The out-of-school time field’s role in serving Denver’s youth & families during the COVID-19 pandemic and beyond
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When the COVID-19 pandemic began disrupting lives in March 2020, comprehensive and content-specific out-of-school time (OST) providers across Denver immediately stepped into uncharted territory, mobilizing their staff and resources to continue offering youth programming, both virtually and in person, and making it possible for parents in essential industries to continue working.

This report, which was developed by the Denver Afterschool Alliance, highlights the collective impact created by 10 comprehensive OST organizations during the COVID-19 pandemic. In addition, it looks ahead to how the OST industry can help address post-pandemic challenges, including offering a set of recommendations for funders, advocates and partners to consider as they work to ensure OST providers have the resources needed to support the well-being of Denver’s most vulnerable youth and families.

**OST Providers: Safely Serving Youth & Families**

By helping to fill the gaps created by other sectors and systems that have been unable to consistently serve youth and families over the past year, comprehensive OST providers, which typically offer consistent, daily programming to the same cohort of youth, have remained a trusted, responsive and steady resource during a time of crisis for families living in some of Denver’s most high-need communities.

Throughout the pandemic, many of Denver’s comprehensive providers, including Boys & Girls Clubs of Metro Denver, Colorado “I Have A Dream” Foundation, Denver Public Schools Extended Learning & Community Schools, Girls Inc., Heart & Hand Center, MSU Denver, Project VOYCE, Scholars Unlimited, Sun Valley Youth Center, and YMCA of Metro Denver, have safely served more than 7,000 Denver youth, including 82% who receive free and reduced-price lunch and 92% who are non-White. In addition, comprehensive organizations have been conducting unprecedented outreach to the communities they serve, listening to families’ needs and expanding their program models to include wrap-around supports.

While this report highlights these 10 organizations, countless other comprehensive and content-specific OST providers across Denver have been serving youth and families during the pandemic — and face similar opportunities and challenges in the future.
OST Providers: An Essential Industry

Research shows that quality out-of-school time experiences improve children’s academic achievement and social-emotional development, and these programs are a vital support for working families.

Now more than ever, it is essential that comprehensive OST organizations and their staff are recognized for keeping youth safe and engaged, supporting their learning, and engaging them in high-quality enrichment opportunities.

Yet, with more adequate funding and resources, these organizations could be serving many more youth and families in need of these programs during the pandemic and beyond.

Denver’s youth and families need — and deserve — more consistent access to quality afterschool programming and the supportive services these organizations provide.

The following pages of this report provide insight into and examples of how comprehensive OST providers have been nimble, innovative and decisive during a time of crisis and uncertainty.
Comprehensive OST organizations have provided consistent in-person programming throughout the COVID-19 pandemic.

At the beginning of the pandemic, the City and County of Denver and Denver Public Schools asked many OST organizations to keep their doors open to provide in-person programming for the children of essential workers. Responding to this call to action, OST organizations have taken necessary risks and found creative ways to continue offering in-person programming. This included partnering with schools and recreation centers to open remote learning centers, where youth could get in-person support for virtual school, and providing in-person programming options, particularly over the summer, that adhered to COVID-19 safety protocols.

Learn more about how the YMCA of Metro Denver and Denver Public Schools’ Office of Extended Learning & Community Schools have safely provided in-person programming during the pandemic on pages 12 and 14.

Comprehensive OST organizations have effectively navigated safety regulations to ensure the health and safety of youth and staff.

OST organizations have navigated evolving COVID-19 public health guidelines and received the necessary approvals to operate in-person learning. In addition, organizations quickly trained their staff on safety protocols, provided them with adequate PPE, and enacted policies to help promote health and safety, including cohort models and more strict pick-up and drop-off policies. To support the health and well-being of staff, organizations have provided new opportunities to connect, including more frequent check-ins, meetings and office hours, and many organizations have offered increased health benefits, access to COVID-19 testing, and mental health supports.

Learn more about how Boys & Girls Clubs of Metro Denver has safely provided innovative, flexible in-person programming on page 16.

Comprehensive OST organizations quickly pivoted to providing virtual program options.

Organizations have quickly and effectively ventured into the world of virtual programming, adopting or enhancing a virtual program strategy that allows them to serve more youth and families. Since the pandemic began, more than 2,700 youth have participated in virtual programs that help them learn, connect, and grow, and OST organizations have worked with more than 50 content-specific providers to create and deliver virtual programs with a range of content areas, including leadership, science, visual and performing arts, and mental health and well-being.

Learn more about how MSU Denver and Colorado “I Have A Dream” Foundation have shifted their program models to offer virtual supports on pages 18 and 20.
Comprehensive OST organizations have been adept at listening to the communities they serve and responding to their specific needs. Because OST organizations are trusted by the communities they serve, providers meaningfully connect with youth and families to gather real-time information and feedback, rather than guessing about what they need. During the COVID-19 pandemic, OST organizations have been conducting unprecedented parent and caregiver outreach to extend their services, which has helped to create even more trust. Because OST organizations do not take a “one-size-fits-all” approach to programming, they are able to customize their services to best meet the needs of youth and families, including offering both in-person and online programming, and adding new lines of wrap-around services to help stabilize families that are struggling with basic needs.

Learn more about how Sun Valley Youth Center has been listening and responding to the challenges its community has faced over the past year on page 24.

To leverage the potential of virtual programming, comprehensive OST organizations have worked to build new technology infrastructure, train staff, and equip families with the technology and supplies needed for online learning.

