

2019 IMPACT REPORT

Dedicated to spreading awareness about the capabilities of people with Down syndrome and supporting their dreams of higher education.



“Now that I have graduated from UNCG, I’m living my life strong with my roommate, and still working at my job at a movie theater!”

Taryn Stinson

2015, 2017 & 2018 Rockin’ Recipient

University of North Carolina–Greensboro
2018 Graduate





Mission statement: At Ruby's Rainbow, our mission is to help adults with Down syndrome achieve their dreams of higher education by granting them scholarships, while spreading awareness of their capabilities and general awesomeness.

Vision statement: Our vision is a world in which there is no stigma attached to having Down syndrome or an intellectual disability, and no barriers to higher education, employment, acceptance or inclusion for people who are rockin' that extra chromosome.

Ruby's Rainbow Board of Directors

Liz Plachta, Executive Director, President & Co-Founder

Kelle Hampton, Vice President

Jon-micheal Rogers, Treasurer

Tim Plachta, Co-Founder, Secretary & Board Member

Catherine Morris, Administrative Director

Ross Clurman, Board Member & Website Manager

Marc Lippincott, Board Member

Sara Plachta-Elliott, Board Member

Stephanie Bomely, Board Member

Jon-Michael Rogers, Board Member

Tyrell McElroy, Board Member

Since 2012...

 **306**

Rockin' Recipients



\$910,000

In Scholarship Grants



10+

Awareness Campaigns

- 306 Ruby's Rainbow Scholarships granted!
- \$910,000 in scholarship funds awarded!
- We're all set and SO excited to pass that \$1 million mark in 2020!!

“College has been the best thing that happened to me, and Ruby’s Rainbow has made it possible for me to go. Without the help I have received, I couldn’t have attended college and I would have never met my best friends or learned to live independently.”

Dalton Cron

2017, 2018 & 2019 Rockin’ Recipient

Clemson University, ClemsonLIFE Program





YEAR IN REVIEW

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

The second I held Ruby for the first time, I knew she was going to change the world. In the nine years since her birth, I have gotten a front-row seat to just how much of an impact her little life is having, not only on those around her, but across the globe. I saw something in her that I wanted the world to see—that the world needed to see—and I cannot tell you how much it means to me to hear from parents with a new diagnosis who share that finding Ruby, Ruby's Rainbow and the faces of our Rockin' Recipients has changed their vision for their own child's future.

This is why the awareness aspect of our mission is so important to me. There is so much more to a person with Down syndrome than a diagnosis. Simply by raising expectations, we are changing lives and creating a more beautiful and inclusive world for people of ALL abilities!

Also, as a mama, it brings my heart so much joy and hope to see what individuals with Down syndrome are accomplishing these days! Did you know that my first goal when we founded Ruby's Rainbow in 2012 was to raise just one \$2,000 scholarship? Imagine my excitement and grateful heart when we were able to give out ELEVEN scholarships that year! Since then, we have granted more than 300 scholarships totaling over \$900,000!!! WHAT?!? And it just keeps growing every year! We simply

could not have done all this without all the love and support from this amazing community, so I hope you will take a moment to look over this report and feel proud of the impact you've helped us make.

In 2019, we conducted a survey of our past and present Rockin' Recipients to learn how they felt about their post-secondary education programs. Did their programs help them work toward their personal and career goals? Had they helped to prepare them for gaining employment and internships that would contribute to job readiness?

What we learned was inspiring, and convinced us that our scholarships are filling a very real need. Post-secondary programs for students with intellectual disabilities are, on average, more expensive than programs for students who don't need those extra supports. Over 80% of survey respondents said attending college would have been difficult or impossible without their Ruby's Rainbow scholarships, with fully 40% of those saying they would not have been able to attend if they hadn't received a scholarship. This is key, as research shows that attending post-secondary education makes all the difference for people with intellectual disabilities in becoming working, contributing members to society.

