



2023 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.



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.



Inspiration

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



Education

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



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.



Inclusion

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

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

Rachel Heinz, Special Projects Manager

Ross Clurman, Web Manager & Board Member

Marc Lippincott, Board Member

Sara Plachta-Elliott, Board Member

Stephanie Bomely, Board Member

Tyrell McElroy, Board Member



Taylor Freeman

2021—2023 Rockin' Recipient
Clemson University — ClemsonLIFE

Taylor is a three-time Rockin' Recipient, a junior in the ClemsonLIFE advanced program and a member of Sigma Kappa. She says, "My sorority sisters embrace me and love hanging out with me, and my Big is the best. I hope that I can be a good Big Sigma Kappa to a new sister one day!"

Since 2012...



741

Scholarships
Awarded



\$2,670,000

In Scholarship Funds



22+

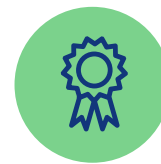
Awareness
Campaigns

In 2023..



142

Ruby's Rainbow Scholarships
granted in 2023!



\$632,000

in scholarship funds awarded!



Markus Lanier

**2022 & 2023 Rockin' Recipient
University of Oklahoma — Sooner Works**

Markus is studying media production and finance at OU, and hopes to have his own film business someday. He says the college experience is helping him develop his independence and work toward his goal of living independently after graduation. He also credits college with helping him become braver about trying new things, like auditioning to be the OU mascot!



Liliana Salinas and Sabine Collins

**2023 Rockin' Recipients
Austin Community College — STEPS**

Lili and Sabine are friends who are both attending the STEPS program at Austin Community College, where Sabine is studying communications and Lili is pursuing General Studies. Both are accomplished swimmers who have won numerous medals at Special Olympics and Unified events. Sabine even won gold at the Special Olympics National Games, where she represented Team Texas!

Year in Review



When I look back on 2023, I am filled with pride and amazement. WOW, was it a year of incredible growth for our organization! There were tons of highlights throughout the year as we worked hard to carry out our mission, with the help of so much love and support from our amazing community!!

For starters, Ruby and I were so excited to be **interviewed by Al Roker on *The Today Show*** in January! It was an amazing experience, and just a huge honor to get to meet and joke around with Al while spreading the word about what we do here at Ruby's Rainbow. Ruby even got to show off her trombone skills!!

In March, we were blown away during the 3/21 Pledge when this incredible community of ours **raised over \$600,000** in the two weeks leading up to World Down Syndrome Day. That enabled us to give out more funds and more scholarships in 2023 than ever before—\$632,000 in funds and 142 scholarships, to be exact!!

That raised our total funds granted since 2012 to **\$2.67 MILLION**—which, honestly, just blows my mind. If you'd told me way back in the beginning that this is where we'd be just 12 short years later...I would NOT have believed you for even one second!! The fact that we've come this far is a testament to how dedicated and passionate this community truly is about rallying around individuals with Down syndrome, and ensuring that peeps of ALL abilities can access higher education and the career paths of their choice...just like anyone else. Again, THANK YOU for supporting our Rockin' Recipients and our mission!! My heart is beyond grateful!

We hosted two **Rockin' RainBOWL events** last summer—one in Austin and one in San Diego. These are always so much fun, because they bring together so many of my very favorite things: bowling, live music and COMMUNITY, which is my #1 jam!! Ruby and I also got to go to Orlando in July to attend the **annual National Down Syndrome Congress convention**. I love the NDSC conference so much, because I love connecting with so many people there and making tons of new friends! We also got to surprise so many Rockin' Recipients with their 2023 scholarships at the convention, which is one of Ruby's favorite things to do (and one of mine, too). Handing over that big check is truly such a special moment!

In September, the Ruby's Rainbow crew (my two employees and I!) traveled to Colorado Springs to attend the **annual State of the Art conference**, where we presented a workshop about what makes a great application. We shared our tips for submitting a compelling Ruby's Rainbow scholarship application as well as how to rock almost any application for a scholarship, job or internship. Best of all, we had the pleasure of having two Rockin' Recipients stand up and speak with us: Mia, a two-time Rockin' Recipient who graduated from the University of Colorado Colorado Springs in 2019 and now teaches American Sign Language at UCCS; and Kylie, a two-time Rockin' Recipient and a junior at UCCS who is studying business as she works toward her goal of opening a cupcake bakery someday.

In October, which is **Down Syndrome Awareness Month**, we had so much fun raising awareness about individuals with Down syndrome by sharing daily photos, videos and stories as we reflected back on our very first October awareness campaign back in 2016, and marveled at how far we've all come since then. More on that in a bit!!

