

# 2020 IMPACT REPORT



Supporting people with  
Down syndrome in achieving  
their dreams of higher education  
while spreading awareness  
of their capabilities and  
general awesomeness!!



## OUR MISSION

Supporting people with Down syndrome in achieving their dreams of higher education while spreading awareness of their capabilities and general awesomeness!!

## OUR VISION

A world that celebrates people with Down syndrome and supports the pursuit of higher education, employment, acceptance and inclusion for people of all abilities.

## OUR CORE VALUES

**Community:** We believe community is one of our most powerful assets and that the best things come from pulling together.

**Education:** We believe all people are lifelong learners and everyone deserves access to education.

**Inclusion:** We believe every person has worth and should be valued in their community.

**Inspiration:** We believe showing the world what's possible brings hope and creates opportunities.

**Integrity:** We believe in being truthful, decent human beings who consistently do the right thing. We honor the trust placed in our organization by our scholarship recipients, fundraisers, volunteers and donors, by handling their generous investments with care.

**Kindness:** We believe everyone in the world is deserving of love, respect and compassion, and we see kindness as the key to a brighter world for all.

## BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Liz Plachta, Executive Director, President & Co-Founder

Kelle Hampton, Vice President

Tim Plachta, Co-Founder, Secretary & Board Member

Jon-Michael Rogers, Treasurer & Board Member

Catherine Morris, Administrative Director & Social Media Representative

Ross Clurman, Web Manager & Board Member

Marc Lippincott, Board Member

Sara Plachta-Elliott, Board Member

Stephanie Bomely, Board Member

Tyrell McElroy, Board Member

# Since 2012...



## Scholarships Awarded



**\$1,186,000**

## In Scholarship Funds



15+

## Awareness Campaigns

- 387 Ruby's Rainbow Scholarships granted!
- \$1,186,000 in scholarship funds awarded!
- 15+ awareness campaigns launched to spread the word about how AWESOME people rockin' that extra chromosome truly are!!



**We asked YOU if you could describe Ruby's Rainbow in just ONE WORD...  
what would it be?**

It was so humbling to hear everyone's thoughts and this visual of all your words makes my heart smile SO BIG! When I started this, I could have never imagined touching so many lives and inspiring HOPE to so many people all across the world!! I have to say that I'm lovin' the fact that FUN made it in there!!!"





# Year in Review

## **A Note from Liz Plachta, Executive Director and Her Most Important Job: Mama to Ruby and Ella Mae**

Our annual Impact Report is our way of letting our community of donors and supporters know what we accomplished together in the past year—but 2020 was a very strange year, to say the least. As we reviewed the past months to determine the impact we'd had as an organization in 2020, we realized it may not make sense to apply the same standards as in previous years. People around the world were and still are struggling, and to this day, life in some ways is still on indefinite pause. Until life returns to something a little more normal, do metrics like how many of our scholarship recipients are enrolled in classes or working in their communities even apply?

It turns out they do, thanks to our endlessly inspiring Rockin' Recipients as well as our incredible community of supporters. Because of all of you, Ruby's Rainbow was able to make a profound impact in 2020.

And is it odd to say that while it was a tough year, it was one with some incredibly beautiful high points as well? Adjusting to pandemic life caused stress and worry for people around the globe, and it was the same for us at Ruby's Rainbow. Still, life went on in new ways, and like others, we figured out how to make things work, even when we had to do it from a distance.





We were very excited to welcome our first twins into the Ruby's Rainbow family this year—identical twins, in fact! Bailee and Lynsey Richardson are rockin' it so far at Jefferson Community and Technical College!



Ruby helped me send out 81 congratulations letters and scholarship packets to our new Rockin' Recipients! This is one of her favorite jobs—you can see on her face just how much she loves it!!

What inspired us most to keep on keepin' on? Our incredible Rockin' Recipients, who didn't let the pandemic keep them from learning or following their dreams. They adapted to on-line learning, social distancing and mask wearing as they continued working toward their higher-education goals.

We knew we couldn't let the pandemic get us down, either, or stop us from serving this incredibly worthy population. So, like just about everyone else on the planet, we pivoted, in many ways and as many times as we needed to.

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Because of YOU—all of you—we are able to do what we do.

