



Higher Ground

reach. transform. elevate.

ANNUAL REPORT

2017-2018



BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Senator David Bradley - President
Barry Richardson - Secretary
Ken Heeter - Treasurer
David Reilly - Board Member
Simeon Wagner - Board Member
Alicia White - Board Member
Richard Rubin - Board Member

EXECUTIVE STAFF

Jansen Azarias - CEO and Founder
Barbie Azarias - Co-Founder and Senior Director of Culture and Quality
Daniela Siqueiros - Director of Development and Community Relations
Araceli Mendibles - Director of School Programs
Andy Barreras - Director of Operations
Arthur Rodgers - Community School Director - SUSD
Rema Hamdan - Community School Director - TUSD
Rhody Downey - Director of Finance
Rob Lester - Executive Assistant

STAFF

Adriana Gutierrez – Child Services Advocate
Alex Moreno - SEL Instructor
Alexis Zozaya – SEL Instructor
Andres Leon - Rec Coach
Andris Rapa - AmeriCorps Program Manager
Carlos Pujon - SEL Instructor
Cheryl Lopez - Parent Engagement Coordinator
Denise Garcia - Transportation
Desmond Davis - Behavioral Health Specialist
Dina Mathis - Rec Coach
Erin Thompson – Child Services Advocate
Felicia Mendibles - Office Manager
Fernando Gil Lamadrid - Student Engagement Coordinator
Hans Bontrager-Singer – Child Services Advocate & SEL Instructor
Heather Raftery - Jui Jitsu Coach and Project Manager
Isa Barreras - Program Manager
Jesse Haro - Boxing Coach
Kenan Hadstrom - Rec Coach
Mary Ann Angulo - Rec Coach
Michael Sumner - Judo Coach
Ray Barreras - Transportation Lead
Rebecca Davis - Lead Billing Specialist
Ryo Sato - School Programs Manager
Steve Owens - Judo Tournament Coordinator

Dear Supporters of Higher Ground,

Last fiscal year was our 10th year of Higher Ground, a huge milestone accompanied by some significant achievements. Through our work with Social Venture Partners (SVP) of Tucson, we have produced our first strategic plan since Higher Ground's inception. This three-year strategic plan has allowed us to create a laser focus in our effort and direct our continuous rapid growth in a way that is sustainable.

As will be reflected in this annual report, our financial income exceeded one million dollars last year, another big milestone for any organization. We have continued to diversify our income sources and have maintained spending 80% of them directly on youth and family programming. We expanded our reach to serve over 1,500 youth in over fifteen different program delivery sites, and this has achieved some phenomenal effects. While we have continued to grow rapidly, our mission focus has remained the same – to empower one life a time to reach, transform, and elevate the community through love and building character. Our outcomes continue to show that building relationships, investing in people, teaching skills for character building, and supporting the staff in our public school systems will enable us to remain effective. Our mile deep and inch wide approach is now being implemented in schools through our Community Schools Strategy. Community Schools, a nationally recognized strategy, has become the primary vehicle for Higher Ground's plan for expansion. Higher Ground's effort is being guided by the expertise of the following national organizations - Children's Aid and the National Center for Community Schools.

Our partnerships with national organizations have also grown. We are now working in partnership with TUSD and Character Lab, Dr. Angela Duckworth's organization, to work alongside scientists in developing effective ways to teach our children character and social-emotional learning (SEL) skills. Research has shown that these SEL skills and character skills, such as grit, growth mindset, self-control, have a direct impact and might potentially be a greater indicator of future success among youth than IQ or academic grades. Additionally, we are also now working with Dr. Gabriele Oettingen and Dr. Leah Kapa on improving our outcomes with youth. We believe that youth work should not be guesswork, but should rather be driven by effective methods as they are the future of our great nation.

We continue to maintain great partnerships with our school districts, Tucson Unified School District (TUSD) and Sunnyside Unified School District (SUSD), and serve them in more expanded capacities. Along with our Community Schools collaboration with Arizona Serve and La Frontera, our work with the school districts now includes alternative to education systems, school day integration, and professional development for teachers. We have expanded our partnerships with Pima County to greater impact our youth, thanks to the leadership of our County Supervisor Ramon Valadez.

