

# Scholars Unlimited 2021 Annual Report



Strength in Connection & Resiliency

## MESSAGE FROM LEADERSHIP

"Be bold, be humble, be brave, be resilient, be productive, be good, good to yourselves and good to each other." Be careful; be caring. Katie Couric

Dear Friends,

I want to personally thank each of you for your support over the past year. Unprecedented doesn't even begin to describe the year of 2020 and all the ways our lives were impacted. Resiliency is threaded throughout our past year, and as an organization and individuals, we found opportunities to dig deep into our strengths and focus on ways to move forward. We knew that we would come out of it changed, and also stronger.

The uncertainty of the pandemic directly impacted the implementation of our programs. It caused us to quickly pivot and be responsive to the needs of scholars and their families by turning our planned in-person summer program to a robust online program. We modified our expectations, increased our training, developed one-on-one tutoring, and created a hybrid model that allowed for some in-person programming.

Alongside a public health crisis, our staff, families and scholars were not only adjusting to the changing school environment, they were directly impacted by all that was happening globally. The murders of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Elijah McClain, and many others lost to police violence catapulted a movement of racial and social justice. We recognized the need for our community to be seen and for all of us to be allies and champions for equity, justice, and change.

Change starts from within, so we thought about how we could enhance the literacy elements of our programs. We strive to connect scholars with the skills and love of reading alongside cultivating the confidence and space for our scholars to find their voice, their self love, and their path.

With this in mind, we developed a curriculum to emphasize and include culturally responsive literature. In this report, you will learn more about the author Zetta Elliot and her book series Dragons in a Bag. Zetta did not see herself reflected in the books she read as a child, which fuels her commitment to telling stories with representation.

You will also learn more about our Book Reading Campaign, which has provided an opportunity to highlight and feature diverse stories, as well as a variety of book readers from within the community we serve. Building on this year's summer books, Scholars Unlimited is committed to continuing to develop a curriculum that reflects the scholars in our program and their diverse experiences and voices.

So, thank you for being champions and part of our community that we have strengthened this past year. Thank you for your belief in the resilience of scholars, and thank you again for partnering with us and opening your heart to the possibility that each scholar holds for the future.

With gratitude, Diana Romero Campbell President of Scholars Unlimited



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## MOVING STEADY THROUGH A PANDEMIC

Moved office location and consolidated space for fiscal and organizational efficiency

Provided dedicated one-on-one tutoring

Remotely trained 119 site staff to prepare for in-person summer program

Connected scholars with STEM activities through virtual volunteer day Provided emotional and technological support to enable all staff to work remotely

> Launched a new online learning platform

Created home learning kits & distributed supplies and books to scholars & their families

> Connected scholars with technology and headsets

Provided vaccine incentive to all staff.

- 70% were vaccinated by the summer
- 100% of staff are currently vaccinated Provided all staff and

scholars with vital

PPE

eful for all

I am very grateful for all the hard work that everyone did to make this program work for the kids. I appreciate the fact that the teachers were actually online teaching. I know that remote teaching, especially with young ones, isn't easy, but you all did an excellent job!

> College View Elementary Parent

Jennie Merrigan - Director of Programs & Learning

We are Online We are Connected We are resilient We are Steadfast



## ex·pe·ri·ence /ˌik'spirēəns/ noun an event or occurrence that leaves an impression on someone.

What do you do when you don't know what decisions districts will make about schools being in-person or virtual? What do you do when you are deeply invested in your scholars and want to walk alongside them in an uncertain time? What do you do when you know that the year has been hard on scholars, their families, teachers, and your staff?

When faced with so many hard questions, our programs team answered with determination. We chose to lean into our wealth of knowledge, creativity, and ingenuity. We decided that no matter the medium we were using, we would connect with our scholars in meaningful ways. We would ensure that everyone enrolled in Scholars Unlimited programs would have a fun and rich experience.

#### Experiencing new bonds:

In the virtual space, we delivered one-on-one tutoring, which gave us more focused time with each scholar. We got a new glimpse into their world, seeing their personalities through their home environments, and getting to know what they needed in their learning, so that we could meet them where they needed support.

