

2020: A Year of Perseverance



St. Louis Oasis
2020 Annual Report



Greetings from Oasis

Locally, nationally, and globally 2020 was a year like no other. The social and economic impacts of a pandemic were most acutely felt by lower-income communities, families with children at home due to school closures, and those most vulnerable to symptoms of the disease—older adults. Oasis centers across the country were forced to suspend all in-person operations. Exercise, lifelong learning, and social events, classes, and programs were canceled. Tutors were abruptly cut off from the students they were mentoring with our nearly 700 elementary school partners across the country. By the end of March, we faced the immense challenge of sustaining our mission when everything about the way we connected with participants and communities was no longer possible.

Local and national Oasis leaders and teams quickly shifted focus to a contact-free form of engagement, launching virtual classes through national and regional platforms. In June of 2020, our virtual national Oasis center, oasiseverywhere.org, was born, and within months over 1,000 people were enrolling in live interactive classes. Local Oasis network centers quickly pivoted in sync, offering virtual courses to their Oasis communities, and simulcasting their best content on Oasis Everywhere. The virtual programs allowed participants to continue lifelong learning while following stay-at-home orders, protecting their health and community. Oasis quickly attracted current Oasis participants, as well as new participants discovering us for the first time as a virtual education resource.

As a leader in technology education, we are committed to teaching new digital adopters the basics of safe internet use and building confidence in navigating a digital world. Conversely, the pandemic revealed the reality of living without home internet. The “digital divide” is very real for hundreds of thousands of American families and seniors. Barriers to technology exist across a range of demographic boundaries. As a result, our virtually engaged audience is less diverse. We recognize the need to span these gaps of disproportion to reach ALL older adults. As we emerge from the pandemic and begin operating as dual-venue centers, offering the option of in-person and online classes, we are addressing disparities between our participants. Through new and renewed partnerships, resource communication, presence in community events, and programs not dependent on technology we are continuing our mission to serve seniors across the country in every economical circumstance.

Perseverance got us through 2020 making us stronger and expanding our mission. We will emerge resilient and look forward to being together again.



Paul Weiss, PhD

President
Oasis Institute

Building Consistency & Strength During the Pandemic

Elizabeth Hines has always enjoyed exercising. But with a busy lifestyle, she didn't always exercise consistently. When she joined St. Louis Oasis in 2016, she discovered how to make exercise part of her weekly schedule.

"Now that I have some health issues, I don't have a choice but to exercise consistently," Elizabeth says. "I used to just walk but realized I needed stretching and strengthening, too. I feel better with exercise. It helps your mind stay more alert and helps you move better. So I sign up for an exercise class every session. I also like to step out of my boundaries and meet other people through these classes."

When the pandemic hit, Oasis exercise classes were paused. "I tried to pump myself up to get out to walk but I didn't do it consistently," Elizabeth says. "If it's left up to me, I can talk myself out of exercising."

Once the exercise classes transitioned to Zoom, Elizabeth says her challenge was finding the right device to use. First she used her cell phone but found the screen too small. Then she used an older iPad model, but the Zoom app didn't function well on it. Finally, her son bought her a Mac laptop and Elizabeth was quickly back in exercise mode.

"I've found it's a time saver because I don't have to drive anywhere," Elizabeth says. "The class helps create a routine for me. I do miss the personal interaction with classmates though."

Elizabeth typically takes one class at a time that equates to two exercise classes a week. And it's paying off for her mentally and physically.

For each virtual class, she moves some of her furniture out of the way. "I noticed I can now pick up a chair to move it for exercise class—I couldn't do that before," she says. "Overall, my body is more toned."



She continues: "These Oasis classes have been a very positive thing for me. It's easy not to involve yourself and get in a rut if you're not working. But this is a way to meet people and stay active. I will be doing this for the rest of my life."

The Beat Goes On

When Gene Rauscher began teaching an Oasis concert band class in 2019, he got the nearly 30 older adult musicians “back in shape” to hopefully perform at senior living facilities in the future.

“We had some students who had played consistently, some who played in high school or college, and some who hadn’t played an instrument in years,” Gene says. “It was a wide mix of skills and abilities but we rehearsed and had a true community band experience.”

The band’s last group performance was at a funeral for a former band member. “It was an honor to play a song as a tribute to him. Then the pandemic hit and when we walked away, we didn’t realize how long it would last.”

While the group continued to connect by Zoom for a few weeks to primarily socialize, rehearsing by Zoom wasn’t feasible.

With the pandemic raging on, Gene transitioned to teaching a virtual theory and jazz improvisation class with another music ensemble conductor. Many of the previous concert band class members participated in his class.

“The challenge when I switched to the theory and improvisation class was that as a drummer and a pianist, I never had to do improvisation where you make up music on the spot,” he explains. “I had to teach myself so it was a big growth experience for me. When the students learned improvisation, they felt they had learned something of value, too.”

He feels the pandemic led him to focus on being a better teacher and musician. “This time has been very exciting and freeing because I’ve been learning as much as I had when I was in college. I felt the world getting larger not smaller. I think my students have benefited from my excitement. And they’re more confident to push themselves more. It’s inspiring when you see students have that ‘aha’ moment when the lights go on behind their eyes.”



