

# OUR COVID-19 STORY: HOW WE EMERGED STRONGER

A social impact report from the Al Wooten Jr. Youth Center  
March 2020 to March 2023 and beyond



AL WOOTEN JR.  
YOUTH CENTER  
SINCE 1990 **CATCH THE VISION!**

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AL WOOTEN JR.  
YOUTH CENTER  
SINCE 1990 **CATCH THE VISION!**

Serving the South LA area

# FREE ONLINE

## Homework assistance, private tutoring & more for grades 3-12

#zoom

#loginandlearn

#alltogether

#forouryouth

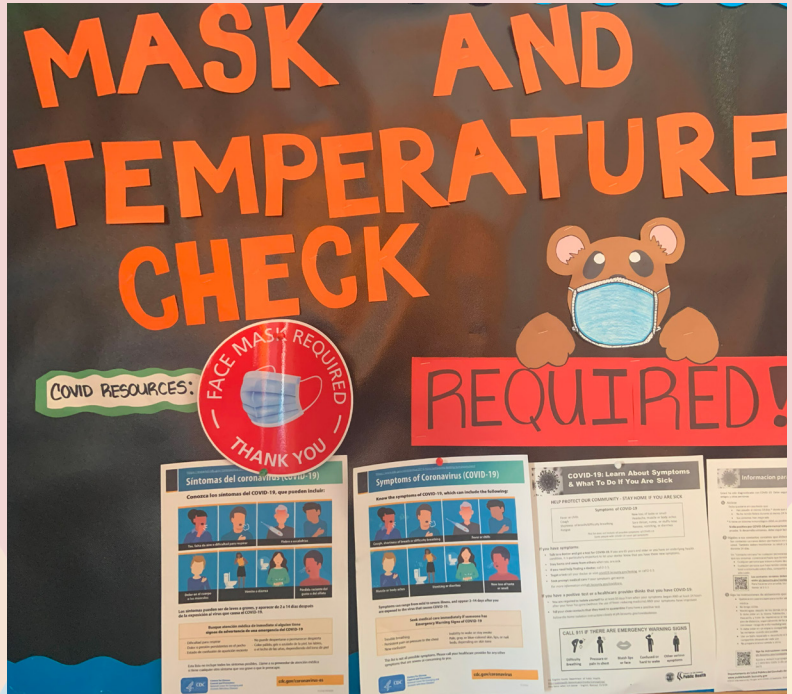


[www.wootencenter.org/online](http://www.wootencenter.org/online)



Live instruction by Wooten teachers and tutors  
from Loyola, Pepperdine and USC

This is the flyer distributed after our temporary closure on March 13, 2020. The young man is in his home kitchen participating in our virtual world languages and culture with cooking class on Zoom. We added the cooking component since we were no longer able to serve the variety of cultural dishes at the center. We are continuing the practice of students cooking, but at the center now! We displayed the sign in our Parent Room front entrance after we reopened in June 2021 after 15 months of closure.







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**Cover:** Wooten executive director Corey Dantzler taking a selfie with students Terron and Sandra as they give two thumbs up for our impacts in the South Los Angeles area.

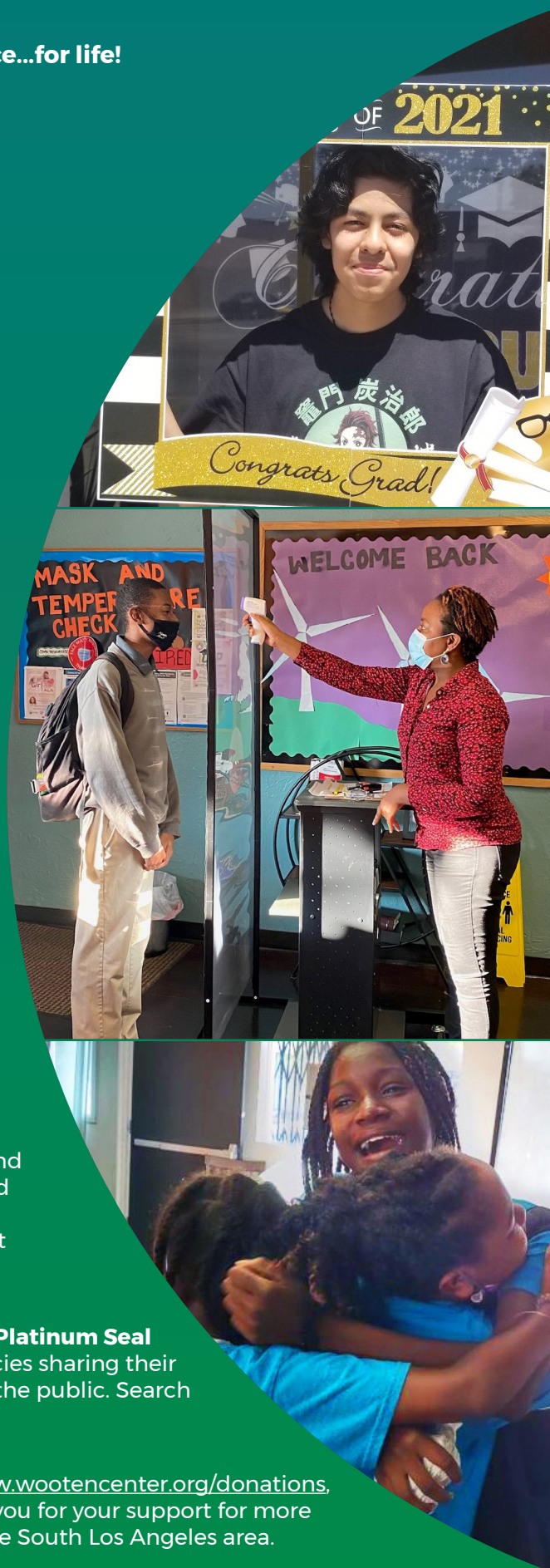
**Credits:** Thank you to our board members Naomi McSwain and Kathy Talley-Jones, and our Taproot Foundation volunteer and consultant Kathleen Spellman for producing our first social impact report. Thank you to our staff and board for their input and our graphic designer Joshua Gray for his beautiful work.



Candid has awarded the Wooten Center their **Platinum Seal of Transparency**, their highest honor for agencies sharing their organizational and financial information with the public. Search for our profile at [www.candid.org](http://www.candid.org).



**How to Give:** Scan QR code, give online at [www.wootencenter.org/donations](http://www.wootencenter.org/donations), or via Zelle at [zelle@wootencenter.org](mailto:zelle@wootencenter.org). Thank you for your support for more than 300 students per year in grades 3-12 in the South Los Angeles area.





# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Special thanks to the donors who gave \$565,793 in 2020 to sustain our services when we were at our lowest (see Road to Recovery), particularly our board of directors without whose financial, volunteer, and moral support we may not have survived.

Thank you to our long-time major contributors Frank Babka, Debra Gero, Tom and Laurie McCarthy, David and Elizabeth McFadzen, Alice Short, and Steven Vielhaber whose gifts have helped keep our doors open for many years.

Corporations like Bank of America and Kinecta Federal Credit Union have supported us in various ways, also for decades. Friends like SAA interiors + architecture and HKS Architects give volunteers, finances, and pro bono services valued at tens of thousands of dollars.

Without partners like AKA Sorority, Inc. Tau Beta Omega, USC Viterbi School of Engineering, PS Science, Outdoor Initiative, LA STEM Collective, Jenesse Center, South Central Training Consortium, and more we could not offer our holistic approach with quality activities that our youth and parents love. Private tutors and other volunteers from various universities and corporations keep our students on the cutting edge of instruction and professionalism.

Thank you to our beloved families for your dedicated community involvement and partnership, and the offices of LA City Councilman Marqueece Harris-Dawson and LA County Supervisor Holly Mitchell for contributing financially and more.

Last but not least, thank you to our executive director Corey Dantzer for the care and mentorship you provide for our children, especially our young men, to our associate director Christelle Telesford for faithfully overseeing our daily operations for many years, and to all Wooten Center staff and our retired executive director Naomi McSwain for the love and resiliency you have shown in pushing through your own challenges to give your best.

We appreciate you. Take care.





# DEDICATION

The Al Wooten Jr. Youth Center was founded in 1990 in remembrance of a South Los Angeles man killed in a drive-by shooting at age 35, an innocent victim of a gang initiation.

We dedicate this social impact report to him, his mother, our founder, and two long-time board members who gave of themselves and their resources to help sustain our work for more than 25 years. We appreciate and honor everyone.

**Myrtle Faye Rumph**, Our Founder  
February 21, 1930 to January 7, 2015

**Ron Glass**, Board Chair Emeritus  
July 10, 1945 to November 25, 2016

**John G. Lapham, III**, Past Board Chair  
September 5, 1952 to October 30, 2022



# OUR MISSION

The Al Wooten Jr. Youth Center is a neighborhood approach to the revitalization and empowerment of a community in crisis. We provide a safe and nurturing environment committed to good citizenship and academic excellence.

Thank you to acclaimed artist Synthia SAINT JAMES for the "Envision" artwork featured in our logo. Catch the vision of college and career readiness for our students!







## GREETINGS

### Paul Wetmore, Chairman of the Board

The most rewarding part of my connection to the Al Wooten Jr. Youth Center is seeing how young students arriving for their first programs will progress over the years to become confident young adults with strong academic backgrounds that can take them anywhere they want to go. This cycle of potential, however, was put at risk when schools and community organizations closed their doors and moved to an untested model of educating due to the mandatory closures connected to the COVID-19 pandemic. While we all felt uncertainty, the impact was amplified in our at-risk communities.

What I saw next from the Wooten Center was nothing short of extraordinary. Pivoting to online alternatives over a single weekend, the center not only maintained services, but also made them stronger. They continued to provide a safe and nurturing environment for students while supporting their extended families. Center staff and volunteers saw the hurt and confusion in their kids and devoted themselves to ensuring no child was left behind. The center uses a holistic approach and understands that a child's success takes the support and encouragement of everyone around them.

While the intensity of the pandemic is behind us, the quieter impacts remain: learning loss, lingering mental health concerns, families living in financial uncertainty. Education opens doors to new opportunities and is a way to move up in society. The center is a lifeline to our most vulnerable families. I humbly ask and encourage you to consider how you can lend a hand to the Wooten Center. Your donations of time, financial resources and partnerships can have real and long-lasting effects.

As Chairman of the Board, I am grateful for the dedication of my fellow board members, the resilience and passion of our staff, our tireless volunteers, and the optimism and hope of the children and families we serve. They are truly my inspiration. As I look at the next wave of kids entering the Wooten Center doors, I can only begin to wonder how they will fulfill their potential if they are able to receive the life-changing support and encouragement they deserve.



# GREETINGS

Corey Dantzler, Executive Director

As one of the newest members of the Al Wooten Jr. Youth Center family, I could not be more proud to shine a light on the families we serve, our tireless staff, and the community of volunteers, donors, and other agencies that support us. I have spent my entire career in the non-profit space, and I was thrilled to be back in South Los Angeles focusing once again on children and families. I joined the center in December 2022 as Executive Director and it felt like coming home.

The essence of the Al Wooten Jr. Youth Center is to provide a safe and nurturing environment committed to good citizenship and academic excellence. A bold mission on any day became even more challenging when the team here had to shutter our physical doors due to the mandated closures connected to the COVID-19 pandemic. Our world swiftly changed and many among us were impacted to the greatest extent. I am compelled to pause for a moment to honor the memory of those we lost during the pandemic. May we always remember their stories and support their loved ones.



When I was first getting up to speed at the center in early 2023, I was enthralled by the ingenuity of this small, but mighty organization during the pandemic. Powered by willing hearts and a determined spirit, the center dug deeper and looked wider to not only maintain, but also improve upon our programming. Through the guidance of our past executive director, Naomi McSwain, who retired in March 2023 after 17 years in the position, the center helped its community of families navigate through this new terrain during a time when those who needed our resources were most vulnerable.

