



# 2021 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

Ross Clurman, Web Manager & Board Member

Marc Lippincott, Board Member

Sara Plachta-Elliott, Board Member

Stephanie Bomely, Board Member

Tyrell McElroy, Board Member





## Colton Vazquez

2018–2021 Rockin' Recipient  
Duquesne University – Compass

From Colton's mother, Candy: "I wanted you all to see what amazing things happen as a direct result of your generosity. Colton is engaged on campus, and creating and developing a life beyond our wildest dreams. To say he is living his best life, or living the dream or slaying it, is such an understatement!

"This year all around has been spectacular. Halloween is an absolute favorite for Colton. He saw an ad for performers for Fright Night at a local amusement park, and made it his mission to become a vampire. He set up an interview, went in to meet the Director of Operations, and landed exactly what he wanted to do at \$16 an hour. He worked every day of the season, including 12-hour shifts the final weekend. His work ethic and commitment are unmatched!

"He was also very happy to return to campus and focus on theater life and becoming a fraternity brother. The first day on campus, Colton declared he wanted to 'go Greek.' And now he is officially a TKE brother!

"We never could have done this without each and every one of you. Thank you for believing in him!"





# 2021 marked a decade of RUBY'S RAINBOW!



Since 2012...



**480**

Scholarships  
Awarded



**\$1,562,000**

In Scholarship Funds



**16+**

Awareness  
Campaigns

In 2021:



**93**

Ruby's Rainbow Scholarships  
granted in 2021!



**\$376,000**

in scholarship funds awarded!



# Year in Review



## A Note from Liz Plachta, Ruby's Rainbow Executive Director and Her Most Important Job – Mama to Ruby and Ella Mae

What an incredible year 2021 was for Ruby's Rainbow! This year marked our 10th birthday as an organization, and we saw some incredible growth—and had the incredible honor of awarding \$376,000 in scholarships to a brand-new crew of 93 Rockin' Recipients! WOW!!

A full decade of Ruby's Rainbow. I can still hardly believe it! It's mind-boggling and humbling to think back to the beginning, when Ruby was less than a year old and I had my mama-heart set on raising just one \$2,000 scholarship for someone rockin' that extra chromosome who was going to college. I wasn't even sure back then if people with Down syndrome went to college! I just knew what I saw in my daughter: Though Ruby was still a baby, I believed in her, and knew she was worthy of EVERYTHING—every opportunity, regardless of what life path she might someday choose. I knew learning didn't stop after high school, and that people with Down syndrome should have the same opportunities as everyone else to learn and grow. That's the belief we built Ruby's Rainbow on, when we granted those first few scholarships back in 2012.

I am blown away by this amazing community, which has shown up, again and again, for a full decade now, to show our incredible Rockin' Recipients just how much we believe in them and their worth—and I am SO grateful for the support!

We have known for several years that we've been growing fast and we need a plan



to help ensure that we reach our long-term goals, so in 2021 we developed and launched our very first Strategic Plan. We have so many big goals for Ruby's Rainbow, all aimed at granting more scholarships to support more college students with Down syndrome around the United States as we continue spreading awareness and shouting their worth to the world!

Our Strategic Plan is still in its beginning stages, yet we have already seen some incredible results. For example, we had our best 3/21 Pledge ever in 2021! We joined with our community last March to raise \$460,000 together to support our Rockin' Recipients in reaching their dreams of higher-education and independence! That amazing fundraising total blew our original goal right out of the water—we were completely blown away! During the lead-up to World Down Syndrome Day on March 21, Ruby and I were featured on CBS News and Studio 512 to spread the word and help raise more scholarship funds. What amazing experiences!

July marked our 10th annual Ruby's Rockin' RainBOWL event! It was our second fun LIVE virtual bowling event and fundraiser, and featured spotlights on our Rockin' Recipients, dance parties with DJ J-Ma, and lots of creative and hilarious "Show How You BOWL" videos! I loved it, and Ruby had so much fun. We can't wait to return to our first in-person RainBOWL event in three years this coming summer!!