On a more personal front, here's one of the biggest things that stands out to me about last year: **Ruby turned 13 in December!!!** I cannot believe she's a full-fledged teenager now! ...OK, actually, maybe I can 😂 If you follow us on social, you probably already know this lil' lady throws off her fair share of sass every now and again, like any other newly minted teen 😏😏 But she's also still the same ol' sweet, spunky Ruby (just do NOT call her Ruby Doobs anymore—she's outgrown that old nickname!!). She started seventh grade last fall, and she continued playing in the middle school band and is a cheerleader now as well. Ella started high school in the fall, and continued her basketball journey by joining her high school's team. She turned 15 on Halloween, and she's an incredible big sister to Ruby. It's been so fun and such a privilege for Tim and me to watch both of these young ladies grow and blossom this past year!

I just want to say one more huge THANK YOU from the bottom of my grateful heart for every single thing you do to support Ruby's Rainbow, our mission and our Rockin' Recipients. I hope you know how much your love and support mean, and what a difference they truly make in the lives of some incredibly worthy and capable individuals!



Here's to keepin' on rockin' it in 2024!!

With big love and a grateful heart,

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



Amanda Altemus, Ashley McCormick and Kendall Montgomery

Clemson University — ClemsonLIFE

CONGRATULATIONS to our 2023 Clemson graduates! Amanda (2021 & 2022 Rockin' Recipient) loved attending football and soccer games at Clemson and swimming with the Tiger Sharks. Post-graduation, she moved to Florida in hopes of getting a job at Disney! Ashley (2018 Rockin' Recipient) and Kendall (2019—2022 Rockin' Recipient) got an apartment together after graduation, and both have continued working—Ashley in a restaurant, and Kendall in the ClemsonLIFE office. We wish all three grads the very best!

Facts & Statistics



The Facts Are Clear: Your Support Truly Makes a Difference in the Lives of Students with Down Syndrome!

In 2019, we began sending out periodic surveys to our current and past scholarship recipients in order to gather information about the impact of higher education on their lives. Specifically, we were curious whether our Rockin' Recipients were employed, both during and after college; what their living situations were; how important their Ruby's Rainbow scholarships were in helping them access higher education; and whether they felt their lives were enhanced by post-secondary education. **What we've found has been truly inspiring.**

Here's a bit of context

Recent research commissioned by Special Olympics and conducted by the Center for Social Development and Education at the University of Massachusetts Boston shows that just 34% of adults ages 21–64 with intellectual disabilities (ID) are employed. By contrast, 83% of adults of the same ages without disabilities are in the labor force. Furthermore, research published by The Arc of the United States has shown that a minority of adults with ID—only 20%—live independently, while 80% live with caregivers (who are usually family members).

When we compare these national findings to our own data that we've gathered internally about our Rockin' Recipients, they give even more strength and meaning to our mission. It's clear what a **positive effect post-secondary education can have** in the life of an individual with ID.

In the four years since we began gathering information from our Rockin' Recipients, these are the trends we've found:

98%

have reported they are **glad they attended higher education** and that their programs **helped them achieve their goals.**

69%

of our **scholarship recipients who have graduated** are employed.

73%

of our Rockin' Recipients **live independently** (alone or with housemates), in college and after graduation.

87%

have reported that it would have been **difficult or impossible for them to attend their higher-education programs** without the support of their Ruby's Rainbow scholarships.

What does all this mean?

Higher education gives individuals with ID a major leg up in terms of employment opportunities and readiness, independent living skills, and leading a life that is meaningful and fulfilling. We hope all our supporters feel proud of their contributions to our Rockin' Recipients' lives and education. **You are truly making a difference!**



Baylee Auger

**2019 & 2021—2023 Rockin' Recipient
Boise State University**

“Since going to college, I have shown myself I can do it. I have been working on my abstract thinking, critical thinking, problem solving, decision making, and communication skills in college classes and with the Miss Amazing program. I think these skills will prove to be useful in my personal and professional life.” CONGRATULATIONS to four-time Rockin' Recipient Baylee, who won the 2022 Idaho Miss Amazing Jr. Miss Division, maintained a high GPA during her years at Boise State, and earned her Associate's degree from BSU in December 2023!

