



# 2020-2021 ANNUAL REPORT



## DEAR ARYSE SUPPORTERS,

In 2021, we started a new tradition at ARYSE team meetings. In an effort to gain a more holistic understanding of each person and ensure everyone's voice is heard, we each take a turn answering three questions: "What is something you're proud of?" "Where is your knowledge expanding?" and "What is currently challenging you?" I'll use these questions to reflect on the past year.

*"What is something you're proud of?"* I am so proud of our team. I'm so proud that the experience of navigating the pandemic has brought everyone at ARYSE -- our staff, students, board members, partners -- closer and deepened our shared sense of purpose. In 2021, ARYSE served 134 immigrant and refugee youth across 5 programs, and supported a team of 11 staff, 2 Americorps members, 15 camp counselors, and 14 youth staff. I can write thousands of words about the value, beauty, and expertise that each member of the 2021 ARYSE team brought to our work. Morgan, Mike, Taya, Maryam, Jeff, Meg, Karenna, Sophie, Prachi, Megan, Melinda, Amanda, Josué, and the entire ARYSE Academy team, I am so proud of what we built together!

I am also proud of the partnerships we created and deepened, especially with Open Field, JFCS, A+ Schools, All for All, Global Wordsmiths, Duquesne University, and the University of Pittsburgh Center for International Studies. Thank you for investing your unique resources and people into ARYSE to help us build organizational capacity and improve program quality. I am so proud of the community ARYSE has become and so very grateful for the community we are a part of.

Last but certainly not least, I am so proud of our students -- especially our Youth Steering Committee members -- for showing up with their assignments, enthusiasm, ideas, exhaustion, and trust to all of the meetings, events, and programs where they were invited. We know how tiring these past 3 school years have been and the determination it has required. Students, thank you for trusting us, for playing an active role in this work, and holding us accountable to our mission.

*Where is your knowledge expanding?* In 2021, our team asked difficult questions and experimented with potential solutions. For example, after years of conversations about how to reach and support LGBTQIA+ immigrant and refugee youth, we launched the Queer Youth Space. This program has quickly become a place where students feel a strong sense of belonging and in the program's founder, Jeff Zeng's words, "know they can exist."

We're also learning how to ensure our high school juniors and seniors have the support they need to graduate and be prepared for what comes next. In large thanks to our After School Program Director, Mike Sirera, we're understanding the specific challenges newcomer refugee youth face in achieving economic mobility and we're working with partners to develop and improve upon programming to fill the gaps. I'm so excited to see this programming blossom in 2022.

*What is currently challenging you?* We are witnessing the most significant refugee crisis of our time; around the world, there are over 82 million people displaced from their home countries. Between the Afghan refugee crisis, the U.S. government's goal of resettling 125,000 refugees annually (a 733% increase from the historic low of 15,000 set in the previous administration), and Pittsburgh's resettlement agencies increasing from at least 2 to 4 by January, we anticipate having to respond to a much greater demand for our programming in 2022 and beyond. While this transition is already posing new challenges, I am so excited to collaborate with our partners to ensure families' transition to Pittsburgh is as welcoming and supportive as possible.

At ARYSE, we work alongside our students to help them actualize their potential, advocate for their well-being, and make Pittsburgh a more welcoming place for them and their families. There is a long road ahead of us, but thanks to the incredible young people our team has the privilege of supporting each day, I'm very hopeful about the future of our communities.

Thank you for taking the time to review this report and learn about our work over the past year. We look forward to sharing many more great stories with you from 2022!

With love,



Jenna Baron,  
Executive Director

## ARYSE Staff



**Jenna Baron,**  
Executive  
Director



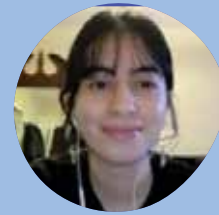
**Morgan  
Puterbaugh,**  
Operations  
Manager



**Mike Sirera,**  
After School  
Club Director



**Taya Jackson,**  
Girls Art and  
Maker Group  
Coordinator



**Maryam Nader,**  
Youth Steering  
Committee  
Facilitator,  
Graphic Designer



**Jeff Zeng,** Youth  
Steering Committee  
Facilitator,  
Special Projects  
Coordinator



**Meg Booth &  
Karena Oner,**  
ARYSE Academy  
Co-Directors



**Sophie  
Burkholder,**  
Family  
Communications  
Coordinator



**Prachi Patel,**  
Communications  
Manager



**Megan Heise,**  
Counselor-  
in-Training  
Supervisor



**Melinda Ho,**  
All for All  
Americorps  
VISTA



**Amanda  
Gamwo,** KEYS  
Americorps

## ARYSE Board

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Jewish Family & Community Services

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Hospital

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## ARYSE in the Community

### EXCELLENCE IN COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AWARD

ARYSE, JFCS, and Duquesne University were presented with the Excellence in Community Engagement Award from the PA Department of Human Services at "Envisioning," the PA Statewide Refugee Resettlement Consultation in January, 2021 for their work on the After School Club.



