



PHOTO: Ken Ge

# IMPACT REPORT



# 2022





## OUR MISSION IS TO EMPOWER YOUTH THROUGH MUSIC & MENTORSHIP.

Guitars Over Guns offers students from our most vulnerable communities a powerful combination of music education and mentorship with professional musicians to help them overcome hardship, find their voice and reach their potential as tomorrow's leaders. Guitars Over Guns creates safe spaces for youth to express themselves through music and empowers them to make positive choices at school, at home and in their communities.

### 2022-2023 AT A GLANCE

1,247 STUDENTS

68 MENTORS

43 SCHOOL &  
COMMUNITY  
SITES

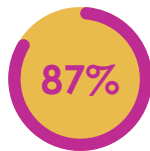
# OUR IMPACT



Since launching in 2008, we have served more than 8,000 students nationwide.



of students reported that Guitars Over Guns has helped them feel more confident taking healthy risks and trying new things



of students could identify a personal goal they set and achieved with the help of a Guitars Over Guns mentor



of students agreed that Guitars Over Guns has helped them learn to appreciate their own talents and abilities



of students reported using the skills they learned through Guitars Over Guns to help them make positive decisions in their everyday lives

Guitars Over Guns uses trauma-informed & culturally affirming Social Emotional Learning (SEL) practices, investing into young people's mental health & creative expression so that students can do the individual work to take ownership of their life path.

## MEASUREMENT & EVALUATION TOOLS:

- HelloInsight SEL & Positive Youth Development Evaluation Platform
- YouthARTS & Science Participant Skills Assessment (Americans for the Arts)
- Educational Engagement Scale for Teenagers (Child Trends)
- Positive Youth Development Inventory (Oregon State University)
- Program Quality Assessment (Weikart Center for Youth Program Quality)
- Student, Parent, and Partner Satisfaction Surveys



# THEORY OF CHANGE

Through arts-based mentoring, Guitars Over Guns is addressing three primary, interrelated challenges facing youth from vulnerable communities in Miami and Chicago: the need for positive adult relationships, the lack of access to high-quality arts programming, and the cycle of disenfranchisement, apathy and violence. Through after-school and community-based programs and trauma-informed mental health support services embedded alongside mentorship, Guitars Over Guns is not only providing quality arts programs and the opportunity to develop creative skills to populations that would not otherwise have access, but also personalized care by adults who are there solely to support their mentees' advancement and development as creative, self-directed, responsible and engaged individuals who are not only on the path to completing their high school education, but also have the capacity to be economically independent and socially, civically engaged leaders far beyond their secondary school education.

## **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 and creative self-expression



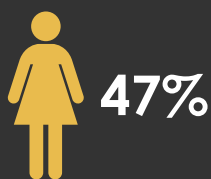


# WHO WE SERVE

**96%** live at or below the federal poverty level

**44%** identify as Black or African-American

**46%** identify as Hispanic or Latinx



## ALUMNI SPOTLIGHT

Gabriel's journey began, as all great journeys do, with a moment that changed everything. "It all started in the very four walls of Mr. De Leon's classroom at North Miami Middle," Gabe said. "After one session, I fell in love with the program." Though he changed schools part way through, Gabe found his way back to GOGO as a high schooler. "Mr. De Leon invited me to be a peer mentor and teach guitar to the younger students. That experience allowed me to realize so many things about myself and how important mentorship really is," he said. "Working with the kids, I grew my capacity as a leader and my ability to understand that everyone has a story that deserves to be listened to."

As for Gabe's story? The talented bassist has gone on to found Kingdom Vybez, a faith-based performing arts nonprofit; has performed at venues including the Adrienne Arsht Center; has shaken hands with President Obama as a guest at the MBK Rising Summit; and now serves on Guitars Over Guns' Board of Directors. Not to mention, he's embarking on his greatest adventure yet – fatherhood. "Guitars Over Guns has shifted my perspective on life and what it truly means to live a life of purpose. This organization has inspired true happiness and a desire to not only help myself but the people and community around me."





