



**RISING  
GROUND**

*Paths to positive change since 1831*



**ANNUAL REPORT 2020**

## helping children, adults, and families thrive!

### mission

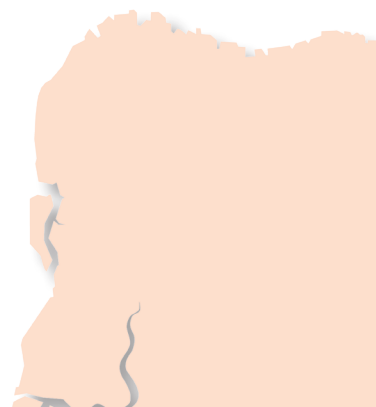
Driven by the belief that each of us can thrive when life has hope and opportunity, Rising Ground provides caring support and proven paths to positive change, helping children, adults, and families rise above adversity.

### vision

Rising Ground envisions a future for New York where every child has an equal opportunity to succeed; where vulnerable individuals and families have the resources and support they need; where people with disabilities can access opportunity and fully participate in their communities; and where all are supported as they navigate life's challenges and positively direct their lives.

### values

Rooted in an unshakeable belief in every individual's ability to change and grow, we value **accountability**, **connection**, **tenacity**, and **service** as we help children, adults, and families pursue their dreams and goals.





# Together, we forge positive paths all across New York City

- Foster Care, Residential & Shelter Programs
- Family Stabilization Programs
- STEPS to End Family Violence Programs
- Early Childhood Centers
- Special Education & Community Schools
- Justice for Youth & Families Programs
- Intellectual / Developmental Disabilities Services
- Community Health Initiatives
- Administration

**50**  
programs

**71**  
sites across New  
York City & Westchester

more than  
**10,000**  
direct program participants

more than  
**25,000**  
family members supported

## Your support is vital as we continue creating hope and opportunity for New York!

2020 was certainly not like any other. While the norms for all of us were upended, the health, mental health, and economic impacts of the pandemic have been real and uneven.

Despite the many challenges, Rising Ground continued to provide vital supports and resources to New Yorkers — more than 25,000 children, adults, and families who face various forms of adversity that have been compounded by the hardships of the global health crisis and its economic impacts.

Since 1831, we have continually evolved to meet the needs of New York City communities. Moments in our 190-year history have required Rising Ground and our supporters like you to step up to overcome exceptional circumstances. To meet the needs of this particularly trying time required resilience, innovation, and dedication. This has been true of our direct-care staff who showed up and continued to provide support for those in our residential programs, as well as our educators who engaged students remotely utilizing technology and innovative approaches, and our community services co-workers who provided clinical and concrete support by phone, video, and in homes and outdoors to meet children, adults, and families where they need us most.

In these pages, we share some of the stories of how Rising Ground was able to continue creating positive paths forward for New Yorkers despite the challenges of this year. We also share some updates about how we have been able to evolve and add new programs during this time. And of course, in this Annual Report, we recognize and thank our donors, funders, and volunteers.

To continue our life-affirming work required the unwavering support and generosity of donors like you. In a time when funding is among the many uncertainties we face, your support is as vital as ever.

**Thank you!**



**Matt Del Percio**  
Board President



**Alan Mucatel**  
Chief Executive Officer

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Left: Donors cheers as emcee Chuck Nice presents our 2020 Virtual Gala in September. Right: Board Member Margery Ames presents a memorial tribute to former Board Member Larry B. Thompson as part of our Virtual Gala.



## Rising Ground Leadership

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*\*deceased*

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## meeting needs in challenging times

Rising Ground touches the lives of more than 25,000 New York children, adults, and families. In 2020, while how we had to operate changed due to the pandemic, our enormous, positive impact has remained. The Covid-19 pandemic shut down so much in the city. Yet, the needs we address did not go away. For many, the health and economic crisis made difficult circumstances even harder. New challenges arose as both our staff and the people we support faced an unprecedented level of uncertainty. Throughout the year, we were able to adapt, evolve, and meet the needs of the community and those we support. Amid the pandemic, we even continued to expand our programs and apply our experience and expertise to new populations.

