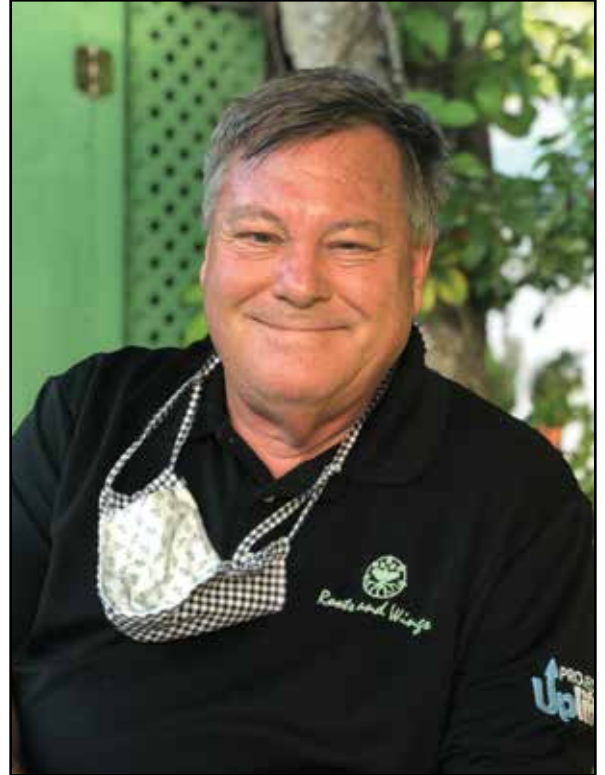
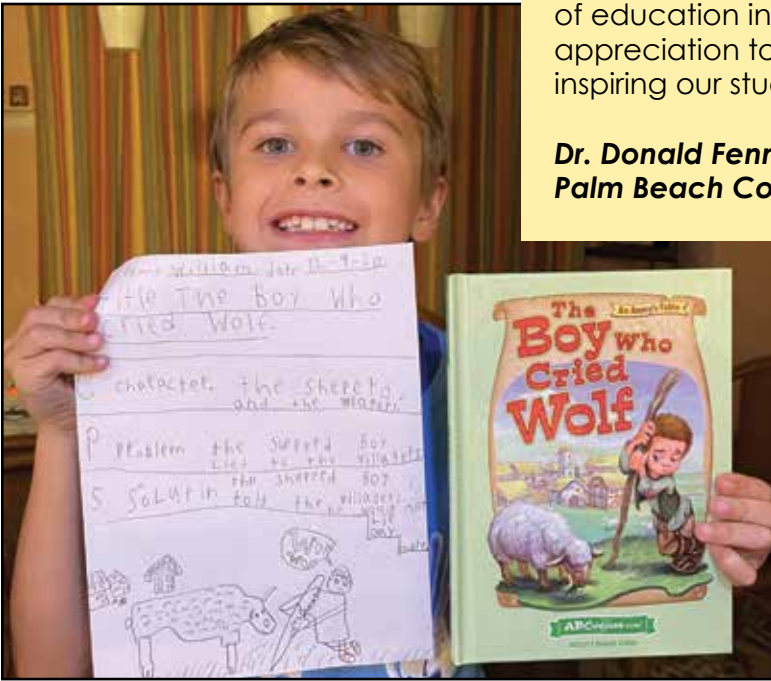


# FOUNDER'S REPORT 2020



"Roots and Wings, through its Above and Beyond Teacher and Staff Recognition Program and Project Uplift, improves the quality of education in Palm Beach County by recognizing and showing appreciation to our dedicated teachers and by supporting and inspiring our students. I am grateful for this unwavering support."

**Dr. Donald Fennoy II, Superintendent, School District of Palm Beach County**



"The Uplift program at Orchard View has become more important than ever to our students, especially those who continue to learn virtually. This tutorial is critical to overcoming "Covid Slide" which has been a real issue for many. Our children are eager to meet together in a small group to grow their reading skills and boost their confidence as readers, but for our virtual students, the social connection is especially important. It's a time where they have an opportunity to interact and discuss ideas with their peers in a way that is not always possible during the school day. Just before winter break, we talked about our plans for Project Uplift in January. One of my fourth grade students wrote his thoughts in the chat box. It made me realize just how important our program is to them, not only as students learning to read, but as children trying to do the best they can in the midst of a pandemic. His quote brought tears to my eyes."