# FOCUS ON OUTCOMES

## UNLOCKING LEADERSHIP CAPACITY

Our country is failing to place youth who live in vulnerable and poverty-impacted communities on a path to success. We believe that these youth – who are thriving in the face of adversity – have the capacity to be our greatest leaders.

For Guitars Over Guns, the key to unlocking that capacity is a caring mentor who connects with them through the transformational power of music. We leverage music as a vehicle for expression, a gateway to dignity, a universal language and a bridge to connect youth to a mentor that can help unlock their potential, empowering them to break the cycles that often dominate the realities of their environment. Our students have a positive sense of self, build capacity to redefine and achieve success both personally and academically, and take accountability for their future.

**94%** of Guitars Over Guns students made or maintained academic gains in school year 2021-2022.



# OUR CURRICULUM

Guitars Over Guns' unique curriculum emphasizes social-emotional learning and outcomes through music and arts instruction. After each session, mentors assess students' academic performance, school and program attendance, artistic progress and peer interactions. We use Social Emotional Learning (SEL) measurements to evaluate key competencies.

After-school program participants meet twice weekly throughout the school year. Community-based programs meet for at least 3 hours per week. All Guitars Over Guns programs culminate in a series of gallery showings, performances, recording sessions and/or music videos, and all programming, field trips, instruments and equipment are provided free of charge to our students.

**SEL COMPETENCIES:**  
**EMPATHY**  
**TEAMWORK**  
**INITIATIVE**  
**RESPONSIBILITY**  
**PROBLEM-SOLVING**  
**DECISION-MAKING**

## 14 ARTISTIC DISCIPLINES

GUITAR • BASS • KEYS • DRUMS • LATIN PERCUSSION •  
MUSIC PRODUCTION • MODERN BAND • SONGWRITING •  
POETRY & SPOKEN WORD • RAP • VOCALS • MUSICAL  
THEATER • VISUAL ART • PHOTOGRAPHY & DIGITAL MEDIA



# 2021-22 HIGHLIGHTS



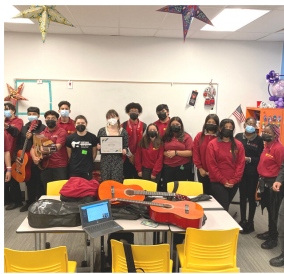
## TEACH IT FORWARD

In Chicago, our songwriting students at Curie Metro High School trained in the same social-emotional learning (SEL) techniques as our mentor team, preparing them to meet monthly at Evergreen Academy Middle School and provide mentorship and guidance to their younger peers.



## A SAFE SPACE TO CREATE

We celebrated the grand opening of GOGO Studio Homestead, the culmination of our expansion to serve the communities of South Miami-Dade through impactful arts-based programming that keeps youth engaged in positive, creative, and safe activities during after-school hours.



## MORE LIKE FAMILY

USC Hybrid High and the Ednovate Charter School Network presented us their network-wide "More Like Family" Partner Award, for our unique contributions to the school's community, culture, and climate. We are grateful to our mentor team for helping us earn this recognition – our first award of its kind in Los Angeles!



## A LIFE-CHANGING EXPERIENCE

Five Guitars Over Guns students were accepted and received full scholarships to study with leading instructors at Interlochen Arts Camp for budding visual and performing artists. From songwriting to digital animation, these students spent the summer honing their crafts, and returned to Miami with memories that will last a lifetime.



## MY CHI. MY FUTURE.

At our Haven Studios program, our mentees performed for Mayor Lori Lightfoot at the City of Chicago's launch party for the new mobile app, My CHI. My Future. The performers did an amazing job on stage at the Harold Washington Cultural Center! Not only were they given tickets to Lollapalooza, but they also were featured on WGN News.



# TESTIMONIALS

## SOFIA "ATLAS" ALVAREZ

### LOUIS SALGAR LEGACY AWARD WINNER 2022

"I did not overcome my journey through mental health by being told all that was wrong with me. Instead I surrounded myself with people who cared enough to remind me what I had to offer and without their help I would not be where I am today. Guitars Over Guns inspired my future and that is something I will forever be grateful for....Thank you for proving to me that things will get better. Thank you for showing me that I have a purpose. Thank you for rescuing my voice that I had nearly discarded. Thank you for rescuing me. Thank you."



