



2020
&
2021
Annual Report

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Director of Creative Leadership and Organizational Innovation

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Cover: *Honk for Peace*, Nydia Colón, videographer. Personal collection.

Not just a place to go. A place to go *further*.

508-791-4702 | WorcesterYouthCenter.org



1st Place Winner, *Why is the World*



In 2020 and 2021, youth had to express their creativity remotely. They learned the fundamentals of filmmaking: cinematography, lighting, sound, editing, acting and directing.

Some 20 students brought the Violence Is Not Normal campaign themes into their films after conversations about identity, stereotypes, conflict resolution, advocacy and power.

Throughout this report, you'll see screenshots from winners of the 2 Minute Film Festival. Visit our YouTube channel and support the work that empowers youth for today's complex world.



Dear Youth Center SUPPORTERS,



We have long described the Worcester Youth Center as not just a place to go, but a place to go further. Yet for much of 2020 and 2021, that place had to be virtual.

With the global pandemic, we had to close our doors but open our Zoom account and bring youth into conversation in a new way. Uncomfortable and unfamiliar at first, this new way of being with each other quickly became part of our daily routines.

The world began opening up and schools began in-person sessions in the spring of 2021 and our programming resumed in person.

Then the floodwaters came. In late August 2021, we had to close our doors again, and everyone returned to Zoom.

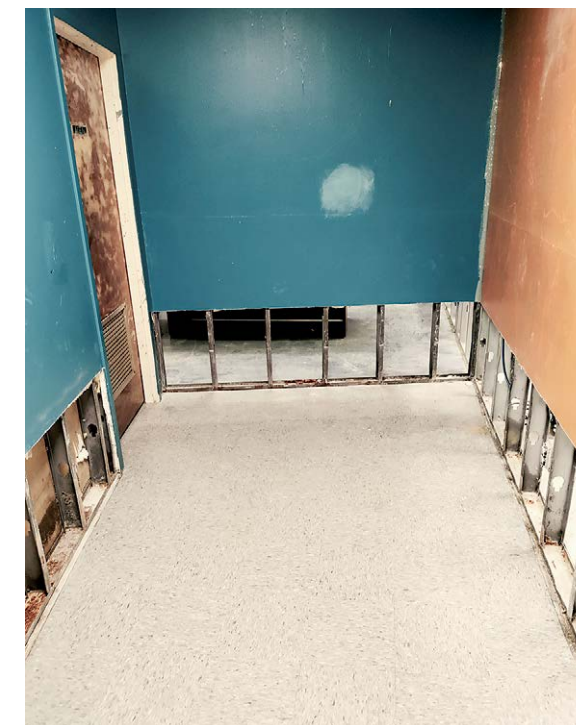
By the end of our fiscal year, we were still rebuilding, but contractors finally arrived, the paint dried, and we are welcoming youth back to the Center.

Throughout these tumultuous times, we all appreciate the continuing support you have provided.

With gratitude,

Samuel Martin,
Executive Director

“We all appreciate the continuing support you have provided.”



The flood waters were high, the damage was severe.



“We want our SUMMER BACK”

Video helped teens ease pandemic stress

It helped them share their feelings. It also taught them video skills.

The Teen Circle members who created the video that went viral, “We Want Our Summer Back,” during the summer of 2020, learned more than storyboarding and framing a shot.

“It was difficult to talk about how we felt.”

One of those teens, Lady Manu, then 15, explained, “When the pandemic came in, it was difficult to talk about how we felt.” The video helped the group members communicate “how we were doing, how our families were doing, how we felt,” she said.

In June 2020, members of Worcester Youth Center’s Teen Circle, funded by the Daniels Foundation, joined forces to create a video with a catchy beat and serious message, “Wear a mask, wear your gloves, sanitize, sanitize.” Abbi Nyamekye, then 14, said the experience “just felt really cool” and she liked bonding with the other teens.