In October, which is Down Syndrome Awareness Month, we held our annual awareness campaign on social media, and I was excited to be featured on KTLA. We talked about the mission of Ruby's Rainbow and how Ruby and Nella were checking off things on their college bucket list during the campaign (#rubyandnellabucketlist if you missed it!) to show the world the possibilities!

On that note...my biggest takeaway from 2021 is just how many times my heart was full to overflowing, again and again, thanks to our incredible Rockin' Recipients and the way they are showing the world exactly what they are capable of—and also thanks to YOU, our amazing community of supporters. I always hope you know just how deeply I appreciate every time you drop a comment or "like" one of our Facebook posts, or press that little heart on Instagram, or donate whatever amount you can, or invite your peeps to make a donation, or share our posts...or just any and all of the ways you SHOW UP big, again and again!! From the bottom of my heart, THANK YOU!!



With love and a grateful heart,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Liz". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

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





## Isabel Trower

2021 Rockin' Recipient  
Barnabas Prep

“Ruby’s Rainbow has helped me to make my dreams come true. I wanted to go to college like my siblings and friends, and now I do! I also get to live on my beautiful campus at Barnabas Prep. I have learned to be more independent and make many new friends. Thank you, Ruby’s Rainbow!!!”

## Jeremiah Whitehead

2021 Rockin' Recipient  
Vanderbilt University – Next Steps

“I’m still involved with church, Best Buddies and Special Olympics. I want to be a pastor. I can’t wait to start my internship at the Scarritt Bennett Center.”







## Lucy Sturman

**2018 & 2019 Rockin' Recipient**  
Northern Virginia Community College

“Going to college became a dream for me when I finished high school. College has helped me in ways that I’m so grateful for. The Ruby’s Rainbow scholarship was helpful because it helped me to see that I can do things to my own ability.”

## Mark Hublar

**2014 Rockin' Recipient**  
Jefferson Community & Technical College

“I have my own businesses, Mark J Hublar Speaks. I am a motivational speaker and I speak across the country on ROI: Respect, Opportunity, and Inclusion for individuals with disabilities. I am currently a group leader in southern Indiana for the Work to Include Coalition.”







# Facts & Statistics

## How Your Support Makes a Difference in the Lives of Our Rockin' Recipients

In Spring 2022, we sent out a survey to all of our Rockin' Recipients, past and present. We conduct these surveys every couple of years in order to gain a view of the impact that post-secondary education and our scholarships are having on our Rockin' Recipients' lives. The survey findings are always so inspiring, and this time was no exception! We hope you take pride in knowing that your support has improved these individuals' lives, career prospects and more!

This year, we learned that out of all our survey respondents...



**65%**

are currently enrolled in their post-secondary educational programs



**6%**

of respondents are currently on a break from school (but are planning to return soon)

**29%**

have graduated



**100%**

of survey respondents who have graduated from their programs are employed, working full- or part-time jobs!





## Employment and Independence

**65%**

of survey respondents are living independently—either alone or with roommates—in houses, apartments or college dorms



**52%**

are working full- or part-time jobs, including 100% of those who have graduated and 35% of those who are currently enrolled in school



## Volunteerism, Self-Advocacy and Community Impact

Striving to have a positive impact on your community, through actions like volunteering and self-advocacy, is one of the core values of Ruby's Rainbow. Based on our survey results, it's clear that our Rockin' Recipients have a wonderfully strong sense of self-efficacy—of their own place and power in the world. This means it's working—your donation dollars, our efforts to spread awareness—they are working! They are coming together to improve the lives and futures of individuals with Down syndrome, and that fact makes me so incredibly happy!!

**62%**

of survey respondents are volunteering, interning or both



**67%**

of respondents consider themselves to be self-advocates who are making an impact on their communities through public speaking, lobbying on Capitol Hill, working with people with disabilities, and sharing their stories to spread awareness and inclusion.





## The Importance of Post-Secondary Education for Students with Down Syndrome:

Without their Ruby's Rainbow scholarships, the vast majority of our Rockin' Recipients would have had a much harder time attending post-secondary education due to financial limitations. Many of them report that the scholarship made all the difference, and without it, they would not have been able to attend. This shows there is great need for these scholarships, and great payoff when people with Down syndrome are able to pursue education past high school.