## MALIK JOSEPH

### KEYNOTE SPEAKER, 2022 END-OF-YEAR CELEBRATION

"This program has changed my life and I'm certain it has made an impact on others' lives too. This year I lost someone, someone who was like a brother to me. Through all of this, GOGO was like a place of peace for me. It was somewhere I felt safe and every time I opened the doors to my classroom, there's always a bright smile on my face."





# SPOTLIGHT ON: M-POWER MENTAL HEALTH & WELLNESS

At the core of Guitars Over Guns' mission is a belief that all young people deserve a safe space to express their true selves and tell their stories fearlessly and authentically. In the Fall of 2019, we launched M-Power, our first-ever dedicated mental health initiative. The program, powered by a Mental Well-Being Grant from the Florida Blue Foundation, provides trauma-informed social-emotional support to students through targeted social work interventions including no-cost wellness coaching for students, as well as resources for mentors including one-on-one wellness coaching, professional development, lesson planning guidance, and more.

Looking to the future, M-Power is poised to grow its impact, with national initiatives planned to engage Guitars Over Guns students, parents and families in lending their voices and perspectives in an advisory capacity that will help shape our programs to best meet community needs.



**93%** of students improved their functioning (as measured by CGAS), with an average increase of 11 points.

The Childhood Global Assessment Scale (CGAS) is a widely recognized tool to measure young people's psychological and social well-being.



# SPOTLIGHT ON: ANNUAL MUSIC VIDEO PROJECT

## MAKING (HEAT) WAVES

It was a spring break with summer vibes as nearly 120 middle and high school students from across our Chicago region gathered at Fort Knox Studios to put their unique spin on the Glass Animals hit, "Heat Waves." For two full days of music-making, video-shooting, and community-building, students and their mentors enjoyed a professional-grade experience in the studio and on set, with plenty of laughter, lots of hard work, perseverance through challenges, and the satisfaction of nailing each track.

For Tyrese C., the trip to Fort Knox Studios was filled with new friends and new musical discoveries. The 6th grader from Washington Irving Elementary spent over an hour behind the drum kit during a group jam session before turning to bass mentor Dexter Sims and saying emphatically, "I could play this all day!"



