



Holding ground. Growing strong.

January–December 2024

**School's Out
Washington
Annual Report**



FROM OUR CEO



Dear Community,

When I reflect on 2024 from the midst of all that has come with the year that followed, I find myself grateful that we focused as we did. Like a household shoring up its foundation before a storm, at School's Out Washington we too reinforced our roots.

In 2024, we deepened our community connections and adapted our supports to better meet the changing needs of Washington's diverse and community-connected summer, afterschool, and youth development programs.

Guided by our strategic plan, we doubled down in our role as advocates. Through the collective power of our coalition, the Youth Development Strategy Table, we advocated for state funding for youth development, with a priority on funding and access gaps in rural and other under-resourced geographies, as well as for grassroots and BIPOC-led programs providing deeply connected supports for youth.

As we deepened our advocacy, grantmaking, and quality and professional learning supports, we also made sure to invest in our own internal capacity and improvement. We did so without adding new resources by honing our focus and working collaboratively across our team. This included a cross-staff work group focusing on strengthening our staff culture, a cross-team evaluation team that enhanced our data and evaluation capacity, and adjustments across our program delivery to ensure stronger engagement and impact.

I closed out 2024 by travelling the state to meet with program providers and community stakeholders, to connect about our advocacy strategy and learn about

“In 2024, we deepened our community connections and adapted our supports to better meet the changing needs of Washington’s diverse and community ...”

what they are navigating as they work to support youth in their communities. I heard about their concerns about youth safety and mental health, about limited access to programs, and cuts in funding. And at the same time, I heard story upon story of the vital impact these programs play in their communities—from joyful artmaking and connection in the only afterschool program in a small migrant community in Central Washington, to safe and empowering spaces for LGBTQ youth in Eastern Washington, to leadership programs for foster youth in the South Puget Sound.

By the end of 2024, I knew the year ahead would bring many changes and challenges, and I knew that we were as ready and committed as we could be to ensuring that youth most impacted by inequity have access to safe and empowering youth development opportunities that center their strengths and support them to thrive.

Elizabeth Whitford

School's Out Washington CEO

SCHOOL'S OUT WASHINGTON BY THE NUMBERS



Self-paced learning

Self-paced learning in the LMS increased from

624

users with

498

hours of engagement in 2023 to...

949

users with

5,101

hours of engagement in 2024

Youth programs

154 youth programs received coaching from one of SOWA's youth program quality coaches.

98% of Youth Program Quality Cohort participants agreed that the Youth Program Quality assessment helped identify strengths in their program practices as well as practices that could be improved.

93% of Youth Program Quality Cohort participants agreed that the use of quality practices at their program increased as a result of participating in the Youth Program Quality Initiative process through SOWA.

SPOTLIGHT

Hilltop Children's Center's Commitment to Continuous Growth and Improvement

School's Out Washington (SOWA) supports youth programs on their program quality improvement journey.

One program that has shown commitment to quality improvement is Hilltop Children's Center. A longtime partner through a contract with the City of Seattle, Hilltop is an early childhood center that offers after school programming and childcare for elementary aged children. They are dedicated to helping young people thrive through strong relationships with trusted adults.

Elli Licea, a Mentor Educator at Hilltop, has seen firsthand the value of SOWA's support, and during her tenure, Hilltop has deepened their engagement.

"The more I experienced the coaching and Learning Community Meetings, the more I wanted to be involved," said Elli. They now "understand social and emotional work and have been able to provide the youth we serve with the tools they need," Elli mentioned.



Jaimie Wiggin | Hilltop staff member

"[SOWA] approached things with curiosity by asking why we made certain choices instead of telling us what to change. That really helped me grow."

Engagement in Learning Community Meetings (LCMs) can be transformative for providers working to strengthen the impact of their programs. Despite this, getting busy organizations to participate has been hard. Samone Coleman, Program Quality Coach and Manager, facilitates these and spearheaded efforts to strengthen engagement in LCMs.

"I think the learning community meetings are the most successful when they're in person and they happen at a program site location," said Samone.

Further, she said that LCMs were continuously responsive to provider feedback, reflecting real-time interests from the field. Recently, LCMs have focused on lesson planning, addressing disruptive behaviors, and navigating difficult conversations with youth.

"The topics have been spot on," Elli said. "We talk about things that are new and fresh."

Samone's decision to shift LCMs to rotate hosting sites was valuable. Last fall, Hilltop hosted a quarterly LCM, transforming a tour into a scavenger hunt that showcased their creativity.

"It was really meaningful for us [to host] because we just acquired this new space we transformed," Elli said. "It was nice to bring everyone into our space and share our journey and struggles."

For Jaimie Wiggin, another Hilltop staff member, SOWA's approach to quality improvement is intentional. "It never felt prescriptive. [SOWA] approached things with curiosity by asking why we made certain choices instead of telling us what to change," said Jaimie. "That really helped me grow."

Ultimately, Hilltop's engagement with SOWA has been rooted in relationships. They have built authentic trust in their coaches and peers. "It's the people," Elli said. "That's what's made all the difference."

