

S.T.E.P.S., Inc.

Striving Toward Empowered Personal Success

ANNUAL REPORT 2024-2025 “Stronger Girls, Stronger World”



Headquarters: 300 State St., #403 | New London, CT 06320

Mailing Address: P.O. Box 1907 | Groton, CT 06340

Email: info@stepsCT.org

Phone: 860-941-7949

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Thank You Grantors, Sponsors & Donors



About S.T.E.P.S.

S.T.E.P.S. is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization that teaches young women self-esteem, self-efficacy, leadership and life skills through afterschool programming and a variety of other activities.

Our Vision

A world where every young woman has the opportunities and the support to reach her full potential.



Our Mission

Empowering girls and uplifting communities by providing young women the tools necessary to build lives of integrity and self-sufficiency through positive choice.



Message From Our President & Founder



Beatrice Jennette

President & Founder

In 2024–2025, S.T.E.P.S. experienced a significant period of growth as we continued empowering girls to build confidence, discover their voices, and pursue their dreams. This year also marks 18 years of making a positive impact across eastern Connecticut — a milestone we celebrate with gratitude!

We expanded our reach to include 4th- and 5th-grade girls at C.B. Jennings International Elementary Magnet School in New London, giving students more years of support and opportunities. We also welcomed Teachers' Memorial Global Studies Magnet Middle School in Norwich and hosted a vibrant Career Fair at Robert E. Fitch High School in Groton with more than 35 vendors. In a full-circle highlight, a former Board member and a S.T.E.P.S. alumnae joined us as Lead Facilitators, bringing powerful experience and leadership to our programs.

To strengthen our long-term impact, we advanced several strategic initiatives, including preparations to hire our first full-time Executive Director in January 2026. As I reflect on my 18 years in this role, I am profoundly grateful for how this organization has grown and for the girls whose lives we've touched. As we enter this next chapter, we remain committed to expanding opportunities, nurturing potentials, and supporting the bright futures of girls throughout our region.

As S.T.E.P.S. moves through this leadership transition and our strategic investments take shape, I am confident in the path ahead. We are not only extending our reach, we are deepening the quality of the programs that matter most. Together, we are building meaningful and measurable long-term growth.

With heartfelt thanks, I recognize our Board, staff, consultants, donors, funders, supporters, partners, volunteers, and community stakeholders. Your dedication has helped transform our vision into reality.

Thank you for your commitment and courage as we work toward a future where every girl has the opportunities and support she deserves.

Message From Our Board Chair & Founding Member



Vivian Harrison

Board Chair &
Founding Member

Serving as Board Chair for S.T.E.P.S. is both an honor and great responsibility. From our home in eastern Connecticut, we are committed to creating meaningful impact in the lives of young women and in the communities we share. To continue our vital mission, we rely on the support of people like you, our girls and their families, local businesses, and the broader community. Together and through partnerships with organizations that strengthen our purpose, we will ensure S.T.E.P.S. continues to grow and thrive.

Many of the girls we serve come from underprivileged and underrepresented communities. Thanks to your generosity, we are able to open doors to new and exciting opportunities that would otherwise be out of their reach.

Your support demonstrates to these girls just how much they really matter and why the work we do is so essential to their growth and future. With your help, S.T.E.P.S. can continue to expand, reaching hundreds more girls who long for a sense of sisterhood, encouragement and love.

Here in this report, we will share with you how your gifts directly help.

On behalf of S.T.E.P.S.' Board, thank you for believing in our mission and for helping us make our community a stronger, brighter place. We are deeply grateful for all you do, and we look forward to continuing this journey together.

Meet Our Board Of Directors & Officers



Beatrice Jennette

President & Founder



Vivian Harrison

Board Chair & Founding Member



Deborah Evans

Treasurer, M.B.A., C.P.A.



Kat Kobyluck

Board Member, B.A.



Gay Clarkson

Emeritus Board Member,
B.A. Art History, M.S. Art Education



Ornet Hines

Board Member, M.B.A.



