



2023 Annual Report



From our CEO

Dear Community,

Reflecting on 2023, I am proud of School's Out Washington's (SOWA) investment in evaluating the reshaped youth development landscape across Washington, clarifying our role, and setting our stakes and strategies toward a brighter future.

Washington lacked adequate investment and supports for the youth development sector. Many young people, particularly those most impacted by systemic racism, had little to no access to high-quality programs that their families could afford in many communities across our state. Last year, we engaged community to identify key focus areas to help us realize this vision by clarifying our theory of change and developing our strategic plan.

We focused on driving new resources to programs, especially to grassroots and Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC)-led organizations and to under-resourced parts of our state, both through our grantmaking and by deepening our advocacy. We ensured that our training, coaching, and quality supports were broadly accessible, responsive, and impactful, exceeding pre-pandemic levels. We also invested in SOWA's capacity to move boldly and sustainably forward in alignment with our values: relationships, responsiveness, and racial equity and justice.

Our work was rooted in relationships on the ground.

SOWA worked across many different scales to achieve our impact. Coaches and youth program leaders worked

together to channel their passion to create impact for young people daily. We supported best practices in local systems and partnerships, including assisting schools and community organizations to align practices to ensure that youth and families have access to responsive and high-quality programming all day and all year in their schools and housing communities. And we mobilized to shift policies and drive resources to support the broader youth ecosystem through intentional advocacy efforts and by bringing in youth and youth program provider voices.

All these threads of support have been instrumental in creating community-rooted and systemic change for young people and the programs that helped them thrive. We are proud of the progress we made last year and

are grateful to all our partners and supporters who continued to make this possible.

In community and with immense gratitude,



Elizabeth Whitford
SCHOOL'S OUT WASHINGTON CEO



2023 SOWA Metrics

2,935

total unique training participants, a 13% increase over 2022

500+

organizations had staff engaged in SOWA trainings

55%

of unique participants that identify as BIPOC

280

trainings delivered in 2023, representing a 12% increase overall

168

virtual workshops

112

in-person workshops, a 300% increase in in-person training delivery over 2022

135

youth programs receiving coaching from one of SOWA's Youth Program Quality Coaches

Grantmaking Information

Refugee School Impact Program (RSIP)

In 2023, we funded **15 school district-led community-based partnerships** to provide wraparound supports for refugee youth and directly funded **13 youth development organizations** for their work to support Afghan and Ukrainian refugee youth. This represents a **300% increase** in the number of RSIP grantees over 2022.

Best Starts for Kids (Best Starts) Expanded Learning Initiative

In 2023, we funded **55 programs** through the Best Starts Expanded Learning Initiative, impacting **5,275 youth**, more than a **300% increase** in the number of youth served in the previous investment.



After-School All-Stars

One of the greatest challenges facing youth development nonprofits is access to sustainable and multiyear funding, especially for smaller, grassroots, and BIPOC-led programs.

In partnership with King County Best Starts SOWA works to address this issue by providing funding and quality- and capacity-building supports for expanded learning providers through the Best Starts Expanded Learning Initiative. This initiative invests in BIPOC-led organizations as well as Place-Based Collaboratives—made up of at least three organizations offering programming in school or housing communities.

When **After-School All-Stars** (ASAS) Puget Sound opened in Washington in 2016, SOWA helped them understand the local youth development landscape, convene with youth organizations, and step into the advocacy arena in Washington. When SOWA had an open grant process, they applied, and they received their first award in 2022.

As a small nonprofit, ASAS Executive Director Ranna Daud said they found it hard to secure funding. The Best Starts Expanded Learning Initiative provided them sustainable funding for three consecutive years. “Best Starts allowed us to dream big,” said Ranna. They were able to “not only strengthen partnerships, but also strengthen relationships with the community and school districts.”

Co-designed with the youth in their program, ASAS provides free afterschool and summer programs focused on five pillars: academic

readiness; career exploration; social and emotional learning and wellness; arts; and science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM). In collaboration with Federal Public Schools—specifically Lakota Middle School and Geeking Out Kids of Color (GOKiC)—they serve about 600 young people per year.

With any partnership comes challenges. To help mitigate challenges among the Place-Based Collaborative grantees, Kintasha Martinez-Jackson was hired as SOWA’s Best Starts partnerships manager, and she has worked with ASAS, Lakota Middle School, and GOKiC. She is available to answer questions and support with grant requirements. Most importantly, she is there to provide support with resources, training opportunities, and capacity building. Kintasha enjoys site visits the most.