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Our annual **3/21 Pledge** is held every March. 321 is a special number in the Down syndrome community, since it signifies Trisomy-21—the presence of a third copy of the 21st chromosome, which is also known as Down syndrome. That's why World Down Syndrome day falls on March 21 each year (3/21!), and why we named our biggest fundraiser of the year the 3/21 Pledge.

For 2020, we'd set our loftiest 3/21 Pledge goal ever, of raising \$321,000 and granting more scholarships than ever before. We kicked off the Pledge on a high note with our annual kickoff party hosted by

Pride Socks, one of our incredible long-time partners—but by the time the Pledge culminated two weeks later, on World Down Syndrome Day, the world was on lockdown, and people everywhere were

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The gratitude and honor I feel are so overwhelming as to be nearly indescribable.

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suddenly uncertain about their jobs, their health, their finances and their futures.

And yet, you all showed up, just like you always do. You pitched in, pulled together and showed our incredible scholarship recipients just how much you believe in them. Through the two weeks of the Pledge, despite the sudden uncertainty making life feel precarious on almost every level, our community managed to raise an incredible \$276,000—an amount that sling-shotted us to a major milestone and beyond: As of 2020, with love and support from amazing people all over the world, we hit the \$1 million mark in scholarship funds granted since we first started doing this gig eight years ago. We have now officially awarded 387 scholarships to students with Down syndrome since 2012, totaling nearly \$1.2 million!!

What a milestone and feeling to share!! The gratitude and honor I feel are so overwhelming as to be nearly indescribable.



The RainBOWL LIVE was such a blast! Attendees from all over the country (and even the world!) showed up for the live event.



When the world is a more inclusive place, embracing of people's strengths and accommodating of their needs and challenges, we all benefit.



Next came our **Rockin' RainBOWL**, another annual family-fun event that we've held every summer for eight years in bowling alleys in Austin and San Diego. Last summer, when the pandemic made it unsafe to gather in groups, we pivoted, figuring out a way to have a fun family bowling event in an online, virtual forum.

And when the time came for our annual October Awareness Campaign, which normally involves following the fun adventures of Ruby and Nella, we pivoted yet again, focusing on what the essence of Ruby's Rainbow is truly all about—and we realized it's all of us. It's you—YOU are Ruby's Rainbow!! It's only because of you, ALL of you, that we are able to do what we do.

I hope you know that what we're doing together is truly changing the world! Not just for our Rockin' Recipients and their families, classmates and coworkers, but for everyone. When the world is a more inclusive place, embracing of people's strengths and differences and accommodating of their needs and challenges, we all benefit.

Please read on through this report to learn more about our annual events last year, to get inspired by the accomplishments of some of our incredible Rockin' Recipients, and to celebrate the impact your incredible support, love and generosity made on the world in 2020!!



With love and a grateful heart,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Liz". The signature is stylized and cursive.

Liz Plachta, Co-founder, Executive Director,  
and most importantly, Mama to Ruby and Ella Mae

## Krista Graf

2017 & 2018 Rockin' Recipient  
Bethel University, 2018 Graduate

Since graduating from Bethel University in 2018, Kirsta is now working in the Dining Center at Bethel and contributing to her 401K! About her job, she says, "This is a good, new experience for me to do new things."