Shareah Bree

Board Member,
Undergraduate

Meet Our Programming Team



Tonya Jackson

Program Director



Wendy Ladd

Assistant Director



Fern Cipriani

Lead Facilitator



Elizabeth Gowitzke

Assistant Facilitator



Nicole Wheeler

Lead Facilitator



Maria DePina

Assistant Facilitator



Ashley Riddick

Lead Facilitator



Minerva Gonzalez

Assistant Facilitator

Afterschool Programs

Project4Success & Ready4theWorld

S.T.E.P.S. provided afterschool workshops in Groton, New London, and Norwich for girls in grades 4–12. These programs focused on strengthening mental health and wellness, building self-esteem and self-efficacy, developing leadership skills, and preparing participants for their futures through college and career readiness.

Students participated in workshops covering self-esteem, leadership, avoiding peer pressure, positive body image, and self-advocacy. For high school students, we include financial management, dating violence prevention, employment skills, career guidance, and community involvement.

S.T.E.P.S. successfully maintained both the continuity and the high quality of our programming. Our expansion into younger grades at C.B. Jennings International Elementary Magnet School proved to be highly effective. Reaching girls earlier continues to be a key factor in long-term success. By increasing the number of workshops centered on mental health and wellness, we reinforced our commitment to providing meaningful support at a critical stage in their development. Whether in the classroom or in the community, S.T.E.P.S. offered a consistently positive and stable environment where girls felt safe, valued, and empowered to grow beyond their circumstances.

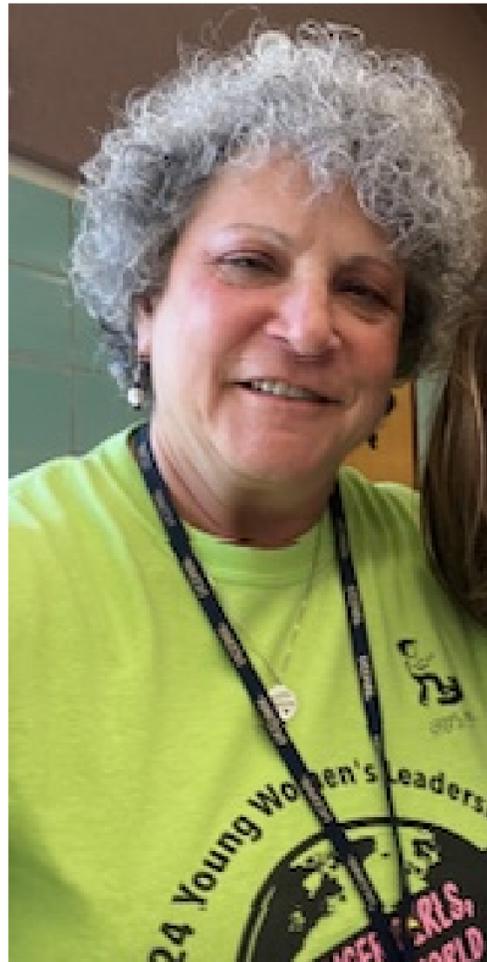
S.T.E.P.S. also provided enriching offsite activities that broadened students' perspectives and strengthened community engagement. Participants enjoyed a variety of enriching experiences, including attending The Nutcracker at the Garde, touring colleges throughout the tri-state area, supporting the Gemma Moran Food Center, participating in the L+M Auxiliary annual fundraiser, and more.



“I now know what I have to do to get into a good school so I can live my dream of becoming a pediatric doctor.”

Meet Fern Cipriani - Lead Facilitator

“I wish that every young woman could understand how valuable and strong they are. If they believe in themselves and stand up for themselves, they will achieve what they set out to do. I always tell them, they are their biggest and best advocates, so believe in yourself and everyone else will.”



When I retired after 25 years of teaching, a S.T.E.P.S. member reached out to me. As I listened to her tell me all about the wonderful things STEPS does for girls in our community, I knew this was for me. I've seen what support and a little push every now and again can do for people, especially teenagers, and jumped at the chance to be able to continue to provide both.

