2021 ANNUAL REPORT

FY January 2021–December 2021

Wise
WOMEN'S INITIATIVE FOR SELF EMPOWERMENT

www.womenofwise.org

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Letter from our Executive Director

Dear Friends of WISE,

As we look back at fiscal year 2021, we recognize that it was a year of transitions. WISE transitioned to a 32-hour work week and began to adopt wellness practices into the workplace, which includes having exercise equipment available and utilizing ergonomically-friendly office equipment. We had two staff and one board member transition away from WISE to take their dream jobs, another board member finished her second term, and two new staff members joined WISE. We also transitioned from online services to hybrid services, and finally back to in-person activities.

It was a challenging year for our students as they returned to school and readjusted to life wearing masks and social distancing. WISE students are very resilient and they continue to grow and learn. WISE added new sites for the Girls Getting Ahead in Leadership and Healthy Relationships programs. These programs are now at Washington Technology Magnet School, Humboldt Secondary School, Sejong Academy, and Oromo Community of Minnesota. A new music video on preventing gender-based violence was made with Sejong Academy students who created the lyrics, beat, storyboard, and performed for the video.

The parent encouragement activities branched out to include sharing research with parents through short videos, and creating a series of parent workshops that present information about each stage of a child's healthy development, spanning from infancy through young adulthood.

The WeLEAD post-secondary program has grown to 40 students, with an increase in first year college students and high school seniors preparing for college. The participants attended financial literacy and homeownership workshops, as well as active bystander intervention training to prevent gender-based violence.

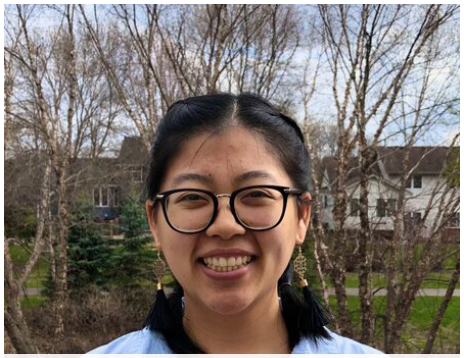
WISE' board of directors worked throughout fiscal year 2021 to draft a five-year strategic plan that will provide a roadmap for the agency to expand its scope and range of programming and accessibility. We will share it broadly in the spring so that you, our supporters, can share in our excitement for our future goals. We are certain that our participants will continue to achieve their goals through their resilience, perseverance and creativity. May 2022 bring increased opportunities and resources for our students and their families!

Pamela Zeller
Executive Director, WISE

Our Leadership Team

WISE Staff

PAMLEA ZELLER
Executive Director



PAKOU KHANG
Communications & Development Mgr.

STEPHANY LOPEZ
GGAL Program Coordinator

SEE LEE
WeLEAD Program Coordinator

ZAMZAM DINI
Parent Encouragement Specialist

CYDI YWJ SIAB YAJ
Healthy Relationships Coordinator

2021 Board Leaders

Eliana Reyes, Chair
On Camera Talent & Creative Entrepreneur
Founder & Owner of LianiRey Creative

Pa Nhia Khang, Secretary
Benefits Associate, CLA

Yuri García-Peña, Member
Scholar Programs Associate, Wallin Education Partners

Stela Center, Member
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Ra'Wi Mahamud, Member
Global Communications Specialist, Cargil

About Us

WISE was founded by a group of multicultural, first generation immigrant women in 1995 as a vehicle for educational, leadership, social and economic empowerment for immigrant and refugee women and girls*.