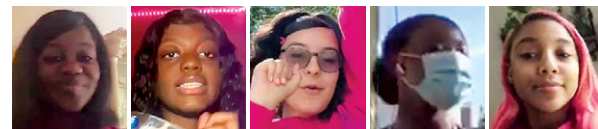
Abbi enjoyed the process of making the video, while finding a possible career path. She learned about filming from different angles and voice settings she could do from home.

She credits her newfound interest in filming to Nydia Colón, director of Creative Leadership & Organizational Innovation at the Youth Center, who directed the video.

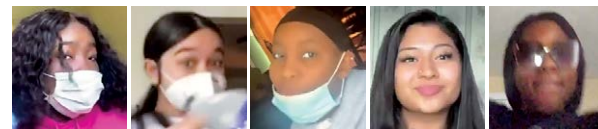
Community feedback was positive for the video’s creativity and quality. People related to its theme, and it made them realize “I’m not the only one feeling this way about the whole pandemic,” said Lady, then a 10th-grader at Worcester’s South High Community School. “I like putting the message out there.”



We Want Our Summer Back, Title Screen



Abby Frene Giana Lady Maureen



Nasya Nevaeh Olivia Raven Tiffany

The video and youth were featured in a “Wake Up Call” segment on WCVB-TV in Boston with NewsCenter 5 morning anchor Doug Meehan.

“It’s very exciting to see yourself on TV,” added Abbi, also a 10th-grader at South High at that time.

Since their turn in the spotlight, Lady and Abbi have done outreach for the Youth Center’s campaign, Violence Is Not Normal (VINN). One woman Lady met in the community changed her mindset about gun violence after talking to Lady. Others would tell Lady stories about violent incidents and discuss their feelings about gun violence. Abbi also did interviews for a documentary on VINN and encouraged community members to get the coronavirus vaccines.

Lady liked being part of the Worcester Youth Center because the organization “gives people a lot of opportunities they don’t have.” Both girls agreed staff members make people feel welcome and cared for.

Spreading Positive ENERGY

Poet and longtime Youth Center member Devon “DD” Morgan wanted to help others get through these COVID times. A participant in the HopeVid program, he worked to share his positive energy and support Worcester youth to see poetry as an outlet to express their feelings.

“Stay healthy and safe. There is hope.”

Starting in March 2020, the group met twice a week to create a video infused with their poetry and art. As the first weeks of the pandemic became months, they also learned about coping skills, job search strategies, personal finance and how to listen when someone needs to talk.

Devon credits Nydia Colón for setting clear rules and keeping the group on task. The group ultimately produced a 17-minute video presented in June 2020 in a special community-wide Zoom event. One of his poems was published in a *Telegram & Gazette* article.

He’s written poetry since fifth grade, he said, and English is his favorite class in school. His message to everyone is simple and clear: “Stay healthy and safe. There is hope.”



Devon Morgan



2nd Place Winner, *The Orphanage*



3rd Place Winner, *Tough Love*

“Let’s DO THIS!”

Staffing through the pandemic

While they joke about that fateful evening of Thursday, March 12, 2020, three Worcester Youth Center staff members recall the two-year suspension of life-as-we-knew-it as a serious opportunity to do things differently.

“We closed for a week, and then immediately decided to get on Zoom,” said Nydia Colón.

Given the stresses of a changing world, youth members needed connection even more. Digital options required technology. So the Center distributed 25 free tablets pre-loaded with the Zoom app, dropping them off home by home.

But not every program translated easily into a digital format. Cassie Giardina, then Team Leader of Health and Wellness, wanted to finish the second half of her adolescent sexuality education program (ASE). Awkward enough subject matter for in-person classes, virtual

