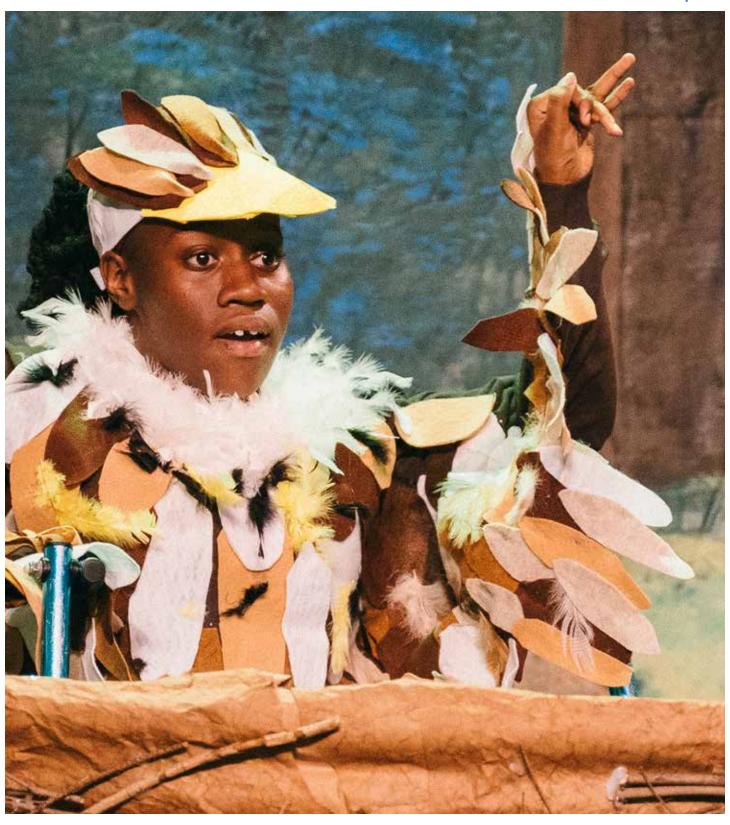


Unique **performing arts** programs for people with physical disabilities

2023 Annual Report







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Acting Without
Boundaries (AWB) aims
to transform lives and
build self-esteem in an
empowered community
of people with physical
disabilities through theater
that celebrates ability.







A letter from our founder and executive director

AWB Friends and Supporters,

With heartfelt appreciation, we celebrate AWB actors and organizational achievements of 2023, filling us with immense gratitude, pride and joy! Thank you!

Our spring season kicked off with AWB Juniors and Seniors delivering a powerful performance of *Uniquely Me* at the Kimmel Center, sharing their life journeys during Philly Theatre Week. It was an incredibly powerful performance – many tears were shed that night. Acting Lab programs continued at Inglis with more advanced curriculums and expanded again this year through new collaborations with the UPenn Veterans Hospital and Christiana Care in Delaware. AWB can now claim itself as a "national" organization. In May, the AWB Juniors performed an original play *Will the One-Winged Eagle*, inspired by 2021 Hero Award honoree, Jimmy Curran's book. The Junior's stellar performance drew our largest audience to date. Our summer and fall seasons saw the AWB Seniors shine in Disney's *Newsies*, garnering warm community feedback. With guest instructor Peg Denithorne, the AWB Masters' program which focused on directing this year resulted in participants collaboratively creating and directing their own pieces. It was an amazing experience watching each of the actors create, direct, and act in scenes they pieced together on their own.

Our AWB Melodies program continued to thrive with 16 unique programs this year, spreading disability awareness and education in schools and universities. Partnering with the Lewis Katz School of Medicine, Temple University and Princeton University to name a few. Additionally, we had the opportunity to present on the benefits of the performing arts at the NJEPA-TRA (New Jersey Eastern Pennsylvania Therapeutic Recreation Association) conference for Recreational Therapists licensed on the east coast. Our actors led the discussion showcasing the impact of our programs in fostering equity, access, and inclusion for people with disabilities in the arts and beyond.

AWB's annual Hero Award was very special this year. Not only did we honor Mark Chilutti as our 2023 Hero Award honoree, but we also honored Susan Tachau as our first Outstanding Advocate Award honoree. Mark and Susan are remarkable people who truly strive to make a difference in the lives of people with disabilities. It was an honor to have the privilege to recognize them and their efforts in making the world a better place.