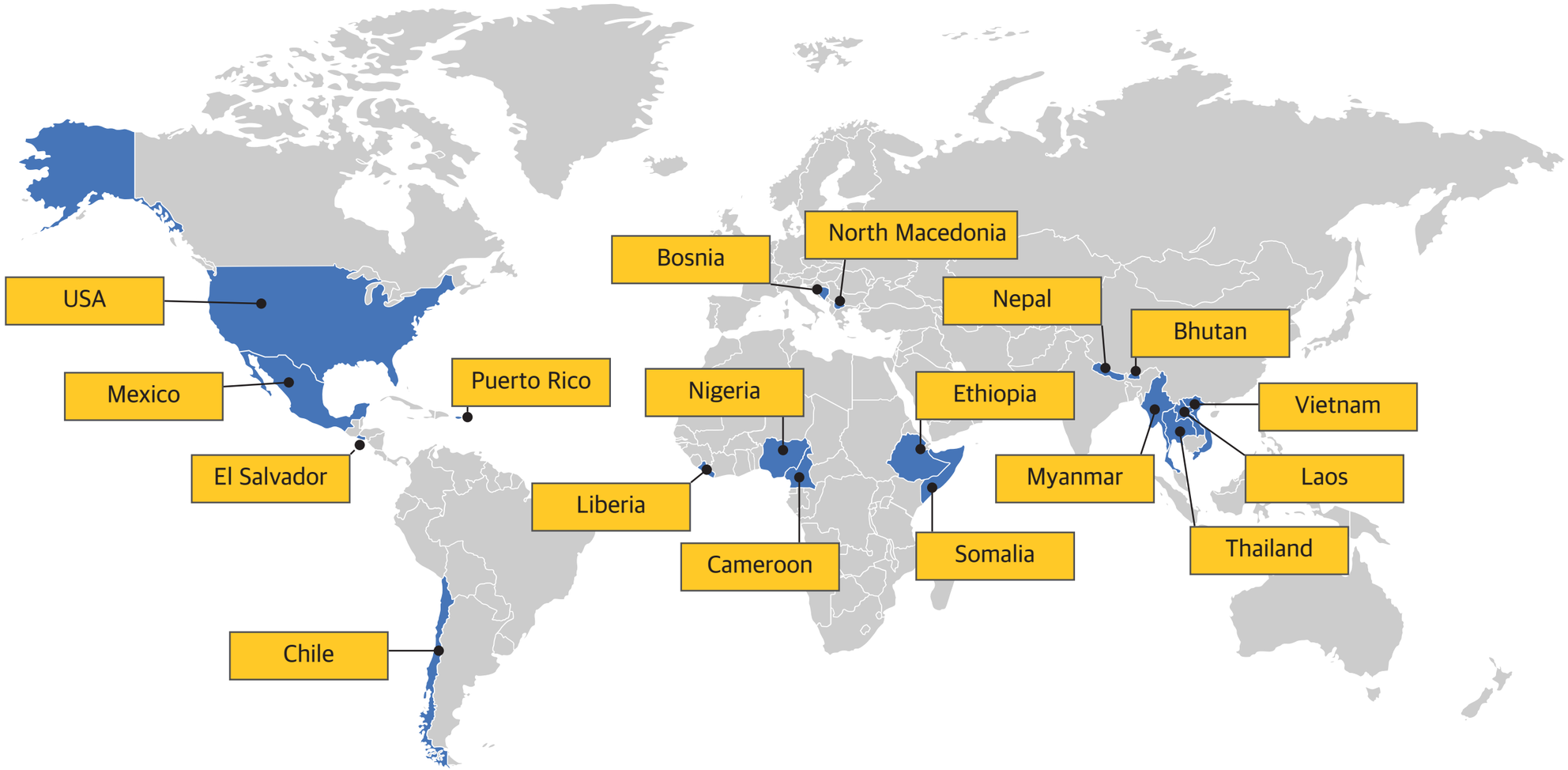
Our mission is to empower immigrant and refugee women and girls to succeed through advocacy and culturally competent services.

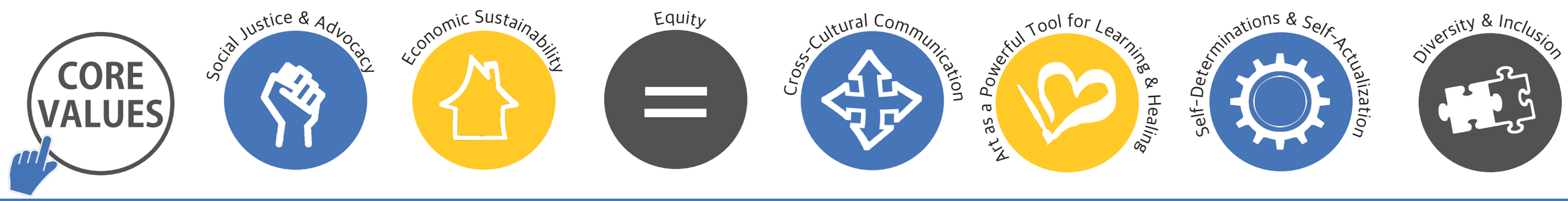
We envision a world where immigrant and refugee women and girls are **honored** for their wisdom, **celebrated** for their leadership, and **empowered** to create change.