Fundraisers, Awareness Campaigns and Events



The 3/21 Pledge

Watching this community come together during last year's 3/21 Pledge was such a meaningful experience! We had set a fundraising goal of \$500,000, which we thought was pretty lofty—but thanks to the incredible generosity of so many people, we were able to blast right through that goal and **raise over \$600,000 together** by World Down Syndrome Day on March 21!! That was just mind-blowing, in part because it enabled us to grant a total of \$632,000 last summer to 142 Rockin' Recipients all over the country who are pursuing their dreams of higher education and independence. That was more total funds than we've ever been able to award in one year before, and more Rockin' Recipients than ever before as well! THANK YOU again for supporting these incredible students in their educational pursuits, and for dreaming so big with us!!



Ruby's Rockin' RainBOWL!

We hosted a Rockin' RainBOWL in Austin last summer and one in San Diego as well. Both family-fun events were such a good time, complete with bowling, live music, laughter and COMMUNITY—my very favorite thing of all! Ruby always rolls out the first ball at each RainBOWL event, and we always have several Rockin' Recipients in attendance along with so many members of the incredible Down syndrome community. Best of all, between the two events we were able to **raise even more funds to support more students rockin' that extra chromosome** in pursuing their dreams of higher education and independence!



Down Syndrome Awareness Month

The theme of our 2023 Down Syndrome Awareness Month awareness campaign was "Then and Now!" All month, we shared throwbacks from one of our favorite shoots ever. It was so fun revisiting where we started with the #RubyandNellaRocktheFuture awareness campaign back then in 2016...and comparing those old photos and memories with pics, videos and stories showing where Ruby and Nella are now.

What I have realized is that so many of the things I hoped and dreamed for Ruby back in 2016 still hold true today. We are still dreaming BIG and believing with our whole hearts!!! The biggest difference between THEN and NOW is that today, we are dreaming more with Ruby and Nella instead of for them. They have their own dreams and goals now, which makes my heart so happy to see!



Sujay Kolli

**2022 & 2023 Rockin' Recipient
Ferris State University — Ready For Life Academy**

Sujay studies marketing, social skills and photography at Ferris State. He is also very proud to have recently earned his driver's permit! His advice to other college students with Down syndrome: "Follow your path wherever it goes and don't give up."

2023 Financials & Strategic Plan



In 2023, we carried out the third year of our three-year Strategic Plan first implemented back in 2021. Originally conceived as a road map to help us ensure that Ruby's Rainbow is working steadily toward our key long-term goals as a growing organization, our Strategic Plan guided us through some exciting new benchmarks of progress last year! We hope you are as pumped about these initiatives as we are. We're especially proud of our new Rockin' Recipient Advisory Committee (more on that below!), and grateful these essential voices are front and center as our organization develops through its second decade.

We are also very proud that, as always, our administrative and fundraising costs took up only a small portion of the overall Ruby's Rainbow budget in 2023. Only 10% of last year's budget went toward those costs, plus 2% toward sustainability. Fully 88% of the funds we spent as an organization directly supported our mission of providing scholarships for students with Down syndrome to pursue higher education, and spreading awareness about their amazing capabilities.



Rockin' Recipient Advisory Committee



We are very excited to have realized a longtime dream in 2023 by launching our Rockin' Recipient Advisory Committee! Rockin' Recipients are an essential part of Ruby's Rainbow, and we value their voices as and input as an integral part of the work we do. We wanted to find a way to utilize their lived experiences and perspectives in a more direct and constructive way—and that's how the Rockin' Recipient Advisory Committee (RRAC) came about.

Made up of former Rockin' Recipients, the RRAC plays a valuable role in helping shape Ruby's Rainbow into the future. In 2023, the RRAC gave vital input on special projects, events and initiatives such as planning a Donor Appreciation Event; brainstorming on other Ruby's Rainbow events; assisting with fundraising by working with the 3/21 Pledge Committee; and helping with national advocacy efforts.

The Rockin' Recipient Advisory Committee is open to all past Ruby's Rainbow scholarship recipients who have graduated from their post-secondary programs and want to get more involved with Ruby's Rainbow, now and into the future!



Donor Appreciation Event

Ruby's Rainbow hosted an end-of-year Donor Appreciation Event on December 7 to thank donors for their generous support of the Ruby's Rainbow mission and to honor their efforts in advocating for individuals with Down syndrome! Planned by our Rockin' Recipient Advisory Committee (RRAC), this fun and celebratory virtual lunch-hour event focused on the many ways these donors made an important impact throughout the year. We also shared our goals for the organization heading into 2024.

Two Rockin' Recipients from the RRAC spoke at the event, sharing about the personal impact their Ruby's Rainbow scholarships and post-secondary education have had on their lives. Fun fact: After the event, one of the corporate donors in attendance hired one of these speakers—Mark Hublar, a 2014 Rockin' Recipient, graduate of Jefferson Community and Technical College, and professional motivational speaker—to speak at a corporate event in 2024!



