

GRASSROOTS HEALTH

2024

ANNUAL REPORT

"BEYOND THE NUMBERS"



WE HAVE THE #s,
BUT IT'S THE STORIES
& THE PEOPLE THAT
MAKE GRASSROOTS
HEALTH SPECIAL



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DEAR SUPPORTERS,

2024 was quite a year! Writing this letter always brings a wave of reflection and emotion. For all of us at Grassroots Health, this work is more than just a job—it’s a community, a mission, and a family. And like any family, this year we celebrated big wins, created powerful memories, faced new challenges, and said some tough goodbyes.

One of the biggest shifts in 2024 was the departure of our incredible Founder, Tyler Spencer. After years of visionary and selfless leadership, Tyler passed the torch, leaving behind a thriving organization built on his belief in the power of young people and the value of meeting communities where they are. Thanks to his legacy, Grassroots Health continues to center youth, celebrate health in bold new ways, and reimagine what prevention and health promotion can look like—led by athletes, rooted in relationships, and focused on impact.

Stepping into the role of Executive Director, I felt both excitement and nerves, but I quickly realized how strong and thoughtful our foundation is. Tyler’s leadership made this transition smooth and opened the door for us to evolve our staffing model. By deepening our investment in part-time student-athlete leaders and with our incredibly passionate full-time staff, we now reach more than 1,700 youth annually, and are doing so more efficiently. In 2024, we trained 200+ athletes, and for the first time, more than half of them completed three or more programs each semester. This tells us two things: our athletes are rising to meet the moment, and when systems are built with and for them, they thrive—and so do our middle school students.

The spirit of our youth, the passion of our volunteers, and the power of our community continue to propel Grassroots Health forward. As the funding landscape shifts, we’re especially grateful for the corporate and foundation partners who understand that deep, local work doesn’t always make headlines, but it does change lives. Your belief in our mission allows us to keep showing up, year after year, with programs that are responsive, reliable, and rooted in love.

Looking ahead to 2025, we’re feeling energized. We’re welcoming new team members, continuing excellence from staff who have been with us for years, refining our model, aiming higher with evaluation, and reaching for more ambitious fundraising goals. Most importantly, we’re committed to keeping the heart of this work—youth, health, and equity—front and center as we grow in DC and beyond.

Thank you for being part of this extraordinary family. We couldn’t do this without you.

With gratitude,
Jane Wallis

MISSION

TO ADVANCE HEALTH
EQUITY IN CITIES BY:

Using sports to re-imagine health education in middle schools.
Mobilizing NCAA athletes as health educators & role models for youth.

VISION:

A world where schools everywhere have the support they need to prioritize health and physical education as core subjects for students.

'24 Community Members

- 1773 Youth in Programming
- 85 Parents/Caregivers
- 236 Athletes Trained
- 4 Grassroots Connect Events
- 15 Community Providers

Impact Snapshot:

An external review of 4 years of impact data (2021–24) highlights the consistent positive impact of GRH programming on youth. These reports show **statistically significant pre- to post-program growth** based on surveys measuring youth competency in the listed areas:

Health Literacy, Self Efficacy, Attitudes & Values, Communication Skills, and Stigma-Reduction

FULL HISTORY OF IMPACT

- 2009**
Founding athletes (Georgetown)
- 2010**
Howard & GW athletes join in
- 2013**
Major national recognition and full-time staff begin
- 2015**
Randomized Controlled Trial demonstrates effectiveness
- 2017**
AU athletes join the mission
- 2018**
Program expansion: Grassroots Fam, Grassroots Connect, Nutrition, and Mental Health curriculum create a pipeline and holistic approach to health ed.
- 2020**
Virtual programming to maintain programs through Covid Pandemic
- 2022**
Rebrand – from The Grassroot Project to Grassroots Health
- 2023**
Pilot program in Philly shows curriculum is impactful/accepted in a new geographic context
- 2025**
A new evaluation and strategic plan is born - [\[see p. 17\]](#)

665

Total Programs Facilitated

2,288

Total Athletes Trained

12,462

Total Students Reached

CURRENT SCOPE

Each school partner has signed a minimum 3-year MOU to work with Grassroots Health

