



changing
the face of
aging



Dear Oasis Friends,

“Do you mind if I ask your age?” It’s a question that reveals one of the most misunderstood aspects of our self-presentation to others: the arbitrary number that reveals when we arrived on the planet. Some embrace it with gusto and enthusiasm, others with wisdom and introspection, but an alarming majority of us often assign shame, self-doubt and dread about chronological age.

Growing older is universally shared. Being authentic and emotionally unburdened about the number that represents our age, while embracing in full measure the opportunities we have before us, is liberating and can affect real change for ourselves and the communities in which we live. How different might things be if we agree to make a radical shift in the way we describe people? What if instead of labels that reflect how long we’ve been around—*older adult, senior, elder*—we choose to lead with language that captures what we’re doing now and what we want to do in the future—*volunteer, artist, enthusiast, activist, friend and mentor*?

This is what I love about Oasis and the powerful work we do nationwide to celebrate and encourage adults who are learning, growing and changing the narrative about getting older. We’ve been changing the face of aging for over 35 years, and I hope when Oasis is 70 we will look at what we’ve accomplished, be proud of the wisdom we’ve earned and maintain a humble optimism about what we’re going to learn and accomplish as an organization in the years ahead. I’m proud of this journey, and so thankful for the people who support Oasis and the older adults who share it with us.

Warmly,

Paul Weiss, PhD

President, The Oasis Institute



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St. Louis Oasis: Where Inspiration Began and Continues to Grow



At St. Louis Oasis, we believe that opportunities to grow don't end just because we get older. The Oasis mission to promote healthy aging through lifelong learning, active lifestyles and volunteer engagement got its start in St. Louis in 1982.

We're proud that more than 35 years later, Oasis programs continue to enrich the lives of older adults nationwide and locally. Today, St. Louis remains the home of our national office and a community impacted by Oasis programs that empower and inspire adults to rethink the possibilities for themselves as they age.

Thelma Lewis (shown here at right) has been on a lifelong adventure with Oasis for 18 years and counting! In addition to taking classes, she's part of a dedicated group of volunteers giving of their time to ensure that St. Louis Oasis runs smoothly. For Thelma, it's time well spent.

"I can certainly say that my life has gotten better since becoming an Oasis participant," she says. "I have learned more about myself and how to keep my body and my mind healthy. I've also learned how to be a leader. I get so energized by Oasis, and I see so many other people who are being energized too!"

In 2018, 95 percent of participants indicated that they would recommend St. Louis Oasis to a friend.

St. Louis Oasis At-A-Glance



17,177
class enrollments

22
school districts



2,000
tutors



224+
community partners



2,100
volunteers



6,715
participants

5,000
classes



156,000
volunteer hours



Creating New Paths Through Lifelong Learning

When she enrolled in a creative writing skills class at St. Louis Oasis, Vivian Gibson could not foresee just how far down the path toward publication she'd be in just a few years' time. "I've had two stories published and am currently working on a manuscript for a memoir scheduled for release in 2020," says Vivian.

"The workshop has been more surprising and rewarding than any new experience I could have imagined," she says. "I joined with limited expectations of getting feedback on writings I had accumulated over the years, but the support I received led to stimulating discussions that significantly improved my writing skills and bolstered my confidence."

The class is led by instructor and accomplished author Kim Lozano, who appreciates the variety of backgrounds, life histories and experiences that students bring with them. "I love getting the opportunity to help people who want to write get better at it," says Kim. "Whether someone is looking to publish their work, wants to record family stories for their loved ones, or just wants to write for their own enjoyment, it's a pleasure getting to be a part of the process." Lozano's writing class is one of hundreds of lifelong learning opportunities offered by St. Louis Oasis each year.

Humanities classes covering a variety of topics in literature, history, arts, music and current events often turn newcomers into Oasis "regulars," just like Vivian. "My Oasis classes have become valuable additions to my weekly schedule, and I plan most all other activities around them," she says, pointing out another very important Oasis perk. "Oh yeah, I've made some great new friends, too!"

