# 2022 – 2023

# **Annual Report**

A Year of Accomplishments, Innovation and New Programs

Westchester Independent Living Center

Satellite Office Putnam Independent Living Services

#### MISSION STATEMENT

The Westchester Independent Living Center is a peer-driven, community-based organization that empowers people with disabilities to lead self-directed lives in the community through advocacy, training and referral to resources that promote Independent Living.

#### **VISION STATEMENT**

Promoting full community inclusion for people with disabilities by breaking down barriers.

"There is nothing I have accomplished without reaching out to empower others."

Justin Dart Disability Rights Movement Icon Father of the ADA

"Some people say that what I did changed the world, but really, I simply refused to accept what I was told about who I could be."

Judy Heumann Disability Rights Movement Icon *Mother of Disability Rights* 

## Executive Director's Message

Looking back on 2023, it was clear for me to see the evolution of the Center over the past few years. To recap, 2019 – 2020's Annual Report was entitled "A Year of Changes, Challenges & Transitions" with our founding Executive Director, Joe Bravo, retiring and the beginning of the COVID pandemic; 2020 – 2021 was "A Year of Adjustments & Perseverance" which was my first year as Executive Director, the height of the pandemic, and the Center adjusting to continue to meet the needs of the increasing amount of people who needed assistance; 2021 – 2022 was entitled "A Year of Optimism & Expansion" as, through the ongoing pandemic, a harsh flu season, and economic setbacks, not only did staff remain optimistic, keep the individuals' goals in sight, and provide services, but the Center actually expanded Programs and office space to meet the needs that our communities were facing. This brings me to this year, 2022-2023, a FANTASTIC YEAR - "A Year of Accomplishments, Innovation & New Programs."

The Center's accomplishments encompass our ability to stand out as "Innovators." We do not get "stuck" in our old ways but evolve with our community. This is shown through the increasing number of individuals served and populations we hadn't reached before.

We began new programs for transition age youth, such as Ready Set Work!, Peer Advocacy, and Healthy Food Choices. Staff participated in Ride Alongs with the White Plains Police Department to provide advocacy and assistance for victims of domestic violence who are persons with disabilities. Due to the growth of the Center's Nursing Home Transition and Diversion/Traumatic Brain Injury Waiver Program, the Center received additional funds from the New York State Department of Health to hire additional staff. We received a grant from the Christopher Reeve Foundation to expand our Post-Rehabilitation Transition Program at Burke Rehabilitation. The Center's Rapid Transition Housing Program expanded to now serve 2 more counties. And, our much-needed new Veteran Directed Care Program got up and running.

With all that the Center has accomplished, to say that I am proud of our staff is an understatement. I am very excited and honored to share this 2022-2023 Annual Report - "A Year of Accomplishments, Innovation & New Programs" with all of you.

Be well,

Margaret Nunziato Executive Director

# BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Shelley Klein, PhD – President

Jennifer Johnson – Vice President

Jesse Sahagan – Treasurer

Marna Solarsh – Secretary

Richard Keller Frank Mastroianni Dylan Emmons John Boyle

Westchester Independent Living Center, Inc. (WILC) was incorporated in 1981 as a private, nonprofit (501c3) agency and is funded as a Center for Independent Living by both federal and state governments. WILC serves people with disabilities, their families, businesses, schools, and community agencies.

### President's Message



As you will read in the pages to follow, the past year has been another year of success and innovation at WILC. We have increased our outreach in both our Core Services and our Specialized Services to more than 6,200 individuals. We are proud of the life-changing assistance WILC has provided through ongoing programs such as Educational Advocacy, Minority Outreach, Mental Health Advocacy, and Olmstead Housing Subsidy Program; new programs such as our Veteran Directed Care Program; and through expanded programs such as our LHV and NYC Nursing Home Transition and Diversion/Traumatic Brain Injury Waiver Programs. The consumer stories you will read in this report offer powerful testimony to the accomplishments achieved.

In 1675, the great physicist Sir Isaac Newton said, "If I have seen further, it is by standing on the shoulders of giants." Here at WILC in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, our vision, as expressed in our vision statement, is to promote full community inclusion for people with disabilities by breaking down barriers. But we too stand on the shoulders of giants. And we would be remiss if we did not mention the lifelong work of Judy Heumann, a friend of WILC and an ardent disability rights activist and leader, often called the "Mother of Disability Rights", who passed away this past March.

