Cruz
Pa'lante Alumni & Training Manager





Mindful Rage

Expanding Pathways Out of the Criminal Legal System and Into Beloved Community

Pa'lante Peer Leaders created Mindful Rage as a space of healing and community, and as a strategy to challenge racial inequities in the juvenile justice system.

Mindful Rage is a dynamic, joyful, youth-led alternative to a standard anger management course, co-facilitated by a youth and an adult staff. We acknowledge the legitimate and systemic reasons youth get mad. Part political education and part skill building, Mindful Rage teaches concrete de-escalation strategies, exposes the roots of injustice, and creates a sense of community and kinship among youth. We learn from the work of artists and activists who have used their anger to create beauty and systemic change. As a recent participant shared, "Mindful Rage shows you there are so many feelings beside just happiness, sadness, and anger. And so many ways to use your anger beyond just taking it out on somebody else."

“

At Pa'lante, we look at the bigger picture, at the patterns of injustice, so we can start to break down those systems, and create different narratives about our people.

We do this to improve our own lives, and because we think about all the kids coming after us.

Pa'lante Peer Leader, Age 17

”

7

youth trained
as facilitators

44

youth graduated
from Mindful Rage

88%

reported increased emotional literacy

91%

rate Mindful Rage as
relevant and helpful

Meeting the Moment

After noticing the rising costs of groceries and how many young people in our drop-in space were navigating food insecurity, alumni staff Aleyx Bernard led our efforts to forge a partnership with the Food Bank of Western Massachusetts. Since January 2025, as a member agency, we have operated a biweekly food pantry, open to the general public.

In our first 6 distribution days, we served over 50 households and reached more than 65 youth in our community. As one young person recently shared, “I spent a good quarter of my life not having enough to eat.. I don’t like to talk about it, but I know I’m not the only one.” In fact, nearly 1 in 2 families in Hampden County are navigating food insecurity. Another youth said, “I am able to help my mom at a moment when it’s really hard to keep up with all of the bills and the cost of things just keeps going up.” Youth are also getting the word out to friends and family: “I called my aunt because I know she’s struggling, and I texted my boyfriend’s family too to let them know we have resources here and they don’t have to wait outside or anything. They’re going to be welcomed here.”

When asked about how he feels with the project thus far, Aleyx said, “I’m just glad that the hunger so many of us face has become a less lonely struggle.”



Pa'lante's Food Pantry is open the 1st & 3rd Tuesday of the month, from 3:30 - 5 PM for people of all ages.

Finding Belonging in Borikén

For years, Pa'lante youth have dreamed of taking a trip to Borikén/Puerto Rico, where young folks from the Caribbean diaspora could not only swim in the ocean, eat familiar food, and speak Spanish comfortably, but also connect Pa'lante's use of indigenous circle practice (taught to us primarily through North American indigenous lineages) to Taíno indigenous practices and connect with Puerto Rican legacies of activism and resistance to colonization.

Last year, with the support of the Episcopal City Mission's Finding Our Way Home grant and a grassroots fundraising campaign, we hosted Taíno elder Irka Mateo for a weekend retreat here in Western Mass and a group of 22 Pa'lante Peer Leaders and Staff (many of whom are alum), spent February Break on the island, hosted by Ra & Yacely of Wuru Taino.

As Co-ED Alicia Thomas explained, “ Our guides –Ra and Yacely- both had a wealth of knowledge, and they planned powerful experiences for the youth. I heard so many young people say how they felt they belonged in Borikén , like it was something their spirits were calling for... Those moments are priceless.”



Reflecting on the trip, one youth wrote, “Overall, I can’t believe I got the opportunity to go to Borikén, to learn so much about my heritage, and to unlearn colonized ways of thinking. I just want to say THANK YOU to everyone who helped us get there.”

Pa'lante Peer Leaders returned to Holyoke inspired to share what they learned. They reported back to family, friends, and neighbors at Sigue Pa'lante – our annual community share back in May 2025 – and designed and hosted a new week long summer program called Somos Borikén to foster cultural knowledge and pride among middle school aged youth.





