



ACE

African Community Education

embracing culture | building community | creating change



FY 2024 Annual Report

A Letter from ACE Leadership



Dear Friends of ACE,

Thank you for making 2023-24 yet another remarkable year for African Community Education. We are excited to share all that we have accomplished over the past year in the following pages.

This year was particularly special for ACE as we spent our first full year in our organization's new home at 51 Gage St. When ACE began in 2006, we envisioned one day owning a space that was truly ours; a permanent location that would serve as a second home for ACE students, families, and community members.

Now, not only do we own a space we can call our own, but we are renovating it to become the home that ACE students and families deserve. This year, we began that process by renovating 11 academic and enrichment spaces including dedicated youth classrooms, a STEAM lab, a dancing and drumming studio, dedicated adult education classrooms, and a room to host our early literacy playgroups. We also renovated three dedicated office spaces for our programming and outreach teams.

The move and renovations have had an immediate impact on our organization and the families we serve. We welcomed record numbers of students and families across all programs, hosted several community events, and brought in new partners to our space, helping us to serve Worcester's immigrant and refugee communities in new ways.

We enrolled 150 youth across our After School, Saturday, Mentoring, and Summer Programs. Our Family Education Program enrolled 242 adults, and 98 young children as part of our Early Literacy Playgroups. We helped eight seniors graduate high school, with seven attending college this fall. Our Outreach team provided wraparound services to 429 families, nearly double the number served in the previous year. Seeing the need in our community, we welcomed our newly arriving Haitian neighbors to ACE, serving over 200 families. Across all of our programs and services, we directly served over 2,100 individuals, more than we ever have before.

These accomplishments would not be possible without the dedication of our hundreds of volunteers, the generosity of our donors and funders, the talents of our partners, the tireless work of our staff and board, and, most importantly, the passion, resilience, and determination of ACE students and their families.

Every sign of support we receive shows that more and more people believe in the work we do and in what we are building at ACE. We cannot thank you enough for that belief.

With deepest gratitude,

Kaska Yawo

Executive Director & Co-Founder

Biodun "Mr. B." Akande

Chairperson, ACE Board of Directors

Our Mission & Vision

The mission of African Community Education is to assist African refugee and immigrant youth and families in achieving educational and social stability through access to academic support, leadership development, cultural expression, and community outreach.

Our vision is a community where African refugees and immigrant youth and families are empowered, self-sufficient, and secure.





PROGRAMMING

Programming Overview

After School Program

The After School Program served 137 students during the 2023-2024 school year, with an average daily attendance of 60. Students made use of the new ACE building and engaged in a variety of activities. Select high school students participated in Zero Robotics, an international competition where students control robotic SPHERES aboard the International Space Station, meeting weekly during the 3rd and 4th quarters. In addition to homework time, students took part in social-emotional learning activities, gym sessions, art classes, and swimming lessons. In the spring, they enjoyed dance and drumming lessons with Crocodile River Music (CRM). The program also hosted a holiday party and honored students on the honor roll each quarter.

Saturday Program

The Saturday Program conducted 27 sessions during the 2023-24 school year, serving 92 students. The program offered STEM and English classes, as well as ThinkGive, a social-emotional learning curriculum. Students took dance and drum lessons and received support in computer skills and homework assistance. The 4th Annual ACE Africa Day celebration was a major highlight of the year. This event featured a model summit where students presented on various African countries and participated in cultural performances celebrating African music and dance in collaboration with Crocodile River Music. We also hosted a panel of experts on the theme, "Access to Education in the 21st Century: Building Resilient Education Systems for Increased Access to Inclusive, Lifelong, Quality, and Relevant Learning in Africa."

Summer Program

The Summer Program was the largest ACE has had in years as 76 total students attended the program. Students in grades 3-12 had the opportunity to complete summer reading assignments, partake in project based learning initiatives, see friends, engage in arts and crafts activities, and go on field trips. The 5th and 6th grade students had the special opportunity to participate in STEM lessons at the EcoTarium and all students participated in a weekly STEM activity with a WPI student teaching intern. Students presented their project work as part of the Project Fair, which included high school students performing a play. More than 60 students attended our end of summer celebration at Rutland State Park.