SPOTLIGHT

Dylan Jude Harrell Community Center

In 2021, Claire Bruncke helped found the Dylan Jude Harrell Community Center (DJHCC) to address a severe lack of access to afterschool programs in her rural community of Pacific County, Washington. The DJHCC has since become a key touchpoint for families and children in the county, serving roughly 65% of K-12 youth in the district last year.

But, like many youth providers across the state and rural programs in particular, the DJHCC has had to navigate a glaring gap: funding. While 26 states dedicate funding for afterschool programming, Washington does not.

As the executive director of the only youth program in her county, Claire knows firsthand how this lack of state funding limits youth programs' ability to meet the needs of children and families. While connecting with SOWA for support in 2022, she learned about the Youth Development Strategy Table (YDST), a statewide coalition coordinated by SOWA that advocates for youth development policies and funding.

Joining the coalition was an opportunity Claire couldn't pass up—especially as a much-needed voice for rural communities.



Claire Bruncke | DJHCC Executive Director

“[We’re] a collective ecosystem. If our story can help make a change that will benefit everyone, that’s a win for us.”

“One of the things that was important was that we use our experience to try and create change for other communities like us,” Claire said. “The YDST seemed like a really great fit for that.”

Claire’s involvement in the YDST, including becoming co-chair of the Leadership Committee in 2024, has helped fuel her work and keep policy and advocacy a top priority for the DJHCC.

The majority of Claire’s advocacy happens in the interim between sessions, when legislators have the time to learn more deeply about the communities they serve. An effective strategy that Claire engages in is inviting legislators and elected officials to visit DJHCC programs and see youth in action.

“It’s really easy to not support [something] if you can’t

connect it to real people,” Claire said. “The more that my legislators look at a bill and see my kids’ faces, the better.”

But a successful advocacy strategy involves more than meeting with legislators. Claire also invested in building momentum on the ground. Between monthly YDST coalition and leadership meetings, check-ins during legislative session, and sessions at SOWA’s Bridge Conference, Claire spent 2024 telling the story of the DJHCC—and helping providers across the state do the same for their programs and communities.

“[We’re] a collective ecosystem,” Claire said. “If our story can help make a change that will benefit everyone, that’s a win for us.”

SPOTLIGHT

International Rescue Committee

Resettling one's family in an unfamiliar country is not an easy feat. Having survived violence and persecution in their countries of origin, refugees face a plethora of new challenges when resettling in the United States—but their commitment to paving paths of success for their children is unwavering.

Spokane County experienced an influx of refugee families between 2021 and 2023. Spokane Public Schools (SPS) was suddenly faced with the challenge of addressing the complex and unique needs of the large number of refugee students in the district.

But there was hope in a new partnership with the International Rescue Committee (IRC)—an organization that helps people affected by humanitarian crises to survive, recover, and rebuild their lives—which opened an office in Spokane in 2022.

Heather Richardson from the SPS English Language Development Team reached out to the IRC to build a partnership through a flagship in-home tutoring program that would address two key concerns of refugee families: transportation and trust.

By offering in-home tutoring, trained volunteers could deliver high-quality



Marianne Sfeir | IRC Youth Program Coordinator

“SOWA has been instrumental to our youth programs in Spokane. Funding is what set the foundation for [this expansion] to happen.”

individualized support in a child's home once per week for six months. Tutors foster accessible environments for students to strengthen their skills, build confidence, bridge learning gaps, and reinforce what they were learning in school. “The students we work with are so bright, motivated, funny, creative, and just hungry to learn and grow and succeed,” said Marianne Sfeir, Youth Program Coordinator at the IRC in Spokane. “They have big dreams.”

But tutoring only addressed one of many challenges refugee families faced. To support refugee communities more holistically, SPS and the IRC leveraged their collective resources—as well as federal Afghan Refugee School Impact and Ukrainian Refugee School Impact (ARSI/URSI) funding administered by School's Out Washington (SOWA)—to develop and offer more programs.

“SOWA has been instrumental to our youth programs in Spokane,” said Marianne. “Funding is what set the foundation for [this expansion] to happen.”

What started as one flagship program serving 15 students has since grown into seven programs serving 150-200 students in a year, as well as 50+ parents and 400+ educators, through school support, virtual reading programs, family engagement, mentorship, and professional development.

“All these services in addition to each other is what transforms lives,” Marianne said.

The community's dedication to welcoming and engaging refugee youth led this partnership to blossom into an impressive, responsive network of holistic programs that aim to address the full web of complexities facing refugee families.

BEST STARTS FOR KIDS EXPANDED LEARNING INITIATIVE BY THE NUMBERS

792.5 hours in coaching
(2023-2024)

29 place-based
collaborative orgs

30 BIPOC-led
organizations

6,986 youth
served

85% of youth served
identify as BIPOC

Since 2018, SOWA has administered King County's Best Starts for Kids Expanded Learning Initiative, making a dual investment of funding and capacity building in programs that are advancing equity and opportunity for young people. This is accomplished through two funding models: **BIPOC-Led Organizations** that are embedded in culturally specific or cross-cultural communities of color, and **Place-Based Collaboratives** that are made up of three or more organizations offering programming in underserved areas focused in schools and housing communities.

