



Annual Report

FY 2015-16

*Reaching Individuals, Transforming Families, Elevating
Communities...One Life at a Time*

Higher Ground—A Resource Center

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To Our Donors

Dear supporters of Higher Ground,

Our 8th year at Higher Ground was a year of growth. We acquired our first contract with the state of Arizona—building on our contract from last year—and doubled our annual income. We expanded from after school programming to program implementation during school hours. We looked into developing ways to replicate our outcomes to impact more youth in at-risk situations. Led by our mission of reaching individuals, transforming families, and elevating the community, we began supporting families in other areas of their life and created more sustainable partnerships in the community.

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We improved the strong team of staff we had last year and grew from the core group of 4 directors to over 12 staff members and over 20 Americorps volunteer members. We know that programs are useless without a group of passionate, diverse, mission-minded people who are willing to do whatever it takes to build relationships with the youth and improve the overall quality of the delivery of our services. Our staff went through hundreds of hours of training last year on topics such as Social Emotional Learning, Trauma Informed Care, Motivational Interviewing, Positive Behavior Interventions, Behavioral Health Methods, Love Languages, De-Escalation, and many other topics to ensure that our families and youth all receive the same values and methods regardless of who is serving them.

Last year, we saw Higher Ground’s methods go past afterschool programming and become integrated into the regular school day. We also saw Higher Ground impact youth in other organizations through several partnerships that were formed with the community. Higher Ground’s strategic partnerships with other organizations led to the opening of the doors to our first steps in the 3rd part of the mission: elevating the community. Because of our work last fiscal year, we can proudly go into this new year ready to make a lasting impact in the community and integrate into bigger systems, such as our public school system and juvenile justice system. Through your continued support and passion towards our mission, we are now beginning to see a sustainable path for Higher Ground to leave a legacy in the community of Wakefield.

Since Higher Ground became a nonprofit in 2011, we’ve continue to learn and grow in the areas of our finances. Our income trends for the last 5 years as a non-profit organization shows a constant growth of almost 70% or more each year. This financial growth ensures that our community can rely on Higher Ground for future generations. We continued to be an AHCCSS provider for behavioral health services, passed as a Community Service Agency and ensured that our staff got certifications to continue improving our work. We strengthened our partnerships with the community and measured the impact of our projects. With all this growth, we continue to have high satisfaction levels with our students, while never straying from our original method – building effective relationships with every single one of our youth.