### ParentChild+ expands to serve a new neighborhood community

Rising Ground's ParentChild+ program gives parents with young children the skills and resources to best serve as their children's first and most important teacher. Over the years, we have worked with low-income families in the Bronx and expanded our reach by working with childcare providers and reaching homeless and housing-insecure families. In 2020, we expanded these same services to the East New York neighborhood of Brooklyn, bringing our successful implementation of this national program to a new borough.



### delivering on promises

ParentChild+ is an early literacy program in which Early Learning Specialists visit the home of families with young children twice a week, bringing books and educational toys to advance young children's literacy. Team members model for parents reading, play, and interactions that promote learning and early development. During the pandemic, educational visits were conducted virtually, but our staff were also able to provide a safety net for many at-risk families. More than 95 percent of the families we support live below the poverty line and were particularly vulnerable to health and economic risks associated with the pandemic. Parents shared concerns and needs with our staff. In response, ParentChild+ Coordinator Jeanette Morocho (right) organized special deliveries to families. In addition to the books and toys needed to complete the program, the team provided necessities like diapers, food, and protective gear. "During the pandemic, we were able to be in contact with our families on a weekly basis, so we got to see a picture of what their needs were," explains Morocho. "Many of them were worried about food. Most of them had someone in the home who lost a job. They were worried about how they were going to provide for their families. I am thankful that we have been able to provide basic-needs items to help these families during this difficult time."



ParentChild+



## stepping in & stepping up

Baby Kaylin was 8 days old when she was placed in the home of foster parent Sharon Henry in October 2019. When the Covid-19 pandemic quickly sent New York City into lockdown months later, the family hunkered down to keep Kaylin and themselves safe. However, Ms. Henry was hospitalized in April 2020 for pre-existing health conditions and, while in the hospital, contracted Covid-19. She never came home to her family and to continue caring for Kaylin. Her sister, Marjorie Allen, both lived in the same house and, as her emergency backup, had received foster parent training. Case Planner Olukayode Ojo stayed in constant contact with the family throughout the period, but he had anticipated finding a new home for Kaylin when he received news of Ms. Henry's death. "The first thing the family asked me was 'Mr. Ojo, we'd like to care for this baby until she returns to her mother, is it possible?'" he recalls. "So, we made it happen. She's done an excellent job, and I'm proud of them and grateful to them." Throughout the pandemic, Mr. Ojo and Ms. Allen have cared for Kaylin and kept her safe as they coordinate increased interaction with her mother, who is on track to reunify with her daughter. "I was expecting my sister to come back home to take care of Kaylin, but that never happened. Sharon meant the world to us, and I can't believe she's gone," Ms. Allen says. "We love this baby so much, and this would have been my sister's wish — to see Kaylin stay here until she goes back home with her mother."



### New initiatives in foster care put parents front and center

Rising Ground launched two new initiatives in our **Family Foster Care** program that further assist parents as they reunite with their children. We grew our co-parenting work. This effort sees foster parents not just caring for children during a particularly unstable time in their young lives but also assisting parents by keeping them engaged with their children while separated. Although an innovative approach in New York City, shared parenting has been shown to reduce stress for children in foster care, speed family reunification, and enhance the family's ability to stay together after a child returns. In 2020, we were one of two organizations selected to partner with the New York City Administration for Children's Services, to employ parents who themselves have been involved in the foster care system as advocates to support parents with children in foster care. Having personally experienced the intrusion of the child welfare system in their own lives and the accompanying emotions — anger, resentment, frustration, and sorrow — that families often feel when a child is removed from them, parent advocates are uniquely able to support parents on their journey to being reunited with their children.