Participants satisfied with their experience with their programs:

91% of youth were
satisfied

95% of families were
satisfied

Youth impact — youth made their program outcome goals:

84% of 7,580 youth met
their program's
stated outcome

“Through the support of BSK and SOWA we have developed our out of school time services that are helping our children to succeed. The BSK/SOWA resources have helped our organization to support children and their parents to have a voice, be confident in their own cultural identity and to ask for assistance so their families thrive.”

— Iraqi Community Center of WA

2024 BRIDGE CONFERENCE

Moments to Movements

School's Out Washington's Bridge Conference is the only conference in Washington state that brings together the full spectrum of youth development professionals—grassroots program staff, organizational leaders, advocates, community members, and funders. Over the course of two days, we come together to form meaningful connections and gain knowledge to enhance our collective impact.

Each year, the conference serves over 500 attendees and intentionally centers and empowers diverse Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) voices throughout the event, from planning to implementation. This past year, 70% of attendees identified as BIPOC, representing a wide range of urban, suburban, and rural programs from 16 counties across Washington.

Each inspiring speaker, passionate presenter, and engaged attendee at the 2024 Bridge Conference embodied our conference theme, Moments to Movements, by dedicating time and energy to supporting young people across the state.

The impact of a moment

Keynote speaker Lana Hailemariam opened the conference with reflections on the moments and relationships that shaped her as a young person. She invited attendees to intentionally craft validating and empowering experiences for youth—especially BIPOC youth, youth in poverty and/or rural areas, LGBTQ+ youth, disabled youth, and any youth facing barriers to access and opportunity.

Over 500 attendees chose from 35 workshops on day one, gaining valuable insight from field experts. The day wrapped up with our Exhibitor Showcase & Networking Social, where attendees deepened relationships and discovered new products and services offered to youth development professionals in a music-filled space.

Movements in motion

Bridge Conference Day 2 started with Tacoma's Poet Laureate Christian Paige. His message was clear: invest interest in young people and believe you have the skills to support young people. Day 2 also offered 20+ workshops focused on practical strategies to support youth.

"I left each session full of ideas and tangible skills to bring back to my organization," shared one participant.

By fostering connections and providing space to build networks across the field, our conference invested in the momentum that will carry our collective movement forward.

Moments to movements

School's Out Washington's CEO Elizabeth Whitford highlighted the Youth Development Strategy Table (YDST), bringing Claire Bruncke of the Dylan Jude Harrell Community Center and Sam Martin of SDMC into a thoughtful conversation around policy and advocacy work in our state and how we can all get involved.

Closing speaker Luis Ortega shared how storytelling can advance systemic change for young people. He encouraged participants to craft their own stories while reflecting on our connections to each other and how we can create the movement needed to support and empower young people.

Moving forward

As we reflect on last year's Bridge Conference, we're grateful for the community of presenters and attendees that helped us deeply engage with the youth development ecosystem. Our collective voice and action are critical to creating a movement that benefits young people in Washington.

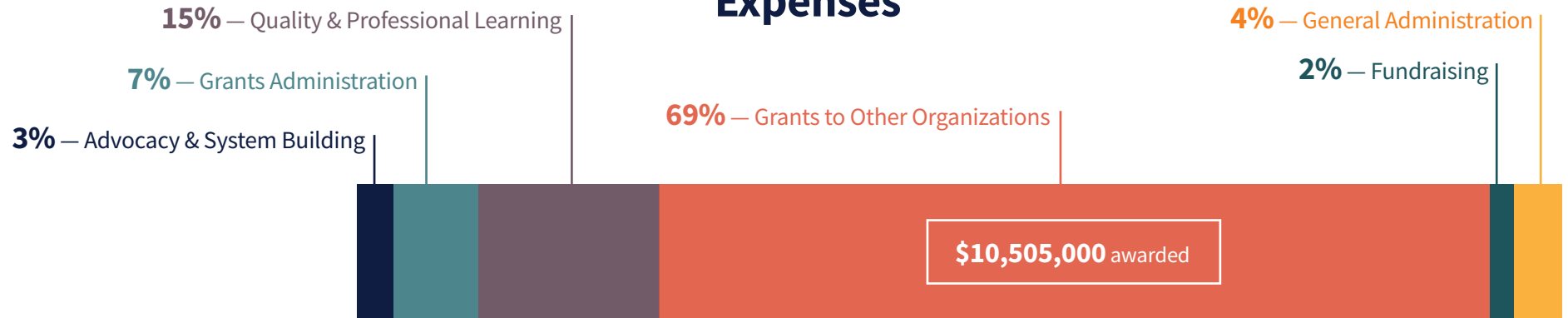
Save the date for Bridge Conference 2025!

October 27 & 28, 2025

Meydenbauer Center
Bellevue, Washington

FINANCIALS

Expenses



Total 2024 Expenditures = **\$15,216,211**

Income



Total 2024 Income = **\$15,296,171**

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Let's Stay Connected

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