Today, WISE has reached over 500 program participants and remains one of the few nonprofits nationwide that caters specifically to immigrant and refugee women and girls.

*We use the term “women and girls” interchangeably with “female-identified individuals”.

Our staff, board and program participants represent 18 countries across the globe.





2021 Summary

COMMUNITY GIVING

20% ↑

2020 Total Giving

2021 Total Giving

21% ↑

2020 Number of Donors

2021 Number of Donor

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

2 Family Night Events

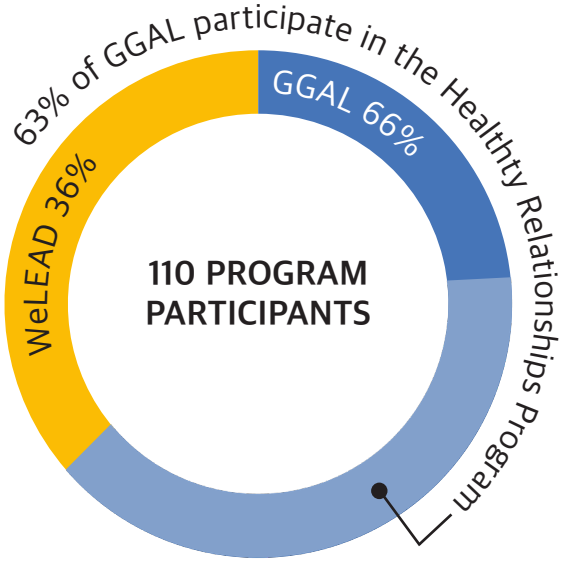
1 Financial Literacy Workshop for Homeownership

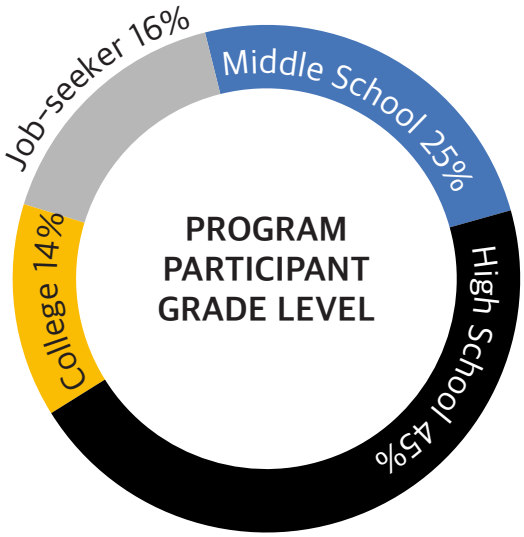
10 Healthy Relationships Workshop Series

7 Green Dot Active Bystander Trainings

11 Parent Workshops & Webinars

4 Partner Program Sites





GETTING TO KNOW
WOMEN'S INITIATIVE FOR SELF EMPOWERMENT (WISE)
PRESENTED BY Stephany
Invest.
Impact.
empower
Repeat.

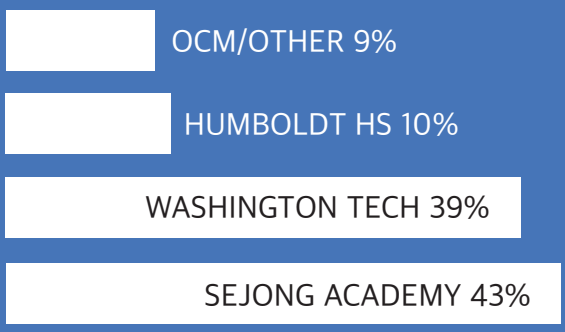
PROGRAM

Girls Getting Ahead in Leadership

The Girls Getting Ahead in Leadership (GGAL) program serves immigrant and refugee girls in grades 6-12 in academic support and leadership skills training. The GGAL program guides girls in developing their own identities, and ensures that they have the knowledge and resources to make their own informed decisions.