Organizations have made significant investments in their technology infrastructure, including adding new hardware and software; ensuring that staff has adequate internet connectivity; partnering with content-specific providers to offer programming; training staff to use technology and providing quality virtual experiences; and navigating new issues such as cyber liability and online safety measures/protocols. To support youth and families with technology access, organizations have provided computers, helped them gain internet access through Comcast Essentials, and supplied youth with at-home learning kits to ensure they have the supplies needed to meaningfully engage in online programming.

Learn more about how Scholars Unlimited has invested in virtual infrastructure and trained staff to provide quality online experiences on page 22.

Filling the Gap: New Service Lines Support Working Families

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Service</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Families received assistance with food, utilities, and rent</td>
<td>546</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Families received food or care packages</td>
<td>53,797</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Families received mental health check-ins</td>
<td>1,547</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Families received technology or internet supports</td>
<td>2,041</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

To leverage the potential of virtual programming, comprehensive OST organizations have worked to build new technology infrastructure, train staff, and equip families with the technology and supplies needed for online learning.
Many comprehensive OST organizations have offered short-term, emergency assistance to families struggling with food insecurity, housing instability, and other basic needs.

While OST providers have typically focused on providing youth programming, the COVID-19 pandemic proved that a two-generation, whole-family approach is necessary to stabilize families and ensure that youth can take advantage of OST programming. In addition, OST providers are trusted and accessible, so many families have looked to them throughout the pandemic for help accessing emergency assistance. Over the past year, many organizations have boldly expanded their services to include food distribution, rent and utility assistance, and referrals for other emergency supports.

Learn more about how Girls Inc. of Metro Denver has expanded its services to meet the needs of youth and families on page 26.

Comprehensive OST organizations have supported youth and families by quickly developing new partnerships with both family support and content-specific providers.

OST organizations’ ability to forge innovative partnerships has been key to their success supporting youth and families. Working with emergency service providers, public health officials, curriculum experts and content-specific providers, OST organizations have shown that they are open to collaboration, nonterritorial, and willing to think creatively about how to best serve their communities.

Learn more about how Heart & Hand Center has developed new partnerships to support youth and families on page 28.

Flexible, consistent operational funding has made it possible for comprehensive OST organizations to respond to the needs of youth and families during the COVID-19 pandemic, and this support will be necessary as they look to address future challenges.

Many funders have recognized and trusted comprehensive OST organizations to deliver programming and resources to Denver’s youth and families during the COVID-19 pandemic. The general funding that OST providers received over the past year has made it possible to retain staff, offer programming, and provide new types of wrap-around services. While the availability of funding in 2021 is uncertain, it’s imperative that comprehensive OST organizations are adequately resourced so they can continue providing needed programming and supports to Denver’s youth and families.

Learn more about how Project VOYCE has received philanthropic support to provide direct family services during the pandemic on page 30.
Looking Ahead:
OST’s role in addressing post-pandemic challenges
When the pandemic ends, it will be more important than ever to address the new challenges that youth face, including learning loss, feelings of disconnection, a widening opportunity gap, and the need to confront issues of racial equity and injustice.

Comprehensive OST organizations have demonstrated that they are willing and able to rise to the post-pandemic challenges — and they are already strategizing how to do so. But they need consistent, reliable funding and partnerships to help strengthen programming, solve challenges, and fill gaps.

As the Denver Afterschool Alliance looks to the future, the following are recommendations that need broad sector support and awareness so that OST providers can remain trusted resources for Denver’s youth and families.

Prioritize the return to consistent, reliable, in-person programming through access to indoor facilities.

Many comprehensive OST organizations would have provided more in-person programming in 2020 and 2021 if they had access to indoor facilities. In a typical year, Denver’s OST field serves more than 20,000 youth at locations across the city. But, because OST providers often don’t own the facilities where they operate, many were able to serve only a fraction of their pre-pandemic capacity, largely due to space constraints. OST organizations and facility owners must have solid partnerships so that timely agreements can be made that prioritize access to in-person programming for youth. In addition, the industry needs additional facility owners to make their space available for programming.

Explore hybrid program models that include a continuation of virtual options.

While consistent, personal, in-person interactions with youth are preferred, OST organizations have realized that virtual programming reduces barriers to participation and offers new access points to meaningfully engage youth. For example, virtual programming is an option for youth who lack reliable transportation; program staff can expand the hours they are available to youth; and adults who serve as volunteers/mentors can more easily integrate time with youth into their work schedules. In addition, virtual programming helps reduce overhead costs for OST organizations, and it solves the problems many providers have related to available indoor program space. But, while many OST organizations now have the infrastructure in place to provide virtual programming, some of Denver’s most vulnerable youth and families still lack reliable internet connection and devices, which must be addressed to ensure access for all youth.

Move toward smaller group sizes and more personalized interactions between staff and youth.

Comprehensive OST organizations often must prioritize serving large numbers of youth, which can come at the expense of developing deeper relationships and providing more individualized programming. The COVID-19 pandemic has proven that small group sizes and more personal interactions, both in-person and virtually, have benefits for youth and OST staff. With more manageable program rosters, OST organizations can connect meaningfully with youth, and they have increased capacity to take a whole-family approach that includes supporting the needs of families by providing wrap services, emergency referrals, and reliable information. As we look to the future, it’s important for OST organizations to be able to prioritize depth of impact in addition to breadth.

Continue taking a two-generation, whole-family approach that includes providing wrap services and stabilizing supports to struggling families.