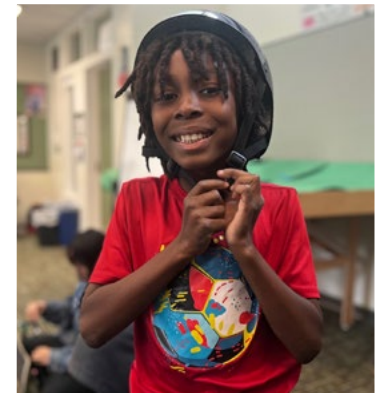
At a recent site visit to ASAS, Kintasha met with Ranna and witnessed the youth engaging with the program. The youth were working on photography, skateboarding, and playing card games. There were also youth participating in STEM activities with GOKiC and receiving tutoring through Federal Way Public Schools.

“I have seen this collaborative grow over the past year,” said Kintasha. “It was lovely to see.”

“

I feel like we have our roots, and we are blossoming now. It would not have been possible, I don’t think, without the support of Best Starts and SOWA.”

~Ranna Daud, Executive Director
After-School All-Stars



Bridging Cultural Gaps

Bridging Cultural Gaps' Hidden Genius program, which has introduced traditionally marginalized students of color to the fast-growing field of technology since 2018, is about more than learning applicable skills like coding—it's about belonging, connection, and possibility.

Abdi Haro, program manager at Bridging Cultural Gaps, recognized the potential of offering this programming to Afghan refugee students in his community, but he simply didn't have the capacity to do so effectively. That changed in 2023 when Abdi learned about a federal grant opportunity provided through Washington Department of Social and Health Services' Office of Refugee and Immigrant Assistance, which was administered by SOWA's Refugee School Impact Program team.

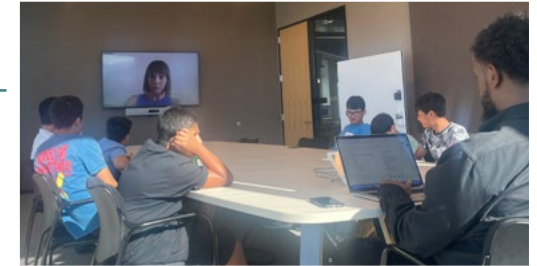
With this Afghan Refugee School Impact funding, Abdi introduced the Afghan youth coding class, an incredible six-week cohort expansion of the Hidden Genius program that provides culturally responsive opportunities for Afghan refugee students to learn and use code, research a topic of their choice, present to the class, and collaborate with peers. Funding also allows the program to provide each student with a laptop.

"This program is about more than programming," Abdi said. "It's really to allow students to broaden their worldview [and] get access to different fields and topics . . . it goes back to just knowing the possibilities."

Recognizing the importance of having role models that students can relate to, Abdi was intentional about recruiting instructors who share the refugee experience and speak Dari and Pashto, the students' native languages. In the course's first year, Abdi noticed a significant improvement not only in students' ability to code and work with technology, but also in their confidence and English fluency.

"Our Afghan youth coding class has embarked on a journey that will shape their lives and leave an indelible mark on the world around them," Abdi wrote in [an article](#) for Medium.com. "It is a journey that combines technical skills with the profound power of human connection."

You can learn more about Hidden Genius and browse some of the final projects from the Afghan youth coding class on the [Bridging Cultural Gaps website](#).



SPOTLIGHT

Living Well Kent

For youth program coordinators Yusuf Ali-Halane and Ankita Gupta, engaging with quality improvement has been a journey of both individual growth and collective transformation for the youth and families they serve at [Living Well Kent](#).

As a BIPOC-led organization funded by the King County Best Starts Expanded Learning Initiative, Living Well Kent receives ongoing coaching support from lead coach, Lynda Llavore.

“Lynda helped us grow as individuals, helped us know our own strengths,” said Ankita. “That has helped us cultivate programs that work for the benefit of youth.”

SOWA’s coaching practices are informed by the Youth Program Quality Intervention model developed by the David P. Weikart Center for Youth Program Quality. In addition to the foundations of this model, Lynda provides continuous support to the providers she works with, including curated resources driven by the direct needs of providers.

