A new name. A new chapter.

Annual Report 2014

A new name. A new chapter.
Our mission remains unchanged: To support low-income, academically struggling young learners by providing rigorous literacy instruction and enrichment programs in order to help students achieve measurable success and to inspire life-long learning.

Our new name reflects what we’ve always been: Unlimited in our commitment to helping young students build solid foundations for academic and personal success. Unlimited in our belief that the children we serve can reach their full potential. Unlimited in our gratitude for all of the community partners and donors that make our comprehensive programs possible.

Dear Friends,

What a year it’s been! For the past 12 months at Summer Scholars, we’ve been on the move and bringing key elements of our strategic plan to fruition. Which has meant stepping outside the box with expanded programs and fresh approaches, streamlining our processes and places, and striving to be one giant step ahead of the emerging needs of our kids and community.

If you’re wondering “What does she mean by that?” you’re NOT alone!

• During the summer of 2014, students enrolled in our “fresh” math program at Ashley Elementary experienced a “flipped” classroom with facilitated learning. An expert educator served as a “guide on the side” rather than the lecturer at the front of the room. The instructional model encouraged student-centered learning on an interactive web-based platform. Students made significant gains in math skills and became more self-directed learners over the course of the summer.

• Our friends at Opera Colorado immersed scholars from Stedman Elementary into a year-long operatic experience. Scholars identified a storyline, developed the libretto, worked with a composer to develop the score, rehearsed, staged, and performed their own original opera. Talk about an enriching experience!

• Our legacy literacy program was supercharged by full implementation of mClass, a web-based assessment that gives teachers real-time data to inform instruction and adapt interventions to meet specific student needs – at the moment they complete the assessment.

• At Harrington Elementary, we launched “Scholars Plus” – a program for higher performing students with big promise. This program provides additional individualized supports and aims to remove barriers to success, whatever they may be. We’ll continue to keep you apprised of outcomes from this three-year pilot program.

Building on our legacy, we’ve continued to support the struggling readers that our founders identified as our raison d’être. We follow reading research and incorporate best practices into our practices, we use technology to provide blended learning within our literacy instruction, and we strive to embed literacy learning within our enrichment offerings.

Our progress also means we are bidding a fond farewell to a name that established our place in the community and has served us well – but which no longer reflects the broad array of rich opportunities we offer throughout the year. I invite you to join me in embracing our new name, which also reflects our unwavering belief in our students and their potential: Scholars Unlimited.

Sincerely,

Kathleen King
President

What remains unchanged is our dedication to helping students master critical academic skills. To broadening disadvantaged students’ views of the world around them. To sparking imaginations and inspiring a passion for learning. And to helping our scholars build an unlimited belief in themselves.

Since our humble beginnings in 1993, this life-changing work has been possible only with the support of our community. To our funders and donors, partners and advocates, volunteers and friends, we say “Thank you.”

And we invite you to be a part of the journey as Scholars Unlimited begins a new chapter.
Summer Scholars is now Scholars Unlimited. It’s a short sentence – but it was a long and thoughtful process to change the organization’s name. In fact, the process began in 2012. That year, key staff and the Board of Directors embarked on a strategic planning process. The result was a comprehensive strategic plan, formally adopted in December 2012, which outlined key goals and objectives, including:

Raise our community profile by developing and implementing a marketing plan.

We recognized that marketing was not a core competency, so we recruited several community members with expertise in marketing, public relations, and communications to serve on our marketing task force. We also allocated limited financial resources for the project.

The task force’s first job was a rigorous selection process that led us to partner with Launch, a small Denver agency with a big heart. Launch’s first task was to conduct market research. They began with an online survey, sent to all friends of Summer Scholars via our e-newsletter. About 10 percent of the organization’s friends participated in the survey (considered a very high response rate); they represented a broad cross-section that included donors, educators, volunteers, staff, and representatives from community partners.

When the responses were tallied, we were especially gratified by responses to the question, “If Summer Scholars were a person, what words would you use to describe that individual?” The number-one response, across all audience segments: Caring. Other top words were dedicated, supportive, compassionate and fun.

But responses to another question were more troublesome. When asked, “What is the first thing that comes to mind when you hear the term ‘Summer Scholars?’” the top answer was “summer.”

As one member of the task force noted, “You don’t want your friends and supporters to think of a season of the year when they think of you!”

Launch then worked with GutCheck, a local firm that provided pro bono services. Participants in GutCheck’s online focus groups also were friends of Summer Scholars. They applauded the organization for creating positive learning experiences, for providing warm and nurturing environments, and for giving students opportunities for hands-on learning and exploration. Yet they tended to limit our programs to summer only – despite the fact that Summer Scholars began providing after-school programs in 2000.

These findings, coupled with anecdotal remarks, led Launch to recommend that our organization’s name be changed, and the Board approved.