Our scholarship recipients are also making another, less tangible yet still deeply important impact in their own communities. In college, they develop friendships, mentorships and other relationships with people who care about them, who follow them even after they graduate and move on. As my dear friend Amanda Booth says, "If Down syndrome is something that is recognizable, then it will be familiar. And when something is familiar, it is welcomed." These relationships that our Rockin' Recipients are able to develop in college benefit everyone, increasing familiarity and acceptance not just for them personally, but for all people with disabilities.

All of this is why my promise to you is to keep on shouting as loud as I can that people with Down syndrome are capable, amazing and worthy. I promise to continue sharing their stories to inspire others while helping as many peeps rockin' that extra chromosome as I can to go for their dreams of higher education and independence!!

With love and a grateful heart,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Liz". The signature is stylized and cursive.

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

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



Shepherds College
\$47,800 per year



Clemson University
ClemsonLIFE
\$41,000 per year

In-state ClemsonLIFE students pay \$14,000 more annually than other Clemson students in additional program & support fees



George Mason University
Mason LIFE
\$44,500 per year

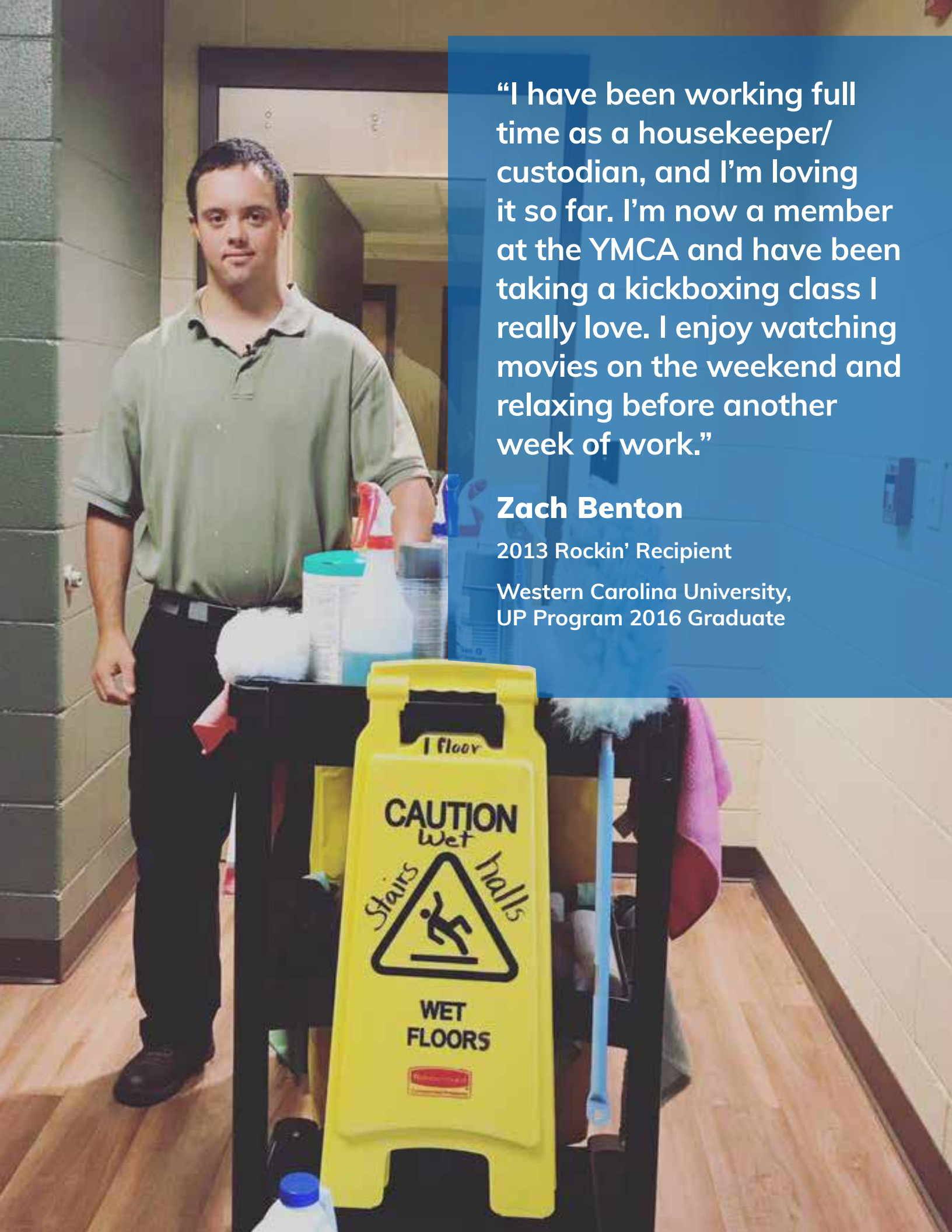
In-state Mason LIFE students pay \$17,000 more annually than other GMU students in additional LIFE program & support fees