Looking ahead, we want to continue the quality of our individual work with our youth and families. We also want to build on the systemic work that has begun to ensure our impact expands to entire communities in the city of Tucson. We want to begin creating a sustainable and replicable model that will impact the public schools and other youth systems for years to come. In order to identify and invest in the future leaders who will sustain and continue our work in other communities that are in need.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Jansen Azarias', with a large, stylized flourish at the end.

Jansen Azarias
CEO and Co-Founder

PROGRAMS

YOUTH DEVELOPMENT CENTER

Higher Ground's Youth Development Center at Wakefield Middle School provided social-emotional learning skills to youth in at-risk environments during the 2017 - 2018 school year. During our after school program, students participated in archery, art, basketball, boxing, coding, dance, digital design, drumline, jiu jitsu, judo, music, outside sports, and robotics -- all at no cost to the family. Our student activities were used as a delivery mechanism to teach communication, creative problem solving, emotion management, mindfulness, self control, and Grit in an environment of inclusion and belonging - an effective method delivery based on the evidence of researchers like Dr. Adele Diamond and Dr. Angela Duckworth.

Highlights from this year include our Harry Potter themed Summer Program in which students were able to explore social-emotional learning skills in creative ways by delving into the popular, imaginative wizarding world. Throughout the five-week program, students had the opportunity to study magic (chemistry and biology), prepare to fight evil in Defense Against the Dark Arts class (dodgeball, kickball, capture the flag), and learn protective spells to benefit their friends and families (family and consumer sciences such as first aid, CPR, babysitting care, and household management). As always, our students practiced building social-emotional skills and self-control in the afternoons through their choice of basketball, Jiu Jitsu, Judo, boxing, dance, music, and art.

IN-SCHOOL PROGRAM AT STAR ACADEMIC HIGH SCHOOL

Higher Ground brought its model into STAR Academic High School to teach social emotional learning skills, vocational skills, and college preparation. The program has become so successful that it has lead STAR Academic High School to be recognized by Sunnyside Unified School District for having the most improved student attendance. Higher Ground has worked alongside the Junior Achievement program for the last three years in the STAR classroom to equip students with the financial, career, and personal skills they need to succeed.

HIGHER GROUND PLAYS A UNIQUE ROLE IN THE DELIVERY OF BOTH EDUCATIONAL SUPPORT AND BEHAVIORAL HEALTH SERVICES FOR SOME OF TUCSON'S MOST VULNERABLE CHILDREN. STARTED INITIALLY AS AN EFFORT TO ASSIST A FEW NEIGHBORHOOD KIDS TO RECEIVE THE GUIDANCE THEY NEEDED TO STAY IN SCHOOL AND DEAL WITH PERSONAL AND FAMILY PROBLEMS, HIGHER GROUND HAS GROWN TO BE A LIFELINE FOR HUNDREDS OF CHILDREN WHO FACE SIMILAR CHALLENGES. THE NEED FOR HIGHER GROUND'S BLEND OF CARING FOR AND ENCOURAGING KIDS TO TAKE EFFECTIVE CONTROL OF THEIR LIVES GROWS EVERY DAY.

-David Bradley
Arizona State Senator (District 10)
Higher Ground Board President



YOUTH SUCCESS CENTER

In collaboration with the Pima County Juvenile Court Center, Higher Ground's Youth Success Center offered on-site social-emotional development opportunities to youth on probation as an alternative to incarceration.

DISTRICT ALTERNATIVE EDUCATION PROGRAM (DAEP)

Through a partnership with TUSD, Higher Ground provided the District Alternative Education Program (DAEP) program for social-emotional learning, utilizing Jiu Jitsu, Judo, and basketball, along with vocational education, to students suspended from school. Sites included Project MORE High School, Doolen Middle School, Magee Middle School, and Southwest Middle School and High School.

COMMUNITY SCHOOLS

In collaboration with TUSD, SUSD, La Frontera, and Arizona Serve, Higher Ground has been the lead agency in creating the community-schools infrastructure in Tucson's high-needs neighborhoods. By utilizing AmeriCorps volunteers to provide comprehensive services including health, social services, and family support at individual school sites, we have met the immediate and long-term needs of children and their families living in poverty so they can succeed, thrive, and eventually give back to the community. Now in its 5th year of the Community Schools Initiative, Higher Ground placed AmeriCorps members at 8 schools throughout TUSD and SUSD during the 2017-2018 school year, forming community hubs out of high schools to efficiently distribute services to the student body and their families. We plan to have permanent Community Schools Directors placed at various sites to establish sustainability in our model of teaching social-emotional learning.