So the team at Launch began name exploration. The task force reviewed dozens of possibilities and after several rounds of exploration selected three potential names for further vetting.

We began testing each of the options with friends and supporters of Summer Scholars. In these conversations, the name “Scholars Unlimited” emerged as the clear favorite – and people’s comments indicated that the name clearly conveyed our organization’s purpose and promise while honoring our history.

“Scholars Unlimited is my favorite. It has a nice feel to it, balancing the strength of the word ‘scholars’ with ‘unlimited’ is... well, unlimited! And it has some brand equity. The word ‘unlimited’ is... well, unlimited! And it has some brand equity. The word ‘scholars’ is... well, unlimited! And it has some brand equity. The word ‘unlimited’ is... well, unlimited! And it has some brand equity. The word ‘scholars’ is... well, unlimited! And it has some brand equity. The word ‘unlimited’ is... well, unlimited! And it has some brand equity. The word ‘scholars’ is... well, unlimited! And it has some brand equity. The word ‘unlimited’ is... well, unlimited! And it has some brand equity. The word ‘scholars’ is... well, unlimited! And it has some brand equity. The word ‘unlimited’ is... well, unlimited! And it has some brand equity. The word ‘scholars’ is... well, unlimited! And it has some brand equity. The word ‘unlimited’ is... well, unlimited! And it has some brand equity. The word ‘scholars’ is... well, unlimited! And it has some brand equity. The word ‘unlimited’ is... well, unlimited! And it has some brand equity. The word ‘scholars’ is... well, unlimited! And it has some brand equity. The word ‘unlimited’ is... well, unlimited! And it has some brand equity. The word ‘scholars’ is... well, unlimited! And it has some brand equity. The word ‘unlimited’ is... well, unlimited! And it has some brand equity.

Among the specific comments we heard:

- “Unlimited implies greater potential. It conveys that we are beyond school constraints. Conveys limitless opportunities.” – Board member
- “Scholars Unlimited is my favorite. It keeps the connection with the current organization (which is successful and has earned brand equity). The word ‘unlimited’ is... well, unlimited! And it has some brand equity. The strength of the word ‘scholars’ with the feeling of being unlimited. ” – Foundation representative
- “Your ‘Scholars Unlimited’ is perfect! It says what you do – and it conveys unlimited potential.” – Teacher in our program
- “I like the choice ‘Scholars Unlimited’ because it is the word ‘scholars’ in the name. Secondly, the name denotes potential beyond the classroom. I am in agreement with the name change, because many parents in the community were upset by the impression that programs are offered only in the summer. With the name change, parents will understand more clearly your connection and your recent collaboration with schools.” – School Principal
- “Good feel and connection to current name. Conveys that we are beyond school constraints. Conveys limitless opportunities.” – Board member

Parents were uniformly enthusiastic, saying that the name “Scholars Unlimited” sent positive messages to their children, including:

- “Yes! ‘Scholars Unlimited’ is perfect! It says what you do – and it conveys unlimited potential.” – Teacher in our program
- “It was the responses of our students themselves that sealed the deal. We posed a simple question to them: If I told you that you were going to be going to a program just like Summer Scholars, but it’s called Scholars Unlimited, what would you say?
- “Scholars Unlimited is my favorite. It has a nice feel to it, balancing the strength of the word ‘scholars’ with the feeling of being unlimited.” – Foundation representative

And so we embark on a new chapter for our organization, marked by our new name. A name rooted in our commitment to helping students increase their academic achievement, while conveying our belief in the unlimited potential of every child we serve.
Volunteer Story: Seleste

When she was a student at Harrington Elementary School, Seleste Solis was an enthusiastic participant in Summer Scholars’ programs: she participated in both the summer and after-school programs while she was in grades 2 through 5. “Seleste showed up every day, and she was an eager learner,” recalls Kelly Dent, site coordinator at Harrington.

Two years ago, Seleste advanced to Bruce Randolph School – but she still eagerly participates in Scholars After School every day. Seleste’s younger brother started at Harrington just as Seleste left for middle school. And following in his big sister’s footsteps, he was enrolled in Scholars After School. Each day, Seleste would leave Bruce Randolph and walk to Harrington, where she waited for her brother to complete the after-school program before walking home with him.

It didn’t take long for Seleste to begin lending a hand. “I always thought the program was really fun,” she remembers. “And I was already here, and I knew the routine, so it was easy to step in and help out.” Seleste quickly became an integral part of our team. “Our staff and students have come to recognize Seleste as a vital part of our program, and they look forward to seeing her every day,” says Kelly. “Seleste assists our recreation staff with their enrichment activities – she helps with everything from arts and crafts to various gym activities. She has a good attitude and is willing to help wherever she is needed most. She is reliable, hardworking, and always respectful to students and staff.”