**100%**

of survey respondents report they are glad they chose to pursue secondary education



**81%**

say it would have been difficult or impossible to attend their programs without the help of their RR scholarship

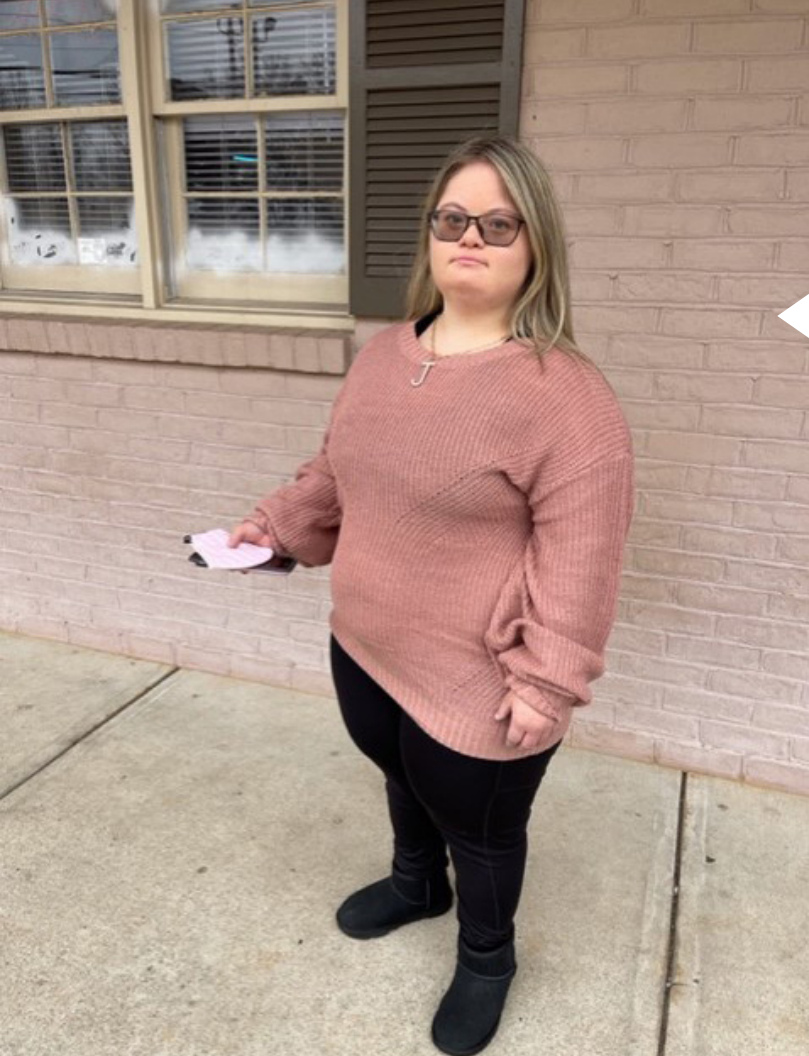


**90%**

report believing that their secondary-educational program has helped them reach their goals







