

so kids
SOAR

**ANNUAL
REPORT**

2024



Letter from the Executive Director

One of our longstanding values is “Build an Inclusive Community”: not just one that is beautifully diverse; moreover, one that thoughtfully includes the entire family and not just the participants of our programs. The So Kids SOAR community has organically grown and evolved since 2011; and our board and staff have always felt inclined to connect with not just the participants, but our parents/guardians and volunteers too.

I know that So Kids SOAR would never have made it to this point without the support of dedicated parents and volunteers. We only recently grew to a full-time staff of three. This organization is built on the inspiring people we serve and the dedicated parents and volunteers that strive to impact the world and change the narrative around differing abilities. And 2024 was a testament to how we all continue to work together to propel the So Kids SOAR Mission.

From pivoting our Parents Committee into a support network to creating a podcast run by our very own 2021 Your Path To Success graduate Michael that will highlight SKS community members (both of which will launch in early 2025)-- our

Letter from the Executive Director

As we reflect on 2024, we are filled with gratitude for the remarkable growth and impact of So Kids SOAR. This past year was a testament to the power of community, resilience, and innovation—values that have defined this organization since its inception. It is an honor to serve as Board Co-Chairs for a community that continues to evolve and expand in ways that touch so many lives.

At the heart of So Kids SOAR is a commitment to inclusivity—not just in words, but in action. The spirit of our organization is built upon the dedication of our participants, families, volunteers, and staff, all of whom play an invaluable role in fostering a space where everyone feels seen, supported, and celebrated. It is this collective effort that has propelled our programs forward and allowed us to reach new heights this year.

One of the most inspiring developments in 2024 was the evolution of our Parents Committee into a support network, providing much-needed connection and advocacy for families. Additionally, we are thrilled about the upcoming launch of our community-driven podcast, led by 2021 Your Path to Success graduate Michael. These initiatives are just two examples of how So Kids SOAR is constantly innovating to better serve our community and amplify the voices of those who make our work possible.

Your Path to Success remains a beacon of opportunity for our participants, ensuring that no one ages out of our community without continued support and resources. As we look ahead

community investment continues to reach new heights, just like a rocket. And this is because I have always believed in the collective power of an inspired group. And I have witnessed the impressive outcomes of this investment within our own community. It is a promise that I will always honor -- to always innovate and shift when it comes to our inclusive programming so that we are always serving our community as best we can. With more exciting ideas on the horizon and the potential to truly build a self-sustaining ecosystem through Your Path To Success--we are discovering more ways to empower our participants and their community. The ripple effects are endless.

Finally, with the passing of a few of our tenured participants over the last five years, I've truly come to understand the necessity of this 'village' that we have created. The Your Path To Success program was created in 2017 in response to offering more support once the participant had aged out or ended their time with us; therefore, we are always trying to find new ways to be there for all of our constituents.

With gratitude, Glenda



to 2025 and beyond, we are committed to strengthening and expanding this program, with the goal of creating a self-sustaining ecosystem that empowers participants to thrive in all aspects of their lives.

We are also thrilled to report that our volunteer engagement has continued to grow. In 2024, we welcomed over 250 new volunteers, a significant increase from previous years. Our commitment to volunteer retention remains strong, with nearly 60 volunteers returning year after year. This steady growth underscores the unwavering dedication of our SKS community.

Finally, we want to take a moment to honor the legacy of the participants we have lost over the past five years. Their impact on our organization is immeasurable, and their presence will always be felt in the village we have built together. This community is stronger because of them, and we will continue to innovate and adapt to best serve all those who are part of the So Kids SOAR family.

To everyone who has contributed their time, talent, and passion to So Kids SOAR—thank you. Your commitment is the reason we continue to grow, and we are excited to embark on another year of meaningful impact with all of you.

Sincerely, Will Cole & Christi Main



Christi Main

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The ripple effects of our vocational building program...

Want to see the ripple effects of our vocational building program, 'Your Path to Success (YPTS)'? College student Theo Johnson served as a YPTS mentor in 2022, in addition to assisting us with our prom in both 2021 and 2022. Since he began volunteering in 2021, Theo has created friendships with many of our participants.

Despite having moved on to college in 2023, Theo still found ways to give back (by creating our annual YPTS video since 2022) and staying in touch with his mentee Leonardo. Throughout the program, the two went to a Washington Commanders Game and Leonardo's own hockey games (where Theo cheered on his mentee to victory). "It means a lot to have someone who cares," he expressed

to Theo at the November 2022 graduation. Leonardo ended up going to a technical school right after our program concluded.

It's not only rewarding but inspiring to hear and reflect on Leonardo's story. This rocket will keep soaring high and sending these ripples all over the planet. The So Kids SOAR mission is to take our participants on a journey of self-realization of their potential. Each of our programs provides different types of empowerment; 1) social engagement through our adaptive clinics; 2) community service through our Holiday Program; 3) confidence building and career development through our Your Path To Success program. With So Kids SOAR, many of our children have the opportunity to be a part of a community where they feel important and validated.

"I thought you might like to know that Leonardo circled back with me over winter break (December 2024), and we met multiple times to catch up. We'd been in touch throughout the past three years, but reconnecting in person served as a reminder of how much our friendship has continued to grow even as we've begun to pursue career/educational goals. I'm sure you already know this, but YPTS creates meaningful and long-lasting friendships for its mentors and mentees, and I'm so lucky to see that realized in my friendship with Leonardo. Thanks!" - Theo Johnson



Our Mission

So Kids SOAR (SKS), a not-for-profit 501(c)(3), provides life-changing programs that empower youth with physical and developmental disabilities to Strive, Own, Achieve and Realize their potential.

