



IMPACT REPORT



2024

OUR MISSION IS TO EMPOWER YOUTH THROUGH MUSIC, ART AND MENTORSHIP

Guitars Over Guns offers students from our most vulnerable communities a combination of arts education and mentorship with professional musicians to help them overcome hardship, find their voice and reach their potential as tomorrow's leaders. Since 2008, we have served nearly 12,000 students



2024 - 2025 AT A GLANCE

1622 Students

59

School &
Community
Sites

105 Mentors

17 ARTISTIC DISCIPLINES TAUGHT

Guitar, Bass, Cinema, Keys, Dance, Drums, Latin Percussion, Modern Band, Music Production, Songwriting, Spoken Word, Photography & Digital Media, Poetry & Creative Writing, Rap, Visual Art, Vocals, DJing



Miami
Since 2008



Chicago
Since 2014



Los Angeles
Since 2021



New York
Since 2024

OUR IMPACT

HOW DO WE MEASURE IMPACT?

Guitars Over Guns mentees complete biannual surveys using Hello Insight, a nationally recognized platform that helps youth development programs evaluate and respond to the needs of their young people. In these surveys, mentees self-report their growth across six Positive Youth Development (PYD) pillars, including the ability to engage authentically and manage their goals. We also ask them to list the number of supportive adults in their lives who believe in them, broaden their interests, and challenge them to grow artistically, emotionally, and academically.

Guitars Over Guns mentors use healing-centered, culturally affirming PYD practices in program sessions. By investing in the mental health and creative capacities of our young people, we create space for each student to work hard and own their path in life.

Measurement

& Evaluation Tools

- Hello Insight SEL & Positive Youth Development Evaluation Platform
- Student, Parent, and Partner Satisfaction Surveys
- Quarterly Artistic Progress Reports
- Academic Achievement Data

Measurement Methods

- Hello Insight
- Artistic scale measurement
- Academic achievement data



During the 2023-24 program year...



of students said that their mentor pays attention to their lives and can be counted on for help



of students felt encouraged to work through difficult challenges



of students reported that GOGO gave them opportunities to set and reflect on goals



of students demonstrated measurable growth in multiple core Positive Youth Development capacities



of students reported that their mentor encourages them to envision their future

OUR METHOD

Our mentoring-centric approach helps alleviate primary challenges faced by youth in vulnerable communities by providing:



Trusting relationships
with caring adults



High-quality, no-cost arts
education during typically
unsupervised hours



Enriching, safe activities
that foster self-esteem &
creative self-expression



Skill Development



Performance



Trauma-informed mental
health support

Our successful model pairs youth with a caring adult mentor, the unparalleled power of music, and trauma-informed mental health support. Separately, these interventions have proven to increase student academic and social-emotional development and future employability and economic potential. We uniquely combine these to maximize their collective effectiveness. Through weekly after-school music and art instruction, mentoring, trauma-informed care, and performance opportunities after school in Miami, Chicago, Los Angeles, and New York, GOGO is a platform for youth to learn, grow and unleash their leadership potential.

WHO WE SERVE

GOGO largely supports kids affected by systemic challenges that reduce their access to opportunities. Aged 8-18, GOGO mentees self-identify as 44% Black/African American and 46% Hispanic/Latinx, with 96% living at or below the federal poverty level.

THE SKILLS FOR TODAY AND TOMORROW

Through Guitars Over Guns' programs, youth develop core skills and a support system that are crucial for personal and professional success:

- Confidence and self-awareness
- Empathy and a sense of belonging
- Emotional intelligence and creativity
- Self-presentation and expression
- Workforce readiness and life skills
- Trusted mentors & positive role models
- Supportive community of peers

VALUES-BASED OUTCOMES



of Guitars Over Guns students made or maintained academic gains in the school year 2023-2024.



of Guitars Over Guns students improved conduct in their classes over the course of the school year in 2023-2024.