With guidance from Strategy Arts, we curated AWB's first strategic plan, a valuable roadmap to propel us into our third decade. Implementation of the plan is already springboarding AWB to new heights in 2024. Special thanks to AMP Agency for their support in the creation of AWB's brand new, fully accessible website! Please check it out: **actingwithoutboundaries.org**! Click to visit our new fully accessible website.

AWB is not just a performing arts program; it's a place where individuals with physical disabilities take center stage when outside our program, where they are not given that opportunity. Your unwavering support is instrumental in positively changing the lives of those with physical disabilities. We look forward to furthering our reach to new people, places, and audiences together in 2024. Thank you for being an integral part of our journey.

With warmth and gratitude,



Christine Rouse





AWB was very exciting and something new in that I wasn't expecting to enjoy the expressive side of acting as I'm shy and don't like public speaking.

—AWB ACTING LAB AT INGLIS PARTICIPANT

AWB redefines the landscape of artistic education, making it accessible to all through the AWB Acting Lab.

We bring our instructors and our curriculum to partnering organizations also serving people with disabilities to eliminate participants' need for transportation. The AWB Acting Lab is not just a program; it's an extraordinary adventure that empowers participants to break free, embrace their potential, and create their own masterpieces!

In 2023, we made waves with six exhilarating Acting Lab programs. Three courses delved into the basics of acting, while two introduced a groundbreaking curriculum titled Movement, Voice & Speech. Participants from Inglis House and Inglis Day Program explored the intricacies of speech, projection, and the integral role of movement in the performing arts. One Intro course even culminated in a spectacular video project, showcasing the incredible talents of our participants.

AWB expanded our horizons by partnering with Christiana Care in Wilmington, DE, and the Philadelphia VA Hospital. This allowed us to reach new populations of aspiring actors and explore compelling topics relevant to their personal lives.

As the grand finale of the year, our 6th program concluded with the second annual "Acting Lab Reunion." Previous participants reunited to continue honing their performing arts skills, all while socializing and having an absolute blast. The AWB Acting Lab is not just a program; it's a thrilling adventure that empowers, inspires, and brings people together in the magical world of performing arts!

increase in participants in one year. In 2022, there were 52 participants. And in 2023, that number rose to 63 participants!



21%





of Princeton first-year Melodies attendees stated the program was valuable to their learning about people with physical disabilities.

The AWB Melodies program is a force of positive change, breaking down barriers, fostering understanding, and showcasing the inherent strength and beauty within our diverse community of people with disabilities.

We're not just showcasing the incredible abilities of individuals with physical disabilities; we're sparking conversations that resonate across our community. In a groundbreaking year, we hosted an unprecedented 16 unique Melodies programs in the region, a remarkable feat that more than doubled last year's impact.

AWB stretched its influence to six brand-new partnering institutions, including prestigious venues like Princeton University, Woodcrest Elementary, Widener Memorial School, and the NJ/Eastern PA Recreational Therapy Conference. At Princeton University, our actors and staff not only highlighted the importance of accessible arts but also engaged in improv activities with first-year students as part of their Community Action Program. The impact of our presence was felt at the Lewis Katz School of Medicine, where we spoke to over 150 medical students about proper patient communication and care.

Our commitment extended to the broader community through participation in two outdoor public events, Bryn Mawr Day and Disability Pride in Philadelphia. Here, we interacted with locals, spreading the word about AWB and fostering a sense of inclusivity. Throughout the year, our TGIF Socials, Spotlight 180 Web Series, and Social Outings created dynamic platforms for our actors to socialize, engage, and redefine their connections.

Beyond educational initiatives, our resonance echoed through the Kimmel Cultural Campus during Philly Theatre Week. Uniting actors from our Senior and Junior programs, we presented "Uniquely Me," a powerful compilation of songs and monologues that celebrated the inherent uniqueness in all of us. Over 100 attendees, deeply moved by our extraordinary performers, participated in a post-performance Q&A.

I enjoyed the accessibility of the slides. The words were large and contrasted and the videos all had closed captions."

—AWB MELODIES AUDIENCE MEMBER







I was nervous; but once I hit the stage, I was confident; I got this. The show came out way better than I expected."

