

A photograph of two young women smiling and hugging outdoors. The woman on the left has long red hair and is wearing a white jacket. The woman on the right has dark hair in braids and is wearing a dark top. The background is a blurred green field.

# **S.T.E.P.S., Inc.**

# **2021-2022 Annual Report**

## **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.

# In this report you will find:

Message from President & Founder

Message from Board Chair & Founding Member

Board of Directors

Meet Tonya Jackson – Program Coordinator

Meet Shaneva Edwards – S.T.E.P.S. Girl

Highlights & Features

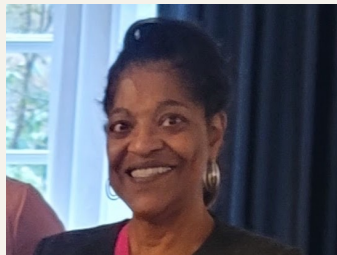
Financials & Supporters

***Fun Fact:** S.T.E.P.S. serves girls in grades 6-12 in Groton, New London, Norwich and now in Plainfield.*



# Message from our President & Founder

Beatrice Jennette



Dear All,

It is another great year here at S.T.E.P.S., Inc., from meeting the changing needs of our students to our amazing new hires. It was a year of continuing to learn and expand our resources to have S.T.E.P.S. always be flexible and poised for action.

The young women in our programs came back to school after the COVID pandemic with concerns in the mental/behavioral health field that we needed to address. We addressed these concerns with the hiring of a new Program Coordinator, Tonya Jackson, a Ph.D. candidate in psychology. Her expertise in mental health and wellness was an important factor. Ms. Jackson brought our Lead and Assistant Facilitators together to a new level of cohesiveness, knowledge and training. This is what our students needed from us and we met that need.

Our Lead and Assistant Facilitators are the backbone of our organization with their continuing dedication and commitment to S.T.E.P.S. They stepped up when we needed them to and prepared themselves for the challenges our girls were facing. They changed girls' lives from showing up as themselves, by the lessons they taught, and the care they showed.

With the growth of our programs, we met another need, by hiring an Administrative Assistant. Maria Foti was hired to fill that position and has brought her excellence in organizing and planning.

S.T.E.P.S. Assistant Director, Wendy Ladd, continued to expand our reach and growth. She played a major role in organizing and managing our 2022 Summer Leadership and Enrichment Program. The program included hands-on projects such as building planters at Home Depot, having a yoga class on the lawn of Harkness Memorial Park, STEM workshops at Three Rivers Community College, and so much more. This was exactly what the girls needed after a year of returning to school while still struggling with COVID challenges. We listened and met the need.

Our Board of Directors and Officers continue their unwavering commitment by serving on committees, raising funds, engaging in program activities and events, and by preparing and executing our strategic plan. I am sincerely grateful for their service and sacrifice.

The Board was led by Board Chair Vivian Harrison. She demonstrated her steadfast leadership through Board meetings and participating in events and activities. She is a role model and motivator for Board members and staff, and she keeps the organization on track toward fulfilling its mission. I appreciate her dedication to S.T.E.P.S. and to me as I navigate new opportunities for the organization.

Thank you to the brave girls and young women we support and work to empower. They work to be positive role models to all of those around them. They are our heroes and I thank each and every one of them for their belief that there is something better out there for their own success.

Thank you staff, volunteers, donors, funders, and community stakeholders who help us be all that we can be. From your kind words to the support you have shown us, thank you. Without your help, we would not be the S.T.E.P.S. organization we are today.

With gratitude,  
Beatrice L. Jennette



## Message from our Board Chair & Founding Member

Vivian Harrison



We may live in a small community, but our spirit is large. You make it possible for us to meet our mission as a nonprofit organization working to advance the betterment of our young women.

You'll read in this report about the many ways your gifts were used to benefit S.T.E.P.S. and our girls. We hope you recognize the immense value of your generosity and are proud of these achievements.

Giving is your chance to invest in the future of our young women. Making a gift to S.T.E.P.S. gives motion to your money and intentions, pushing it forward toward the greater good of our wonderful community. It will be carefully stewarded and mindfully used.

On behalf of S.T.E.P.S.' board and staff, thank you for all you do to make our community a better place. Best wishes to you.