We created hands-on activity kits and arranged drive thru pickups, and deliveries so that our scholars were well equipped with supplies. This was a great opportunity to also connect with families and siblings. We invited the community to volunteer by creating virtual experiences for our scholars.

This summer, we were so thrilled to return to inperson programs and build on our connections while creating a space that reintroduced some normalcy. The driving quote for our summer was, "Try to be the rainbow in someone's cloud" by Maya Angelou. Our dedicated staff took this quote to heart. Many of our staff dealt with the same stressors our scholars faced, and they came to work every day to put a smile on the scholar's face, and built those positive adult relationships that will transcend our 6 week summer program.

#### Experiencing new books:

The love of reading can be sparked by finding a favorite book. Every year, we provide our scholars with books. This year, our team selected the books that would align with our summer curriculum. We intentionally highlighted a book written by an author who represents the BIPOC and Latinx communities and incorporates diverse lead characters, heroes, and heroines of the story. Over 85% of the scholars we serve are children of color, so it was important to us that scholars are represented in the books that are selected.

In our new "One Community, Boundless Stories" book reading campaign, we created a list of books for our volunteer readers that had affirming messages and diverse characters. We introduced these books on our website for our scholars, their families, and the community to enjoy. Each book within the campaign also became a gift for a scholar's home library.

#### **Experiencing new adventures:**

It was exciting to pack our summer with hands-on activities that coincided with our Random Acts of Kindness curriculum. We also had fun activities to promote team building. We returned to going on field trips, including a trip to the Denver Museum of Nature & Science, Aurora Reservoir, and Rocky Mountain Arsenal. Our scholars also enjoyed experiences that we brought to the school, including Hawk Quest, Space Time Kids, Mad Science, and Imagine Arts Academy.



Scholars Unlimited has a proven track record of supporting schools and students in the Denver metro community. The organization has been a strong partner in providing much-needed wrap-around services that help students make bigger academic gains and discover engaging activities that they might otherwise never experience.
• Maxine Quintana - OST Initiatives Director/Denver Afterschool Alliance Lead

## **Growing as Learners**



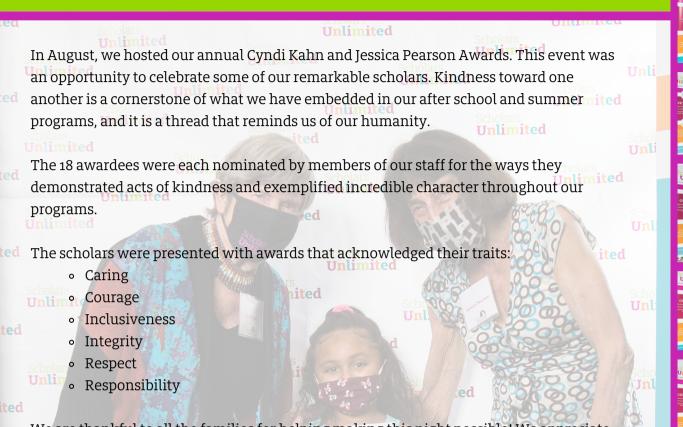
## **Listening to Our Scholars**

Connection is a key element in learning and we focus on the ways we are supporting our scholars' social emotional learning growth. In an effort to help our Scholars Unlimited staff recognize ways to make authentic connections with our scholars, we invested in multiple professional development opportunities to build these skills. Following our summer programming, we partnered with Denver Public Schools Extended Learning to survey our summer scholars in third to fifth grade . This survey was modified from SAYO (Survey of Academic Youth Outcomes).



Scholars Unlimited programs are a fantastic outlet to slowly gain independence, make friends, and build character. The fact is, I grew up in foster care and in poverty which meant there was not much opportunity for me to have experiences or excel. However, Scholars Unlimited's programs provide a tremendous opportunity. -Christopher, Parent of three Summer Scholars

## **Cyndi & Jessica Awards**



We are thankful to all the families for helping making this night possible! We appreciate them inviting us be part of their children's lives. It was an honor to celebrate with everyone who joined us.

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A'Riyah-1st grade

Bryan- 1st grade

Chance- 2nd grade

Danielle- 3rd grade

Faith-Kindergarten

Felix-5th grade

Jesse- 1st grade

Gervon-3rd grade

Assoumou-5th grade

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Scholars Unlimit Congratulations!!