Seleste says she enjoys working with staff and students, and says her volunteer work has helped her learn new lessons. “I learned I should have listened more when I was in the program,” she says with a mischievous smile. “It’s hard taking care of kids sometimes!”

“What that means is that Jayley made more progress over the six-week summer program than she did during the entire school year.”

Scholar Story: Jayley

After moving into the home of her great-grandmother, Judy, in the Montbello neighborhood of northeast Denver, Jayley K. was enrolled at John Amesse Elementary School. She joined the Amesse community as a second-grader – but her first Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA) indicated that she was reading at a level 4, considered a low first-grade level.

Over the course of the school year, Jayley made steady but slow growth. On her final DRA for the year, she had moved up to a level 8, indicating progress, but still reading in the first grade range.

By now, Judy was acutely aware that her great-granddaughter was a struggling reader. So when she learned about Summer Scholars’ signature summer learning program, she didn’t hesitate to enroll Jayley.

And the intensive, personalized intervention provided by Summer Scholars proved to be just what Jayley needed to accelerate her progress. As Judy recalls:

“It was part-way through the program and Jayley was reading aloud to me. Honestly, I was just sitting there with my mouth hanging open, because I couldn’t believe how she just zipped through those books.”

Jayley’s tremendous progress was evident to Margie Miller, too. Margie works as a reading interventionist at John Amesse, and noted that Jayley started this school year at a DRA level 14. “What that means is that Jayley made more progress over the six-week summer program than she did during the entire school year.”

Margie addressed her next remarks directly to Jayley: “What that means is that you have proven you can do it. If you work hard and apply yourself, you can make great strides – which means you can be anything you want to be! What that means is that your future is unlimited.”

“Hard, sometimes – and rewarding every day. “It’s so rewarding when they see me, because they are excited to see me, and I know they want me here,” Seleste explained. “It’s why I like being here. I really get along with everyone here, and when you’re in this program, you’re part of something bigger. It really gives me a sense of belonging.”
Learning to read. It’s a complex process that requires mastery of many skills:

**Letter recognition.** Reading proficiency begins with the ability to recognize and name letters. In fact, the ability to recognize the letters that compose a child’s own first name is considered a key kindergarten readiness skill.

**Phonemic awareness.** A phoneme is the smallest unit of sound. Children must be able to distinguish phonemes (recognize the difference between the “en” and “en” sounds, for example), and be able to associate letters with the sounds they make. It’s a seemingly simple task – but it is often difficult for children who don’t grow up in language-rich environments.

**Alphabetic principle.** Beginning with the knowledge that words are composed of letters that represent sounds (or phonemes), children must be able to generate the sounds for all letters… to understand that certain letters change the sounds of others (for example, adding an “e” to the end of a word changes the sound of the preceding vowel)… and to blend sounds into recognizable words. Children “de-code” or sound out words by breaking them down using letter-sound correspondence.

**Vocabulary.** As they de-code words, children must also be able to understand (or infer) their meanings. Vocabulary knowledge is critical for reading comprehension.

**Fluency.** Sometimes referred to as “automaticity,” fluency is the ability to read words with little effort. Fluent readers have mastered word recognition skills and can use them in connected text; they are able to read aloud accurately and smoothly, with few pauses or breaks. Reading fluency is considered the gateway to comprehension.

**Comprehension.** Often referred to as the “why” of reading, comprehension is the ability to extract meaning from the words we read. For young children, it’s the ability to read and understand the simple story an author is telling… but as children progress through school, they must be able to read and comprehend more and more complex text for ongoing learning and academic success.

Learning to read can be a bewildering process for any child – and it is often much more difficult for disadvantaged students who have not experienced language-rich environments, and for children who are learning English as a second language.

The good news is that extra intervention and individualized instruction can make a difference. The personalized, high-dosage literacy programs provided by Scholars Unlimited help young learners master the fundamental skills of literacy, and use these skills to become fluent readers who are able to comprehend what they have read.

The evidence of Scholars Unlimited’s effectiveness can be seen in our DIBELS assessment results. The DIBELS (Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills) is a brief, nationally normed assessment that measures student ability within each of the five domains of literacy: alphabetic principle, phonemic awareness, vocabulary, word accuracy and fluency, and comprehension.

At the beginning of our summer and after-school programs, Scholars Unlimited administers the DIBELS Next® assessment to every student. The benchmark assessments at the beginning of our programs identify each child’s individual learning needs and enable us to tailor instruction to meet the needs of each learner. Another DIBELS assessment at the end of the program measures each child’s individual progress. And aggregate data enables us to evaluate overall program effectiveness.
Together, we never stop learning. A message from the Board Chair.

Dear Friends:

As I begin my term as Chairman of the Board, I’m certain that this is one of the most exciting times in the 22-year history of Scholars Unlimited. And I am equally certain that each of our Board members shares my enthusiasm for the opportunities ahead. With our new name comes a renewed appreciation of our history in helping disadvantaged students and an excitement for our mission moving forward.