Leadership matters. And, if the 2022-2023 year at WILC has been a *Year of Accomplishments, Innovation and New Programs*, none of this would have been possible without the hard work and creative energy of WILC's dedicated staff under the leadership of our indefatigable Executive Director, Margaret Nunziato, who herself was awarded a 2023 *Women Innovators in our Region Award*. Together, they keep WILC true to its mission to empower people with disabilities to live self-directed lives in the community - a fitting tribute to Judy's legacy. May they go from strength to strength.

Shelley Klein President, Board of Directors

## **Consumer Story**

The consumer is an 18 year old male diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder, Anxiety, and ADHD. PILS Director of Educational Advocacy first began working with the consumer and his family when he was in preschool. At that time, he had a diagnosis of Pervasive Developmental Disorder (PDD). When the consumer was in 5<sup>th</sup> Grade, his PDD diagnosis was changed to Aspergers. In 2020, a neuropsychological evaluation was completed and Autism Spectrum Disorder, Anxiety, and ADHD diagnoses were given. The COVID school closures were very difficult for him. He became withdrawn, did not like online learning, and became avoidant. As school moved back to in-person, he was better, but began feeling anxious about graduating. With PILS Director of Educational Advocacy's support, community-based services were secured through Putnam County's Department of Children's Mental Health. Transition planning became a component of his meetings in school and in the community. He wanted to go to community college, live on campus, and study computer science. He understood to reach these goals, he needed to attend school, complete his classes, and take the Regents exam. He was found eligible for OPWDD in 2022 and his budget was approved for self-direction. He graduated in June 2023 with a Regents Diploma. His Senior quote in the yearbook said, "Sometimes it is the people no one can imagine anything of who do the things no one can imagine." - Alan Turing. During the Summer, he was a lifeguard at the town pool. In September, he began attending **Dutchess Community College.** 

### **Core Services**

- Benefits and Entitlements Advisement
- Information and Referral
- Community Outreach
- Peer Advisement
- Independent Living Skills
- Individual and Systems Advocacy
- Deaf Services
- Equal Access/ADA Consultation

### **Total Persons Served During Year**

People with Disabilities	6,826
Family Members/Significant Others	1,006
Other Non-Disabled (Includes	
Agency/Business Personnel	503
Business/Agencies	153
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Number of Institutional Transitions	249
Number of Institutional Diversions	942
Number of Full-Time Job Placements	18
Number of Part-Time Job Placements	6

## **Specialized Programs**

- Minority Outreach (MOP)
- Mental Health Advocacy
- Educational Advocacy
- Nursing Home Transition and Diversion/ Traumatic Brain Injury RRDC for the Lower Hudson Valley Region
- Nursing Home Transition and Diversion/ Traumatic Brain Injury RRDC for the New York City Region
- Open Doors Transition
- NY Connects/No Wrong Door
- Parent Training and Information
- Peer Integration (PIP)
- Olmstead Housing
- Rapid Transition Housing
- Post-Rehabilitation Transition at Burke Rehabilitation Center
- Post-Rehabilitation Transition at Phelps Hospital
- Diabetes Prevention
- Veteran Directed Care
- Anger Management
- Domestic Violence Prevention
- Ready Set Work
- Re-Entry Programming

#### PROGRAMS FOR TRANSITION AGE YOUTH

### **Ready Set Work!**

Ready Set Work! Career University – Advancing to the Next Level is a career readiness curriculum for justiceinvolved youth ages 14-24. Endorsed by the NYS Division of Criminal Justice Services (DCJS), it is a collaborative effort of the NYS DCJS, NYS Department of Labor, County Probation Departments, and community-based organizations with frontline experience working with this youth population in New York State. The skill-based training/curriculum includes modules on Barriers & Resources, Work & Education, Career Assessments, Job Retention, and Job Search. Participants in WILC's Ready Set Work! Career University – Advancing to the Next Level Program are youth with disabilities who are or have been involved with the juvenile/criminal justice system. Upon completion of the modules/workshops. MOP staff follows up with the participants for 90 days. This year, WILC's MOP Director of Minority Outreach/Re-Entry Programming facilitated one cycle of the Ready Set Work! Career University – Advancing to the Next Level Program. We had 7 participants complete the Program.