During a presentation at the Consultation, ARYSE presented a video showcasing a panel of 3 students (Rahwa, Sharifa, and Sylvie) who spoke about the important role of After School Club in their lives, especially throughout the pandemic and remote schooling.

### PITTSBURGH LEARNING COLLABORATIVE FAMILY HOTLINE

As a response to the COVID crisis, A+ Schools spearheaded the development of a coalition of nearly 80 regional organizations and individuals across Pittsburgh's learning community to create the Pittsburgh Learning Collaborative (PLC). Through this collaboration, ARYSE joined the effort to establish a Family Hotline to help families navigate any uncertainty surrounding education, learning hubs, tutoring supports, internet access, family support and more. Other organizations involved in the hotline include Boys & Girls Clubs, Catapult, CUE Heinz Fellows, Latino Community Center, and Lawrenceville United.

### COVID-19 VACCINE Q&A

On February 21st, ARYSE hosted a Covid-19 Vaccine Question & Answer workshop with Dr. Maya Ragavan, Pediatrician at UPMC Children's Hospital of Pittsburgh and ARYSE board member, and Dr. Ken Ho, MD Infectious Diseases, UPMC for the Youth Steering Committee and After School Club youth. Dr. Ragavan and Dr. Ho responded to concerns and questions about the vaccine as well as resources the students could use to regularly find factual and updated information.





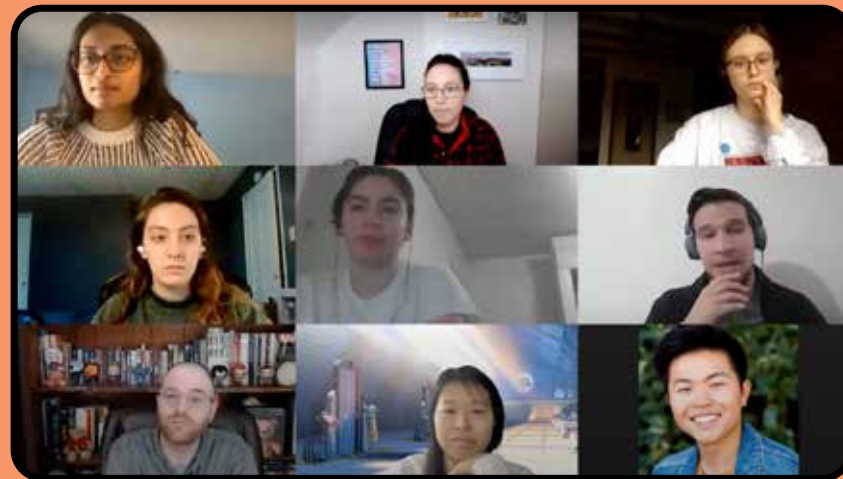
## “THE RIVERS DON'T KNOW” BY CITY THEATRE

In 2019, City Theatre was awarded a grant from the Allegheny Regional Asset District's RADical ImPact program to commission and develop a play about stories of immigration in Pittsburgh through a collaborative process informed by community partners like ARYSE. Playwright, Jim McManus, and director Michael John Garcés of Cornerstone Theater Company facilitated a number of story circles and interviews with community

members, including the ARYSE Youth Steering Committee. The play became, “*The Rivers Don't Know*”, which explores stories of immigration past, present, and future in Pittsburgh and was brought to the stage in September, 2021. ARYSE's very own, Tomi Taiwo, played the part of Khadija in the first readings of the play and PRYSE Academy Counselor, Danielle Obisie-Orlu, was cast as Khadija in the show!

## ARYSE WINS AN UNIVERSITY OF PITTSBURGH MOMENTUM GRANT: “PITTSBURGH IS OUR HOME, TOO: REFUGEE ARTS AND EDUCATION FOR WELL-BEING”

In partnership with Dr. Josué Lopez, Assistant Professor of Decoloniality in Pitt's School of Education, ARYSE was awarded a seeding grant to engage ARYSE youth as co-researchers to better understand their educational needs and interests, the role of arts education in and out of schools and the ways in which refugee youth perceive arts education contributing to their ability to live well.