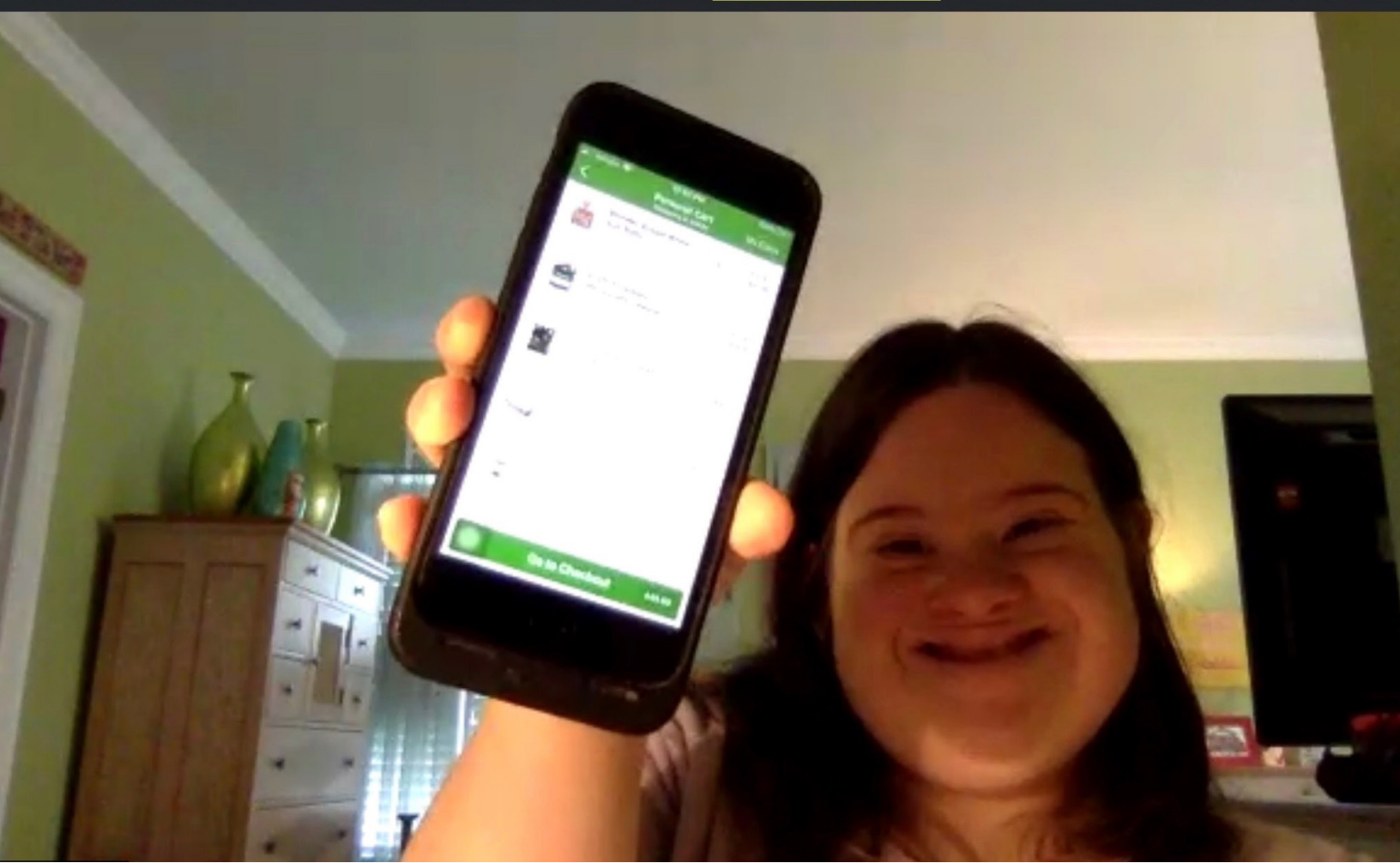


## Sophia Spizzirri

2020 Rockin' Recipient  
Judson University

Sophia is having a great college experience so far, and says, "I am really proud of myself because even though I really miss my family, I am doing things on my own and learning how to be more independent."