Because youth living in stable families are more likely to consistently participate in programming, comprehensive OST organizations see the value in continuing to provide wrap-around and emergency supports to families in their communities. To make this a viable part of their program models, providers need additional resources, including dedicated staff like family support navigators, to sustain this work over the long term. In addition, OST organizations must continue partnering with human service providers to ensure there is a strong referral network available to youth and families.
Address OST workforce issues and professionalize the field.

Denver youth deserve to engage with OST professionals who are paid livable wages, offered health care benefits, and have a viable career path within the industry. The organizations featured in this report employ hundreds of staff to work directly with Denver youth, and these professionals are at higher risk of burnout and turnover, which negatively impacts both OST organizations and the youth they serve. In addition to providing OST professionals with the compensation, benefits and training that reflect their contributions, they should be classified as essential education workers and receive the corresponding resources and supports. While the DAA advocates on behalf of OST professionals and provides professional learning to the field, there is an opportunity to replicate work that’s been done in other youth-serving industries, such as early childhood education, to help transform policies and practices that impact the OST workforce.

Advocate for new funding streams so that OST organizations are more financially sustainable.

OST organizations need access to additional federal, state and philanthropic funding sources that provide consistent, flexible and long-term support. For example, the 21st Century Community Learning Center (CCLC) program is the only large-scale, consistent federal funding dedicated to supporting local afterschool, before-school and summer learning programs. Yet most organizations receive this funding for only five years. Once the grant period is over, they are forced to close program sites and discontinue services because there are no other significant, multi-year funding sources locally available. It is imperative that afterschool providers, advocates and funders work together to establish a dedicated funding stream for youth programming in Denver’s low-opportunity neighborhoods.


While this report highlights 10 comprehensive OST providers, Denver’s out-of-school time industry includes hundreds of organizations that serve thousands of youth of all ages.

The Denver Afterschool Alliance is working alongside providers, advocates and other partners to explore the above recommendations for strengthening Denver’s out-of-school time industry so it is positioned to serve youth and families now and in the future.

Learn more at www.denvergov.org/afterschoolalliance.
OST Spotlight:
Stories from the field
YMCA of Metro Denver is Unwavering During COVID-19, Providing In-Person Support to Families in Need

In the early days of the COVID-19 pandemic, youth and families were thrown into crisis as schools closed across the Denver region. The YMCA of Metro Denver (YMCA) mobilized into action, working first with public health and government officials to ensure proper protocol and training so it could keep its doors open to provide emergency child care to essential workers, ultimately serving 175 youth per day.

Then, it worked with school district and City of Denver officials, expanding its reach to 11 locations across metro Denver and providing families with a safe and caring environment for their children to learn remotely with the support of trusted adults.

That continuous care and flexibility stretched through the summer months, into the delayed school start, and the fall semester. Throughout, the YMCA has provided the essentials for remote learning support — location, internet access, and healthy snacks — and staff motivated youth with tough schoolwork, fostered social interaction among peers, and provided an environment where youth felt loved and cared for.

Throughout the pandemic, the YMCA has been doing what it does best: caring for the community and providing essential support to youth and families when it is most needed.

“I feel safe sending my kids to the Y because I know that they are getting love and attention. As a nurse in the community, it’s important for me to be able to rely on the Y. I know they are teaching my kids to care for one another, care for friends, be kind, and they are learning good values that I hope they carry with them as they get older.”

Arian Hilsendager, mom to Ryden and Reese & a health care worker
Looking Ahead:
Continuing to Be a Place Where Youth Learn, Grow and Thrive

The YMCA team is prepared to meet the challenges the pandemic has created for youth — learning loss, social inequities, and isolation — by reinforcing the social and emotional skills they need and helping them to regain lost academic and social ground.

Across its early child care, Out of School Time, summer camp, and other youth programs, the YMCA has proven to families and schools that it has the ability to respond to the changing pandemic landscape. With its skilled and experienced staff, the YMCA continues to be creative in its in-person programming, fostering a mentoring relationship with youth.

The YMCA is gearing up for summer day camp and it will deliver an adapted program of educational outdoor field trips and workshops for the 24,000 Denver youth it serves annually.

As a nonprofit organization, the YMCA has a fundraising strategy that pursues both public and private funding streams. Through the generosity of donors, the YMCA is able to offer scholarships for many of its child care and youth programs.

Above all else, the YMCA is committed to helping all children learn and thrive.

OST Spotlight: YMCA of Metro Denver

In-Person Programming During a Global Pandemic:

- **11** locations
- **175** children of essential workers served per day

“The YMCA is about building strong families and communities, so when schools closed last spring, we knew we had to act. I’m more than proud of our staff for setting aside their own fears and providing a critical service for families during this crisis.”

*Sue Glass, President and CEO, YMCA of Metro Denver*

About The YMCA of Metro Denver

The YMCA of Metro Denver is dedicated to the health and well-being of all. As a catalyst to transform lives and communities, its programs are embedded throughout metro Denver in wellness centers and through partnerships with other nonprofits and community-serving agencies. It is developing a new generation of changemakers through its early childhood education, Out of School Time, Summer Camp, Power Scholars, Youth in Government, Youth Sports and Swim programs.

Learn more at [www.denverymca.org](http://www.denverymca.org).
Within Colorado’s largest school district, Denver Public Schools Extended Learning and Community Schools (ELCS) has collaborated with DPS leadership and public health officials to develop rigorous COVID-19 health and safety protocols that have proved effective with the DPS Discovery Link program, allowing for in-person programming to eventually occur within 43 DPS school buildings. Over this time period, ELCS has a 4.6 percent staff positivity rate, which is an industry low that is directly correlated to the consistent health and safety efforts of ELCS staff.