Naomi, Al Wooten's cousin and our founding executive director, is a warrior for youth and the community. When you say someone dedicates their life to a mission, she is the epitome of what that means. On behalf of everyone we serve, I offer immense gratitude to Naomi for leading the center during our roughest time and am grateful for her continued inspiration as a member of our board of directors.

As the center adapted and iterated through the cycles of the pandemic, our Wooten team was able to offer improved resources such as hybrid programs offering online and onsite (which allows us to connect with more students), a high-impact tutoring approach (which serves as a model for other programs), expanded physical facilities (to increase student capacity), and broadened mental health resources (to alleviate the lingering impacts of the pandemic).

When Naomi exited her role, she left the center in a strong position with \$1.7 million raised in 2022 and increases in staff and other resources, but she was also clear: there is more work to do! We are committed to continually evolve our methods through an enhanced focus on leadership development and agency collaboration. We want to increase awareness of our services, attract more staff and volunteers, and build up our physical and online presence to serve those in need.

I could not be more confident that the center is ready to meet the evolving needs of the community. Our students are thriving, and this could only be possible through the dedication of staff and volunteers, the generosity of donors, the collaboration with public and private agencies, and the resilience of the families we serve.

I invite you to explore this social impact report to "Catch the Vision" of how these new initiatives came to life and their inspiring results.





**Naomi at her retirement party passing the baton to Corey. The baton around Corey's neck is an employee badge previously worn by our founder, Naomi's aunt Faye.**



# REPORT SUMMARY

Naomi McSwain, Executive Director (retired), Board of Directors

## Closing the Knowledge Gaps

We are in our fourth year after the World Health Organization declared March 11, 2020 as the start of a global COVID-19 pandemic. As a nonprofit youth center, we are still assessing and improving our educational support services to help students recover from the learning losses due to the school closures. The idea that many children suffer from the condition caused by losing knowledge they had attained or missing knowledge they never received is not new in our community, not with statistics like only 2% of students recently testing on grade level in math at nearby Manhattan Place Elementary. That's a drop from 4% the year before in 2021-22 when the state resumed collecting data. Schools did not administer tests from 2019-20 to 2020-21 due to the pandemic.

High-impact tutoring is a proven method to help students attain the knowledge needed to be college and career-ready, able to perform without remediation at universities and businesses. There is a silver lining in that the pandemic brought attention to what educators have always known—that the personalized attention that high-impact tutoring's private and small group instruction gives is capable of helping students of any background become high achievers.

The pandemic introduced our world to virtual learning and its use as an accessible and affordable tool for a wealth of academic and personal enrichment like the free reading and math diagnostics and private tutoring we provide using [www.i-ready.com](http://www.i-ready.com) and [www.khanacademy.org/digital-sat](http://www.khanacademy.org/digital-sat). Someone suggested that we use the term “individualized tutoring” instead of “private tutoring” because the latter sounds too elitist and is something people would not believe we could provide in the inner city. We can use tools like these that use state content standards and adaptive learning to assign lessons based on student needs and performance. Students can receive lessons above grade level. Plus, the tools ensure students will receive the right personalized instruction and practice, no matter the tutor helping guide them.

In this report on the Wooten Center's recovery in the LA County emergency declaration period from March 4, 2020 to March 31, 2023 and our change to a hybrid model, we share our lessons learned to help inform and inspire other service providers and prevent undue challenges (see Road to Recovery). We are a nonprofit youth development agency that faced permanent closure in 2020 after 30 years, but for the saving grace of largely individual donors and board and staff members who set limits and goals and achieved them.

Our then 18-member board gave \$181,000 in 2020, and obtained \$129,000 from their friends, bringing our first signs of financial recovery by year-end. With additional support from volunteers and partners offering programming, and donors providing relief funds, the center went from a budget cut of \$300,000 in 2020 to \$1.7 million in income raised in 2022, including some 54% in multi-year funding.

Our students saw an approximate 10-point jump in their reading and math scores from 2022 to 2023 in part due to high-impact tutoring. This gives us hope for more increases in coming years.

Meanwhile, we learned an important lesson about setting goals for tutoring when our students focused on homework without studies to fill their knowledge gaps. Both are required for any child to reach their highest potential. Read the section on Program Results to see what occurred. Also note our closing section, Looking Forward, for planned expansion efforts.

We are grateful for every lesson learned and for the people who stood with us during the pandemic and continue to do so to bring peace to our homes and communities. Certainly, we could not have done it without all the people mentioned in this report. Thank you for catching the vision of college and career readiness for all students.



# WHO WE ARE

## Then

In 1989, a teen young man who has never been identified murdered Alton Wooten, Jr. in a drive-by shooting on Adams near Crenshaw in South Los Angeles. Alton was not a gang member like his killer but, at age 35, the innocent victim of an initiation, according to police. Instead of retaliating or allowing family members to do so, his mother, Myrtle Faye Rumph, looked for a way to help keep other people from suffering her son's fate. One week after his funeral, Ms. Faye, as she would come to be known, began holding weekly Saturday morning meetings in her Inglewood home with family and friends wanting to find solutions to the gang crisis in their area.

After three months of some very passionate discussions, the group agreed that a youth center would be an ideal solution to provide the safe and nurturing environment that kids need during the 3 p.m. to 6 p.m. hours when gang violence is at its height. It was about 4 p.m. when the young man in a passing car emerged from the front passenger window, taking potshots at people walking down the street, hitting Alton once in the stomach with bullets from an assault rifle. Though others were targeted, Alton was reportedly the only one killed that day.

"If that young man had been someplace like a Teen Post instead of the streets, my son would still be alive," Ms. Faye said at the meetings, referencing the youth center that helped her three children in the 1960s.

## A two-room storefront

One year after her son's murder, in 1990, Ms. Faye rented a two-room storefront at 9115 S. Western Ave. next door to the moving and storage business she owned with her husband. With help from family and friends, she opened a free afterschool program for boys and girls ages 8-18. Our first students were four pre-teen boys, wannabe gang members who used to hang out on the corner in front of Ms. Faye's business.

With a supportive husband who had never seen his wife so insistent, Ms. Faye sold their home to cover most of our initial costs in our first two years. Her "founding family members and friends" volunteered to help with homework and field trips and the candy and pizza fundraisers that helped pay the rent, utilities, and other operations and program expenses.

We were completely volunteer-run until 1992 when some much-needed financial support came in unexpectedly after LA's civil unrest and a front-page *Wall Street Journal* article featuring Ms. Faye highlighted our work in the riot zone (see [www.wootencenter.org/news](http://www.wootencenter.org/news)). Our first paid staff member was a secretary hired to respond to the donations that totaled more than \$50,000 in week one. Shirley Jaffe gave her birthday party at the center and asked her friends to bring gifts to the kids. She and her husband Stuart gifted the van above.





## Now

Today, after 34 years of service, the Wooten Center is still on Western Avenue, this time in six storefront buildings that we own across the street from our original site. We serve more than 300 students in grades 3-12 in our afterschool and summer programs and have a budget of \$760,000. Our goals are to help students attain grade-level proficiency and promotion, high school graduation, and college and career access and success.

Our mission statement, created in 1991 with help from a United Way pro bono consultant, is as follows:

“The Al Wooten Jr. Youth Center is a neighborhood approach to the revitalization and empowerment of a community in crisis. We provide a safe and nurturing environment committed to good citizenship and academic excellence.”





# WHO WE SERVE

## Then

The learning losses that resulted from the COVID-19 pandemic school closures are not new to us. We see it year after year with the majority of students entering our programs performing below grade level. For example, in 2022-23, only 2% of students at nearby Manhattan Place Elementary met state standards in math, with a low 12% in English language arts.

During the emergency declaration from March 2020 to March 2023, the Wooten Center provided academic and personal enrichment for more than 800 students in grades 3-12. We offered services online only after our temporary closure on March 13, 2020 and onsite and online (hybrid) after our reopening 15 months later in June 2021. Our free virtual private tutoring has attracted students from some 10 miles away in the South Bay to 1,000-plus miles in Texas.

## Now

The Wooten Center primarily serves low-income families in the South Los Angeles area, particularly our Gramercy Park community, which has one of the highest rates of violent crime in Los Angeles County. About 98% of students at nearby Manhattan and LaSalle elementary schools are eligible for free or reduced lunch, a proxy measure for low-income status.

According to the South Los Angeles Demographic Profile, the median household income here in 2021 was \$47,692, some 38% lower than the county's median income. Some 53% of households with children in South LA are headed by single parents who largely cannot afford to pay for afterschool care, let alone private tutoring and the transportation we provide from schools to the center. Our college and career readiness are also essential for guidance as only 8% of South LA residents have a four-year degree or higher.





# WHAT WE DO

## Then

We had been enjoying our newly renovated youth center for only three months when COVID-19 hit. LA Unified School District (LAUSD) announced its planned two-week closure on Friday, March 13, 2020. Come Monday we joined the shut down and opened online only with virtual private tutoring.

Two weeks earlier, with referrals from our board chair Paul Wetmore, a managing director of investments at Merrill Lynch, we had started taking students to Bank of America in downtown Los Angeles to work one-on-one with staff volunteering to serve as private tutors. It was a pilot to explore the value of more personalized instruction as a means to help students perform on or above grade level. It was working so well we started looking at [www.freeconference.com](http://www.freeconference.com) as a tool for remote volunteers to work online with students.

When COVID-19 abruptly interrupted our experiment, our staff already knew what method and tool we could use to connect Wooten staff with students. Per the LAUSD announcement, we thought the school closures would be temporary. We didn't expect that our virtual learning would become long-term or permanent. We only wanted to help students with the assignments schools had sent them home with for two weeks. Our executive director worked over the weekend to pull the procedures and materials together.

## Fewer than 10 students

Enrollment started slowly with fewer than 10 students signing up our first week. Once everyone realized that the schools would not reopen soon and that fewer teachers would be available to help kids with their assignments, our private tutoring jumped to an average of 45 students per day using a service that was growing in popularity—Zoom.

At our height in spring 2021, we provided an average of 224 private tutoring sessions taught by 34 volunteer tutors, plus six Wooten staff and board members. The volunteers largely came from universities and corporations whose students and staff were more available under the stay-at-home orders. Since we were online, volunteers could come from any distance. Our furthest were a group of students at St. John's University in New York, all serving remotely.

Other CollegeTrek Afterschool Program online activities held during the three pandemic years included coding and robotics with South LA Robotics, Girl Talk with Positive Results Center, Animation with STEAM:CODERS, College Admissions Night with AKA Sorority, Inc., College Applications Night with Lezlee Matthews Consulting, singing and piano with Whitehall Arts Academy.





Staff added to the academic and personal enrichment with online classes including world languages and culture with cooking with Ms. Christelle and virtual playground featuring gaming with Mr. Casey and Mr. Jason. We added a cooking component to the former since the kids could not taste the sample food from around the world that we had provided in person. With parents at home from their closed worksites, it was great seeing them cooking a variety of cultural foods with their kids in their own kitchens.