The consumer is a 16 year old Hispanic male with Intellectual Disability. He was referred to WILC's MOP by the Youth Shelter. He had been in the Shelter for the past year, was not doing well in school and wanted to discover a trade he might be good at/interested in. The consumer attended MOP's Ready Set Work! Program for Youth. He discovered he would like to work with his hands. MOP staff reached out to The Guidance Center which was offering an apprentice program for Electricians. The consumer enrolled. He now has a Mentor who is assisting him get his GED while he is in the Apprenticeship program. He is very excited now about his future.

### **Healthy Food Choices**

A Healthy Food Choices training, which includes topics such as snacking, diets, grocery shopping, interpreting food labels, food prep, fast food, etc, was developed by WILC's MOP staff to assist transition age youth with disabilities. WILC's Director of Minority Outreach/Re-Entry Programming collaborated with the Youth Shelter's Executive Director to have the training included in **Emerging Adult Justice Initiative** programming for the Shelter's transitional age youth. Emerging Adult Justice programming provides meaningful opportunities for resolving criminal cases by pursuing alternatives to conventional prosecution, sentencing and incarceration for young people between the ages of 18 - 25. The objective is to connect young adults with services, resources, and opportunities which place these emerging adults on the path of success and self-autonomy in becoming productive members of society. In September 2023. WILC's MOP staff conducted a 2day Healthy Food Choices training in-person to seven (7) transition age youth with disabilities who are in the Youth Shelter's Emerging Adult Justice Initiative

### **Peer Advocacy**

WILC's MOP staff developed a Peer Advocacy Group program for transition age youth with disabilities which includes topics such as goal setting, Independent Living Skills, self-advocacy, and empowerment. This year, Exodus Transitional Community, Inc. incorporated the MOP-developed Peer Advocacy Group program in its Youth Empowerment Program. Founded in 1999, Exodus offers a broad spectrum of services for adults and youth affected by the justice system. Exodus' Youth Empowerment Programs focus on helping young people (ages 16-24) obtain a GED or High School Diploma, complete post-secondary Education or Training, successfully enter the workforce, and keep them on track by either preventing them from becoming justice/gang involved, or providing re-entry services for those youth who have been incarcerated and need a second chance. In April 2023, six (6) transition age youth with disabilities who are members of Exodus' Youth Empowerment Program attended a 2-day Peer Advocacy Group program conducted by WILC's Director of Minority Outreach/Re-Entry Programming.

### Consumer Stories

The consumer is a 51 year old male with mobility issues. He felt he was too young to be in a nursing home. He was referred to WILC's Olmstead Housing Subsidy (OHS) Program. The consumer cooperated with WILC's OHS Housing Specialist in getting all the documents needed for OHS approval. Once approved, he told the OHS Housing Specialist that he wanted to reside in Westchester. While waiting to secure housing, the consumer went into the hospital for surgery. After recovery, he was afraid the hospital would discharge him to a shelter. WILC's OHS Housing Specialist contacted the Social Worker and told her he was in the OHS Program and actively searching for housing. He was returned to his original nursing home and the housing search continued. WILC's OHS Housing Specialist was subsequently informed by a Property Manager that they had an accessible vacancy. WILC's OHS Housing Specialist contacted the consumer. His application was approved and he is now happily living independently in the community.

The consumer is a 58 year old female with Epilepsy, Anxiety, and mobility issues who had a Stroke. When PILS Open Doors Transition Program's Lead Transition Specialist began working with the consumer, she was residing in a Nursing Home. The home she and her husband lived in had an elevator and did not need any modifications for her to return. What complicated this transition was that her home was in Long Island, which made this a crossregion transition. PILS Transition Specialist worked with SILO's Transition Specialist to secure the necessary supports and services. The consumer is extremely happy to be home and is settling in nicely.

### **Veteran Directed Care Program**

This year, WILC became one of three pilot programs for the Veteran Directed Care Program in New York State. This nationwide program is a self-directing program for veterans which is funded through the Veteran's Administration. WILC's Veteran Directed Care Program will be working with Castle Point VA Medical Center and VA Hudson Valley Health Care to provide services to veterans in the Hudson Valley Region. Our Service Coordinator for the Program will discuss with the veterans what they need, i.e., aides, services, assistive technologies, resources, role modeling, etc., and develop care plans. The Program does not duplicate VA services. Each Vet will get an individualized budget based on their needs and will be empowered to make their own decisions regarding their care/services. Center staff received intensive training and the Center went through Readiness Reviews for Service Delivery Approvals and received its approvals. We are excited about this new Program and the services and independence we will be able to bring to veterans in the Hudson Valley Region.