In 2021, GGAL served a total of 70 girls in in-person and virtual learning. 61% of GGAL participants were in high school while 39% were in middle school.

Despite experiencing program setbacks due to COVID-19 precautions, GGAL expanded its services to include two more program sites, Sejong Academy and Humboldt High School, in addition to its original program sites, the Oromo Community of Minnesota (OCM) and Washington Technology Magnet School. These additions serve as a vital leap in WISE' strategic goal to reach more women and girls in our community.



GGAL youth attend program at four partner sites, including one community center and three schools.

GGAL youth come from diverse ethnic backgrounds.

PROGRAM

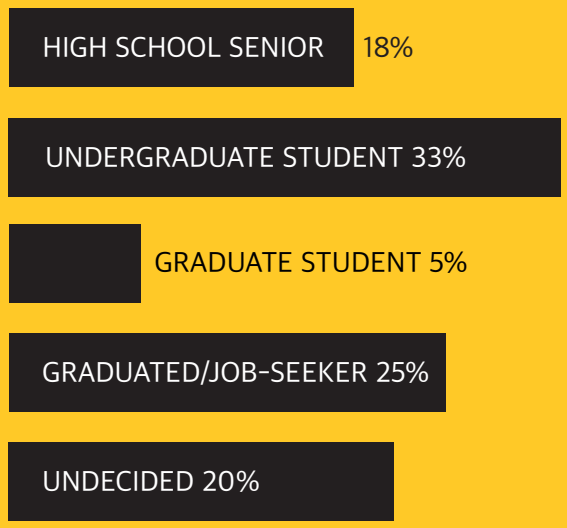
WeLEAD

WeLEAD serves immigrant and refugee women entering or already in college, and with women transitioning to the workforce. While GGAL works with girls to develop their self-identity and agency, WeLEAD helps our participants navigate school systems and economic systems; and provides opportunities for participants to develop professional skills.

In 2021, WeLEAD served a total of 40 students, including six high school students transitioning to college. A total of nine women graduated in 2021--one student graduated with an associates degree, two with bachelor's degrees, and six with high school diplomas.

WeLEAD also saw an increase in financial support thanks to grants from the Geisler Family Foundation, the Minneapolis Foundation, and the HIWAY Credit Union Foundation. These grants were exclusively used to close the tuition gaps of WeLEAD participants and to aid in any other education-related expenses.

Three WeLEAD participants graduated college and six participants graduated high school in 2021.



WeLEAD works with women in all parts of their post-secondary educational and career journeys.

PROGRAM

Healthy Relationships

The Healthy Relationships program's mission is to equip girls with the knowledge and skills to build and maintain healthy relationships in their lives. Through these healthy practices, girls can help foster a community free from violence against women and girls. The program promotes healthy relationships through regular after school sessions with GGAL students and encourages community involvement to end violence through workshops and trainings.

In 2021, the Healthy Relationships program provided regular programming to 44 GGAL participants, resulting in two digital media projects: a whiteboard animation video on sexual violence awareness and a music video on healthy friendships. Both projects were developed and performed by GGAL students!

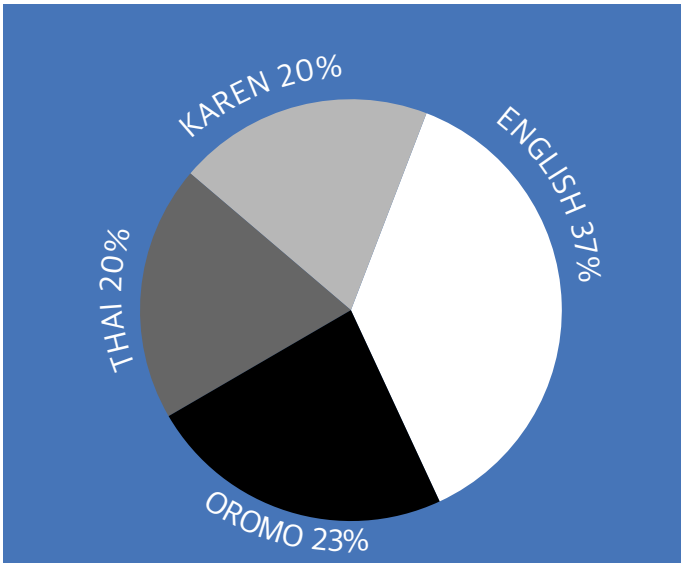
The program facilitated seven Green Dot Active Bystander Trainings in Oromo, Thai, Karen and English. Additionally, nine schools and nonprofit youth programs in the Twin Cities participated in the 7-hour Healthy Relationships workshop series.