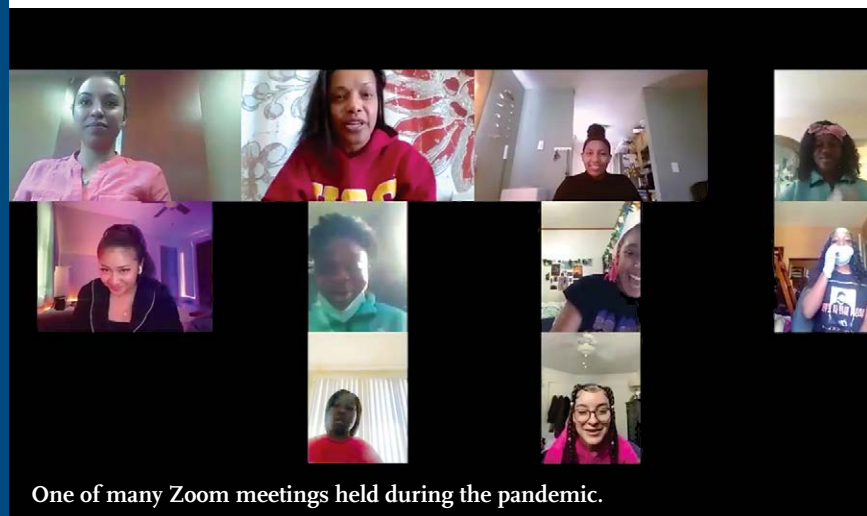
to 30 youth engaged with daily wellness check-ins, fun questions of the day (if you had to spend a million dollars all in one day, what would you do?), peer mentoring and breakout rooms for private conversations.

Staff quickly grasped the potential of Zoom, forced to be creative. Online games, polls, screenshares of scoreboards all came into play.

“One of the silver linings,” said Cassie, “was a lot of organizations came to us for advice.”

Staff members had their own daily check-in sessions. They created a virtual running club, challenging each other to “Defeat the ‘Rona’ with 88-mile months. They cheered each other on through a shared app.

Youth work readiness remained a mission. What skills could youth develop during lockdown conditions? And how could they empower youth through the arts in a new way? The answer turned out to be in their hands.



One of many Zoom meetings held during the pandemic.

sessions raised new questions about who was in the room – could students find a quiet place away from siblings and parents? Interactive games encouraged participation. All 10 finished the program.

Cassie and Nydia conferred with many of their peers on how to make this work. Creative responses kept up

“A lot of organizations came to us for advice.”

Smart phones empowered them to become filmmakers. Storytellers with a distinctive point of view.

“Filmmaking is such a significant outlet for our young people to express themselves,” said Nydia. They decided to create a digital time capsule. Paired with the VOICES evidence-based curriculum exploring issues of identity, advocacy and community power, the project led to HopeVID 2020. In June 2020, youth shared this 17-minute collage of news, opinion, music and poetry with the greater Worcester community, over Zoom, of course.

No Questions ASKED

Most local funding organizations support programs, not organizations. The pandemic turned that model upside down. The key phrase has been “flexible funding” to enable agencies to meet their most immediate needs.

For the Worcester Youth Center, that meant serving youth in virtual ways. The United Way of Central Massachusetts (UWCM), the Daniels Foundation and Greater Worcester Community Foundation were among the city’s innovative funders that made possible the Center’s creative responses to the abrupt shift in members’ lives.

The Youth Center qualified for the first, rapid response phase of support from the Worcester Together Fund, explained Carolyn Stempler, then interim CEO for the Greater Worcester Community Foundation (GWCF). “We knew we needed to get funding into the community as quickly as possible to support the unknown,” she said. While not sure what might be involved, “providing services for youth would be a high priority.”

As an initial step, UWCM extended for one year all of its current funding agreements. The goal was to stabilize the community’s non-profits. “We were doing 72-hour grant making,” recalled Tim Garvin, CEO of UWCM. “Tell us who you are, what you do, what you need and how we can help.”



“We were doing 72-hour grant making.”

The summer of 2020 presented a new set of challenges as youth continued to be isolated at home. The Daniels Foundation continued its focus on investing in girls and, among other programs, funded Teen Circle’s video project that produced “We Want Our Summer Back.” The Worcester Together Fund supported 40 Nights of Summer and the virtual, evening hours programming the Center offered through Worcester Connect.

Giving quarterly rather than just once a year had the impact the Daniels Foundation sought. Sarah Daignault, then grants manager, wanted to “change what the Worcester Youth Center could do.”

