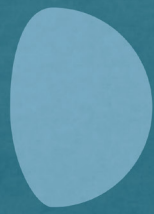


826
MSP



ANNUAL REPORT

2019
2020

MID-CONTINENT GEOGRAPHIC INSTITUTE empowers underserved K-12 students to think creatively, write effectively, and succeed academically alongside a community of caring volunteers.

In this anthology, the young authors of MCI's After-School Homework Help program tackle questions like:

WHAT IS POWER?
WHAT IS YOUR POWER?
WHO EMPOWERS YOU?
HOW DO YOU EMPOWER OTHERS?

As a key part of Homework Help, students engage in weekly creative writing prompts and activities at the Writers' Table. Each semester, MCI publishes a collection of our after-school authors' work.

A LETTER FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



Dear 826 MSP community,

We started the 2019-20 program year with much to celebrate. Our organization turned ten years old, and we became an official chapter of the largest network of youth writing centers in the country, 826 National. We joined forces with our sister chapters in eight other cities to strengthen our work of amplifying youth voices and redistributing power through literacy. The fall semester was full of high enrollment in programs, partnering with community organizations and local authors to deliver programming, and continuing to settle into our youth writing center in South Minneapolis and our Writers' Room at South High (both in their second year).

Then, spring 2020 brought with it a pandemic that significantly altered every facet of our lives. As the pandemic closed our youth writing spaces, we reimagined our programs to ensure that the young writers of the Twin Cities had the educational support and writing platform they needed. We offered academic support to all students and families via Zoom, safely delivered books, supplies, and technology to students' homes, and made writing instructional videos that could be watched by not only our students, but the greater Twin Cities community of young authors.

And then in May 2020, a member of our community, George Floyd, was killed in our South Minneapolis neighborhood. Our city moved into an uprising, and our students transitioned from a spring facing screens to a summer facing unrelenting injustice.

We invite you to read through this report and sit with our heartbreaks and triumphs of the last year. As you will see from these pages, and most importantly from the students' words themselves, being a young author in the Twin Cities at this moment is full of resistance, resilience, and hope.



Samantha Sim-Am



BECOMING 826 MSP

August 26, 2019

The 19-20 program year started with a significant milestone: MOI officially became 826 MSP! As the ninth chapter of the largest network of youth writing centers in the country, 826 National, we amplify the voices of Twin Cities youth on a national scale and collaborate with communities of writers and educators throughout the United States. Being part of this network means enhanced collaboration on programs, professional development, fundraising opportunities, and so much more.





OUR MISSION

Who We Are and What We Do

Our mission is to empower underserved students in grades K-12 to think creatively, write effectively, and succeed academically alongside a community of caring volunteers. To help close the educational opportunity gap caused by systemic racism, 826 MSP empowers diverse communities of K-12 writers in the Twin Cities with free writing, tutoring, publishing, and leadership programs. Core to our model is using creative writing not only as an academic skill-builder, but as a tool for processing experiences, building community, and changing the world.





STUDENTS

*Adam & Ayub – brothers
Grades 6 & 3*

QUICK FACTS:

- *Adam is a 13 year old on a quest to find out who he is.*
- *Ayub is 9 year old on a quest to find hope in his life.*

"IT WAS
ACTUALLY FUN
TO WRITE A
POEM WITH MY
BROTHER"