Sexual Violence Prevention Program

By the Fall of 2021 the Sexual Violence Prevention program (SVP) began to provide direct training and services to youth at Washington Technology Magnet School. This includes

- One-on-one support to youth with our program partner and service provider, Transforming Generations.
- Recruitment and training of 24 student influencers in active bystander intervention methods.

2021 marks the SVP program's second program year.



A total of 25.5 hours were spent facilitating Green Dot Active Bystander Trainings in four languages.

PROGRAM

Parent Encouragement

The Parent Encouragement program is an extension of the GGAL program that works with immigrant and refugee parents. The program encourages parent involvement in their child's educational journey by connecting parents with school resources and facilitating conversations that can strengthen parent-child relationships.

In 2021, the Parent Encouragement program developed a series of webinars aimed at sharing and breaking down research about immigrants and refugees. This series attempts to help make knowledge more accessible in order to better support marginalized communities.

>> Click here to view more Parent Encouragement workshops and webinars.

Beginning in late 2021, the program also began to promote monthly family nights at the Oromo Community of Minnesota for Oromo parents to learn more about healthy child development, and how to support their children in school. These family events will continue through 2022!

2 family nights were conducted at the end of 2021

11 total parents were involved in family nights

11 total parent workshops and webinars were facilitated

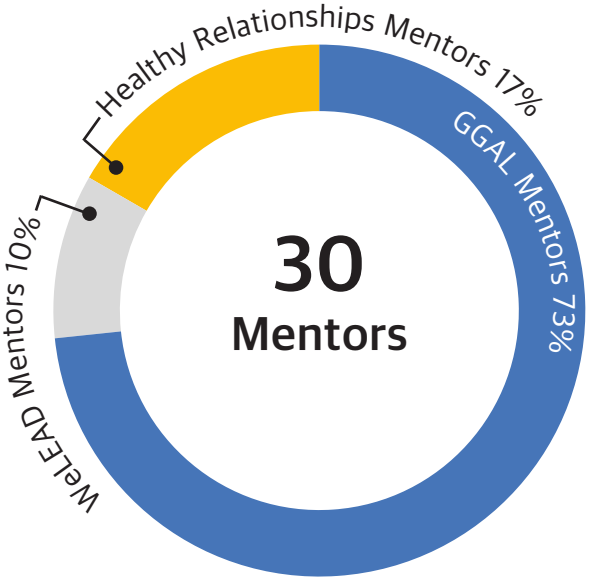
13 hours were spent facilitating parent workshops and webinars

Mentorship

At the beginning of 2021, WISE offered both vitural and in-person mentorship opportunities, which led to a 25% increase in mentors compared to 2020. We saw a total of 30 mentors acrosss all of our programs, consisting primarily of college students in Saint Paul and Minneapolis.

Our mentors helped with participant recruitment, facilitated activities, provided transportation support, and offered homework help to students in need. Thank you to all of our amazing mentors for their support in 2021!

>> Read about our mentors

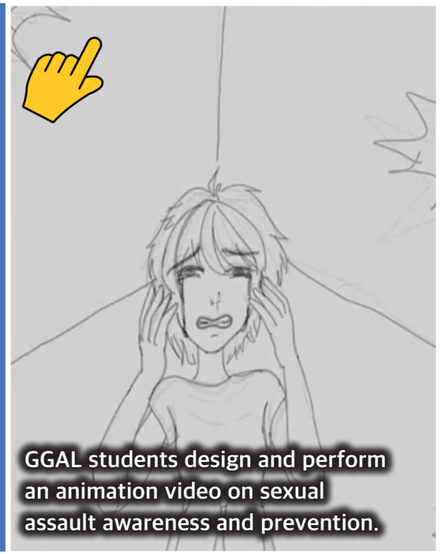


Mentorship is a core component of our women and girls programs!

We impact *generations* of women and girls.

WISE in Action!