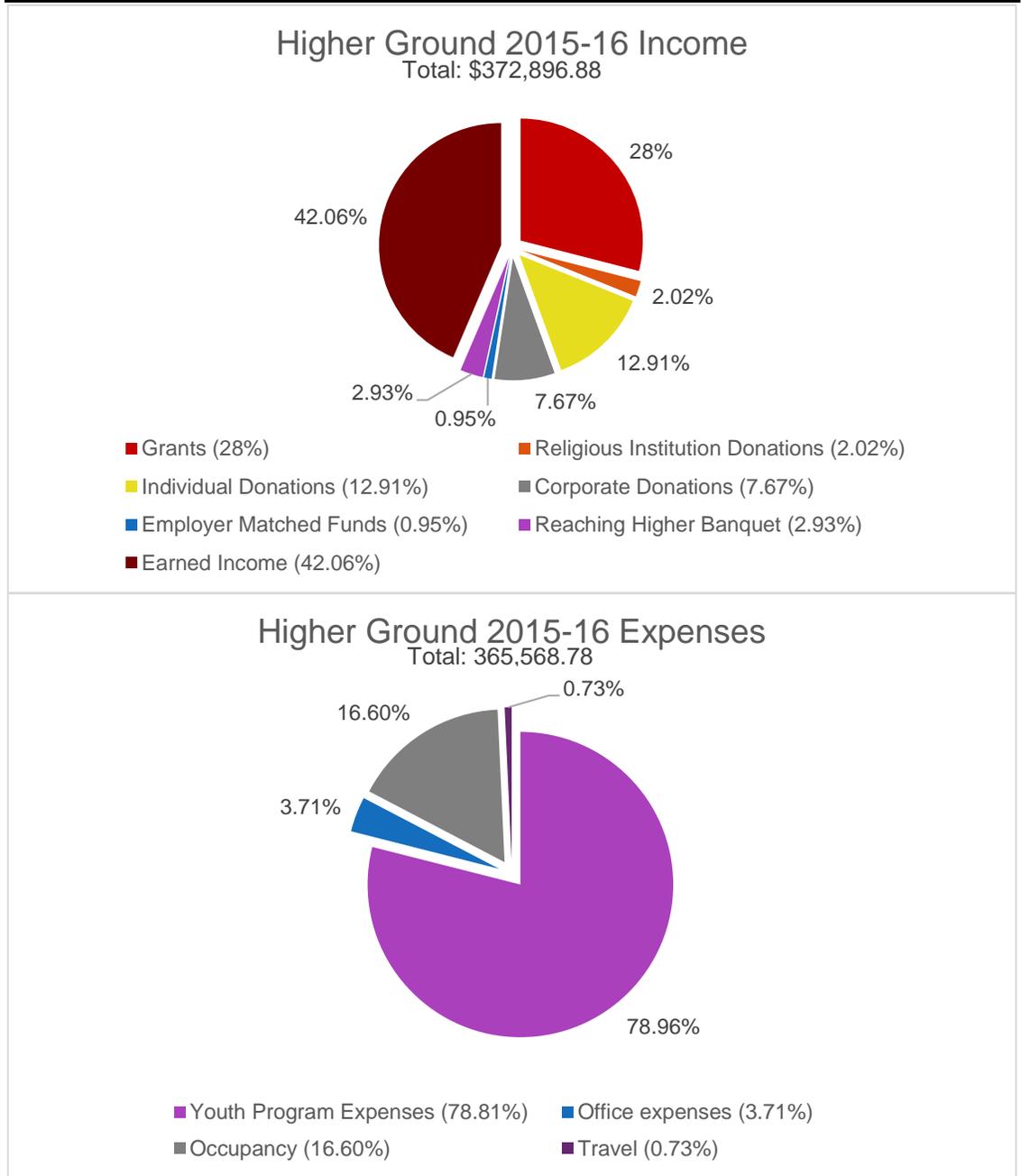
Looking ahead, we want to continue the quality of our work with our youth and families while expanding our impact in the community. We want to begin to get rid of our waiting list and be able to accommodate every family that walks into Higher Ground. We want to continue to provide our services for free in the community and continue pursuing the best quality we can offer. We want to begin to impact entire systems for our youth and help elevate our community by becoming a model for youth programs and outcomes.

We could not have succeeded this year without your help. Thank you for your continued support.

Sincerely,

Jansen Azarias
Executive Director
September 9, 2016

Financial Summary



2015-16 Statement of Comprehensive Income

- Income: \$372,896.88
- Expenses: \$365,568.78
- Profits: \$7,328.10

Financial Growth

Over the past year, our center has grown immensely as we extend our reach into the community and connect with new partners. We have been lucky to increase our funding in a number of key areas, as well as our total profits.