Texas A&M
Aggie ACHIEVE
\$41,200 per year

In-state Aggie ACHIEVE students pay \$13,000 more annually than other A&M students in additional program & support fees.

*These numbers are averages based on 2019–2020 in-state tuition and fees per each program's website



“I have been working full time as a housekeeper/ custodian, and I’m loving it so far. I’m now a member at the YMCA and have been taking a kickboxing class I really love. I enjoy watching movies on the weekend and relaxing before another week of work.”

Zach Benton

2013 Rockin’ Recipient

Western Carolina University,
UP Program 2016 Graduate

Access to Post-Secondary Education Helps Rockin' Recipients Build Career Skills and Find Jobs and Internships

Our survey of our past and present Rockin' Recipients included questions about how their post-secondary programs had prepared them for gaining employment and internships that would contribute to career readiness. What we learned was inspiring.

The outlook for adults with intellectual disabilities (ID) in the workforce is brightening, but it has historically been grim, and there's still room for improvement. According to data published by Special Olympics, only 44% of adults with intellectual disabilities are in the labor force, and fully 28% of adults with ID have never had a job. Data from Think College reveals only 40% of students with ID who were exiting college programs in 2015 had a paid job within 90 days.

At Ruby's Rainbow, our Rockin' Recipients tell a different story. According to data we gathered from our survey respondents:



85%

of our recipients who have graduated are currently employed



69%

of our graduated recipients live independently

34%

of those still in school are also concurrently employed



96%

of our recipients are glad they attended their post-secondary educational program and feel it has helped them develop job-readiness skills and find work





“I have been working for over 1 year and 3 months at a great job at a health spa because of the skills I learned in my post-secondary program.”

Tessa Egan

2016 Rockin' Recipient

Cape Cod Community College

Awesomeness at Ruby's Rainbow in 2019!

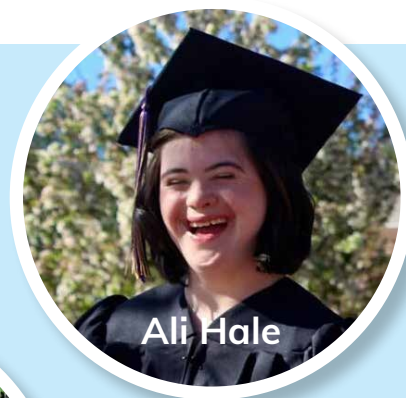
The 3/21 Pledge

Held every March in celebration of World Down Syndrome Day, the 3/21 Pledge is our biggest fundraising and awareness campaign of the year! We always kick things off with Rockin' with Ruby, an amazing night of live music and great peeps, hosted by Pride Socks. This year's kickoff party set the tone for an incredible 3/21 Pledge, during which we shared the inspiring stories of three Rockin' Recipients to show what their lives are like now that they have graduated college. **Mark Hublar** is living out his dream of being a motivational speaker; **Zach Benton** is working full-time with benefits at his dream job as a university custodian; and **Ali Hale** is also living her dream, working with children as a preschool teacher's assistant. All three live independently and are truly rockin' that extra chromosome!!