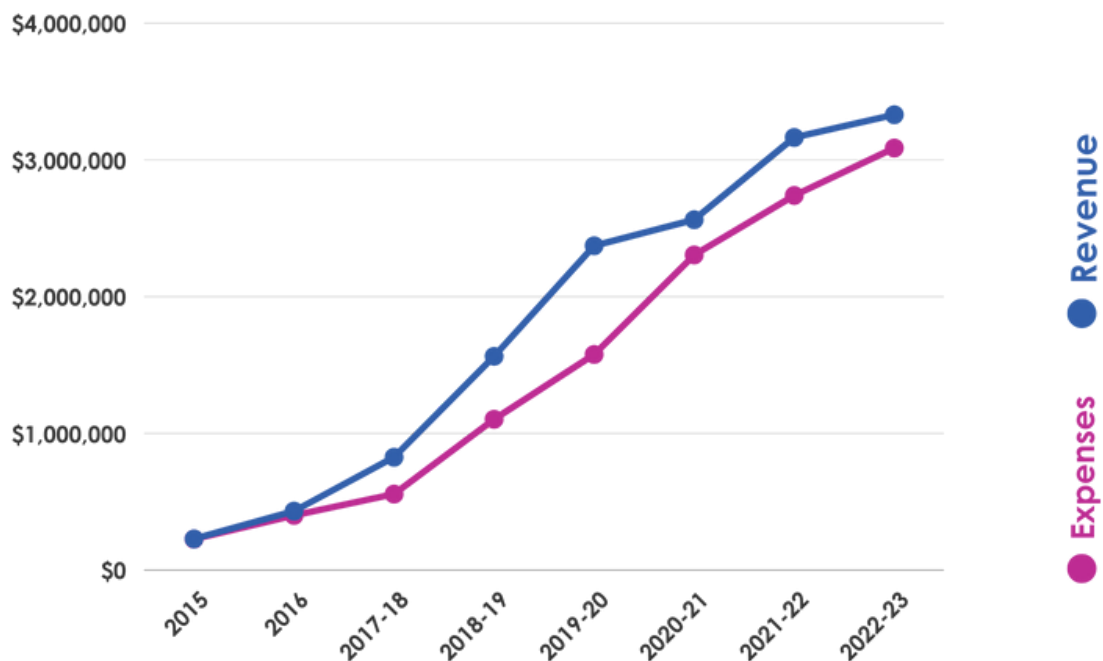
## WITH PRIDE

This year, it was an absolute honor to cover "Be Alive" by Beyoncé from the King Richard movie soundtrack. Students selected this song unanimously because of its powerful message, which represents perseverance through obstacles, believing in yourself, and never giving up.

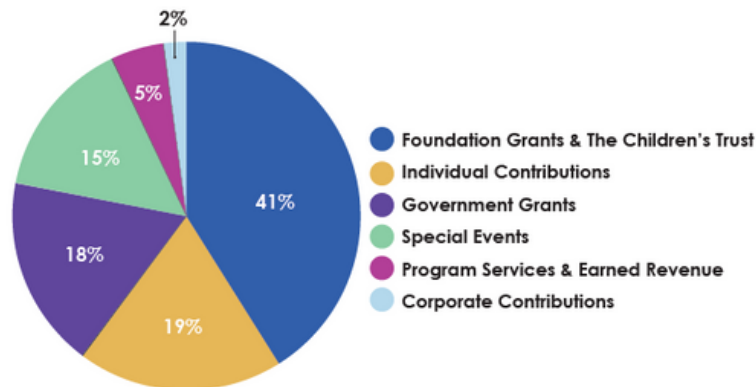
With the help of 48 mentors, Guitars Over Guns students across 20 Miami sites gathered at The Bridge studio for audio tracking, followed by filming at Sandrell Rivers Theater. After the adversities of the past few years, this opportunity for our students and mentors from all across Miami-Dade to collaborate in-person was a priceless reunion. We are so grateful to all the students who contributed to making our biggest, most powerful video yet, by expressing themselves unapologetically, being courageous, and having pride.



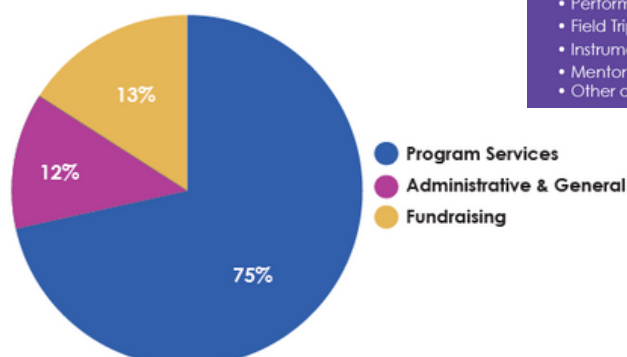
## ANNUAL BUDGET GROWTH SINCE 2015



## WHERE THE MONEY COMES FROM



## WHERE THE MONEY GOES



### Program Services Includes:

- Mentors
- Staff
- Performances
- Field Trips
- Instruments & Supplies
- Mentor Training
- Other operating expenses



# IMPACT LEVELS



\$75 provides  
one mentoring session



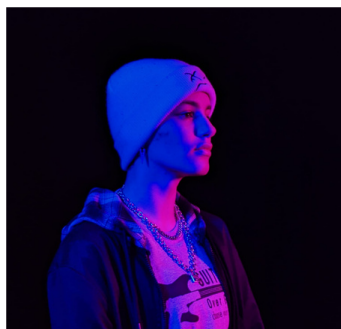
\$100 provides  
an acoustic guitar



\$250 provides  
a drum set



\$500 provides  
a keyboard



\$1,000 supports a  
music video



\$2,500 supports a  
recording session



\$5,000 supports  
a student



\$10,000 supports a  
school program



**J. HOWARD**  
**MUSIC PRODUCTION**



**BERTRAND BOYD**  
**CREATIVE WRITING & POETRY**

# SPOTLIGHT ON: GATE PROGRAM

Guitars Over Guns provides high-quality music mentorship delivered in seamless partnership with the Jackson Health's GATE Program for juvenile weapons offenders.