—AWB JUNIORS ACTOR PARTICIPAN



Led by the visionary Artistic Director, Maria Ceferatti, the Juniors Program goes beyond conventional boundaries, providing children with a unique platform to collaborate, unleash their creativity, and learn the essentials of the performing arts.

Monthly gatherings are more than just rehearsals; they are lively social events filled with music, theater games, and the joy of shared creativity. In 2023, the AWB Juniors delivered a stellar performance of *Will the One-Winged Eagle* at the Agnes Irwin School, marking their first solo show since the pandemic. The participants rose to the challenge, captivating the audience with a heartwarming tale about love and determination.



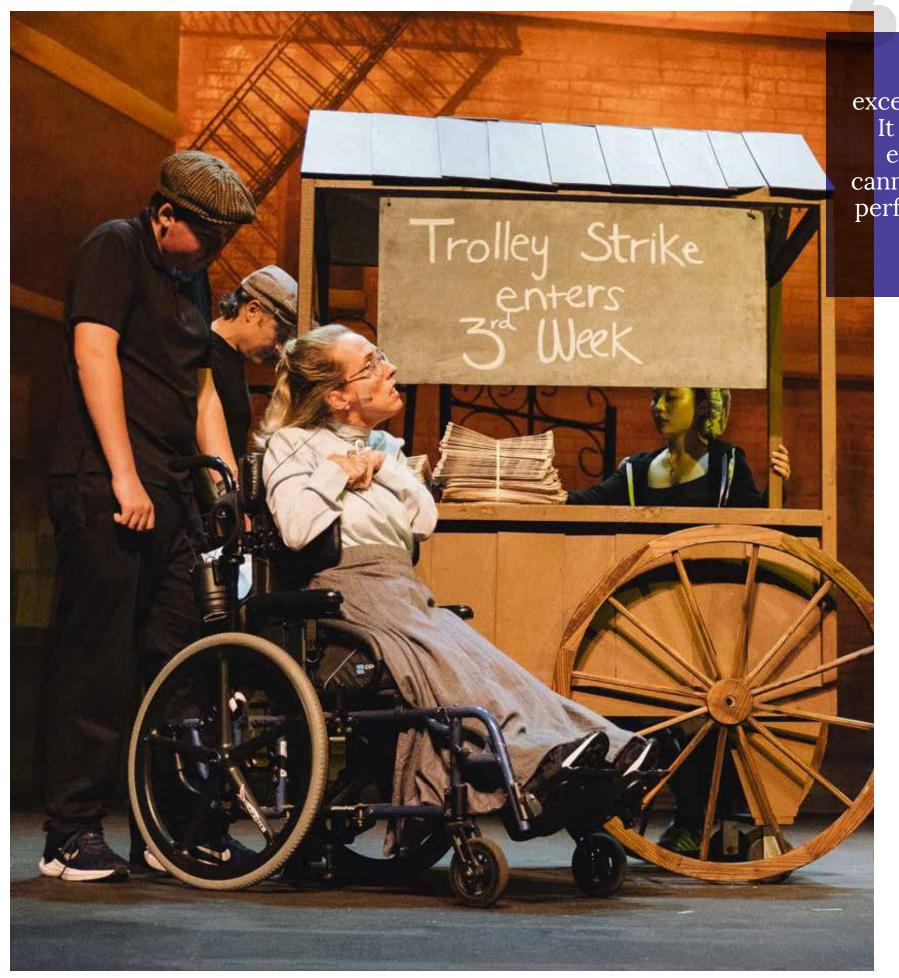
This enchanting play brought to life the story of Will, the one-winged eagle, and taught valuable lessons about adversity and determination. The children embodied a myriad of woodland creatures, each with unique personalities, spreading a message of family and perseverance. The collaboration extended beyond the stage as students from Agnes Irwin actively participated on-stage and behind the scenes, contributing to props, costumes, and managing technical aspects.

The auditorium echoed with cheers, laughter, and even tears as the audience became immersed in the touching performance. Will the One-Winged Eagle wasn't just a play; it was the culmination of ultimate collaboration, not only among AWB actors but also with the incredible volunteers and partners at Agnes Irwin. The event was a joyous celebration, leaving the AWB Juniors and the entire community with lasting memories of a magical theatrical experience.



volunteers helped create the eagles nest and costume feathers, over 29 hours volunteer hours for these two elements alone.