- 1

Center City PCS – Brightwood Campus **[69]**
- 2

Center City PCS – Capitol Hill Campus **[85]**
- 3

Center City PCS – NoMa Campus **[67]**
- 4

Center City PCS – Petworth Campus **[79]**
- 5

Center City PCS – Shaw Campus **[71]**
- 6

E.L. Haynes PCS **[222]**
- 7

KIPP DC AIM Academy **[293]**
- 8

KIPP DC Valor Academy **[255]**
- 9

KIPP DC WILL Academy **[219]**
- 10

Mary McLeod Bethune Day Academy PCS **[61]**
- 11

Meridian PCS **[153]**
- 12

Perry Street Preparatory PCS **[140]**
- 13

Washington School for Girls **[59]**
- 14

American University **[28]**
- 15

George Washington University **[60]**
- 16

Georgetown University **[13]**
- 17

Howard University **[127]**

[# of students or athletes in School Year 24-25 programs]

OUR

We are here because many DC middle schoolers, especially those who belong to BIPOC communities, are navigating urgent health challenges without the tools or support they deserve. In neighborhoods rich in culture but too often excluded from preventive care, we show up with something different: consistent, joyful, and relevant health education that centers students' lived experiences.

WHY

We meet students and their families where they are and help grow the protective experiences they need to thrive; equipping them not just with facts, but with agency, connection, and hope. Our work responds directly to what both the data and our communities tell us:

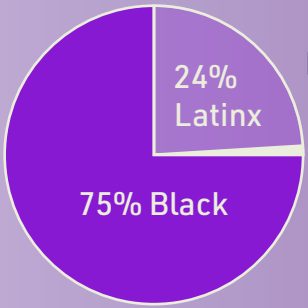
1/3 DC youth (ages 10–17) are considered overweight or obese *(USDA SNAP-Ed)*

Up to 70% of DC youth don't get enough physical activity *(State of Play, 2023)*

Fewer than **5%** of DC schools fully comply with the Healthy Schools Act's health education requirements *(DC Appleseed)*



28% of DC middle schoolers have seriously considered suicide, rising to 38% of Black and 40% of Latinx students *(FPI, 2023)*



99% of DC teen births involve Black (75%) or Latinx (24%) youth, with over half occurring in Wards 7 and 8 *(DC Health, 2023)*

SITUATION:

Access to health services and knowledge about them are key drivers of strong community health. **Yet in DC, fewer than 5% of public and charter schools meet the city's health education requirements.**

Without education, youth and families lack awareness of available resources and their importance—contributing to rising challenges in nutrition, sexual health, and mental health.

Inputs:

College Athletes
(trained volunteer health educators)

DC Public and Public
Charter School
Partners

Grassroots Health
Curricula & Program
Materials: impact-
tested, games based
(nutrition, sexual, &
mental health)

Grassroots Health Staff,
Board, Advisory Groups

Outputs:

PARTICIPANTS

of middle school
youth

of partner schools

of complete sessions
of nutritional, sexual,
and mental health
programming

of parents receiving
Grassroots Fam
programming

of students attending
Grassroots Connect
events

ACTIVITIES

Attendance & data
collection

Schools sign
agreements (MOUs)
with Grassroots Health

Fidelity & engagement
reports recorded in
Salesforce

Athlete training &
development

School stakeholder
initiatives

THEORY
OF
CHANGE



Outcomes:

SHORT TERM (Psychosocial)

Improved Nutritional Health Outcomes
(from pre to post survey)

- Nutrition Health Literacy
- Nutrition Values
- Nutrition Expectancies
- Self Efficacy

Improved Sexual Health Outcomes
(from pre to post survey)

- Sexual Health Literacy
- Self Efficacy
- Attitudes/Beliefs
- Communication

Improved Mental Health Outcomes
(from pre to post survey)

- Mental Wellbeing
- Outcome expectations for talking about personal mental health
- Outcome values for talking about personal mental health
- Self-Efficacy to understand and impact personal mental health

LONG TERM (Behavior)