“The focus of the Worcester Youth Center and the work they’ve done since the pandemic began in very difficult circumstances has been exceptional,” said Garvin. “This is why we do what we do.”

“This wasn’t about programs,” said Stempler, “it was about the community we serve and our mission.” Worcester’s response was unusual, she said, and has become a leadership model for other communities.



Honorable Mention, *Black and White*

Community celebrates GUN VIOLENCE PREVENTION

Youth at the Worcester Youth Center have been busy getting the word out that Violence Is Not Normal. The Youth Center announced this public service campaign to prevent gun violence during a fun-filled community gathering June 26, 2021 that built enthusiasm for the serious message. A year later, they held another celebration.

“We’re going to change the thinking and let people know that it’s not normal,” Samuel Martin, Executive Director, said in remarks that kicked off the campaign.

“Violence was never normal and never should be normal,” said Nydia Colón.

“Violence was never normal and never should be normal.”

Leading off a series of remarks from elected officials, Worcester Mayor Joseph M. Petty cited the increase in gun violence in Worcester and across the country. Youth Center staff and supporters want to let people know the Center exists and is a place for youth to come together and get to know each other.

“Youth are our future,” he said. “You’re going to make a difference.”

Youth wearing bright orange T-shirts emblazoned with the message Violence Is Not Normal mingled with other participants at the “Building Pathways to Peace” event.

Member Kofi Brefo, then 15, said he believes the gun violence prevention campaign will be effective. The message that Violence Is Not Normal might change someone’s point of view. Someone who is thinking about using a gun, for example, might be persuaded to avoid violence.



Top: Violence is Not Normal I-290 westbound billboard.
Above: Staff and attendees at the opening BBQ.

Making other youth aware of the gun violence prevention campaign is a role Kevin Boakye, then 17, enjoyed as he walked around the city, asking people to pledge “not to engage in violence as it does not solve any problems.”

Inside, there were free COVID vaccinations available, as well as information about COVID safety and transmission. There was also plenty of music, teenagers playing pool, getting free haircuts from Billionaire Barbers, and enjoying the food.

The event was broadcast live by members of a radio program that is a collaboration of the Worcester Youth Center and Unity Radio WUTY 97.9 FM. Entertainment included live performances by local artists.



Above: Converting pavement to produce, the Center’s garden beds.

The day ended with a short prayer and a call to end violence. Asked to gather in a circle, each participant received a rose. Those who had been victims of violence or witnessed violence were asked to release one rose petal into the circle. The floor was soon covered.

Violence Is Not Normal was funded by the Massachusetts Department of Public Health and the Mass Cultural Council. The Worcester Youth Center received \$800,000 from the two-year Massachusetts Department of Public Health Gun Violence Prevention grant, which took effect July 1, 2019. A total of more than \$8 million was awarded to 10 community organizations in May 2019 to prevent gun violence among youth.

Youth contribute to city’s historic archive of life during COVID

Four Worcester Youth Center members participated in a special online presentation hosted July 28, 2021 by the Worcester Historical Museum. Describing their life experiences during the pandemic, they shared both positive and negative changes they experienced in school, their relationships and their self-awareness. Nydia Colón noted the youth actually were battling three separate pandemics: COVID-19, racial injustice, and violence.

In 2020, the Worcester Historical Museum and Worcester Polytechnic Institute teamed up to collect stories from the community about life during the pandemic and record them in a digital time capsule. The Worcester Youth Center partnered with Worcester Historical Museum to participate in the project, “COVID-19 Chronicles: Worcester’s Community Archive.”

Using art and music to respond to that “knot in their stomach,” Nydia said, they created the video time capsule project, HopeVID2020. The video and the July presentation are now both part of the historic record established and maintained at the Worcester Historical Museum as a project in collaboration with faculty and students from Worcester Polytechnic Institute.

The program can be seen on YouTube and was covered by the *Telegram & Gazette*.