1,500
STUDENTS
SERVED ANNUALLY

NEW FOR THE 2018-2019 SCHOOL YEAR

Hollinger K-8

Higher Ground will teach judo and jiu jitsu with a focus on social-emotional learning as an elective for 6th grade students.

Community Schools

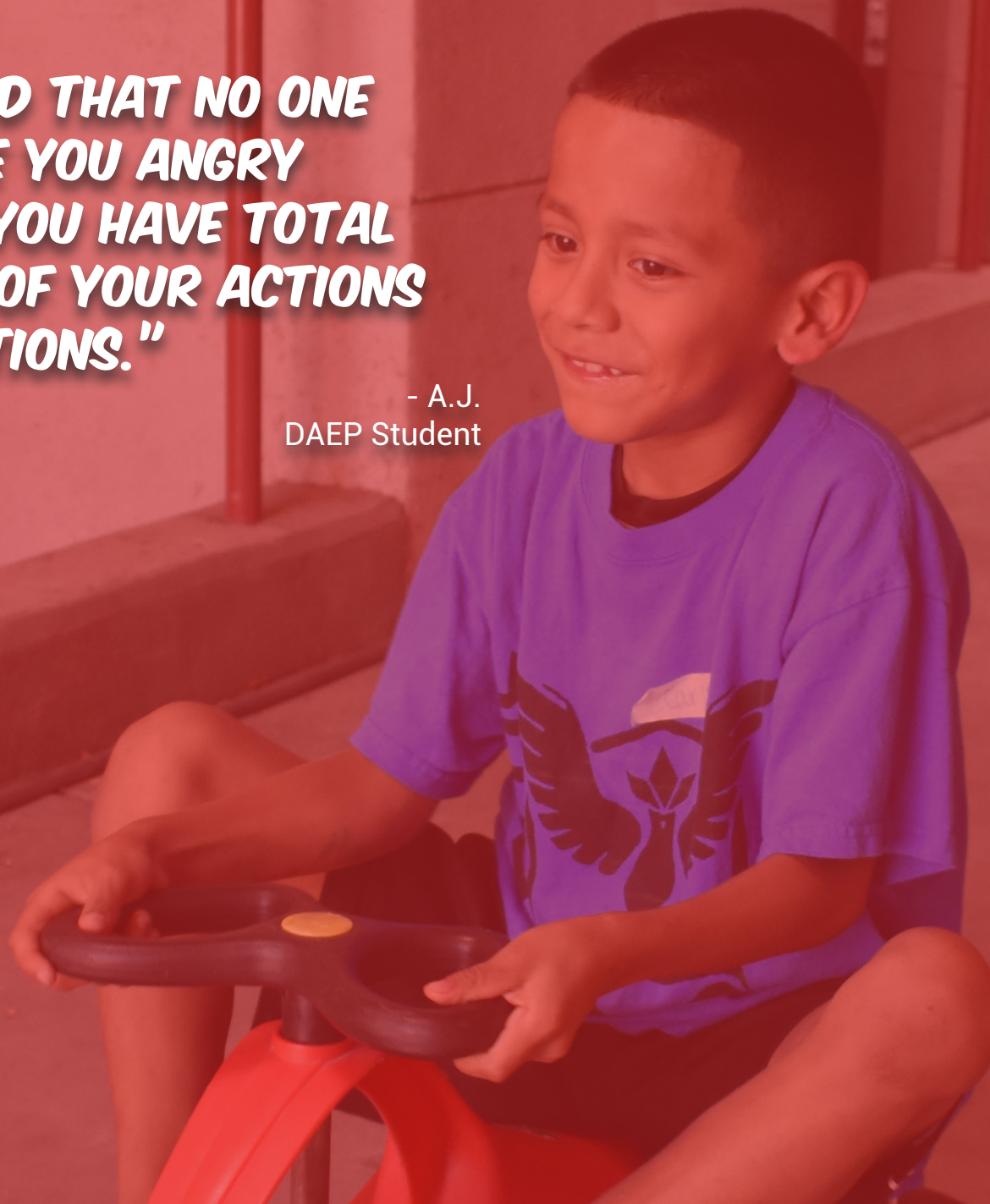
Hollinger K-8 (TUSD) and Gallego Intermediate (SUSD) will each have a full time Community School Director to implement the Full Service Community School Model with the guidance of Children's Aid and the National Center for Community Schools.