Nutrition Behavior Changes

- Eat balanced meals with a variety of nutrients
- Positive relationship with nutrition & overall wellness
- Increase in whole foods consumption
- Increase in water consumption

Sexual Health Behavior Changes

- Delayed sexual debut
- Choose to have sex utilizing: contraception, condoms, testing
- Increased consent
- Decreased abusive sexual behaviors

Mental Health Behavior Changes

- Utilize mental health services when necessary
- Increase practice of personal mental health promotion at home (stress management, mindfulness, emotional regulation)



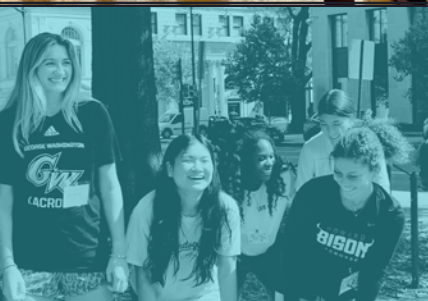
IMPACT:

Advancing health equity in communities by giving young people the knowledge and resources to make healthy decisions and choices for themselves.



"I like that we can speak our minds comfortably without being judged for it."

- Middle School Student



"When I found Grassroots Health, I was met with friendships and an opportunity for community outreach that felt very fulfilling."

- Françoise Hall, HU Swim



"My favorite thing was when we played games but it was like we were inside the human body."

- Middle School Student



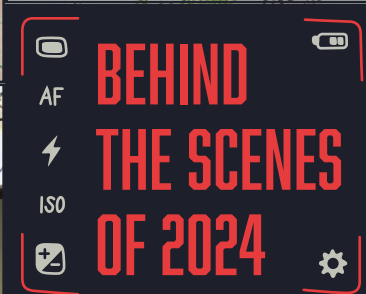
"I'm grateful to my teammates, who invited me to join Grassroots. Being a student-athlete can be so demanding, but everyone at Grassroots understands that and is incredibly supportive."

- Catherine Hany, AU T&F



"My favorite was playing games that related to every day life problems."

- Middle School Student



"I liked that everyone in my groups felt comfortable to talk about our emotions and feelings."

- Middle School Student



CURRICULA OVERVIEW

The scope of health topics that we cover (in order of each consecutive session) can be found below. Each topic has been gamified to support our kinesthetic, sports-based model of teaching health education.

6TH GRADE: Nutritional & Physical Health

HEALTH TOPIC	GAME
1 Intro to Nutrition & Physical Health	Tag style-game
2 Intro to Major Nutrient Groups	Capture the Flag & Review of Food Labels
3 Balanced Diet & Major Nutrient Groups	Relay Race: hurdles, speed ladders
4 Vitamins & Minerals	Team-Building Balance Activity
5 Sugar, Fat & Salt	Team-Bowling Game
6 Healthy Breakfast	Soccer
7 Navigating Corner Stores	Life-Size "Hungry, Hungry Hippos" & Food Labels Review
8 Puberty, Influences & Advertising	Sharks & Minnows
9 Understanding Barriers & Challenges	Dodgeball & Running Relay Race

7TH GRADE: Sexual Health

1 Making Your Own Choices	4-Corners: running activity
2 Hormones & Introduction to SH Terms	4-Way Dodgeball
3 Juggling Decisions Around Sex & Vulnerability	Teamwork Activity: Throwing/Catching
4 Sex Education Basics	Team Relay Race
5 Navigating SH Challenges	Cat & Mouse: extreme tag
6 HIV Basics & Risk Reduction	Running Activity & Throwing/Blocking Game
7 Transmission of STIs/HIV	Handshake Activity & Team-Building Activity
8 Unplanned Pregnancy Prevention	Prevention Soccer
9 Influences & Peer Pressure	Tug-of-War
10 Consent & Communication	Three-Legged Race

