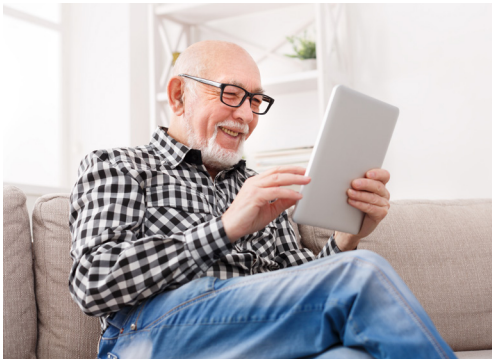


2020: A Year of Perseverance



Upstate Oasis
2020 Annual Report

Greetings from Oasis

We will long remember the past year for a global pandemic that caused the world to shut down and disrupt every aspect of our “normal.” With very little time to craft a plan, we halted our regular in-person programming and prepared to work remotely from home. I recall driving home from my office that day in mid-March, frantically making phone calls to equip us for conversion to virtual learning. I needed to acquire Zoom licenses and schedule training sessions to quickly transition our Oasis classes to an online format. As the world was shutting down, Upstate Oasis was “gearing up”—we were ready to persevere.

The word resilient comes to mind when I consider all that our staff, instructors, volunteers, and participants did at Upstate Oasis in 2020. We transitioned to Zoom and continued quality programming. We met regularly with our colleagues across the national Oasis network. We forged ahead, making new friendships and curating content to be shared nationwide as “Oasis Everywhere,” providing a more robust experience for all Oasis members. Each center shared its best programming, and participants were able to join in classes from across the entire country.

I could not be more proud of the way that we managed operations during this once-in-a-lifetime global event. Despite the pandemic shut down, we were able to add 486 new participants. Many of them joined from other states due to current participants sharing their love of Oasis with friends and family searching for things to do while in quarantine at home. Our donors contributed more than ever before, resulting in Upstate Oasis reaching our highest-earning Spring Appeal ever! These events define perseverance, poising Upstate Oasis to move forward more robustly than before as we further the mission of healthy aging in

Central New York and beyond. I look forward to building on our shared accomplishments!

Cynthia Woods
Executive Director
Upstate Oasis



Locally, nationally, and globally 2020 was a year like no other. The social and economic impacts of a pandemic were most acutely felt by lower-income communities, families with children at home due to school closures, and those most vulnerable to symptoms of the disease—older adults. Oasis centers across the country were forced to suspend all in-person operations. Exercise, lifelong learning, and social events, classes, and programs were canceled. Tutors were abruptly cut off from the students they were mentoring with our nearly 700 elementary school partners across the country. By the end of March, we faced the immense challenge of sustaining our mission when everything about the way we connected with participants and communities was no longer possible.

Local and national Oasis leaders and teams quickly shifted focus to a contact-free form of engagement, launching virtual classes through national and regional platforms. In June of 2020, our virtual national Oasis center, oasiseverywhere.org, was born, and within months over 1,000 people were enrolling in live interactive classes. Local Oasis network centers quickly pivoted in sync, offering virtual courses to their Oasis communities, and simulcasting their best content on Oasis Everywhere. The virtual programs allowed participants to continue lifelong learning while following stay-at-home orders, protecting their health and community. Oasis quickly attracted current Oasis participants, as well as new participants discovering us for the first time as a virtual education resource.

As a leader in technology education, we are committed to teaching new digital adopters the basics of safe internet use and building confidence in navigating a digital world. Conversely, the pandemic revealed the reality of living without home internet. The “digital divide” is very real for hundreds of thousands of American families and seniors. Barriers to technology exist across a range of demographic boundaries. As a result, our virtually engaged audience is less diverse. We recognize the need to span these gaps of disproportion to reach ALL older adults. As we emerge from the pandemic and begin operating as dual-venue centers, offering the option of in-person and online classes, we are addressing disparities between our participants. Through new and renewed partnerships, resource communication, presence in community events, and programs not dependent on technology we are continuing our mission to serve seniors across the country in every economical circumstance. Perseverance got us

through 2020 making us stronger and expanding our mission. We will emerge resilient and look forward to being together again.