**WHAT I LEARNED TODAY
WILL HELP ME MAKE BETTER
DECISIONS IN THE FUTURE.**

- D.C.
DAEP Student

**"I LEARNED THAT NO ONE
CAN MAKE YOU ANGRY
BECAUSE YOU HAVE TOTAL
CONTROL OF YOUR ACTIONS
AND EMOTIONS."**

- A.J.
DAEP Student





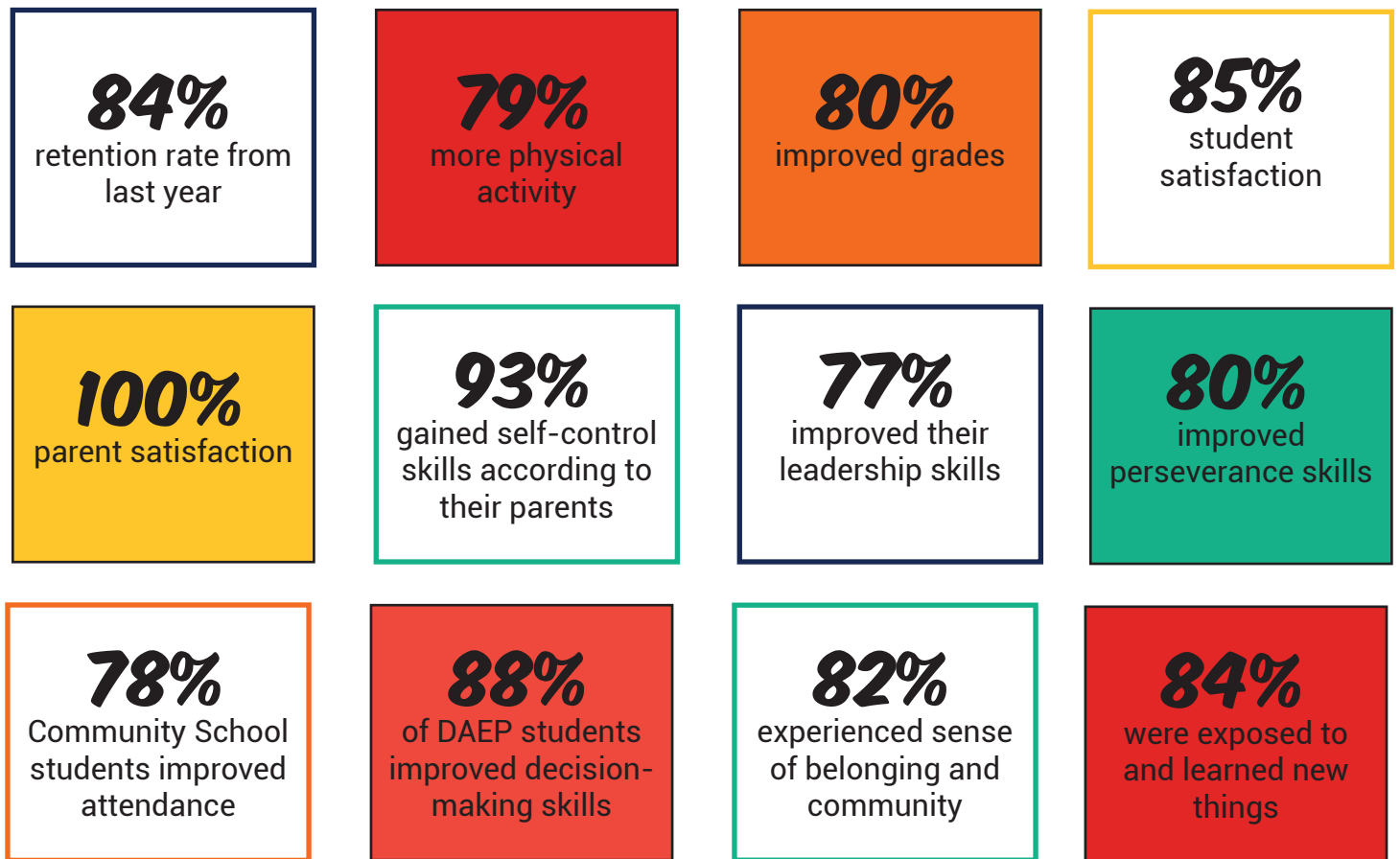
OUR IMPACT


At Higher Ground, we try to better our students in all aspects of life including academics, physical activity, and personal development. Over the past year, this has been apparent through our tangible results.