8TH GRADE: Mental Health

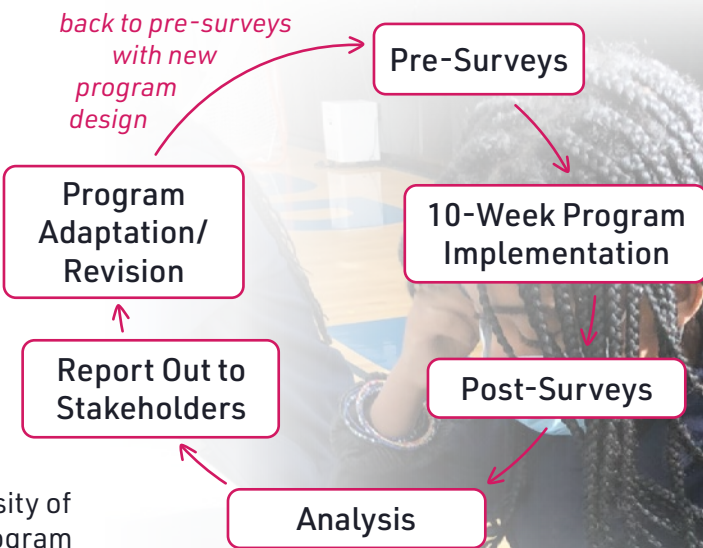
1 Mental Health Stigma	Trust Fall & Flag Football
2 Stress Identification (acute vs. chronic)	Stress Football
3 Coping Mechanisms	Capture the Flag
4 Emotional Regulation	Spike-Ball & Parachutes
5 Gender & Sexuality	Relay Race
6 Interpersonal Skills & Healthy Relationships	Volleyball
7 Assertive Communication & Boundary Setting	½ Court Basketball
8 Problem Solving & Conflict Resolution	Skill-Building Circuit: various sports
9 Mindfulness & Goal Setting	Journaling & Dodgeball

OUR APPROACH TO EVALUATION

Grassroots Health has historically aligned its approach to data quality and rigor with academic standards that define what "counts" as evidence. The widely accepted, nonprofit evaluation hierarchy considers a gold standard of large sample sizes, validated survey instruments, and experimental research designs. We value this type of science for its rigorous, consistent, and transparent measurement of program impact.

We also recognize that science—while striving for objectivity—is not immune to bias and can reproduce institutionalized and unequal power structures.

As an organization that centers student voices and inclusivity in our work, we strive to incorporate a diversity of perspectives about what program impact means. Our work is strongest when we gather many interests, resources, and perspectives together for a common mission.



OUR ACTION IN 2024:

We engaged a data scientist from [ETR](#) (Education Training Research), a leading national evaluation organization, to analyze program data from 2021 to 2024. The analysis found that **all three curricula had a statistically significant impact on youth outcomes**. While we have collected over 4,000 data points to date, we recognize the need for a more formalized research study to strengthen the rigor of our findings and share our impact more broadly with the public health and education communities.

We hired our first-ever **Evaluation Manager, Cara Geschu**, to lead this effort and updated all surveys in 2024 as the first step toward developing a quasi-experimental design for 2025.



Cara Geschu



Dr. Tamara Henry

We also welcomed **Dr. Tamara Henry** to our Board of Directors to provide strategic guidance as we advance our evaluation goals.

WHAT'S NEXT?

In the coming 2025-2026 academic year, GRH is further improving our data collection and quality by implementing a quasi-experimental design. This change will allow us to publish our findings and show local and national stakeholders the impact that the Grassroots Health curriculum has on students.

As we collect even higher quality data, we plan to disseminate our findings to more schools and stakeholders locally and around the country. By doing so, any community could adapt our unique curriculum design and programming, ensuring that as many students as possible receive appropriate, impactful, and fun health education.