## BreAnna White

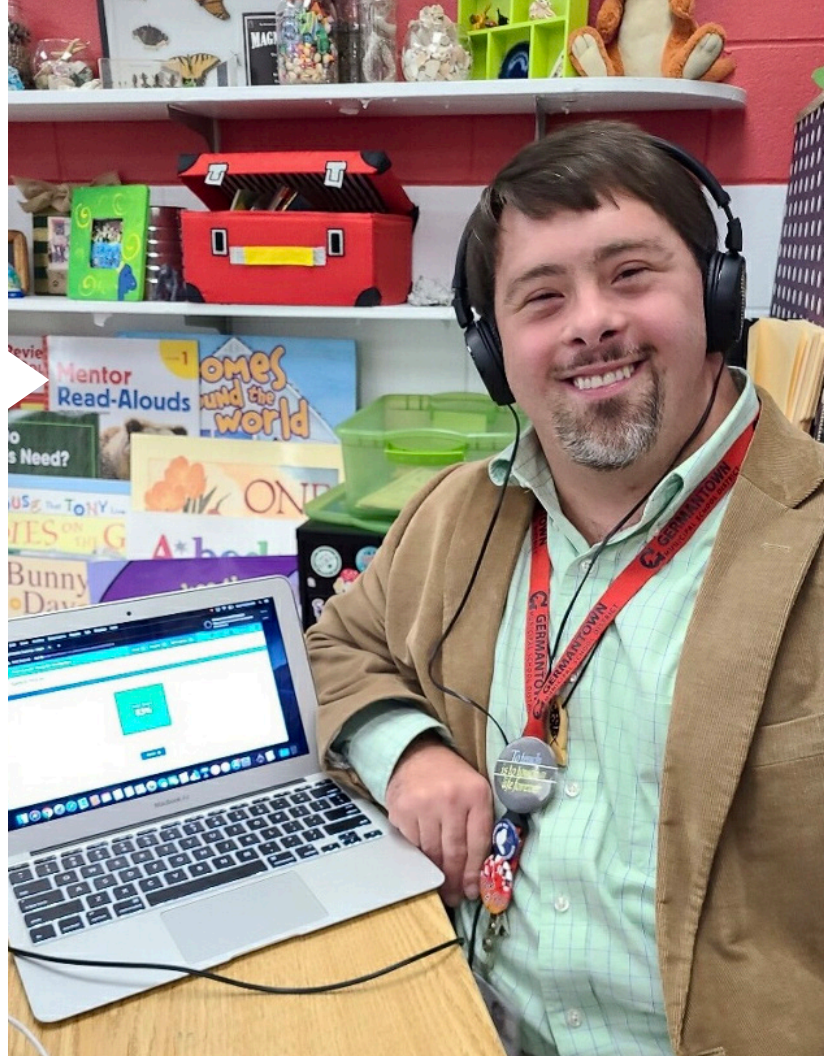
2018–2021 Rockin' Recipient  
Georgia Highlands College

“Ruby’s Rainbow means so much to me! I love Ruby, and I hope someday she will be in college or doing whatever her dreams are. Ruby’s Rainbow has paid for a lot of my college and I am taking REAL college classes. I do have a few accommodations. One is extended time on tests. Last semester I did really good. B! This semester I am loving my World Civilization Class. It’s so much fun! And I love my professor. My dream is to graduate with an Associate’s Degree and work in a preschool as a librarian. I love, love, love to read!”

## John T. Farley

2014 Rockin' Recipient  
University of Memphis – TigerLIFE  
Graduated 2015

“The Ruby’s Rainbow scholarship was most helpful with my college opportunity. I am now employed as a teaching assistant in a local elementary school.”