The students we help typically come from low-income backgrounds and are therefore in greater need of the services Higher Ground provides. The community we serve looks like this:



THE HIGHER GROUND DIFFERENCE





AS A YOUNG CHILD, I GREW UP IN AN AREA THAT MOST WOULD CONSIDER IMPOVERISHED, UNFAVORABLE AND UNFORTUNATE. THERE WERE TIMES THAT I WOULD WALK HOME FROM SCHOOL AND PURPOSELY TAKE THE ROUTE THROUGH THE NICER NEIGHBORHOODS TO STARE AT A LIFE THAT I KNEW WAS FAR OUT OF MY REACH.

AS A CHILD, I HAD NO PLACE TO GO, NO ONE TO TURN TO AND MOST OF ALL NO HOPE IN WHO I WAS OR IN A FUTURE THAT DID T INVOLVE DESPAIR. TWENTY YEARS LATER I CAN, FORTUNATELY, SAY LIFE AND THE BLESSING FROM OTHERS HAD A DIFFERENT PLAN FOR ME.

UNFORTUNATELY, MY STORY IS NOT UNCOMMON FOR THE CHILDREN OF SOUTH TUCSON AND THE SURROUNDING AREAS. THIS STORY IS COMMON AMONGST THE STUDENTS AT HIGHER GROUND, WITH ONE MAJOR DIFFERENCE, THE STUDENTS AT HIGHER GROUND HAVE A PLACE TO TURN TO AND MOST OF ALL HOPE, THAT THEY CAN WRITE THEIR OWN FUTURE, REGARDLESS OF THEIR BACKGROUND.

HIGHER GROUND IS MORE THAN JUST A BUILDING AND MORE THAN JUST A NUMBER OF STUDENTS WE SERVE. HIGHER GROUND IS A HOME, A SAFE HAVEN AND MOST IMPORTANTLY IT'S HOPE WHEN ALL OTHER THINGS ARE IMPOVERISHED, UNFAVORABLE AND UNFORTUNATE.

- Kenny Briggs
AmeriCorps Member

FINANCIALS

Higher Ground is a 501(c)3 organization. Our mission is to empower one life at a time to reach, transform, and elevate the community through love and building character. Over the past year, our reach has grown immensely. We extended into the community and connected Higher Ground with new partners. Higher Ground has been fortunate to increase our funding in a number of key areas.