FULL-TIME STAFF



Jane Wallis
Executive Director



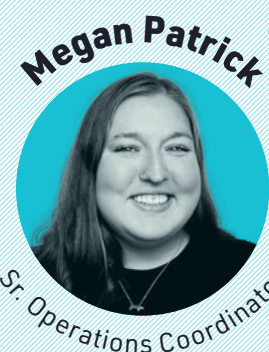
Cara Geschu
Evaluation Manager



Maria Ortiz*
Development Manager



Asia Horne
Sr. Program Coordinator



Megan Patrick
Sr. Operations Coordinator



Darien Thomas
Program Manager

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

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2024 LEADERSHIP

Madison Steskal
Communication Coordinator

Camryn Curtis

Carson Hinton

Celeste Noraian

Chris Williams

Daniel Dunac

Erin Farrell

Jasmine Warren

TRAINING FELLOWS

Andres Franquez

Gabby Kaczorowski Maxine Engel

Nydia Arnold

Rita Mazumder

Simonne Legette

Sarah Patton

Training Fellows are athlete volunteers who spend eight weeks over the summer deeply engaging with the curriculum, strengthening their facilitation skills, and participating in professional development. Upon completion, they are qualified to lead Athlete-to-Coach training sessions during the school year.

SITE COORDINATORS

Site Coordinators are experienced athlete volunteers who help coordinate programming alongside fellow volunteers, teachers, and Grassroots Health staff. This role deepens leadership development opportunities for our athletes and expands our capacity to serve more schools and youth.




WHERE ARE THEY NOW?

Catch Up w/ Alumni



Georgetown University '23

 Women's Rowing


NOW: Associate Digital Director for DC Mayor Muriel Bowser's Office

AUBREY BENZING-PLOURDE

"My time with GRH instilled a deep-rooted love and respect for the first city that ever truly felt like home: Washington, DC. **Communicating critical health topics to middle schoolers sparked my passion for public service—and for the power of clear, thoughtful communication.** Today, I have the privilege of continuing that work on a citywide scale, on behalf of DC Government."



Howard University '23

 Men's Track and Field

NOW: Lieutenant in the US Air Force, pursuing JD at Rutgers Law School

KEVON ELZEY

"It takes a village to raise someone... it takes a team to make a leader.' **GRH was part of the village that helped raise me** when I was an 18 year old freshman at Howard, far from home. **They were also part of the team who made me into the leader I am now,** as a Lieutenant in the US Air Force and law student at Rutgers Law School."



Howard University '23

 Football

NOW: Accepted into Medical School, current NFL player for Chicago Bears

IAN WHEELER

"**Being able to lead and teach others during my time with GRH has made me a better student, both in school and in my career.** I'm able to take the lessons that I learned from my peers, students, and teachers and apply them to everything that I do."



Howard University '24

 Women's Soccer

NOW: Pursuing MD at the University of California, San Francisco

MARLI BERRY

"As a GRH volunteer, **I learned how to be an effective health educator by translating complex medical topics into accessible, easy-to-understand information** which is an essential skill for physicians. I've continued to prioritize health education in my work as a Schweitzer Fellow, where I focus on empowering women through targeted health education initiatives."



American University '21

 Cheer


NOW: Teaching Early Childhood P.E. at KIPP DC Discover Academy

HALEY MAHON

"My time with GRH inspired me to prioritize my own well-being and share the importance of healthy habits with others. **Now, as a PE teacher, I'm committed to promoting health and wellness throughout the DC community.** I'm grateful that GRH gave me the foundation to keep myself and my students active, empowered, and connected."



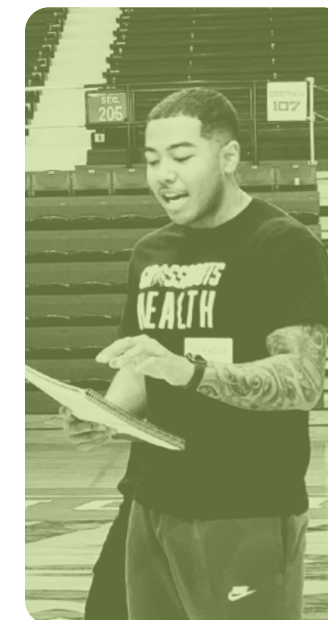
George Washington University '24

 Women's Rowing

NOW: Volunteering in Peace Corps as a Youth Health Facilitator (Panama)

CELESTE NORAIAN

"My time with Grassroots Health deepened my passion for health education, youth empowerment, and advancing health equity. **As a Peace Corps Volunteer, I've been able to apply those values in an international context—**continuing to learn through cultural humility while working alongside communities to promote healthier futures."