***Fun Fact:*** S.T.E.P.S. provided an 8-week summer program that included 15 field trips!

# Board of Directors

**Beatrice Jennette** *President and Founder*

**Vivian Harrison** *Board Chair and Founding Member*

**Deborah Evans** *Treasurer, M.B.A., C.P.A.*

**Jessica Bessette-Kavanagh** *Secretary, Board Member, B.A. Education*

**Laura Quashnie** *Board Member, M.A. Education*

**Gay Clarkson** *Board Member, B.A. Art History, M.S. Art Education*

**Kathleen Flynn** *Board Member, Esq.*

**Leslie Hawley** *Board Member, Ph.D., M.B.A.*

**Ornet Hines** *Board Member, M.B.A.*

*Fun Fact: S.T.E.P.S.' Summer Leadership and Enrichment Program has been featured in local newspapers and on Eyewitness News.*

# Meet Tonya Jackson – Program Coordinator

## **What brought you to S.T.E.P.S. and why did you join us?**

I recently joined S.T.E.P.S. because I wanted to work at a place where I could make a difference. I am enthusiastically working on multiple projects for S.T.E.P.S. I am very passionate about the process of our young girls' achievement and success here at S.T.E.P.S. I am also aware of the stigma surrounding mental health and offer my support to educate and provide resources for the ones who struggle in that area.

## **What changes in our students have you observed because of their participation in the program?**

Students are motivated and happy to have somewhere that they can share, grow and participate in activities with one another.

## **What do you find most rewarding about your position?**

This is a rewarding position for me to work as the Program Coordinator for S.T.E.P.S. I am constantly on the move, meeting new people, making sure that the programming is secure, safe, ethical and proficient. My team motivates me as they are the ones who are out there doing the work with our girls. There are many things that are rewarding about S.T.E.P.S. My President and Founder, Ms. Bea, is a champion in all that she does. Excellence and accurate empowerment for the girls are essential. This type of energy is what S.T.E.P.S. is all about. Striving to empower our girls is the main goal and there is nothing more rewarding than that!

## **What do you wish every young woman understood about herself?**

I am a go-getter! I am enough! I am prolific! The sky's the limit is not just a cliché, it is the set bar for excellence. YOU CAN BE and DO ANYTHING that your HEART sets out to do. I came from a place in life where not many people thought I would make it, that I would not survive. Here I am a proud American Indian/Black woman who is a Ph.D. candidate in Psychology and a Certified Mental Health Counselor. If I can make it, if I can dream, if I can be confident, safe and secure in who I am as a woman, then they can too!

**Tonya R. Jackson, MS, CMHC**



# Meet Shaneva Edwards – A S.T.E.P.S. Girl

**What school/grade were you in when you joined S.T.E.P.S.?** I attended Bennie Dover Jackson Middle School in New London, Connecticut. I officially joined S.T.E.P.S. in my 7<sup>th</sup> grade year and continued throughout my high school years.

**What did you like best about S.T.E.P.S.?** One thing I loved most about S.T.E.P.S. was that it provided a safe space for other girls to come after school and learn valuable life skills. What we gained at S.T.E.P.S. could never be received anywhere else. We covered a Multitude of topics ranging from financial literacy to mental health awareness.

**What have you been working on lately?** Lately, I have been finishing up my bachelor's of science degree from Lycoming College in Williamsport, PA. I have been majoring in Neuroscience and double minoring in Psychology and Philosophy. I am involved in various clubs and organizations on campus. I have recently wrapped up my summer internship at Pfizer, Inc., in Groton, Connecticut and have presented my research both to colleagues and to my campus community.

**Do you have any advice for future S.T.E.P.S. girls?** Thinking about the girl I used to be, I would encourage future S.T.E.P.S. girls to venture out and meet people as often as they can. Once I was able to gain that sociable skill, life became full of opportunities. I also think that not being afraid to stand on what you believe in, even if it is outside the norm, helps to build a strong and withstanding foundation that I think is crucial for all girls to have.

**What are your plans for the future and how did S.T.E.P.S. prepare you?** My plans for the future include pursuing medical school to potentially become a neurologist. S.T.E.P.S. has prepared me for my future by encouraging me with my studies, being a great support throughout my years, beyond high school, and providing me tools and resources to succeed. S.T.E.P.S. was a pivotal moment for me in coming out of my shell and learning to advocate for myself within spaces I never believed I could be in.