### Reopening the center

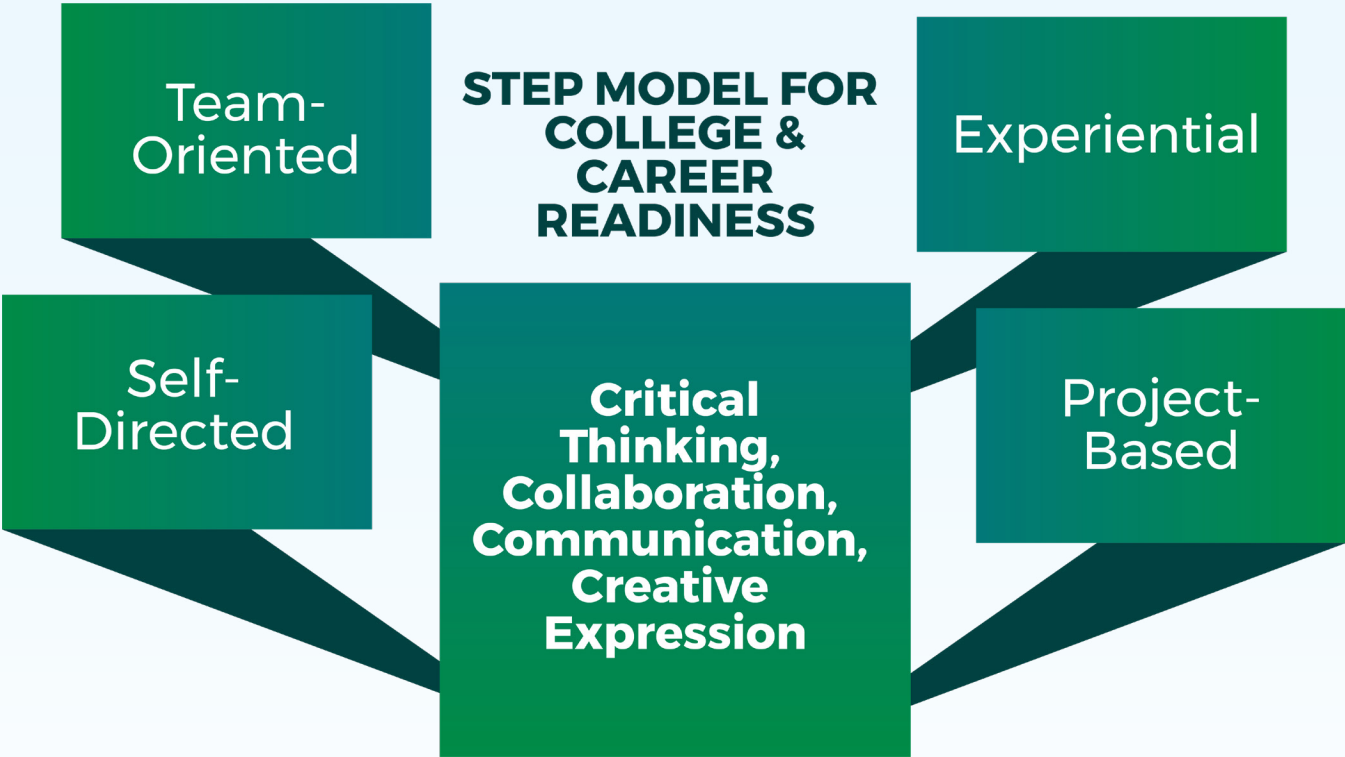
Reopening the center with our Summer Fun Camp in June 2021, we used LA County Public Health guidance documents for childcare centers to adopt daily COVID protocols including temperature checks, masks, air filters, desk shields, and hand washing. Other preparations included installing windows and ceiling fans for airflow and floor stickers for social distancing in lines, along with sanitizer dispensers in classrooms and bathrooms and signage on the best method for washing hands. A new digital scanner and badges for signing in at the front door helps prevent spreading COVID-19 and other germs.

More than 60 students participated in our first hybrid environment. A survey of parents and students revealed that most were still wary about in-person activities even though the schools were reopening too. As a result, only about 25 participants came to the center that first semester. Our temperature checks at the door found around three students and staff with COVID in that period. We attribute the low number of cases in part to the isolation and other protocols that we followed religiously.

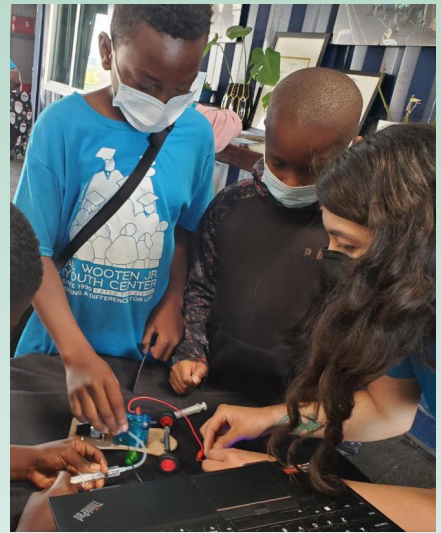
### Now

The Wooten Center remains hybrid with online and onsite activities, though mostly the latter. We offer college and career readiness with a holistic approach for academic and personal enrichment for students in grades 3-12. Our theory of change is that education is a pathway to success, empowering students to avoid the kind of lifestyle that led to the murder of Al Wooten, Jr.

All lesson planning is based on our STEP Model for quality activities that are self-directed, team-oriented, experiential, and project-based. STEP activities engage students in our four college and career readiness skills: critical thinking, collaboration, communication, and creative expression.







## Our Three Programs

The center's primary goals are to help students attain grade-level proficiency and promotion, high school graduation, and college and career access and success. We achieve them through these programs:

**CollegeTrek** is a free afterschool program with hybrid activities including homework assistance and private tutoring with academic assessments and instruction tailored to individual student needs on i-Ready and Khan Academy, weekly classes in coding and robotics with USC Viterbi School of Engineering, Science Lab with PS Science, visual and performing arts, world languages and culture with cooking, sports and recreation including basketball, soccer, golf and gardening, as well as field trips and more.

**Summer Fun Camp** is a low-cost fun and educational summer bridge program featuring an annual STEM theme with guest mentors and special project-based activities exploring the focus, as well as private and small group tutoring, a basketball camp, world languages and culture with cooking, weekly swimming lessons at Ketchum YMCA, and field trips including kayaking, surfing, fishing, movies and more.

**MyCollegeTrek** for teens only provides year-round college and career-prep activities for teens age 13+, including Teen Scholars high school success planning workshops and college advisement and applications assistance with Educate California, Youth Leadership Institute with AKA Sorority, Inc., Teen Helper paid and volunteer internships, Teen Night discussion groups, Teen Job Shop workshops with the Archdiocesan Youth Employment Services (completing resumes and job applications), financial literacy workshops, Boys to Men and Just for Girls discussion groups, college tours and scholarships, Juvenile Justice Jeopardy discussion groups with cops and kids discussing juvenile law, and more.





# KEY IMPACT STORIES

## I. Road to Recovery

The following is an excerpt from an email a foundation sent to our executive director on March 27, 2020, two weeks after we closed on March 13 for an unexpected 15 months:

*We must respectfully decline your funding request at this time. Due to the public health crisis of the COVID-19 pandemic - an international medical emergency that we have not witnessed before in our lifetimes - you should also know that the foundation has temporarily suspended the receipt of online grant applications.*

In another email, a funder's community relations representative who we reached out to stated,

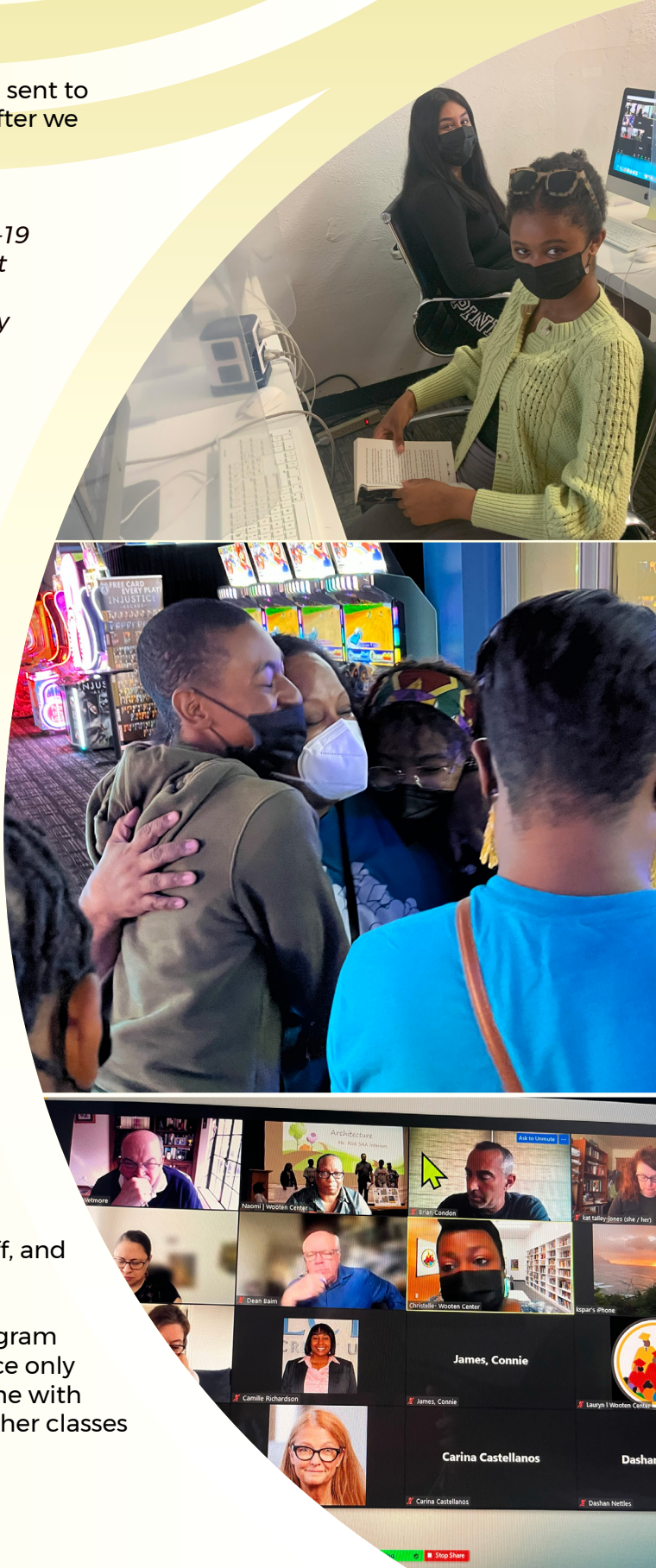
*We are currently focusing our funding to support hospitals/clinics, food banks, and organizations that primarily serve homeless and elderly populations. I will notify you if we extend support to include the efforts you described below.*

In total, we received an unprecedented \$420,000 in grant denials in 2020 from 14 prospective funders, eight of them within one month of our closing. Several cited "interruptions" in operations. We had thought at least \$100,000 of the denials were promising. This added to the unpredictability and grief we felt seeing televised images of hundreds of dead bodies piled up at cemeteries, the delayed and uncertain reopening of schools, and at least one dozen people at the center contracting COVID by year-end. All thankfully survived.

On March 22, our board chair Paul Wetmore sent the following email to our executive director Naomi McSwain: "With the 22k in reserves and no cash coming in, *how long would the center stay open?*"

Naomi responded with a recommended \$12,457 per month in cuts, including layoffs for five of our 10 staff members and three of five contractors (see Financial Results). She held virtual meetings with our board, staff, and families to discuss solutions.

We had already started our free virtual afterschool program on our first day of closure, offering homework assistance only for help completing the assignments schools sent home with students. We later added music, STEM, gaming, and other classes the kids requested.





After identifying essential expenses to keep the program going and our facilities in place for our eventual return, our next steps included contacting board members, corporate donors, and other friends for contributions. By April 30, we received about \$65,000 in donations, most from board members and their friends. Two Paycheck Protection Program loans from the Small Business Administration totaling \$79,443, and a \$40,000 COVID relief grant from the California Community Foundation allowed some rehiring and a free virtual summer camp by June.

In November 2020, the foundation mentioned in the first email excerpt awarded \$20,000, an unexpected and appreciated gift after the denial for our original \$60,000 request. We submitted a new proposal to them the following year and received approval for \$75,000. In addition, we very gratefully received about 50% of the projected sponsorships for our dinner and golf tournament in 2020 and 2021, even though we canceled the annual events.

In the beginning, we considered laying off everyone except our executive director and accounting contractor. We didn't know how or when we could pay everyone, or how we could maintain essential expenses like mortgage and insurance when other nonprofits were closing doors permanently. This did not happen at the Wooten Center thanks to the individual donors who contributed when foundations understandably established other priorities. By year-end, we had raised \$565,793, some 54% from individual donors, including \$181,000 from our board.