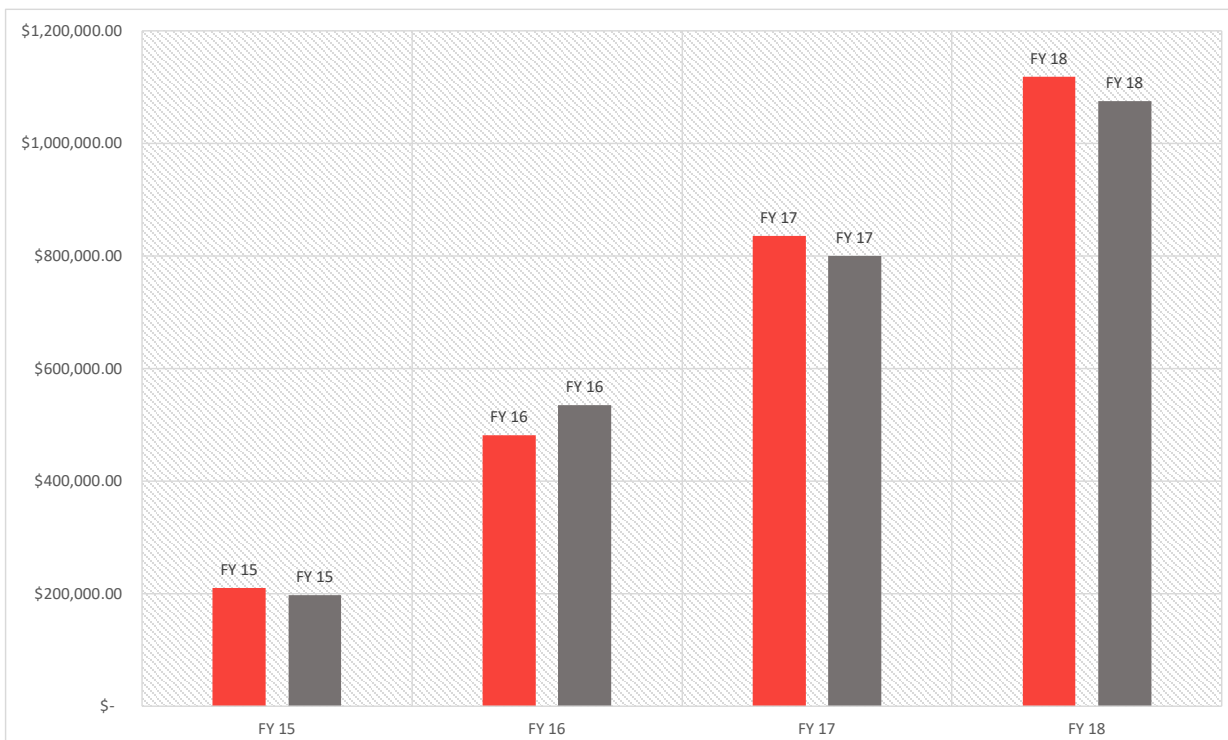
FY 18 EXPENSES

Program	\$ 887,624.75
Occupancy	\$ 182,019.71
Office	\$ 135,427.83
Travel	\$ 12,006.70
Total	\$ 1,074,853.55

FY 18 INCOME

Grants	\$ 98,930.15
Donations	\$ 182,019.71
Contracts	\$ 785, 636.43
Banquet	\$ 51,373.90
Total	\$ 1,117,960.19

FINANCIAL GROWTH - INCOME



* Our organization's financials are independently audited annually. FY 18 audit has not occurred at this time.

VOLUNTEERS

51

LIFE CHANGERS

32

HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS

6,473

HOURS LOGGED

\$ 24.69

2018 VALUE OF
VOLUNTEER TIME PER
HOUR ACCORDING TO
INDEPENDENTSECTOR.ORG

\$ 159,818

CONTRIBUTED IN
VOLUNTEER HOURS

IMPACT STORY

When you look at this family, you will never realize the many struggles they have been through. Each of the children are smiling, happy, engaged, and on track with many goals in their life. However, seven years ago, this was not the case. Their mom left five children, ages 2, 5, 6, 8, and 13 due to substance abuse and some issues with local law enforcement at the doorstep of their grandmother. That day grandma's life was disrupted to now becoming the responsible guardian for five young children who were full of trauma, anger, and sadness. Grandma did not have anyone except for Higher Ground.

She immediately told Higher Ground the situation and received beds, clothing, basic needs, and other support for her grandchildren. Higher Ground engaged her and her family with different support systems to help them navigate the traumatic experience and the continuous emotional roller coaster that this sudden change in their life was going to bring.

Seven years later, the work continues and they have truly become part of the family at Higher Ground. The oldest grandchild is now a high school graduate with a full time job and living independently. The second oldest grandchild is now part of the High School Enterprise Program at Higher Ground, volunteering her time to mentor other students and help to run the office in the afternoon. The three other children are all engaged in competition judo and jujutsu classes, winning state championships and placing in national tournaments. Grandma continues to be the guardian and has fully integrated into Higher Ground, volunteering her time for special events and helping advocate for Higher Ground.

**No names were mentioned to protect family's identity and privacy.*

“

THE STORY OF HIGHER GROUND IS WHY I STUDY GRIT. INDIVIDUALS WITH PERSEVERANCE AND PASSION—PARTICULARLY THE KIND THAT IS PURPOSE-DRIVEN, THAT IS FOCUSED ON HELPING OTHERS—CHANGE THE WORLD.

- Dr. Angela Duckworth
Character Lab



Higher Ground Staff with Dr. Angela Duckworth



THANK YOU TO OUR DONORS!