Paul Weiss, PhD
President
Oasis Institute



Continuing Classes Miles Apart

The pandemic has proven to be the mother of invention—and new opportunities.

After living in Syracuse for 50 years, Grace and Michael Flusche moved to the Washington, D.C. area in August 2020 to be closer to family members—including a 2-year-old grandson. Even with a location change and a national shutdown, the Flusches' access to Oasis classes was seamless.

Over nearly 15 years, the Flusches have taken dozens of classes at Upstate Oasis in Syracuse. Thanks to the virtual opportunities through Oasis Everywhere, the Flusches continue to take a steady stream of classes in their new home hundreds of miles away.

"We've been able to continue taking the kind of classes online that we've been taking in person," Michael says.

Virtually, the Flusches loyally participate in a yoga class with their Syracuse instructor, Pam. "Even in Zoom, our yoga instructor greets us all by name, and we all catch up and have a social time," Michael says. "The classes are very personal."

In addition, Grace and Michael take French, history and other classes through Upstate Oasis. And through Oasis Everywhere, they've accessed a San Diego Oasis class on the history of the English language, among others.

Each semester, the couple is immersed in two to four classes at a time. "We always want to stay engaged and be challenged and enriched," Michael says. "For us, 'staying alive upstairs' is incredibly important. Oasis has high-quality instructors and has made good use of the rich talent pool Syracuse has. We're interested in a lot of things Oasis offers so we've been consistently enrolled in classes. For us, it's a natural thing to do."

He admits he was disappointed at first when classes went virtual. "But I quickly got over it and found out Zoom works well. The online classes are so convenient because they come right to us. Weather and travel aren't issues."



Grace and Michael also appreciate the routine the classes brought to their lives during the pandemic. "The Oasis classes were a salvation in an otherwise dismal situation," Michael says. "It was nice to have classes scheduled each week. We felt less isolated."

The class content is the biggest draw for Michael and Grace. But the sense of community Oasis classes offer is more important to them than ever. "Right now, Oasis is a very valuable means of staying connected and is a source of enrichment that we feel lucky to have," Michael adds.

Rallying Together

When Mary Pat Olier was Vice President of Human Resources at SUNY Upstate Medical University more than 20 years ago, she was part of the university team that helped establish Upstate Oasis in Syracuse. Even then, she recognized its value.

“I thought Oasis was a marvelous opportunity for employees as they retired,” Mary Pat says. “Then when I retired the first time in 1999, I began taking Oasis classes.”

Mary Pat’s retirement didn’t last long. She soon took a job with the university’s foundation until she retired for good in 2016. Yet she stayed involved with Oasis through both retirements, serving on the Oasis Advisory Council for the past 12 years and as the chair for the last four years.

The last year has probably been the most challenging as the Oasis staff and their Upstate partners successfully transitioned in-person classes to virtual Zoom classes during the pandemic.

“It was a bold experiment,” Mary Pat says. “We were concerned participants may not adjust to online classes but it was astounding to see how quickly people adapted. Upstate offered instruction on how to use Zoom and people jumped on it. In some classes that became virtual, we’ve had the largest enrollment ever. More people enjoyed exploring opportunities through Oasis Everywhere, too.”

With all the changes and new processes, volunteers and Oasis staff members were more critical than ever during the pandemic.

“During ‘normal times,’ Oasis has a wonderful volunteer core but during the pandemic, that in-person support wasn’t possible,” Mary Pat says. “The Oasis staff was fabulous during very trying circumstances. They really stepped up without complaint.”



So did Mary Pat. In addition to being the Advisory Council chair, Mary Pat became a volunteer class coordinator for Oasis during the pandemic.

“Oasis needed help as the class coordinator role became more involved due to the virtual format,” she says. “I was familiar with Zoom from other organizations I’m involved with, so I stepped in to help. Many other volunteers and Advisory Council members also shifted seamlessly to become class coordinators. We rallied together to get through this.”