During my time with S.T.E.P.S. I have noticed leadership skills being demonstrated by the girls. I have watched a girl who was very quiet become comfortable talking about herself and the changes she wants to make for herself.

Seeing the successes the girls have achieved is what I find most rewarding.

I love that they know I care about them and am always available to them. Earlier this year, one of my high school girls named the text thread we have Girls Empowerment! She is part of a group of girls I met when they were in 7th grade and are now 11th graders. I love the changes I have seen in them as they grow. Three of them are class officers this year and 7 of them are involved in a program where they are earning college credits.

Another young lady, new to S.T.E.P.S. this year, came on the College Fair trip we took. On the way home she told me she loved me and loved S.T.E.P.S. and asked when we were going to the food bank to help out. It's moments like this that I realize how much I love my job and how important it is what we do for our girls.

Meet A'Charee Sampson



My name is A'Charee Sampson, and I am a junior at Norwich Free Academy. I'm involved in numerous extracurricular activities and constantly push myself to excel academically. This year, I'm taking all college-level courses, participating in more than five clubs, and playing sports year-round.

After high school, I plan to attend college to pursue my dream of becoming a forensic scientist. In my free time, I enjoy many activities and my favorite is writing poetry.

Last year, I had the honor of competing in a Juneteenth pageant, where I was crowned Miss Juneteenth. I've earned over 25 medals and trophies for sports, a medal from the ACT-SO National NAACP competition, and many certificates from schools and organizations.

As you can probably tell, I'm a very busy young woman, and sometimes life can feel overwhelming.

One thing that has helped me stay grounded is S.T.E.P.S. They've played a major role in my journey, helping me navigate life with encouragement, support, and reassurance.

The S.T.E.P.S. leaders have become more than mentors—they've become family. Earlier this year, I had the amazing opportunity to participate in the I Am Empowered Luncheon & Fashion Show organized by S.T.E.P.S. From the workshops, to meeting new people and learning new things, I enjoyed every moment.

Through this experience, S.T.E.P.S. taught us how to walk with confidence, make a powerful impression, and, most importantly, strive for success. I will forever be grateful to be part of this organization. The women of S.T.E.P.S. and the message they share with young women will always stay with me.

Annual Young Women's Leadership Day

S.T.E.P.S.' annual Young Women's Leadership Day at Mitchell College continued to be a powerful source of inspiration and growth for girls across eastern Connecticut. Participants engaged in a full day of hands-on learning and skill building, with sessions focused on yoga, mindfulness, self-defense, vision boards, leadership, healthy relationships, financial fitness, nursing, and more. A keynote speaker and a series of interactive workshops, led by community leaders and professionals, provided meaningful guidance and real-world insights.

The event emphasized mental health and wellness, STEM/STEAM pathways, and college and career readiness. Students explored new interests, gained essential life skills, and built confidence as they connected with peers and mentors. With transportation and meals provided, all participants were able to fully engage in the day's activities.

By the end of the event, the girls left with a renewed sense of pride, strengthened leadership abilities, and a deeper connection to both one another and their broader community.



“At the leadership class I learned how to be more confident and to trust my abilities as a leader.”

“I Am Empowered” Fundraiser

S.T.E.P.S. hosted its inaugural luncheon and fashion show , “I Am Empowered...To Be That Woman,” at the Port 'N Starboard Conference Center at Ocean Beach Park. Designed as both a celebration and a fundraiser, the event provided critical support to ensure our girls continue receiving the highest-quality programs and services. What unfolded, however, was far more meaningful than we imagined.

Over several weeks leading up to the event, participants met with our team and professional stylists to select outfits from a wide array of clothing, shoes, handbags, and jewelry. These styling sessions offered the girls a unique opportunity to make choices that reflected their personalities and built confidence through self-expression.

On Saturday, March 29, the girls arrived early for professional hair and makeup before taking the stage. The day featured two fashion shows, a delicious lunch, and inspiring presentations, creating a powerful atmosphere of pride and empowerment. The community’s support was evident throughout the event and had a profound impact on the girls’ self-esteem and sense of possibilities.