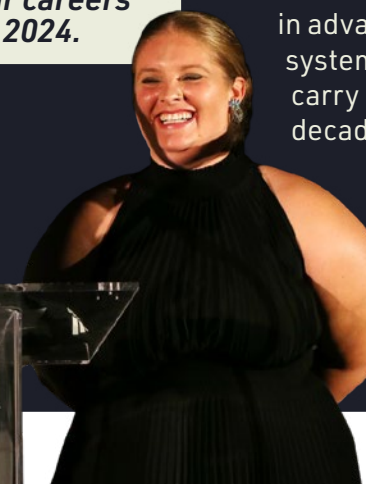


We are proud to celebrate two incredible leaders who transitioned to the next chapters of their careers in 2024.

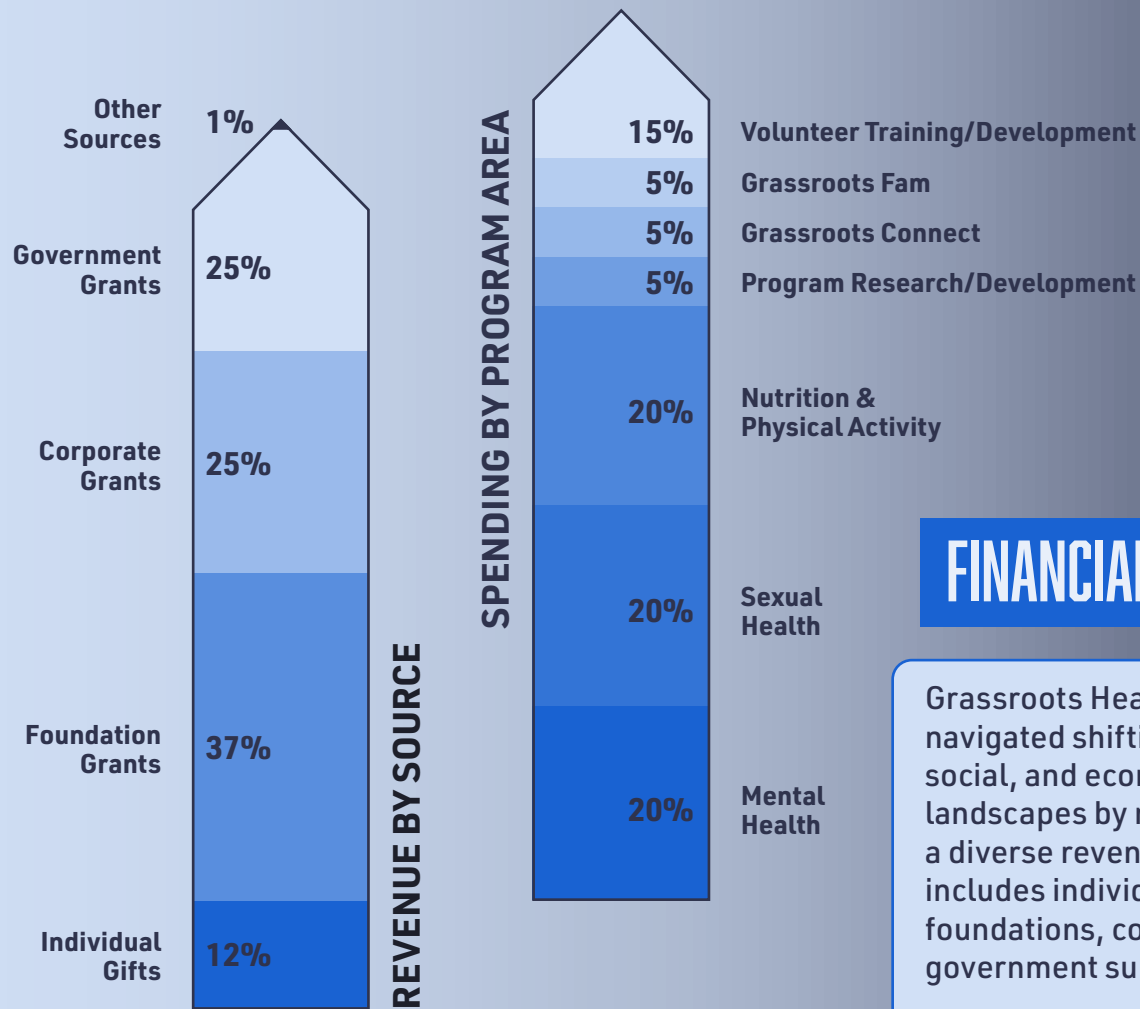
Tyler Spencer, our fearless Founder, devoted the last 16 years to building Grassroots Health with unwavering passion, strategic vision, and a deep commitment to growth and sustainability. His leadership shaped the organization into what it is today.