Joe Smith was another volunteer who became a class coordinator. His background as the former director of Educational Communications at Upstate was invaluable to help instructors learn to teach virtually and to launch the Zoom classes.

“For many instructors, this was the first time they’ve had to teach virtually so they had a significant challenge,” he says. “So much work was done in the background to make this possible for participants. Instructors really progressed, especially those with multiple courses.”

In his role as class coordinator as well as a knowledgeable resource, Joe serves as co-host for the Zoom meetings and gets online before the class to test the presentation visuals and other technical details so the classes go smoothly.

“It has been rewarding to share my knowledge and skills to help,” Joe says.

Mary Pat says Oasis is forever changed because of the pandemic—but in a positive way.

“We learned a lot this past year. Circumstances forced us to be creative and the response from participants has been so rewarding. The virtual classes have given us all something scheduled on a regular basis despite the quarantine and lockdown. Through Oasis, we could still connect and learn together.”



Local Impact

102

Volunteers

2,767

Volunteer Hours

1,384

Participants

4,001

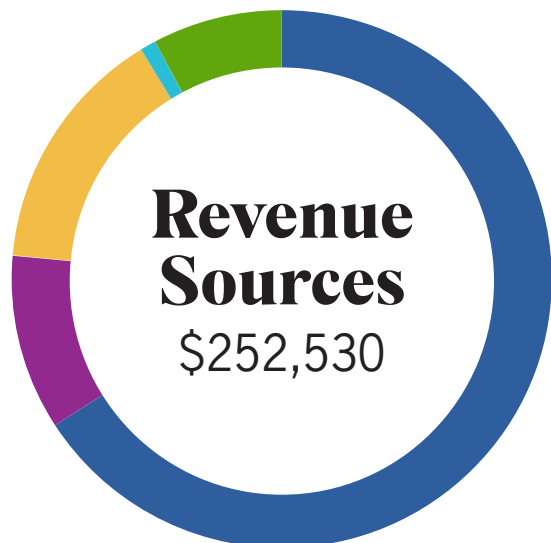
Class Enrollments



\$252,530
Revenue

\$242,055
Expenses

\$10,475
Surplus



\$166,545
Earned Revenue

\$37,426
Partner Support

\$26,706
Individual Contributions

\$19,501
Investment Income

\$2,352
Grant Support

NOTE: Endowment funds as of 12/31/2020 had a balance of \$281,531

National Impact

657
Schools

4,500
Volunteers

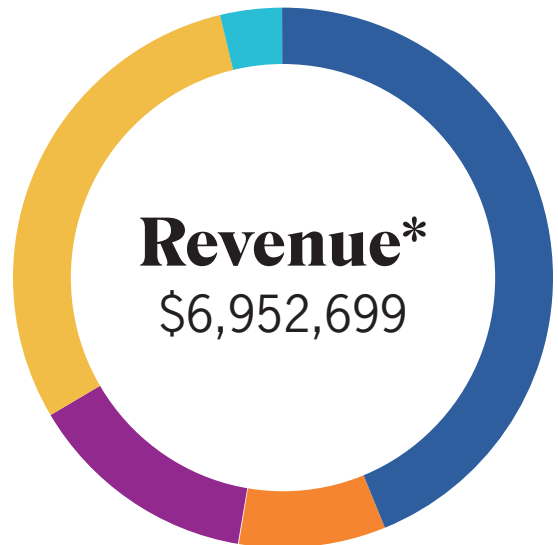
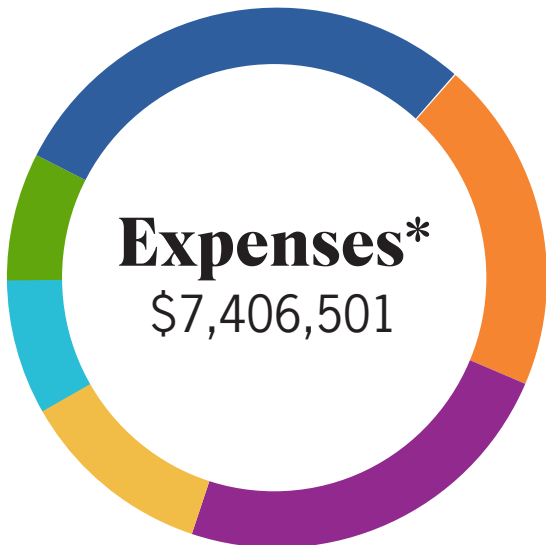
1,362
Communities Served