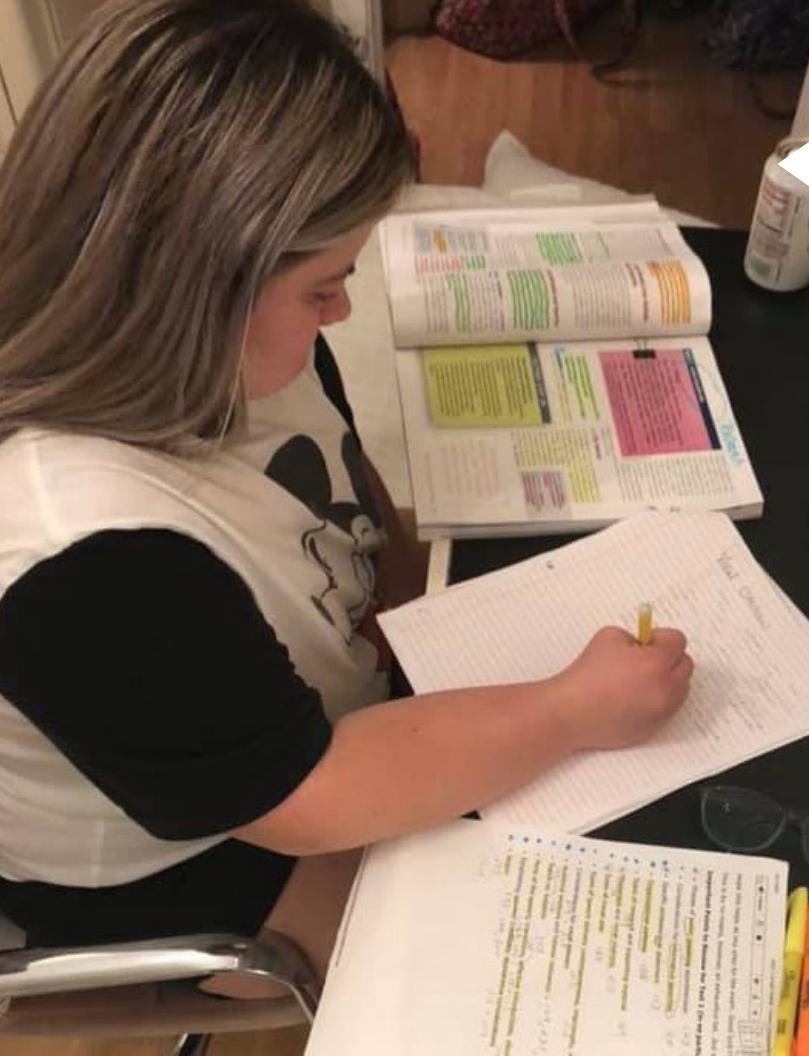




## Kendall Montgomery

2019 & 2020 Rockin' Recipient  
Clemson University

Kendall graduated from the initial two-year ClemsonLIFE program and entered the two-year Advanced program in Fall 2020. One of her professors reported, "Kendall is doing absolutely incredible at the start of her junior year. She virtually attends classes, hangs out with mentors on Zoom for social club and cooks Monday night dinner for her family in cooking class. She learned about portions and Myplate in nutrition class this week and then as her assignment added fruits and vegetables to her Instacart to have these delivered as part of her next grocery order. She's absolutely rockin' it and I can't wait for the rest of this year to see how much she grows in her independence!"



## BreAnna White

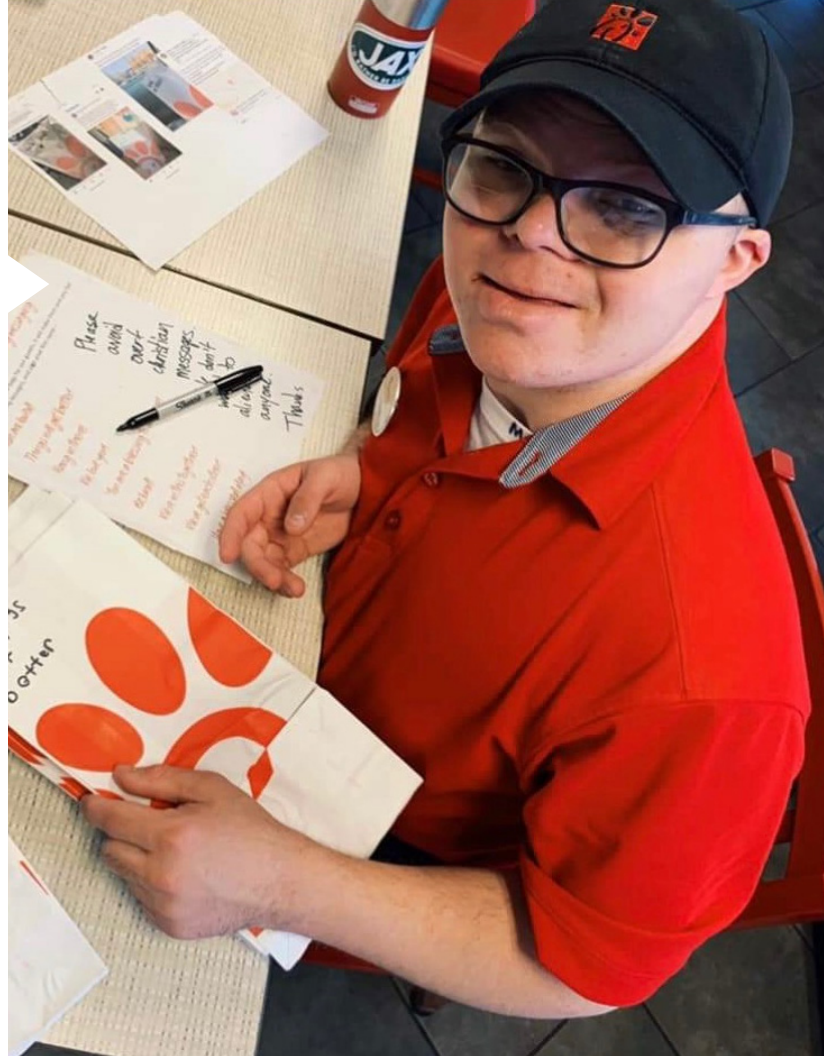
2018, 2019 & 2020 Rockin' Recipient  
Georgia Highlands College