UNLOCKING YOUTH POTENTIAL

Talent is universally distributed, but opportunity is not.

A CRISIS OF CREATIVITY

Complex societal problems are on the rise. Innovative solutions require creativity, yet we are seeing a decline in creative thinking skills. To prepare young people to be leaders and innovators in our rapidly changing world, we must invest in their creative potential now.

THE POWER OF THE ARTS

Research shows that investing in music and the arts significantly enhances creativity, critical thinking, emotional intelligence, and problem-solving: skills that are essential for the success of all young people. Yet, too often, society overlooks the arts as one of the most effective tools for youth development.





MENTORSHIP: THE MISSING LINK

While the arts are our vehicle, mentorship is our engine. Unlike traditional arts-based programs focused on creative expression, our trauma-informed approach seeks to develop the “whole” child, which drives measurable grade improvement, healthier behaviors, lasting relationship building, and increased well-being.

Our impact is exponential. Investing in Guitars Over Guns delivers a 22X return on investment driven by economic activity generated by the arts and emotional intelligence development.

M-POWER

Mental Health & Wellness

Over the past year, our M-Power Mental Health and Wellness program has experienced remarkable growth and expansion across all regions, underscoring the ever-growing need for comprehensive support services for both youth and mentors.

This school year, we've further honed our M-Power curriculum, enhancing its ability to foster positive youth development and healing through intentional dialogue and community-building. Our front-line mentors now lead dynamic, interactive sessions using circle-keeping lesson plans, incorporating powerful opening and closing circles. With a variety of engaging exercises at their disposal, mentors guide their mentees through reflective practices that deepen connection and promote personal growth.

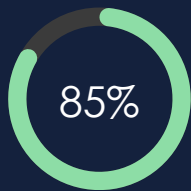
In keeping with our mission, all mentors and staff across the country have received rigorous training in Youth Mental Health First Aid, equipping them with the skills to address and support the mental health needs of the young people they mentor.

From its inception, M-Power has been seamlessly integrated into every aspect of Guitars Over Guns, ensuring that mental health and wellness are central to our mission. By continuously evolving our training, expanding our team, and designing thoughtful, interactive programming, we are better prepared than ever to support our youth on their journey toward resilience and personal growth.



MAKING AN IMPACT

The Childhood Global Assessment Scale (C-GAS) is a widely recognized tool to measure young people's psychological and social well-being. In 2023-24, 62% of students scored 81 or higher, indicating they were doing well. Additionally, 100% of GOGO students whose score indicated some noticeable problems showed an increase of 5 points or more!



FALL 2023

of students increased or maintained their C-GAS score



SPRING 2024

of students increased or maintained their C-GAS score

WELLNESS MENTORS

Wisty Andre, Jessica Freitas, Dana Gatzliolis, Tiana Lanier, Josh Levine, A'ja Prophet

2023-24 WELLNESS INTERNS

We partner with universities to bring social work interns to our sites, pursuing degrees in social work and music therapy. Interns are fully integrated with the music and arts mentor team to support students' creative and holistic growth.

*Kayla Jean Baptiste, Florida Memorial University
Gabriela Cabrera, Florida International University
Alex De Rosa, Florida International University
Stella Diez, Florida International University
Benjamin Eisenberg, Frost School of Music
Jeannette Ferrierra, Barry University
Shadrack Jeanbaptiste, Florida Memorial University
Daniella Lexine, Barry University
Anaya Miller, Florida Memorial University
David Ossa, Jewish Community Services South Florida
Katherine Queirola, Florida International University
Daniela Soto, Florida International University
Judelle White, Barry University*

“In my very first session with the students, I brought up the idea of living life unapologetically yourself. Being able to stick to your values and do what makes you your own person. As I reached my final session with the group, one of the students shared their song from our songwriting activity. She was asked what her inspiration was and she responded that her 6th and 7th grades of middle school were terrible for her but as she went through her 8th-grade year, she lived her life as her own and didn't try to follow anyone else's footsteps. She followed up by saying that this year was immensely better and she is super proud of herself for doing so.”