Lilye Luz Mek Trut Victo Yese Yudi Zach

Lillith- 3rd grade Lilyette- Kindergarten Luz - 5th grade Meklit- 5th grade Truth- 4th grade Victor- 5th grade Yesenia- 3rd grade Yudith- 2nd grade Zachariah- 4th grade

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Literature transforms human experience and reflects it back to us, and in that reflection we can see our own lives and experiences as part of a larger human experience. Reading, then, becomes a means of self-affirmation, and readers often seek their mirrors in books.



#### **Connecting Within the Community**

Award winning author, Zetta Elliot writes books with representation that her parents never had the chance to read to her and books that she wishes she had as a child.

As our scholars were reading her books, Dragons in a Bag and The Dragon Thief, they had the opportunity to connect with Zetta during a virtual visit. Zetta was amazing and talked about her experience as an author of color, and as an immigrant. She spoke about publishing and the writing process, as well as emphasized the importance of diversity in books. Zetta shared that early in her career, when she was not focused on incorporating diverse characters, she felt she was writing herself out of her own stories. At the close of her visit, Zetta took time to answer questions from scholars about her books and encourage them to write their own stories.

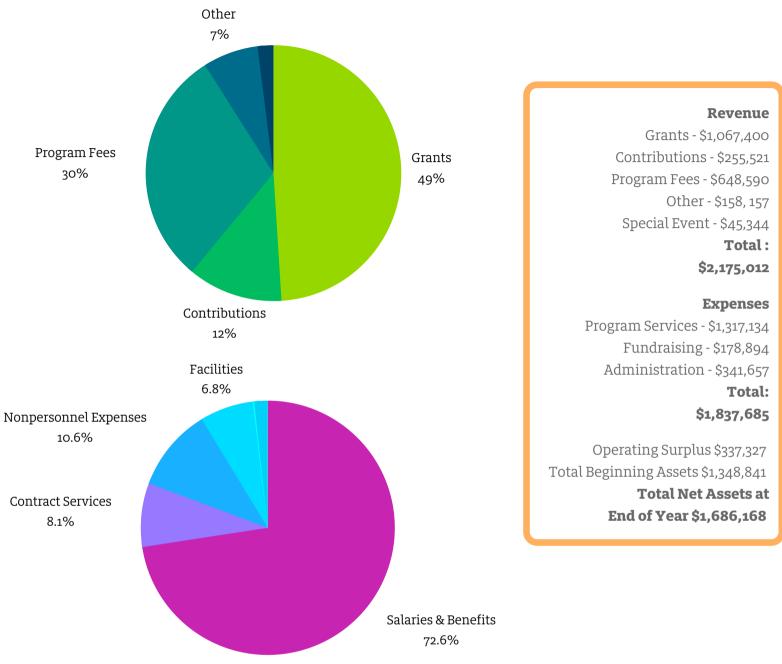


#### **One Community Boundless Stories**

This year, we also invited community members to bring a book to life in our "One Community, Boundless Stories" Book reading campaign. Nearly 50 volunteers joined this project by reading and recording books to be shared with our scholars through our website. Many bilingual volunteers also recorded books in Spanish. The readers and the books reflected the diversity of our Scholars Unlimited community. After sharing their book, each volunteer personally inscribed it before it was given as a gift to a student within our programs.

"This experience has been incredible! I have mentioned the organization to various other people in my family and community and encouraged them to reach out!" - Rachel, Volunteer Reader

## FINANCIALS 8/1/2020-7/31/2021



Scholars Unlimited increased the Net Assets by \$337,327 (\$200,000 is restricted for FY2021/2022). This increase was due to generous donors like you, Colorado Cares COVID grants, and intentional cost containment by all staff. Scholars Unlimited has a healthy financial reserve with four months in cash and two months in short-term investments. Scholars Unlimited strives to stretch every dollar to ensure our students come first and they have what they need to be successful in our program.

## **Thank You to Our Team!**

A special thank you to all of our outstanding site and central office staff for all your contributions to help carry out our mission. You are so dedicated and your passion for our works shines bright in everything you do!

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