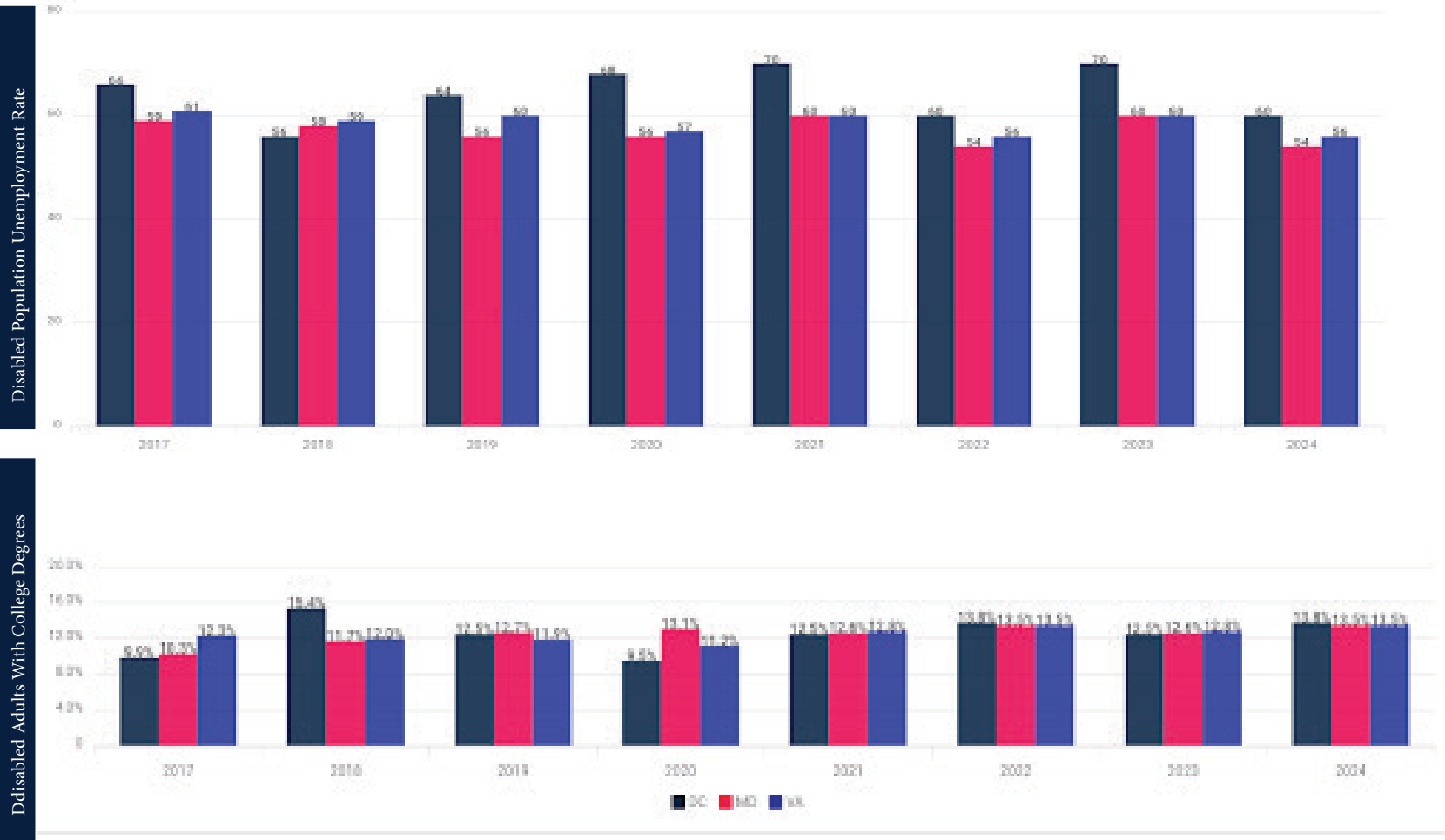
Our Vision

SKS enables participants to SOAR through a suite of adaptive programming that includes athletic, recreational, and skill-building activities. The self confidence and skills gained through these programs inspire each child to realize that their disability will not prevent them from fulfilling their potential.

Why We Exist

As with each year’s annual report, we like to educate our community and stakeholders on why our work is vital to youth with disabilities by analyzing the overall disability metrics landscape. If you have followed our journey, you know that YPTS graduate Kierra Johnson was offered a full-time position with us at the beginning of 2024 and as our Programs Analyst she has created a weekly series about our impact through data, entitled “See Kierra’s Stats”. In fact, it is Kierra who has put together this very page of information. Kierra once again reviewed the Annual Disability Statistics Compendium and compared it with previous year compendium data to demonstrate the importance of our work through data.

First, let’s celebrate the fact that in 2024, it was reported that the unemployment rate for DC has gone down by 10%. MD and VA have remained the same, highlighting the importance of programs such as Your Path to Success (YPTS), where we continue to put young adults with disabilities in positions to land more jobs or continue into higher education. Kierra also wanted to highlight that more people with disabilities are going to college and coming out with degrees from four year universities (as seen in the second chart). This is a slight increase from 2023, which arguably shows that by implementing YPTS, we can provide another avenue for our young adults to explore instead of going straight into the workforce.



Why We Exist

Special Ed Breakdown 2025				
	3-5	6-11	12-17	18-21
US	471,167	3,347,361	3,183,915	339,845
DC	1,021	6,667	5,854	777
MD	9,161	48,720	46,678	5,015
VA	10,591	75,445	77,659	8,940

This is a breakdown of the special education students served in schools by age (across the nation). There is still a huge opportunity for So Kids SOAR to expand and serve as many youth in this demographic as possible. Our programs work in tandem with school programs to build confidence in our participants and help excel even more in their classrooms. The below testimony along with our post program survey results show that our So Kids SOAR participants feel more confident in school after attending our programs.