This performance
exceeded my expectations.
It was glorious! I loved
everything about it! I
cannot wait to see the next
performance and I plan on
being a sponsor.

—AWB SENIORS AUDIENCE MEMBER



Under the dynamic leadership of Artistic Director, Neill Hartley and Music Director, Maria Ceferatti, AWB Seniors stands as a beacon of creativity and talent, championing inclusive theater for older teens and adults.

Throughout the year, our dedicated Senior actors gathered monthly to cultivate their passion, culminating in two spectacular performances – one for local campers in July and another for the public in October.

In a bold move this year, the Seniors embraced the challenge of the iconic musical, *Newsies*, set against the backdrop of 1899 New York City. Adorned in authentic newsboy caps and attire, our actors immersed themselves in the era, perfecting New York accents and attitudes to bring the tale of newsboys striking for fair wages to life.

A four-day workshop leading up to the preview ESF camper performance showcased the actors' unwavering dedication. They tirelessly learned blocking, using appropriate props, authentic time period costumes and set pieces, ensuring a seamless and captivating show. Upon their return in the fall, the Seniors wowed family, friends, and the community with the culmination of a year's worth of hard work.

In a significant stride toward inclusivity, AWB continues to not only use audio description but also open captioning. Words scrolled across a screen, mirroring the dialogue and songs, allowing those with low vision or hearing impairments to savor every moment. The response from both the audience and actors was overwhelming—a testament to the power of accessibility and the magic of theater that knows no bounds.



of the audience members who completed a post-performance survey of Newsies, stated watching an AWB performance or program had a positive impact on their life.





I enjoyed the program very much, and I feel that the Masters program keeps getting better and better each year.

—AWB MASTERS' PROGRAM PARTICIPANT

The AWB Master's Program unfolded as a vibrant medley of creativity, igniting the passion within seasoned actors from our AWB Seniors and AWB Acting Lab programs.

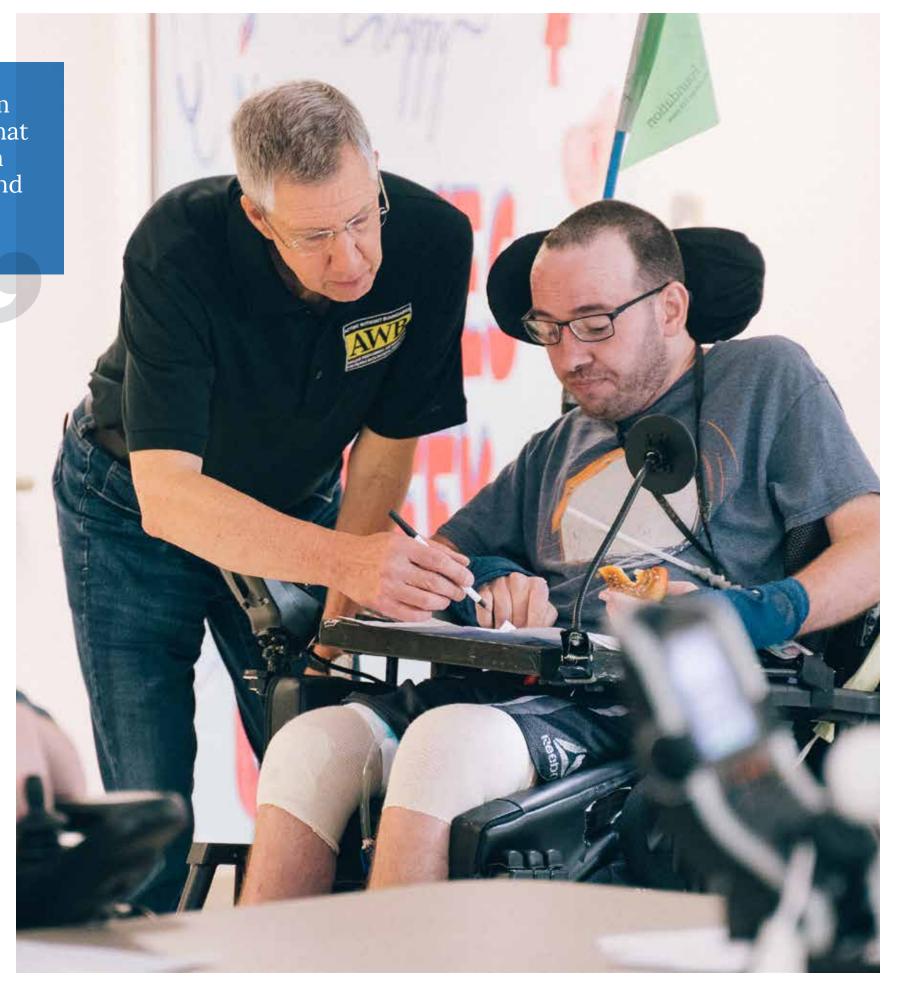
For four exhilarating days in June, the program delved into the realms of Stage Direction, Text Analysis, Design, and the Physicality of a Scene, as well as the intricate craft of Stage Management.