**How has your leadership skills and the internship prepared you to serve the community where you live?** By being in spaces with other like-minded people, it has been easier to hone in on my teamwork and leadership skills. The positions that I am in has helped me to collaborate with peers and create change within the community at large. In the Williamsport community (where I reside for college), I was able to organize a community service event for a women's homelessness center, where we aided in priming and painting their new recreational center. This was possible with my involvement in many clubs and organizations where I've had to work well with others and with my involvement in my summer internship, where I had to give and take criticism and aim to create change. Being adaptive and willing to learn are two major components one must have in order to successfully work well with others and complete the goals they aim to achieve.

**Shaneva Edwards**





# Afterschool Empowerment Programs

S.T.E.P.S. hosted 138 girls, ages 10-18, in Groton, New London, Norwich, and Plainfield Public Schools. They attended 25 weeks of afterschool workshops in person and online. S.T.E.P.S. provided the girls with the important tools, mentoring, resources, and support they needed. We increased students' self-esteem, self-efficacy, leadership and empowerment skills to increase the probability of success. The obstacles these young women faced can only be met with resiliency and confidence if they are to be surmounted.

After months of being home due to the COVID pandemic, we added a mental health and wellness series to our sessions. We provided varied social-emotional workshops in self-care and self-confidence, and we kept this focus all year long. We expanded our staff and our programming to focus more intensely on getting the girls we served over the obstacles they faced during the COVID pandemic.

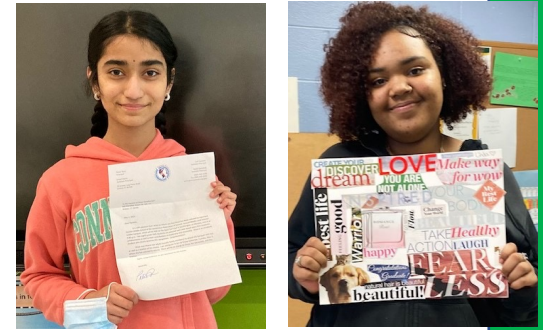
We expanded into Plainfield when Mark Simmons, Director of the Plainfield Recreation Department and Senior Center, contacted us after reading an article in The Day newspaper about our Summer Leadership and Enrichment Program. He expressed his concerns about the lack of opportunities for girls in the Plainfield community and requested that we bring our program to Plainfield Central Middle School. S.T.E.P.S. was welcomed by administrators, staff and students at the school, and we achieved remarkable outcomes.

We also continued our College/Career Mentoring Program. We connected girls with diverse role models and career presenters with a variety of experiences. The women spoke about their journeys, the obstacles they faced, lessons learned, and what it took for them to get to their goal. Bringing in women who had similar backgrounds as the girls brought enormous value.

**This is what the girls said:** "I learned that I can be what I want if I believe it enough." "I learned that it can be difficult sometimes but its good to keep pushing yourself to get to your goal." "When I started in STEPS, I was insecure and depressed. Now I feel better emotionally and don't hate everything about myself." "I learned the power of teamwork in combining our different skills." "You can't make this program better, because it is already amazing."

**This is what a parent said:** "My daughter built her confidence, met new people and it kept her off her phone."

Some girls come to S.T.E.P.S. to learn to love themselves enough to see their way through the obstacles, and we give them the tools and faith to do just that.





# Summer Leadership and Enrichment Program

S.T.E.P.S.' Summer Leadership and Enrichment Program was designed to engage the girls over the summer by providing educational and innovative programming. Attended by 43 girls, it included 15 trips, a mental wellness week and a STEM week. It spanned over 8 weeks, included bus transportation from hubs in Groton, New London, Norwich and Quaker Hill, and provided snacks and a full nutritious meal at every event. The program was available FREE to every young woman in southeastern CT, ages 10-18.