## FILM SCREENINGS WITH CASA SAN JOSE, “LIFTING UP IMMIGRANT AND REFUGEE VOICES”

In December, 2020, ARYSE hosted a series of film screenings with Casa San Jose, “*Lifting Up Immigrant and Refugee Voices*.”

## After School Club K-8

In the Spring of 2021, the virtual K-8 program was facilitated by Open Field's Lead Coach Mentor, Yusuph Ulomi. We are so grateful for Yusuph and the Open Field team's willingness to step in and the valuable role they play in our collective students' lives and the broader community.

My goal for the After School Club K-8 virtual program in the 2020-2021 school year was to structure the virtual space in a way that maintained and motivated student engagement. We met virtually twice a week for a total period of eight weeks and each session included a conversation around a relevant theme as well as physical activities to promote movement. Throughout the year we covered topics like creating good habits, empathy, forgiveness, honesty, accountability, overcoming obstacles, and goal setting.

The physical activities portion of the program involved fun soccer exercises and mini competitions. This portion of the program played a critical role in fostering an environment where students could express their energy, attention, and enthusiasm for learning and being active.

Structured into each weekly session was the “circle question,” where we went around and every student and mentor shared their personal interests and experiences. I recall how intrigued and excited I was to learn about students' various hobbies. I truly enjoyed working with the youth enrolled at After School Club and especially loved seeing them participate in conversations on the selected topics and observe the collective learning that happened each week. The students asked great questions and shared profound insights.

*Yusuph Ulomi,*

Lead Coach Mentor  
Partner at Open Field



# After School Club 9-12

At the beginning of March 2020 when the reality of the pandemic set in and we paused our in-person programming, I don't think any of us could have imagined that we would still be remote a year later. Students spent their entire year living in a virtual world defined by Microsoft Teams, Schoology, and Zoom. I remember asking a student, "How long do you spend on the computer each day?" She just laughed and said, "The whole day, Mr. Mike!" as if it were some joke that everyone else was in on. I know she wasn't kidding, because we had been there with her and her family late into the evenings, helping with homework and other needs caused by the pandemic.



When the school year began, it became apparent that the students would need a tremendous amount of support. Students had a harder time seeking support from their teachers, managing their immense amount of classwork and homework, and navigating technology required for their classes. To meet the moment, we expanded our programming to five days

a week on Zoom: Tuesdays and Thursdays were our official program days for homework help; Mondays and Wednesdays for extra support for individual students, and Fridays we held our group activities. Together, staff and mentors were able to support 24 students across 101 virtual sessions of After School Club, and provided an additional 1,182 hours of individual support to students outside of the regularly scheduled program time.

Every other Friday at the program, staff from the 412 Futures at JFCS would visit to talk with the students about college and career readiness. We spent other Fridays focusing on additional program goals like community building, celebration of culture and identity, social and cultural integration, civic engagement, and life satisfaction. Some program highlights from the year were virtual murder mystery and escape room games we designed to help students practice their English skills, computer fundamentals training, a discussion about the presidential election process and a mock election, a visit from students of Duquesne's Black Student Union to talk about activism on campus, a COVID-19 mask making service project, and a student-led

discussion focused on the question, "What is the solution to racism?"

I am deeply proud of each and every one of our students, especially the 8 students that pushed through remote learning to graduate last year. Through all of the late nights and Zoom fatigue, our students showed up, worked hard, and gave all of themselves to their work. I know the pandemic has been hard for all of us, but the students were the bright spot to my day everyday; I am thankful they allow us to be a part of their lives.

*Mike Sirera,*

After School Club Program Director

**TOGETHER, STAFF AND MENTORS WERE ABLE TO SUPPORT 24 STUDENTS ACROSS 101 VIRTUAL SESSIONS OF AFTER SCHOOL CLUB, AND PROVIDED AN ADDITIONAL 1,182 HOURS OF INDIVIDUAL SUPPORT TO STUDENTS OUTSIDE OF THE REGULARLY SCHEDULED PROGRAM TIME.**



# Girls Art and Maker Group

This past year at Girls Group, we explored how art can be used to come out of our shells and connect with others. Due to COVID-19, the program operated completely on Zoom with an in-person celebration at Point State Park in June. Despite the limitations of virtual programming, we developed meaningful relationships with each other, explored various art mediums, created memories, and used the virtual space to decompress from life's daily stressors.