### Foster Care amps up efforts to help youth access higher education

In 2020, we increased the resources, skills training, and advocacy available to young adults as they leave foster care as well as supporting former foster care youth up until age 26. We amped up our supports to youth who may pursue college education. Recognizing that historically only 20 percent of youth in foster care go to college and only 3 percent graduate, a College Specialist has joined our team. In addition to providing support and guidance to 17 youth already in college, she arranges college tours for high school students as they explore opportunities available to them.



### ***Excellence In Practice***

*As our Family Foster Care team helps children, youth, and families thrive, our efforts are not going unnoticed. The New York City Administration for Children's Services honored two team members with 'Excellence In Practice' awards. Case Planner Olukayode Ojo was honored in September 2020 for his dedication to baby Kaylin, as described above. Co-Parenting Facilitator Michele Favale was honored in February 2021 for her work implementing the co-parenting and parent advocate efforts.*



*At the start of the pandemic, staff from many programs reported that families they support were experiencing concerns about access to food and financial hardship. Many community partners stepped in to donate meals and food staples, which were made available to families through our Soundview Family Resource Center (below) and other programs.*



### Biondi School expands offerings to children with autism

Our **Biondi Education Center** opened two classrooms for children with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) this year after receiving approval from the New York State Education Department. Rising Ground offers early childhood support to very young children exhibiting signs of autism in our preschools, especially at the Children's Learning Center, which focuses on supporting such children and their families. By opening a Kindergarten and first grade classroom, with plans to continue growing to subsequent grades, children from our special education preschools can now stay in the Rising Ground family. Biondi already has a culture of providing hands-on, individualized support to students with learning disabilities, emotional disorders, and other health impairments. Biondi has added to its team teachers trained and experienced in working with students with ASD who will offer educational and therapeutic services.

### Justice For Youth & Families programs support youth leaving Rikers

As Covid-19 posed an increased risk for incarcerated populations, New York City moved to fast-track efforts to get youth out of Rikers. With a track record of success in helping youth with past involvement in court and juvenile justice systems, Rising Ground was selected to provide **Functional Family Therapy (FFT)** services to youth and their families to assist with the re-entry into the community. Through this evidence-based model, clinical teams from our Family Stabilization and Justice for Youth & Families departments are working with older teens and their families to build a healthy family foundation. Each family starts with an assessment of their family dynamics and the specific needs to be addressed, and we engage families on an ongoing basis for 3-4 months as youth return home and into the community.

## keeping connected

Our My Next Move credible messenger mentoring program provides guidance and positive support for youth who have been involved with, or who are at risk of involvement with, the juvenile justice system. The Justice For Youth & Families program has met for years in both the Bronx and Brooklyn to bring young people together to discuss their lives and explore how to make positive decisions. The groups are led by "credible messengers," mentors who have been through similar experiences. The program also allows youth to engage in group discussions and create systems of support among themselves. When the Covid-19 pandemic started, in-person meetings were no longer possible, so our mentors quickly adjusted to make sure the youth we support stayed connected, engaged, and inspired to continue on positive paths. In addition to hosting meetings online, Coordinator Calvert Tonge and mentors Chazz Lynes and Nimotali Edidi delivered special incentives, essential items, and take-out food (one of the highlights for many youth of the weekly meetings) out into the community. As restrictions eased over time, groups came back together for socially distanced meetings outside. "It has been so important to keep the youth engaged during the pandemic," says Tonge. "We have formed relationships with the youth that allow them to trust us and look to us for guidance. To lose those connections, especially during such an uncertain and trying time, there would definitely be a risk of youth feeling lost, isolated, or to backtrack into past patterns that led to their court involvement in the first place."