BreAnna is on track to become the first person with Down syndrome to graduate from GHC with an Associate's degree! She says, "I just completed 2 years at GHC! It was so hard. I did get a B in Art Appreciation and this Fall I think I am going to just take College Algebra because it is so hard. Then I get to take the fun stuff like Science. I am still working to get my associates degree I changed my major to Health Professions. College is fun and hard."

## Matt McNeil

2019 & 2020 Rockin' Recipient  
Western Carolina University

Matt will graduate next May, and is already living in his own apartment. He works at Chick-fil-A, where he helped spread some cheer after pandemic lockdowns began by writing encouraging notes to customers on their takeout bags!







## Facts & Statistics

In 2020, Ruby's Rainbow granted 81 scholarships totaling \$276,000. This was awesome in itself, and it also brought our organization to a milestone that blows our minds in the best possible way: **Since 2012, we have granted 387 scholarships totaling \$1,186,000!!**

To think that we started out with the goal of granting just one \$2,000 scholarship, and have grown over the course of nine years to where we are today—it seriously boggles the mind. And we could not have done a bit of it without the love and support of every single person who has ever followed us on social media, made a donation or helped us spread the word about the capabilities of the incredible, awe-inspiring adult

students with Down syndrome whom we are so proud to help pursue their college dreams. So we hope you are feeling the pride along with our deepest gratitude!!

Our Rockin' Recipients are attending post-secondary programs at community colleges, colleges and universities across the country.

Of our 2020 scholarship recipients:

- **Nine** are attending Clemson University
- **Four** are attending Syracuse University
- **Four** are attending Judson University

- **Three** are attending Jefferson Community and Technical College
- **Three** are attending Ivy Tech Community College
- **Two** are attending Auburn University
- **Two** are attending Bethel University
- **Two** are attending the University of Colorado at Colorado Springs
- The other **52 recipients** are attending 46 other programs around the United States—in California, Oklahoma and Washington State; Arkansas, Ohio and Pennsylvania; Florida, Alabama and Missouri; and beyond.

About one-quarter of our Rockin' Recipients chose to defer their 2020 Ruby's Rainbow scholarships until 2021 due to concerns about the COVID-19 pandemic. The other three-quarters chose to continue their planned courses of study,

either in person or via virtual learning. These programs are expensive due to the myriad supports in place for students with intellectual disabilities and learning differences, including mentors and advisors, assistive technology, on-campus support centers, and more.

Ruby's Rainbow offers scholarships ranging from \$1,000 to \$10,000. Notably, our scholarships are among the few available to students with Down syndrome that do not set minimum eligibility requirements for recipients' course hours. This means we serve a diverse group of students—some who take full course loads (three to five courses per semester), others who focus on just one course at a time, and still others in between. This enables us to truly value differentiated learning and serve students exactly where they are.



**\$1,186,000**

in scholarship funds  
granted since 2012



**387**

total scholarships  
granted since  
2012

**81**

scholarships  
granted in 2020



**\$276,000**

in scholarships funds  
granted in 2020





## Approximate Annual Tuition & Fees\* of Top Programs for Students with Intellectual Disabilities



**InclusiveU program at  
Syracuse University**  
\$55,000 per year



**ClemsonLIFE program at  
Clemson University**  
\$41,000 per year



**RISE program at  
Judson University**  
\$26,000 per year

\*These numbers are averages based on 2020-2021 in-state tuition and fees per each program's website. Out-of-state tuition is higher for each program.