“My son Mekhi was having some difficulties navigating his energies and motivational efforts with his classes as a new Middle Schooler. After having a parent teacher conference with a few of Mekhi’s teachers they suggested for him to take more charge and own his educational schoolwork while navigating through any difficulties. Basically try and try your best no matter what.

When the So Kids SOAR program had their summer football event at Howard University in 2024, it was Mekhi’s 1st event with the program and he had an Amazing time with the football players because he loves the sport.

When the Horseback riding event took place in late Fall of 2024, Mekhi was needing a motivational pick me up for the endurance of his school classes. So, as his Mom, I gave my son what I call a “Me Time Motivational Break”. SOAR was that Break! When he returned back to his classes from his 1st time riding a horse his whole confidence, demeanor and attitude changed to a more “Can Do This Attitude”.

The 2024 Hockey Capitals event was a significant confidence booster for him as well. It was a reminder learning experience that no matter how many times you fall down on that ice, get back up and try again, Mekhi did just that and without complaint. Mekhi was so happy to have the support all along the way with each of these events and it’s been such a confidence booster still for him that even his teachers have seen an improvement over the past few months in his his attitude and are very excited for him to excel in his educational endeavors even more.

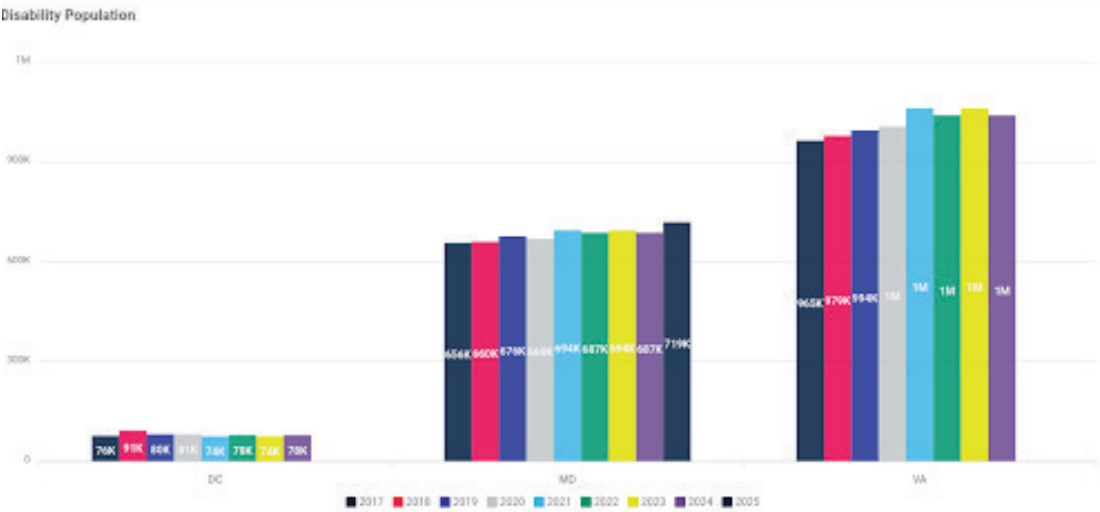
It’s awesome to see the growth and how he learns something new each time!

Looking forward to more Future Soaring! - The Hughes family



SKS Clinics

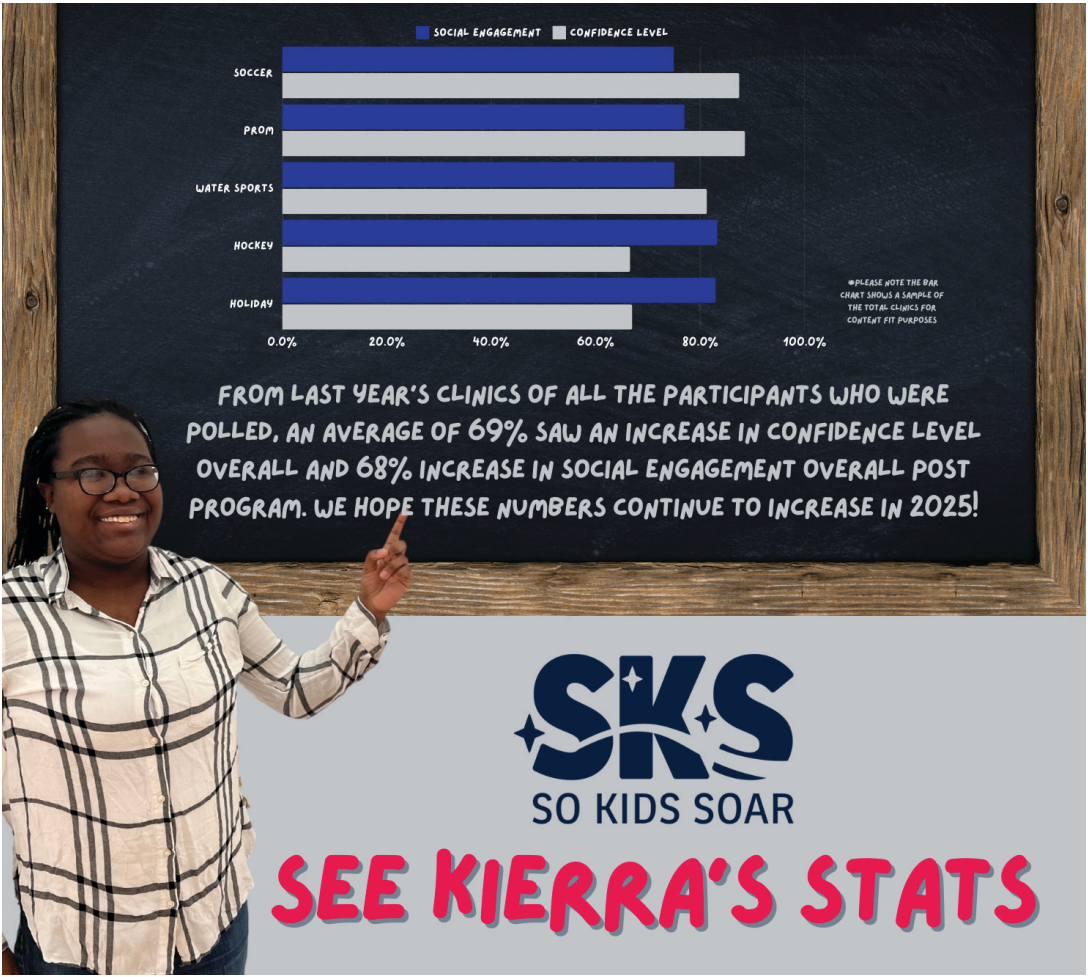
SKS adaptive clinics allow those with physical and developmental disabilities to come off the sidelines and unite with their peers. The empowerment and self confidence gained through participation in SKS clinics... the home, classroom, and community, allowing them to realize that their disability will not prevent them from fulfilling their dreams. Each child is partnered with a volunteer to learn the essence of teamwork and develop camaraderie. Beginning in 2020, SKS added digital clinics to our offerings as an outlet to connect our community during the pandemic. We will continue to provide opportunities to participate in a virtual environment on a monthly basis.