AYUB, GRADE 3

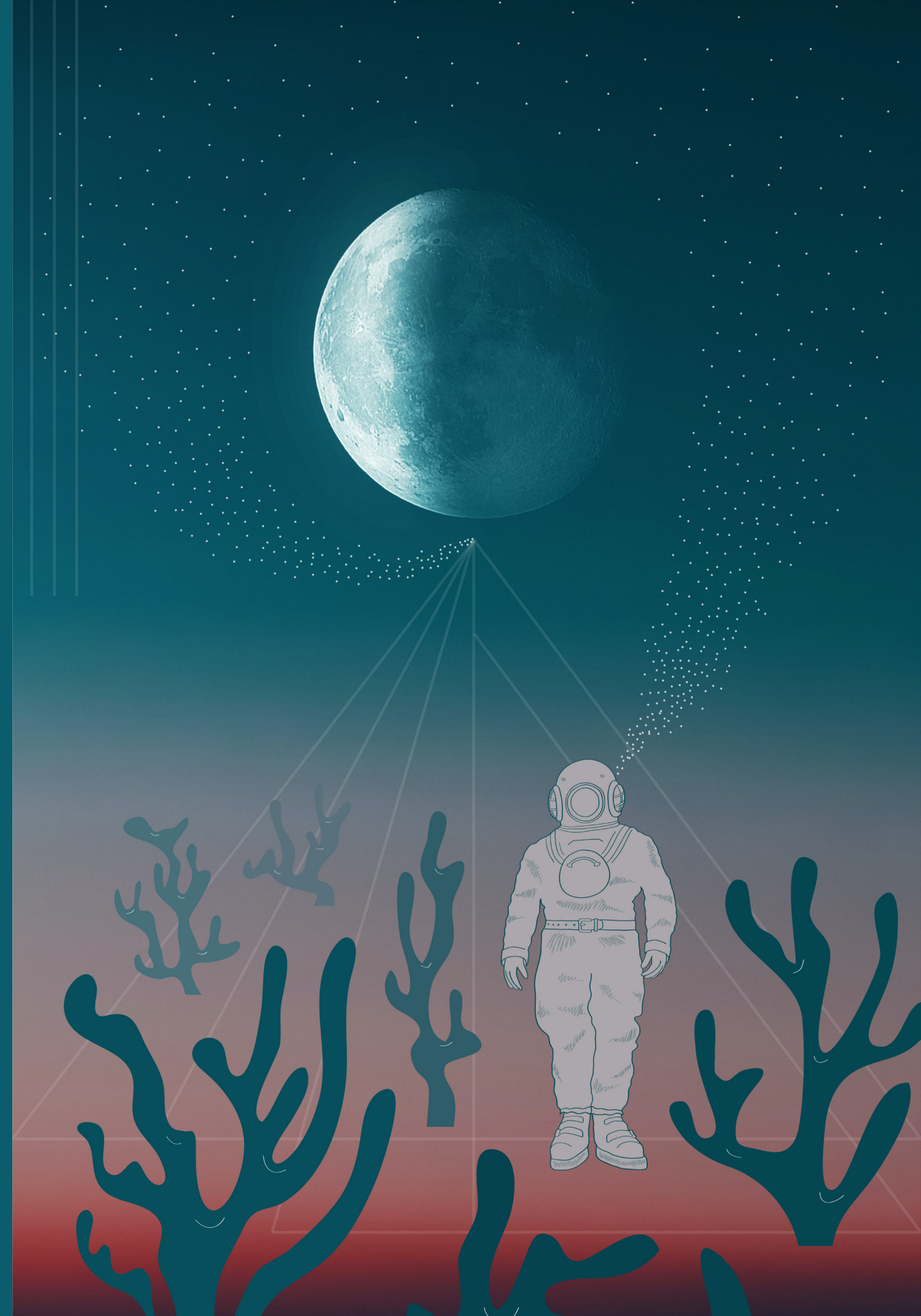


19 THINGS ABOUT HOPE

*Hope is dreams
That are still within us
and the last beacon
and there's still hope for life in this universe
and there's still hope for aliens that live to this day
and there's still hopes and dreams
and the last chance to get something
and there's still hope for other planets
and hope is the last man standing
and hope is magical
and hope is joy
and hope is your last chance
and hope is amazing
and hope is overjoyful
and hope can bring peace
and hope can bring anything*

*- Adam & Ayub, Grades 6 & 3
(2019)*

*Art - Hannah Hiler
Photography - Alexander Andrews*





"WHAT REALLY MATTERS IS BEING THERE"

HEIDI, ASWL VOLUNTEER

AFTER-SCHOOL WRITING LAB

Deepening Community Connections

After-School Writing Lab (ASWL) is a free tutoring and creative writing program which takes place Monday-Thursday from 3-6 p.m. at our youth writing center in South Minneapolis or, more recently, through distance-learning. Volunteer tutors and 826 MSP staff work with students on homework and creative writing activities which lead to publication. Thanks to positive word-of-mouth and high satisfaction in our community

with this program, it officially hit capacity at 75 students enrolled for both semesters of the 19-20 school year. As this program serves young writers in grades K-12, it's accessible to whole families and can be a stable presence for youth as they transition across ages, grades, and schools. The impact of volunteers, in addition to our focus on literacy skill-building and publishing opportunities, makes ASWL especially unique.



Volunteer

Heidi

QUICK FACTS:

- Volunteer since 2017
- Cuttlefish Society member (monthly sustaining donor)

“When I began volunteering with 826 MSP (then MOI) I did so because I needed to do something tangible, something real and active, to make a difference in people’s lives. I’ve gone from being unsure how someone like me, without a background in education, could possibly help students with homework (math!) and writing skills to knowing what really matters is being there. Being there to care and help. Being there to listen, to patiently lend support and encouragement. That the time and attention we give as volunteers is one of the most important resources we offer to our students.”





ALL NATIONS COLLABORATION

Partnership with Indigenous Young Authors

In the spring of 2019, 826 MSP published Indigenous Originated: Walking in Two Worlds with students from the All Nations program at South High School through our program, Young Authors' Book Project (YABP). When we reconnected with these students in the fall, they said,

"LET'S WRITE ANOTHER BOOK!"

To meet this passion and provide continued engagement, we developed a YABP extension project. Our Program Director, Cristeta Boarini, met with these students weekly at our Indigenous nonprofit partner site, MIGIZI to create a literary magazine. When we switched to distance learning in the spring, we hosted a writing workshop with teaching artist Carson Faust and published the All Nations Literary Magazine as part of a virtual powwow in collaboration with the All Nations program and MIGIZI.