**Lisa Hirschy, Reading Coach, Orchard View Elementary**



"I have been fortunate to become involved with Roots and Wings. Typically, teachers are overlooked for their dedication and commitment. It has never been more apparent than during the pandemic how critical our teachers are. Roots and Wings' Above and Beyond Awards are making a difference in the classroom by acknowledging teachers and all they do for our future generation."

**Gary Hildebrand, 2020-2021 Club President, Rotary Club of Boca Raton**



## 2020 Founder's Report

**W**hat an extraordinary year this has been for Roots and Wings and its programs. Now as we begin our fifth year, we are improving the quality of education in our extended south Florida community by helping children most-in-need learn to read, and providing encouragement and assistance for teachers who are working tirelessly to influence and inspire children to learn. In spite of school closings, the challenges of distance learning and widespread teacher burnout, we have continued to find meaningful ways to pursue our mission in the midst of this unprecedented COVID-19 crisis, and we are enhancing our plans for the fall when schools will likely open again.

***“Literacy is the bridge from misery to hope.” Kofi Annan***

# Donor Highlights

Our board and staff are encouraged by the generous, increased outpouring of support that Roots and Wings received in 2020. The partial list that follows will give you a clear picture of the valuable relationships that are unfolding and growing, providing the financial assistance we need to deepen our impact on public elementary education. You will see that these relationships are truly “partnerships” we share with our lead donors, as Roots and Wings leadership has contributed to funding priority needs hand-in-hand with its key supporters:

- **Impact 100 Palm Beach County:** A competitive \$100,000 grant over two years covers the cost of our core 2nd and 3rd grade free, intensive, small-group Project UpLift after school reading program at 2 additional Title One elementary schools, Rolling Green in Boynton Beach and Coral Sunset in Boca Raton. As part of our arrangement with Impact 100 PBC, Roots and Wings agreed to fund the program at Village Academy in Delray Beach. As a result of this important partnership we have added 180 students to our program. “Project UpLift,” said JoAnne Greiser, Compliance Committee Chair of Impact 100 PBC, “quickly pivoted to acquire on-line tools to be able to work with students virtually until they could deliver the planned program. We are excited to have them as a grantee and look forward to their results in the next two school years.
- **Impact 100 Men:** The \$50,000 grant funded the comprehensive Fountas and Pinnell guided reading programs requested by Project UpLift’s participating principals at 4 of our schools. As part of this partnership, Roots and Wings leadership covered the additional funds to purchase this invaluable tool for distance learning, and negotiated free shipping. This comprehensive learning tool will serve more than 8,000 struggling readers over the next 4 years and is proving invaluable for distance learning.



Phot Credit: LuAnn Warner-Prokos

- **Libra Foundation:** The \$30,000 grant, generously increased from \$20,000 in 2019, allowed Project UpLift to add 60 new students to its program, providing complete funding for an additional school's struggling 2nd and 3rd graders to participate.
- **State Farm Insurance:** This nationally competitive grant of \$25,000 was given to only 40 organizations nationwide. Based on thousands of votes from area supporters, we received this generous grant allowing us to fund the Fountas and Pinnell guided reading kits to support distance learning for struggling 1st through 3rd graders at Village Academy in Delray Beach and Coral Sunset in Boca Raton. Roots and Wings provided the additional funding needed to purchase the reading kits.



- **Lattner Family Foundation:** An increase of \$15,000 was a welcome boost, bringing us \$25,000 from the Foundation in 2020. This crucial support has allowed us to continue complete funding of Plumosa School of the Arts, one of our original four Project UpLift schools in Delray Beach.
- **McGue Millhiser Family Trust:** A \$20,000 grant made in 2020 launched our first grade pilot program at 4 schools. Due to the pandemic, the funds were not fully utilized. Eager to stem the tide of learning losses and continue the first grade program, the Trust donated an additional \$5,000 to extend the pilot to our 8 schools. Said Tom Millhiser, "The goal of helping children most-in-need read at grade level by the close of third grade is more urgent than ever. The McGue Millhiser Family Trust is proud to be part of achieving that goal."
- **Stephenson Pope Babcock Foundation:** An \$8,000 grant made it possible to complete our goal of supplying requested supplementary reading materials to all our schools. It was especially meaningful to our Rolling Green teachers to receive Foundations<sup>®</sup>, a phonics-based learning tool providing crucial support for their struggling readers.