The disability population took a slight dip in 2024 compared to 2023. Yet this population is still sizeable. From last year's clinics (of the participants who were polled), 68% reported increased social engagement and 69% reported excellent or above average confidence levels post program. The need is there to keep providing confidence-building and socially engaging programs for these youth.



In 2024, SKS provided 13 in-person clinics and 13 digital clinics to a total of 182 participants and 237 volunteers. From football to prom, here is a glimpse of our 2024 adaptive clinics. Below is a testament to the social emotional level growth from of our participants post 2024 in-person clinics, curated by Programs Analyst Kierra.



SKS Holiday Celebration

Throughout the year, So Kids SOAR provides a wide variety of adaptive clinics for children with physical and developmental disabilities— from waterskiing and football to cooking and Prom. The SKS Holiday Celebration is more than a seasonal party; it is our culminating year-end event that provides participants the opportunity to “pay-compassion-forward”. Participants engage in a variety of philanthropic activities at the Holiday Celebration, including: wrapping presents for underprivileged children; decorating desserts for homeless shelters; making holiday cards for Veterans, and more. The Holiday Celebration is a time for fun and philanthropy, and a reminder that their disabilities will not hold them back from reaching their potential.

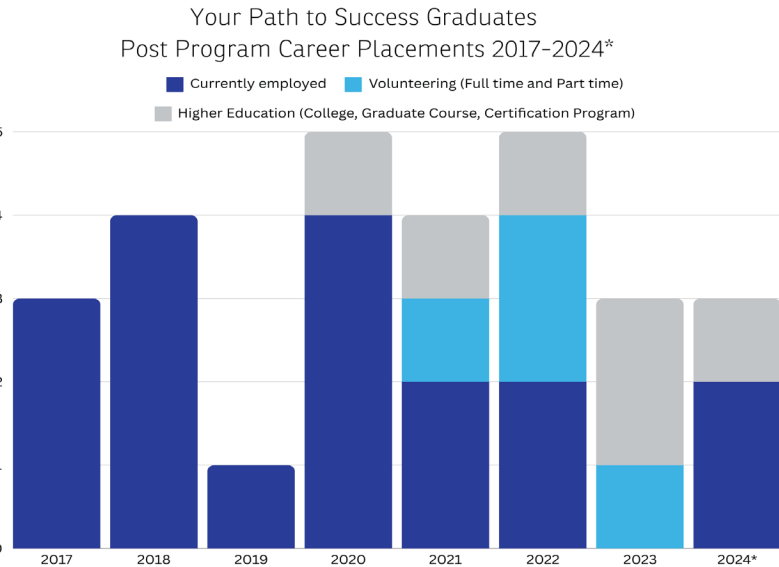
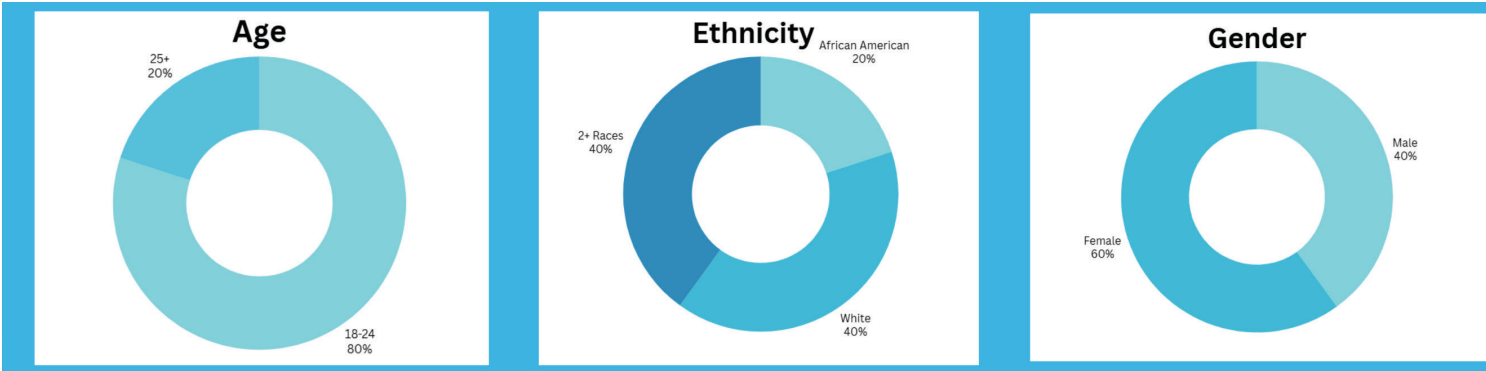