“I Am Empowered...To Be That Woman” marked an important milestone for S.T.E.P.S. Not only did it raise essential funds, the event also strengthened community connections and provided life-changing experiences for the young women we served and for all the attendees. We are excited to carry this tradition forward in the years to come.



Moderator & Panelists



Fashion Models



Committee Members

“I never thought I could actually walk in a fashion show before today, and I did it!”

Inspiring Poem by A'Charee Sampson

Below is the poem I wrote and performed at our I Am Empowered Luncheon and Fashion Show



I am empowered.

*I've learned to celebrate the woman I'm becoming,
Not just the instrument but the hands that are strumming.
Plucking the strings of life, each note my own,
Finding my rhythm, my truth fully shown.*

*I now know my power to change is infinite,
I once thought the path was fixed, but now I see no limit.
The journey was never meant to be a straight line,
But a melody composed of highs and lows, each note divine.*

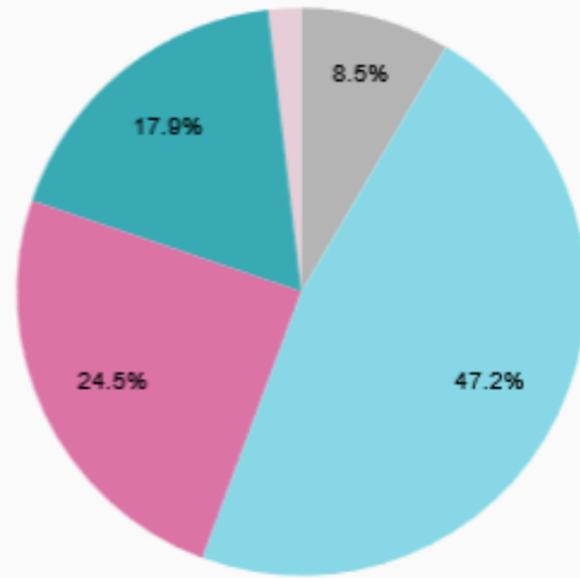
*Striving for strength is like climbing a steep, endless climb,
But step by step, I rise—one moment at a time.
And when I reach the top and look at the ground,
I see the struggle, the growth, the strength I have found.*

Student Demographics

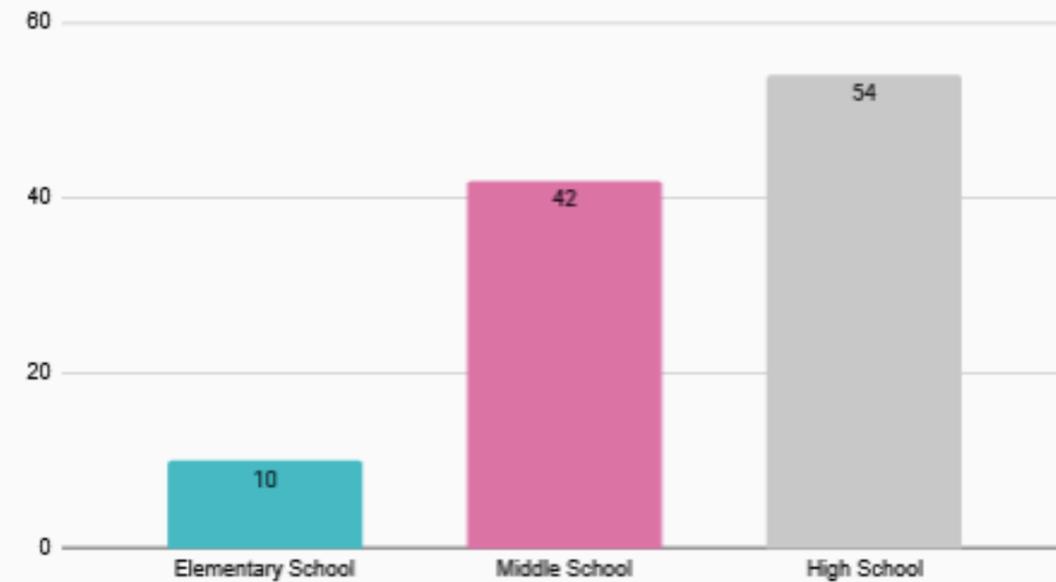
Students' Races

- Asian
- Black/African American
- Mixed-2 or more races
- White
- American Indian/Alaskan Native 2.1%