## Colton Vazquez

2018, 2019 & 2020 Rockin' Recipient  
Duquesne University

Colton's mom shared in an email:  
"Sure, we had to do things a bit different this year. Mask, hand sanitizer, social distancing. But not one bit of that will stop this kid. He's got plans and he intends to meet his goals."

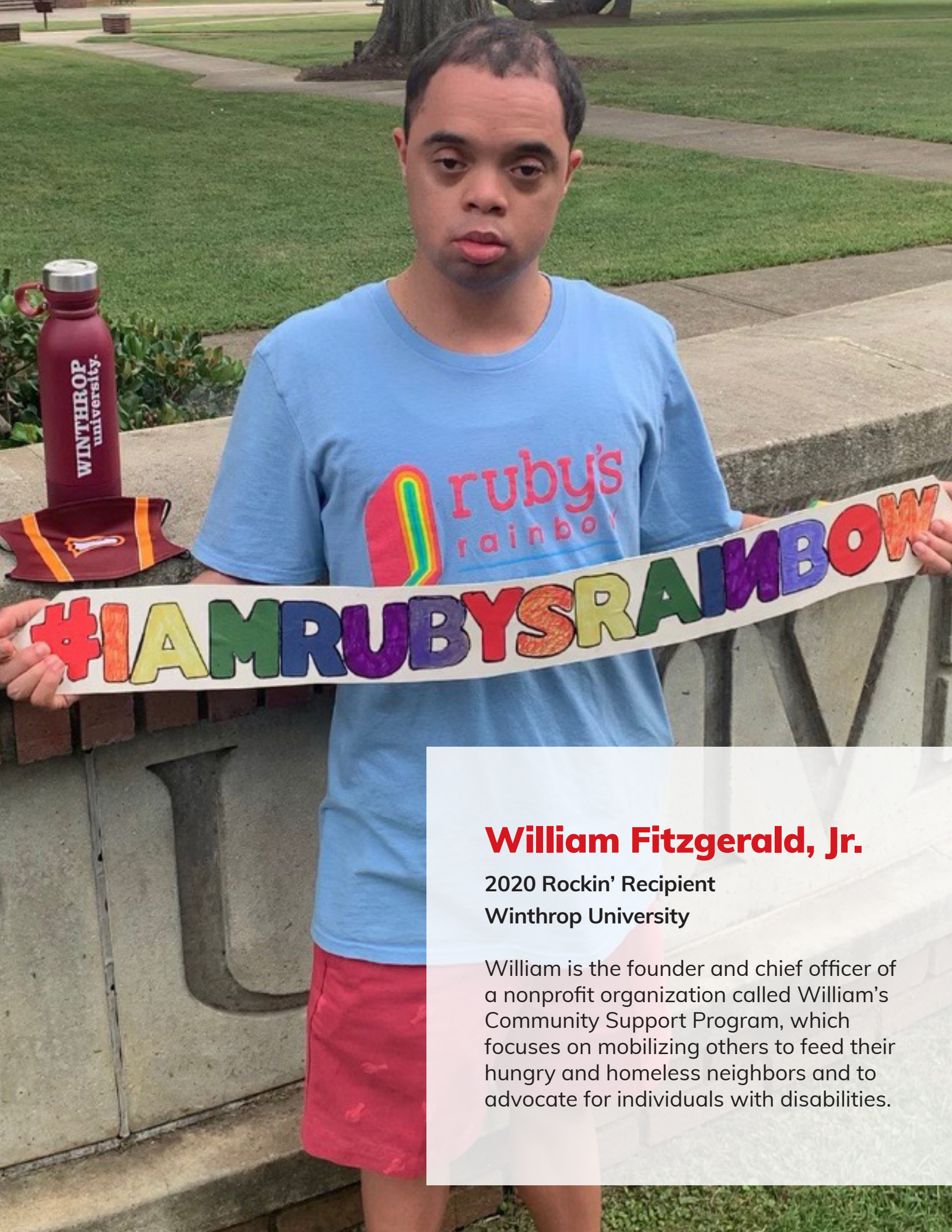


## Paulette Guest

2018 Rockin' Recipient  
Jefferson Community and Technical  
College, 2019 Graduate

At 52, Paulette is our oldest female Rockin' Recipient! She loves going to church and singing the gospel, and has claimed retirement now that she has graduated. We are SO PROUD of Paulette!!