Understanding the importance of in-person programming, ELCS has advocated for access to DPS buildings for OST partners. As a result of its efforts, more community organizations will be able to use DPS facilities in summer 2021, as the OST industry returns to more traditional in-person summer programming. In addition, DPS and ELCS have ensured that their comprehensive partners were included in the first wave of educator vaccines, honoring their commitment to serving kids and families throughout the pandemic.

Due to its willingness to assume risk and pilot new approaches during the pandemic, ELCS has established itself as a leader and advocate within the field, helping to ensure that OST is viewed as an essential support by leadership within DPS and beyond.

“My daughter started kindergarten this year and I am so thankful for Discovery Link! My husband and I are both essential workers and without the remote learning support program that Discovery Link has provided, my daughter would not have been able to attend a public school at all. Then, outside of assisting with online learning, my daughter comes home talking about all of the incredible activities she gets to do. This program has been the brightest point for us this school year.”

Jamie, parent
About Denver Public Schools Extended Learning and Community Schools (ELCS)

Extended Learning and Community Schools creates opportunities for school communities to engage and inspire Denver youth and families. It oversees many of the afterschool programs in the district, serving around 8,000 youth every year and increasing equity for families in the district by ensuring youth can be supported outside of the school day. ELCS programs include Discovery Link, community partnerships, enrichments and professional development.

Learn more at www.dpsk12.org.

Looking Ahead:
Increasing Access to Programming, While Supporting Staff Development

The pandemic highlighted existing inequities across Denver, and, moving forward, ELCS is focused on addressing the lack of consistent access to quality afterschool and summer programs in Denver’s most vulnerable communities.

By collaborating with community providers to offer robust programming at 45 school-based sites in the coming year, ELCS plans to hone in on the needs of its communities, continuing to address social-emotional learning, foster a sense of belonging, and ensure that youth with special needs can access and benefit from its offerings.

As one of the most diverse workforces in DPS, ELCS is leading the district’s efforts around planning for equitable hiring and retention practices. With the support of internal and external professional development partners, all ELCS staff are receiving extensive training on culturally relevant spaces, encouraging positive behavior, building their careers in OST, and how to support youth with special needs. It is working more closely than ever with the DPS Special Education team to ensure that full inclusion is the standard in every school.

In 2021 and beyond, ELCS is committed to putting equity at the forefront of all of its decisions for youth, families, and staff.

OST Spotlight: Denver Public Schools

In-Person Programming During a Global Pandemic:

4,000 unduplicated youth served since March 2020 across 43 sites
98% full-time staff retention throughout the pandemic
99% of families said ELCS provided a safe and inclusive environment

“Isabel was so excited to be getting back to school this month in person. Her behavior and ability to cope with her emotions improved because of Discovery Link. She is still learning while having fun and I am comforted in knowing that it is a part of what will help Isabel continue to become the best version of herself!”

Parent

www.denvergov.org/afterschoolalliance
Youth and families served at Boys & Girls Clubs of Metro Denver (BGCMD) feel the negative effects of the pandemic disproportionately. For Club parents and caregivers, most of whom are essential workers, resources that provide food, technology, and safety for youth have been in short supply — or nonexistent. So, every day since the pandemic began, BGCMD has been listening to families and adapting its operations model to meet the needs of the community.

In addition to providing afterschool and virtual programming, BGCMD has offered remote learning and extended learning services to support teachers and staff in school-based Clubs and neighborhood facility sites. To ensure the health and safety of both Club members and staff, BGCMD’s safety measures have been comprehensive and responsive. Along with mask-wearing, social distancing, and sanitization practices, Club members are divided into cohorts, and all members and staff complete daily health checks.

As the majority of partnering school districts have returned to in-person learning, BGCMD has shifted its focus back to afterschool programming.

Additionally, BGCMD is continually seeking new partnerships to address the needs in the communities it serves. In parallel with programming, BGCMD’s staff continues to provide emergency family assistance, from teletherapy to groceries.

“For many of our Club kids, every day is a new set of challenges due to circumstances and threats beyond their control, such as poverty, homelessness, food insecurity, and inequitable cultural barriers. Our focus is on meeting the needs of kids and families as they continue to grow and change during the pandemic.”

Erin Porteous, CEO, Boys & Girls Clubs of Metro Denver
About Boys & Girls Clubs of Metro Denver

Boys & Girls Clubs of Metro Denver changes lives. From the first day of kindergarten to high school graduation, Boys & Girls Clubs of Metro Denver helps kids succeed in school, develop good character and citizenship, and live healthy lives. At 22 neighborhood Clubs, members have safe, supportive, fun and enriching environments that inspire and empower them to achieve their greatest potential. Learn more at www.GreatFuturesDenver.org.

Looking Ahead:

Returning to Afterschool Programming While Addressing Learning Gaps

2020 was exponentially more disruptive for BGCMD youth, who were already facing uphill social, economic, and equity battles in a pre-pandemic climate. Looking back on data from just a year ago, 90 percent of BGCMD kids graduate, 78 percent exercise four or more times a week, and 80 percent perform community service once a month. These data points reinforce the effectiveness of BGCMD’s evidence-based pillars to promote academic success, healthy lifestyles, and strong character and leadership, and the organization remains focused on delivering essential services and benefits for Club kids in the year to come.

BGCMD is optimistic about its goal to increase daily attendance from the bare minimum restrictions that governed during the worst of the COVID-19 pandemic, up to 1,000 children across all Clubs by March 31. With that as an early post-vaccine goal, BGCMD will redouble its efforts to restore historic levels of attendance and active membership in parallel with public safety guidelines. The organization is also actively planning and enrolling members for summer camps and summer learning supports with school and youth provider partners.