Mackenzie Jones, a powerhouse behind the scenes, played a vital role in advancing our mission, building the systems and infrastructure that will carry Grassroots Health into its next decade of impact.



While we deeply miss them both, we are grateful for their lasting contributions and know they've left Grassroots Health stronger than ever.



FINANCIAL UPDATES

Grassroots Health has navigated shifting political, social, and economic landscapes by maintaining a diverse revenue base that includes individual donors, foundations, corporations, and government support.

In 2024, contributions from long-standing annual donors—along with several exciting new partnerships—helped make the year a success. Our supporters not only fuel our programmatic impact through financial contributions but also strengthen our organizational infrastructure through mentorship, collaboration, and valuable connections.

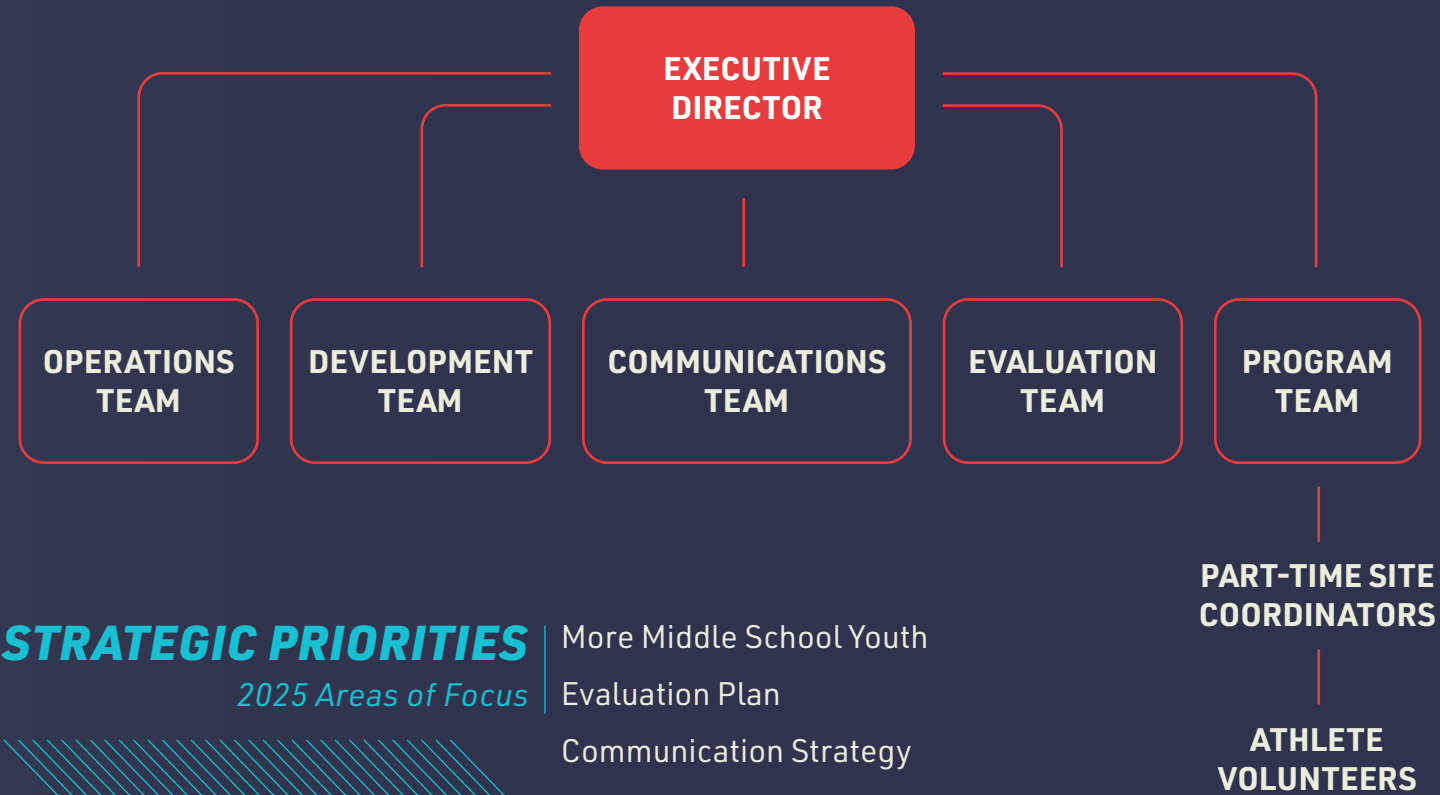
We're proud to allocate over 80% of our annual budget directly to programming. While our three flagship curricula represent the core of that investment, we remain deeply committed to supporting parent engagement, volunteer development, program evaluation, and meaningful community partnerships.