—Benjamin Eisenberg, M-Power Intern, Spring 2024

“One of our students shared how helpful these wellness discussions and activities were in assisting her through a traumatic experience she faced and how the exposure of Guitars Over Guns' resources assisted in her healing process. She also expressed how grateful she was to have an understanding of why she wants to become a singer and how music has always been an outlet that has brought her so much joy, peace, and serves as her very own therapy. From students from single-parent homes, to students dealing with depression, anxieties and traumatic experiences, the M-Power program provides students with a strong support system and exposure to positive coping strategies to help the students better express their emotions, cope through life's challenges.”

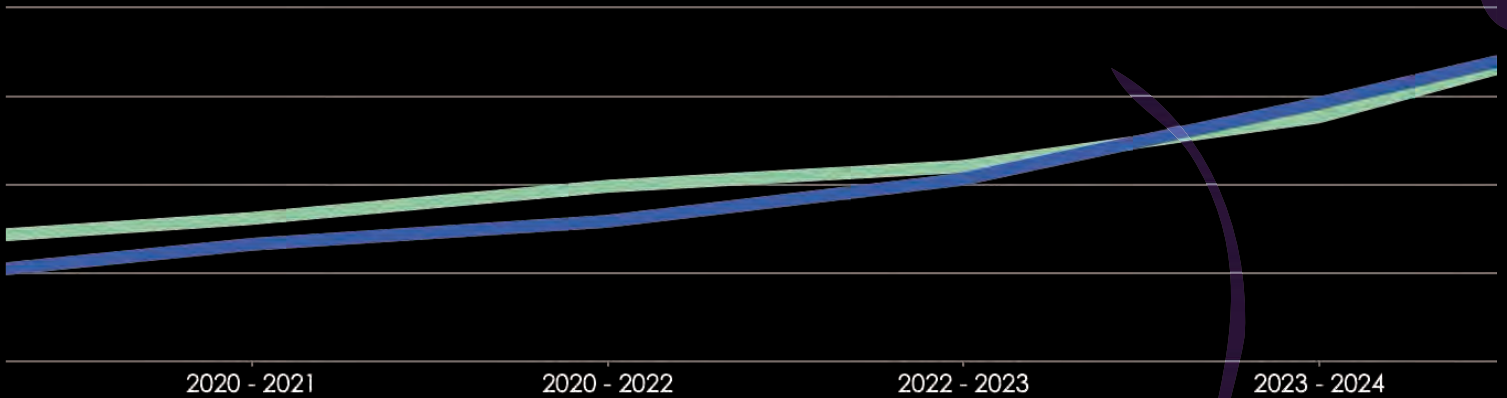
—Daniella Lexine, M-Power Intern, Spring & Summer 2024