OST Spotlight: Boys & Girls Clubs of Metro Denver

In-Person Programming During a Global Pandemic:

18 remote learning centers open in fall 2020
22 clubs open today
1,430 active members today

“When I came to the Club, I was in the dark. Without the Club, I don’t know if I would be here. The Club is my second home — and my family.”

Lorena,
Club member, age 13
Colorado “I Have A Dream” Foundation Challenges Itself to Provide Holistic Supports in a New Context

At the onset of COVID-19, Colorado “I Have A Dream” Foundation quickly shifted its focus to providing holistic support for youth and families in a new context. As schools announced that all youth would begin the school year learning remotely, families voiced concerns about having consistent internet access and an adult present to support virtual learning.

In response, Colorado “I Have A Dream” Foundation partnered with Denver Public Schools and the City of Denver Office of Children’s Affairs to offer in-person support at four remote learning centers that provided 150 youth with one-on-one academic support from August 2020 through January 2021.

Realizing that it could not engage its entire community with in-person programs during the pandemic, Colorado “I Have A Dream” Foundation challenged itself to pivot to a virtual platform that could support youth and families in a different way. By August 2020, it was providing virtual afterschool enrichment programming to youth four days a week, along with online social-emotional and mental health supports.

Throughout the pandemic, Colorado “I Have A Dream” Foundation has focused on finding new ways to connect with youth and frequently check in with families, providing stability and serving as a trusted resource over the past year.

“It must be challenging to offer enrichment activities remotely, so I want to recognize these teachers for the patience, grace and encouragement they have displayed when offering robotics and art classes online. Additionally, the Colorado “I Have A Dream” Foundation staff has made sure he has the proper materials for his activities. The team has been super helpful, communicative, and kind.”

Erica, parent of fourth grader
Looking Ahead:

Meeting the Needs of Youth Through In-Person, Virtual and Hybrid Program Models

Over the past year, Colorado “I Have A Dream” Foundation has worked with families to find the best rhythm for communication, program execution, supplies and basic needs distribution, and feedback collection. Initially, some of the changes felt forced, but they ultimately led to stronger program offerings, new opportunities to engage youth and families, and more consistent feedback loops.

With many families still interested in participating in online programming, Colorado “I Have A Dream” Foundation plans to offer options for in-person learning, fully remote programming, and a hybrid program that incorporates elements of both. This flexibility will allow Colorado “I Have A Dream” Foundation to reach more youth and families across many communities.

But offering multiple program models and serving more youth comes at a cost, and Colorado “I Have A Dream” Foundation is focused on securing the funding, staff support and additional resources required to meet the needs of its youth, families, and communities.

About Colorado “I Have A Dream” Foundation

Colorado “I Have A Dream” Foundation travels side-by-side with the same group of youth and families as they navigate education and life, offering academic, social, and emotional support as they learn, grow, and achieve their dreams. Its afterschool and summer extended learning courses focus on 12 distinct learning pathways that give youth across Colorado access to content-area experts, hands-on learning opportunities, and real-life experiences. Additionally, youth and families receive tools to thrive and build partnerships with trusted adults who are committed to their growth and development. Learn more at www.cihadf.org.

OST Spotlight: Colorado “I Have A Dream” Foundation

3 innovative programs
205 unique youth served
98% family satisfaction

“I am very grateful that Colorado “I Have A Dream” Foundation has offered virtual programming during COVID-19. It has been a wonderful additional activity for the kids during this difficult time when they are isolated from the activities that usually help them build enrichment and relationships.”

Rachel, parent
MSU Denver Pivots to Providing Virtual Academic and Enrichment Supports to Youth and Their Families

After quickly adjusting its services at the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, the MSU Denver Center for Urban Education’s team of student mentors, staff and community partners began delivering engaging, hands-on, virtual afterschool programming and supports to youth and families in April 2020, including hosting well-attended virtual camps over the summer.

Currently, all of MSU Denver’s afterschool programs are being offered online. These “live” seminars and activities range from college and career readiness and STEAM learning to healthy living/self-care and cooking. To support youth participation in online learning, MSU Denver has delivered more than 450 education kits to youth at their homes.

In addition, MSU Denver student mentors are available every day during out-of-school time hours to provide youth with virtual homework assistance, and it has continued to provide supports to English Language Learners.

Extending its online services to parents and family members, MSU Denver is enrolling adults in its spring 2021 English as a Second Language classes, which are also being held virtually.

“MSU Denver’s afterschool program has been able to provide continued and critical supports to our youth and families during the uncertainty of the pandemic. Now more than ever, youth need academic advising, tutoring support, social and emotional connections, and enriching activities to ensure they remain on the pathway to postsecondary success. Our team of professional staff and university students have stepped up and are meeting students and families in our new virtual setting.”

Carla Mirabelli, Director, Center for Urban Education @ MSU Denver
Looking Ahead:

Preparing for a Safe Return to In-Person Programming

Because it provides free afterschool support to middle and high school youth at three Denver Public School locations, MSU Denver is closely monitoring health and safety guidelines and plans to return to in-person services once DPS schools are open to out-of-school time partners.

In addition, MSU Denver hosts on-campus engagement events for youth and families that are a cornerstone of its pre-collegiate program. While these campus-based activities have been put on hold during the pandemic, MSU Denver is hopeful that it will be able to welcome youth and families safely back to campus in 2021.