There were 13 youth who participated in Girls Art and Maker Group in the 2020/21 school year, ranging in age from 13-17 years old. Meetings took place on the first and last Saturday of every month and our goal for the year was simple: build new relationships and deepen existing ones. Participants and their families lived in various neighborhoods through Pittsburgh, including Crafton Heights, Greentree, Brentwood, Sheridan, and various Northside neighborhoods. Since the program was completely on Zoom, I made multiple visits to meet families and to drop off art supplies. It brought me so much joy to connect with people face to face, and these relationships have been crucial for preparing for the return to in-person in the 2021/22 school year.

We had a few special guests who were a regular presence at Girls Group including Christa Drew, TeenBloc Creative Lead & Youth Developer from A+ Schools, Barbara Johnson from the ARYSE board, and Lexi Kentebe, a student from Ellis who interned with ARYSE for the year. From glass painting to raving about our favorite anime shows, we grew together. As it became safer to meet outdoors, we had our final celebration at Point State Park during Pittsburgh Pride Week and Art Fest. We enjoyed our time together listening to music, eating Salem's (an ARYSE staple), playing soccer and UNO, riding bikes, and basking in the joy of seeing each other in person!

*Taya Jackson,*

Girls Art and Maker Group 2021-22 Coordinator



**“ I LOVED GIRLS GROUP THIS YEAR, ESPECIALLY WHEN WE DID THE GLASS PAINTING!”**



**“ GIRLS GROUP THIS YEAR WAS GOOD AND IT WOULD HAVE BEEN EVEN BETTER IF WE MET MORE OFTEN BECAUSE I MISSED Y'ALL!”**



# LGBTQIA+ Initiative: Queer Youth Space

The goal of the ARYSE LGBTQIA+ Initiative is to help all of the organization's stakeholders, especially youth participants and staff, become more expansive in their understanding and acceptance of gender and sexuality. With the intersection of race and ethnicity, familial and cultural values inevitably influence how queer immigrant and refugee youth navigate their identities; an awareness of these factors can inform how mentors and leaders utilize resources to better support those students.

ARYSE's LGBTQIA+ Initiative aims to support the needs of queer immigrant and refugee youth through consistent programming and mentorship. One example is the Queer Youth Space (QYS), a consistent, dedicated program space for ARYSE's queer immigrant and refugee youth and allies. A collaboration between Jeff Zeng and PRYSE Academy 2021 Co-Directors Kareenna Oner and Meg Booth, QYS met 1-2 times each week during camp to discuss LGBTQIA+ topics, including mental health resources, queer representation in the media, and artistic expression.

QYS became a community and continued after PRYSE Academy. Currently, it is co-facilitated by Jeff, Kareenna, and ARYSE youth leaders. It meets twice a month on weekends, with programming centered around queer experiences in immigrant and refugee communities. Recent programming included mapping out dreams for our future, and watching LGBTQIA+ films that celebrate queer joy.

Leading up to the QYS pilot, ARYSE partnered with and learned from experts at Dreams of Hope, a Pittsburgh-based performing arts organization focused on creative expression for queer BIPOC youth. An organization that aligns with ARYSE's arts-centered programming, Dreams of Hope serves as an additional resource for queer BIPOC-related topics through the lens of art. During PRYSE Academy 2021, Dreams of Hope facilitated a workshop for counselors about best practices for working with queer BIPOC youth.

In the future, the LGBTQIA+ Initiative will continue to host the Queer Youth Space, organize regular staff trainings, and ultimately position ARYSE as a welcoming space for queer immigrant and refugee youth. To accomplish these goals, the team remains active on social media and in communication with local organizations and partners. Our hope is that Pittsburgh becomes a place where queer immigrants and refugees feel celebrated and a strong sense of belonging.

*Jeff Zeng & Kareenna Oner*  
Queer Youth Space Founders and Co-Facilitators

## In the News

ENGLISH AS SECOND LANGUAGE STUDENTS IN PITTSBURGH PUBLIC SCHOOLS 'LEFT OUT OF THE EQUATION' FOR ONLINE LEARNING

PITTSBURGH CURRENT, OCT 23

“THE STUDENTS ARYSE SERVES ARE ALSO STRUGGLING WITH REMOTE EDUCATION LANGUAGE BARRIERS AND LACK OF TIMELY TRANSLATED INFORMATION FROM THE DISTRICT.”