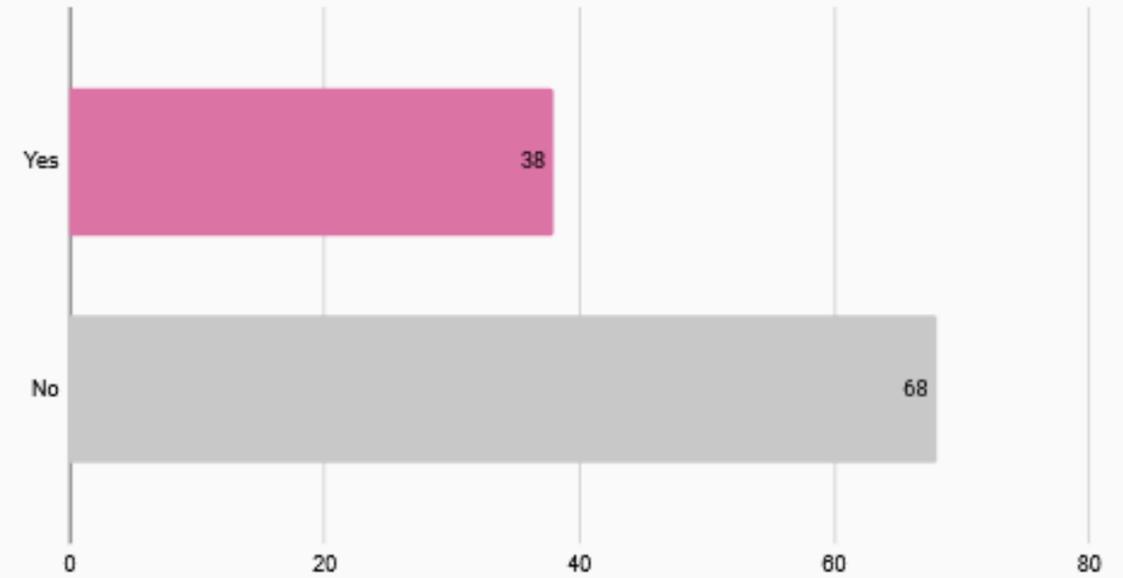
*39 students identified as Hispanic



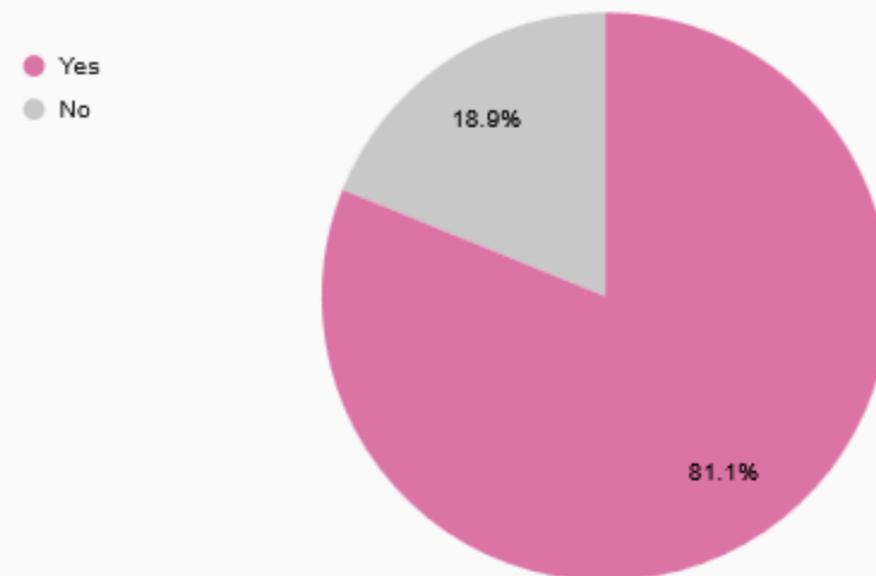
Students' Education Levels



Students who reside in a single-parent household



Students who receive free or reduced lunch



GIRL POWER / Bowl-A-Thon



THERE'S MORE POWER TOGETHER



Our Mission.