“Roots and Wings’ work is important to public education because they bring awareness and research-based academic programming to schools that need community support and involvement. Putting actions into words is what Roots and Wings represents.”

**Kiwana Howell, Ed.S., Director, Extended Learning, School District of Palm Beach County**



“Orchard View needed a village to help it transform from a ‘D’ rated school to a ‘B’ rated school over the last four years. Roots and Wings was, and still is, a critical partner in this journey that we couldn’t live without. They not only provided the Project UpLift reading tutorial program, but also lifted the culture of the school through the Above and Beyond awards for teachers which include some very valuable incentives. Great instruction, great culture, an amazing partner in Roots and Wings!”

**Lisa Lee, Principal, Orchard View Elementary**

“I admire how quickly Roots and Wings has grown Project UpLift, its after school tutoring program for children who are having trouble learning to read. The organization is a great community partner. We help kids get a good night’s sleep and Roots and Wings helps kids read at grade level. Together, we are helping area children form a strong foundation for the future.”

**Suzanne Broad, Executive Director, Sweet Dream Makers**



# Notable Accomplishments

- **Received “Bright Spot” recognition in national Grade Level Reading Campaign:** With the city of Delray Beach as our partner, we presented our Project UpLift program as a model for consideration. We were named a national “Bright Spot” for grade level reading among the 350+ members nationwide. Bright Spots are schools, programs and communities using innovative and promising strategies to help low income children read at grade level.



- **Major Holiday Book Distribution:** Before the winter holidays the Spirit of Giving Network offered us 18,000 copies of ABC Mouse.com’s Aesop’s Fable, “The Boy Who Cried Wolf.” We engaged a host of other local organizations, businesses, and community leaders to add an inscription that highlighted the extensive community collaboration and distributed the books for all 1st, 2nd and 3rd grade students and teachers in Delray Beach, Boca Raton and Boynton Beach. The response to this significant collaboration was truly magical, with big bright smiles from teachers and children in every school community we visited. I am pleased to thank these committed community partners: Spirit of Giving Network, Education Foundation of Palm Beach County, Office Depot, the City of Delray Beach, Children’s Services Council, Delray Beach Elks Lodge, Impact 100 PBC, Impact 100 Men, iTHINK Financial, The EJS Project, Old School Square, the Arts Garage, the Rotary Club of Boca Raton, and the Junior League of Boca Raton.



- **Became an Extraordinary Charity:** Roots and Wings is one of just 35 Palm Beach County charities to be named an Extraordinary Charity for 2021. All of the nonprofits chosen for this distinction serve the county's children and health and human service needs. We are proud to be chosen among hundreds of applicants to be featured in the Extraordinary Charities online directory this year!



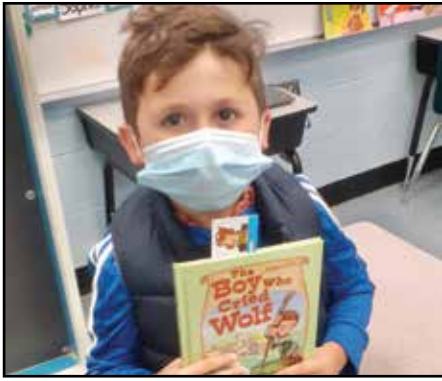
- **Presented Thank You Gifts to 1800 Teachers and School Staff:** To show our appreciation to teachers and staff at the 18 area schools that participate in our Above and Beyond Teacher and Staff Recognition Program we delivered 1,800 thank you cards containing a special Above and Beyond rewards card good for 20% discounts on food at 14 popular area restaurants, a "Delray Beach Experience" Card, and a free delivery from Delivery Dudes. The heartfelt thank you messages we received from the schools let us know that our gesture benefiting all of their teachers and staff during this tough year had been deeply appreciated.