During the two weeks of last year's 3/21 Pledge, inspired by these stories about Mark, Zach and Ali and our other incredible Rockin' Recipients, our amazing community managed to pull together and raise over \$275,000 to support students with Down syndrome who are going to college!! Our ultimate goal for 2020 and for years to come is to raise \$321,000! This will help us continue to make the biggest impact and reach as many people as possible!! Be sure to follow along this March at www.321pledge.org and help us reach our goal!!



Zach Benton



Ali Hale



Mark Hublar

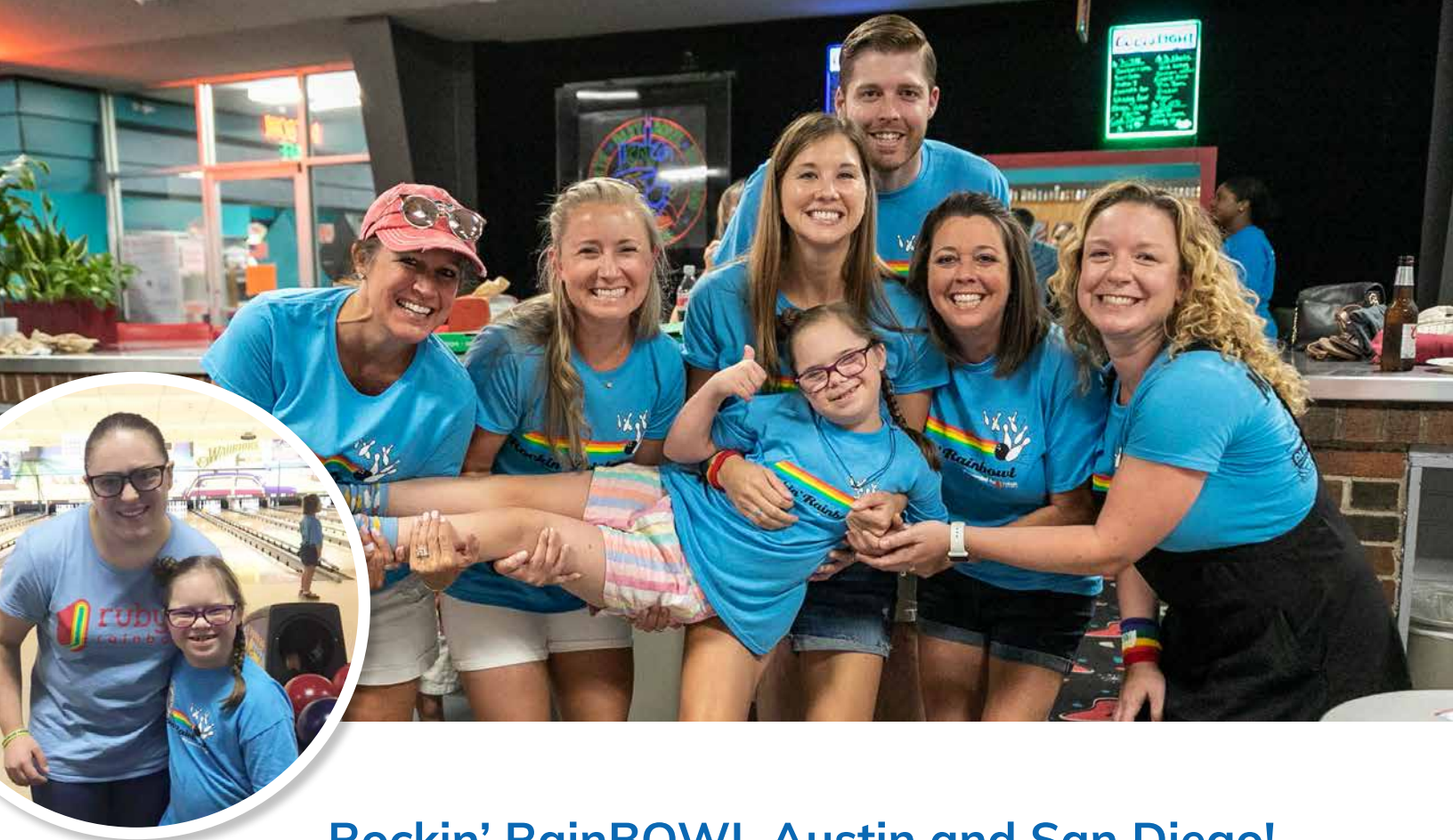
3021
PLEDGE
rubysrainbow.org



Maudie's Cup Golf Tournament

We also enjoyed the eighth annual Maudie's Cup Golf Tournament in Austin in April 2019. We love the Maudie's Cup!! Hosted by Ruby's favorite restaurant, Maudie's Tex-Mex, it's an incredibly fun day of sunshine, golfing, amazing peeps, and awesome food and drinks—and, of course, that priceless warm-and-fuzzy feeling that comes from knowing you're contributing to a great cause. The 2019 Maudie's Cup raised \$30,000 for Ruby's Rainbow and once again provided the Maudie's Scholarship Award of \$10,000—the largest amount we grant. The 2019 Maudie's Scholarship Award Recipient was **Megan Caldwell**, who is attending Kent State University. We are so proud of Megan and so grateful to Maudie's for their ongoing support!!





Rockin' RainBOWL Austin and San Diego!

2019 marked our eighth annual **Rockin' RainBOWL** in Austin and our second RainBOWL in sunny San Diego! Both events were a ton of fun, as always, with live music, food and drinks, raffle prizes, and bowling for the whole family. They were also a huge success, together raising \$70,000 in support of our mission here at Ruby's Rainbow!! Our dream is to host RainBOWLS all over the country—so stay tuned for this super fun event to someday come to a bowling alley near you!!





October Awareness Campaign

