



IMPACT STORY: Pittsburgh, PA

Intersection of Education and Workforce Development

THE INSPIRATION. The [PHASE 4 Learning Center](#), a private charter school, was established in 2003 to divert youth away from the end-of-high-school prison pipeline in their region. Many students were dropping out of traditional learning environments, and being written off by the school districts. The founders of PHASE 4 felt this was a huge disservice to these youth, who were then less able to go to college and had few employment opportunities.

Terrie Suica-Reed, PHASE 4 founder, president and CEO, has participated in the development of a high-impact documentary film called **“Nothing Short of Amazing”** (launching in 2024) which covers the inspiration for PHASE 4. Don’t miss this [2-minute trailer](#) for the film!

THE METHOD. Now we have a much better idea about the fact that everyone learns differently, and that a traditional setting may not serve every learning style. Evidence abundantly shows that many students thrive in environments that provide hands-on learning, low adult-to-student ratios, collaboration, real-world projects, time periods that shift to refresh focus, and other innovations that strengthen motivation and retention.

As a member of [The Clubhouse Network](#), PHASE 4 leverages its learning model, which includes these principles for youth STEM exploration: Following Your Interests, Learning by Design, Fostering Respect and Trust, and Building a Community.

THE REACH. Today, PHASE 4 serves over 25,000 young people in *multiple locations* across the state, including Pittsburgh and Harrisburg, with a **98% graduation rate!**

PHASE 4 also focuses on helping its students discover career paths and earn their high school diplomas. It leverages funding from WIOA (the Department of Labor’s [Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act](#), landmark legislation to improve our nation’s public workforce system by helping youth and others with significant barriers to employment get into high- quality jobs).

WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT. Despite the significant impact on the steel industry in this region, technology remains a constant presence. The Workforce Development Board aims to fill available positions with both young individuals and retrained adult workers. It knows that college costs exceed what many regional jobs earn, leaving graduates struggling to repay college loans. PHASE 4 youth and their families often seek new and different ways to achieve economic success.



Terrie Suica-Reed and student Merle (30 years ago), from the documentary trailer



Terrie and Merle, recently



Aaron McKinnon, Coordinator

PHASE 4 has a dedicated team of facilitators, mentors, and counselors who are focused on guiding their students to build their confidence as they discover technology pathways.

“I let them play, mess up, design, and have fun, but at a certain age, I know we have to start them thinking about what comes next – their evolution toward workforce development,” says Aaron McKinnon, Clubhouse Coordinator.

INDUSTRY SUPPORT. Upon turning 19, PHASE 4 Tech Center members become clubhouse ‘alumni.’ However, well before reaching this age, they are encouraged to acquire in-demand skills and knowledge relevant to current job opportunities. Many participants are pleasantly surprised by their interest in technology. Through partnerships with the Cisco Academy,

Carnegie Mellon Robotics Academy, Google, and other industry education programs, learners access materials that lead to stackable micro-credentials and certifications. For instance, participants can earn certifications in networking or cybersecurity and obtain internships for real-world experience. Additionally, they can join a paid, pre-apprentice 'bootcamp' for 14 weeks with an industry partner.

"Our youth experience a true mind shift as they embark on a career path leading to \$75,000/year," says Aaron.

KEYS TO SUCCESS. PHASE 4's multiple sites remain integral members of The Clubhouse Network, which includes over 150 community-based youth learning centers across 21 countries. Success for these locations hinges on building strong relationships with schools, parents, youth, mentors, alumni, corporate partners, investment boards, housing agencies, and others. This collaborative approach ensures continuity and longevity, facilitated by PHASE 4's experienced staff, many of whom have invested significant time in their roles. Aaron emphasizes that Clubhouse coordinators and CBO program leaders who adopt this mindset create alignment and synergy for continued growth. Every investment of time and care—whether through hallway conversations, collaborative problem-solving, engaging with youth, enjoying music, or developing friendships—makes a meaningful difference.

EXPANSION. In 2024, PHASE 4 is enhancing its impact by expanding into a 6,000 square foot space, offering improved visibility, accessibility, and expanded programming. The new facility caters to the entire community, including veterans and seniors. New programming allows youth members to be funded to assist seniors with using basic technology, including how to safely navigate the internet and social media with their cell phones and tablets. Additionally, youth can hone their skills by mentoring adults seeking higher-level technology skills. As part of Career Pathways, through the TechConnect program, youth are deployed to nearby small businesses to provide tech support in areas such as basic IT, web design, digital marketing, e-commerce setup, data analytics, and conference planning. PHASE 4 youth are encouraged to fully utilize all resources available at PHASE 4 sites.

Youth members also lead an anti-violence program at various schools. This has built relationships with local organizations, businesses, and city leaders (including the mayor's peace plan). This led to funding for youth advocacy activities. Clubhouses are no longer the best kept secrets in their region – they are well known and sought out by youth and education advocates at national, state, county, and city levels.

CITY APPRENTICESHIPS. Tech Launch, PHASE 4's Cybersecurity Pre-Apprenticeship program, is officially registered with the State of Pennsylvania, which funds approximately 70 youth members to obtain their Cisco certifications. After completing the program and taking several courses—such as Intro to Cybersecurity, Networking Essentials, Internet of Things, and Python I and II—along with IT career awareness, soft skills development, resume workshops, and interviewing skills from the Pathways program, youth participants are well-prepared for apprenticeship or workforce roles.

LIFE AFTER THE CLUBHOUSE. As they turn 19, many youth members choose to maintain and nurture their clubhouse network of mentors and friends. They come back to give their time and talent as guest speakers, volunteers, and ambassadors. Some advocate with their employers to provide clubhouse youth with internships and job opportunities.

Now with over 20 years of proven impact, PHASE 4 Learning Centers continue to open minds and support economic success for tens of thousands of regional youth, their families, and their communities. For more information, please visit [PHASE 4 Learning Center](https://www.phase4learningcenter.org).



TV news coverage for PHASE 4 Learning Center



PHASE 4 Graduation 2023