Guided by the expertise of Guest Instructor, Peg Denithorne, whose illustrious directing and educational journey served as a beacon of inspiration, participants were immersed in a transformative experience. Peg, with her MFA in Directing and ABD in Performance Theory, shared invaluable insights earned from her rich career, directing Off-Broadway, national tours, and at major regional theaters.

> Under the mentorship of AWB Artistic Director Neill Hartley, the actors embarked on a deep dive into scene design and stage management, crucial elements of theatrical mastery. Divided into groups, each participant became both director and performer, creating scenes that echoed with their unique artistic voices. They crafted sets from the room's eclectic furniture, breathing life into characters with meticulously designed backstories.

The culmination on the final day was a spectacle of achievement. With each director proudly presenting their scene to an audience of family and friends, witnessing their collective artistry spring to life. The AWB Master's Program not only honed skills but also nurtured a spirit of collaboration, fostering a community where creativity thrived and imagination took center stage.

of participants stated the Masters program helped them build friendships and a community.







I think Ryan was the right person to get the Devon Lengel award.

—AWB STAFF MEMBER



Each year, the Devon Lengel Memorial award is given to a volunteer of Acting Without Boundaries who shows dedication, enthusiasm, and passion.

This individual's brightness exemplifies the everlasting and external light that Devon Lengel brought to AWB and all other aspects of her life. Devon was a member of AWB from 2014 to 2018 and participated in multiple stage productions where she displayed her remarkable acting and singing skills.

This year's recipient was Ryan Holmes, who attended Archbishop John Carroll High School. Ryan volunteered for AWB at two of their recent productions, *Meet Me in St. Louis* (spring 2022) and *The Contrast* (fall 2022), for which he voiced the audio description. In 2023, he volunteered, composed musical numbers and accompanied the actors at AWB Jr's production of *Will the One-Winged Eagle*. A performer and pianist himself, Ryan has been involved in musical theater across the area. Ryan, a member of Upper Darby Summer Stage, was recognized for his contributions to the program and community with their "Service to Summer Stage Award" in the summer of 2022. His experience working with the actors of AWB has influenced him to pursue a degree in Music Education in college, with piano as his



primary instrument. Ryan is incredibly grateful for the members of AWB who have been very welcoming to him, and he looks forward to the future of Acting Without Boundaries. AWB is extremely grateful to have had a member like Devon Lengel in our organization and she will always be a part of our community.





It is our pleasure to support AWB! And I think it speaks volumes about AWB that the kids never seem to leave and stay involved for so many years!

—HERO AWARD SPONSOR

Under the stars of Philadelphia's beautiful outdoor pavilion at Water Works by Cescaphe, Acting Without Boundaries (AWB) illuminated the night on Thursday, September 7, 2023, for its Eighth Annual Hero Award celebration.

This extraordinary event aims to honor those who exemplify resilience, overcome adversity, and champion inclusivity for individuals with physical disabilities.

Mark Chilutti, the Assistant Vice President of Development at Magee Rehabilitation Hospital Foundation, took center stage as the deserving recipient of the AWB Hero Award. With a remarkable 20+ year career at Magee, Mark has raised an awe-inspiring \$35 million, dedicated to enhancing the quality of life for individuals with disabilities. His unwavering commitment has left an indelible mark on the community.