KEEP THE CONVERSATION GOING

Flexible funding from foundations allowed the Youth Center in turn to support new partnerships.

In July 2020, Legendary Legacies began a formal collaboration with the Youth Center, which enabled more creative engagements with the youth they were coaching. Establishing trust is the first step, said co-founder Ron Waddell, and the more flexible funding accessed through the Center allowed him to take the simple step of continuing a conversation over a meal.

It can be months or even years to “dismantle the distrust they may have around our agenda,” he said. Developing individual service plans can’t really begin until there’s a relationship. Working with the Youth Center, he said, has meant his organization can reach 20 more young men who might otherwise not receive services. Programming continued through 2021 for continued impact.

Radio days

The Youth Center and **Pride Productions**, the nonprofit Ernie Floyd founded that operates Unity Radio WUTY 97.9 FM, a community station, collaborated during the summer of 2020. Youth who participated gained self-confidence as well as transferrable skills.

The two organizations have a natural fit, Floyd said, as Pride Productions and the Youth Center serve the same audience. The Center wanted to offer youth an introduction to electronics and communications, and Floyd had the expertise and equipment.

A core group of four to five youth attended regularly, researching projects and working on communications, marketing, design and writing. They learned how to

be producers, how to direct and how to assemble the equipment for live programming. They can bring those skills to any vocation they choose, Floyd said.

Changing the narrative

It’s been more than a decade of collaboration for Dianne Langford James and the Worcester Youth Center, in her roles as founder of the **Yes We Care Teen Academy**, executive director of The Torch Foundation, and grandmother committed to support her grandchildren who were Center members.

The Center “gave them and so many other youth a safe place, and the tools and techniques to take responsibility, make better choices and become the best version of themselves,” she said. “I am honored to work with Executive Director Sam Martin and the entire staff. They are really invested in our youth and young adults.”

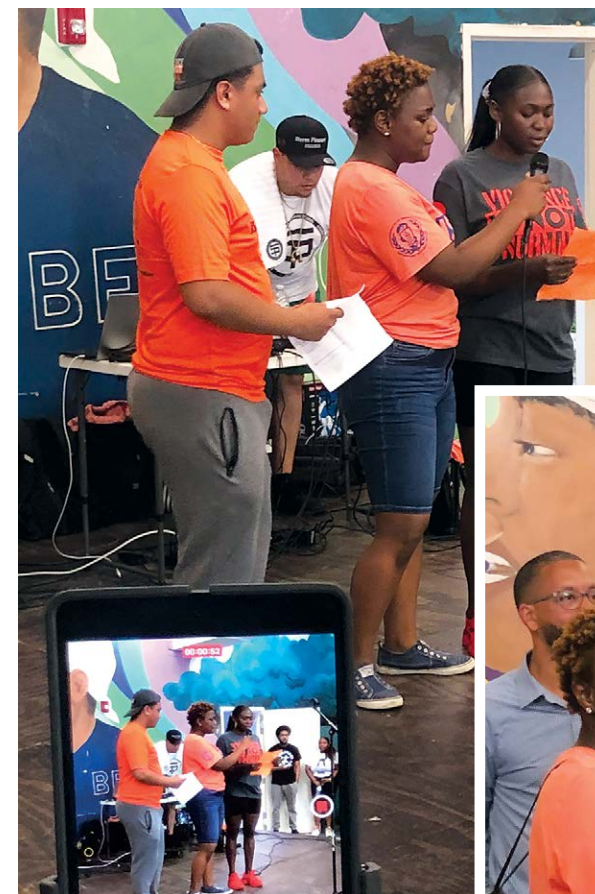
Part of Dianne’s Yes We Care programming is “LICA” – Leaders in Committed Action, training for teens and young adults in an eight-week program. More than a dozen teens also participated in the Center’s work leadership training and job readiness program in 2021 through the Violence Is Not Normal initiative. Members of a cohort of 35 youth, The Torch training included social emotional leadership training.