Programming Overview

Workforce Development Program

Eleven students attended this year's Workforce Development Program. Lessons covered a wide variety of skills aimed to help students find success in the working world. Essential lessons included building resumes, writing cover letters, filling out job application forms, doing interviews, and identifying interview tools and techniques. Students also engaged in activities designed to get them to align their career interests with their existing passions. In addition, we partnered with Centro to put on a financial literacy workshop for students. A visit to UniBank provided a unique opportunity for students to gain a better understanding of the world of banking, the unique services of the bank, as well as human resources policies. In addition, each student participated in a paid internship working in the ACE office.

Mentoring Program

The Mentoring Program offered students one-on-one mentoring relationships, with mentors and mentees meeting for at least one hour each week. They also participated in several group activities during the school year, including attending Worcester Railers hockey games, Worcester Bravehearts baseball games, and a neighborhood clean-up. Mentors supported students with both educational and personal challenges, providing access to opportunities they might not have otherwise had. This year, the program successfully recruited more students and volunteers, ending with 31 active mentor-mentee matches.

Post-Secondary Success Program

The Post-Secondary Success Program supported eight ACE seniors through their high school graduation, with seven now attending college this fall. ACE high school students had the opportunity to tour colleges such as Anna Maria College, Bentley University, and Nichols College. The program also hosted a workshop on the college admission process led by a representative from the College of the Holy Cross. Navigating the 2024 FAFSA was challenging, but MassEdCO visited ACE to provide a workshop on the new FAFSA and its updates. Additionally, the program secured two full scholarships for ACE students to attend Nichols College. The Post-Secondary Success Liaison maintains close contact with ACE seniors and alumni to support their educational and career pursuits.

Programming Overview

Adult ESOL Program

Our Adult English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) Program continued to grow significantly, offering ESOL classes to parents of our students and other adults in the community. The goal of the ESOL Program is to enhance the skills of parents so they can better navigate their new country, secure better employment, and improve their family's quality of life. With our move to a new facility, we expanded the number of levels and classes offered each week, accommodating more students than ever before. By the end of the year, nearly 125 students attended classes daily, with a total of 242 adults participating in the program. Students also visited educational facilities such as the Worcester Art Museum, Worcester Public Library, and Claremont Academy. These visits familiarized parents with local learning institutions and provided information on how these facilities relate to their children's education.

Early Literacy Playgroup

The Early Literacy Playgroup enrolled 98 students during the 2023-2024 school year, with an average daily attendance of 15 students. The program provides free childcare for parents while they attend ESOL classes. The playgroup focuses on learning through play, music, and movement. Children are encouraged to develop literacy and math skills daily by reviewing letters, and shapes, engaging in fun rhyming activities, and reading stories with their instructors. The structured routine and monthly themes such as community, plants, presidents, and summer fun provided a safe and secure learning environment for the students. Additionally, the program organized visits to child-friendly sites outside the classroom.



Programming Overview

Career Development Program

Over the past year, the Career Development Program successfully processed 288 applications, assisted 164 individuals, and secured long-term employment for 45 people. Additional services included job coaching, application assistance, language interpretation, and building partnerships with local employers. The program also partnered with Open Sky Community Services and Seven Hills for the Human Services Career Support Program. This collaboration offered a 6-month training and job placement program that guaranteed graduates full-time employment as behavior counselors upon completion. This year, the program had 28 participants, including 7 ACE clients.

Immigration Services

In the past year, Immigration Services handled a substantial volume of cases and consultations. We processed 105 applications for green cards, 83 applications for citizenship, and 35 applications for employment authorization. Additionally, we have provided phone consultations to 126 individuals and conducted immigration presentations for approximately 250 community members and churches. Lastly, Immigration Services partnered with the Office of New Americans at Friendly House, led by Jillian Philips, various immigration attorneys, led by Alex Mooradian, and several other community partners to assist new arrivals from Haiti with processing authorizations and asylum cases. An estimated 500 cases were managed through this collaboration.