The total income is less than the \$760,000 projected in our original 2020 budget but \$115,793 more than the reduced \$450,000 forecast. We returned to \$760,000 in 2022, raising \$1.7 million that year, 83% from grants. Our lessons learned that led to achieving this success are below in no particular order.

## Lessons learned

**Strategic adaptive planning:** One of many silver linings the pandemic introduced is the capacity building foundations have been investing to help agencies recover. The Wooten Center was fortunate to receive an invitation to attend a six-month "Creating an Adaptive Plan" consultancy with Bridgespan Group "to support your organization's resilience and its capacity to reimagine a better future." The Ballmer Group, the Ralph M. Parsons Foundation, and the Rose Hills Foundation paid the \$7,500 fee for the six-month training. In Fall 2021, Wooten staff participated in the online discussions facilitated by our board member Dr. Laurie Inman, then-chair of the liberal studies department at CSU Dominguez Hills where she taught student teachers how to implement high-impact tutoring. Guided by Bridgespan materials, the team produced an action plan with three priorities—personalized instruction and the full-time staffing and major donations with multi-year funding needed to implement the activity for the long-term. We achieved all three priorities in one year after adopting high-impact tutoring, hiring three full-time staff members, and raising the \$1.7 million in 2022. In addition, the Annenberg Foundation gave \$10,000 to fund a two-year Bridgespan consultancy for our new executive director and administrative staff. The Nonprofit Sustainability Initiative was a new offering that awarded \$100,000 in 2022 for training, hiring incentives, and retirement benefits in the transition period from our past to new executive director.

**Diverse funding:** Pre-pandemic, we typically did not pursue government funding to avoid excessive regulations and paperwork. We do now, further diversifying our funding mix. There are fewer challenges today with public funders in part due to the pandemic's revelation that streamlined processes are needed to get help to people sooner rather than later.

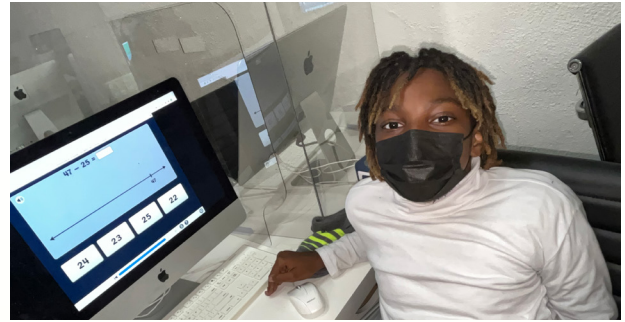
**Self-care:** The pandemic reminded us of the importance of maintaining good relationships with our donors, acknowledging gifts, and letting people know your needs genuinely and graciously. It also raised the issue of self-care. One staff member commented on the challenge of helping people when you are suffering. Wooten board members Amy Johnson and John Lapham



recognized this when they each gave \$10,000 for staff bonuses. John collected more donations from his colleagues at PineBridge Investments for general operating expenses. Durfee Foundation awarded a \$30,000 self-care grant in 2022 from their new Lark Awards. We used the funds for staff bonuses and a week-long planning retreat at a local hotel.

**Mental health:** Meanwhile, our youth were also facing mental health challenges. When a young man in our virtual Teen Talk discussion group expressed daily thoughts of suicide because he missed his friends, we contacted Jenesse Center and South Central Training Consortium (SCTC) for free counseling services. We engaged the young man and other teens in a project where students consulted with SCTC therapists to produce videos on coping with depression. The young man is doing well today in high school. We paid stipends to his team and another teen group that produced a video on COVID-19 impacts at the center. See [www.wootencenter.org/videos](http://www.wootencenter.org/videos). We also looked for ways to bring more joy to counter the depression. The LA28 Olympic Organizing Committee helped by donating bicycles and bringing athletes for fitness and fun.

**Cooperatives:** We were overwhelmed in 2020 after receiving registration forms to provide our free private tutoring for more than 100 students. When Cheryl Branch at LA Metropolitan Churches invited our executive director to a meeting for the newly formed Community Response System of South Los Angeles ([www.crssla.com](http://www.crssla.com)), we saw it as a way to potentially find other agencies to accept our referrals. The result was the formation of a CRSSLA education committee to bring South LA youth agencies and schools together to work cooperatively in meeting the needs of our students. Our executive director Naomi McSwain started the committee and served as co-chair for three years. The result was workshops on case management and high-impact tutoring. Naomi and other CRSSLA leaders met with LAUSD officials to advocate for the free private tutoring the district ultimately provided for students like wait-listed Wooten registrants. The cooperative also introduced us to several agencies serving in our community, including Kedren Community Health Center, which provided free COVID testing at the center, and CRSSLA co-founder Community Build, Inc., which provided PPE supplies, food, and more for Wooten families.





**Engagement:** We had never formally used case management as part of our services, not until we learned about the practice as a method for increasing student participation. We understood when we learned that 15,000 high school students were missing from their virtual classes in Los Angeles. Most students in our afterschool program had also opted against joining us online. In the above CRSSLA meetings, we discussed case management as a means for engaging youth and parents. Dr. Angela Parker, director of training at Jenesse Center, gave a presentation on the method, sharing procedures and templates for adopting the practice at your agency. We immediately assigned one staffer as a family outreach specialist to provide the recommended dedicated person to reach out to our families to see how they were doing and to invite them to join us. It worked.

**Needs assessments:** Last but not least, we have always conducted parent and youth surveys, always held regular staff and board meetings and retreats, and what we call “family meetings” to include our youth and parents in planning. We understand the risk of offering irrelevant services when they are based on your perceptions and prejudices. We did not imagine needs like heaters, jackets, car insurance, or motel rooms when we established our Family Emergency Fund with an additional \$10,000 each from our board members Amy Johnson and John Lapham. We knew that some students would likely need laptops to join our meetings so used the fund and later donations from STEAM:CODERS, AT&T, and Human-i-t to provide this. What we hadn’t counted on was the need for Wi-Fi, which the fund and Human-i-t helped provide. The parents alone knew what their households needed. It was up to us to ask and listen.

With the diversity of needs during the pandemic, we saw the importance of asking and listening to ensure success in supporting our families in meeting their pandemic challenges. There is no doubt that we could have closed in 2020 after 30 years had our friends not listened to us to help meet our needs.

## II. High-Impact Tutoring

In early March 2020, two weeks before the start of the pandemic, the Wooten Center began piloting a more individualized approach to help students attain grade-level proficiency. This pilot was far-sighted and would soon become invaluable in helping students recover from the learning losses suffered because of the school closures. Commonly known as “high-impact tutoring,” where a student receives personalized, one-on-one tutoring at least three times a week for a minimum 30 minutes per session, the approach is proven among top education researchers as an effective strategy to counteract academic shortfalls.

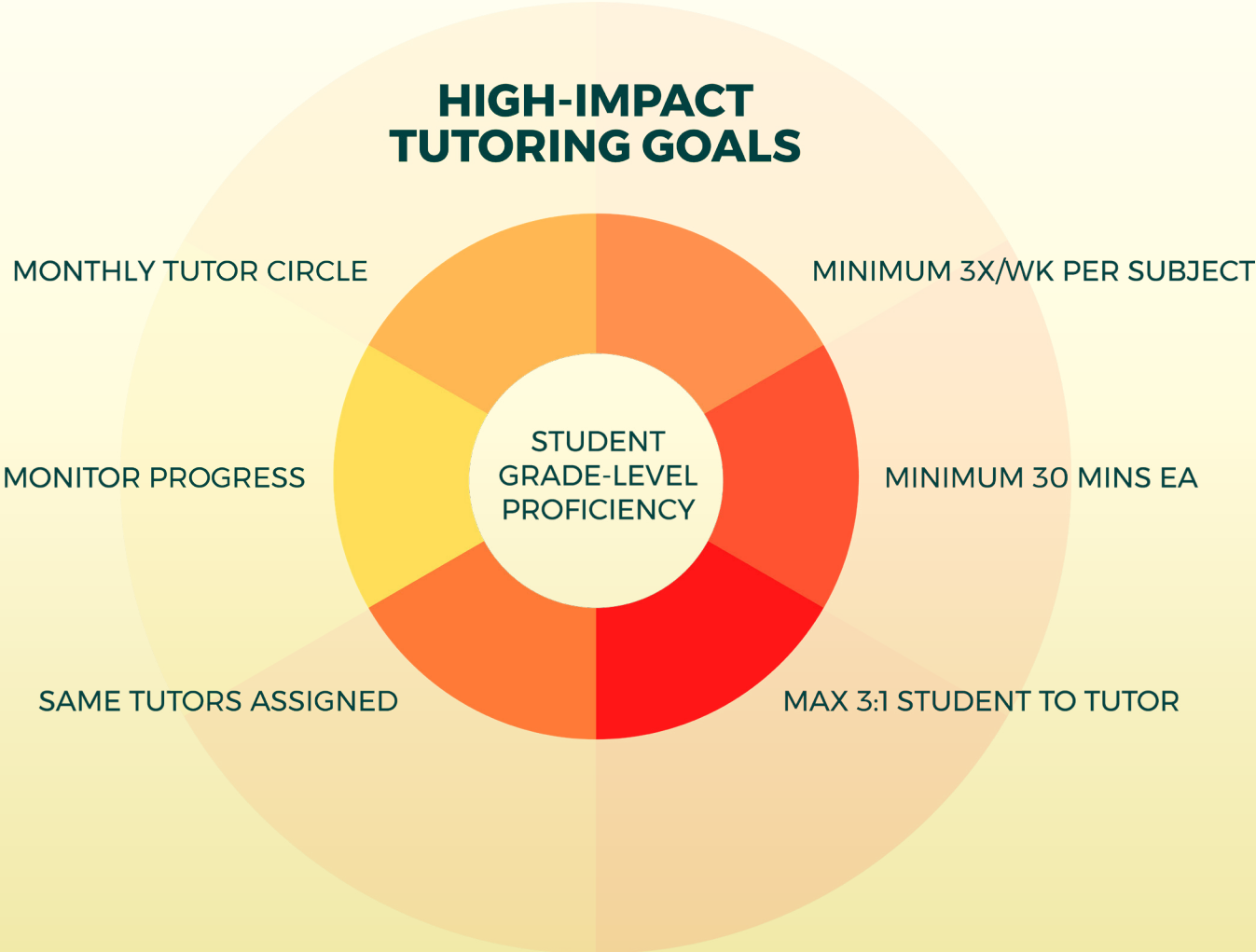


The center has seen the strategy's impact. In 2022-23, more of our students increased their scores in math (87%) and reading (81%) and attained grade-level proficiency in math (39%) than the previous year (reading proficiency held steady at 25%).

### Beyond our walls

While the center aims to strengthen our own capacity to reach as many students in our community as possible, our tutoring approach has expanded beyond our walls by acting as a model for local and regional agencies. Our executive director initially learned of the method from Alexis Coleman, CEO of Urban Scholar Academy. Seeing good results at the center and wanting to share the method with local afterschool providers looking for solutions for academic recovery, in 2021, the Wooten Center partnered with the Community Response System of South LA to provide a workshop that trained representatives from 30 local agencies to develop high-impact tutoring services.

Since the start of the pandemic, the Wooten Center has also shared our approaches via the steering committee for the LA County Public Health Trauma Prevention Initiative Community Action for Peace Committee. One key partnership in progress is with the California School-Age Consortium to develop a training module to help out-of-school time providers statewide adopt high-impact tutoring. Private tutoring, common among affluent families and recommended worldwide for learning loss recovery, is thankfully becoming more accessible and affordable for families in South LA and beyond.