ADVOCATES SAY REMOTE TEACHING PUTS ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS IN AN IMPOSSIBLE SITUATION

NPR WESA, OCT 26

“FOR SEVEN MONTHS SHARIFA HAS BEEN AT HOME WITH HER FAMILY. THE 18-YEAR-OLD ATTENDS A PITTSBURGH PUBLIC HIGH SCHOOL AND LIKE HER PEERS, HAS BEEN LEARNING REMOTELY SINCE MARCH,

WHEN THE DISTRICT MOVED ONLINE TO SLOW THE SPREAD OF THE CORONAVIRUS. SHE'S LEARNING ENGLISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE AND SAYS THE DISRUPTION IN HER LEARNING HAS BEEN CHALLENGING AND FRUSTRATING.”



PHOTO CREDIT PITTSBURGH CURRENT



VIRGINIA ALVINO-YOUNG/90.5 WESA

# PRYSE Academy 2021



PRYSE Academy 2021 offered a hybrid model camp experience in response to ever-changing health and safety realities, as well as student and family input. This hybrid approach grew from the innovative virtual programming of the previous summer and supported over 80 campers. A diverse team of ARYSE administrative staff, 15 counselors (including 3 alumni), and 14 counselors-in-training (CITs are current high schoolers who are PRYSE Academy alumni) also created new solutions to provide weekly in-person opportunities for students to connect with us and each other, safely.

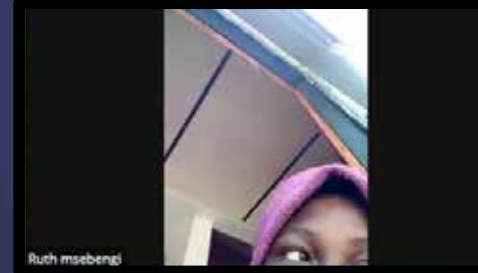
Virtual classroom assignments were made on the basis of students' grade in school and length of time in the U.S. Each classroom met for 1 hour each day, Monday through Wednesday. There were 3 middle school classes and 3 high school classes, 1 of each which were designated for newcomer students who had been in the U.S. for less than a year. Each classroom had 10-16 students, and most classrooms had interpreters who helped students participate in discussions. Classes were not held on Thursdays or Fridays, as those were our in-person program and staff development days respectively.

- 80+** CAMPERS
- 15** COUNSELORS
- 14** COUNSELORS IN TRAINING
- 3** MIDDLE SCHOOL CLASSES
- 3** HIGH SCHOOL CLASSES
- 10+** STUDENTS PER CLASSROOM



Following class time, students spent an hour in clubs. Clubs were designed according to students' expressed interests, including storytelling, media, anime, future planning, and movement & wellness. There was also an Open Room for students to spend their time socializing or exploring other interests. For those who wanted to spend the time developing their English language skills, ESL tutoring was also offered during this time. This year also marked the pilot of ARYSE's Queer Youth Space, which facilitated conversations and activities for LGBTQ+-identifying and allied campers. Students were allowed to switch between clubs each day, diversifying their interests along the way.

Virtual days ended with an hour of creative workshops. Unlike clubs, students dedicated their attention to one workshop throughout the summer in order to delve more deeply into projects. This year we publicized an open call for workshop proposals and received a record number of applications from impassioned local artist-educators. One workshop offered this year was Magazine Making, facilitated by local publishing company iGeneration Youth. Another workshop was Fashion Design, facilitated by the Andy Warhol Museum. Other workshop topics included photography facilitated by Kelly Lanzendorfer, art facilitated by Zoe Scruggs and Lou Tanden, and dance facilitated by Kaleb Kenner.





On Thursdays, rain or shine, campers and counselors gathered in Schenley Park for a day of in-person camp. Local youth sports non-profit, Open Field, facilitated soccer and local musician, Hugo Cruz Machado, hosted two sessions of Afro-Cuban drumming. In addition to these offerings, we also had volleyball, jumprope, arts and crafts, and games that the students could rotate between. And naturally, the summer wouldn't be complete without a water balloon toss and some Rita's Italian ice!

On Saturday, August 7th, we hosted the PRYSE Academy Final Showcase. The showcase is an ARYSE tradition and is a culmination of student projects created throughout the summer. This year, we were so grateful to be able to host the final showcase in-person once again! Students, staff, families, community members and partners all gathered at the amphitheater in Crafton Park to witness the force of students' passions and creativity manifested in song, dance, personal testimonies, photography displays, henna art and storytelling. It was a spectacular event that was a perfect ending to camp.