Programming Fast Facts

2,100

Individuals served
through programming
and outreach services

150

Students attended
ACE youth Programs

242

Adults attended ACE
ESOL classes

98

Children attended
Early Literacy
Playgroups



25 Countries of Origin



**27 African languages
spoken at home**



542 Program Sessions



1,558 Program Hours

Student Spotlight

ACE's out-of-school-time programs exist to educate and empower ACE students. Often, older ACE students serve as inspiring role models for their younger peers.

ELDA

Eldamenjie Laudin is an ACE student born in Haiti and raised in South America. She joined ACE last fall and is now a rising junior at North High.

Elda is an active athlete, playing both volleyball and basketball for North High, and she plans to attend college in the future. Known for her strong work ethic, she attends ACE every day and serves as an excellent role model for all students. Elda has been instrumental in creating a welcoming environment at ACE for Haitian and African students.

Over the summer, as a YouthWorks intern, she impressed the summer coordinator with her responsibility and maturity. Elda went above and beyond by walking younger students from Hotel Worcester to ACE to ensure their safety. Overall, Elda has had a profoundly positive impact on ACE.



ACE Graduates

This year, **8 ACE seniors graduated high school!** They are now attending colleges including Nichols College, Worcester State University, and Quinsigamond Community College.

NICOLE

Nicole Djotas was born in the Democratic Republic of Congo. After fleeing her country and spending over two years in a refugee camp in Tanzania, she and her family resettled in Worcester, MA. Nicole began her U.S. education in 5th grade at Thorndyke Elementary School at the age of 11, with no prior knowledge of English. Over the years, she has been a vital part of the After School and Saturday Programs at ACE. Nicole was also one of the first student participants in the ACE Mentoring Program and has one of the longest-standing partnerships in the program.

As a paid summer intern at ACE, Nicole excelled in assisting staff with program coordination and providing classroom support. Although these positions are typically given to new students each year, ACE awarded Nicole the internship for a second summer due to her outstanding performance. Notably, while working as an ACE intern, Nicole managed two other demanding part-time jobs and contributed her earnings to her family's household income.

Nicole excelled academically and demonstrated a special talent in creative writing. She has been a guest speaker at ACE events, where she has performed readings of her original poetry to great acclaim. As a sophomore, she received a city-wide creative writing award from the Worcester Public School System.

When her family moved to Minnesota at the start of her junior year, Nicole faced another challenging transition but again rose to the occasion. She maintained her relationship with her ACE mentor, Lisa, through Zoom and phone calls for continued academic and social support. In May, Nicole graduated from high school and will return to Massachusetts at the end of August to begin her studies at Nichols College in Dudley, MA, as a first-generation college student. She aspires to become a judge and will study Pre-Law, aiming to be the first member of her family to graduate from college.



Alumni Spotlight

ACE's Post-Secondary Success Program ensures the ongoing success of ACE graduates as they pursue life after high school.

FIDELE

Fidele Topan was born in the heart of the Central African Republic and has two sisters and two brothers. Due to conflict, he relocated to Chad, where he was on the cusp of starting high school. Fidele's journey continued in 2018 when his family was able to move again, this time to the United States. The initial months were particularly challenging due to the unfamiliar language and environment.

Fidele was extremely active in all ACE programs, including as a member of the ACE Drum Team, and excelled academically. Fidele graduated from North High School in 2023. Said Fidele of ACE, "When I moved to the U.S., I didn't know English. ACE helped me develop my English skills . . . ACE is always there for me when I need it."

Fidele is now a student at UMass Dartmouth, majoring in Computer Science with aspirations of becoming an electrical engineer. After graduating from college, he hopes to spend a few years back in Africa. His childhood dream was to become a professional soccer player, ideally in France or Spain, with the goal of using his success to support underprivileged individuals. Fluent in four or five languages, Fidele enjoys playing soccer, working out, spending time with friends, and getting a good night's sleep when not studying.

He recently enrolled in a history course because, although he is African, he did not have the opportunity to study African history in high school. He is excited to learn about the diverse nations and rich cultures of Africa and believes this course will provide a better understanding of African history.