“She’s like an encyclopedia,” Yusuf said. “She can think up immediately [something] that targets what we’re talking about. That’s one of the best things, learning from a coach like that.”

“I know if anything happens, I can always go to her,” Ankita reflected. “She’s almost like a family member—I don’t think of her as a coach.”

Yusuf and Ankita have witnessed the positive impact of the quality improvement process on the youth they serve at Living Well Kent. “We’re fostering connections between these youth,” Yusuf said. “We have kids that want to come to this program, they’re looking forward to it, they’re asking, ‘Why can’t the program be longer?’ Those are the things we want to see from our youth.”

They’ve also received positive feedback

“

The beauty of SOWA’s approach is that it really is holistic. You have that immediate impact, but the overall impact will be the transformation—because coaching is transformative.”

~ Lynda Llavore, Lead Coach at SOWA

from parents—including an increase in parent-to-parent referrals for their program.

“It’s really a gift to coach,” said Lynda. “This is successful ... because of ongoing communication [and] reflective listening—really listening to what they’re saying.”



A Year of Strategic Mobilization and Advocacy for Youth Development

As an intermediary in Washington, mobilizing, convening, and advocating to fund the youth development field were fundamental objectives in 2023. Upon hiring our strategy and partnerships director, Fahren Johnson, she restructured the Youth Development Strategy Table (YDST), and SOWA became the formal backbone for the coalition. Fahren also focused on uplifting the coalition voices. The YDST, a coalition of public, nonprofit, and community stakeholders, now had an organized leadership team.

“We now have a co-chair model, and it really pulls from the depth of knowledge of the field,” said Fahren. “I think this will be strategic and key to keeping diverse voices in leadership.”

During the 2023 legislative session, the coalition pushed Senate Bill 5601 to create a youth development office and grant program and House Bill 1386 to create a youth development grant program. Both bills passed in their initial committees but stalled in budgeting committees.

“Those bills didn’t pass, but they didn’t die,” said Fahren. “We built momentum, we started building awareness, and I don’t know if we have ever done that.”



**Left to right:
Fahren, Riya, Chloe**

Parallel to building awareness and momentum in the legislative arena in 2023, Fahren also envisioned co-designing a strategy with young people. While this goal hasn’t fully come to fruition, Fahren worked with young people in Pierce County to talk about their needs and the value in supporting youth development. Riya, Boys & Girls Club of South Puget Sound 2024 Youth of the Year, has worked with Fahren for years and supported Youth Advocacy Day last year.

“It’s really important to have youth voicing their

opinions,” said Riya. “My role in this advocacy space is to take my peers’ thoughts and to elevate them to the level of people who are able to make that greater impact on the state level, city level, and implement change to the best of my ability because I want [youth] to have an enjoyable program.”

Young people are dedicated to influencing legislation in ways that support their overall well-being, success, and growth. Fahren said SOWA must “show legislators that young people and those who support them are in this together. We’re here as a force, right? Young people walking alongside, co-designing with their caring adult, and talking about the things that need to show up to help young people journey, to help them become, to help them determine what success looks like for them, but to also equip them and bring awareness.”

Chloe, a young person deeply involved in policy and advocacy, said finding Fahren was instrumental in finding her passion. “I always think about my time with Seeds of Peace as something that I got very lucky with,” said Chloe. She said it would be great “if SOWA had the ability for students to make those [kinds of] connections with adults to involve youth more directly.”

2023 Bridge Review

Over 550 youth development leaders, community organizers, and nonprofit professionals joined us for two unforgettable days at the 2023 Bridge Conference in Tacoma, Washington. More than 80 skilled presenters, facilitators, and speakers from across the state brought the conference to life with 40+ workshops united under our conference theme: **Forging Brighter Futures.**

Starting strong on day one, keynote speaker Melannie Denise Cunningham encouraged attendees to reflect on their own biases and individual journeys—a necessary starting point for collectively reimagining and creating the holistic and supportive environments that young people deserve.

During the conference, attendees actively engaged in workshops that addressed pressing issues in the youth development field, inspiring well-rounded conversations on mental and behavioral health, racism and racial justice, community-responsive collaboration, and more.

Washington State Senator Yasmin Trudeau closed out our conference with a powerful message about building sustainable systems, motivating attendees to involve elected representatives in mobilizing the youth development sector.

After spending valuable time **reflecting, connecting, and reimagining** throughout the conference, attendees returned to their communities and respective programs across the state with new perspectives, expanded networks, and the tools to create change.