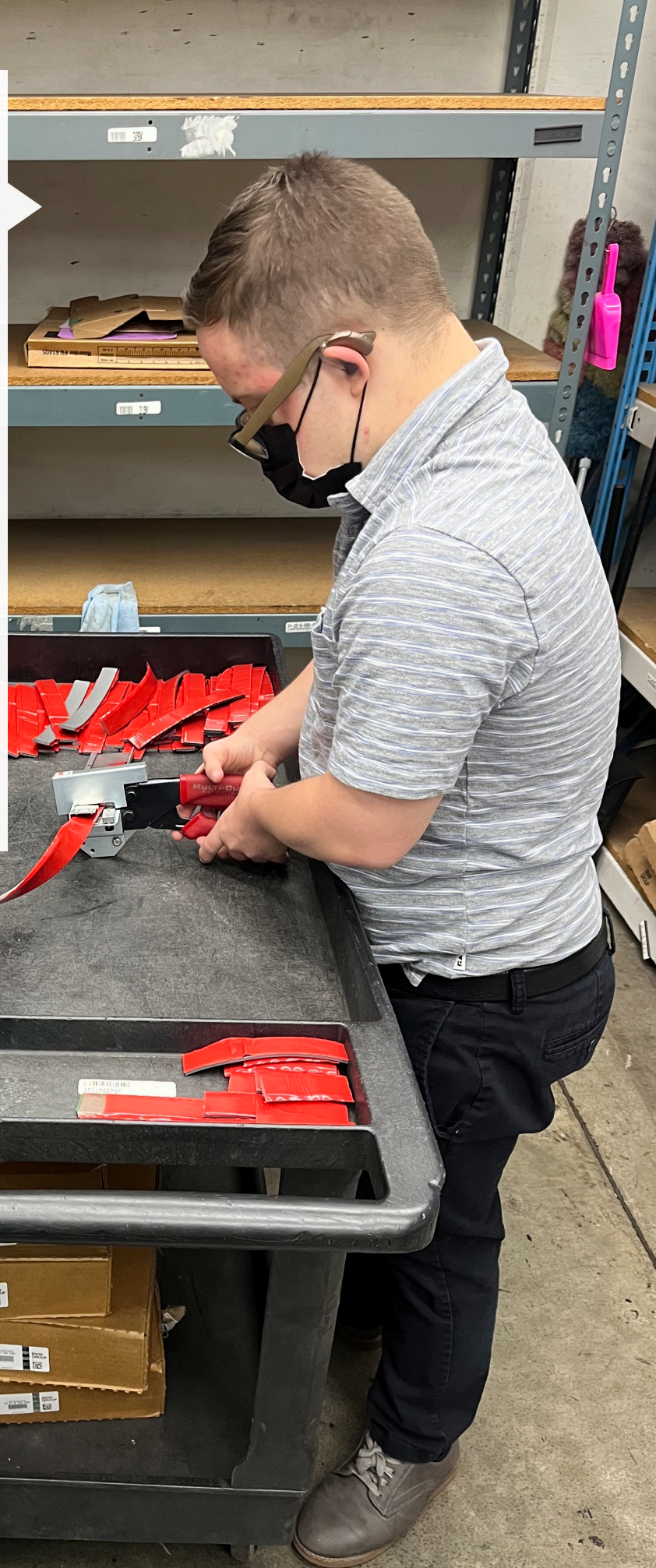




## Jeremy Fraser

2019–2021 Rockin' Recipient  
Life College at Stanbridge University

Jeremy has an internship in the parts department at a BMW dealership. He thoroughly enjoys his time there and loves talking about sports and other common interests with the mechanics. In school, he is taking classes in Interpersonal Communication, Career Development, Current Events, Self-Advocacy, and Independent Living, and continues to build the skills necessary to live a more independent life!







## Grace Davis

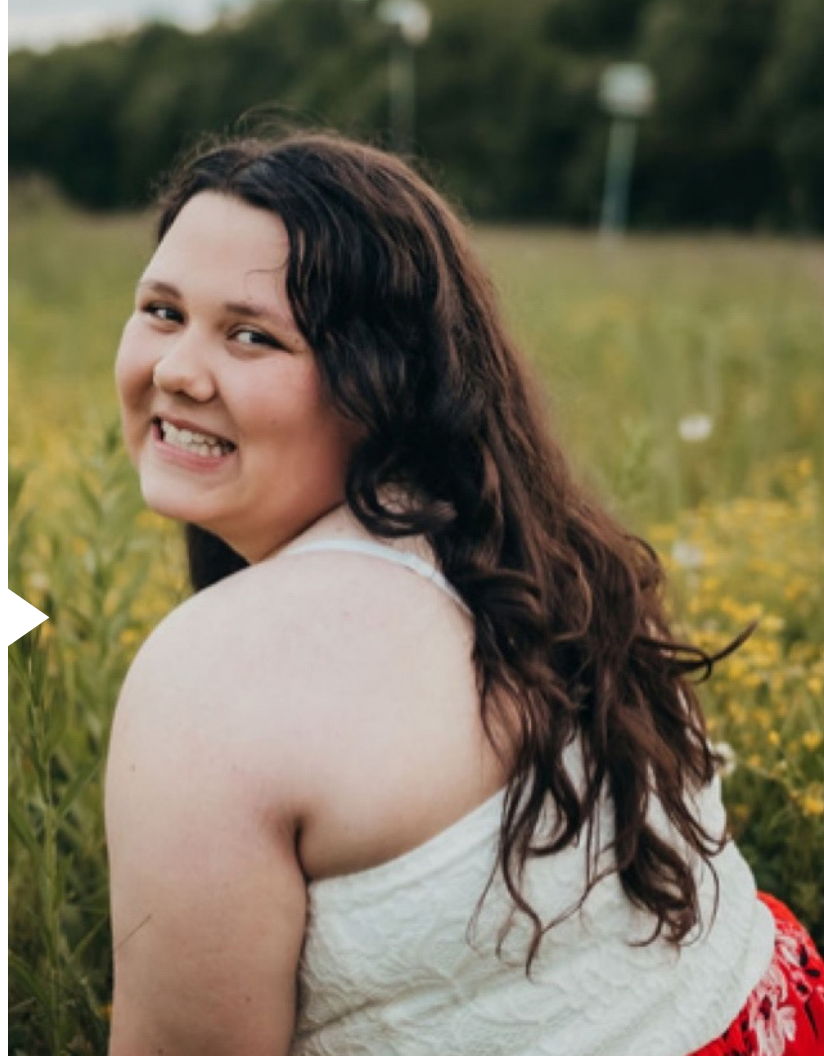
2020 & 2021 Rockin' Recipient  
Auburn University – EAGLES