Moving With Purpose

When an exercise class starts with 10 people and quickly grows to more than 60, something right must be happening. Volunteer instructor Pat Atkins, who leads the popular **ExerStart** classes offered by St. Louis Oasis at High Ridge Library and the House Springs Senior Center, says the secret to success is pretty simple: enthusiasm.

"Seeing class members show up, and wanting to be there, gives me the drive to keep doing this," says Pat, who hasn't regretted her decision to dive right in teaching Oasis classes after retiring in 2014. "Their enthusiasm for life, independence and staying healthy encourages me."

Janet Mertsensmeyer has attended Pat's **ExerStart** class for four years and might be responsible, at least in part, for the increase in enrollment. "I recommend this class and the instructor to everyone," Janet says. "I love it! We socialize, release stress, sing along to the music. It's a great aerobic exercise."

ExerStart is one of many community-based programs offered by Oasis designed to provide a path to health and wellness for older adults right where they live. **Matter of Balance, Tai Chi for Arthritis for Falls Prevention** and several other fitness classes also help to improve balance, flexibility, strength and mobility.

As the instructor, Pat agrees that the sense of community that has developed among the **ExerStart** participants is really something to experience. "We have fun and laugh a lot," adds Pat. "We are like family."

See the full 2018 Annual Report online at annualreport.oasisnet.org.





Staying Connected with New Technology

Keeping up with today's ever-changing technology is a lot easier with a lifelong learning mindset.

Marge Williams is comfortable navigating iPhones, tablets, personal computers, the internet and just about any new tech device that comes along, but she knows not everyone brings that level of confidence to a new tool. She enjoys the impact she can have in her role as a volunteer instructor with **Oasis Connections**, a national digital literacy program designed specifically to equip older adults with the technology skills they need to access services and stay connected with family and friends. "I'm impressed at the determination of the students who come to my classes," says Marge. "They want to stay active and are willing to keep learning."

Marge is part of a team of 16 volunteer instructors who offered more than 60 Connections classes through St. Louis Oasis in 2018. For 11 years, she has been teaching classes and answering questions through Ask-A-Techie, a free program that provides one-on-one help to older adults who have specific questions about their technology.

"It's very rewarding interacting with people, and to know that you're helping them," adds Marge.

Nationwide, nearly 1,800 Connections classes were offered in Oasis centers and through collaborations with senior centers and residences, faith-based organizations, libraries and other partners committed to providing high-quality technology education in their communities. Connections is made possible with support from AT&T, the Consumer Technology Association Foundation and Charter Spectrum.

Renewing Purpose Through Tutoring

His new friends call him "Mr. B." And Dean Barnes is just fine with that. When he decided to volunteer with the **Oasis Intergenerational Tutoring** program not long after retiring, Dean fully expected he would be helping children with reading. But he couldn't predict just how hooked he would become on his new role as a tutor.

"The relationship that I've been able to build with these kids has been really rewarding," says Dean. "I'm there because I want to be, and the children pick up on that. If you think about it, everyone benefits from some one-on-one attention."

In his first two years as an Oasis tutor, Dean has worked with 14 different students in two St. Louis area school districts, Parkway and Rockwood. Typically, Oasis tutors meet individually with students in grades K-3 for one hour a week during the school year.