Reading is essential for learning throughout students’ academic careers. Helping students become proficient readers will ensure their academic success. With our new name comes a renewed appreciation of the opportunities we have to expand our programming to support this essential step in learning.

But Scholars Unlimited’s out-of-school time programs offer more than just academic instruction. When I visited our partner schools to see our programs in action, I saw students actively participating in a wide variety of engaging – and educational – activities:

- Slicing cucumbers as the first step in making pickles (while learning about nutrition and practically applying math skills).
- Playing sports with created super hero characters they had developed, in costumes they had designed. (Exercising creativity and imagination? Check. Practicing writing? Check.)
- Competing in teams to see who could build the tallest structure using only plastic straws (while learning about geometry and engineering, and practicing skills of communication, collaboration and problem-solving).

I was equally impressed with the results of these comprehensive programs. Scholars Unlimited students are making significant gains in fundamental literacy skills, reading fluency, and comprehension. Participants are reporting that like school more and feel more self-confident. Educators and parents alike praise the programs for boosting academic achievement and positive behaviors. We can not ask for better results!

And I know that our commitment to providing year-round, high-quality programs will not waver.

Yes, our organization has a new name. But our deep commitment to helping disadvantaged students remains unchanged.

And that’s the most exciting thing of all!

Sincerely,

David Wilkins
Board President

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2014 Financial Information
Fiscal Year Ending October 31, 2014

**TOTAL SUPPORT & REVENUE: $3,034,251.71**
**TOTAL EXPENSES: $3,018,585.00**

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<th>SUPPORT &amp; REVENUE</th>
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**Helen M. McMahon-Stinner Children Development Fund**
$977,030.00

**SCHOLARS UNLIMITED, INC.**
$1,054,221.71

**TOTAL LIABILITIES AND NET ASSETS: $1,318,045.00**

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**Scholars Unlimited donors. Our heroes.**
You can create brighter futures for children in our community … by investing in the work of Scholars Unlimited.

Your financial support provides comprehensive summer and after-school programs to disadvantaged young learners. With your gift, you enable our scholars to increase their academic achievement, explore new interests, and develop new skills. Beyond a financial contribution, consider these ways to give:

- Become a sustaining supporter by setting up a recurring gift. (Visit our website for details.)
- Leverage your employer’s matching gifts program to increase the value of your contribution.
- Participate in your workplace’s United Way campaign.
- Include Scholars Unlimited in your giving on Colorado Gives Day.
- Donate appreciated stock or securities (and reap the associated tax benefits, too).
- Include Scholars Unlimited in your will or estate plans.
- Honor someone special by making a tribute or memorial gift, just as these supporters did last year:

  - Rick Acosta
    In honor of Holly Bennett
  - Partners in Education – Bert Foundation
    In honor of Jordan Miller, who served as an intern with the Bert Foundation and is a former participant in the Summer Scholars program
  - Paula and Steve Goddard
    In memory of Janet and Kenneth Yee, Carolynn and Jack Grabley, and Suzanne Nihonmatsu
  - Diane Holtz-Nash
    In memory of Grady Clay III
  - Colleen O’Reilly and Ted Clay
    In memory of Grady Clay III, who loved to see kids learn
  - Cynthi and Bill Holley
    In memory of Norbert G. Yee, son of Michelle Sine Gas
  - Kathleen King
    In celebration of the great staff at Summer Scholars!
  - Melvia Green Laverne and Donald Laverne
    In honor of Holly Bennett
  - Katherine Lever
    In honor of Elizabeth Mitchell and Jon Bender – and their great work on behalf of Summer Scholars
  - Judith McCandless
    In memory of Grady Clay III
  - Barbara Mercer
    In memory of her brother, John Salleh
  - Bob Nelson
    In memory of my father
  - Patricia Paul
    In honor of Warren Paul
  - Trudy and Patrick Waddell
    In memory of John Marrack
  - Porsche Club of North America, Rocky Mountain Region
    In memory of Grady Clay III
  - Bear Family Foundation
    In memory of Beverly/Debra Obit
  - Jennifer Cianco
    In memory of Rod Fugler
  - Carol Taylor
    In memory of my mom Judy Hankinson
  - Susan Warner
    In honor of the marriage of Christina Ortiz and David Bluth
  - The Beer Family Foundation
    In memory of Beverly/Debra Obit

Scholars Unlimited programs are not possible without strong collaborations with community partners and the generous support of individuals, foundations, and community-spirited corporate citizens.

Want to see our programs in action and meet our scholars? Join us for a Scholars Unlimited Discovery Tour. Contact Coleen Truax for details:

303-381-3746 or ctruax@scholarsunlimited.org

To all who contribute, we say THANK YOU!

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