"Roots and Wings has been a tremendous support to our Pine Grove families and staff. With their support, we are able to recognize deserving teachers and staff members throughout the year. They come bearing gifts and treats to ensure the teachers and staff members know the impact they have made. They capture it all through beautiful pictures that are shared with our staff and throughout the district. The amount of money available for teacher and staff recognition is extremely scarce and the help we get to celebrate our staff especially this year is invaluable. I am so thankful for the family we have in Roots and Wings and extremely proud of the work they continue to do in Pine Grove and how they have spread their wings to impact many other schools in our district."

**Shauntay King, Principal, Pine Grove Elementary**





"I have had the honor of participating in the Above and Beyond Awards recognition program acknowledging outstanding teachers in local schools. The students, teachers, and participants are all deeply affected – some, I suspect, for a lifetime! These recognition awards for teachers fill a void that results in teachers feeling supercharged and students feeling great pride in their teachers and the learning process. Every time I participate, I feel joyful. I love Roots and Wings!!"

**David Zappitell, Zappitell Law Firm**



"Roots and Wings is such an asset to our community. Project UpLift has amazing results in helping our local students increase their reading skills. We love that Roots and Wings' Above and Beyond Awards support our true community heroes – The Teachers!"

**Lindy Harvey, Spirit of Giving Network**



“Our students come from homes where English is a second (and new) language. Their inclusion in Project UpLift, in small group settings, has provided the opportunity for our children to get the extra help necessary to raise their reading levels and their overall performance in school has been ‘Uplifted.’ Project UpLift is an important step in leveling the playing field.”

**Kathy Fazio, Executive Director,  
Paul’s Place**



“Everything begins with reading! A student who can read has no boundaries; a student who can read can achieve unlimited success. At Plumosa less than 50% of our 3rd graders are reading on grade level. The Project UpLift after school program allows us the opportunity to work with the students in 1st and 2nd grade to close the learning gap before they reach the critical 3rd grade year. My most effective teachers work with students in small groups. Last year’s UpLift data shows that students in the program made strong academic gains. What the data cannot show is the pride and confidence the students feel as a result of being able to read and comprehend text. Those gains are unmeasurable. We are grateful for Project UpLift.”

**Cathy Reynolds, Principal, Plumosa School of the Arts**



# Challenges

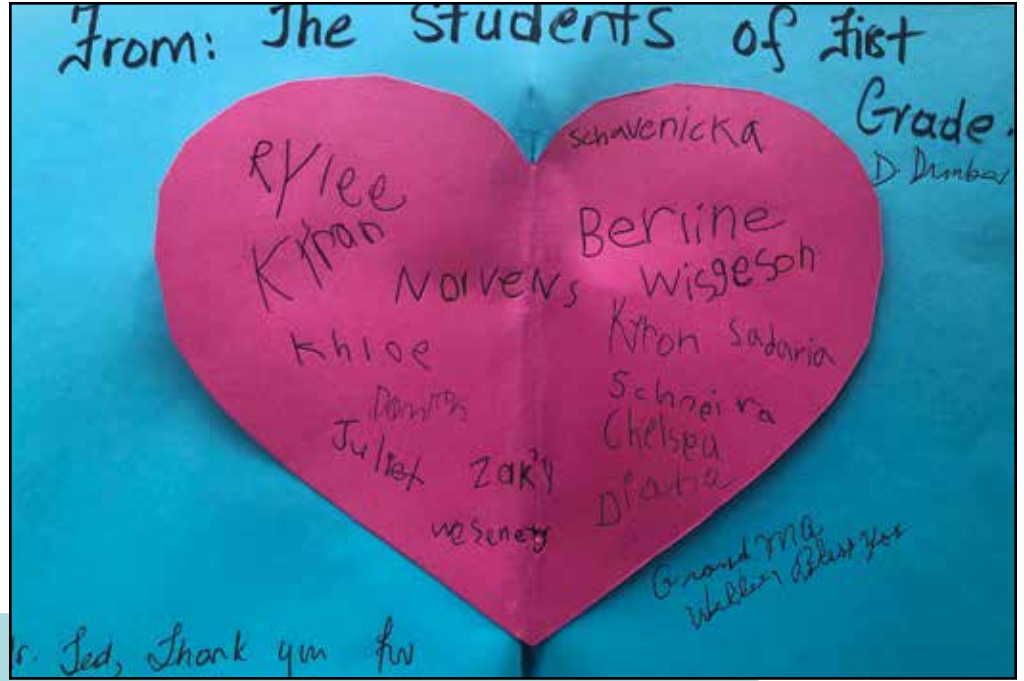
**If You Can't Read, You Can't Learn:** If you can't read by the end of third grade, you only have a 1 in 6 chance of catching up. According to figures provided by Florida Chamber of Commerce Business Alliance for Early Learning Report there were 444 third graders in the 8 schools we serve who were not reading at grade level at the last testing period in spring 2019. Principals believe that number may now have doubled. Here are some of the most important statistics from the National Institute for Literacy, National Center for Adult Literacy, The Literacy Company, and U.S. Census Bureau underscoring the critical need to address illiteracy in the United States:

- Currently, 45 million Americans are functionally illiterate and cannot read above a fifth-grade level
- 50% of adults cannot read a book written at an eighth-grade level
- Only 1/3rd of fourth-graders reach the proficient reading level
- 85% of juvenile offenders have problems reading
- 3 out of 5 people in American prisons can't read
- 3 out of 4 people on welfare can't read

SOURCE: <https://www.literacyprojectfoundation.org/30-key-child-literacy-stats-parents-need-to-be-aware-of/>

**Teachers and Students are Burned Out:** As of the holiday break in December 2020, only about 50 percent of children in Delray Beach, Boca Raton, and Boynton Beach were attending school each day. The other 50 percent were at home using computers to access distance learning. This model requires teachers to attend to students in their classrooms while also addressing the challenges of students learning at a distance. Many children learning from home do not have sufficient oversight to keep them on target with their lessons, and they often drift away or are absent completely. Teachers are forced to spend many evening hours contacting parents to let them know their students are absent for part or all of the school day. Even those children who are attentive from home are burned out from staring at their screens all day. Both students and teachers are missing the lively social interaction, in-person nurturing, and personal satisfaction that the normal classroom setting provides.

**Significant Learning Losses:** Teachers and principals at our 8 Project UpLift schools are reporting deep concerns that students have lost significant ground during the pandemic. Lisa Lee, principal at Orchard View Elementary in Delray Beach, shared this stark fact: Last year there were 17 third graders at her school who were reading at a first grade level at the beginning of the school year and *this year there were 40!* This example mirrors what is happening in all of our public schools.



“Roots and Wings has been an incredible educational partner to our schools. The Above and Beyond Program has made an indelible impact, creating a sense of pride and accomplishment for our teachers and staff. Project UpLift has provided the opportunity for the schools to offer high quality, small group tutoring after school for free! Our increase in student outcomes from this program speaks for itself.”



**Jamie Wyatt, Instructional Superintendent, South Elementary 1, School District of Palm Beach County**



The June 2020 McKinsey & Company report, *COVID-19 and Student Learning in the United States: The Hurt Could Last a Lifetime*, estimated that if in-class instruction did not resume until January 2021:

- All students will lose ground — from 3–4 to 12–14 months.
- Black and Hispanic students will lose 3–5 months more than white students. Low-income students will lose 12+ months.
- Up to 1.1 million students could drop out of high school for COVID-19-related reasons.
- These impacts will produce an estimated GDP loss of \$173 billion to \$271 billion per year.

SOURCE: [www.mckinsey.com/industries/public-and-social-sector/our-insights/covid-19-and-student-learning-in-the-united-states-the-hurt-could-last-a-lifetime](http://www.mckinsey.com/industries/public-and-social-sector/our-insights/covid-19-and-student-learning-in-the-united-states-the-hurt-could-last-a-lifetime)



Because we serve Title One schools with a high percentage of students of color, this portrayal is especially poignant for us. “While all students are suffering, those who came into the pandemic with the fewest academic opportunities are on track to exit with the greatest learning loss...**The pandemic has forced the most vulnerable students into the least desirable learning situations with inadequate tools and support systems to navigate them.**” McKinsey & Company (Time Magazine, December 2020)



"The UpLift program is a great benefit to our school and students. One of the most impactful aspects is that the students are eager to do their best because of Roots and Wings. The kids know the community, as well as their teachers, are rooting for them and helping them to reach their full potential."