His journey from the Central African Republic to studying Computer Science at UMass Dartmouth exemplifies tenacity, adaptability, and the pursuit of his goals. Fidele is committed to using his education and experiences to make a positive impact, blending his love for soccer with his academic pursuits. His story reflects not only his own journey but also the aspirations of many who value knowledge and selflessness in striving for greater achievements.



Volunteer Spotlight

This year, **281 volunteers** contributed **2,644 hours** of service to help ACE students and families.

KJ

KJ Kamugu, a biology student at Quinsigamond Community College, will soon be transferring to a college in New Orleans. As a Kenyan immigrant, she approached her volunteering with great passion and enthusiasm.

This year, her involvement in the Saturday and Summer Programs has been particularly impactful. KJ excels at building relationships with students of all ages through her dedicated tutoring and active participation in activities. In addition to her regular duties, she has helped students with their presentations for Africa Day, attended the ACE Gala and ACE Festival, and consistently assisted with event set-up.

Throughout the year, she has also participated in mentoring events and provided extra support when needed. While many volunteers go above and beyond, KJ's contributions are especially noteworthy. We greatly appreciate her dedicated support and presence.



Mentoring Spotlight

This year, **31 mentor-mentee matches** participated in our Mentor-Mentee Programs.

LISA & NICOLE

Lisa Beittel and Nicole Djotas, a well-known mentoring match at ACE, have been meeting regularly since 2019. They initially connected through the After-School program and consistently attended mentoring events. In the summer of 2023, Nicole's family relocated to Minnesota. Despite the physical distance, they maintained their connection through phone calls, text messages, and Zoom meetings, allowing their relationship to continue to grow.



Nicole remained involved with ACE's Post-Secondary Education program, and Lisa supported her with academic tasks, daily homework, and school-related assignments, while also offering personal advice and emotional support for challenges Nicole faced in Minnesota. Their enduring bond exemplifies the significance of mentoring. Even though they were separated by hundreds of miles, they stayed close at heart.

Nicole graduated from high school this past June, and Lisa traveled to Minnesota to celebrate this significant milestone. Nicole is now planning to attend Nichols College in Dudley, MA. This is exciting news as she received a full scholarship and will be closer to her friends in Worcester, and, most importantly, closer to Lisa.

DEVELOPMENT



Key Facts & Figures

35

Grant funders

\$1.37M

In grants awarded

37

Corporate & event sponsors

334

Individual donors

\$316K

In annual fund donations

\$773K

For capital projects

Grant & Corporate Funders

Thank you to our grant funders and corporate sponsors. Without you, our work would not be possible.

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Thank you to all of our donors. Whether it's \$1 or \$1,000, each gift lets ACE families know there is one more person in their corner.

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Yvonne Posa
Zachariah Combs
Zohar Badenhausen

Kupanda: ACE's Recurring Giving Community

In 2018, ACE launched **Kupanda**, our recurring giving community. These donors have made a long-term, recurring commitment to support ACE. **108 donors** were members of the Kupanda community this year.

Thank you to our Kupanda Members!

Abil Dhee
Alex Mooradian
Alex Swenson
Amy & Rain Corneliusen
Amy Connery & Joshua Plisinski
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Timothy O'Neil
Tom Colucci
Uyanga (Melody) Mungunchimeg
Vaughn Hathaway
Yatta Yeawolo
Zachariah Combs

Build, Learn, Grow: The 17th Annual ACE Gala

The 17th Annual ACE Gala took place on Saturday, November 4, and celebrated our theme of “Build. Learn. Grow.” We had a record number of 340 people in attendance at Mechanics Hall and raised over \$112,000 for ACE programs and families!

The highlight of the evening was the ACE Student Fashion Show conducted in partnership with the WPI Black Student Union and various African fashion designers. The evening also featured stellar performances from Crocodile River Music, Africano Waltham, and the ACE Drum Team. The event was an incredible success thanks to dozens of amazing sponsors, raffle donors, vendors, performers, and partners. We are especially grateful to UniBank for serving as our Title Sponsor for the event.