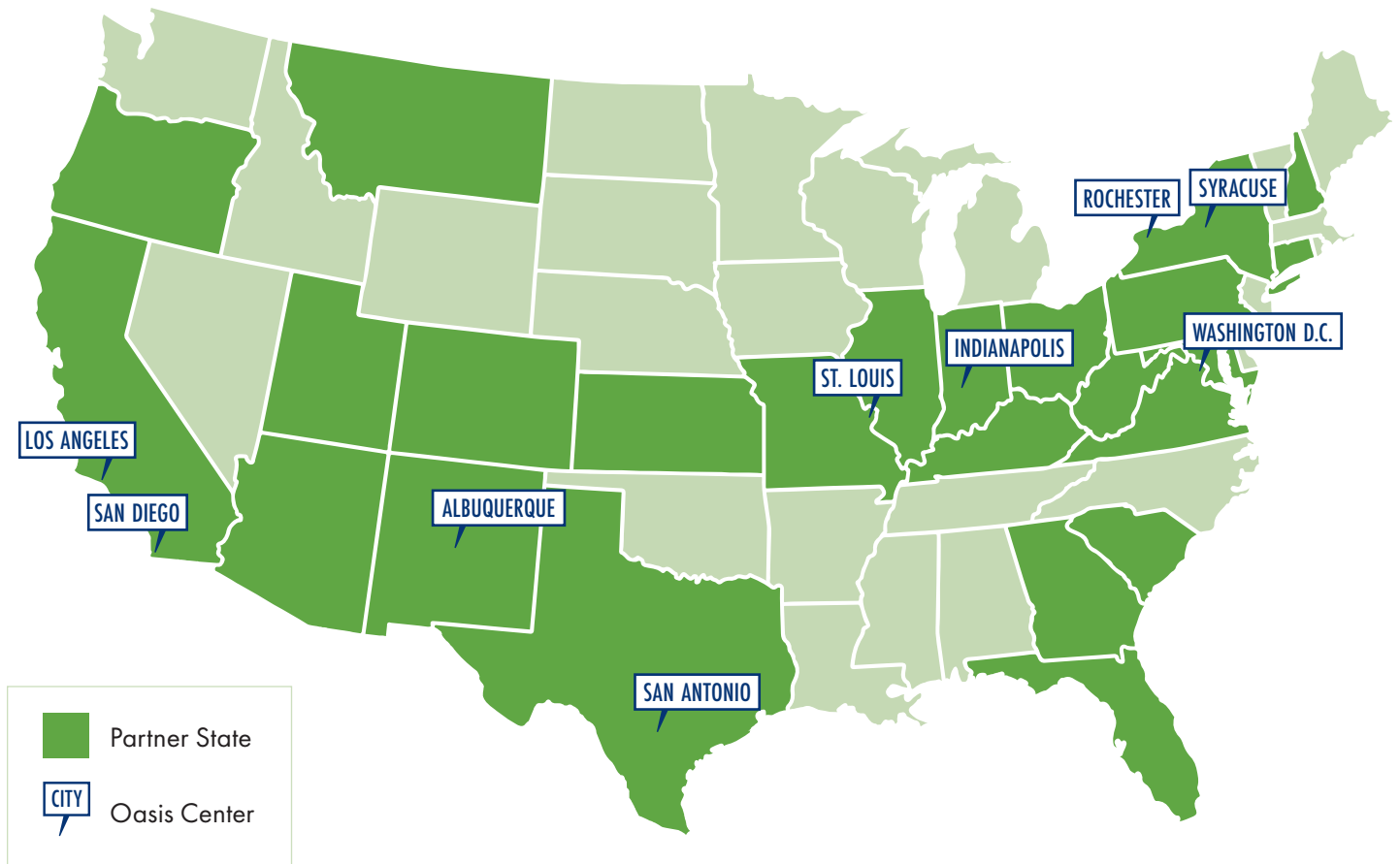
"My experience with Oasis is very rewarding. I have been on the receiving end of the joy that a student can display from having positive supporters help with academic or social issues. I find developing meaningful and purposeful relationships with students a privilege," adds Dean.

Dean is among 2,000 Oasis tutors who volunteered in 22 St. Louis area school districts in 2018. He joins the ranks of over 4,000 older adults volunteering as tutors with the program nationwide.



National Impact in 2018

A national education organization, Oasis reaches a broad audience in more than **250 communities** through **nine education centers** and a national network of over **700 partners** in **23 states**. And we're growing!



4,000
tutors



6,100
volunteers



52,000
participants



630
schools



332,000
volunteer hours



140,000
class enrollments

Growing Population, Growing Opportunity

Americans older than 65 by 2035 will be in good company. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, the year represents a turning point: for the first time in U.S. history, people 65+ are projected to outnumber children. While it's critical to address the many challenges that this demographic shift will present, it is just as important to recognize the opportunity that exists when such a large group of people are healthy, active and empowered to be the answer to many of society's most pressing needs.