**Laura Fuller, Literacy Coach, Pine Grove Elementary**

"Project UpLift provides an incredible opportunity for children who are struggling with reading to get help and encouragement to not only get to their grade level proficiency but, in many cases, go ahead of their peers. How do you solve a math word problem without having the ability to read?"

**Ezra M. Krieg, Community Activist**



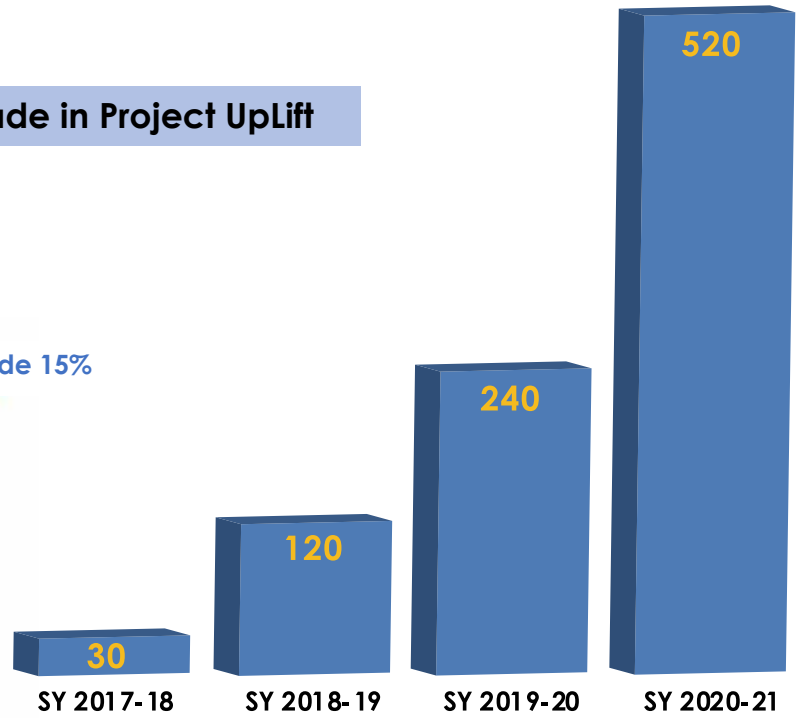
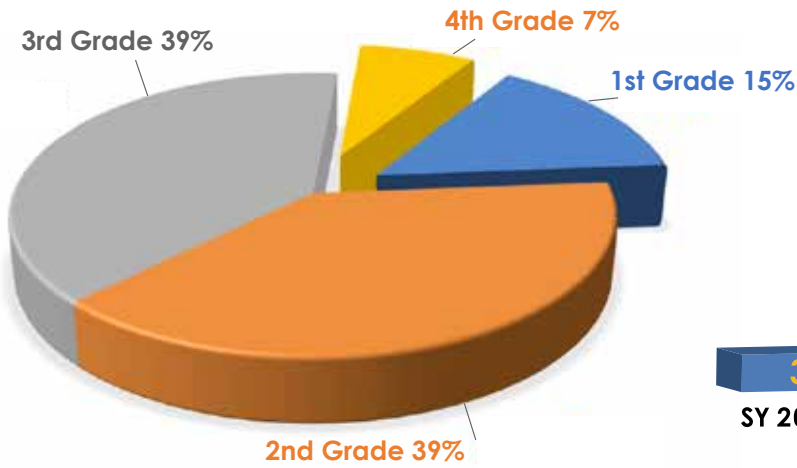
"Our community is very fortunate to have Roots and Wings' Project UpLift providing small intensive reading groups that help struggling readers improve their foundational skills leading to self-confidence and long-term academic success. The principals love this program and I hope it can be expanded to serve more children given its proven success!"