# WILC Receives Grant From Christopher Reeve Foundation

This year, the Center received a grant from the Christopher Reeve Foundation for \$25,000 to provide post-rehabilitation services to Spinal Cord Injury patients at the Burke Rehabilitation Center. Staff will be collaborating with Burke's Spinal Cord Injury Unit on this Program. The Program will work in conjunction with WILC's Post-Rehabilitation Transition Program at the Burke Rehabilitation Center.

# WILC Receives Funding to Expand Program

Due to the growth of the Center's Lower Hudson Valley and New York City Nursing Home Transition and Diversion/Traumatic Brain Injury (NHTD/TBI) Waiver Regional Programs, the NYS Department of Health approved additional funding for these Programs. WILC's NYC NHTD/TBI Waiver RRDC will receive an additional \$475,000/year and WILC's LHV NHTD/TBI Waiver RRDC Program will receive an additional \$375,000/year. The funds will be utilized to hire additional staff.

### **Consumer Stories**

The consumer is a 41 year old Arab female with Mental Health who came to the Center as a result of outreach done at the VIVE School. She had no income. Her husband had abandoned her and informed her that he would no longer provide housing support. In her culture, a woman is mostly dependent on their spouse for financial support. WILC's Program Director of IL Services worked with the consumer and discovered that she had been working, but had lost her job at Dunkin Donuts due to its closing for renovations. She discussed Unemployment Insurance and Temporary Cash Assistance from DSS with the consumer. With help from WILC's Program Director of IL Services, the consumer filed for Unemployment and was approved for benefits. She now has a source of income holding her over until she finds a new job. Although she struggles with depression, she reassures herself that things will get better and is grateful for the assistance she received.

The consumer is a 9 year old male with Other Health Impairment (OHI). The consumer has experienced a traumatic childhood. Both of his parents were not consistent figures in his life as a result of their addiction issues. He lives with his paternal grandmother and both the consumer's grandmothers are his guardians. PILS Educational Advocate began working with the consumer's quardians to obtain an IEP for the consumer. In October 2022, the consumer had his CSE eligibility meeting where he was classified as OHI and was now able to get the much-needed support of a Special Education teacher throughout the course of his day, as well as other accommodations he required to be more successful. In November, PILS Educational Advocate attended the consumer's first program review with both the grandmothers. Additional services were incorporated from various agencies to provide family support, as well as counseling, for the consumer in both grandmothers' homes so that there is a collaborative approach to meeting the consumer's needs.

The consumer is a 62 year old Hispanic/African American female with Cancer who was in need of housing. She was undergoing chemotherapy and was a candidate for stem cells, but unless she had stable housing, she could not proceed with the treatment. WILC's IL Mental Health Peer Advocate assisted the consumer in applying for Section 8 subsidized housing in Westchester and NYC. She was granted a housing subsidy and after many applications was approved for an apartment in Yonkers. WILC's IL Mental Health Peer Advocate worked with the Furniture Share House to furnish the apartment. The consumer moved in and has high hopes for being able to live without Cancer.

The consumer is a 30 year old African American male with Substance Abuse. He was referred to WILC's MOP for Domestic Violence training due to a dispute with a former partner. He was struggling to keep a job due his history of substance abuse. MOP staff connected him with a support group and AA. The consumer successfully completed MOP's Domestic Violence Program. When he got an interview for a job, MOP staff worked with him and he landed the job. MOP staff connected him with available housing. He is now living in a studio apartment, likes his job, is still attending his groups, and has not relapsed.