4,015
Tutors

82,675
Class Enrollments

115,000
Volunteer Hours

27,250
Participants



\$2,139,445
Health Programs

\$561,469
Technology Literacy

\$1,488,532
Education Programs

\$1,750,172
General & Administrative

\$862,741
Volunteer Programs

\$604,142
Fundraising

\$3,049,109
Contributions & Grants

\$609,670
In-Kind

\$2,074,862
Government Grants

\$257,121
Other

\$961,937
Program & Partner Revenue

*Source: 2020 Consolidated Financial Audit

Opening Up a New World

The COVID-19 pandemic had devastating consequences across the world. It hit many populations hard, especially older, underserved people who were often left in isolation due to lack of access to technology. So Upstate Oasis took action.

Using Oasis scholarship funds, Oasis hired an instructor to provide this population with the technology education necessary so they could connect with family, friends and the rest of the world.

With assistance from instructor Kaitlyn Jackson, Oasis first worked with the Syracuse Housing Authority to survey the elderly housing population to find out what they needed most. Next, Kaitlyn posted sign-up boards at each of the ten buildings for older adults around the city. She then called everyone on the sign-up lists to invite them to a Zoom class.

“The lower-income population often has limited access to computers and may not have anyone to teach them how to use technology,” Kaitlyn says. “We focused on teaching the older adults computer basics, Zoom and how to use their smart phones. Many were astounded what they could do with their phones.”

Many buildings in Syracuse Housing Authority feature community areas with desktop computers and some individuals had their own computers. Kaitlyn brought Chromebooks for participants to use during each class so participants could follow along through hands-on learning.

“Our goal was to help them reconnect, so they don’t feel so isolated, especially if we have another shutdown or another pandemic ever happens again,” Kaitlyn says. “This class made them more resilient. They felt empowered because they now have the ability to reach out to others and connect.”

Beginning in late October 2020, the classes were safely taught in-person with social distancing in a large community room with limited class size.

“We’ve had seven classes so far, and they have been really successful,” Kaitlyn says. “Once the students realized they were all in the same boat, they all felt comfortable to ask questions. It’s been so rewarding. In addition to the positive comments we receive at the end of the class, I saw in their faces how appreciative they



were that we took the time to teach them. One student called me to tell me she had just used FaceTime for the first time on her own. She was so excited.”

Tara Harris was a student in Kaitlyn’s Zoom class. She is also secretary of the Tenant Association for her building. She took the class for her own knowledge as well as to help others.

“With the pandemic, a lot of our residents are isolated and don’t know how to do Zoom,” Tara says. “Prior to the class, I knew very little but now I can show others how to use Zoom because Kaitlyn showed me how. The class was eye-opening. Before I used my phone for a lot, but learning how to do things on the computer and seeing things on a bigger screen was a different experience.”

The class opened a new world for Tara. “Now I do all of it—Microsoft Teams, Zoom and dialing into things,” she says. “I went from basic knowledge and being anxious to feeling like a pro due to Kaitlyn’s training. Now I am asked weekly to show others how to use Zoom, so people can access different meetings and events virtually.”

The computer training has allowed housing tenants to join important Tenant Association meetings safely through Zoom. This ability is especially critical now because the building is about to go through a major development.

“Being able to use the technology for the meetings keeps our elderly residents informed,” Tara says. “During the pandemic, a lot of residents were scared to go anywhere, but now we can all join the meetings from home through Zoom and get the same information as those who attend in person.”

Advisory Council

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Michael Ratner, MD
Co-Chair | Development &
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Martha Ryan

Diana Biro

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Lisa Vigliotti Bane
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