GIRL POWER, established in 2018, is a collaboration of 4 nonprofits with similar missions that all support and empower women and girls in New London and Windham County.

Our Team.

Representatives from each of the four organizations meet throughout the year to work together on joint-fundraising efforts and to support each other's programs. Our largest GIRL POWER fundraiser is our bowl-a-thon held annually on the first Sunday in May.

While we are each individually good at what we do for women and girls, we are far better together through expanding our networks and resources. All funding raised is equally divided between all four organizations who are part of the GIRL POWER collaborative. S.T.E.P.S., Inc. acts as our GIRL POWER fiduciary for all our collaborative efforts.



S.T.E.P.S., Inc.

STRIVING TOWARD EMPOWERED PERSONAL SUCCESS
Empowering Young Women Since 2008

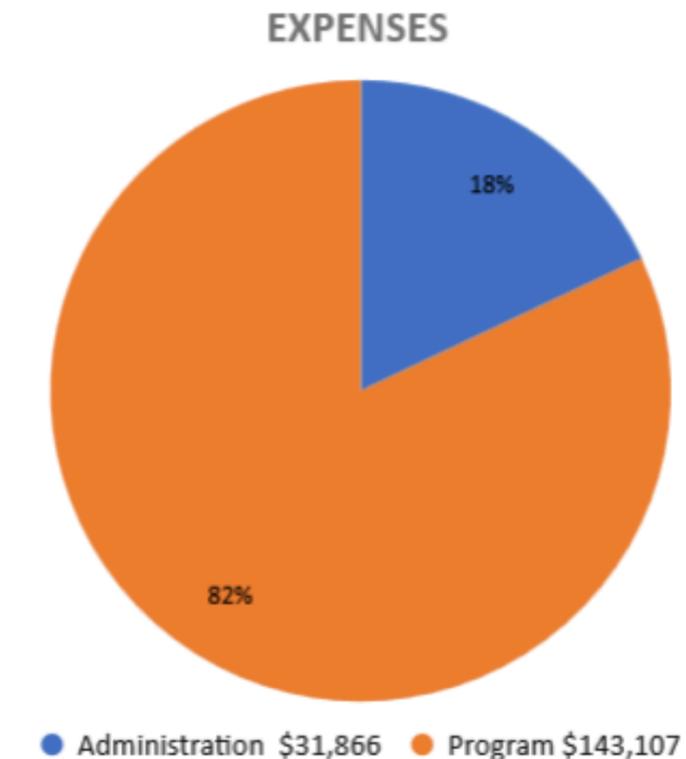
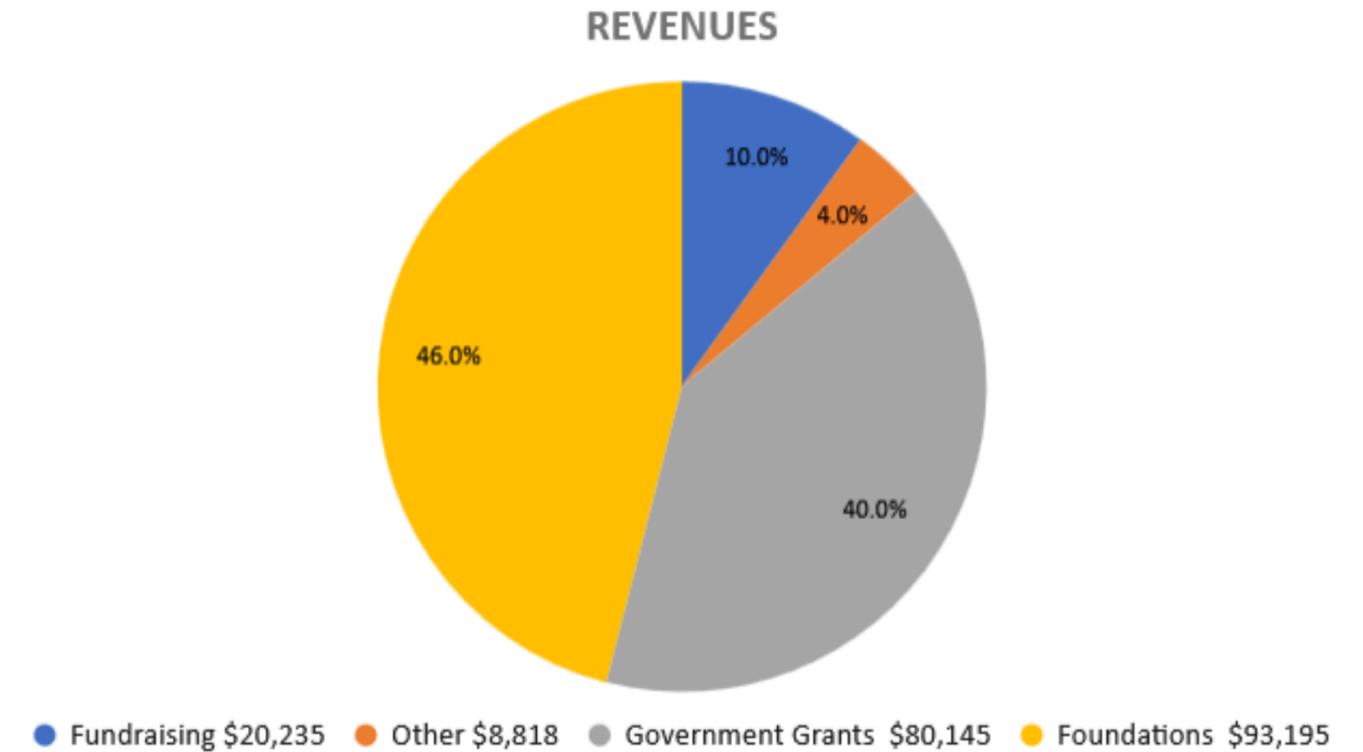