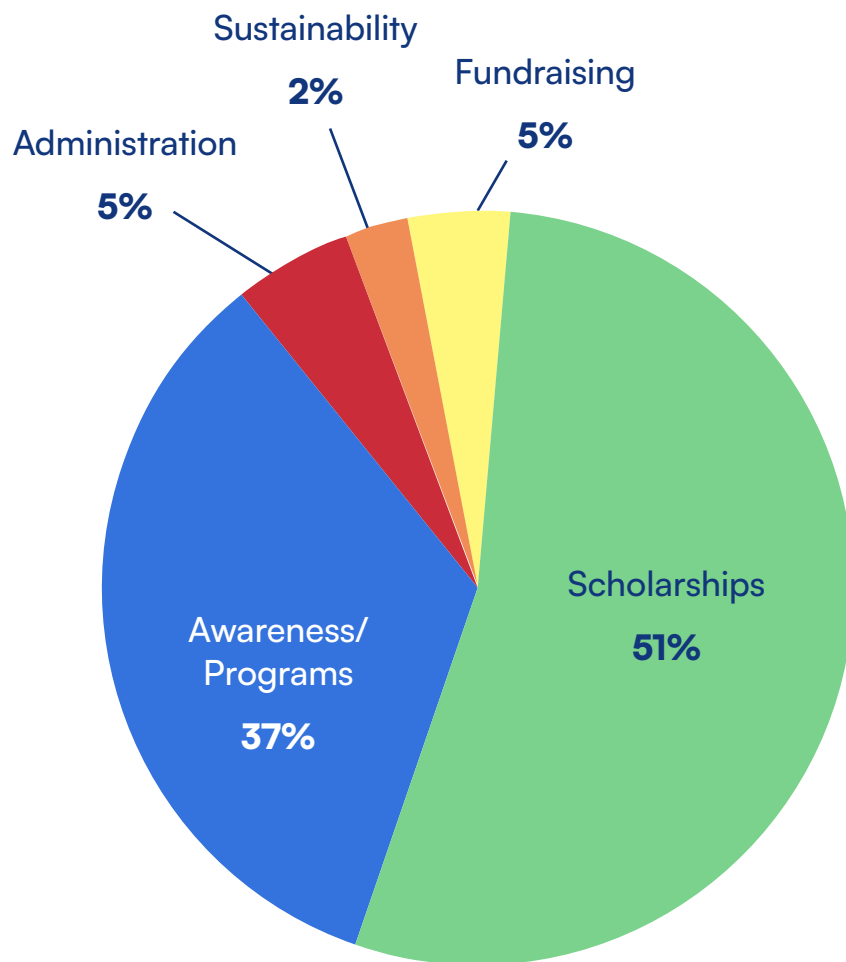
Donor Appreciation Celebration

Thursday, December 7
12-1 p.m. CST

Virtual event hosted on Zoom



2023 Financials



- Scholarships \$567,357 (51%)
- Awareness/Programs \$410,783 (37%)
- Administration \$51,349 (5%)
- Fundraising \$51,349 (5%)
- Sustainability \$23,631 (2%)

2023 tax return



Looking Ahead

Here's one more big THANK YOU for all your love and support! We are so grateful for the difference your generosity makes—not just in the lives of our Rockin' Recipients, but in the lives of everyone around them as well. We truly could not do what we do without YOU!!

With SO MUCH love and gratitude,
Liz, Tim, Ella Mae, Ruby and the RR Crew!



rubysrainbow.org | (512) 879-7801

 @RubysRainbow  @rubysrainbow

We Love and Appreciate Our Sponsors



2023 Sponsor Spotlight!



Maudie's Tex-Mex

An Austin tradition since the early 1950s, Maudie's Tex-Mex is an amazing longtime supporter of Ruby's Rainbow—not to mention, Ruby's all-time favorite restaurant! (Their queso is truly the best!)

2023 marked the ninth Maudie's Cup, an annual golf tournament and fundraiser benefitting Ruby's Rainbow. Since the very first golf tourney back in 2012, Maudie's has raised a mind-blowing \$206,000 on Ruby's Rainbow's behalf. That's 12 Maudie's Scholarship Awards—each one a \$10K scholarship for one of our Rockin' Recipients—plus 41 other Ruby's Rainbow scholarships. Wow!!

We are so grateful to the folks at Maudie's for their partnership, their continuing support and their incredible generosity!