Although MSU Denver has successfully pivoted to virtual services, its afterschool programming model, which includes everything from summer camps to theater productions to sporting events, is built around in-person engagement. As with all out-of-school time providers, MSU Denver is looking forward to reconnecting with youth and providing its academic advising, tutoring, and social emotional support to them in person.

Virtual Programming During a Global Pandemic:

- **200** youth served virtually since March 2020
- **450** education kits delivered to youth at their homes
- **300** points of contact made with youth and families

“I wouldn’t have the grades I have if it wasn’t for you. You guys are like my second family.”

A.G., KCAA student

About Metropolitan State University of Denver

For over 10 years, Metropolitan State University’s Center for Urban Education has proudly partnered with Denver area schools to bring afterschool tutoring and enrichment programs to build students’ motivation to learn, participate, and advocate for their own educational success. The Center for Urban Education provides free programming for middle and high school students from the following DPS Schools: Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Early College; Kunsmiller Creative Arts Academy; and Denver Center for 21st Century Learning. Learn more at www.msudenver.edu/centerforurbaneducation.
In response to the needs of youth and families during COVID-19, Scholars Unlimited made a significant investment in converting its custom summer curriculum to a remote teaching model, and, by doing this, it was able to hire staff, provide them with extensive training, and engage hundreds of youth and families over the summer.

To prepare adults and youth for online instruction, Scholars Unlimited provided its staff with training on interactive instruction, engagement strategies, and hands-on activities, while youth without access to technology were connected, and all participants received headsets to enhance their online participation.

Scholars Unlimited made it easy to connect to its “classroom” and centralized a phone line to offer technical support, allowing instructors to focus on the instruction rather than technical issues. The centralization of support made it possible to quickly identify common issues and solve problems.

After hearing from families that youth needed more personal interaction, Scholars Unlimited pivoted to offer one-on-one tutoring, refining its focus on what it does best: literacy intervention with strong social-emotional support.

“I am very grateful for all the hard work that everyone did to make this program work for the kids. I appreciate the fact that the teachers were actually online teaching. I know that remote teaching, especially with young ones, isn’t easy, but you all did an excellent job!”

Parent, College View Elementary
Looking Ahead:
Continuing to Learn, Grow, and Achieve Together

Scholars Unlimited staff and students have experienced considerable trauma beyond the impact of COVID-19, as the struggle for racial justice has hit close to home in conjunction with headlines.

When a student is struggling with trauma, mental health, or other safety concerns, Scholars Unlimited works with the school community and local city services to access the support they need and deserve. This teaching approach is a blend of meeting the needs and helping to mitigate the effects of the pandemic.

With new challenges due to the pandemic, Scholars Unlimited’s mission goal remains the same. It is focused on increasing scholars’ literacy skills and social-emotional development, and measuring progress in these two focal areas with assessments.

Scholars Unlimited has several teachers, paraprofessionals, and youth development instructors giving an out-of-school time boost, and it is making additional touchpoints with families to ensure students receive the individualized attention needed to help them stay on track with their academics and mental health milestones.

About Scholars Unlimited
Since 1993, Scholars Unlimited (formerly Summer Scholars) has partnered with public schools in Denver, Aurora, and Westminster, community organizations, and families to meet the needs of children living in underserved communities. Scholars Unlimited provides out-of-school time programs to families at no cost after school and during the summer months. It supports the development of the whole child by providing intensive literacy intervention, engaging enrichment activities, recreation, and positive youth development practices that support social-emotional learning.

Learn more at www.ScholarsUnlimited.org.

OST Spotlight: Scholars Unlimited

Virtual Programming During a Global Pandemic:

400+ youth and families served
27 online summer classrooms
42,596 total minutes accrued monthly by students on literacy intervention

“I am so happy that my daughter got the opportunity to learn from and work with the teachers from Scholars Unlimited. It has been so wonderful to see her excited to get on calls, to make things, to talk about books that she loves, and then to also think and talk about herself. It was a well-rounded program, and I’m so happy that she got to do it.”

Parent, John Amesse Elementary School
Sun Valley Youth Center Listens and Responds to a High-Need Community’s COVID-19 Challenges

Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, the Sun Valley Youth Center has never stopped serving its community, or listening to and responding to the constantly changing needs of families living in the Sun Valley neighborhood.

By staying deeply connected to its community, Sun Valley Youth Center has received first-hand insights into the challenges that youth and families are facing. In the midst of quarantine, families said they were most concerned about providing safe spaces for their children to play and be active. In response, Sun Valley Youth Center mobilized donations of everything from toys to tissues. Books, crafts, puzzles and other essential items were packaged and distributed to families as “sanity bags,” which helped keep youth and families engaged while they were at home together.

Through donations and grants, Sun Valley Youth Center has provided rent assistance to families each month, hosted weekly cycling classes to get youth safely outside, and offered full-day care for youth who needed virtual learning support.

Although it has returned to regular programming, Sun Valley Youth Center continues to solicit feedback from the youth and families it serves, which allows it to remain a trusted, responsive resource in one of Denver’s most low-opportunity neighborhoods.

“I’m grateful to Sun Valley Youth Center for dropping off all the games during quarantine. It has been hard keeping everyone entertained and sane. Every week, we’ve gotten a new game or puzzle, and it’s fun to try them out with the family.”

Christie, parent
About Sun Valley Youth Center

Sun Valley Youth Center provides an engaging and safe place for youth to have their needs met in the afterschool space. It also serves the youth and families of Sun Valley through family activities, parent trainings, material provision, and system advocacy to support them in creating sustainable life changes that allow them to reach their greatest potential. Its afterschool program serves children ages 5-15, while children ages 16-18 can work as aides at the center or at the Sun Valley Youth Kitchen. Learn more at www.sunvalleyyouthcenter.org.