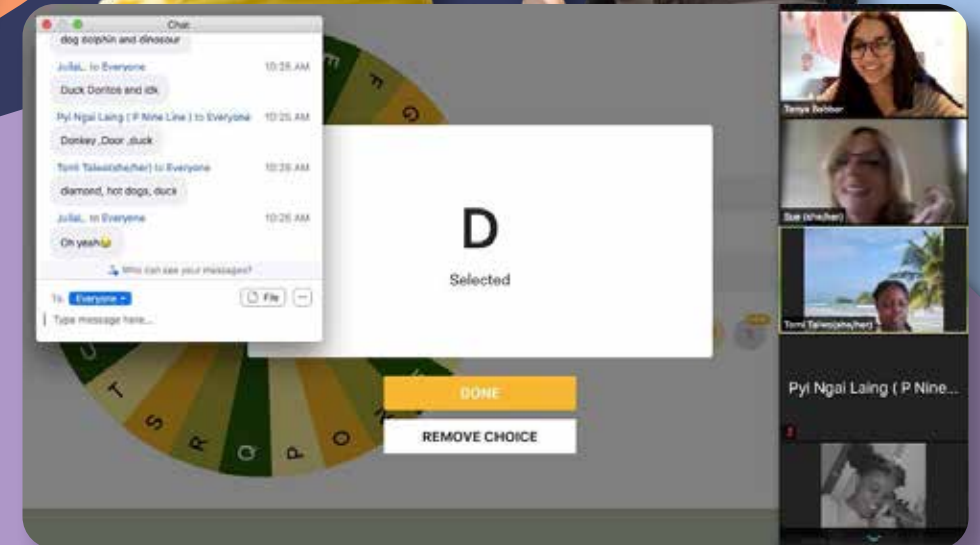
We value the opportunity we had as co-directors of PRYSE Academy and recognize the uniqueness of this experience and community. This summer pushed us not only to envision meaningful ways to support and share spaces with young people, but also to work within a network of people to implement shared visions. We were intentional about centering student voices and frequently consulted members of the Youth Steering Committee (YSC) as well as students themselves to guide program decision making.

This summer was a powerful reminder of the contagious energy and purpose PRYSE campers offer not only to ARYSE, but to Pittsburgh and beyond. We were fortunate to work with such a dynamic team of people who share a commitment to creating spaces for refugee and immigrant youth to thrive. Thanks to the possibility of a hybrid camp model, this summer allowed us to be in-person again; something we've greatly missed during the past few years. We can't emphasize enough the importance of this summer camp as a place that encourages relationship building, identity exploration, and self-actualization. We are excited to see how PRYSE will grow and develop with each new iteration.

*Meg Booth and Kareenna Oner*

PRYSE Academy 2021 Co-Directors

# PRYSE 2021



# Youth Steering Committee

Currently in its fourth year, ARYSE's Youth Steering Committee (YSC) aims to hone students' leadership skills to help the organization make important decisions, such as providing input in hiring staff, curriculum development and activity planning, and best practices for supporting newcomers. In addition, the YSC facilitators lead professional workshops for committee members like resume building, career development, financial management, and public speaking.

During the 2020-2021 academic year, the YSC met bi-monthly on Zoom. The YSC meetings kicked off with the traditional PRYSE Academy feedback session and then goal-setting and programming requests for the rest of the school year. Initiated during PRYSE 2020, the collaboration between the YSC and Pittsburgh's City Theatre continued. YSC members met with City Theatre staff and other artists to discuss a census project to draw immigrant, refugee, and BIPOC communities to complete the nationwide census. Tomi Taiwo was selected to film and perform a monologue, which was distributed on social media.

The YSC also engaged in several professional development opportunities. For example, the resume-building workshop helped YSC members understand best practices for formatting and adding content that reflects their dynamic leadership experiences. Second, a college and professionals panel was assembled to allow YSC members to ask questions about college, and how to navigate the job market after graduation.

In the spring of 2021, the YSC played a major role in selecting the co-directors for PRYSE Academy 2021; they were present during virtual interviews, where they asked questions and provided feedback about each candidate. The YSC also provided advice in the overall structure and programming of the summer camp such as the camp curriculum and creative workshops.

**ARYSE'S YOUTH STEERING COMMITTEE (YSC) AIMS TO HONE STUDENTS' LEADERSHIP SKILLS TO HELP THE ORGANIZATION MAKE IMPORTANT DECISIONS, SUCH AS PROVIDING INPUT IN HIRING STAFF, CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT AND ACTIVITY PLANNING, AND BEST PRACTICES FOR SUPPORTING NEWCOMERS.**

New to the 2021/22 school year, ARYSE is training new YSC facilitators with an emphasis on youth leadership. Therefore, long-time ARYSE students Sharifa Mkomwa and Rahwa Angesom were chosen to shadow current co-facilitators, Jeff Zeng and Kareenna Oner at each meeting, equipping them with the skills to lead interdependently in the future.