One huge way that Ruby's Rainbow makes an impact each year is through our October Awareness Campaign. This past October, we visited the **ClemsonLIFE Program** at Clemson University, where we had 13 Rockin' Recipients living out their college dreams!! We followed them around campus to show what college life looks like for them and the impact they are making on their community. Our recipients are changing the world and raising expectations for the generation that's coming up behind them by changing the perspectives of their peers, teachers, mentors and coworkers.





Anna started a Random Acts of Kindness Club at her community college. Eighty-five people signed up the first day to become RAKtivists!

Anna Mutter

2019 Rockin' Recipient

Northern Virginia Community College,
College Steps Program

Random Acts

Kindness Club

Be a RAKtivist!



Making a Positive Impact

At Ruby's Rainbow, we highly value individuals with Down syndrome who strive to make a positive impact on their school, work, religious or local communities. We believe people with Down syndrome can and should be valued members of society who contribute meaningfully, in ways that give them a sense of fulfillment and build their self-worth. Research has shown time and again that these are essential elements of a satisfying life, for everyone—regardless of ability.

45%

of our survey respondents have been actively involved with volunteer work

31%

are active as self-advocates, doing public speaking engagements focused on spreading awareness about the capabilities of people with Down syndrome, the importance of inclusion and ending the use of the R-word




“Graduating from college has been one of the greatest experiences in my life. It has given me the confidence and the opportunity to reach my full potential as a motivational speaker. I now speak to businesses, educators, government, families and Self-Advocates about the importance of giving everyone Respect, Opportunity and Inclusion (ROI).”

Mark Hublar

2014 Rockin’ Recipient

Jefferson Community and Technical College, College Connections
with Down Syndrome Louisville 2016 Graduate