Looking Ahead:

Thinking Creatively About Meeting the Needs of Sun Valley Youth

As schools fully reopen, Sun Valley Youth Center is transitioning back to providing afterschool care and adjusting its spaces to accommodate up to 20 youth with proper social distancing and safety protocols like health screenings, mask wearing, and hand-washing.

In addition to providing homework help and meals, Sun Valley Youth Center is exploring creative ways to engage youth based on their needs and interests. Recently, it set up a makeshift bike studio with indoor trainers, and it offers mixed martial arts classes. To continue its focus on trauma-based care, it also provides emotion regulation and mindfulness programming.

Youth will also continue to receive virtual supports in both structured and unstructured formats. From virtual cooking classes to leadership and identity classes for teens, Sun Valley Youth Center continues to think creatively about how to create impact in the lives of the youth and families it serves.

OST Spotlight: Sun Valley Youth Center

Supporting Families During a Global Pandemic:

- 150 families provided grocery gift cards and weekly food/supply deliveries
- 2,000 snack bags delivered
- 87% of parents trust the safety of the center during COVID-19

“I come to the virtual programs because I like hanging out with Mr. Bruce and Jesus. We play a lot of games together, and I like just talking to the staff. I don’t really have homework, but they check on me to make sure I’m good with everything for school.”

Tiler, seventh grade student
Girls Inc. of Metro Denver Expands Services to Meet the Changing Needs of Girls and Families

To help meet the changing needs of girls and families during the COVID-19 pandemic, Girls Inc. of Metro Denver (GIMD) has been relying on trusted relationships and consistent communication with its community, which has revealed that many families are in need of technology and internet; food and emergency supplies; remote GIMD programming; and social connections.

Taking a two-generation, whole-family approach to supporting youth, GIMD has expanded its services and developed innovative program offerings that support both girls and their families.

As girls have navigated virtual learning with unreliable internet or outdated hardware, GIMD has provided technology support and equipment loans. When girls have been unable to return to its West Colfax Center for in-person learning, GIMD has provided remote learning kits and virtual programming. As families have faced food insecurity and difficulty meeting other basic needs, GIMD has opened a free food and emergency supply pantry. And, as many have struggled with mental health and anxiety, GIMD staff and volunteers have focused on self-care, teaching mental wellness strategies for girls of all ages.

“I’m proud of the way Girls Inc. honors people and relationships. From care packages to collective grieving, creative online experiences, to one-on-ones, we found small and large ways to show up for girls and each other. We treated people like people — not employees or co-workers or numbers. Because of that, the Girls Inc. experience is still strong.”

Jamie Newton, community educator, Girls Inc. of Metro Denver
Looking Ahead:

Scaling Innovative Programs that Extend Reach Beyond In-Person Programming

When it became clear that the pandemic would continue into 2021, GIMD realized it needed to find a new and sustainable way to provide engaging, hands-on, and accessible programming for girls of all ages.

The GIMD team developed GIRLS thINC Outside the Box, a monthly subscription box program that brings the Girls Inc. experience into the home by delivering books, supplies, instructions, and guides that girls need to meaningfully engage in independent learning.

Recognizing that girls have the power to be leaders of their own learning, exploration, and practice, GIRLS thINC Outside the Box is a way for GIMD to reach girls during the pandemic, but it also has the potential to engage girls throughout metro Denver and beyond, even after GIMD can return to fully in-person programming.

Currently, GIMD is expanding the GIRLS thINC Outside the Box concept to other ages and content areas, including an initiative to make comprehensive healthy sexuality content available outside the classroom. This new approach to providing healthy sexuality programming will be scientifically accurate, up to date, and inclusive, offering a way for youth to connect to important information about their sexual health.

OST Spotlight: Girls Inc. of Metro Denver

Supporting Families During a Global Pandemic:

- 23,000 pounds of food distributed, including fresh fruits and vegetables
- 3,613 learning kits distributed
- 351 families accessed comprehensive programs & wellness checks

“If it weren’t for Girls Inc., I don’t know what our family would do. It’s been a blessing to be part of the Learning Community because we don’t have other support. Our daughter Jaycee has been excelling in school and is not falling behind.”

Lori,
Girls Inc. parent

About Girls Inc. of Metro Denver

In partnership with schools and community organizations, Girls Inc. of Metro Denver focuses on the development of the whole girl. The combination of long-lasting mentoring relationships, a pro-girl environment, and research-based programming equips girls to navigate gender, economic, and social barriers, and grow up healthy, educated, and independent. Informed by girls and their families, GIMD also advocates for legislation and policies to increase opportunities and rights for all girls.

Learn more at www.girlsincdenver.org.
Heart & Hand Center Partners With Youth and Families to Provide Responsive Programming

Heart & Hand Center families — most of whom are people of color from low-income households — have been disproportionately affected by the health, economic, and academic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. As most Heart & Hand families hold jobs that do not allow them to work from home, they also worry about finding child care and keeping their children safe.

Heart & Hand has pivoted countless times throughout the pandemic, offering new and innovative options to ensure young people experience a loving community each day. It has provided virtual programs, YouTube lessons, in-person outdoor summer camp, food resources, and remote classroom support. While Denver Public Schools was remote, Heart & Hand provided nine weeks of full-day, remote learning centers where youth received support with online learning, developed social emotional skills, and connected with trusted peers and adults.

This responsive fluidity was made possible because of strengthened partnerships and communication with schools, food providers such as Denver Food Rescue and We Don’t Waste, and young people and families.