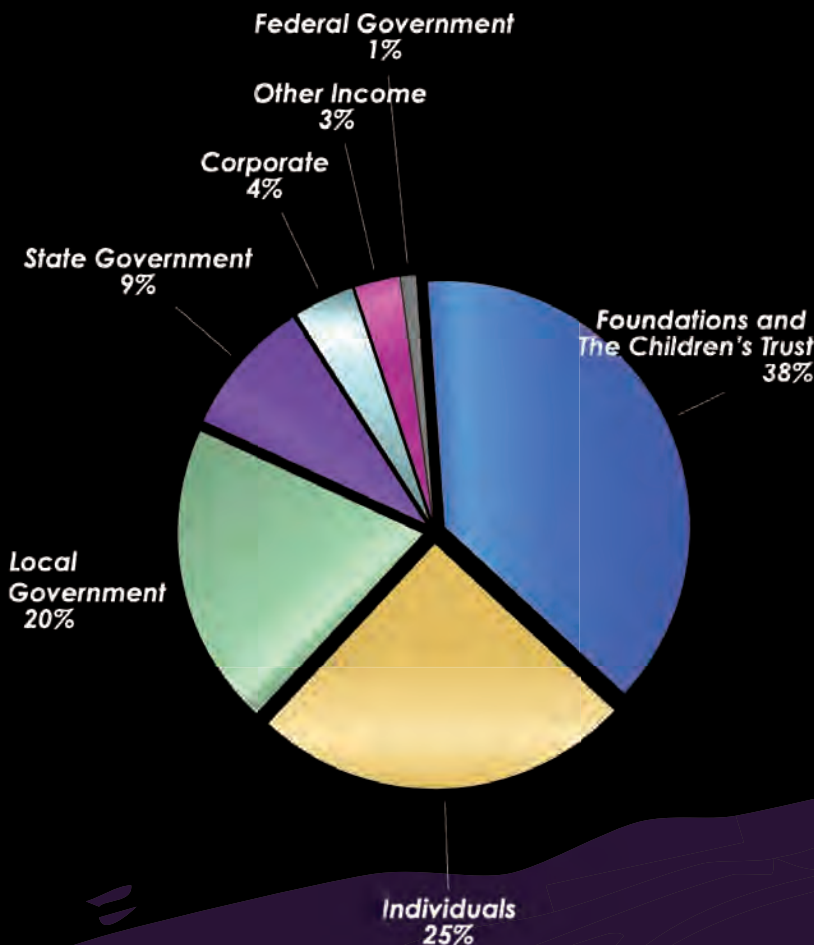
2023-24 | ANNUAL REPORT

ANNUAL BUDGET GROWTH PAST 5 YEARS

Expenses Revenue



WHERE THE MONEY COMES FROM



WHERE THE MONEY GOES

IN 2023 - 2024, YOU SUPPORTED...

- More than 12,000 hours of arts-based mentorship and mental wellness programming for youth at 55 school and community sites
- 60+ student field trips and community performance opportunities
- 5 fully equipped community-based recording studios
- 2 EPs of original student music, professionally produced and recorded
- Increased pay rate for our professional mentors, providing economic sustainability to the artist community
- Our outstanding mentors and alumni elevated into positions of leadership. In 2024-25, 42% of our full-time staff are former mentors, and 6% are program alumni.

STRATEGIC HIGHLIGHTS



Debuted a powerful new version of our signature music/arts and mental wellness curriculum, equipping mentors with the training and resources to carry out the GOGO methodology, stronger than ever.



Launched GOGO New York with a pilot program in two Harlem schools, serving 23 young people and establishing lasting partnerships in the community.



Expanded our relationship with the Miami-Dade County Department of Parks, Recreation & Open Spaces, now serving four public parks including the launch of the Papa Keith Music & Media Studio at Gwen Cherry Park.



Strengthened key community partnerships like Lollapalooza, TEDxChicago, the Obama Foundation's MBK Alliance, and Illinois State Senators Johnson, Sims, Hunter, and Peters to elevate opportunities for our youth in Chicago.



Grew our M-Power mental wellness department nationally with the addition of Wellness Mentors in Miami and Chicago, new partnerships with local universities' social work intern programs, and the implementation of Youth Mental Health First Aid certification for our mentors and staff.



Our outstanding mentors and alumni elevated into positions of leadership. In 2024-25, 42% of our full-time staff are former mentors, and 6% are program alumni.



WHAT'S NEXT?

Our goal is to serve 10,000 students annually across the U.S. as a national leader in arts-based youth development.

Audited Financial Statements and Form 990 available upon request by emailing info@guitarsoverguns.org

New York City

MINI DOCUMENTARY



“Watching GOGO New York – a vision and a dream – become reality, I couldn’t be prouder. I had to pinch myself watching the kids perform, watching the school community rally so hard behind the students, listening to one of the most incredible principals we’ve ever had the honor of working with tell us that we’re reaching kids that aren’t typically engaged or who may don’t normally have the access or opportunity to hold the mic, to tell their own story.”