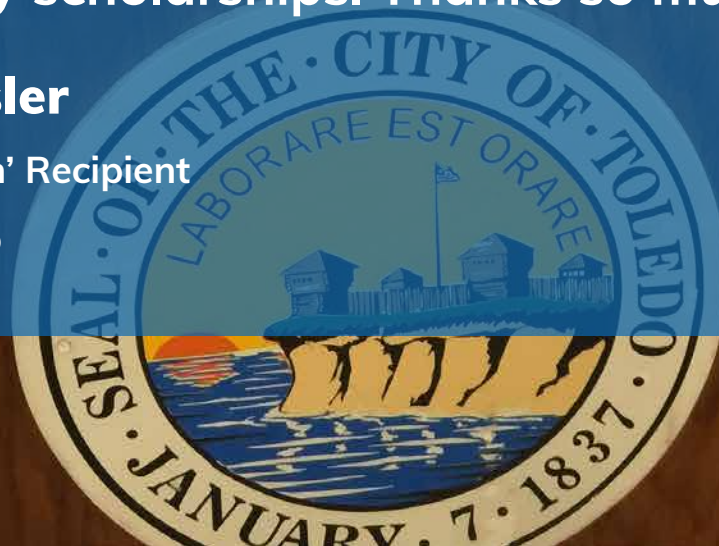
A young woman with brown hair and bangs, wearing a white cardigan over a dark top, stands behind a wooden podium. She is smiling and looking towards the camera. Behind her are three flags: the United States flag, the Ohio state flag, and the City of Toledo flag. The City of Toledo flag features a circular seal with the text 'CITY OF TOLEDO' and 'EST. 1837'.

“Receiving the Ruby Scholarship has helped me continue to pursue my dreams. I love learning new things, meeting people and being involved in the community. I love singing and acting and one day hope to go to Hollywood and be in a movie or commercials. This is a reality made possible because of my scholarships. Thanks so much.”

Bethany Wissler

2016 & 2019 Rockin' Recipient

University of Toledo



Attaining Life Goals

Moving out of their parents' home, living with roommates, graduating college—these are major life milestones for many young adults, including those who are rockin' an extra chromosome. In the not-so-distant past, individuals with Down syndrome rarely lived independently, and pursuing higher education was nearly unheard of. Thanks to early intervention programs, increasingly inclusive education and work opportunities, and other markers of progress, people living with intellectual disabilities now have more access than ever before to the same types of opportunities, milestones and life experiences as everyone else.

Of course, we still have a ways to go. According to 2017 data published by The Arc of the United States in their annual FINDS report, 80% of individuals with intellectual disabilities live with a caregiver who is a family member, and 50% of people with ID leave high school without a diploma.

The Ruby's Rainbow crew is so proud of our Rockin' Recipients, who are defying these statistics all over the country! Our survey of our past and present recipients revealed that their college programs have helped them develop independent living skills along with the confidence needed to follow their dreams. Over half of our survey respondents are living independently, and 97% are either actively enrolled in post-secondary programs or have already graduated. Furthermore, 96% of respondents reported they were very glad they pursued higher education and felt their college experiences were helping them reach their dreams.

This makes our hearts smile so BIG over here, knowing the impact we are making in their lives, and that these programs are increasing the independence and overall quality of life for our recipients!!

98%

of survey respondents are enrolled in higher education or have graduated their post-secondary programs

