

2024

Gratitude Report

SUMMER STARS



SUMMER
STARS
CAMP FOR THE
PERFORMING ARTS

A Message from the President of the Board

Thank you so much for your contributions to this 25th year of operation for Summer Stars Camp for the Performing Arts. It was a great year. Better still, it was a great year to help launch us into the next 25 years of Summer Stars.

Camp itself is running better than ever. One hundred and twenty-five deserving campers from the New York and Boston areas experienced a 9 day performing arts camp at absolutely no cost to them or their families. Our internal surveys (noted elsewhere in this report) show how Summer Stars changes the way campers see themselves—and the world around them.

We've grown our community: 2024 saw our biggest and best fundraising year ever, highlighted by our gala 25th anniversary celebration at Fenway Park in March. Over 200 of our staff, friends and community attended, and we raised over \$125,000 for Summer Stars. Plus: It was a fun party, with great performances from Curt Smith, Broadway Stars and Summer Stars staff and campers.

Our base of support has grown—in addition to gifts from new and long-time individual supporters, we received more grants in 2024 than ever, from family foundations like Sonic Boom Foundation, The Meehan Family Foundation, William P. Anderson Foundation, the Horn Foundation and the Michele E. Dufault Foundation, plus a substantial increase in donations from businesses and professional funding organizations like TD Bank, Massachusetts Council for the Arts, Rockland Charitable Trust, and South Shore Playhouse Associates.

We're representing our community inside our organization in more ways than ever: We have camper alumni on our board, on our staff (53% are Alumni!) and as Teaching Artists at camp.

Our social media and press outreach continued to bring more attention to what we teach and

how we teach it on television, in the Boston Globe and other print, and through our social outreach partnership this Summer with Niwaki.

We're planning a Strategy Workshop for February 2025 to engage our community fully in planning for the next 25 years, focusing on our goals of serving even more campers, and bringing more of our pedagogy and curriculum to our communities.

We've hired our first dedicated grant writer to help fund these initiatives.

And finally I'm pleased to report that Donna Milani Luther will focus even more of her time on growing the camp beginning July 1. She is retiring from her very successful run at Inly School. Her full-time work for Summer Stars will allow her to raise funds, grow the camp program and guide strategic planning for Summer Stars' next 25 years.

We are poised for major success going forward, and on behalf of the Board and all of us, let me say THANK YOU AGAIN—for your support, your contributions and your friendship. We're thrilled to have you as part of our community.

Best,



Steve Stockman
President
Board of Directors
Summer Stars Foundation, Inc.



A Message from Our Executive Director

“AS WE EXPRESS OUR GRATITUDE, WE MUST NEVER FORGET THAT THE HIGHEST APPRECIATION IS NOT TO UTTER WORDS, BUT TO LIVE BY THEM.”

—JOHN F. KENNEDY

Dear Friends of Summer Stars,

With heartfelt gratitude, I reach out to thank you for being an integral part of Summer Stars Camp for the Performing Arts as we celebrate 25 incredible years. Your belief in our mission has been the cornerstone of our success, transforming the lives of thousands of young people through this unique and life-changing experience.

The journey of transformation begins with courage—our campers take a brave step into the unknown, leaving the comfort of home to embrace a program filled with challenges, growth, and creativity. Over the past quarter-century, we’ve had the privilege of guiding over 2,500 young people through this journey, witnessing their remarkable growth.

One camper recently shared how their time at Summer Stars impacted their life when asked, “If you attended Summer Stars in past years, how has your experience at Summer Stars impacted how you show up in school when you return?”

“I’m more social, I work with people better, I’m more confident and kind to people, more caring, less judgmental, I have more motivation and a clearer path with life and my journey.”

What an extraordinary testament to the power of this program—and to the generosity of supporters like you who make it all possible.

As we look to the future, we are inspired to build on this legacy, supporting more young people as they discover their voices, talents, and potential. Together, let’s embark on the next 25 years of empowering lives through the arts.

Thank you for being part of our journey.