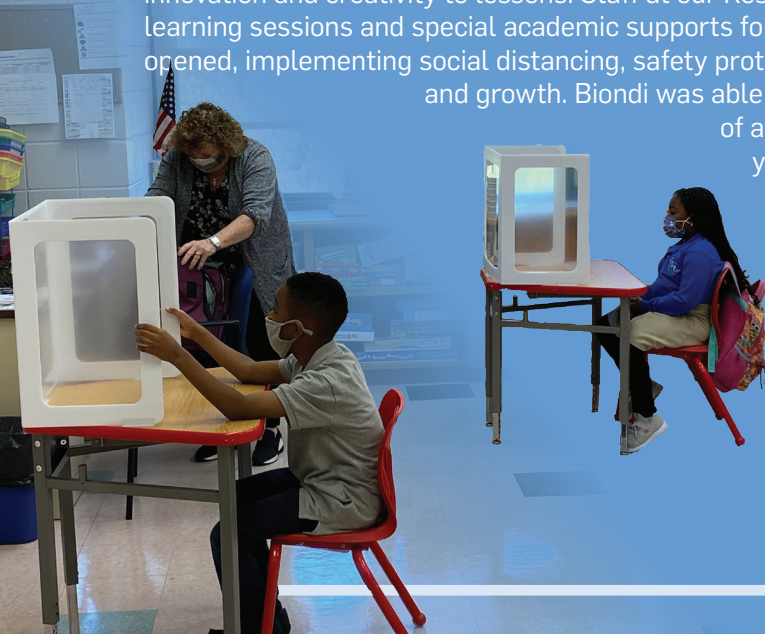


**Justice For Youth  
& Families**

## learning despite disruption

The Covid-19 pandemic brought New York City to a halt, but for our schools and programs that work to encourage proper development, a delay to progress was not an option. From our special education preschools to our Biondi Education Center and Residential Treatment Center, teachers, clinicians, and other staff jumped into action to make sure children, youth, and families were equipped to keep learning. In accordance with guidelines set by the New York State Education Department, all schools went online. Teachers worked with parents and brought innovation and creativity to lessons. Staff at our Residential Treatment Center set up socially distanced virtual learning sessions and special academic supports for youth who stayed on campus. With time, our schools reopened, implementing social distancing, safety protocols, and adapted activities that fostered continued education and growth. Biondi was able to do so without having to close school a single day because

of a Covid case. "Across our educational programs, we support young people who face a number of challenges — learning disabilities, emotional and behavioral challenges. In the work we do with students of all ages, we work to set goals and constantly make steps forward," says Dr. Angela White, Superintendent of Schools. "The pandemic posed a huge risk to the progress of so many of the students we support. Our staff demonstrated so much dedication and innovation in making sure we were able to continue that progress, first online and then in person, all while keeping everyone safe."



### Rising Ground launches restorative justice program for survivors of gender-based violence

Expanding our gender-based violence services, including our historic work with criminalized survivors, Rising Ground launched our **Restorative Justice** program this year. Through the initiative, we provide community-based programming and supervision for survivors of gender-based violence in lieu of a jail sentence. Our services are designed to meet the complex needs of survivors using two interventions - *Seeking Safety* and *Beyond Violence* - along with a variety of evidence-based trauma treatment approaches. *Seeking Safety* is an evidence-based, present-focused counseling model to help people attain safety from trauma. *Beyond Violence* is an evidence-based curriculum for women in criminal justice settings with histories of violence. These two models are specifically designed to enhance clients' decision-making, self-management, and interpersonal skills. The program will provide post-mandate services and keep them engaged for an additional 6-12 months.

### JustUs supports young women of color at risk of criminalization

At the intersection of systemic racism and gender bias, women of color — particularly those who identify across the LGBTQ+ spectrum — experience disproportionate representation among those involved in juvenile and criminal justice systems. In response, Rising Ground is partnering with Girls for Gender Equity (GGE) to launch JustUs, New York City's first ever gender-responsive diversion program for girls and other gender-nonconforming youth who are involved with or at risk of involvement in the juvenile justice system. JustUs is a three-year demonstration project funded by New York City and inspired by years of work by the Task Force on Ending Girls Incarceration in New York City. "We begin with a holistic process to understand who each human is, where they are coming from, what they need, what they want, and how we can best support them so that they can thrive," says Helianis Quijada Salazar, Director of JustUs, "We then draw up a plan for what each girl needs to make that a reality."