At the 2024 SKS Holiday Celebration, 41 participants and 63 volunteers achieved the following goals:

- 250 presents for DC Metro Foster and Adoptive Parent Association
- 89 presents for The Napkin Network
- 57 backpacks stuffed with school supplies and toys for Kids in Need of Defense (KIND)
- 50 backpacks stuffed with hygiene kits for Comfort Cases, Inc.
- 50 stuffed Kong balls for Montgomery County Partners for Animal Well-being
- 70 flash cards for Hands On Tokyo

Your Path To Success

So Kids SOAR's mentorship program that provides communication, leadership, and vocational skill building for young adults with developmental delays and/or physical disabilities. The program concept derived from the need to provide SKS participants with resources to expand and grow after their time in SKS clinics. The three month program offers participants skill-building workshops on topics such as resume development, interviewing, and formal e-mail communication, as well as off-site group projects, site visits to places that employ those with disabilities, and opportunities to network. We seek for participants to walk away with meaningful relationships, new confidence, and real skills that allow them to pursue independence and gainful employment.



Post career update for the past graduates from 2017-2024. *We are currently placing the 2024 cohort graduates into jobs for 2025, but the results look extremely promising as we attempt to get more young adults with disabilities into higher education and the

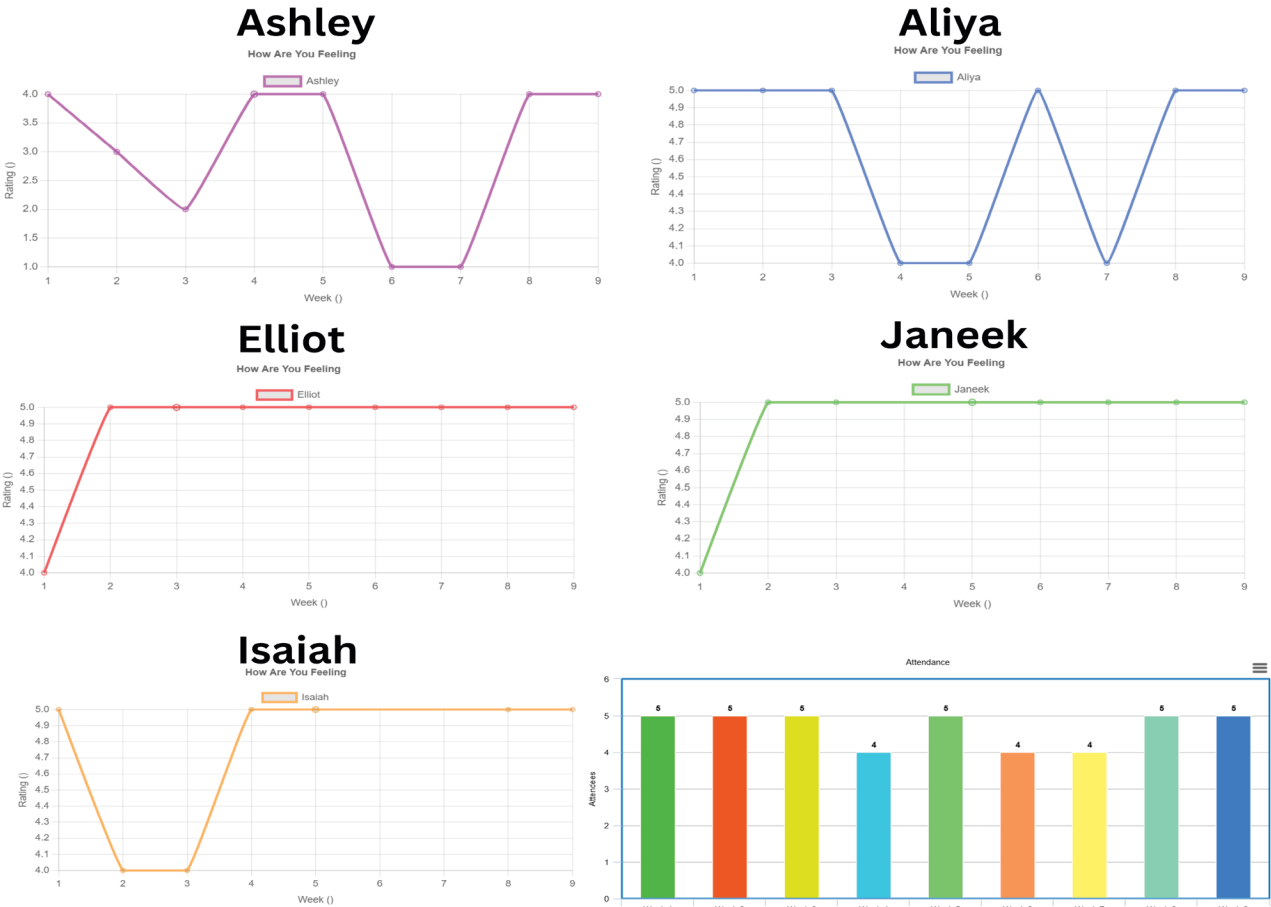
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Meet Our 2024 YPTS Mentees



Each week, mentees had to report how they felt regarding the course material and their own progress on a 5 point scale with 1 indicating struggling and 5 indicating thriving. This allowed us to assess the amount of support to give each mentee and which areas to focus on if the mentee responded to 'struggling'.