Susan Tachau was also celebrated with the first ever Outstanding Advocate Award. As the co-founder of Pennsylvania Assistive Technology Foundation (PATF), Susan's relentless dedication since 1998 has empowered over 4,700 Pennsylvanians with low or no-cost loans, worth more than \$46 million. Her advocacy has been a beacon of hope for individuals and families affected by disabilities.

The evening united nearly two-hundred guests in a shared celebration of these outstanding individuals and their contributions. Through the generosity of sponsors, ticket sales, and spirited live and silent auctions, AWB triumphantly raised over \$245,000. This outpouring of support ensures that AWB can extend its reach and continue serving more individuals with disabilities, marking a promising chapter in the organization's journey toward a more inclusive future.

7%

increase in income generated from the Hero Award from 2022 (\$233,198) to 2023 (\$249,385)





Spotlight Series
Aaron Deede, senior actor

How did you discover AWB? I discovered AWB through an acting workshop located in Maine, which is where I met Neill.

What part of AWB interested you and why?

What had interested me most about AWB is the fact that I am still able to act even though I now use a wheelchair. My dreams don't have to die just because I can no longer walk. My dreams just have a new path to take.

How do you feel empowered through AWB?

AWB has empowered me to show others that your dreams never need to take a back burner to your life. That if you truly want it you can truly achieve anything.

How do you think you have grown through AWB?

Through AWB I have grown as I now see life as a possibility that I can achieve the life I have always wanted

What do you love about AWB? There is so much to love about AWB. But the one thing that I truly love more than anything else is the friendships I have, friendships that will last forever.



Spotlight Series Matt Repece, volunteer

How did you discover AWB? I saw a spot on the news covering the amazing performance that AWB put on of Meet Me in St. Louis.

What part of AWB interested you and why? What interested me most was the opportunity to work directly with the actors and be part of a theater production. I've always loved the performing arts and acting specifically has been an interest of mine since I was a child.

Why did you decide to devote your time to

AWB? I was looking to become part of something meaningful. After my first day volunteering with AWB, I knew I had found that something. I look forward to every table read, every dress rehearsal, and every chance I get to spend with the AWB family.

What is your biggest take away from volunteering with AWB? AWB's aim is to "transform lives and build self-esteem in an empowering community of people with physical disabilities through theater that celebrates ability" and I see that every single time I'm with them. The amount of love, respect, and genuine compassion for each other shown by everyone involved in this organization is truly unique. I'm a better person for having volunteered with AWB and my biggest take away is a reminder to strive to live what I refer to as the "AWB Way".

What do you love about AWB? The first thing that comes to mind is the actors. They are all so talented and dedicated to their craft that just getting to be around them and watch what they do is really special. Not only are they gifted in many artistic mediums, but they've been so warm and welcoming to me as a relatively new volunteer.



Spotlight Series Brandon Snead, professor

How did you discover AWB? AWB is an extremely respected organization among Recreational Therapists in Philadelphia.

What part of AWB interested you and why?

As an instructor at Temple University's College of Public Health it is very valuable for me to connect with organizations that allow students to see inclusive and adaptive programming. When students volunteer with AWB, I know they are going to see actors who are supported and respected for their craft.

programs? For many students, this is their first experience of having a person with a disability teaching them and most have never had someone with a disability manage them. Seeing someone with a disability in a leadership position or an acting role is an extraordinary opportunity for them to reflect on the, often overlooked, absence of people with disabilities on stage, in movies and in leadership roles. It allows them to consider the loss of having a diversity of people in these important positions.

What has been the most memorable positive feedback that you've gotten from your students? Every semester, Temple's Recreational Therapy students rave about the opportunity to learn from the agency's director and staff. They talk about being inspired by people who are passionate about their craft. It makes them consider the role of recreational therapy in eliminating barriers that could otherwise prevent people from being involved in meaningful activities.



Spotlight Series

Sarah Breck, parent

How did you discover AWB? We first found out about AWB through the ESF camps that my older daughter attended. We came to a few performances. Years later, Maria came up to us in a restaurant to see if we might be interested in joining. I wasn't sure because Katherine is nonverbal but she assured me that no matter what the challenges are, AWB could work with them.