— Chad Bernstein, CEO/Co-founder

The transformative power of music is undeniable, and it was of the utmost importance to capture the work being done during Guitars Over Guns’ New York launch. Darryl and Nakia Booth, of Media Scheme Productions, helped realize our vision of capturing an authentic look into the lives of our kids.

As an organization who prides itself on putting children first, it was only fitting to have Whitney C., a 5th grader at P.S. 197 John B. Russwurm, narrate her experience. While this is only a glimpse into our program, it’s also an acknowledgment of the unwavering dedication of our staff, school partners, and the larger Harlem community.



SCAN TO WATCH



Program Spotlight

OVERTOWN YOUTH CENTER

A staple of Miami's historic Overtown neighborhood, OYC is a hub for community empowerment and enrichment. In partnership with the Playing for Change Foundation and DJ Khaled's We The Best Foundation, OYC reached out to Guitars Over Guns to envision growing a music program at the center's state-of-the-art music studio facility. With a program launch in December 2023, GOGO hired and trained dedicated mentors in our trauma-informed curriculum, who now facilitate OYC programming both after school and during the summer for middle and high school youth.

During GOGO's summer camp at OYC, students created original RnB songs that appeal to kids like themselves. From learning production with Julian to singing their hearts out with Ronnie, students encouraged one another through what Ronnie describes as "friendly competition." He recalls this dynamic as a "great way to see how badly the kids wanted to prove themselves from all levels of confidence and musical experience." From brainstorming to songwriting, recording, and feedback, Julian and Ronnie emboldened students with the confidence to collaborate and let their true voices shine. This process culminated in the creation of the two catchiest hits of the summer: "All I Do" and "Future Role Model."

Performing their original songs at OYC's final summer showcase further drove students to shine and reflect on the impact of their newfound GOGO family. By the way the songs captivated the showcase's young audience, "you would've thought a celebrity walked in," recalls Julian. This fun atmosphere and the success of GOGO's OYC program opens the door for an exciting future, with students' musical growth and Julian and Ronnie's powerful mentorship culminating for an unforgettable summer highlight.