*As in-person activities went online, technology became essential for the people we support across programs to continue to learn, grow, and thrive. We were fortunate to get some help from community donors who donated tools to make sure their neighbors were able to continue participating in these programs. Empire BlueCross BlueShield provided a \$10,000 grant to provide laptops for people in our Day Habilitation program for adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities. The Loyalty Foundation and Robin Hood Foundation donated computers to youth in our schools and early childhood programs.*

# financial statements

FOR THE FISCAL YEAR ENDING JUNE 30, 2020

**Rising Ground is funded through several public sources, as well as through the generous support of our Board of Directors, individuals, foundations, and corporations.**

Public funding sources include New York City Administration for Children's Services, New York City Department of Education, New York City Department of Youth and Community Development, New York City Human Resources Administration, New York City Department of Probation, New York City Mayor's Office of Criminal Justice, Center for Court Innovation, New York City Council, Office of the New York District Attorney, New York State Office of Children and Family Services, New York State Education Department, New York State Office for People With Developmental Disabilities, New York State Office of Victim Services, U.S. Department of Health & Human Services Office of Head Start and Office of Refugee Resettlement, Medicaid, Westchester County Department of Social Services, Westchester County Department of Health, and local school districts of Nassau, Westchester, Rockland, Putnam and Orange counties, and the state of Maine's Department of Social Services.

## FINANCIAL POSITION

### Assets

Cash & Cash Equivalents	\$1,136,921
Investments	\$12,210,772
Accounts Receivable	\$19,777,992
Contributions Receivable	\$232,185
Prepaid Expenses	\$2,693,561
Assets Limited as to Use	\$6,628,951
Other Assets	\$4,422,728
Fixed Assets - Net	\$28,662,264
<b>Total Assets</b>	<b>\$75,765,374</b>

### Liabilities & Net Assets

<b>Liabilities</b>	<b>\$63,905,915</b>
Current Liabilities	\$38,124,152
Long-Term Liabilities	\$25,781,763
<b>Net Assets</b>	<b>\$11,859,459</b>
Unrestricted	\$7,382,993
Restricted	\$4,476,466
<b>Total Liabilities &amp; Net Assets</b>	<b>\$75,765,374</b>

**Auditors: BDO USA, LLP**

622 Third Avenue, Suite 3100 • New York, NY 10017

A copy of Rising Ground's most recent audited financials is available upon request.



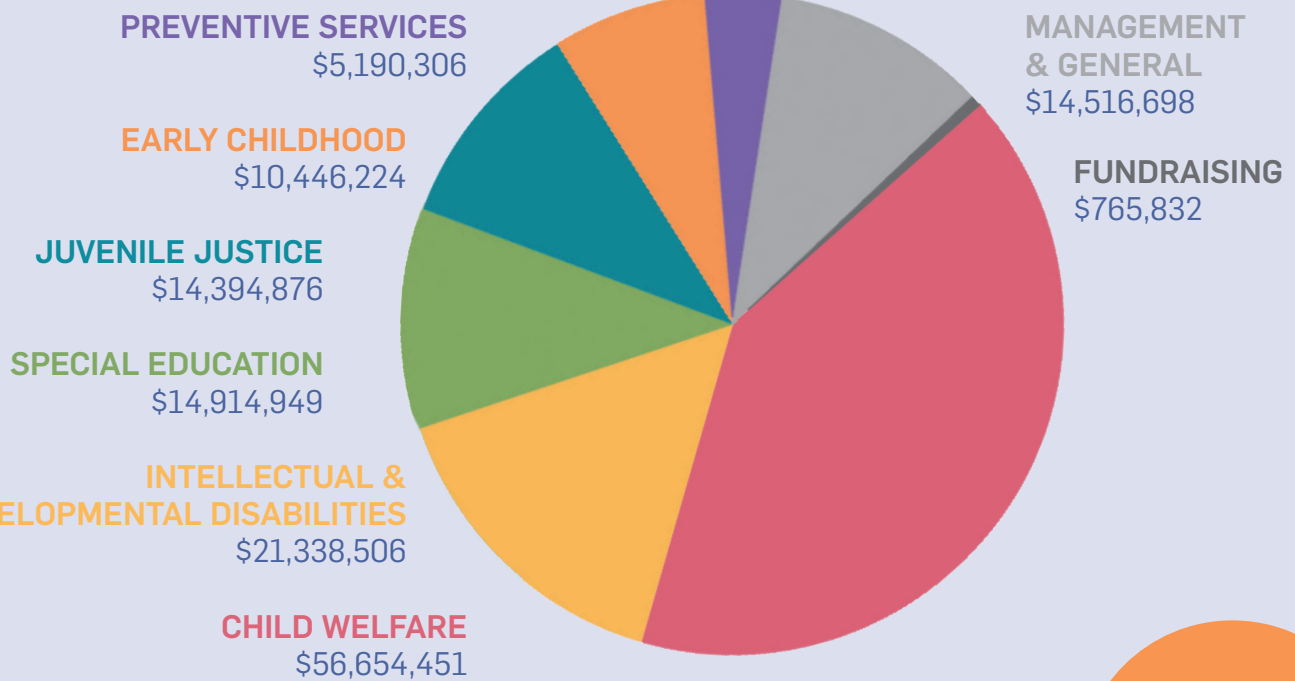
While a large portion of Rising Ground's funding comes from public contracts, individual and corporate contributions are critical to ensuring we can provide the highest quality of support to help New York City area children, adults, and families overcome adversity.