Thank you for helping to make the 17th Annual ACE Gala the best yet!





FINANCIALS

Financial Overview

FY 2024*

INCOME

Foundation Grants	\$485,967
Government Grants	\$892,127
General Donations	\$316,519
Capital Donations	\$773,050
Rent Income	\$91,025
Interest Income	\$20,056

TOTAL INCOME	\$2,578,745
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EXPENSES

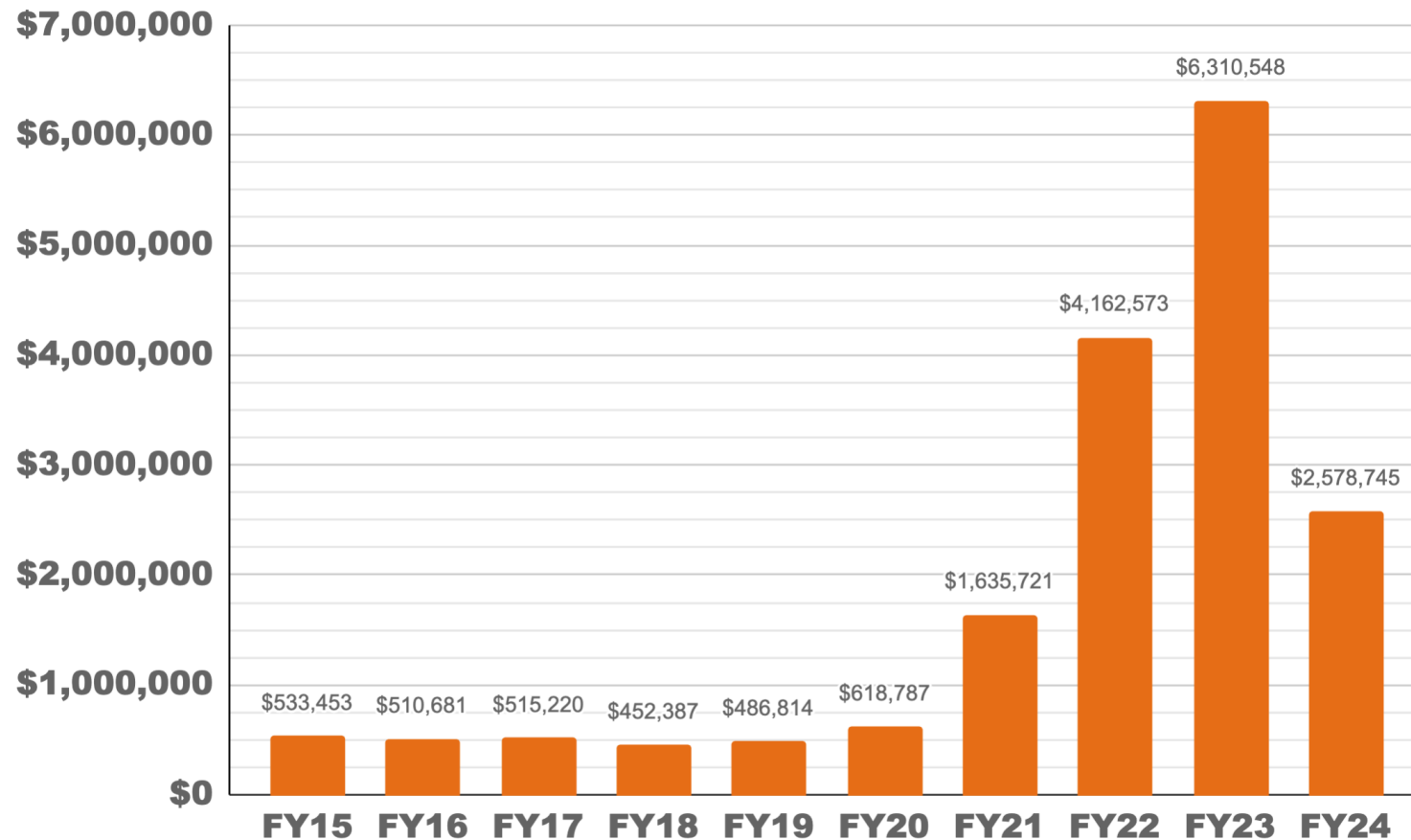
Payroll	\$1,660,726
Health Insurance	\$16,031
Payroll Taxes	\$154,973
Contractors	\$39,285
Program Expenses	\$108,035
Fundraising Expenses	\$155,868
Other Admin Expenses	\$80,783
Software Expenses	\$25,328
Transportation	\$24,351
Rent and Facilities	\$125,163