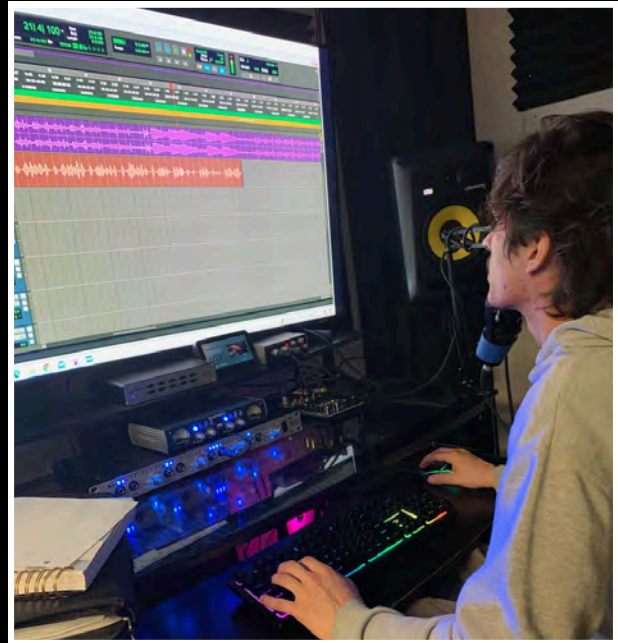


Program Spotlight

A DIFFERENT OUTLOOK ON LIFE

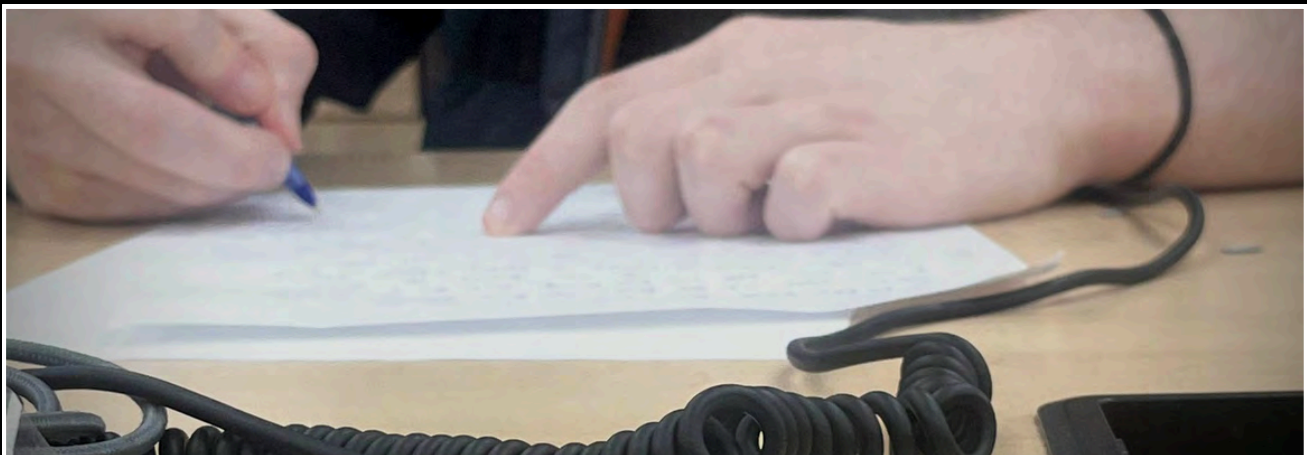
Too often, youth involved in the justice system have stories told about them, but don't always have the chance to tell their own story. In 2023-24, with the support of the Marx Fund, GOGO piloted a program at the Juvenile Electronic Monitoring Program at the TASC Reporting Center, working with 39 Cook County juvenile probation clients. Our mentors guided them to learn skills in songwriting, rap, and music production, ensuring the presence of caring, dedicated adults in their lives while creating safe spaces for them to express themselves, tell their stories, and improve their self-esteem.

Youth involved in the justice system face an increased risk of adult incarceration, decreased likelihood of high school graduation, and worsening of mental health. "Many of our youth lack strong social support and resources to help them navigate difficult circumstances," says Angela Blunt, Reporting Center Supervisor. "The TASC Reporting Center believes that having Guitar Over Guns here teaching music twice a week benefits them in the most fundamental way." Our partnership with TASC presents a unique, challenging, but very rewarding program for GOGO mentors. To hear it from our mentees, the impact couldn't be clearer. "It makes me look at a different outlook in life when it comes to



changing myself and changing my decisions," says James, a TASC mentee. "Really, I see Guitar Over Guns as a way to express myself," adds another mentee, Elijah. "Before I got into music production I didn't know what I wanted to do. [My mentors] Ron and Dolan helped me figure out what I wanted to do, and it helped me work with other people a little better."

Thank you to Senator Mattie Hunter for supporting this program!

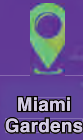


OUR SITES



MIAMI GARDENS

- Carol City Middle School*
- Lake Stevens Middle School*
- Miami Carol City Senior High School*
- Myrtle Grove K-8 Center*
- North County K-8 Center*



Miami Gardens

Golden Glades



North Miami

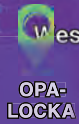
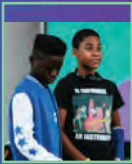
NORTH MIAMI

- Linda Lentin K-8 Center
- North Miami Middle School
- North Miami Senior High School