The consumer is a 88 year old African American male who had a Stroke and who also has Diabetes and Dementia. The consumer had been residing in a nursing home for approximately 6 years when he and his family decided that he would have a better quality of life at home/in his community. He was referred to WILC's Nursing Home Transition and Diversion (NHTD) Waiver Program. Due to his significant physical needs and cognitive deficits, the consumer needed oversight and hands-on assistance with his activities of daily living. Once enrolled onto the NHTD Waiver, the consumer was able to secure a Service Coordinator who worked closely with the nursing home to plan for and secure a safe discharge. The NHTD Waiver was able to provide him with an Aide (24/7), durable medical equipment and assistance with his rent. The consumer made a successful transition to the community and is currently enjoying community living. (Transition)

### **Consumer Stories**

The consumer is a 4 year old female with Morning Glory Abnormality – a rare congenital malformation of the optic nerve. Her impairment is rare and presents with various difficulties that affect her functioning in school, such as depth perception (judging steps correctly) and activities of daily living. She also fatigues quickly. The consumer's mother reached out to PILS Educational Advocacy Program to help secure appropriate supports in October 2022. The consumer was attending a private preschool program 3 days a week. The consumer had an IEP and was receiving some supports through the Committee on Preschool Special Education (speech, vision, OT, and Special Education itinerant teacher), but more was needed. An orientation and mobility evaluation was conducted and the consumer's parents asked the CPSE to secure a 1:1 aide for her while she was in school. They were told that 1:1 aides could not be given to students in preschool. PILS Director of Educational Advocacy reached out to NY State Ed Quality Assurance and clarified that indeed 1:1 aides can be given to preschool students in order for the student to participate in a preschool setting in the least restrictive environment. She shared this information with the consumer's parents, the school district, and Putnam County's preschool Special Education representative. A CPSE meeting was held in December 2022. At that meeting, the NY State Ed criteria for determining aide support was reviewed in detail. The CPSE recommended the provision of a 1:1 aide to support the consumer's access to the least restrictive environment. The County agreed to hire a 1:1 aide for the consumer. In January 2023, the aide was hired and began working with the consumer 3 hours per day while she is in her preschool environment. With the appropriate supports in place, the consumer is now thriving in her preschool environment.

The consumer is a 65 year old Hispanic female who had a Stroke. After having the stroke, the consumer had been a patient at the Burke Rehabilitation Center. Following her stay at Burke, the consumer was temporarily in a subacute nursing facility. When she returned home, she needed transportation, homecare, a hospital bed, and at-home therapy. WILC's Burke Post-Rehabilitation Transition Program Specialist worked with the consumer until the consumer's needs were met completely.

The consumer is a 61 year old female with Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) and Diabetes. The consumer sustained her TBI from falling down a flight of stairs in 2010. Since 2010, she has had many hospitalizations due to falls and poor health. In June 2022, the consumer was admitted into rehab for intensive OT, PT. and Diabetic Education. As the consumer was deemed unsafe to be home without around the clock support services, a referral to WILC's TBI Waiver Program was made and the consumer was enrolled onto the Waiver. Upon discharge, the TBI Waiver began providing 24 hours a day Home and Community Support Services. Because of Waiver services, the consumer was able to avoid a nursing home placement and return home, where she is living safely in the community. (Diversion)

The consumer is a 22 year old Bi-Racial female with Mental Health and Emotional Disabilities. She is a single mother of two young children who recently became homeless and was referred to WILC's MOP Anger Management Program by Child Protective Services (CPS). The consumer's children had been taken away due to neglect. MOP staff connected her with a Mental Health provider and got her a bed at the Women's Shelter. MOP assisted the consumer with several housing applications and SNAP benefits. MOP staff set up transportation so she would be able to make her supervised visits with her children. The consumer successfully completed MOP's Anger Management Program and is abiding by all court mandates so she can regain custody of her children. She is out of the shelter and living with relatives. She completed her parenting classes and secured a housing voucher. She is on the waitlist for a 2-bedroom apartment. Once she has that housing, her children will be able to live with her again.

### WILC's Executive Director Receives Award

WILC's Executive Director, Margaret Nunziato, was one of the 2023 recipients of the Women Innovators in our Region Award. The Women Innovators Awards acknowledge women who take initiative, drive positive change, and redefine the workplace experience across all industries in our region - paving the way for future generations. Other recipients of the Award this year were the Executive Director of Pace Women's Justice Center and the Executive Director of the Youth Shelter Program of Westchester. The Center's staff and Board of Directors are beneficiaries of Ms. Nunziato's vision, leadership, and executive skills. Everyone at WILC and PILS congratulated her and took great pride in her accomplishment.