“I am thankful for the EAGLES program at Auburn because I have made so many friends and had wonderful opportunities. I have learned many life skills so I can be successful one day. It has helped me get involved in so many things like a sorority, church, and friends. I love being on my own with my friends. I am so thankful for my Ruby's Rainbow scholarship because it helped me get here!”

## Hazlee Gaddie

2021 Rockin' Recipient  
Indiana University Southeast

“This Ruby's Rainbow Scholarship has meant so much to me because it has helped me to be more motivated in my journey to reach my dreams of becoming an accountant. They have also helped me be more confident. If it was not for Ruby's Rainbow, I would not become who I am today.”







# Fundraisers, Awareness Campaigns and Events

## The 3/21 Pledge

Last year's **3/21 Pledge** fundraiser was an amazing experience!! This annual event, held online from March 7–21 and culminating on World Down Syndrome Day, is our biggest fundraiser each year, but we also use it as a chance to spread awareness.

In 2021, we wanted to highlight something our Rockin' Recipients and other individuals with Down syndrome do so well: Being their unique, authentic selves, and loving and celebrating themselves exactly as they are! Throughout the two weeks of the Pledge, we highlighted stories about our Rockin' Recipients who are spreading love and acceptance to their communities and the world, simply by making their way in the world while rockin' that extra chromosome.

We also set what we considered a lofty fundraising goal—to join with our community to raise \$321,000 over the course of the Pledge. We were shocked, humbled and amazed that by World Down Syndrome Day on 3/21, we had blown past that goal—and made it all the way to \$460,000!!! WOW!! THANK YOU so much for such an incredible show of support for our mission and our amazing Rockin' Recipients!!!

**3021**  
**PLEDGE**  
[rubysrainbow.org](http://rubysrainbow.org)



# Ruby's Rockin' RainBOWL LIVE!

Click [HERE](#) to watch Luke Bryan surprise one of our 2021 Rockin' Recipients with his scholarship award!

We held our second-ever **Ruby's Rockin' RainBOWL LIVE** virtual event, to continue the decade-long tradition of our annual family-fun bowling events while also continuing to keep our community safe during the pandemic! In summer 2022, we will be returning to our first in-person RainBOWL family-fun bowling event in three years!!



## Down Syndrome Awareness Month

October is **Down Syndrome Awareness Month**, and every year, we share pictures and stories every day during the month of October to raise awareness about people with Down syndrome—about their daily lives, their hopes and dreams, their work and their goals, and more. Our goal is to show the broader community, and the world, that Down syndrome is awesome. [Liz was even featured on KTLA](#) last October to help spread awareness about all the awesomeness that comes with that magical extra chromosome!