OPA-LOCKA

- North Dade Middle School



OPA-LOCKA

BROWNSVILLE / ALLAPATTAH

- Brownsville Middle School
- Georgia Jones-Ayers Middle School



LITTLE HAVANA

- Citrus Grove K-8 Center



SOUTH MIAMI DADE

- Coconut Palm K-8 Academy*
- Redland Middle School
- Richmond Heights Middle School
- Cutler Bay Middle School
- South Dade Middle School
- West Homestead K-8 Center*
- Homestead Middle School
- Homestead Senior High School
- Leisure City K-8 Center*
- Mandarin Lakes K-8 Academy*
- Miami Southridge Senior High School



COMMUNITY-BASED PROGRAMS

- Demps Park
- GATE Program @ Jackson Health
- GOGO Studio Homestead @ Live Like Bella Park#
- North Dade Ambassador Band
- Oak Grove Park
- Overtown Youth Center
- Papa Keith Music & Media Studio @ Gwen Cherry Park
- South Dade Ambassador Band – The Atomic Lollipop



SUMMER PROGRAMS

- Genesis Hopeful Haven @ Live Like Bella Park
- Miami-Dade County Parks Music Camp @ Live Like Bella Park
- Music Camp @ Little Havana Leadership Learning Center
- Music Camp @ North Miami Middle School
- Music Camp @ Overtown Youth Center
- Music Camp @ Oak Grove
- Music Camp @ Dennis C. Moss Cultural Arts Center
- Music and Art Camp @ Lake Stevens Middle School
- Papa Keith Music & Media Studio @ Gwen Cherry Park



*powered by the Arts Access Miami Fund at The Miami Foundation

#powered by the Office of Commissioner Danielle Cohen Higgins, Miami-Dade County District 8, SafeSpaces and SafeSummers grants

OUR SITES

WAUKEGAN AND NORTHERN SUBURBS

- Mosaic Hub#
- Waukegan High School Brookside Campus#
- JNAC Creatives#
- John R. Lewis Middle School#
- Boys & Girls Club of Lake County#



WEST SIDE

- Roberto Clemente Community Academy*
- Rusu-McCarten Boys & Girls Club
- Washington Irving Elementary School
- William H. Brown STEM Magnet School
- William P. Nixon Public School



SOUTHWEST SIDE

- Evergreen Academy Middle School
- James Shields Middle School
- Curie Metro High School*
- A.O.N. Productions Career Pathway*+



South West Side



South Side

SOUTH SIDE

- Art in Motion
- Chicago Collegiate High School+
- CICS Prairie +
- CICS Lloyd Bond Charter School
- Gary Comer College Prep Middle School +
- Kenwood Academy High School*
- Gary Comer Youth Center +
- Haven Studios +
- Juvenile Probation Program @ TASC
- Haven Cinema+
- Cinema Career Pathway



SUMMER PROGRAMS

- Camp GOGO @ Covenant Harbor
- Haven Studios
- Kenwood Academy High School*
- Curie Metro High School*
- Roberto Clemente Community Academy*
- Haven Cinema



*Powered by After School Matters
 # With the support of Senator Adriane Johnson
 + With the support of Senators Mattie Hunter and Elgie R. Sims, Jr.

NEW YORK CITY

LOS ANGELES

HARLEM

- P.S. 197 John B. Russworm
- Urban Assembly Academy for Future Leaders



Urban Assembly
Academy for
Future Leaders



P.S. 197
John B.
Russworm



HARLEM

UPPER WEST SIDE

MANHATTAN

MIDTOWN MANHATTAN

New York



GUITARS OVER GUNS

LOS ANGELES

Los Angeles

SOUTH CENTRAL

FLORENCE

- USC Hybrid High School



South
Central

Vernon

Huntington

WATTS

NICKERSON GARDENS

Willowbrook

OUR SUPPORTERS

\$25,000 + [CLICK HERE FOR A FULL LIST OF SUPPORTERS](#)



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COX-VADAKAN FOUNDATION

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