TOTAL EXPENSES	\$2,394,393
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*Financial estimates—audited financial statements will be available in November 2024

Financial History

African Community Education Revenue Over Time*



*Large increases in FY 2022 and FY 2023 were the result of large contributions to capital projects. Operating revenue has increased year over year dating back to FY 2019.

OUR FUTURE



The ACE Center

Since 2007, ACE has operated our youth and family programming in rented and in-kind spaces in many locations, causing inefficiencies and barriers for staff and clients, frequent moves, limited program hours and accessibility, and a lack of space to expand.

Recognizing these longstanding and critical needs, ACE purchased a 56,000-square-foot facility located at 51 Gage St. in January 2022 with the help of the leadership giving of support Daniel Ivascyn and moved into the new facility in January 2023. This facility has allowed us to consolidate all programming and offices, improve accessibility, and significantly expand programming. We are actively raising funds to renovate this space and realize a long-held dream that ACE would create a cultural and community center for the city's and region's vibrant and growing African, immigrant, and refugee populations.

We began renovations this year, creating 11 academic and enrichment spaces including dedicated youth classrooms, a STEAM lab, a dancing and drumming studio, dedicated adult education classrooms, and a room to host our early literacy playgroups. We also renovated three dedicated office spaces for our programming and outreach teams.

We will continue renovations this year, continuing to transform this facility into the home ACE families, community members, and partner organizations deserve. Ultimately, renovations will include:

- Modernizing 16 multi-use education and activity rooms through cosmetic improvements, educational technology, and updated furniture to fit the needs of each program and age-level
- Renovating the gymnasium to serve as a multifaceted space for recreation and sports, community gatherings and events, performances, conferences, and more
- Creating a STEAM innovation lab, robotics lab, and dedicated music education rooms
- Building a commercial kitchen to prepare African meals for ACE and other community events
- Creating spaces to celebrate African arts and cultures
- Reconfiguring the entrance ways, hallway layouts, and building flow to create a welcoming space
- Making needed upgrades for ADA compliance and energy efficiency modifications



Our Team

ACE STAFF

KASKA YAWO, Executive Director & Co-Founder
AYMAN ABDELGADIR, Volunteer & Mentor Coordinator
BEV ARCARO, Grants Manager
EDICIA BORLOH, Administrative Outreach Facilitator
BADERHA BUJIRIRI, Development Coordinator
ABIL DHEE, Administrative Coordinator
TIMON DHEGO, Family Education Program Coordinator
SAINT CYR DIMANCHE, Career Development Coordinator
FLORENCE DOE, Early Literacy Coord. & Custodian Coord.
WINNIE DOE, Worcester Public Schools Liaison
SLY DWYER, After School Program Coordinator
REGINA ENGEL, Director of Finance & Operations
SEAN ENGEL, Information Technology Specialist
PRINCE GWEH, Building Manager
BENJAMIN KAGIGI, Outreach Manager
MELVIN KASKA, Post-Secondary Education Liaison
CECILIA LAFONTAINE, Finance & HR Coordinator
GINA LANDRIN, Outreach Staff
MOUBARAK MAHAMAT, Transportation Coordinator
WIVINE MAKOKO, Family Ed. & Outreach Worker
TEREZA NGENDA HORURI, Outreach Worker
TIM O'NEIL, Director of Development
JP PERKINS, Program Director
MARIA VIVIER, Early Literacy Staff & Custodian
ROSE WINE, Marketing & Development Coordinator
JOHN YORMIE, JR., Saturday Program Coordinator

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Thank you from the ACE family!



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