# 2021 Financials



In 2021, Ruby's Rainbow developed and started to implement a three-year strategic plan, to ensure that we will reach our key long-term goals as an organization. We are focusing on Infrastructure, Marketing and Resource & Development, and are excited to report that we have already seen fabulous growth within our organization as well as in the community as a result of this plan!

As part of our Strategic Plan, we are considering our sustainability as an organization. Thus, in 2020, we began making space for sustainability in our annual budget.

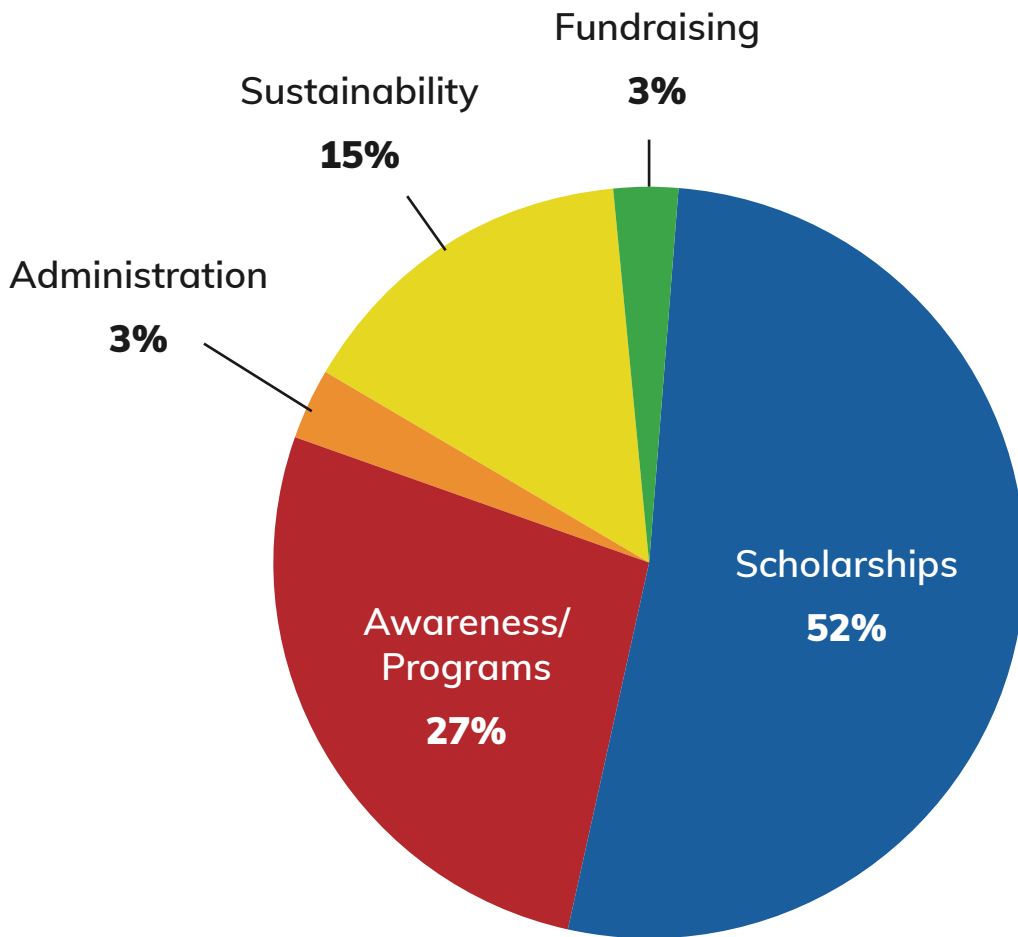
We are proud that our annual administrative and fundraising costs together take up only six percent of our total budget—down from eight percent in 2019. We are even prouder that 79 percent of the funds we spend as an organization goes directly toward our mission of providing scholarships for students with Down syndrome to pursue post-secondary education while 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!!