**Janet Meeks, Education Coordinator, City of Delray Beach**

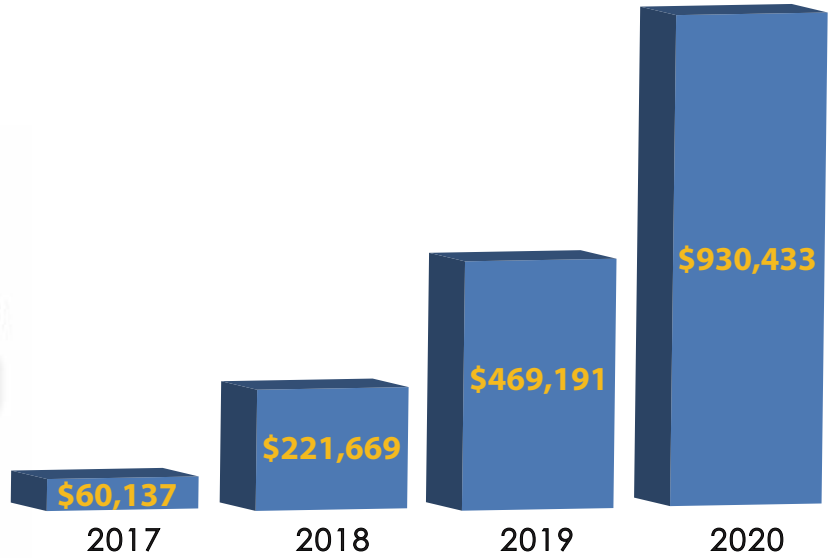
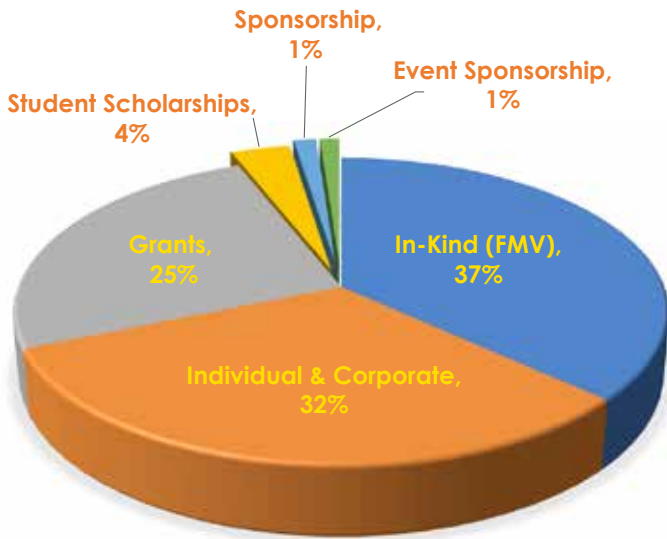


# Statistical Information

Students per Grade in Project UpLift



Revenue by Category and Dollar Growth



"I am grateful for the service of Roots and Wings in Delray Beach, Boynton Beach, and Boca Raton. Their work, recognizing excellence in teaching and their after school tutoring programs are of great benefit to our schools."

**Erica Whitfield, School Board Member, District 4, School District of Palm Beach County**



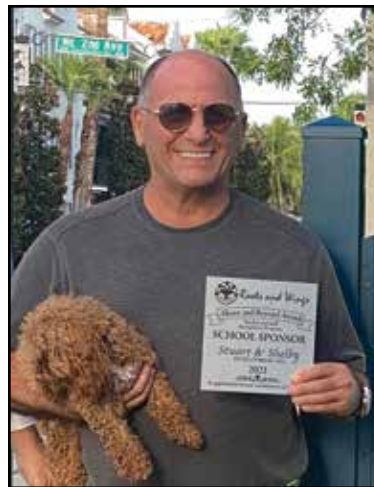
“Roots and Wings’ support for education has been invaluable. Not only has this resulted in increased achievement for our students who need the most support, but by also recognizing our most critical resource, our educators. We thank you, Roots and Wings, for your partnership in making a difference in the lives of students and teachers.”

**Keith Oswald, Deputy Superintendent, School District of Palm Beach County**



“Roots and Wings’ mission matters for its impact on education and the benefits it provides for our children, but it also matters for its impact on economic opportunity. Students who are not reading proficiently in third grade are four times more likely to not graduate high school, and 88% of students who failed to earn a diploma were struggling readers in 3rd grade.”

**Ellen Okrent, CEO, Florence Fuller Child Development Center**





# Solutions

**Project UpLift /Spring 2021:** After speaking extensively with school principals, we faced the reality that we would be unable to provide our usual free, intensive, small group tutoring program for 90 minutes three days a week at our eight schools. We ultimately settled on a spring program at our participating schools with principals each determining how many classes and which grades their certified teachers could reasonably provide.