Describing her approach to working with teens, James says “Youth are our future and the future is now!” and quotes poet Maya Angelou, “Do the best you can until you know better, and then when you know better, do better.” Honored to work with the Worcester Youth Center, she concludes, “it is our duty and responsibility to be the village it takes to raise a child. I believe the Center is a village with villagers and an extended family.”

“Establishing trust is the first step.”



WUTY gives youth the opportunity to expand their electronic and communication skills. Seen here, some youth are taking videos of their interview with Sam Martin.



Youth used their video skills to record the presentation of a state legislature citation for the Violence Is Not Normal campaign.



Your Investment in OUR WORK

Support for the Worcester Youth Center is an investment in our collective future. For more than 25 years, the Center's work has created positive change for thousands of young people, encouraging new directions and better life decisions. Your contributions have had a significant impact on our community. We remain grateful for your confidence and continuing support.

Statement of Financial Position — December 31, 2020

ASSETS

Current Assets

| | |
|---------------------------------|--------------------|
| Cash and equivalents | \$736,071 |
| Grants and contracts receivable | \$127,545 |
| Prepaid expenses | \$24,210 |
| Total Current Assets | \$887,826 |
| Investments | \$706,618 |
| Property and equipment, net | \$848,545 |
| Total Assets | \$2,442,989 |

REVENUE Year ending December 31, 2020

| | |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------|
| Grants and contracts | \$856,574 |
| Contributions | \$224,562 |
| Temporarily restricted | \$135,465 |
| Contributions in-kind | \$4,640 |
| Other income | \$4,348 |
| Special events, net expenses | \$6,235 |
| Net assets released from restriction: Satisfaction of program restrictions | \$145,809 |
| Subtotal Revenue and Support | \$1,235,933 |
| Temporarily Restricted | (\$10,344) |
| Total Revenue and Support | \$1,225,589 |

LIABILITIES AND NET ASSETS

Current Liabilities

| | |
|----------------------------------------|------------------|
| Accounts payable | \$57,636 |
| Accrued expenses | \$40,289 |
| Deferred revenue | \$377,231 |
| Total Liabilities | \$475,156 |
| Paycheck Protection Program (PPP) Loan | \$112,600 |
| Total Liabilities | \$587,756 |

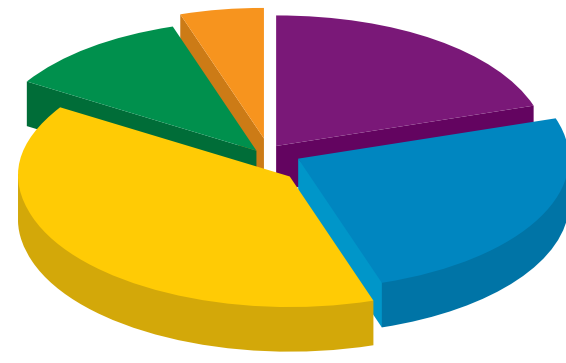
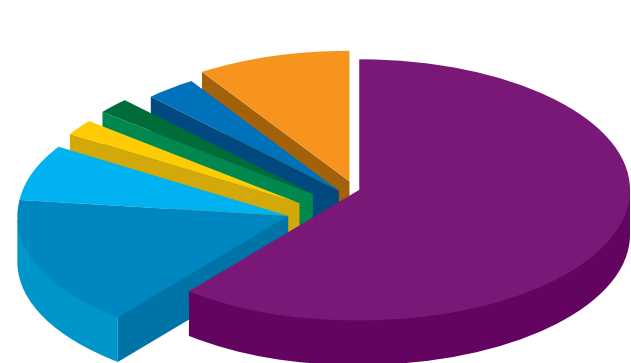
Net Assets

| | |
|----------------------------|--------------------|
| Without donor restrictions | \$1,696,473 |
| With donor restrictions | \$158,760 |
| Total Net Assets | \$1,855,233 |

Total Liabilities and Net Assets \$2,442,989

EXPENSES Year ending December 31, 2020

| | |
|------------------------|--------------------|
| Creative leadership | \$245,373 |
| Health and wellness | \$287,909 |
| Career and education | \$467,785 |
| Management and general | \$132,168 |
| Fundraising | \$61,493 |
| Total Expenses | \$1,194,728 |



Your Continued INVESTMENT

Contributions to the Worcester Youth Center yield far-reaching benefits, as your gifts are an investment in the lives of Worcester's youth. Participation in our programs gives them greater self-confidence, job skills and community leadership opportunities. Our members see the impact their voices and their presence can have on the world around them. From all of us, thank you.