### NY Rollin' KNICKS Go to NWBA Championship Games

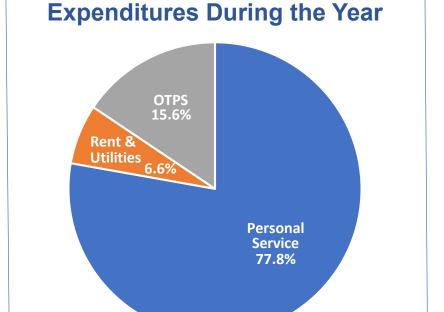
The NY Rollin' KNICKS, a National Wheelchair Basketball Association (NWBA) Division I team, which is cosponsored by the New York KNICKS and WILC, was the NWBA Division I second seed this year. At the NWBA Championship games held on March 31 – April 2, 2023 in Wichita, Kansas, the Rollin' KNICKS played the Golden State Road Warriors. who were the Division 1 number 1 seed, for the National Championship. The Golden State Road Warriors defeated the Rollin' KNICKS in the final seconds of the championship game with a score of 55 - 52. The Rollin' KNICKS have won the national NWBA Championship 4 times before in previous years. The NWBA is the largest series of adapted sporting events in the United States, with 1,800 athletes.

## Disability Pride Month Virtual Art Showcase Honors 33<sup>rd</sup> Anniversary of the ADA

In July 2023, a virtual Art Showcase was available for viewing on the Center's social media pages. WILC's Burke/Phelps Post-Rehabilitation Transition Program Director worked with local artists with disabilities to prepare for the Showcase. Forty (40) pieces of artwork were submitted for the Showcase. The mediums included drawings, paintings, and photographs. The Art Showcase was also available for viewing during PILS Awards Ceremony held on July 26, 2023.

# PILS Award Ceremony Honors Local Accessible Restaurants

On July 26, 2023, the 33<sup>rd</sup> Anniversary of the signing into law of the ADA, PILS hosted an Awards Ceremony at its office in Brewster, NY to honor nine (9) local restaurants for their accessibility for persons with disabilities. Putnam County's County Executive, Kevin Byrne and State Assemblyman, Matt Slater attended the ceremony and presented the restaurants with Certificates of Appreciation from their offices.



OTPS is Other Than Personal Service. That 15.6% includes Telephone, Supplies, Equipment, Repairs/Maintenance, Travel, Insurance, Postage, Marketing/Public Relations, and Contracted Services, such as Computer Services, Fiscal Management, Payroll Services, Audit, etc.

## **Grant Income** -

U.S. Department of Education		
Administration for Community Living Independent Living Funding	\$	230,832
Minority Outreach	Ψ	196,010
Putnam County Satellite Office		233,904
New York State Department of Education		
ACCES-VR Independent Living	\$	376,163
ACCES-VR Putnam County Satellite Office	•	334,054
ACCES-VR Peer Integration Program		200,000
New York State Department of Health		
NHTD/TBI RRDC for the Lower Hudson Valley Region	\$	1,377,800
NHTD/TBI RRDC for the New York City Region		2,072,000
New York State Office for Aging		
NY Connects/No Wrong Door	\$	619,087
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Westchester County		
Dept of Community Mental Health – MH Advocacy	\$	109,676
New York Association for Independent Living		
Olmstead Housing	\$	109,212
Open Doors Transition		425,032
Diabetes Prevention		45,100
Rapid Transition Housing		80,790
Starbridge		
Parent Training and Information	\$	53,000
Field Hall Foundation		
Burke Rehabilitation Center Post-Rehab Transition	\$	25,000
Phelps Foundation		
Phelps Hospital Post-Rehabilitation Transition	\$	95,000
	Ψ	55,550

# **Statement of Activities and Changes in Net Assets**

Support and Revenues:		Expenses:	
Government Grants	\$ 6,487,808	Program Services	\$ 5,783,792
Foundation Grants	91,555	Administrative Expenses	744,525
Fees for Service	76,483	Fundraising	7,263
Interest Income	 1,282	Total Expenses	\$ 6,535,580
		Increase in Net Assets	\$ 121,548
Total Support and Revenues	\$ 6,657,128	Net Assets at Beginning of Year	\$ 595,694
• •		Net Assets at End of Year	\$ 717.242

### OFFICE LOCATIONS

#### Main Office:

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#### **Outreach Office:**

VIVE School – Pathways to Success 75 Riverdale Avenue Yonkers, New York 10701