Feeling Key
5 - Thriving
4 - Gliding
3 - Surviving
2 - Fluctuating
1 - Struggling

Attendance Key
5 - 100% Attendance
4 - 80% Attendance
3 - 60% Attendance
2 - 40% Attendance
1 - 20% Attendance



YPTS SUCCESSES - Measuring Impact

MEASURING IMPACT: CAREER READINESS SKILLS

Mentees were asked to reflect on their knowledge related to job searching, the application process, and career/workforce skills before and after the program. This chart shows how many young people had good or great knowledge before and after. The change in percentage points or number of young people illustrates gains in their career readiness skills. In order to be career ready, young people must learn about their various employment options and weigh how each fits their educational, emotional, and financial needs. Additionally, they need to learn about various ways of applying for jobs and presenting themselves professionally. This set of measures shows that Your Path To Success is helping to increase young people's knowledge and skills in these areas.

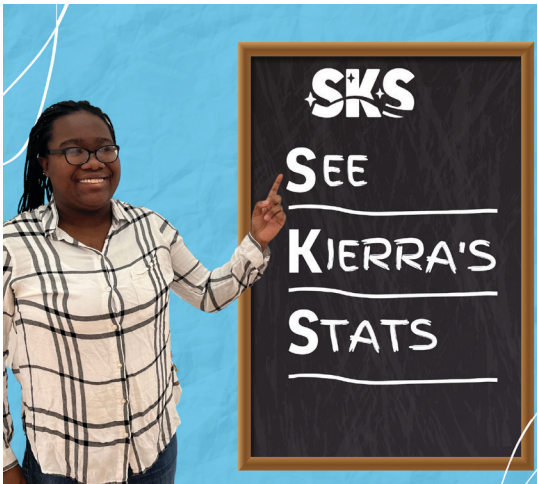
	Percent Who Reported Good or Great Knowledge		
	Before	After	Change in Percentage Points
%  #			
Networking 	20 %	80 %	60 %
Career Options 	60 %	100 %	40 %
Job Interest Exploration 	40 %	80 %	40 %
Time Management 	60 %	100 %	40 %
Public Speaking 	40 %	80 %	40 %
Application Process 	80 %	100 %	20 %
Working Independently 	80 %	100 %	20 %



Mentee Isaiah at the Washington Capitals networking event in November 2024 with Monumental Sports & Entertainment Foundation staff, who served as networking guests and exchanged business cards and information with our mentees.

The SKS Pipeline of Talent: Building Tomorrow's Leaders

Every year, we perform a quarterly check-in with all graduates since the program's inception in 2017. We record where each graduate is in their journey – from volunteering to interning to working full-time. Of all the graduates since 2017:



- 51% (22 of 43 graduates) are currently employed (in full-time, part-time or internship roles)
- 9% (4 of 43 graduates) are currently (or recently completed) in higher education courses
- On average each year, three YPTS graduates find job placement within one year of completing YPTS
- 2022 YPTS graduate Kierra Johnson was hired by So Kids SOAR in January 2023 as the part-time Programs Coordinators; in January 2024, she was brought on in a full-time capacity as the Programs Analyst
- 2020 and 2021 YPTS graduates Patrick Green and Milan King (respectively) have taught our annual in-person and virtual cooking clinics since 2021; and served as the on-site caterers for the 2024 So Kids SOAR fall fundraiser
- 2021 Graduate Michael Simmons launched the So Kids SOAR podcast in 2025 as a part-time paid contractor of So Kids SOAR. Michael will co-produce, record, and edit the entire podcast



YPTS 2020 Graduate Sammy Melideo now works at the Disney World Contemporary shops (as of August 2024), he started his career at Disney 2 years after graduating from YPTS.



YPTS 2020 Graduate Olivia August (Left) is currently employed at Bitty & Beau's Annapolis. She is seen here with SKS Executive Director Glenda Smith and Board Member Jay Chesley during a surprise visit by the SKS team in December 2024.



YPTS 2021 graduate Michael Simmons recording the first episode of the So Kids SOAR podcast, which he conceptualized on his own.

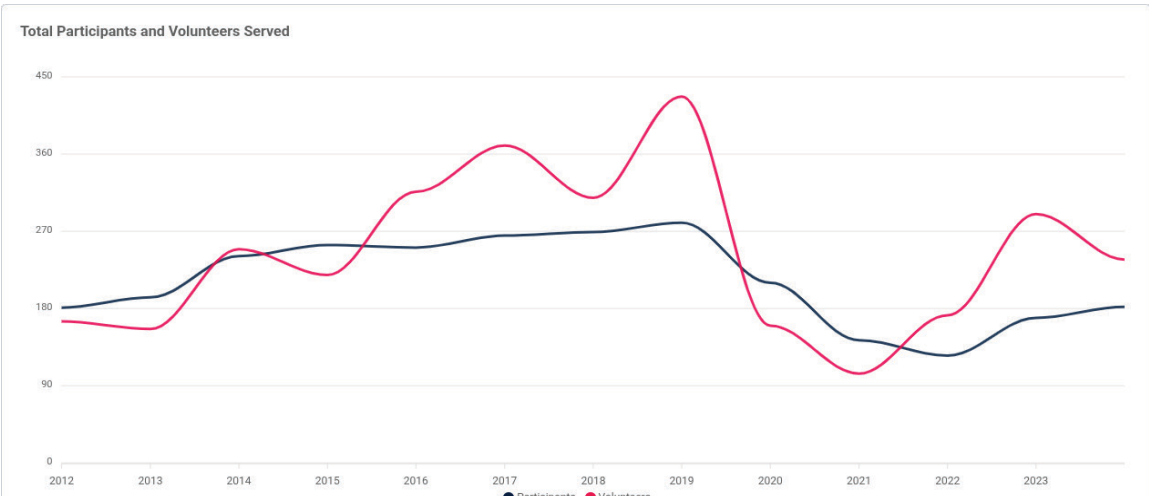


Our Impact, Our Metrics

The So Kids SOAR mission is to take our participants on a journey of self-realization of their potential—giving them the confidence to succeed in all areas of their life. Over the last three years, we have been able to hire our own participants, which creates more depth to our programming.