LOOKING FORWARD

Looking ahead to 2025, Grassroots Health is focused on developing and implementing a new strategic plan that builds on our 2020 strategic plan, with an emphasis on sustainability and diversifying revenue in response to a shifting public health, education, and policy landscape. In addition, the organization is launching a quasi-experimental study to strengthen its evidence base and investing in a new Development Manager to help secure long-term funding aligned with the strategic plan.

ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE:

Grassroots Health will expand it's staff to include development and communications full time while continuing the expansion of part-time site coordinators.



STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

2025 Areas of Focus

- More Middle School Youth
- Evaluation Plan
- Communication Strategy
- Financial Sustainability
- Organizational Stability
- Reputation and Strategic Influence

PUBLIC DISCLOSURE OF REVENUE, EXPENSES, & ASSETS

REVENUE		FY 2023	FY 2024
Contributions and Grants		\$1,101,287	\$695,644
Program Service Revenue		\$0	\$0
Investment Income		\$0	\$0
Other Revenue		\$2,750	\$5,903
Total Revenue		\$1,104,037	\$701,547
EXPENSES			
Grants and Similar Accounts Paid		\$0	\$0
Benefits Paid to or for Members		\$0	\$0
Salaries, Other Compensation, Employee Benefits		\$738,653	\$562,345
Professional Fundraising Fees Total		\$0	\$0
Other Expenses		\$325,112	\$224,410
Total Expenses		\$1,063,765	\$786,755
Revenue Less Expenses		\$40,272	-\$85,208
ASSETS			
Total Assets		\$528,352	\$438,736
Total Liabilities		\$21,650	\$17,242
Net Assets or Fund Balances		\$506,702	\$421,494

2024 DONORS,
THANK YOU!

\$100,000+

Bender Family Foundation
Gilead Sciences

\$50,000 - \$99,999

Department of Behavioral Health
Kaiser Permanente
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Shout-Out to Our 2024
COACHES CIRCLE MEMBERS
(bolded in the list of donors)

These individuals gave in 2024 via monthly recurring donations to
Grassroots Health. If you'd like to join this group of supporters, you can
take the first step by making a recurring donation [HERE](#)

\$500 - \$999

Annika Bannon
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Josh Sattel
Kristi Abbate
Linda Abbey
Patrick Nero
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Tanya Vogel
Tyler Ranalli

\$250 - \$499

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Sidney Cooper
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commitment from our
individual supporters who drive
Grassroots Health forward.

We wouldn't be here without you.

GRASSROOTS HEALTH

Annual Report Design & Creation by [Madison Steskal](#)

✉ madisonsteskal@gmail.com

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DC DEPARTMENT OF PARKS AND RECREATION

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SPORTS**

 **Fair Chance**
EVERY CHILD SUCCEEDS

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formerly Catalogue for Philanthropy



<https://grassrootshealth.us/>



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Grassroots Health



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