Adelita Grijalva
AGM Container Controls, Inc.
Alejandro Magallanes
Andrew Maestas
Araceli Mendibles
Arelly Machado
Arizona Center for Afterschool Excellence
Armando Aguilar
Ashley Olvera
BA Wagner
Bank of Tucson
Barry Richardson
Beth Kasser
Carla Alexander
Casey Cannon
Cathy and Terri Earnest
Celina Morales
Cenpatico
Charles and Elaine Skidmore
Check Family Foundation
Chris Golden
Christina Sprouse
Christopher Carioso
Cierra Celaya
Community Foundation for Southern AZ
Complete Flooring, LLC
Conquistadores Foundation
CPA Check Up, PLLC
Cristy Olof
Dan Eckstrom
Daniela Siqueiros
Danitza Valle
Darleen Parag
David Bradley and Debbie D'Amore
David Reilly
Deborah Bryson
Denise Garcia
Derika Louk
Dominator MMA Inc.
Dominic Ortega
Doug Martin
Dustin and Kristi Williams
Elizabeth Acedo
Elizabeth Flores
Elsa Leos
Elvia Obregon
Enrique Durazo
Eric Busby
Eric Ponce
Erica Hoffman
Eva Guzman
Fernando Lagarda
Francisco Enterprises, Inc.
Fred Knox Rev Trust
Gabriel Trujillo

Generational Financial LLC
George Gessner
Gina Arocha
Giuliana Donnelly
Greg Taylor
H. Ronald Shane
Hank Walker
Hector Rubio
Henry and Jenny Valenzuela
Hester van Heemstra
Hideko Wilmarth
Howard Stewart
Jack and Peggy Comp
James and Emily Firnstahl
James and Merritt Cain
Jansen Azarias
Jay Slauter
Jeff Baze
Jeff Dement
Jennifer Connell
Jesus Medina
Jim Cain
Jim Fish
John and Rosalva Zimmerman
John Flannery
John Knosby
Johnny and Sara Long
Joshua and Amy Plicht
Josie Valenzuela
Juan Jose Aguirre
Julie Frank
Karim Machado
Ken Heeter
Kenci and Randy Lewis
Kevin Martyn
Kirk and Victoria Wilson
KVOI
La Frontera Arizona
Landscape Solutions of Tucson
Larry Munguia
Laura Shimel
Leslie Perls
Lilly Berkley
Livingston Foundation
Luis Rios
Lyndie Rose
MAKA Enterprises
Marcie Carrillo
Maria Bringas
Martin Machado
Martyn Family Foundation
Mary Ann Angulo
Mary E Leos and Louie Leos
Marya Wheeler
Marzo Construction Inc.

Matt Waggoner
Melissa Gaska
Michael Anderson
Michel Lahti Lecroy and Milligan
Native American Advancement Foundation
New Image
Nolan Cabrera
On the Rise LLC
Peggy and Dick Pearson
Pima County District 2
Pima County School Superintendent's Office
PPEP Finance
R Clark
Ramon Valadez
Randall Reynolds
RBC Financial
Regina Romero
Rema Hamdan
Rob and Tracey Lester
Roger Joneos
Ron and Betty Lester
Ronald and Marcia Spark
Rotary Club Sunrise
Roxanna Pesquiera
Ruben Reyes
Sahaurita
Samuel Galbraith
Shelly Duran
Simeon Wagner and Dawn Gessne
Sober Project
Social Venture Partners
Southwest Conservation Corps
St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church
Stephen and Judy Gift Fund
Stephen Hunter
Stuart Bardach
Tim Olef
Tonie Peercy
Trina Nuno
TRUiST
Tucson Business Interior
Tucson Conquistadores Foundation
Tucson Refugee Ministry
Tucson Sunrise Rotary
Tucson Unified School District
Tucson Youth Development Inc.
Undisputed Fitness and Training Center
United Way of Northern Arizona
United Way of Tucson & Southern Arizona
UTUIA
Vanessa Romero
Xiaolan Zhang

**EMPOWERING ONE LIFE AT A TIME TO REACH, TRANSFORM,
AND ELEVATE THE COMMUNITY THROUGH SHOWING
LOVE AND BUILDING CHARACTER.**



101 W. 44th Street, Tucson, Arizona, 85713 | 520-622-1425 | HigherGround.me