SOROPTIMIST®
Investing in Dreams

2024-2025 Financials

In fiscal year 2024 -2025, S.T.E.P.S., Inc. ended the year with net income of \$27,621. Revenues were driven by \$93,195 in public grants, \$80,145 in government grants (state and local) and \$20,435 in fundraising income.

Expenses were driven by \$95,055 in payroll expenses, \$28,224 in professional and consultant fees, \$9,522 in transportation expenses and \$10,620 in room and office rental expenses.



Grantors and Donors - We Appreciate You

We greatly appreciate the support of **ALL** grantors and donors who helped us to achieve our mission of empowering girls and uplifting communities.

SUPPORT - \$1,000 +

Bodenwein Public Benevolent Foundation
Chamber of Commerce of Eastern Connecticut
Chelsea Groton Bank
Dominion Energy
Henry E. Niles Foundation
Kiwanis Club of New London
Nordson Corporation
Rotary Club of Mystic
The Joseph A. Baloga Trust
Dr. Craig & Roberta Trost

EDUCATE - \$3,000 +

Bank of America Charitable Gift Fund
Dime Bank Foundation, Inc.
Groton Utilities
Mohegan Sun

EMPOWER - \$5,000 +

ChelseaGroton Foundation
Elizabeth Carse Foundation
Frank Loomis Palmer Fund
Liberty Bank Foundation
Norwich Public Schools

ELEVATE - \$20,000 +

Community Foundation of Eastern Connecticut
City of New London
Town of Groton

INSPIRE- \$30,000 +

Connecticut State Department of Education
Nordson Corporation Foundation

CONSIDER GIVING A GIFT TO S.T.E.P.S., Inc.

We operate solely to teach, mentor and elevate the young women in eastern CT.

Please [volunteer](#) your time at one of our events or provide financial support for our growth and the students we support. Your [donation](#) will go a long way and serve many.