Statement of Financial Position — December 31, 2021

ASSETS

Current Assets

| | |
|------------------------------------------|--------------------|
| Cash and equivalents and restricted cash | \$612,972 |
| Grants and contracts receivable | \$132,761 |
| Prepaid expenses | \$27,615 |
| Total Current Assets | \$773,348 |
| Investments | \$812,785 |
| Property and equipment, net | \$854,316 |
| Total Assets | \$2,440,449 |

REVENUE Year ending December 31, 2021

| | |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------|
| Grants and contracts | \$1,057,261 |
| Contributions | \$328,311 |
| Contributions in-kind | \$15,971 |
| Other income | \$5,585 |
| Net assets released from restriction: Satisfaction of program restrictions | \$182,968 |
| Total Revenue and Support | \$1,590,096 |

LIABILITIES AND NET ASSETS

Current Liabilities

| | |
|--------------------------|------------------|
| Accounts payable | \$40,744 |
| Accrued expenses | \$91,604 |
| Total Liabilities | \$132,348 |

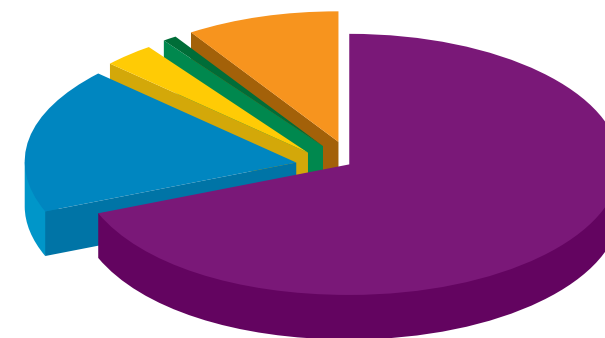
Net Assets

| | |
|----------------------------|--------------------|
| Without donor restrictions | \$2,197,236 |
| With donor restrictions | \$110,865 |
| Total Net Assets | \$2,308,101 |

Total Liabilities and Net Assets \$2,440,449

EXPENSES Year ending December 31, 2021

| | |
|------------------------|--------------------|
| Creative leadership | \$516,028 |
| Health and wellness | \$225,317 |
| Career and education | \$364,498 |
| Management and general | \$140,675 |
| Fundraising | \$75,993 |
| Total Expenses | \$1,322,511 |



Thank you to our 2020 & 2021 SPONSORS



Honk for Peace, Nydia Colon, videographer.

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\$100,000 and above

City of Worcester
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\$25,000 - \$99,999

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CORPORATE, FOUNDATION, GOVERNMENT DONORS

\$100,000 and above

City of Worcester
Massachusetts Department of Public Health

\$25,000 to \$99,999

Amelia Peabody Foundation
Commonwealth Corporation
Greater Worcester Community Foundation
United Way of Central Massachusetts

\$10,000 to \$24,999

Adcare
George I. Alden Foundation
George P. Bishop Foundation
Fred Harris Daniels Foundation
DCU for Kids
Fletcher Foundation
Massachusetts Cultural Council
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Frank R. Peters Trust
Albert W. Rice Charitable Fund
Gertrude Skelly Foundation
Stoddard Charitable Trust
UNUM Foundation

\$5,000 to \$9,999

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 Nellie Mae Education Foundation
 Reliant Foundation
 UMass Memorial Health Care

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 UTEC
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Up to \$999

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 The Auburn Post Office
 The Benevity Impact Fund
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 Melvin S. Culter Charitable Foundation
 Davis Publications Charitable Trust
 International Ceramic Engineering
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