2023 Bridge Insights

93%

of participants felt that Bridge was a good use of their time

97%

of participants agreed that they had meaningful opportunities to engage with other participants at Bridge

95%

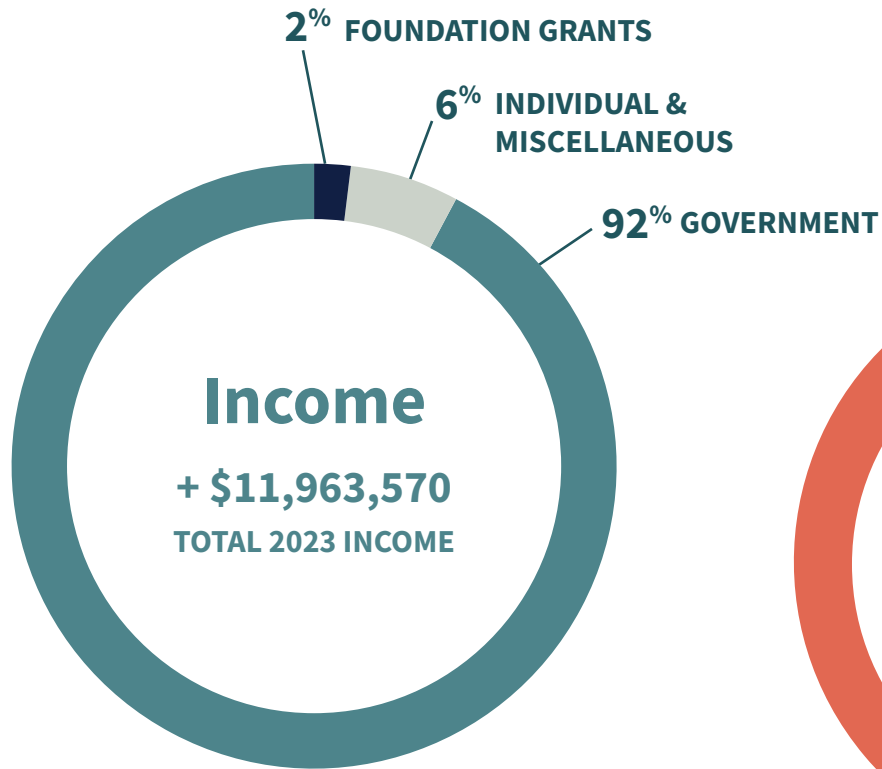
of participants agreed that the overall environment at Bridge was welcoming and inclusive

90%

of participants agreed that they increased their professional knowledge and/or skills as a result of Bridge



Financials



SOWA'S IMPACT
\$7,728,000 awarded

Staff

Adriana Zazula
Adriel Rivera*
Andrea Fullerton
Angel Lai*
April Miller
Benny Baird
Bill Hanawalt*
Carlee Hoover
Clara Rosebrock
Elizabeth Whitford
Fahren Johnson
Gloria Jordan
Jarrod Hamerly
Jessica Winston
Julie Chavez
Justin Tidwell-Davis
Ka'ohe Wong
Katherine McCall
Kelly Riffer
Kimmy Nguyen
Kintasha Martinez-Jackson
Latima Charbonneau
Leandra Shelton

Lindy Lou Ah Sam
Lisle Bertsche Kehr
Liz Director
Lorraine Parrish
Luca Savotsky*
Lynda Llavore
Mandy Pierce
Marcus Warlick
Maria Pia Johnson
Mehateme Emiru
Nat Neville
Nerrisah Townsend
Nicole Ichinaga
Omana Imani
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Samone Coleman
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Sheona Sauna*
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Board

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Carlina Brown Banks*
Scott Caldwell
Luis Gomez
Luis Ortega*
Amber Ortiz-Diaz
Rowena Pineda
Jenn Ramirez Robson*
Jody Rosentswieg
Corinna Quesada*
Nicole Yohalem

**Joined in early 2024*





Left to right: Latima Charbonneau, Leandra Shelton, Shirley Lu, Liz Director, and Elizabeth Whitford at 2023 Bridge Conference


Let's Stay Connected

School's Out Washington

625 Andover Park W, Suite #101
Tukwila, WA 98188
info@schoolsoutwashington.org
206.323.2396

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 schoolsoutwashington.org