“When the students learned improvisation, they felt they had learned something of value, too.”

What Oasis Participants are Saying

A friend suggested I become a member after retirement and that we could take this cooking class together. After attending several classes with my friend, **I soon enjoyed attending classes whether I went with her or by myself.** Being able to choose from a smorgasbord of talks, tours, and classes on various topics was very appealing. —Cindy Blair

Oasis classes have helped me with my memory and recall abilities; I've discovered that **even at the age of 74, I can still learn new things!** —Mary Wyss

Once participants start attending classes, whether in person or by Zoom, they will start to recognize faces that were in other classes they attended. These occasions will bring about social conversations which will lead to asking each other what activity the other person is going to register for next time. **These are the moments that friendships start to develop.** —Alice McHugh



National Impact

657

Schools

4,500

Volunteers

1,362

Communities Served

4,015

Tutors

82,675

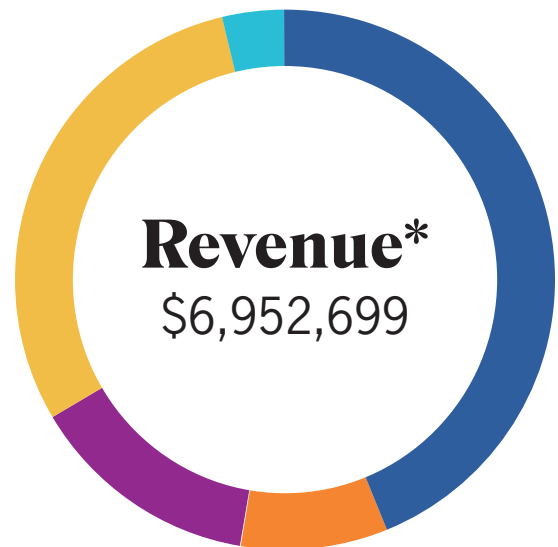
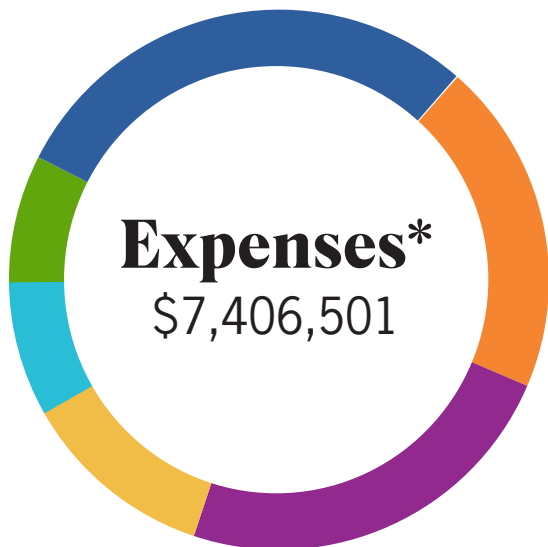
Class Enrollments

115,000

Volunteer Hours

27,250

Participants



\$2,139,445
Health Programs

\$561,469
Technology Literacy

\$1,488,532
Education Programs

\$1,750,172
General & Administrative

\$862,741
Volunteer Programs

\$604,142
Fundraising

\$3,049,109
Contributions & Grants

\$609,670
In-Kind

\$2,074,862
Government Grants

\$257,121
Other

\$961,937
Program & Partner Revenue

*Source: 2020 Consolidated Financial Audit

Discovering the Healing Art of Conversation

Marilyn Brown was first attracted to Oasis because of the Women's Roundtable group, which she joined in 2014. Since then, she has stayed with the group through various changes, including the global pandemic.

"We enjoy real conversations on real topics, along with female companionship," Marilyn says. "Everyone is open. It's a very congenial group."

A successful multi-media artist and published writer, Marilyn is a self-confessed introvert. She turned to the Women's Roundtable "because it was time to try an extrovert role."

"I had friends but I didn't have a very active social life after my divorce," Marilyn says. "I needed a new source of social interaction and the Women's Roundtable has been very helpful in that."

Healers are a theme throughout Marilyn's art, whether it's abstract painting, wood carving or digital art. She often includes angels in her art, or sometimes rabbis, bishops or nuns. The healer theme is personal to her because of her life experiences but she knows it can help others, too.

Her participation in the Oasis Women's Roundtable has been another form of healing. "I believe we all need healing in some way," she says. "And healers are everywhere—mostly in unsuspected places."

While she misses the camaraderie of the in-person Women's Roundtable, she says the virtual meetings have helped with loneliness during the pandemic. She also appreciated the convenience of attending the meetings virtually when it has been cold, snowy or too hot outside.

"We did lose some participants when we started having virtual meetings because some weren't comfortable with the technology," Marilyn says. "When we go back to in-person meetings, I hope the group expands. I'm looking forward to getting together again."



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To connect with Oasis, call or check us out online.

The Center of Clayton | 50 Gay Avenue, St. Louis, MO 63105
314.862.4859 | stloasis.org