In the upcoming year, the YSC is excited to work on two major projects. First, in collaboration with professor Josué Lopez from the University of Pittsburgh and funded by the Pitt Momentum Grant, YSC members will explore a research question of their own choosing that falls within economic mobility and/or arts education. Second, the YSC is collaborating with Danielle Obisie-Orlu, a Pitt student and former PRYSE counselor, to develop their public speaking and leadership skills. Students will meet with Danielle on a monthly basis to develop their oratory abilities and become more confident leaders. We are so proud of our students and excited for another great year!

*Jeff Zeng & Kareenna Oner*

Youth Steering Committee Co-Facilitators

*Sharifa Mkomwa & Rahwa Angesom*

Co-Facilitators-in-Training



# 2020 Seniors

## CONGRATULATIONS



**Ani Anyesi  
Wilondja,**  
Brashear  
High School



**Apolina Aochi,**  
Brashear  
High School



**Sylvie Eca,**  
Brashear  
High School



**Sharifai  
Mkomwa,**  
Brashear  
High School



**Deborah Mwadi,**  
Brashear  
High School



**Shimene Ngulu  
Yongecha,**  
Brashear  
High School



**Fartoon Saleh,**  
Brashear  
High School



**Tomi Taiwo,**  
Taylor Allderdice  
High School



**Florence Uwizeye,**  
Baldwin High  
School

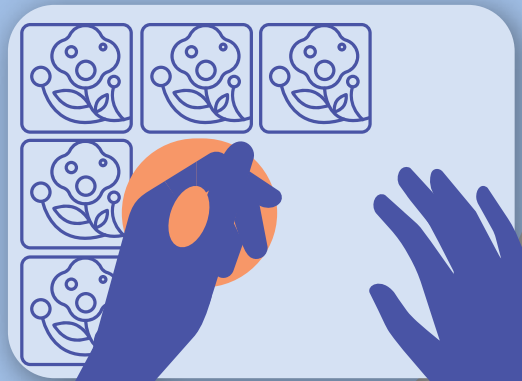
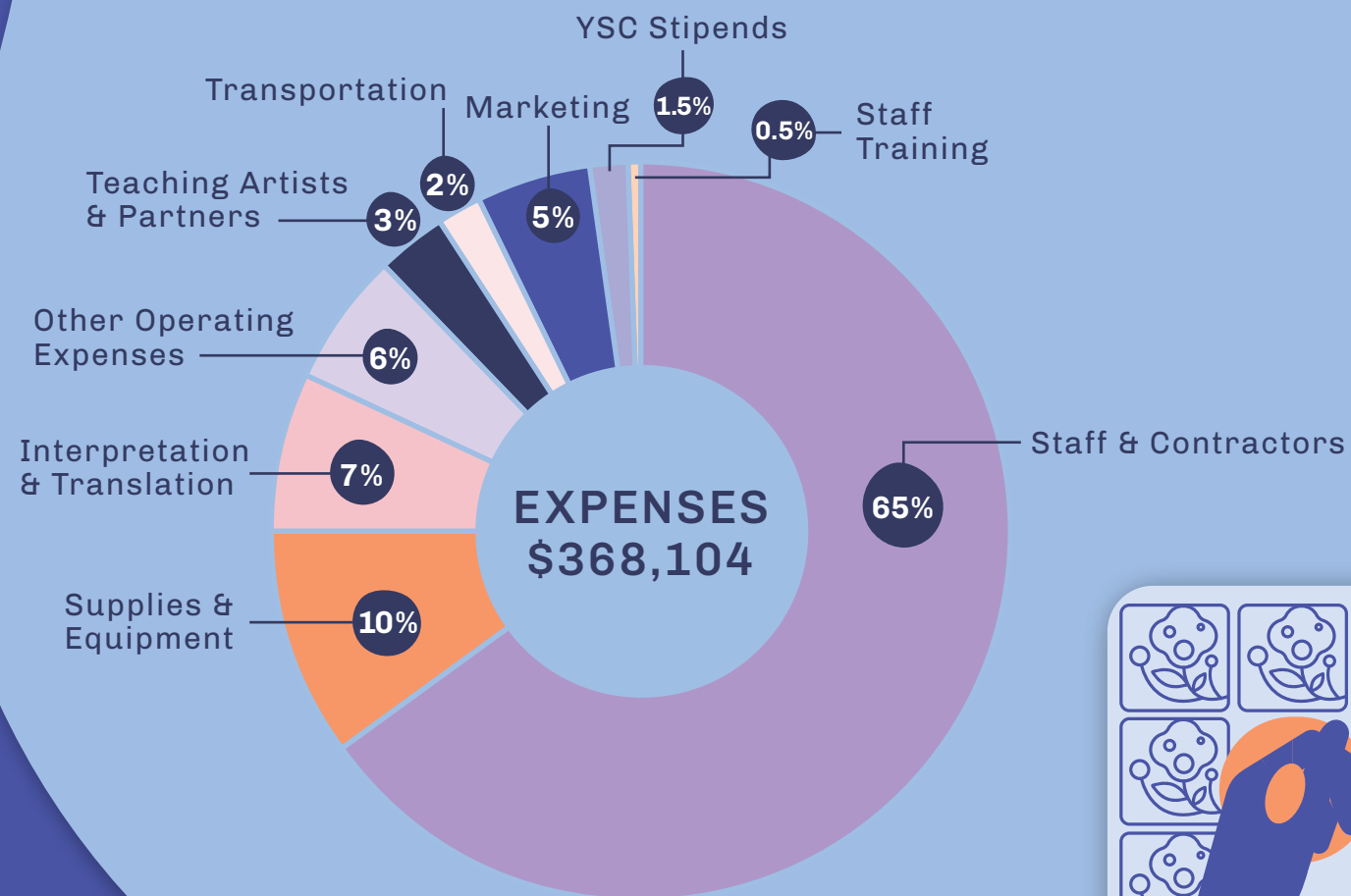
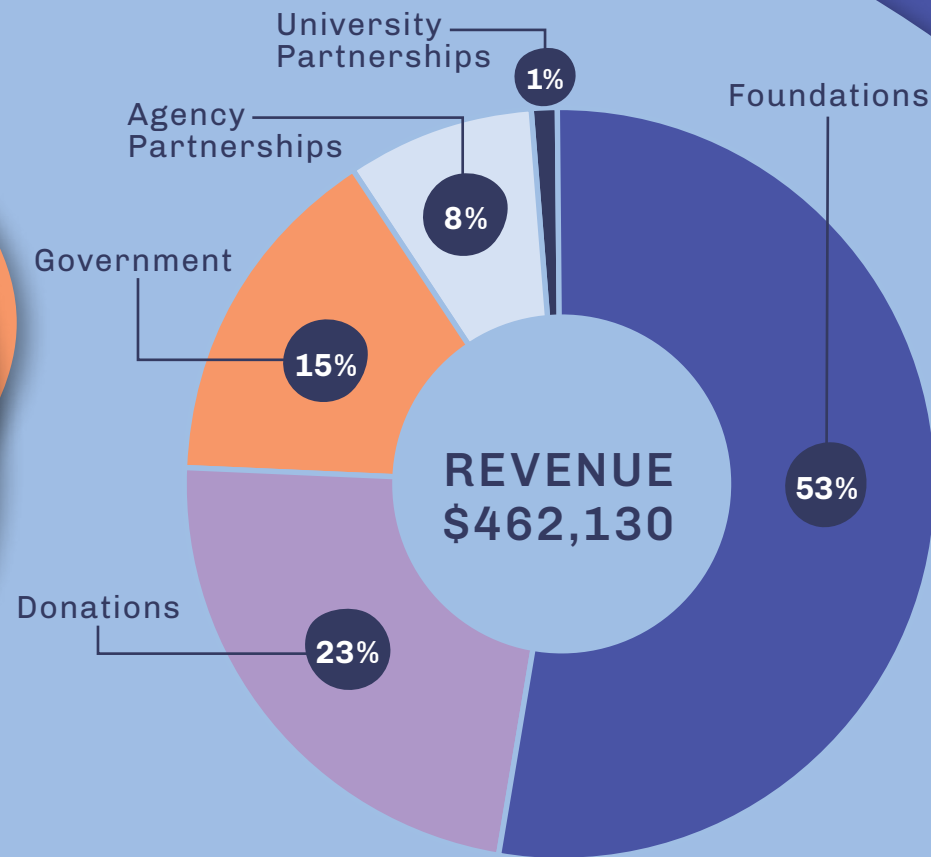


**Mwenebatu  
Wilondja,**  
Brashear  
High School



**Wilondja  
Wilondja,**  
Brashear  
High School

# Financials



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HANSEN FOUNDATION



McELHATTAN FOUNDATION

OPPORTUNITY FUND



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