Warm regards,



Donna Milani Luther
Executive Director
Summer Stars Camp for the Performing Arts



Celebrating Our VOLUNTEERS

Each year at Summer Stars, we enjoy the company and hard work of about 15 volunteers, who work tirelessly for our campers. We are grateful to all who donate their time and talent! **Here are a few highlights...**

Maggie

Seeing the transformation of campers over the course of the week. Also the community of teachers and staff — to be in the company of people so dedicated to helping campers is inspiring and nourishing.



Siri

I go back to the real world feeling energized (and exhausted), motivated, and thankful to have been surrounded by such amazing children and adults. I love watching “the shift” so many of us experience during the short 10 days.

Celebrating Our VOLUNTEERS

Rob

Even with camp going a million miles an hour and getting pulled in a hundred directions there are moments where we get to sit back and see the joy of a non-judged kid perform, someone taking a risk and succeeding, or even someone who is beyond frustrated and not giving up. Seeing these things not only gives me hope for the future for my daughter, but also reminds me to take care of others in a way that is supportive and nonjudgmental.



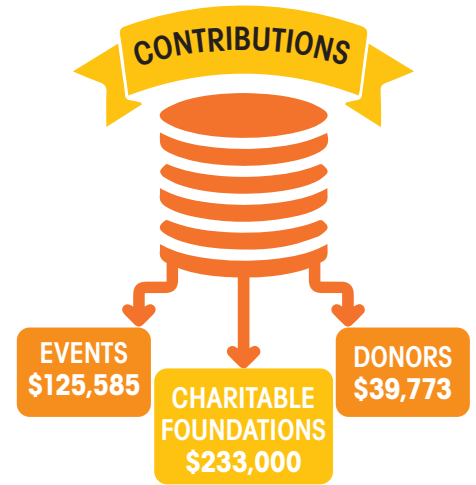
Tim

I learn every year, about theater, about myself, about youth, about race. I also enjoy the community pitch-in culture.



BY THE NUMBERS

125
campers  **from 40+**
TOWNS, CITIES AND STATES 



Summer Stars
Camper Tuition **\$0**

 **TOTAL RAISED**
\$398,358

23 
Teaching Artists
and Workshop
Leaders


1,260
Volunteer
Hours

175+
Individual
Donors


15+ volunteers

 **18** IN SUMMER STARS
LEADERSHIP PROGRAM

17 COUNSELORS

Adesewa Onaghinor

AGE: 27

ROLE: Lodge leader at camp overseeing dorm life and counselor duties.

What do you do outside of Summer Stars?

Outside of Summer Stars, I am a business owner. I launched Rose Glamour Events this year, an event planning company that focuses on creating unforgettable experiences. In addition to running my business, I also work in healthcare. In my free time, I'm passionate about giving back to my community, which is why I regularly volunteer.

How did Summer Stars impact you?

I first attended Summer Stars at 14 years old. Coming from New Jersey, it was my first time out of the city, and it truly felt like stepping into another world. The experience was refreshing and freeing—like the best vacation I'd ever had. I spent most of my time in the Sing-Sing-Sing class, where everyone's voice was heard and self-confidence was built. Those values—listening, inclusivity, and self-assurance—are ones I carry into my daily life. Throughout my years as a camper and different leadership roles I have attained, Summer Stars has helped me grow and develop into the person I am today.

What is it about Summer Stars that keeps you coming back?

Summer Stars feels like paradise, which is why I keep returning year after year. It's not just a place; it's an experience that offers an escape from life's challenges and an opportunity for self-reflection, growth, and connection. Over the years, I've witnessed firsthand how this camp transforms lives—not just for the students but for the staff as well.

The sense of community, support, and belonging at Summer Stars is unparalleled. It's a place where everyone is encouraged to be their authentic selves, and that's what makes it truly special. Watching students thrive and knowing I've played a small role in their journey is deeply fulfilling. Every year, I leave feeling inspired and recharged, and I look forward to contributing to this incredible environment for many years to come.

How does your work at Summer Stars impact you?