S.T.E.P.S. provided trips and experiences that were fun, exciting and educational. Knowledge and adventures our students may not otherwise get the opportunity to have. The program included Tree Trails in Mystic, Ocean Beach in New London, The Art House in Norwich, and The Gray Goose Cookery in Westerly. They built planters at Home Depot in Waterford and had a yoga class on the lawn at Harkness Memorial Park overlooking Long Island Sound. S.T.E.P.S. also partnered with New England Science and Sailing for an experience that included studying marine biology, kayaking and creek stomping. A week focused on STEM, S.T.E.P.S. partnered with Tech Corps, Nordson Corporation and Three Rivers Community College to give the girls a real college experience.

Our summer also included a weeklong Mental Health and Wellness series in Groton that included workshops in Improv, Radiant Journey Dancing, an in-depth discussion on boundaries and toxic relationships. We also celebrated diversity by having a "Henna Night" where our student and her mother from India shared their culture and provided henna, stencils and their expertise. We talked about different cultures and the parent applying the henna said, "Sharing our culture makes it easy to be accepted more."

The quotes we took from the end of the summer survey spoke mostly about the new friends and friendships girls made. One girl said, "I got to do something new and I learned to be more social and more positive." And another said, "I come to S.T.E.P.S. for fun, new experiences and friendship." One parent responded on a survey, "My daughter was severely struggling with mental health because of COVID and had cut back almost entirely on her interactions with others outside of school. S.T.E.P.S. has helped her to improve her mental health so much. She has made so many new friends. Thank you!"

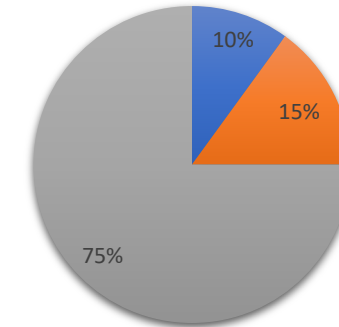


# 2021-2022 Financials

For fiscal year 2021 - 2022, our net income decreased by \$12,936 or 81%. This decrease was driven by an overall increase in total expenses of 90%. The increase in total expenses was driven primarily by expenses associated with adding two new schools (Plainfield and Norwich Free Academy) to our programming suite of schools. These expenses included payroll, meals, supplies and insurance. S.T.E.P.S. also rented office space which added to our expenses in 2021-2022. We incurred advertising and activity expenses associated with our Summer Leadership and Enrichment Program. Conversely, revenue increased by 31% driven by a 54% increase in public grants, a 47% increase in fundraising but we saw a decrease in donations of 216%.

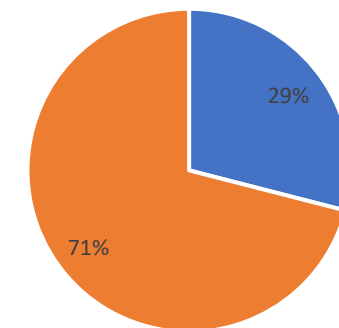
\*\*Impact of Innovation Grant Revenue and Expenses were deducted from this analysis.

### 2021-2022 Revenues



■ Fundraising \$16,702.06 ■ Other \$25,251.25  
■ Foundations \$131,600 ■ Total \$173,553.31

### 2021-2022 Expenses



■ Administration \$49,638.41 ■ Program \$120,806.56 ■ Total \$170,444.97

# GRANTORS AND DONORS - WE APPRECIATE YOU

## ***SUPPORT - \$1,000 +***

Berkshire Bank Foundation  
Bodenwein Public Benevolent Foundation  
Chamber of Commerce of Eastern CT Foundation  
Charter Oak Federal Credit Union  
Dominion Energy Charitable Foundation  
Leslie Hawley  
Mystic Congregational Church  
Mystic Woman's Club  
Pfizer Foundation Matching Gift Program  
Diann Ralls and Denise Ralls-Gaines

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## ***EDUCATE - \$3,000 +***

Chelsea Groton Foundation  
City of New London  
Elizabeth Carse Foundation  
Frank Loomis Palmer Fund  
Nordson Corporation / Foundation  
R.S. Gernon Trust  
The Dime Bank Foundation, Inc.

## ***EMPOWER - \$10,000 +***

City of Norwich

## ***ELEVATE - \$30,000 +***

Community Foundation of Eastern CT

## ***INSPIRE - \$50,000 +***

United Way of Southeastern Connecticut

## **CONSIDER GIVING A GIFT TO S.T.E.P.S., INC.**

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

**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.**