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### III. Parent Power

Parents are the best partners we could ever have. They love their children more than anyone and bring them to the Wooten Center to get the support they want to enhance their children’s well-being. We oftentimes get pleas and sometimes tears from parents seeking help for youth at risk of being held back or getting into trouble.

Our goal is to work in partnership with parents to get their children the help wanted. This could mean giving permission for us to talk to teachers or supporting our decisions for positive discipline. Dealing with the potentials of job loss, homelessness, and food insecurity, during the pandemic many parents also struggled to help their children with their at-home learning, especially with new technology like Google Classroom.

To ensure every parent would be able to access our support services, we continued to offer our free afterschool program and waived our two low-cost fees for registration (\$30 per household) and summer camp (\$65 per week, per student). We are very grateful for the California Community Foundation for making our Summer Fun Camp free for the first time through grants of \$40,000 in 2020, \$50,000 in 2021, and \$75,000 in 2022 under their Summer Learning Initiative.





## Empowering parents

Everyone wants to be self-sufficient and our parents are no different. Seeing the despair some expressed about the challenges meeting their families' needs due to financial or other difficulties, we considered ways to help empower them. The result was our Parent Power Group workshop, held weekly on Zoom with a variety of speakers presenting topics such as Math Tips for Parents, Budgeting and Generating Income Now, Teaching Kids Responsibility and Discipline, and Coping With Grief and Depression.

In addition, we started a family resources webpage to share housing, employment, and other opportunities. We stayed in touch with our current and past registrants via online orientations and family meetings where we brought youth and adults together with staff to plan our activities. We assigned a staffer to serve as a parent resource specialist for case management calling homes to check in and provide referrals to agencies including Jenesse Center for domestic violence shelters and South Central Training Consortium for individual and family counseling.

## Missed his friends

In one call, we discovered that a student hadn't attended his online classes in several months. He was a senior and thought he could still graduate. But he was at a charter school that did not adopt LA Unified's no-fail policy. He said he missed his friends and had been spending time playing games online with them, telling his parents he was in class. Our associate director Christelle had convinced him to call his school to get his status. That's when he learned he was failing. The aspiring automotive engineer had more than a dozen assignments to complete in a few weeks or else. We gave him more than the maximum three weekly private tutoring sessions for help writing papers and more.

We were in a staff meeting a few weeks later when his mom texted us his diploma. Although we offered him a scholarship to a community college, he opted to work with his dad's landscaping business and get an additional job to help with his family's struggles. It was the first time in some 10 years that a Wooten senior did not go straight to college. We gave him the \$250 scholarship anyway to purchase work supplies.

Parents appreciate the support offered and are happy to join us by serving as volunteers for tasks like serving food, cleaning or setting up classrooms, and attending field trips, also supporting fundraisers, and donating snacks and holiday meals. As one parent, Tracy Thomas, noted, "Staff members share a very sentimental and genuine desire to be of support. They have attended my son's graduations over the years and partner with me in tracking his grades and assignments. I often refer to the center as the best-kept secret in this part of Los Angeles."





## IV. Student Achievers

### DIRON

A family feeling overwhelmed and uncertain at the start of the pandemic found an unexpected lifeline at the end of a Facebook search: the Al Wooten Jr. Youth Center. Its resources and, more importantly, its people, guided Diron and his mother Tracy Thomas through one of the “most memorable, scariest and challenging years in history,” she said.

Since starting at the center in May 2020, Tracy has seen her son grow and make advances in his reading, math, and other academic skills. “He is above grade level in math and confidently takes college courses in his dual high school,” she said. “In addition to tutoring, he participates in numerous extracurricular activities, field trips, and the summer program, which has greatly benefited his overall mental health.” Diron added, “One of my favorite activities is to play football at the center. I would be devastated if I couldn’t.”

With the center’s focus on family, both mother and son attended one of their favorite pandemic activities together: the online cooking classes. According to Diron, he “got to learn how to make and eat good food from other countries.” From his mother’s perspective: “Diron has become very knowledgeable of how to safely use many kitchen utensils, and is now affectionately known as ‘Chef D2’ among our family and friends.”

This sense of family extends into direct parental support. Families benefit from the center’s backpack giveaways, laptop donations, food donations, and school supplies, along with information and referrals. “I have to mention the Parent Power Group interactive workshops, which allowed me to advance my knowledge in helping to support my son, myself, and others,” Tracy said.

When asked what she would want to share about supporting the center, she responded, “Having parents that are low-income and living in a society where rent is high, prices are increasing, and the struggle has changed makes the volunteerism and donations worth the while.”

### ALEXIA

For Alexia’s parents, a flyer sent home from school and a family connection spurred their interest in introducing their eldest daughter to the Wooten Center back in 2016. A third-grader at the time, Alexia participated in homework assistance, private tutoring, and art classes.

Over the years, “We have seen Alexia soar,” said her mother Carina Cadena, who added that the Wooten Center has played a pivotal role in guiding Alexia’s academic and personal growth and helping her map out her educational and career goals. Alexia is interested in a science-related field, and she plans to attend a UC school to complete her general education requirements before focusing on her major. She is currently a junior and dual enrollment student working towards her associate’s degree while completing her high school education. Alexia maintains an impressive 3.8 GPA in both her high school and college coursework.

DIRON WON A GIFT CARD FOR ACHIEVING OUR “SMART RALLY” GOALS IN PRIVATE TUTORING.



**“He is above grade level in math and confidently takes college courses in his dual high school.”**

ALEXIA SERVES AS A TEEN HELPER HELPING TEACHERS AND STUDENTS.





“The Wooten Center is a great place for tutoring. The classes are fun and there’s a lot of resources,” Alexia said. The pandemic made it hard to stay connected with friends, and the Wooten Center helped fill that gap. I enjoyed Fridays where we’d play games like Roblox and Among Us. It was chaotic, but we were having fun and it was nice to interact with old and new friends. Without the center, I’d feel like I lost a home.”

Alexia is already paying her opportunity forward by serving as a teen helper at the center. “She has gained valuable experience in dealing with challenging situations and has developed a greater appreciation for the hard work and dedication of the center’s staff,” Carina said.

She added that the center is not only a place for kids to gain academic assistance, it’s a safe place where they can be themselves and excel in every aspect of life. “They create an environment of family that you don’t find in other afterschool programs. When I leave my children at the center, I know that they are safe, that they will get the help they need with their work and that they will have fun.”

Alexia’s family has been an integral part of the Wooten Center for the past eight years. Carina, a library manager, is an active board member, serving as their corporate secretary.

## DELIGHT

Joining the Wooten Center in 2019 during her junior year of high school, Wooten alumnus Delight said the center made a substantial impact on her in a short period of time. “It’s a safe place to make friends and ask for assistance and knowledge,” she said. “It helps to build you up when you’re facing challenges.”

Delight recalls taking advantage of numerous activities (Teen Night, Summer Fun Camp, dance class, homework assistance, private tutoring) that she now realizes were helping her to grow and mature in her teen years. She also calls out the Juvenile Justice Jeopardy sessions, a digital game played with lawyers and police officers to explore juvenile law.

“Through all the activities and support, I felt motivated to make good choices,” she explained. “The center motivated me to select psychology as my major because I want to help people.”

For the past four years, Delight has been a full-time psychology major at Cal State Dominguez Hills. She received a financial boost through the center’s Ron Glass Memorial Scholarship. Delight earned primarily As and Bs and graduated in 2024 with honors.

Delight aspires to serve as a motivator and therapist, helping others make positive changes in their lives. She is currently looking for an internship and job in psychology, and ultimately wants to gain her masters in psychology, and become a therapist.

Her two siblings still benefit from the center’s resources and activities. “If the center wasn’t available to me or them, I would feel really sad,” Delight reflected. “I would tell any potential donor or supporter to do it for the kids. Give to every child in the community so that they know they can do anything; they don’t have to be afraid and that support will be available.”

**“The pandemic made it hard to stay connected with friends, and the Wooten Center helped fill that gap.”**

WOOTEN ALUM  
DELIGHT AT HER  
CSU DOMINGUEZ  
GRADUATION WITH  
OUR ASSOCIATE  
DIRECTOR CHRISTELLE.



**“Through all the activities and support, I felt motivated to make good choices.”**

# PROGRAM RESULTS

The Wooten Center is a grassroots organization founded by people who had no experience running afterschool programming. Helped by more than 30 years of classes and consultants at agencies including the Center for Nonprofit Management, California School-Age Consortium, and Bridgespan Group, we've gone from using sign-in sheets as our only tracking tool to creating a strategic adaptive plan to establish priorities and using an afterschool management software called KidTrax.

Created by nFocus Solutions, KidTrax is used to monitor our students' academic progress, to collect demographics and attendance data, and to facilitate parent and volunteer surveys and communications. KidTrax provides a variety of reports to help us assess our students' needs and provide targeted interventions.



## Tracking progress

We track progress for students completing at least two of our three annual i-Ready diagnostics, plus the lessons provided. After providing students with one-on-one assistance during the first year of the pandemic, from fall 2020 to spring 2021, we were surprised when we saw no real increase in their reading and math diagnostic scores.

A close look at the number of i-Ready lessons completed revealed that students had been largely using their private tutoring time doing homework. A great number of kids were behind in their school assignments and so wanted help for this to ensure grade completion. They wanted their private tutors to spend most and often all of their time helping them with schoolwork. We knew how critical it was for them to achieve grade promotion, particularly for their mental health, and so allowed it.



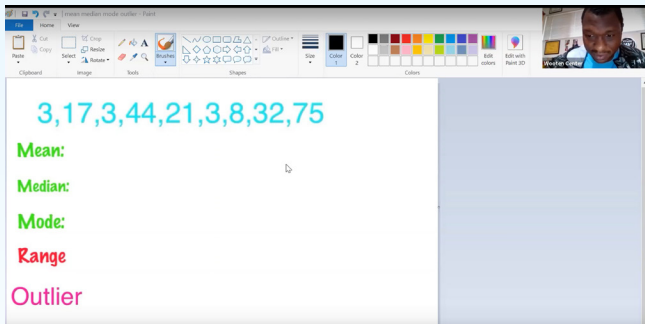


## A different tack

For the next two years, from fall 2021 to spring 2023, we took a different tack in setting goals for students to achieve high-impact tutoring, allowing more time for them to complete the required minimum 30 minutes per session, three times per week, per subject. We established a “Smart Rally” offering incentives like a game truck monthly on “Fun Friday” if students collectively completed goals like 200 lessons per month. As a result, our student scores and proficiencies jumped some 10% each (except for reading proficiency, which remained constant). In addition, in the 2022-23 school year, our math results included 87% of students tested increasing their scores and 38% performing on or above grade level. In reading, 81% increased their scores while 28% achieved proficiency.



It's interesting, however, that while scores increased the number of sessions held decreased significantly over the same period due to schools reopening fully in fall 2021. Also contributing was a drop in volunteers who had returned to schools and work, reducing the available tutors. As a result, we went from an average of 224 sessions per week in spring 2021 to an average of 36 per week in spring 2023.



In addition, in the 2022-23 school year, our math results included 87% of students tested increasing their scores and 38% performing on or above grade level. In reading, 81% increased their scores while 28% achieved proficiency.

And yet the need remains great with only 12% of students at nearby Manhattan Place Elementary meeting state standards in reading in 2022-23, with an even lower 2% in math. We have set a goal to do more targeted outreach to promote the free private tutoring service at this and other local school sites, and to provide more high-impact tutoring and the strategies needed for engagement.

The following are the tools used to measure our students' progress:

1. **KidTrax:** This cloud-based database allows us to record registration information, monitor attendance, facilitate communications, track test scores, and more.
2. **i-Ready and Khan Academy SAT-prep:** These are our chief tools for administering diagnostics and assigning virtual lessons in reading and math.
3. **Zoom Usage Reports and Chat Check-Ins:** A Zoom report and meeting feature for tracking attendance. Students type their names in the chat upon entering meetings.
4. **Wix Booking Calendar:** An online tool for parents to book private tutoring sessions.
5. **Weekly Outcomes Reports:** Staff input attendance, test scores, and other data into KidTrax for weekly monitoring.
6. **Annual Outcomes Summary:** An annual report to review our outcomes results for attendance, test score increases, grade-level proficiency, school promotion, college access, and more.
7. **Surveys:** Quantitative and qualitative data is collected from students, parents, and community members for needs assessments and asset mapping.