## **William Fitzgerald, Jr.**

**2020 Rockin' Recipient  
Winthrop University**

William is the founder and chief officer of a nonprofit organization called William's Community Support Program, which focuses on mobilizing others to feed their hungry and homeless neighbors and to advocate for individuals with disabilities.





## Peter Merz

2012 Rockin' Recipient

University of Cincinnati

TAP program, 2016 Graduate

Peter was one of the first students to receive a Ruby's Rainbow scholarship. He has been working in a café on campus since he graduated, and still meets up with his TAP friends to hang out or attend sporting events. He also continues to take a gym class every semester to stay fit, and has moved into his own apartment!

## Rachel Handlin

2015, 2017, 2018 & 2019

Rockin' Recipient

California Institute of the Arts,  
2020 Graduate

Rachel is a gifted photographer who is making plans to attend graduate school. We are SO PROUD of her for her amazing milestone accomplishment, and we can't wait to see what she goes on to do next!!







# Fundraisers, Awareness Campaigns and Events

## The 3/21 Pledge

Our annual **3/21 Pledge** in March was an amazing experience as we highlighted how our Rockin' Recipients are paving the way and raising expectations for the younger generation! They are having an incredible impact on this world, and we are SO PROUD of them!! Parents of younger kids with Down syndrome shared their heartfelt stories of connecting with Rockin' Recipients and their families, and being inspired to dream big for their own children. And Ruby's big sister Ella Mae teamed up with Nella's big sister Lainey to follow our Rockin' Recipients who are attending Clemson University! Ella Mae and Lainey rocked their first investigative reporting experience for Ruby's Rainbow as they learned how they can best support their own sisters growing up.



**3/21**  
**PLEDGE**  
[rubysrainbow.org](http://rubysrainbow.org)





## Rockin' RainBOWL LIVE Virtual Event

In July, we had SO MUCH FUN with the **Rockin' RainBOWL LIVE** virtual event!! Ruby partnered up once again with Pride Socks to design another pair of socks for the event—featuring unicorns, of course, along with bowling balls! Most of all, this amazing community came together to celebrate peeps who are rockin' that extra chromo-some while raising \$48,000!







Ruby and friends celebrating blowing past the \$1 million mark!

## October Awareness Campaign

And speaking of celebrating peeps rockin' that extra chromosome... Our **October Awareness campaign** highlighted just a few of the many, many people who make Ruby's Rainbow what it is and enable us to do what we do. Hint: That includes you—because we are ALL Ruby's Rainbow! Every “like” and share on social media, every donation, every bit of cheering on our Rockin' Recipients—it's all part of the success of this organization in supporting students with Down syndrome in making their college dreams a reality! We are beyond grateful to you for ALL that you do for us and this rockin' community, so THANK YOU from the bottom of our hearts!!



Incredible Ivy is Ruby's Rainbow too! ... Rachel, Melissa and baby Moxie of Pride Socks! ... Jackson and his mama Mica are also Ruby's Rainbow!!



## Melissa Walker

2020 Rockin' Recipient  
University of Alabama

Melissa is this year's Ruby's Rainbow Warriors For Walt Scholarship Award recipient. After graduating, she plans to enter the teacher education program, as she loves education and helping students, and her goal is to become a teacher.

#IAmRubysRainbow@UA



#IAmRubysRainbow@UA





## Merideth Farich

2020 Rockin' Recipient  
Clemson University

Merideth's mom shared just how ready her daughter was to attend classes in person. "We just said our goodbyes...she patted my shoulder and said 'Adios!' She's ready for the adventure to begin."

## Hazlee Gaddie

2020 Rockin' Recipient  
Indiana University Southeast

Hazlee was able to start at IUS as a sophomore after earning college credits in high school through her AP courses. She is working toward her Bachelor's degree in business and plans to become a CPA!







# Looking Ahead

Thank you all so much for the love and support! I hope you take pride in seeing all these amazing faces and the impact Ruby's Rainbow is having on their lives.... because we could not do it without YOU and our hearts are eternally grateful!!

With love and so much gratitude it's ridiculous,  
**Liz, Tim, Ella Mae, Ruby Doobs and the RR Crew!**

**[rubysrainbow.org](http://rubysrainbow.org) | (512) 879-7801**



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