


Dear Friends and Neighbors,

Now in my second year as program director of Youth First Mentoring, I continue to be inspired by the commitment and dedication of our mentors, board members, mentees, community partners and our donors, big and small. Our 26-year-old mission statement is as relevant today as it was back in 1998: **we exist to help youth develop into confident, responsible, and positive members of our community through the support of high-quality mentoring relationships.**

In the past year, I have met dozens of individuals and organizations committed to helping youth thrive in this time of uncertainty. One thing we all know is that when kids have strong and supportive adult relationships, their resilience grows. Though there are many challenges facing families and youth in our communities, by working in unison toward a shared goal of improving lives, we can make change happen. Whether you are called to financially support our mission, volunteer to become a mentor, refer a child, or help us spread the word, your support matters and makes our community a better place for youth.

Over the course of the next year, I look forward to fulfilling our mentoring mission, which enhances the quality of life for our youth, builds strong ties in the community, and lets kids know they are important and valued. I hope this annual report helps you learn more about what we do and inspires you to continue to support us in our work helping children in Central Vermont.



Sally Russell, program director

Program Highlights FY23-24

Our mentees are central to everything we do, and they do some amazing things! Last year one 8th grade mentee composed a beautiful violin piece that was performed at Montpelier High School in front of a full audience. Another is celebrating her 10th year with her mentor and was invited to return for a second year as a Mentor Ambassador advocating for mentoring at the Vermont Statehouse. Another sophomore mentee received a full scholarship to attend the Counselor-in-training program at Camp Downer because they admired his leadership skills and want him to be part of their program next year! Eight younger mentees attended overnight camp through our partnership with Camp Downer, an important rite of passage that develops independence and resilience. Six of our older mentees spent two Saturdays alongside their mentors in activities designed to help them identify future goals. Our mentees are certainly poised for bright futures!

In addition to our mentoring mission, Youth First Mentoring has always sought to provide high quality enrichment experiences for our mentees, whether that is helping afford school field trips to distant cities, or hosting group events at local venues such as the Barre Opera House. This year, we received a generous grant from the Vermont Children's Fund, which will provide financial support for monthly group activities based



Mark and Zach at Fairbanks Museum

around the themes of service, wellness, art, science, and nature. Be on the lookout for our group planting trees with the Friends of the Winooski or watching the night sky at Fairbanks Museum! You may even catch us bowling! Enrichment activities open mentees to new ideas, build knowledge, and develop skills that will inform their life choices.

Five additional caring and dedicated adults in our community committed to mentoring this year, which means five more children and



Edda and Jan

families benefit from the gift of mentoring. One new match, Edda and Jan, spend their time exploring local swimming holes, hiking, and cooking together. Their adventures are just beginning!

Last year, Youth First Mentoring . . .

Served
22
youth
with over
700
hours
of direct 1:1
support.

Provided mentors with **two training workshops**, one on neurodiversity and the other on mental health safety for youth, which will amplify mentoring's protective factors.



Maribeth and Gracie celebrated 10 years of their mentor-mentee relationship

With financial support from the United Way of Northwest Vermont, YFM **expanded to Barre City** with a kickoff event in May 2024. Over fifty community members warmly welcomed us and our mission to expand mentoring to youth in Barre City.

*“Mentoring has been **one of the greatest experiences in my life**, and I’ve had quite a few great experiences.”*

—adult mentor



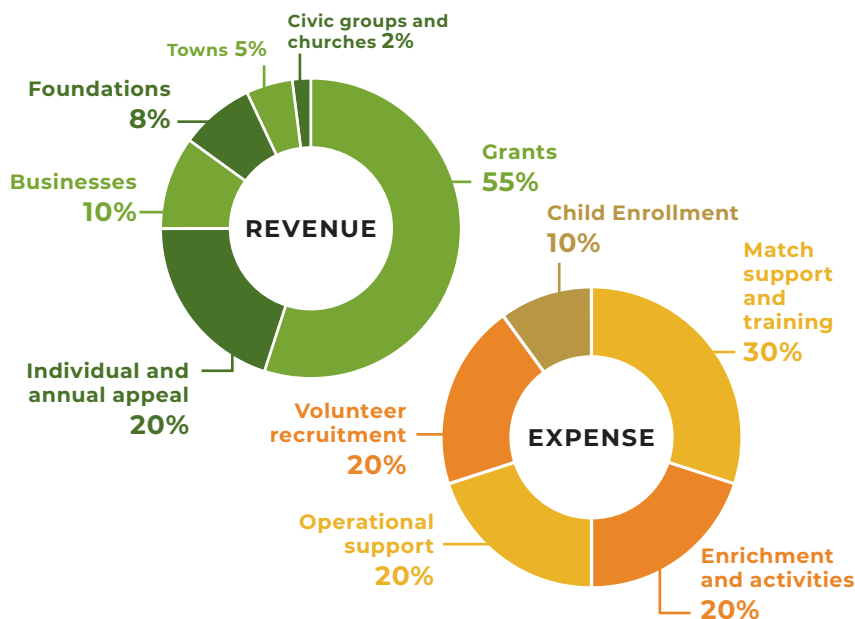
*“This year I taught my mentor **how to understand me more.**”*

—youth mentee

*“Wayne [mentor] taught my son so much **about life** and learning to love others through adversity.”*

—parent

Financials FY23–24



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With Gratitude

None of this would have been possible without the dedication and support of our volunteer mentors and advisory board, families and children who open their hearts to mentoring, and our many individual, business, civic, and grant donors who heed the call to invest in local children.

A special thanks to these donors:

Ben & Jerry's
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