**Thank you  
for your support!**

Learn more and donate at  
**[RisingGround.org/Donate](https://RisingGround.org/Donate)**

## OPERATING EXPENSES

Program Services	\$122,939,312
Supporting Services	\$15,282,530
Management & General	\$14,516,698
Fundraising	\$765,832
<b>Total Expenses</b>	<b>\$138,221,842</b>



**89%**  
of funds received  
go to direct  
service

## Revenue & Other Support

Government Contracts	\$132,718,106
Individual, Foundation & Corporate Contributions	\$1,456,941
Special Events	\$380,919
Direct Costs of Special Events	(\$89,936)
Investment Income & Interest	\$635,913
Other Operating Income	\$1,209,778
In-Kind Contributions	\$120,312
<b>Total Revenues</b>	<b>\$136,432,033</b>

## donors

FOR THE FISCAL YEAR ENDING JUNE 30, 2020

### Rising Ground is deeply grateful to all our supporters and partners!

*We have made every effort to create an accurate report of donors for the period from July 1, 2019, to June 30, 2020. If we have inadvertently omitted your name or listed it incorrectly, please bring this to our attention at [Development@RisingGround.org](mailto:Development@RisingGround.org).*

#### \$100,000+

Anonymous  
Booth Ferris Foundation  
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## **SPECIAL THANKS!**

### **Thank you to our employees who took part in our Employee Giving Campaign!**

Rising Ground employees contributed more than \$50,000 this year. Funds from this campaign support special initiatives in our programs, as well as assist persons in need during emergencies.

Jennifer D'Agostino  
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 Rickie Daniels  
 Abigail A. David  
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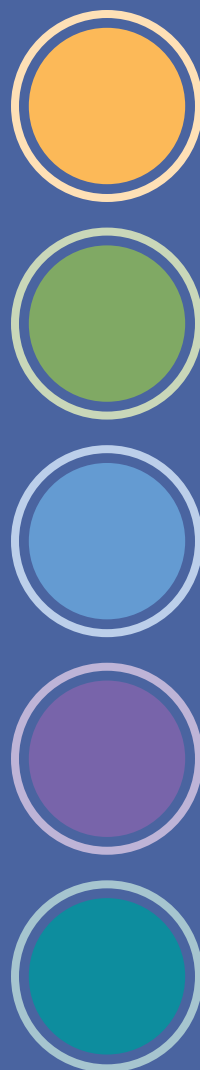
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