# FINANCIAL RESULTS

## Then

The year 2020 brought our largest budget cut since the recession of 2009. The first year of the pandemic, the sudden (and warranted) transfers in foundation grant funding from education to emergency services like food, and the cancellation of our annual dinner and golf fundraisers meant we had to cut \$310,000 from our \$760,000 budget.

Our board chair and executive director used a spreadsheet to go through all of our expenses meticulously, making the tough choices to lay off five staff and three contractors for nonessential services like transportation, maintenance, and music classes. They canceled services like Netflix and trash collection, and reduced the budgets for utilities such as water and electricity.

By year-end, the expense cuts in addition to a rally to raise more support from individual donors led to the first signs of our financial recovery. Our board of directors was largely responsible for this, donating their highest give that year at \$181,000, plus an additional \$129,000 get from their friends.

As a result, some six months after the expense cuts in a very unpredictable environment, we had happily raised about \$115,000 more than the \$450,000 reduced budget we projected. This with the rehiring of three of the laid off staff members and two of the contractors for our virtual learning, thanks in part to \$79,443 from two Paycheck Protection Program loans from the Small Business Administration (SBA), and a \$40,000 summer initiative relief grant from California Community Foundation. The SBA forgave the loans.

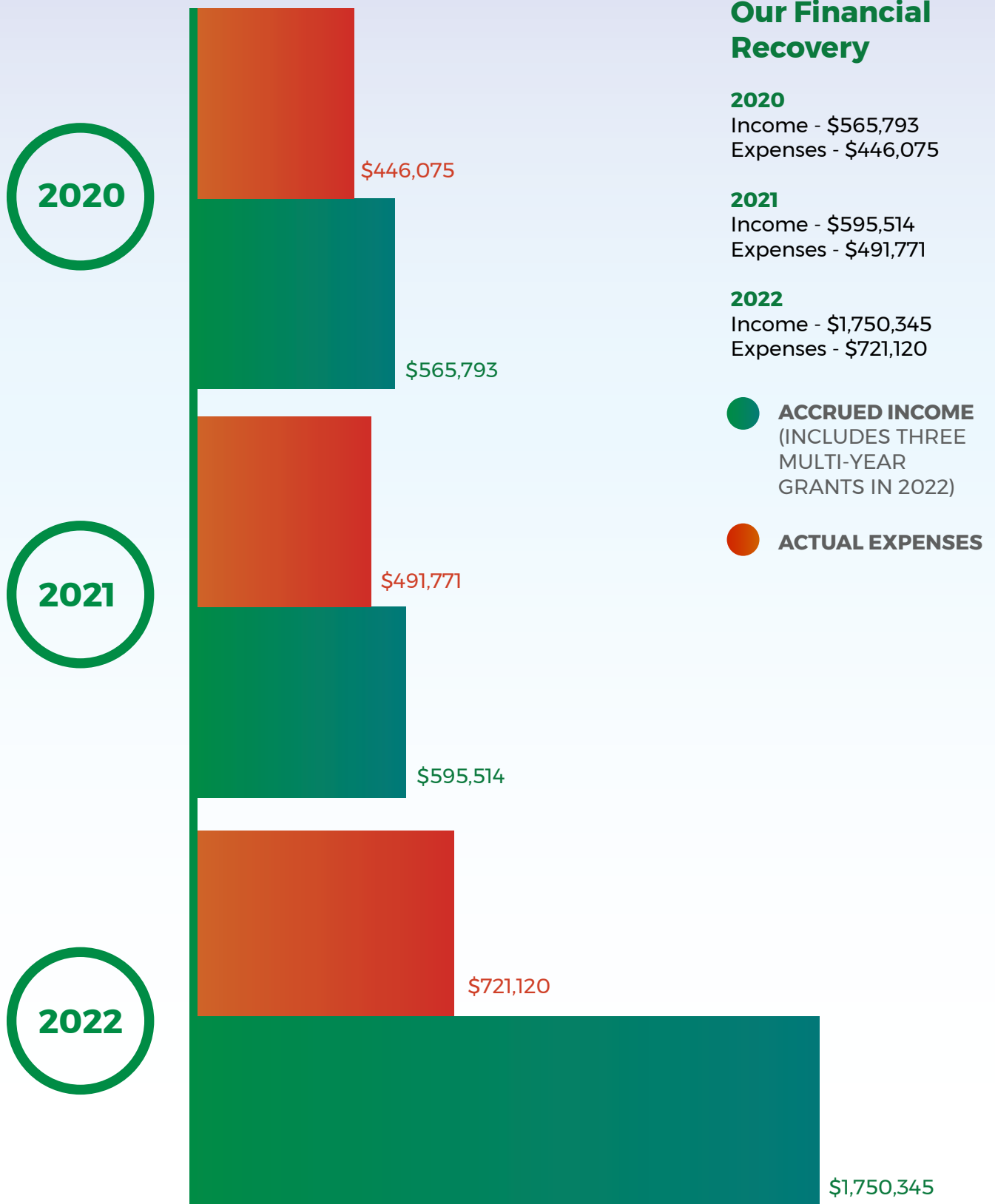
## Now

By 2022, we were in full recovery with \$1.7 million in income accrued, the highest in our history. Some of it was major, multi-year funding from local and state public agencies that had earmarked the dollars for pandemic relief for nonprofits. Education had become a priority at this time to help students experiencing learning losses from the missed school instruction.





The new funding has allowed us to increase the staffing needed for what we expect to be a permanent hybrid environment, and to shore up our reserves, which we had almost depleted struggling to keep our doors open in year one.







Chris  
Teles  
ASSOCIATION PRESIDENT





# OUR SUPPORTERS

For more information, visit [www.wootencenter.org/supporters](http://www.wootencenter.org/supporters).

## Volunteers

Volunteers have been the soul of the Wooten Center since we were founded in 1990. The Wooten Center was completely volunteer-run by Wooten family members, parents, and other supporters, until 1992 when we received our first major gifts to hire paid staff. The same media attention following LA's civil unrest that brought funding also brought volunteers from beyond the community, and in the three decades since our founding volunteers have helped us provide quality programming, personalized instruction, and a world of opportunities for students in grades 3-12. They have also stepped up to donate their administrative and technological expertise.

Agencies, businesses, and educational institutions have also provided everything from interns to counseling to architecture and design services. During the COVID-19 pandemic, we quickly realized that with our reduced budget, we needed more volunteers for private, one-on-one tutoring for the center's youth. We set up a detailed online calendar of dates and times they would be available. Volunteer tutors typically tutor at least one student a week for 45 minutes per session in math or English language arts and help them complete their online i-Ready diagnostics in the two subjects and the online lessons based on their results. They also help with homework.

In summer 2020, we hired a consultant, Dr. Lezlee Matthews (2nd from right above), former director of Community-based Learning at Loyola Marymount University, to connect us with universities for volunteers. Her job at LMU included placing students as volunteers at community agencies, including the Wooten Center. She did a fabulous job reaching out to schools and setting up the online accounts needed for recruitment. We received 24 new volunteer tutors in fall 2020 and 34 in spring 2021 as a direct result of her work.

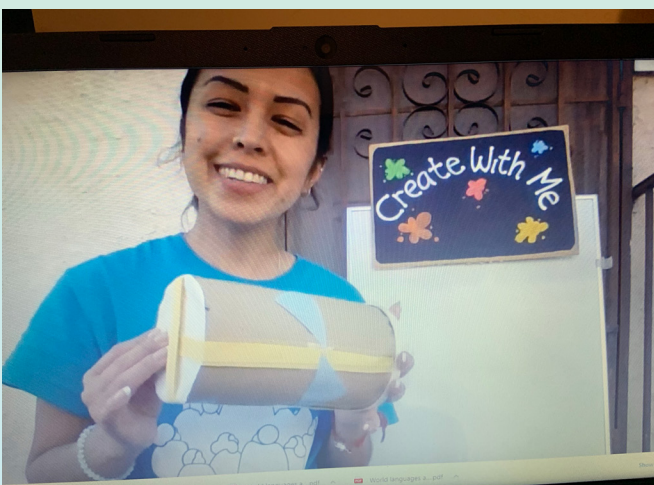


**Nearly all of our new tutors were college students from schools including:**

Azusa Pacific University  
Chapman University  
CSU Dominguez Hills  
CSU East Bay  
CSU Fullerton  
CSU Long Beach  
CSU Los Angeles  
CSU Northridge  
CSU San Bernardino  
Los Angeles Community College  
LMU Community-based Learning  
LMU Crimson Circle  
Pepperdine University Seaver College  
Pitzer College  
San Jose State University  
Scripps University  
St. John's University, Queens, NY  
St. Mary's College  
UCLA  
University of La Verne  
University of San Diego  
USC

**The following agencies and businesses provided volunteer tutors:**

Bank of America  
California Volunteers  
HKS Architects  
LA Urban League  
LA Works  
Merrill Lynch  
Transom Capital Group  
USC Rotaract Club  
Wells Fargo Bank





## Partners

The Wooten Center relies on partners to help us provide high-quality services and materials for our youth and families from homework help and tutoring to STEM and fitness classes, college and career advisement, life skills and leadership development, and performing and visual arts.

We especially relied on partners during the pandemic to provide resources such as job placement and food distribution, in addition to health services such as COVID testing and vaccinations, mental health and counseling services, and legal clinics. These services were online from summer 2020 to spring 2021 and in person from summer 2021 forward.

Thank you to the following partners for supporting Wooten youth and families during the pandemic:

- AKA Sorority, Inc. Tau Beta Sigma
- AltaSea at the Port of Los Angeles
- Archdiocesan Youth Employment Services
- AT&T
- Baldwin Bethany CDC
- Bethel AME Church
- Brentwood Art Center
- Brotherhood Crusade
- California Science Center
- California School-Age Consortium
- Columbia Memorial Space Center
- Community Build, Inc.
- Community Response System of South Los Angeles
- COVID Check LA
- EcoPoint Energy
- Educate California
- Empowered 4 Life Foundation
- Expand LA
- Girls Club of Los Angeles
- Hidden Genius
- Hire LA's Youth
- Holman CDC
- Human-i-t
- Jenesse Center
- Junior Achievement
- Kedren Community Center
- Ketchum YMCA
- Kinecta Federal Credit Union
- LA28 Olympic Organizing Committee
- LA County Library
- LA County Public Health Trauma Prevention Initiative
- LA Metropolitan Churches
- LA STEM Collective
- Lezlee Matthews Consulting
- Los Angeles Rams
- Maggie Hathaway Golf Course
- Marine Mammal Care Center
- Nobility Health
- Paramount Studios Black Employees Resources Group
- Positive Results Center
- P.S. I Love You
- Russell Westbrook Why Not? Foundation
- Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Center
- Self Help Graphics
- South LA Robotics
- STEAM:CODERS
- South Central Training Consortium
- Southern California Council on Black American Affairs
- Strategies for Youth
- The Engineer Factory
- The Experience Christian Ministries
- The Outdoor Initiative
- Tinker the Robot
- Pepperdine University Seaver College
- USC Community and Local Government Partnerships
- USC Credit Union
- USC Sea Grant
- USC Viterbi School of Engineering
- WeMentor 360
- West Athens Westmont Task Force
- White Hall Arts Academy
- Woodcrest Library



## Donors

### Financial Gifts

The Wooten Center is fortunate to be supported by a mix of foundations, corporations, agencies, and individuals, including our board members, and dinner and golf tournament sponsors. For more information on our donors, visit [www.wootencenter.org/donors](http://www.wootencenter.org/donors). Thank you to the following supporters for contributing grants and other financial gifts ranging from \$1,000 to \$200,000 (Weingart Foundation) for a total \$1.9 million received during the three-year pandemic:

- African American Center for World Mission
- Alice Short and Steven Vielhaber
- All Ways Up Foundation
- AmFund
- Amy Johnson
- Angels Wings Foundation
- Annenberg Foundation
- Bank of America
- Barry deGeorge Trust
- Biquis Herrera
- Blackbaud
- Brian Condon and Kara Rossi
- California Browncoats
- California Community Foundation
- California Violence Intervention and Prevention Program
- Cameron Price
- Carrie Estelle Doheny Foundation
- CD Tech
- CD8 Community Grant
- CH Stone
- Cleve and Ferne Hildebrand
- Community Build, Inc.
- Crail-Johnson Foundation
- Dan Sherry
- David and Elizabeth McFadzean
- Deborah Gero
- Dr. Dean Baim
- Dr. Harin and Lotte de Silva
- Dr. Laurie Inman
- Dr. Saeri Dobson
- Drs. Bernard and Connie James
- Durfee Foundation
- Ellen Rosenberg
- Eric Verdin
- Frank and Rosemary Denkins
- Frank Babka
- Fuse Media
- G.R.E.E.N. Foundation
- Gary and Karen Wagner
- Girls Club of Los Angeles
- Jamie Buckstaff
- Jennifer Horn
- Jeremy Burton
- John and Evelyn Lapham
- John Arnstein

### In-Kind Gifts

Nutrition and food services have always been important parts of our programming. It was not hard to see that expecting children to be happy doing homework while feeling hunger pangs would be insensitive at the least. As a result, we have long worked with partners to provide free and nutritious snacks and supper daily in our afterschool and summer programs. During the pandemic, we addressed the issue of hunger with weekly food distributions for our families.

Thank you to Rick Shlemmer at SAA interiors + architecture (SAAIA) for a great referral to his friend Ken Gerdau at Pacifica Foods, who provided super fresh fruits and vegetables for us to distribute. We received food boxes with quality staples from Gloria Davis at Girls Club, and healthy Thanksgiving baskets, gift cards, and backpacks with school supplies from Latrice McGlothlin and Tracy Fairbanks at Kinecta Federal Credit Union. A big thank you to the Wooten parents who turned out to help distribute it all.

In addition, we thank SAAIA for their pro bono architectural and design services, and Rebuilding Together and the Barry deGeorge Trust for the construction grants awarded during the pandemic to help make our youth center facilities safe and secure with fire and accessibility improvements and bullet-resistant walls.





- John Mohme Foundation
- Justine Stamen Arrillaga
- Kaiser Permanente
- Keith and Paulette Parker
- Kevin Wolfson
- Kinecta Federal Credit Union
- Kit and Karen Jennings
- KROQ Radio
- LA County Care First Community Investment
- LA Metropolitan Churches
- Larry McGlothlin
- Lauren McCall
- Leighton Carter
- Leonard I. Green Foundation
- Leslie Fishburn
- Los Angeles Rams
- Mark Covey
- Natalie Bush
- Natalie Torres-Soriano
- Network for Good
- Nonprofit Sustainability Initiative
- Paul and Melinda Wetmore
- Paul Yamaguchi
- PayPal Giving
- Pepperdine University
- Public Allies
- Ralph M. Parsons Foundation
- Rebuilding Together
- Reissa Foundation
- Richard W. Merel, M.D.
- Robert Clark
- Rose Hills Foundation
- Rupinder Sidhu
- SBA Economic Injury Disaster Loan
- Schwab Charitable Fund
- Specialty Family Foundation
- Steven and Debra Oh
- Susan Swedloff
- Tom and Laurie McCarthy
- United Way of Greater Los Angeles
- Vaccinate All 58
- Vanguard Charitable
- Wedgewood Enterprises
- Weingart Foundation
- Yuki Matsumura



## Family Emergency Fund

In the earliest days of the pandemic, then-executive director Naomi McSwain was in tears after talking on the phone with a mother who was afraid of being evicted from their home after she became one of scores of people who lost their jobs. “I didn’t know how we could help her for the long-term since we were also hanging on by a thread keeping our doors open,” Naomi said.

A few moments later Naomi received a call from Wooten board member Amy Johnson who was also in tears after watching news reports on the conditions low-income families were experiencing. Amy offered to donate \$20,000, with half going to establish a Family Emergency Fund for Wooten households and the other to provide relief for staff.

A few days later, another board member, John Lapham, donated \$10,000 for the family emergency fund. The fund has since helped Wooten families pay for needs such as rent, mortgage, utilities, food, car repairs, and heaters, blankets, and jackets for an especially cold winter that further challenged people facing homelessness in 2020.







## OUR BOARD

Our engaged and active board participates faithfully in governance and fiscal oversight via general board and committee meetings and an annual retreat.

With expertise in areas including finance, business, nonprofit management, technology, and secondary and higher education, they offer a wealth of experience to help manage our affairs and sustain our programs and operations. Board members have also included community members, parents, and center alums.

In addition to meetings, they contribute in a variety of ways, including volunteering with students and staff and serving as sponsors for our dinner and golf fundraisers. Each year our board gives and gets more than \$100,000.

The Wooten Center is grateful for the people providing support for our operations and programs through membership on our board of directors. We appreciate everyone for the time and expertise they give to provide the most effective and efficient services possible for our youth, families and community.





## Honorary Board

Myrtle Faye Rumph  
Founder  
(1931-2015)

Barbara Clark  
Founding Member

Ron Glass, actor  
Board Chair Emeritus  
(1945-2016)

Leslie Fishburn, CID, LEED AP  
*Regional Director of Health Interiors*  
*Principal (past)*  
HKS Architects

Sheena Flowers  
*Community and Social Impact Specialist*  
LA Kings Community Relations

Laurie Inman, Ed.D.  
*Assistant Professor*  
Educational Leadership for Justice  
Doctoral Program  
Cal State University, Dominguez Hills

## 2024 Board of Directors

### Chairperson

Paul F. Wetmore  
*Managing Director, Investments (retired)*  
Merrill Lynch

### Vice Chairperson

Keith S. Parker  
*Assistant Vice Chancellor (retired)*  
UCLA Government & Community Relations

### Secretary

Carina Castellanos (Wooten parent)  
*Community Library Manager*  
Lennox Library

### Members

Leighton A. Carter  
*CFO*  
Biashara, Inc.

Brian Condon  
*Partner*  
Arnold & Porter LLP

Lotte de Silva  
*Vice President, Southern California Region*  
*(retired)*  
Owens & Minor, Inc.

Saeri Dobson, Ed.D.  
*Professor of Design*  
*Chair, Studio Arts*  
Department of Art/Art History  
Loyola Marymount University

Connie James, Ph.D.  
*Professor of Business, Strategy, and Ethics*  
Pepperdine University

Christopher "Kit" Jennings  
*Principal*  
Liquid Venture Partners

Amy Johnson  
*Executive in Residence*  
Pepperdine University

Evelyn Lapham  
*Managing Director (retired)*  
Provident Investment Counsel

Naomi McSwain  
*Executive Director (retired)*  
Al Wooten Jr. Youth Center

Scott Miller, Ph.D.  
*Associate Professor of Finance*  
John H. Sykes College of Business  
University of Tampa

Dashan Nettles (Wooten alum)  
*Administrative Officer*  
U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs

Steven Oh  
*Head of Leveraged Finance*  
PineBridge Investments

Camille Richardson  
*Vice President*  
Enterprise Project Management Office  
Nuvision Credit Union

Brett C.S. Roberts  
*Trustee*  
El Camino College

Kathy Talley-Jones  
*Independent Writer and Planner*



## OUR STAFF AND CONTRACTORS

There are a lot of caring souls at the Wooten Center. All of our staff members are committed to helping our students achieve their best. They are also great at working together like family, being patient and instructive with our kids, and always striving for that safe and nurturing environment our mission calls for. We appreciate everyone for their dedication.

Over our three decades of operation, our staff have grown as professionals. All Wooten staff members are college graduates or students engaging in continuing education and networking opportunities provided by agencies including the California School-Age Consortium/National Afterschool Association, LA County Office of Education, Center for Nonprofit Management, Compass Point, Southern California College Access Network, Grantmanship Center, LA County Public Health and others.

Because of pandemic budget cuts, we had to make the painful choice of laying off five staff and three contractors who provided services that could only take place in person, such as transportation, maintenance, and music. Once donations made expanding our budget possible, we rehired three staff members and two contractors.

We are grateful for such caring and capable staff and also contractors working to maintain a safe and nurturing environment for our students.

### Staff

Jose Alfaro, Recreation Director  
Gary Blow, Sr., Van Driver  
Victor Casey, Program Manager  
Marissa Castor, Program Specialist  
Corey Dantzler, Executive Director  
Erica Dewitt, Membership/Database Specialist  
Jason Love, Program Specialist  
Beverly Matthews, Education Director  
Grace Nyenke, Program Administrator  
Rosie Nyenke, Family Outreach Specialist  
Christelle Telesford, Associate Director

### Contractors

Kathleen Chuman, Proposal Writer  
Jeffrey Hill, CPA, Auditor  
Naomi McSwain, Special Projects Consultant  
Veronica Pineda, Caretaker  
Kenneth Smith, Accountant



# AWARDS AND RECOGNITIONS

The following are awards and recognitions received for our youth development programming and advocacy during the pandemic:

- 2020** — LA County Public Health Office of Violence Prevention listed the Wooten Center on its website as a **model afterschool program in South Los Angeles**
- 2021** —
  - The Community Response System of South Los Angeles presented their **“Education Award”** to our then-executive director Naomi McSwain for her work founding and co-chairing a committee that advocated for private tutoring from LAUSD and provided training for public and private agencies to provide case management and high-impact tutoring.
  - The LA Rams presented Naomi with a **“Playmaker of the Year”** award for inspiring change
- 2022** — Information Age Publishing selected the Wooten Center for a case study on our resiliency during the pandemic. The chapter, **“Pathways to College and Career Readiness in South Los Angeles,”** was written by Naomi and published in the anthology, *Built for More: The Role of Out-of-School Time in Preparing Youth for the Future of Work.*









# LOOKING FORWARD

## 2025 Priorities



As we look to the year ahead, we remain committed to our students and families and dedicated to our mission. To further enhance our impact, we will focus on several key priority areas: expanding awareness, renovating facilities, increasing staff, and advocating for increased quality out-of-school time (OST) programming.

The Al Wooten Jr. Youth Center is focused on expanding its impact through increased exposure and awareness of the essential services we provide to the youth and families of South Los Angeles and other neighboring communities. As we continue to grow, our goal is to ensure that more students and families in the community are aware of our afterschool and summer programs, which focus on academic support, college and career readiness, and personal development.

A key aspect of this growth is the renovation and expansion of our physical space. We are currently undertaking the renovation of three buildings, which will significantly enhance our ability to serve more youth. This expansion will allow us to create more classrooms, recreational areas, and dedicated spaces for activities such as STEM labs and art studios. By improving and expanding our facilities, we aim to provide a modern and welcoming environment that will inspire learning and personal growth.

Additionally, to support this expansion, we are focused on increasing our staff and volunteer base. By bringing in more educators, counselors, and program leaders, we can better meet the needs of the growing number of students we serve. Volunteers are also a critical part of our team, and we are actively seeking individuals who are passionate about mentoring youth and contributing to their success. In addition, we are currently partnering with the California School-Age Consortium to serve as a pilot for a new training module for OST providers to adopt high-impact tutoring. The project is funded by a grant from the Weingart Foundation to help equip agencies statewide.

Through these efforts—expanding awareness, renovating facilities, increasing staff and volunteers, and advocating for quality OST programming—the Wooten Center is committed to making a greater impact on the community, empowering more students to achieve academic excellence and good citizenship.