When you see this icon, click to learn more!



GGAL students design and perform an animation video on sexual assault awareness and prevention.

WISE promotes its GGAL and Healthy Relationships programs at Sejong Academy.

WISE facilitates a Karen language Active Bystander training.

GGAL seniors stop for lunch during their college visit.

Community Solutions Fellow from Malawi, Caroline Luka, works with WISE to develop a human-centered curriulum for trauma victims.

WISE hosts their first OCM Family Night of 2021!

Success Story: Pkwa Htoo, a recent graduate, hopes to start her own daycare center.

"I stand on the sacrifices of a million women before me thinking what can I do to make this mountain taller so the women after me can see farther."

–RUPI KAUR

WISE participates in bringing awareness to domestic violence through their October campaign.

WISE spend their staff retreat in Duluth!

"Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world."

–NELSON MANDELA

WISE staff and GGAL students celebrate the end of summer program with a family picnic.

WISE holds an online fundraiser for Women's History Month!

Our Supporters

Thank you to our volunteers, board members, donors, grantmakers, and partners for supporting us in 2021. We hope to continue these collaborations and partnerships through the next year.

Individual Donors & Major Gift Donors

Aleksandra Alcheva
Amanda Ward
Ameer Eddin
Amy Moua
Auodette Yang
Bao Vue
Carol Steinberg
Caterina Grasso
Christy and Lyndon Shirley
Cyd Vang
Hli Xyooj
Janice L. Solek Tefft
Janny Thao
Jena McDermott
Kathleen Thao
Laura Dunford
Mai Lao
Majestanina Vang
Marina Gazel
Meng Lor
Michaela Corniea
Michele Lackey
Molly O'Brien
Nelsie Yang
Network for Good Fundraisers
Pa Nhia Khang
Pahoua Lee
Pakou Khang
Pamela Zeller
Panyia Khang
Pao Her
Paw Ha Eh
Rebecca Wachter
Sheng Vang
Shinaah Thao
Stela Center

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The Benevity Community Impact Fund
Catholic Community Foundation
Dual Citizen Brewing Company
Geisler Family Foundation
HIWAY Credit Union Foundation
Louie-Watson Fund
The Minneapolis Foundation
Minnesota United FC
Minnesota Department of Health – SVP Grant
Otto Bremer Trust
Schwab Charitable
Saint Paul & Minnesota Foundation

Partnerships

Adam Young, LIFT Agency
Annasimon Rizkalla
Aveda Arts & Sciences Institute of Minneapolis
Blong Peter Vang
Caroline Luka
Extensive Knowledge Productions
Humboldt High School
Jaralyn Roberts
Katherine Desantis
Keystone Best Buy Teen Tech Center
Krista Alef, LIFT Agency
Lady Midnight
Macalester College
Madi Stapley, LIFT Agency
Mandy Stephenson, LIFT Agency
Mateus B., Catchafire
Max Lopez
Minneapolis Institute of Art
Minnesota Coalition Against Sexual Assault
Minnesota Council of Nonprofits
Oromo Community of Minnesota
Saint Cloud State University
Saint Katherine's University
Saint Paul College
Sejong Academy
Transforming Generations
Tsogtbilguundari "Bill" Khishigbat
University of Minnesota
Violence Free Minnesota
Washington Technology Magnet School
WAKE International, Tech2Empower
Youth Intervention Programs Association

Mentors & Interns

Ahlaam Abdulwali
Aiyana Basa
Alanah Kennedy
Alice Bruno
Anna Stevenson
Avery Cooper
Cassandra Bliayang
Eliana Gueron
Elizabeth Fasbender
Frances Rae Redpath (Franny)
Hannah Lin
Hannah Rebiostein
Idil Ali Hassan
Julia Himmelberger
Katherine (Katie) McCarthy
Kristin Gill
Mai Yang
Megan Johnson
Minhui Pai
Molly Yang
Noel Craveiro
Norah Ntagungira
Ramla Mohamud
Rebecca Moser
Rebecca Turner
Rita Rai
Salbata Ghimire
Seoyeon Bae
Sesen Abraha
Thuy An Tran

Special Thanks

Malaysia Abdi, former SVP Program Coordinator
Nancy Hlee Vang, former GGAL Program Coordinator