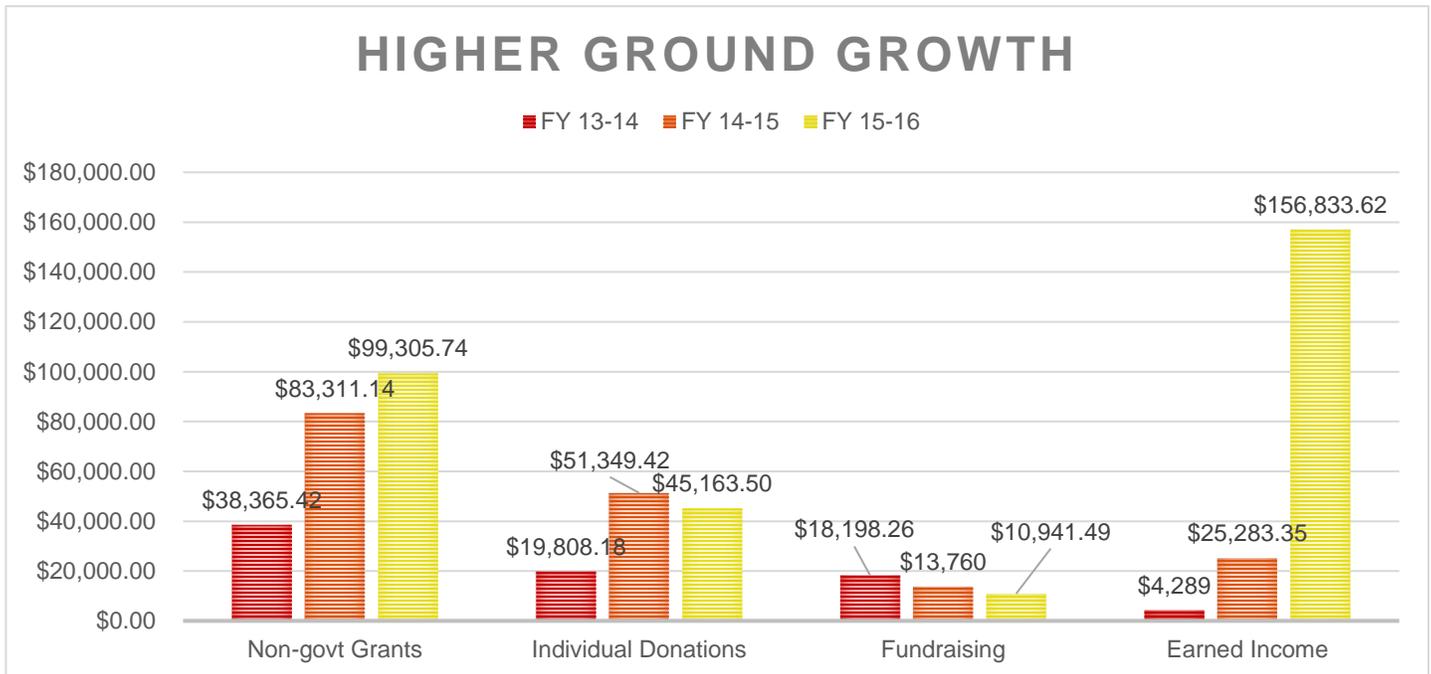


Figure 1: Key Higher Ground funding areas in 2013-14, 2014-15, and 2015-16

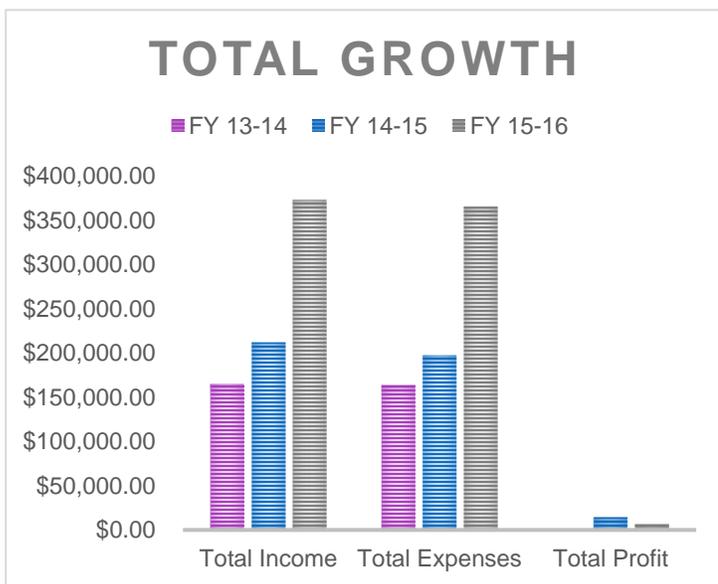


Figure 2: Total growth in income, expenses, and profit

	Percent Growth: FY 13-14 to FY14-15; FY14-15 to FY15-16	
	Income	28.42%; 75.98%
	Expenses	20.30%; 85.27%
Profit	1,366.17%; -49.72%	

Figure 3: Percent growth in income and expenses across 3 years. The center saw large increases in income and spending on programs.

Our Impact

At Higher Ground, we try to better our students in all aspects of life including academics, physical activity, and personal development. Over the past year, this has been apparent through our tangible results.

The Need: Tucson's Community Struggles

The students we help typically come from low-income backgrounds and, therefore, are in greater need of the services Higher Ground provides. The community we serve looks like this:



The Higher Ground Difference (2015-16):



Student Spotlight: Lindsay Kovrig

Lindsay Kovrig started at Higher Ground in 6th grade. During this time, she was uninspired and angry toward several situations in her life. But after introducing her to dance, she began to do full time dance at Higher Ground. After her dance teacher left Tucson, she decided to continue the dance program at Higher Ground and was teaching dance as a junior and senior in high school. She graduated from Tucson High and earned a scholarship at Pima Community College where she is currently majoring in dance. She signed up to be an Americorps volunteer at Higher Ground and continues to mentor students while preparing to graduate from college.