OUR ACCOMPLISHMENTS

- In 2024, we engaged a total 182 participants; with 78 being brand new participants and 104 repeating
- In 2024, we engaged a total 237 volunteers; with 166 being brand new volunteers and 71 repeating



From 2012-2019, the number of participants and new participants has steadily increased- reaching a high of 280 youth served in 2019. 2020 saw decreases due to COVID-19, but not as much as expected due to our quick pivot to online programming. With the introduction of SKS digital clinics, we engaged 100 new participants in 2020. Since then, we have diligently worked toward returning to in-person programming and increase the number of in-person clinics offered to pre-COVID expectations and reach the high numbers we saw previously. 2022 - 2024 were great recruitment and participant rebuilding years with an average 10% participant growth rate. We hope to continue at this pace over the next 3 - 5 years as outlined in our strategic plan.

Our Staff



**Glenda Smith,
Executive Director**

As the Executive Director since 2011, Glenda has developed relationships with professional sports teams in the area, increased fundraising to capacity build, and saw to the development and successful implementation of new programs. She loves sharing her passion for SKS with her two amazing children (6-year old daughter Lily and 3-year old son Cameron) and is focusing on SKS expansion efforts to multiple cities, and growing SKS' recruitment of its own participants. Creating a pipeline of talent through SKS and watching her YPTS graduates succeed in several different industries drives her dedication to the mission. She hopes these future expansions of SKS will be led by YPTS graduates past, present, and future--changing the world



**Daniel Cerullo,
Programs Manager**

Dan was born and raised in the Maryland/DC area and resides in Montgomery county Maryland. He graduated from York College of Pennsylvania in 2022 with a degree in Sports Management and a minor degree in Non-profit Management. He had always known that he wanted to work in the non profit sector ever since the beginning of college and has felt a pull to working with those of intellectual and physical disabilities. Dan is our full time programs manager and has been with us at So Kids SOAR for 1 year now. "I look forward to growing with the organization and finding new ways to support the disabled community in our area."



**Kierra Johnson,
Programs Analyst**

Kierra is in her third year of working with SKS. Kierra is a unique case as she has autism and is a 2022 graduate of Your Path to Success, which is how she came to discover the nonprofit. Kierra first graduated from Montgomery College in 2019 and then transferred to St. Mary's College of Maryland to graduate in 2022 with a Bachelors in Math. Kierra is also a former college basketball athlete who played at both Montgomery College and St. Mary's. She won a gold medal in the Special Olympics USA games. In 2023, she made the transition from part-time to full-time and has been working full-time for SKS ever since! Kierra currently lives with her parents, one sister, and three brothers, one of them also has autism. Kierra has a deep love for statistics. She wants to grow and learn how to use data to help maximize and grow the nonprofit. She hopes to take the data that SKS collects and use it to help the pro-



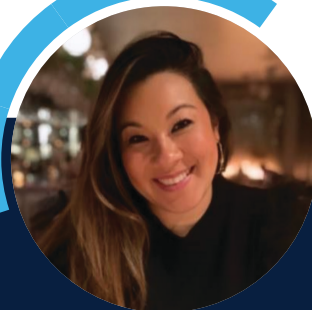
Patrick Green is a 4-year SKS graduate instructor. Patrick received our 2021 for participant of the year award. Patrick has been teaching virtual and in person clinics for So Kids SOAR since January 2021. He has also worked at HomeGoods, Chick-Fil-A, and So Kids SOAR!



Milan King is a 4-year SKS graduate instructor. She has been an employee with Safeway (King St.) for the past two years as their Bakery Clerk. It is here at the Safeway; that Milan has able to demonstrate both her passion as well as knowledge and skills within the Culinary Arts

SKS Leadership

Thanks to the guidance of the Board of Directors, SKS has developed successful programs, processes, and is poised for growth. Your vision and dedication made SKS into one of the leading organizations in the DMV providing programming for youth with disabilities.



Christi Main, Board Co-Chair
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Chloe Stewart
Medstar Health



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Lincoln Properties



Rachel Goldschmidt
Edlavitch DC Jewish Community Center



Claire Levinson
Medstar Health



Kristin Scherago
LMI



Kaushik Rath, General Counsel
Compass Real Estate

SKS Ambassadors

"I absolutely love the soccer clinic each year, To see the smiles and joy on everyone's faces is so rewarding. One year, I spent my birthday at the clinic, and it was such an amazing way to spend my day. In 2024, I got to work with blind athletes, who taught me so much, and I couldn't stop smiling about how much this program enables everyone."