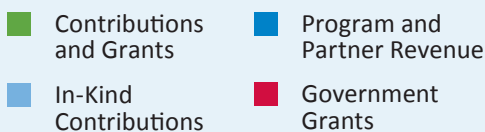
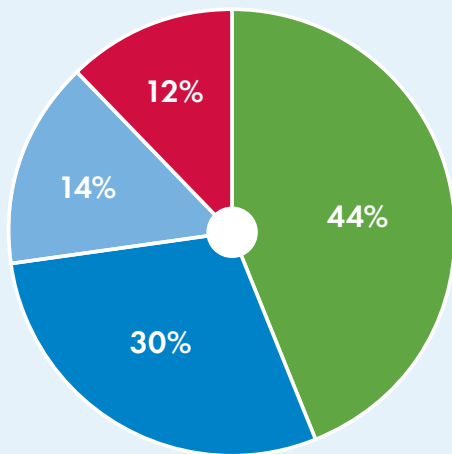
Since 1982, Oasis has inspired thousands of older adults through programs that encourage lifelong learning, active lifestyles and volunteer engagement. In 2018, 95 percent of participants surveyed indicated they recommend Oasis to friends. Here's why:

- > **To learn something new and connect with others.** Oasis lifelong learning classes in the arts and humanities, as well as **Oasis Connections**, an award-winning technology literacy program, attract adults who are still ready to explore and know more.
- > **To stay active and healthy.** Older adults find fitness, stay on their feet and gain the know-how to make healthy choices with a wide variety of Oasis health and wellness programs nationwide.
- > **To give back to our communities.** Through Oasis, adults discover the joy of making an impact volunteering. Whether working one-on-one with children through the **Oasis Intergenerational Tutoring** program or serving as class instructors and peer leaders, Oasis participants make a difference.

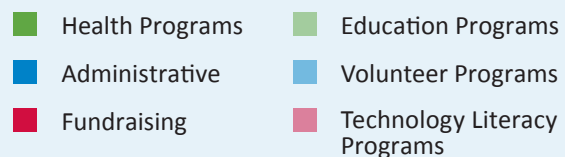
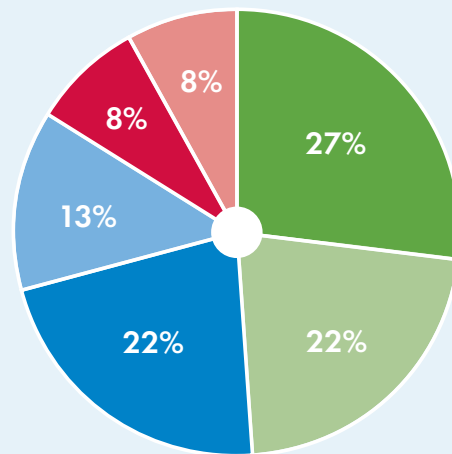
2018 Oasis Institute Statement of Activities

(Source: 2018 Consolidated Audit for FY Ended 12/31/18)

Support & Revenue – \$6.13 million



Expenses – \$7.24 million





Impacting the Community by Giving

Don and Shirley Sher began their Oasis adventures more than 20 years ago. Shirley became interested in learning the Russian language. When she discovered that St. Louis Oasis offered lessons, she quickly signed up to participate. It wasn't long before Shirley realized Oasis was not only a great place to learn, but also to develop new friendships.

She shared her newfound excitement with Don, who also joined Oasis and became a tutor. He tutored children for more than 10 years at Marvin Elementary School in the Ritenour School District. "I always felt I gained more than I gave," says Don. "I met so many interesting children, and there are lovely people devoted to this work. It amazed me to see the vast number of ordinary people who served as tutors. All of us simply wanted to make a difference."

As the Shers' connection to Oasis grew over time, so has their commitment to championing the mission through generous giving. Their donations to St. Louis Oasis have steadily increased over the years.

"Having donors like Don and Shirley, who have been personally impacted by our programs and see the value of our mission to the community, is the kind of grassroots support that we really need to sustain our programs and reach more people," says Paul Weiss, president of The Oasis Institute. "When donors are personally connected to what is at the heart of an organization, the giving is all the more valuable."

In addition to being fond of Oasis tutoring, the Shers are excited about supporting efforts to expand the Oasis reach to more underserved communities in St. Louis. "We give back because we're lucky, and we want to positively impact the community. It is a sense of true accomplishment," says Don.

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