69%

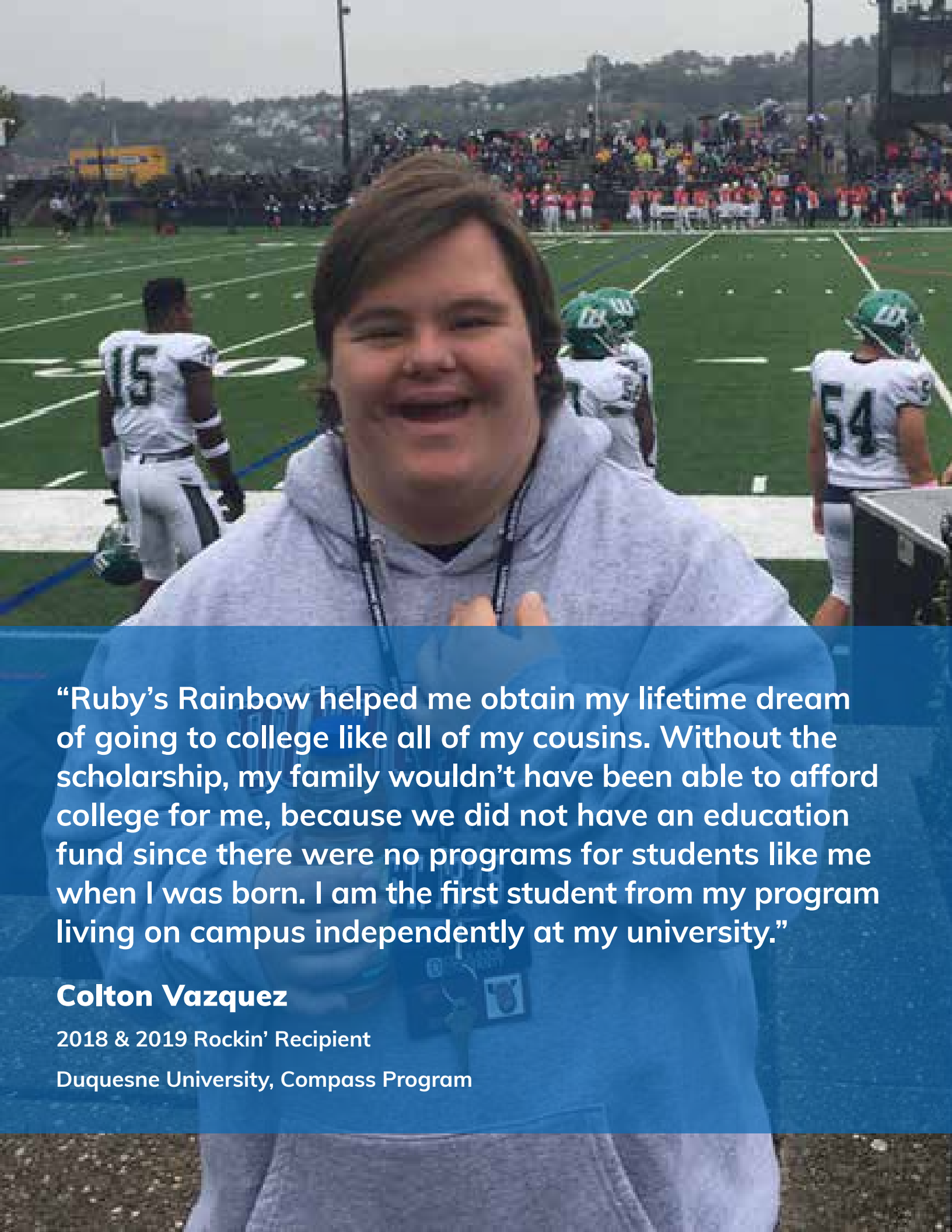
of respondents who have graduated are living independently

Over Half

of all respondents are living independently

96%

are very glad they attended their college program and feel their college experience is helping them reach their dreams



“Ruby’s Rainbow helped me obtain my lifetime dream of going to college like all of my cousins. Without the scholarship, my family wouldn’t have been able to afford college for me, because we did not have an education fund since there were no programs for students like me when I was born. I am the first student from my program living on campus independently at my university.”

Colton Vazquez

2018 & 2019 Rockin’ Recipient

Duquesne University, Compass Program



“Ruby’s Rainbow said YES to my dream of going to college and made it financially possible to attend. I’m currently a sophomore, soon to be a junior. I am the first person in the state of Washington living with Down syndrome who has been accepted into and is attending a four-year matriculated college program. I will be the first with Down syndrome to graduate, too. That will be a great day. Thank you, Ruby’s Rainbow, for believing in me. I love to feel included.”