- Nicole 'Barnie' Barnhart, Assistant
Goalkeeper Coach for the Washington Spirit



Nicole 'Barnie' Barnhart,
Washington Spirit



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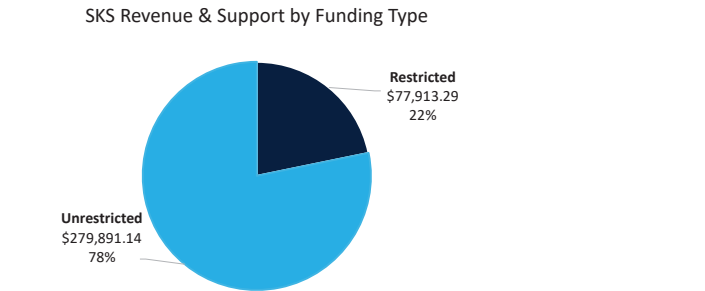
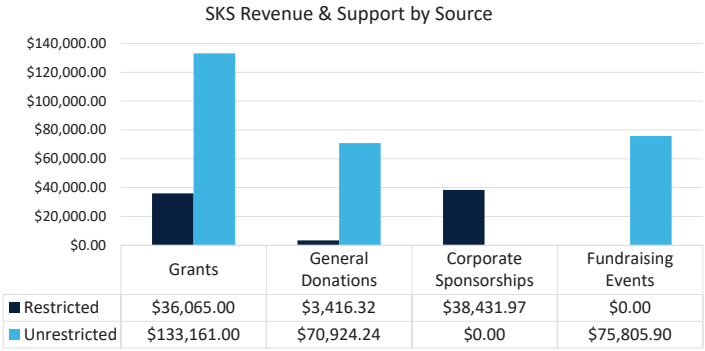
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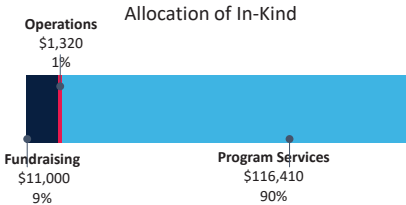
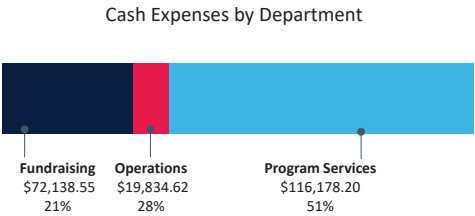
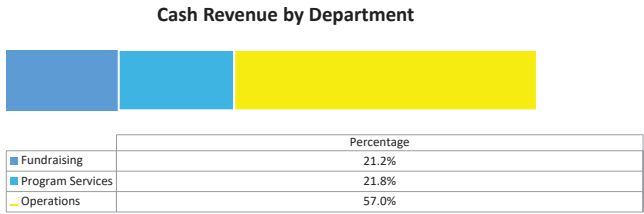
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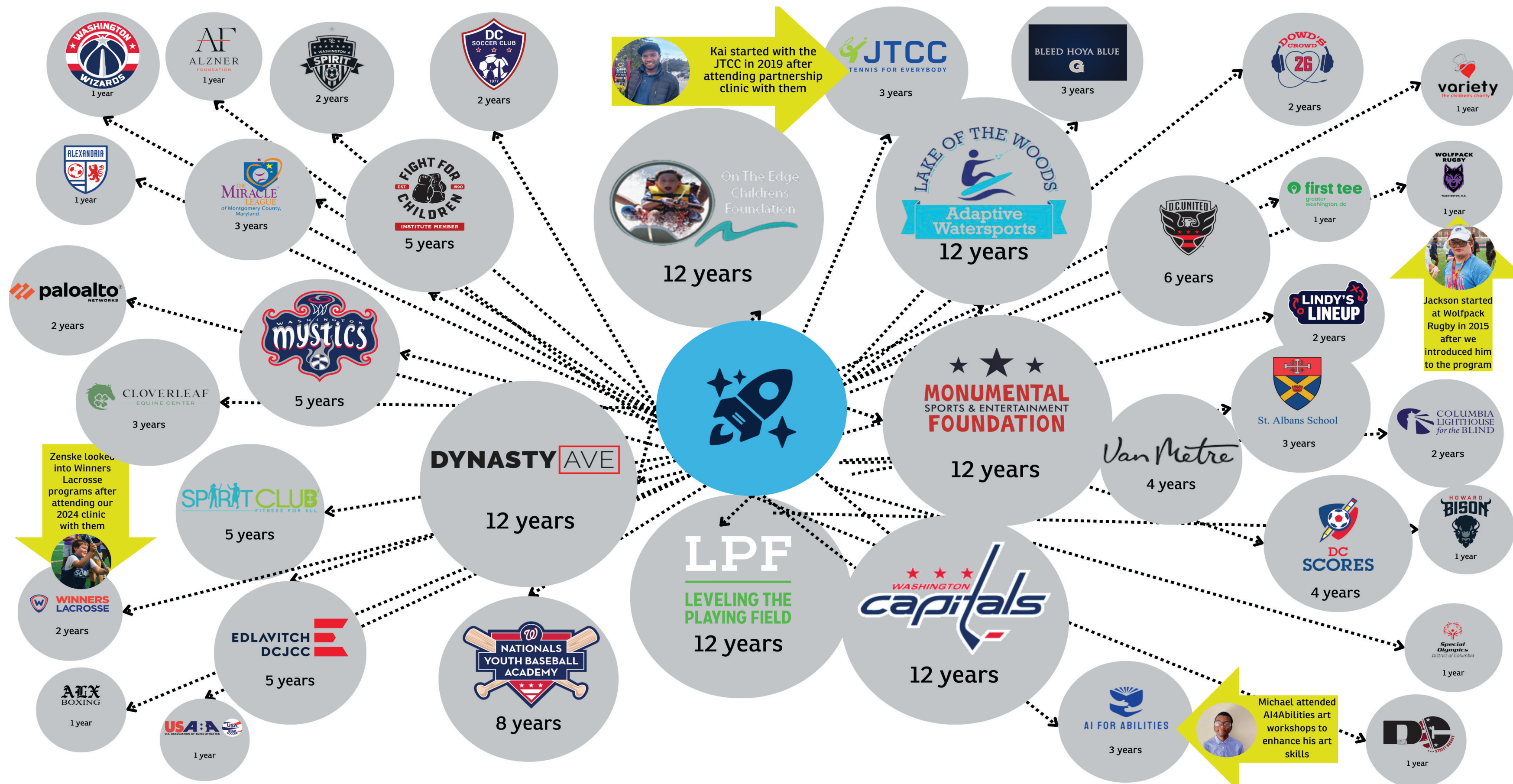
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The Breadth of Our Impact



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Strive. Own. Achieve. Realize.