Working at Summer Stars has been one of the most rewarding experiences of my life. Many of the students face significant challenges outside of camp, and knowing that I can provide them with a week of joy, understanding, and freedom is incredibly fulfilling. It's more than just teaching or leading—it's about building meaningful connections and creating lasting memories.

Over the years, I've realized that I learn just as much from the students as they do from me. Their resilience, creativity, and diverse perspectives continually inspire me. The lessons I've learned from working with them have shaped how I approach challenges in my own life. Summer Stars reminds me of the importance of empathy, patience, and the power of showing up for others. It's a privilege to grow alongside these amazing students every year, and I feel honored to be part of their journey.



Taalib Dibinga-Robinson

AGE: 22

ROLE: Teacher of level 2 hip-hop class and workshop on filming self-tape auditions.



What do you do outside of Summer Stars?

Outside of camp, I'm a full-time artist. You can usually find me acting, choreographing, or curating my rap projects.

My mother, Shaumba-Yandje Dibinga, had been bringing me along with her every summer as a child to watch her classes and explore the camp grounds. I would find myself drawn to the campers' performances. (Open Mic & the final showcase.) When I turned 13, I attended as a camper and was blessed with the opportunity to take a 2-day songwriting workshop taught by Tommi Postley. That class unlocked something within me that I wasn't aware of. He taught me about breathing, song structure, and how to place your emotions in a rhyme scheme.

What is it about Summer Stars that keeps you coming back?

Since then, I haven't missed a year. I continuously came back not only as a camper but as a leader in training, a junior counselor, and now staff going on year five. I would try something new every year, whether it was the musical theater class, Rock & Soul band or African drumming workshops. It didn't matter because the environment that Donna Luther created for us, paired with the genuine friendships that I was able to make, allowed me to consider Summer Stars a safe haven. It's almost as if the outside world/problems no longer matter when your parents drop you off.

How does your work at Summer Stars impact you?

When I was a counselor, my biggest goal was to connect with at least one camper. Not only did I connect with my whole group of boys, but I was able to convince a majority of them to apply again the following year. My first year as a teacher was in 2024, and as nervous as I was, it was the campers who made me feel like I was doing something positive. The class was simple, though. They choose scenes, work on them with their chosen partner(s), and then on day two, I film their tapes. We would speak about talent agencies, advice for young actors, and everything along those lines. I left this year with the same boost in confidence that I had in 2015, taking Tommi's workshop my first year of camp. Along with my immediate family, my Summer Stars family played a huge part in who I am today and how I carry myself as an artist. I don't plan on missing a year any time soon.

17%↑ I believe in my ability to learn new things.

21%↑ I enjoy trying things outside my comfort zone.

6%↑ It's okay to make mistakes because they help me grow.

10%↑ I am comfortable performing in front of an audience.

92% YES! If given the opportunity, would you like to attend Summer Stars next year?

FILL IN THE BLANK: I used to think _____, but now I know _____.

I used to think **I was too much**, but now I know **I was surrounding myself with minds that were too small**.

I used to think **that I wasn't special**, but now I know **there will always be a spark in me that people will love**.

I used to think **that I couldn't perform onstage**, but now I know **I can**.

I used to think **that dance was the only performing art I'm good at**, but now I know **I'm good at so much more**.

I used to think **that I was ok**, but now I know **I am amazing**.

I used to think **that I wouldn't know what to do**, but now I know **to be myself**.

I used to think **that I need my phone**, but now I know **I don't**.

I used to think **I wasn't a good person**, but now I know **it was just the people around me making me feel that way**.

I used to think **I am ugly and stupid**, but now I know **I am amazing**.

Reach for the Stars

25th Anniversary

At *Reach for the Stars*, we celebrated 25 years of Summer Stars Camp for the Performing Arts. With over 200 guests in attendance, we raised \$125,000 to support our mission. This milestone allowed us to reflect on the incredible journey we've had so far and the profound impact we've had on our campers. As we look ahead, we're excited to continue transforming lives for the next 25 years and beyond!



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