Guitars Over Guns mentors meet with two cohorts of 6-8 GATE participants weekly for approximately 4-6 weeks. In addition to the mentoring component informed by the GATE curriculum, Guitars Over Guns mentors provide our unique brand of music instruction to encourage authentic expression, relationship-building, and skill-building opportunities for participants.

We champion culturally relevant styles of popular music and art to incubate the mentor relationships key to our students' transformational growth. This approach sets us apart from traditional arts programs, and as research supports, adds a critically important hook to attract students that are both unlikely to participate in extracurricular activities, and most in need of services. For this program, we offer instruction in these key disciplines:

**MUSIC PRODUCTION:** Coupled with incredibly accessible production software and other music-based technology, students learn how to write and produce music that serves as a vehicle for their own voice and a platform for their own creativity. Music production provides a gateway into the world of music and artistic creation that emphasizes technology that youth are eager to master, and provides a much lower barrier of entry than instrumental music.

**LYRICAL EXPRESSION & HIP HOP:** Poetry and creative writing in the form of lyrical expression drives our students to find their own voice and express their stories in a way that they wouldn't otherwise think or be able to do. We have seen our students have transformational experiences through this medium. Most commonly, hip hop and spoken word serve as the starting place for poetic, lyrical expression.





# SPOTLIGHT ON: HAVEN STUDIOS

Haven Studio, located in Chicago's Bronzeville neighborhood, is Guitars Over Guns' first community-based recording studio. In partnership with Mt. Pisgah Missionary Baptist Church, this unique program features no ordinary classroom.

Instead, students have access to a fully equipped professional music studio, allowing them to use industry standard technology to develop original music and learn vital, career-track skills in music production and engineering. Haven Studios offers instruction in these key disciplines:

**STRATEGY/CONSULTING:** Mentees are engaged in strategy sessions and experiences to better prepare them for the complexities of the music industry. Sessions include key considerations such as financial literacy, contract negotiations, building successful partnerships, marketing and more.

**MIXING/PRODUCTION/RECORDING:** The studio experience provides everything needed for mentees to write their own music, create their beat, and record/mix music.

**HAVEN CINEMA:** The cinema program teaches professional cinematography and photography through direct in the field experience led by Dennis Thompson.

Led by critically acclaimed artist Andre "Add-2" Daniels and Dennis Thompson, our Haven Studio students receive instruction and mentorship from some of Chicago's most accomplished music professionals, who guide and empower them to discover meaningful connections through artistic self-expression. Add-2 has received acclaim from Chicago's own, Grammy Award-winning Common, saying, "He is somebody who seems like he really cares about the culture and cares about uplifting people, and that's inspirational to see."



ANDRE "ADD-2" DANIELS  
FOUNDER



DENNIS THOMPSON  
MIXED MEDIA SPECIALIST



# MUSIC CHANGES LIVES. JOIN US.

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## GUITARS OVER GUNS MIAMI

169 E FLAGLER ST.  
SUITE 1134  
MIAMI, FL 33131

BRAX TINKLER,  
DIRECTOR OF COMMUNITY  
ENGAGEMENT & ADVANCEMENT

brax@guitarsoverguns.org

## GUITARS OVER GUNS CHICAGO

954 W WASHINGTON BLVD.  
SUITE 400  
CHICAGO, IL 60607

LISA THOMPSON,  
DIRECTOR OF DONOR IMPACT

lisa@guitarsoverguns.org