In partnership,

Corey Dantzler, Executive Director  
Christelle Telesford, Associate Director





**THEN**

# CollegeTrek Online

**WHAT** A FREE afterschool program for grades 3-12

- Homework assistance
- i-Ready assessments in reading and math
- Private tutoring
- Coding and Minecraft
- World Languages and Culture
- Field trips and college tours online

**MyCollegeTrek for teens only:**

- Teen Talk with iMentor
- Juvenile Justice Jeopardy
- Teen helper internships
- SAT-prep and college scholarships
- AKA College Admissions Process

**WHERE** [zoom.us/my/wooten](https://zoom.us/my/wooten)  
[www.youtube.com/wootencenter](https://www.youtube.com/wootencenter)

**WHEN** Monday-Friday, 12:00-6:00pm

**Registration**  
[wootencenter.org/online](https://wootencenter.org/online)

**Information**  
(323) 756-7203

**FUNDERS**  
AEG Foundation, The Ahmanson Foundation, All Ways Up Foundation, Bank of America Charitable Foundation, The Crail-Johnson Foundation, Dwight Stuart Youth Fund, The Green Foundation, Kaiser Permanente, Kinecta Federal Credit Union, The Ralph M. Parsons Foundation, S. Mark Taper Foundation, The Weingart Foundation, Wooten board members and other friends

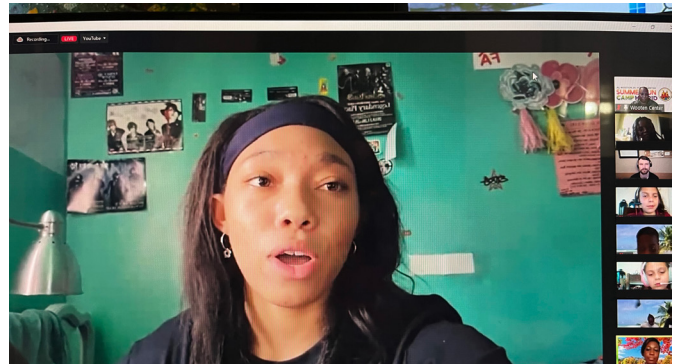
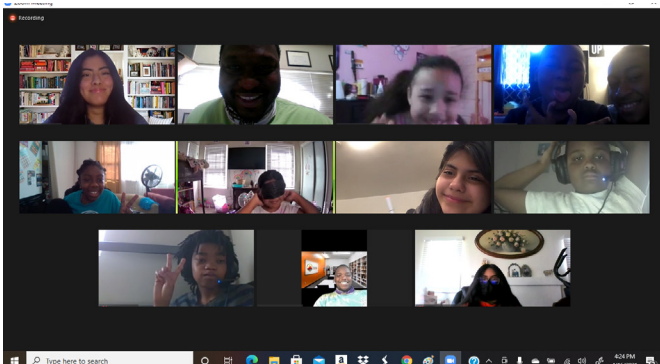
**PARTNERS**  
AKA Sorority, Inc. Tau Beta Gamma, Archdiocesan Youth Employment Services, Brotherhood Crusade, Educate California, Empowered 4 Life, Holman CDC, iMentor, Jenesse Center, LA Community College, LA County Public Health Trauma Prevention Initiative, LA Metropolitan Churches, LA Mission, Loyola Marymount University, New Point Mentoring, Pepperdine University, South LA Robotics, Strategies for Youth, UCLA, USC, Whitehall Arts Academy, YO! Watts

**AL WOOTEN JR. YOUTH CENTER**  
SINCE 1990 **CATCH THE VISION!**  
CELEBRATING 30 YEARS OF SERVICE

**College & career readiness afterschool!**



This is the flyer we used during the pandemic after developing the virtual activities shown. Students accessed all activities online during our 15-month facilities closure. The free virtual private tutoring with i-Ready diagnostics and lessons in reading and math is continuing today as part of our hybrid online and onsite afterschool and summer programs.



*Thank you to our board, staff, students, families, volunteers, and other supporters who helped us endure the challenges and come out stronger with improved and expanded college and career readiness programming for our youth.*



**NOW**

# FREE HYBRID COLLEGETREK AFTERSCHOOL PROGRAM

COLLEGE AND CAREER READINESS FOR GRADES 3-12!



**COLLEGE PREPARATION SHOULD NOT WAIT FOR HIGH SCHOOL.** The Wooten Center starts at grade 3 to help prepare students to complete their journey to higher education. CollegeTrek is a tuition-free, hybrid afterschool program with educational support services on Zoom and at our youth center at 91st and Western in South LA. Homework assistance, one-on-one private tutoring, and more are available online and onsite at no cost. Tutors are largely Wooten teachers, business volunteers, and college students from schools including Loyola Marymount, Pepperdine, USC, UCLA, LACC and more.

**Al Wooten Jr. Youth Center**  
9106 S. Western Ave.  
Los Angeles, CA 90047



**Hours:** Mon-Fri, 2-6pm (1-7pm online)  
**Registration:** \$30/year, per household  
**Transportation:** \$30/month, per household

**Information**  
(323) 756-7203  
[www.wootencenter.org](http://www.wootencenter.org)



## FEATURING:

- ✓ i-Ready and Khan Academy SAT-prep diagnostics and lessons
- ✓ STEM classes
- ✓ Private tutoring
- ✓ Homework assistance
- ✓ Youth, teen, and parent discussion groups
- ✓ College advisement, tours, and scholarships
- ✓ Sports and recreation
- ✓ Performing and visual arts
- ✓ Leadership and life skills development
- ✓ World languages and culture with cooking
- ✓ Gardening, field trips, and more

We use...



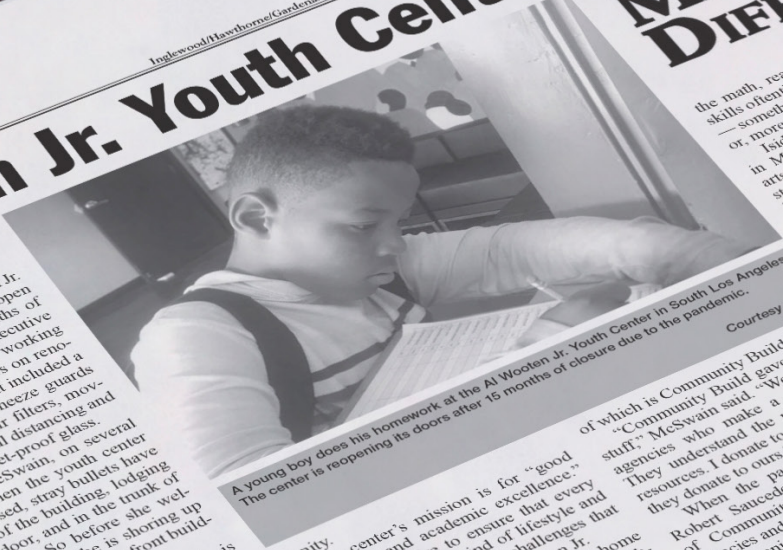
**AL WOOTEN JR.  
YOUTH CENTER**  
SINCE 1990 CATCH THE VISION!

The Wooten Center was founded in 1990 by Myrtle Faye Rumph in honor of her son, killed in a drive-by shooting. We are a nonprofit organization, largely funded by foundation grants and donations from Wooten board members and other friends. Thank you to our families, staff and all partners, volunteers and donors helping us provide quality and affordable educational support services for our youth and community. See [www.wootencenter.org/supporters](http://www.wootencenter.org/supporters).



# AI Wooten Jr. Youth Center back in business

## MAKING A DIFFERENCE



A young boy does his homework at the AI Wooten Jr. Youth Center in South Los Angeles. The center is reopening its doors after 15 months of closure due to the pandemic. Courtesy photo

**By Darlene Donloe**  
Contributing Writer

The week before the AI Wooten Jr. Youth Center was set to reopen on June 29, after 15 months of closure due to the pandemic, Executive Director Naomi McSwain was working day and night with contractors on renovations and construction that included a fresh exterior paint job, breeze guards on desks for more social distancing and the installation of bullet-proof glass. According to McSwain, on several occasions, both when the youth center was open and closed, stray bullets have hit the exterior of a door, and in the trunk of an associate's car. So before she welcomed back students, she is shoring up interior.

The center's annual budget is \$750,000. The center currently needs \$150,000 to \$200,000 to get the building reinforced so bullets don't penetrate the interior.

"The shooting is more critical than COVID," said McSwain, a former journalist who frequently wrote about gang violence. "This is breaking my heart. We're here because of the conditions and circumstances that led to my cousin being killed."

"What's been happening in recent days is former gang members coming out of jail. It's great but to come back and restart wars. It can lead to the kids getting caught in the crossfire."

The cousin to which McSwain's aunt, Myrtle Faye Rumph, Wooten, 35, was killed in a drive-by shooting near Adams and Crenshaw boulevards. The shooting was said to be the result of a gang initiation.

Since its opening, the AI Wooten Jr. Youth Center, located on 91st Street and Western Avenue in South Los Angeles, has been a steadfast anchor in the community.

Darlene Donloe is a freelance reporter for Wave Newspapers who covers South Los Angeles. She can be reached at [ddonloe@gmail.com](mailto:ddonloe@gmail.com).

The center's mission is for "good citizenship and academic excellence." There is a desire to ensure that every student avoids the kind of lifestyle and overcomes the kinds of challenges that led to the murder of AI Wooten Jr.

The center is a refuge. It's a home away from home, a place where neighborhood kids can gather, talk, read, work on computers, be creative, learn math, get tutoring and off the street. It's a way to keep kids off the street, a neighborhood approach to the revitalization and empowerment of a community in crisis that provides a safe and nurturing environment.

McSwain is passionate about the work being done at the center and would love to see more people in the Black community by helping the center both financially and as volunteers.

"We'd like people to 'catch the vision,' which is our tagline," said McSwain, who grew up a troubled kid in South Los Angeles. "Just give the kids some time and attention. We always need donations, but we also need help with private tutors."

"Give the kids an opportunity so they can thrive. That's our vision. We'd love for them to thrive and stay alive. We are crying out to our community. See what we see."

McSwain is thankful for the center's many loyal and consistent partners, one of which is Community Build.

"Community Build gave us a lot of stuff," McSwain said. "We partner with agencies who make a difference. They understand the need to leverage resources I donate to their agencies and they donate to ours."

When the pandemic hit in 2020, Robert Saucedo, president and CEO of Community Build, assembled 32 agencies and partners to pool resources. The organization became known as the Los Angeles (CRSSLA).

The AI Wooten Jr. Youth Center is part of CRSSLA and McSwain is the chairperson of the education committee. Saucedo calls her "the crown jewel of CRSSLA."

"I can't find the words for Naomi or her work ethic commitment and vision which turns into reality," Saucedo said. "They have operated on a level of excellence."

The Wooten Center reopened this week for the Summer Fun Camp, an educational summer bridge program for kids in grades 3-9.

Operating as a hybrid, 28 students are expected at the center, with up to 60 participating online.

STEM classes including robotics, engineering and robotics are offered each year, along with performing and visual arts and recreation, field trips and more. During the sessions, students get

cross workshops, discussion groups as Teen Talk, Girl Talk, and Kid and monthly Juvenile Justice Jeopardy classes engaging cops and kids in a game teaching teens about law. The pandemic explosion needed in the Wooten Center response, including a parent power the needs of par guardians that are ie. The gro budgeting ing a job Kids' ses fo

Person Lynn said, "I asked him, 'How do you eat an elephant?' It was a team effort at a time." This can happen. "You have to do what is needed," Lynn added. "It was a team effort. We worked hard and they can put their children in tutoring. It's free. That kid had lost focus, but he should know that he did. He graduated and he did. I also get so thing out of it. It's rewarding. It's a large effort." The center offers after-school programs, tutoring and effective o youths 8 to 18. Classes include energy lab, reading languages. There is C tual after-school and career grades 3 and 5 and an and vari



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