Elevating the Community

"I have been honored to work with Higher Ground for the past several years and consider it to be the most effective after-school program for high risk youth that I have ever encountered. I have been consistently impressed by the passion, knowledge, commitment and depth of caring exhibited daily by Jansen and his staff, and I am immensely pleased to see this organization beginning to obtain the notice and recognition that it so richly deserves!

**- Dan Ranieri, Ph.D.,
President and CEO of La Frontera, Inc.**

"Higher Ground has been instrumental in helping provide our students at Star Academic Center with the additional support they need to stay on track for graduation. They are wonderful partners that deeply care about students in our community."

**- Steve Holmes,
Superintendent of Sunnyside Unified School District**

We believe it takes a community to raise a child. To that end, we have partnered with 16 different organizations to help elevate our community. Higher Ground focuses on combining resources and working collectively with the community for the most effective outcomes possible. Some of our partnerships include:

SUSD Star Academy

"Higher Ground's partnership with STAR Academy is a project to promote graduation rates and to help non-traditional students succeed. Helping students with academics may be the obvious step, but through the effort and relationships the Higher Ground staff build with the students at STAR, our focus is to find out their underlying challenges. encourage vision, helping students with soft skills, and focusing on helping them through their struggles that can easily be overlooked by an overworked teacher trying to handle too many students on their own. After identifying the roadblocks each student faces, which are unique to each individual, we work with them to become successful, not only in the classroom but in their lives amongst the community too."

Pima County Juvenile Court Center

"Youth are more successful when they have positive pro-social activities to participate in and when they are able to form a stronger connection to their community. The Youth Success Center at Higher Ground provides a safe place for our youth to engage in cognitive skill building, career exploration, music, arts and the opportunity to incorporate positive and pro-social activities into their daily routine. Through our partnership with Higher Ground, we are able to provide youth with resources in the community and exposure to activities and mentoring opportunities that they may not have previously had available. We couldn't be any more excited to embark on this journey with the amazing staff at Higher Ground!"

Community in Schools: Americorps

"Arizona Serve, a program of Prescott College, places AmeriCorps members with nonprofit organizations in Tucson and Yavapai County implementing projects to address poverty. This year, Arizona Serve placed a large cohort of AmeriCorps members with Higher Ground; three AmeriCorps VISTA members and fifteen AmeriCorps State members. These AmeriCorps members helped develop new programming for high school students, create a health and nutrition program, and expand existing programming to serve more students."