Our Intergenerational Board of Directors

Fabio Arnaldo Ayala, Asst Director of Restorative Practices, Amherst College, Board Co-Chair

Amy Bonilla, Alumni ('21) Co-Chair, Girls Inc Facilitator for Middle & High School Programs

Abdallah Mwanilelo ('25), Pa'lante Peer Leader

Noah Mehki Vargas ('25) Pa'lante Peer Leader

Alexis Diaz ('27) Pa'lante Peer Leader

Raúl Gutiérrez, Professor of Latinx Studies & Spanish, Holyoke Community College

Leslie Brazeau ('22), Pa'lante Alumni & Undergraduate at AIC Board Secretary

Jasmine Concepción ('27), Pa'lante Peer Leader

Ana Rodriguez, Retired Education Director of the Care Center, Board Treasurer

Becca Neubardt, BRYT Program Coordinator

Janeyah Madera ('25), Peer Leader

Kia Burton-King, Pa'lante Parent & Family Coordinator for Community Action Pioneer Valley

Gabriel Nieves ('25) Peer Leader

Alyzza Fontanez ('20) Health Care Navigator, Holyoke Medical Center

Alicia Fleming, Co-Executive Director, Jobs with Justice Massachusetts

Nichelle Rivera ('25) Peer Leader



“It’s not hierarchical. We all have a chance to speak, it’s an intergenerational space where our voice matters too. And sometimes, as a youth, our voices actually matters the most.”

- Noah Mehki Vargas, Board Member

Our Finances

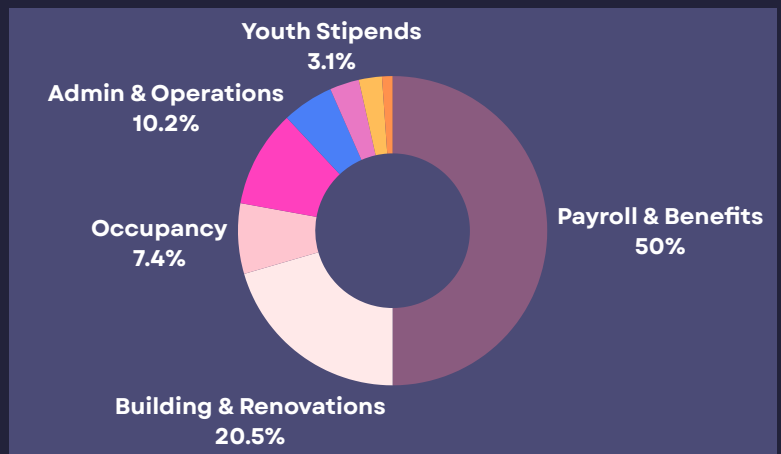
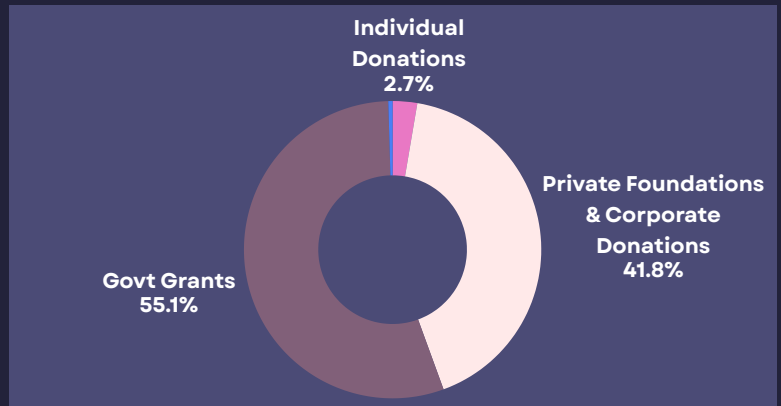
2024 Revenue

Individual Donations	\$23,280.94
Foundations Grant & Corporate Donations	\$360,058.48
Government Grants	\$475,535.37
Earned Revenue	\$4,500.00
Other	\$136.44
TOTAL REVENUE	\$863,511.23



2024 Expenses

Payroll and Benefits	\$455,189.66
Building & Renovations	\$186,510.23
Occupancy (Mortgage, Utility, Insurance)	\$66,854.46
Administrative & Operations	\$92,530.53
Program Expenses	\$48,938.10
Youth Stipends	\$27,950.00
Food (Programs & Events)	\$22,127.82
Travel & Transportation	\$9,909.68
Total Expenses	\$910,010.48



We are so grateful for the support of:

- Community Foundation of Western Massachusetts
- Nellie Mae Education Foundation
- Shannon Community Safety Initiative
- MA Department of Public Health, MA
- MA Executive Office of Health & Human Services
- MA Executive Office of Economic Development
- Schott Foundation for Public Education
- The New Commonwealth Fund
- The Burgess Urban Fund of Episcopal City Mission
- The Visionary Freedom Fund
- TK Foundation
- Holyoke Pediatrics
- Bank of America
- New England Youth Organizing Network
- Carlos Vega Fund
- Winter Lehman Family Foundation
- Beveridge Family Foundation
- Mount Pleasant Fund

& Our Many Donors !



Pa'lante Staff

Bella Reeves | Leadership & Organizing Coordinator

Luke Woodward | Co-Executive Director

Alicia Thomas | Co-Executive Director

Katelynn Cruz | Training Manager & MSW Intern

Thayna Garcia | Alumni Fellow

Cristopher Lora | TJ Coordinator

A'lexus Santiago | MSW Intern

Danielle Hayes | Development & Ops Manager

Aleyx Bernard | Meta Coordinator



Welcome to Kayla Rodriguez, our first ever Director of Finance & Operations! A lifelong Holyoke resident, mother of three, and graduate of Holyoke Public Schools, she brings more than eight years of nonprofit leadership experience in financial management, operations, and organizational development. Deeply committed to youth and families, Kayla also serves on the boards of the Valley Opportunity Council and the Carlos Vega Foundation. She started at Pa'lante in March 2025, and we are so happy she is a part of our team!

Become a Sustainer

Our sustaining donors are a critical part of our community, providing financial stability and flexibility as we grow our organization into a full-time drop in center and sustain our proven-effective approach to youth-led transformative justice. Join us as a monthly sustainer today at PalanteHolyoke.org/Donate

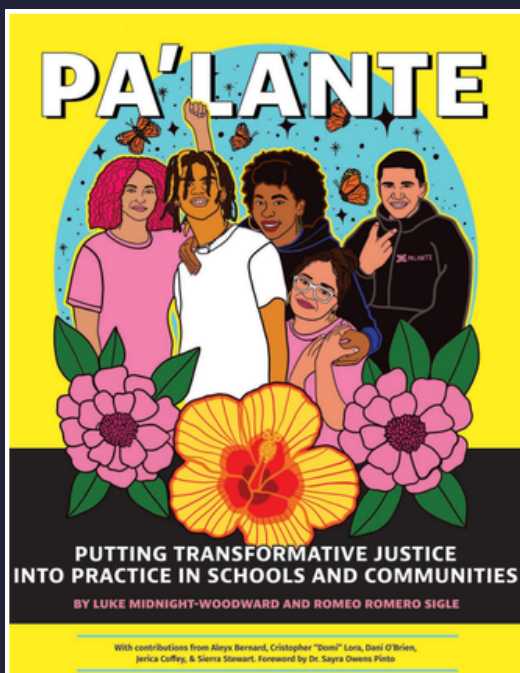


“I love Pa'lante and all you do. As a retired teacher, your vision, mission and actions are very dear to my heart.”

Sustaining Donor Johanna Halbeisen

“In a time where justice can feel out of reach, everything about Pa'lante is a vibe, and intentional. It's been amazing for my two older children to find a place to belong and be involved.

Parent & Board Member Kia Burton-King



We wrote a book!

Let's grow the movement for youth transformative justice together! We are making this 80-page guidebook available for free so you can learn from our successes, heartbreaks, and much more over the last ten years. Read it all the way through for a thorough orientation to our work, or pick it up section by section for insights, ideas, or inspiration. Available at PalanteHolyoke.org/Guidebook. Ready to put it into practice and looking for support? Check out PalanteHolyoke.org/Trainings for our offerings.



A photograph of a man from the back, wearing a pink long-sleeved shirt. The shirt has a quote printed on the back in black text. The man is looking towards the right. The background is blurred, showing other people and a wooden structure. A bright pink vertical bar is on the left edge of the image.

***Es nuestro deber luchar
por nuestra libertad.
Es nuestro deber vencer.
Debemos amarnos
los unos a los otros y apoyarnos.
No tenemos nada que perder
pero nuestras cadenas.***

-Assata Shakur