Heart & Hand also responded to the racial reckoning by providing support to its community, including celebrating Black voices, offering resources for learning and healing, and taking steps to become an anti-racist organization.

“Our virtual learning improved immensely in one day. My son got called out in a positive way by his literacy teacher for the first time this year, and his response to the teacher’s affirmation was, ‘Mom, there were no distractions and people are there to help.’ And, as a frontline worker, I appreciate you for making this happen.”

Elementary school mom, in response to her son starting Heart & Hand’s in-person program
Looking Ahead:

Resilience and Creativity Pave the Way for Heart & Hand’s Future

Despite the pandemic’s challenges, Heart & Hand has found new ways to build even stronger relationships with youth, families, partners and its community.

In response to isolation amid quarantine, Heart & Hand team members have established new communication channels with families, fostering stronger relationships through more consistent check-ins. Virtual tools have empowered its Career & College Readiness emerging leaders to engage more fully by eliminating barriers to participation like transportation and schedule conflicts.

At the organization level, Heart & Hand has found new opportunities to collaborate with school partners and deepen its impact in the Five Points neighborhood by initiating a healthy food distribution service. Ultimately, Heart & Hand’s creativity and resilience throughout the COVID-19 pandemic has laid the foundation for even more powerful partnerships and programming in the future.

Heart & Hand looks forward to building on these successes while returning to a consistent program model. Regardless of the challenges the future may bring, Heart & Hand has proven that it will remain a trusted partner and resource in the lives of Denver youth and families for years to come.

OST Spotlight: Heart & Hand Center

In-Person Programming During a Global Pandemic:

- 3 remote learning centers
- 120 youth served
- 100% parent satisfaction

“This has been the most challenging year in Heart & Hand’s 10-year history, but has simultaneously been the year that we’ve seen our true capacity and brilliance radiate stronger than ever. Amidst uncertainty, we’ve found confidence. Amidst division, we’ve found connection. And amidst obstacles, we’ve found a clear path forward. Through it all, the most important lesson we’ve learned is that the Heart & Hand Center is resilient. This resilience is rooted in deep community partnerships and connections.”

Mary Cipollone, Executive Director, Heart & Hand Center

About The Heart & Hand Center

Heart & Hand Center is a nonprofit organization that disrupts the cycle of poverty for children and families in northeast Denver through community-based programming. It offers afterschool and summer programming based on a whole-child approach for youth in second grade to two years post-graduation, and also provides resources and ongoing support for families. Through intentionally cultivated relationships, Heart & Hand Center is able to ensure that both children and their families experience a loving community and overcome barriers. Learn more at www.heartandhandcenter.org.
In addition to impacting the health of communities, the COVID-19 pandemic has amplified existing disparities related to housing insecurity, poverty, and health, and the Black Lives Matter and racial justice uprisings have been a convergence of pain and possibility in Black and brown communities.

Realizing that youth need supportive spaces during times of social unrest and uncertainty, and that many families have been struggling to meet their most basic needs, Project VOYCE quickly appealed to its funding partners to secure additional support, making it possible to pivot to direct services and provide in-person programming.

Because of COVID-19 relief support provided by the AJL Foundation, Rose Community Foundation, Colorado Health Foundation, and the Latino Community Foundation of Colorado, Project VOYCE launched a care package program that continues today, created a disaster relief program to assist families with pandemic-related expenses, and provided free mental health services to staff and youth leaders. Project VOYCE credits the efforts of grant officers and foundation partners who have advocated for OST programs to access relief funding.

During this time of crisis, the philanthropic funding community has recognized and trusted that OST organizations like Project VOYCE have the ability to deliver programming and resources to Denver’s most vulnerable youth, families, and communities.
About Project VOYCE

What if adults trusted youth as the experts of their own experiences and sought to partner with them to develop innovative solutions to our most pressing community problems? Project VOYCE was founded in 2006 on this premise and is now an established leader in the field of youth development. It is committed to youth-adult partnerships grounded in trust and paired with a culturally relevant and rigorous curriculum that equips participants to understand and address the root causes of social injustices. It provides summer, in-school, and after-school programming that trains, organizes, and employs youth as leaders in our communities able to advocate for social change. Learn more at www.projectvoyce.org.

Looking Ahead:

Preparing Youth Leaders to Engage in Community & Systemic Change

Given the heightened pressures and stressors of the present moment, Project VOYCE remains committed to providing innovative, holistic youth leadership development programming, while ensuring that it offers consistent opportunities for youth to reflect and connect with adult staff and peers.

In addition to enhancing its virtual offerings and providing in-person programming, Project VOYCE is working to incorporate an intentional youth mental health and wellness focus into all of its interactions with youth. This includes helping youth leaders and organizers develop the mental health and healing skills needed to address trauma, build resiliency and avoid burnout.

Because community and systemic change is difficult work, Project VOYCE is focused on helping youth leaders remain passionate and focused by ensuring they can leverage culturally relevant and responsive healing practices to their leadership development and community organizing.

OST Spotlight: Project VOYCE

Supporting Families During a Global Pandemic:

$70K+
Raised and redistributed from late March–December 2020

220
hours of in-person programming provided to youth since March 2020

100%
expansion of in-person program space due to support from the Zeppelin family

“To say Project VOYCE has invested in my future would be an understatement. They made sure I was safe, mentally and physically, in the midst of the uprisings, and provided a space for youth organizers to voice what we felt while providing us with knowledge and tools on how to take action on these issues. They also made sure I had the resources to complete my last year of high school virtually.”

AC, youth participant

AC, youth participant