In spite of teacher burn-out, all schools are offering small group distance learning sessions of 45 minutes three times per week only for students who are attending classes at school during the day. This has cut the number of children we usually serve in half.

**Project UpLift /2021-2022 School Year:** With the hope schools will reopen this fall, we plan to return to our regular programming, offering free, intensive small group tutoring for struggling readers in grades one to four at our Title One schools in Delray Beach, Boca Raton and Boynton Beach. It is our goal to extend our program from three to five days a week.

We imagine expanding our program to 6 p.m. five days a week and adding arts integration, STEAM centered activities, social-emotional learning, and just plain fun! Our ultimate goal is to add Project UpLift to all Title One elementary schools in our communities, building strong, confident readers and providing the best foundation possible for future learning and academic success.

**Above and Beyond Awards/Spring 2021:** The challenges of the pandemic have necessitated flexibility in presenting our Above and Beyond Awards at our 18 participating schools. We cannot routinely go into classrooms to present the awards to our teachers, but when we can, children who are learning from home have participated through their shared distance learning screen. We have also delivered the Awards in person at media centers and in the schools' open spaces. Most often, we are participating in Zoom meetings with the entire faculty present.. The best news is the south Florida business community is supporting our efforts to let teachers know they are appreciated more generously than ever.

**Above and Beyond Awards/2021-2022 School Year:** We will continue delivering awards at each of our participating schools twice a year. We are adding additional school sponsors and increasing both its value and the number of gifts in each bag.

"The ability to read is one of the most important skills you can have. We want our young people to be able to succeed as adults and reading is a building block they must have. I applaud the efforts of Roots and Wings and hope we can grow on the success they have had to date."

**Jack Lauroesch, Charles H Miller Charitable Foundation**

# Closing Thoughts

Through our close partnership with the schools we serve, and the support and encouragement of the Palm Beach County School District, we have found ways to usefully continue our programs. We are eagerly anticipating the opportunity to provide robust in-person teaching and learning as soon as schools open fully again, serving 540 students or more up to 5 days a week with our free, small-group program that serves the individual needs of the children who most need our helping-hand to thrive. As the 2020-2021 school year closes we will have a clear idea of what the needs will be for 21-22. With growing assistance from our broad community of supporters, Project UpLift will stretch to meet the challenges our schools are facing.

Thanks to individuals, foundations and corporations who have already joined our crusade for grade level reading, we have laid a strong foundation for the work that lies ahead. This comes with deep appreciation to those whose generous gifts and shared passion have inspired us to stay the course.

As we move Project UpLift forward to repair the significant learning losses children are facing due to the pandemic, and to bolster the flagging spirits of overtaxed teachers with our Above and Beyond Awards, the support of our community is more important now than ever. We trust our benefactors will continue their votes of confidence in our work with their generosity, and that new partners will emerge to join our crusade to support excellence in public education for our south Florida communities.





Because of the broad support we have already received from regional and national foundations, local businesses and individuals far and wide, we are able to show significant financial growth. The success of Roots and Wings and our status as a School District “outstanding community partner” are possible because of the amazing support we have received from all corners.

We are grateful for our generous partners who believe in Roots and Wings and are helping us make a reality of **our ultimate goal: 90% of third graders reading at grade level.** We will not rest until we get there!

### To get there we need your help to:

1. Encourage prioritization of early literacy and strong collaboration.
2. Provide professional development opportunities for teachers of reading.
3. Expand opportunities to help struggling readers catch up.
4. Engage our communities to embrace the 90% literacy goal.

**We are living in an unprecedented time. The challenges we face as a result of COVID-19 are daunting and will influence the future of the world for years to come. We do, however, have the power to help ensure that the children who come after us are prepared to thrive. The best chance we can give them is literacy...the ability to read opens countless doors to opportunity.**

***“You can’t go back and change the beginning, but you can start where you are and change the ending.” CS Lewis***



Roots and Wings is endorsed by the Superintendent of Schools of Palm Beach County and by the City of Delray Beach.

Roots and Wings, Inc., a Florida not-for-profit corporation, is registered with the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services under registration #CH54161. It is a Section 501(c)(3) charitable organization under the Internal Revenue Code.

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