# 2021 Financials



- Scholarships \$382,619
- Awareness/Programs \$202,307
- Administration \$25,289
- Sustainability \$108,834
- Fundraising \$25,289

[2021 tax return](#)





## Ankur Chandan

**2018–2020 Rockin' Recipient**  
Jefferson Community & Technical  
College – College Connections

“Starting college and the Ruby’s Rainbow scholarship meant a lot to me, as I did not know I had the potential to go to college since coming to Kentucky in 2017.”

## Donovan O'Malley

**2021 Rockin' Recipient**  
Spring Hill College

“The Ruby’s Rainbow scholarship means to me a great deal because this community is supporting me to be able to achieve my goals and break stereotypes. I also support them while they are supporting me.”







## Faith-Christina Duncan

2019–2021 Rockin' Recipient  
Valencia College

"I like the quote by John F. Kennedy: 'One person can make a difference, and everyone should try.' My new platform title is 'Challenge Accepted.' This was the title of my keynote presentation this past September. I am humbled by receiving the Ruby's Rainbow scholarships over three years. It has helped pay for the tuition and books associated with college. I was able to concentrate more on my studies than worrying about paying for them. It means everything to me to be able to go to college and be a part of something bigger."

## Sophia Whittingham

2021 Rockin' Recipient  
University of Nevada, Las Vegas –  
Project F.O.C.U.S.

"I am taking four classes this semester at UNLV F.O.C.U.S., and I also enjoy volunteering in my community. I participated in my community park clean-up recently, and also spread the message of friendship and inclusion with my friends at the Down Syndrome Organization of Southern Nevada."







## Scott Conklin

**2015 & 2018 Rockin' Recipient**  
University of North Carolina–  
Greensboro – Beyond Academics  
Graduated 2019

“Going to Beyond Academics has meant everything to me because now I live alone in a rental house in Greensboro. I’m able to get to work on public transportation and do other recreational activities by myself. I love having my own place and doing what I want when I want.”

## Sophia Spizzirri

**2020 & 2021 Rockin' Recipient**  
Judson University – RISE

“I work at Jerry’s Cafe for my internship. I get to meet a lot of students and teachers. I also make all the drinks and know how to use the espresso machine and steamer. My favorite drink to make is the frozen hot chocolate. I also use the tablet to ring up customers. I plan to use all of these skills when we open up our family donut shop.”








# 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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# We Love and Appreciate Our Sponsors!



DR. YU & ASSOCIATES  
PERIODONTICS & IMPLANTOLOGY



FOUNDATION ESCROW  
WE MAKE BUYING & SELLING SIMPLE





## Pride Socks

Pride Socks has partnered with Ruby's Rainbow for too many years to count!! This amazing little Austin-based company is on a mission to change the world from the socks up. Best of all, Pride Socks is all about inclusion, respect and celebrating differences—a perfect fit for Ruby's Rainbow!



pride  
socks



Over the years, Ruby herself has collaborated with Rachel, the owner and founder of Pride Socks, to bring her visions to life through her Me Do Me and Dream Big sock creations. Think unicorns, rainbows and goldfish crackers—all of Ruby's favorite things!! These special socks are part of the ongoing Pride Socks "Custom for a Cause" initiative, supporting a variety of nonprofits. For every pair of Me Do Me and Dream Big socks sold, Pride Socks gives \$5 to Ruby's Rainbow to help fund scholarships!

Ruby's Rainbow has awarded a Pride Socks Scholarship Award to a new Rockin' Recipient every summer since 2017!

## Matthew's Bonfire BBQ

Matthew Hessburg was a two-time Rockin' Recipient, receiving Ruby's Rainbow scholarships in 2015 and 2017. His longtime goal was to own a restaurant, and during college in the UP Program at Western Carolina University, he held a paid internship at North Carolina's award-winning barbecue restaurant, Haywood Smokehouse.

After graduating from WCU, Matthew used what he had learned at Haywood to launch a line of barbecue sauces. His Blueberry Chipotle and Carolina Gold sauces make the perfect, delicious complement to any barbecue meal!

Ruby's Rainbow was proud to award a Bonfire BBQ Scholarship Award to one of our Rockin' Recipients in 2020!