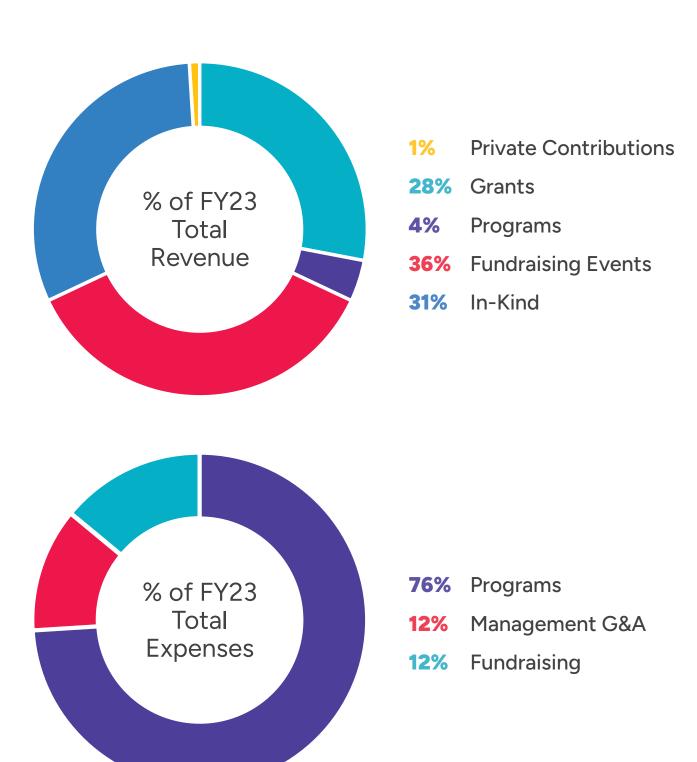
What part of AWB interested you and why? I was interested to provide Katherine with an activity outside of home and school that she would find enjoyable. With her love of music and being with people, it is a good fit!

What positive change have you felt since getting involved with AWB? I have been amazed to see the enthusiasm that the actors have to be part of a show. I have been amazed to see the devotion that the staff has to make sure that everyone has a positive experience. I love the process of creating a show and how the actors have a huge say in the writing of the script. And on the day of the performance, I felt nothing but overwhelming pride and joy for all involved!

As a parent, have you felt empowered through AWB and if so, how? I feel empowered to try to learn more from other parents and their experiences, especially parents with older children. I definitely feel inspired by the children to see how they deal with their individual challenges and to see the camaraderie. I am inspired by the staff who treat each child with respect. That means so much as a special needs parent.

What do you love about AWB? I love seeing the children and staff work together to plan a show. I love the excitement and enthusiasm shown by everyone. I love that Katherine has an experience to shine and use her gifts to work together with a group.







Thank you to our incredibly generous sponsors, donors, and supporters.

We couldn't do it without you!

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William Penn Foundation

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\$15,000 funds the cost of an AWB Juniors performance. Paula Solomon
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\$2,500+

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Robin and Timothy Trautmann

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\$500+

WSFS

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William Conrad
Erika and Josh Dandridge
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Roman Maslennikov

\$25,000 funds the cost of an AWB Seniors performance.

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\$250+ Marie Bridges Elinor and James Buck Desiree and Shaelin Cantwell Deb and Doug Connolly Eveline Heuves and Tjerk Debruin Lauren and Craig Evans Eleanor Godin Harry J Lawall & Son, Inc MaryPat Heilmann Gina Nicoletti Caroline "Cackie" Rogers Karina and Michael Rouse Elaine Stevenson **Robert Tabas**

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\$2,500 funds the nursing staff at the monthly workshops.

Dyann Roth Andrew Sutherland Nicole Tell Terri Tiemann Natalie Joal Tyler Jamie Vaughn Meredith Waldron Kate Yeager Terry Zaccagni

Under \$100

Greg Ackerman Aaron Deede Christopher Fagley Loretta Freda **Emily Gretz** Barbie Heniq Anthony Hibbert Ann Keech Julie Leavitt Pat Lord Mari Meas Lorie Odabashian Patricia Rizzo Susan Short Ron Siggs Rebekah Taussig Linda Thomas Eowyn West

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\$5.000 funds the set design for a performance.

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\$1.000 funds a Spotlight 180 video episode.



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