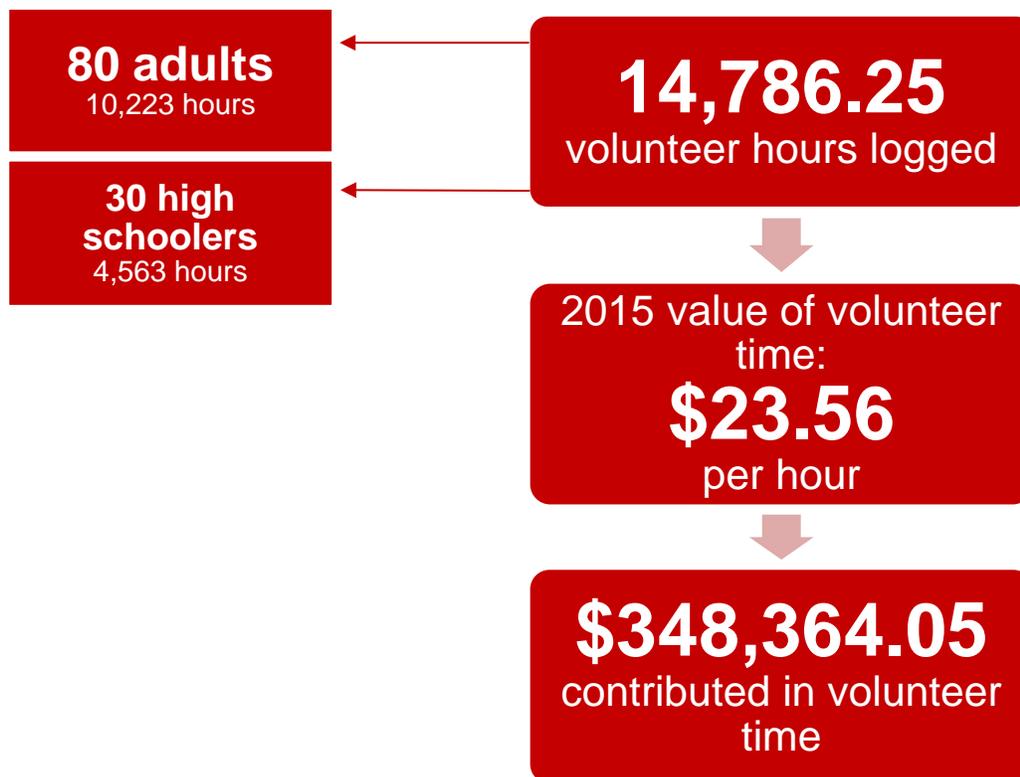
TUSD Hollinger K-8 school

"The Hollinger school community is extremely fortunate to have such a strong partnership with Higher Ground. Our success as a school community is due in part to the ongoing support we receive from their services. Their "wrap-around" services provide academic, emotional and even financial support to our students and families. Their genuine love and compassion for serving others is evident in their daily work. Some specific examples of their support includes bringing our students to school because parents were having car trouble, looking for students in the middle of the night and ensuring they are brought home safely to their families, and advocating for students that are in trouble with law enforcement. As a school we know that we are extremely blessed to have such strong advocates for our families within our community. Hollinger is very fortunate to have Higher Ground as a resource."

Life Changers

Our Life Changers provide valuable services to our center through their generous donation of a valuable asset: time. Many of them study at the University of Arizona and volunteer at Higher Ground during their free time, taking on whichever responsibilities are most needed. Regardless of what role they play, be it a homework tutor, custodian, fundraiser, coach, assistant coaches, office, or even just general volunteerism, they are changing lives every minute they are here. We are who we are because of who they are.

Approximate 2015-16 Life Changer Statistics:



The amazing work of our volunteer Life Changers produced an outstanding 14,786.25 hours of volunteer time over the course of the past two semesters. According to the *Independent Sector*, a leadership network for nonprofits, foundations, and corporations committed to advancing the common good, the value of one volunteer hour in 2015 was \$23.56. This means our Life Changers contributed over \$340,000 worth of time to our center in the past year.

If you are interested in becoming a Life Changer or learning more about the program, please contact Rob Lester at info@higherground.me.

Board Members

Our Board of Directors has the general responsibility of the growth and oversight of our organization. Their primary responsibility is to ensure that Higher Ground meets the financial needs to fully support the community. They raise funds for the operational needs of the center, assist in advising, developing, and oversight of policy, and assist with the general promotion of Higher Ground to support our mission and needs.

Jansen Azarias—Founder & Executive Director

Jansen has guided the formation and growth of Higher Ground from day one. He is the visionary who, after seeing the need in his own family, decided to start Higher Ground as a way to help kids with their homework. Coming from the Philippines when he was 18, he understood the need to break the poverty mentality from the youth and empower them to believe that they can achieve their dreams no matter what obstacles are in the way.

Senator David Bradley—President

Dave has been an Arizona resident for over 50 years. After earning his degrees while serving in the Navy, he returned to Tucson where he currently lives with his wife and daughter. Dave served in the state legislature from 2003 to 2011 and is now serving his first term in the state senate. Having worked in child welfare and mental health services for over 30 years as a counselor, he is an ideal president for the board.

Barry Richardson—Secretary

Barry, whose sons both attend Higher Ground, has 20 years of leadership experience, with expertise in project/program management, operations, logistics, engineering, and production. He enjoys the challenge of taking a project through full cycle development, from new business opportunities, through design and integration, to implementation.

David Reilly—Treasurer

David has been involved with Higher Ground since Jansen first connected with him at the gym. David offered to train students in jujutsu for free at his facility and has since worked directly with the fundraising components of our center. He is the owner of Undisputed, one of Arizona's largest mixed martial arts facilities.

Victoria Wilson—Board Member

Victoria founded Generation Financial, LLC in 2005. Her experience in the financial industry began in 1994 and concentrates her area of expertise in working with families in their pursuit to meet their financial and estate planning goals, and additionally with business owners with succession planning and comprehensive employee retirement benefits.

Ken Heeter—Board Member

Ken joined the HG board in April 2016. He was a Certified Public Account for 40 years whose experience includes public accounting, real estate development, and 22 years in wealth management services. He co-founded Cornerstone Advisors Inc in Washington in 1983 and served as COO until his retirement in 2005.

Simeon Wagner—Board Member

Simeon joined the Higher Ground board in 2016 after his retirement from the County Juvenile Probation Division after 29 years of service in 2006. He works primarily in the area of criminal justice programming and human services and has also been a member of several councils in his home state of Minnesota.

Contact Information



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