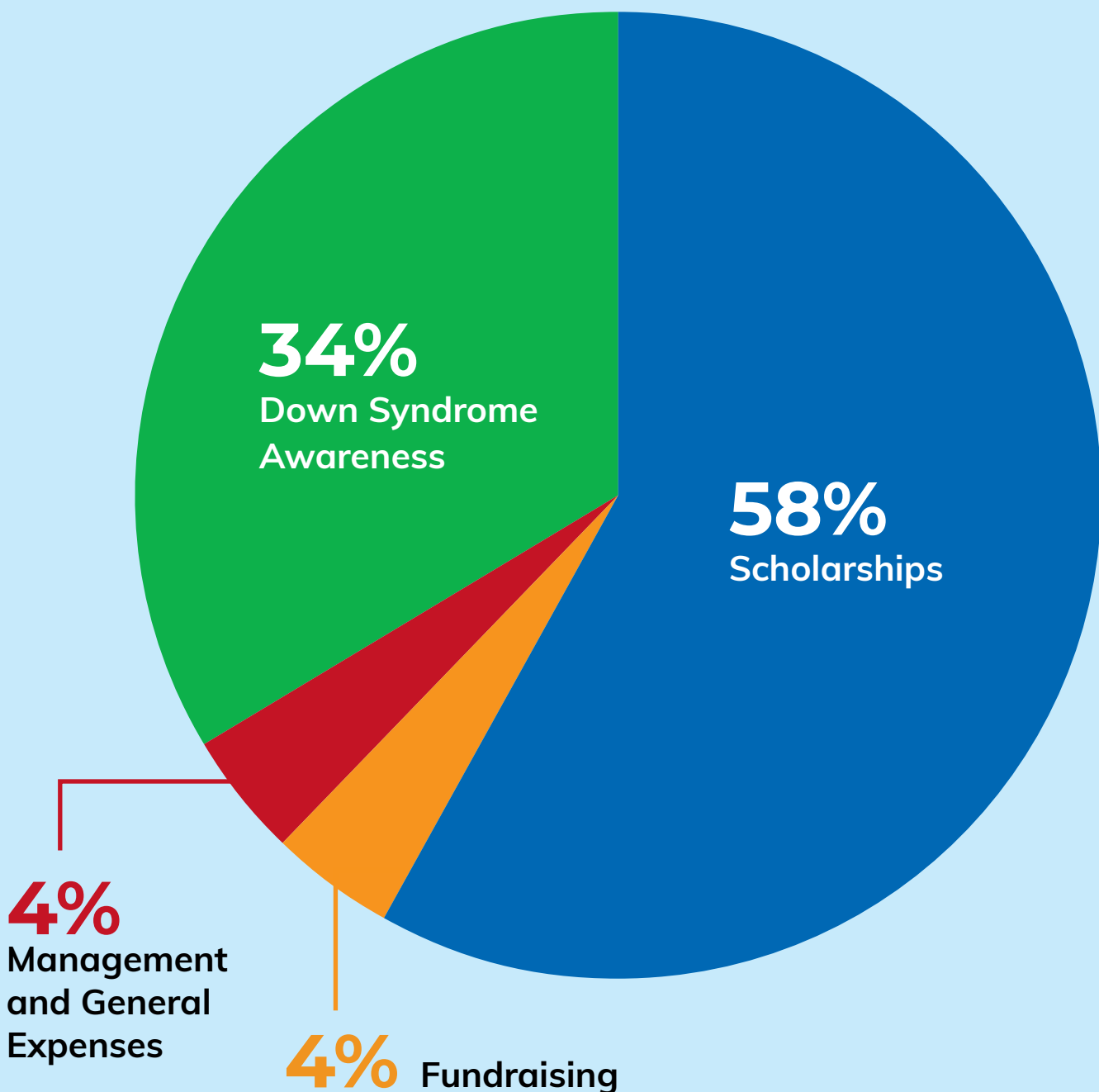
Dylan Kuehl

2016 Rockin’ Recipient

The Evergreen State College

2019 Financials

At Ruby's Rainbow, we take pride in knowing **92 percent** of the money we spend as an organization goes directly toward our mission of providing scholarships for students with Down syndrome to pursue post-secondary education and spreading awareness about their amazing capabilities. We hope this makes our donors proud as well—you have made a huge positive impact on these students' lives, and we could not be more grateful!





LOOKING AHEAD

We simply cannot believe how far we have come in just eight years, and we can't wait to see how much further we can go, with all of the love and support we receive each year from our incredible supporters!! Everything you do, from following us on social media, liking, sharing and commenting on our posts, to donating any amount, large or small – we appreciate it all more than you know and it all comes together to help us keep shouting the worth of people with Down syndrome and helping them go for their college dreams!

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

Here's to an amazing 2020!!!!

rubysrainbow.org | (512) 879-7801

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