YOUNG AUTHORS' COUNCIL

Expanding Youth Leadership Opportunities

As a youth-serving and youth-centered organization, we know that our work is most effective when it's led by youth. This year, we were thrilled to launch our newest program focused on youth leadership skill-building, civic engagement, and writing enrichment for students in grades 6-12. In the Young Authors' Council, ten

students are selected to guide program development, act as representatives of 826 MSP at community events, share input on areas of need, and, of course, to write and publish. In its first year of the program, students met over zoom to engage in writing projects such as writing letters of gratitude to essential workers.



Sarah Warren leading a workshop on 826 Day

CONNECTING WRITERS OF TODAY AND TOMORROW

Increased Work with Teaching Artists

This school year, 826 MSP worked with 19 different teaching artists across our various programs. Many thanks to Maria Isa, Sun Yung Shin, Bao Phi, Tall Paul, Anika Fajardo, Sagirah Shahid, Carson Faust, Ladan Hadafow, Roda Abdi, Kelly Barnhill, Junauda Petrus, Sarah Warren, Warda Mohamed Abdullahi, Isela Xitlali Gómez R, Naomi Kritzer, Safy-Hallan Farah, Nora McInerny, Tom Rademacher, and Dave Eggers. These teaching artists brought passion, perspective and creativity through a variety of engagements—speaking at fundraisers, holding writing workshops, writing the forewords to our books, and most importantly, serving as role models to the young authors of 826 MSP.





TEACHING ARTIST

Sagirah Shahid

Sagirah is a Black Muslim arts educator, poet, and performance artist from Minneapolis.

Sagirah was a guest teaching artist in 826 MSP's After-School Writing Lab and Writers' Room programs.

Sagirah led writing workshops where students wrote poetry about the future, and a workshop where students explored their relationship to power.

"WHAT MELTS THE HEART IS
THE UNFILTERED HONESTY
OF THESE YOUNG WRITERS"

SAGIRAH SHAHID, TEACHING ARTIST





"GIVING TO 826 MSP
MEANS I VOW TO STAND BY
THEIR HOPES AND DREAMS
FOR A BETTER WORLD"

QORSHO HASSAN,
MONTHLY SUSTAINING DONOR

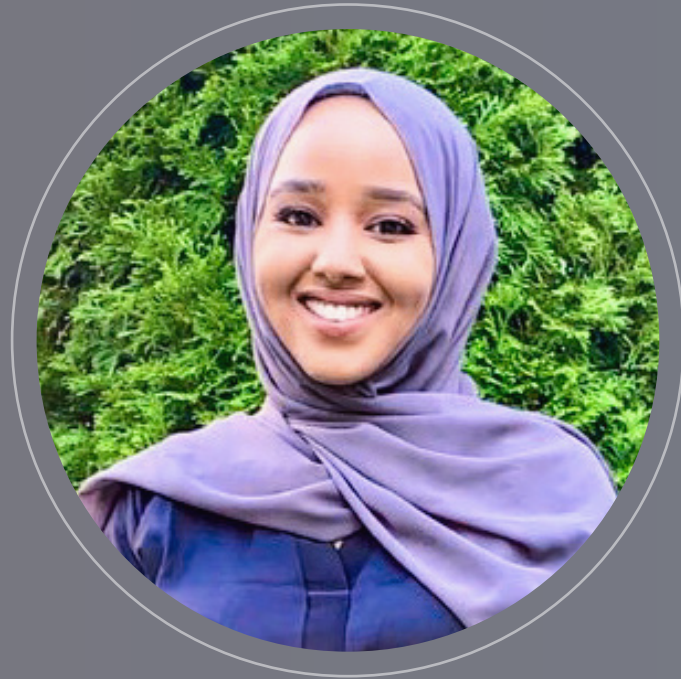
BOOKS FOR BREAKFAST

A Benefit for 826 MSP

This school year also included milestones related to growth and development. We hired our organization's first dedicated fundraiser, Ashley Lustig, and held our largest fundraising event to date, Books for Breakfast. Thanks to our development committee, which includes staff, board members, and volunteers, Books for Breakfast was

a great success! 826 MSP hosted nearly 200 attendees, including 8 young writers from the All Nations program at South High School and special guest, author Nora McInerny. Thanks to our generous community, we raised \$30,000, giving us a strong start to the 19-20 school and program year.





CUTTLEFISH SOCIETY MEMBER

Qorsho Hassan

QUICK FACTS:

- *Joined 826 MSP's board in 2018*
- *Cuttlefish Society member*
- *2020 Minnesota Teacher of the Year*

"As an educator and community organizer, I believe in equipping all students with creative writing tools, academic support, and empowerment. 826 MSP's mission ensures their scholars thrive in education despite systemic barriers. Giving to 826 MSP means I vow to stand by their hopes and dreams for a better world."



NAVIGATING UNCHARTERED WATERS

Distance Learning Amidst a Pandemic

The emergence of COVID-19 radically impacted 826 MSP and our community. Even before official mandates were in place, we chose to cancel our annual Trivia for Cheaters fundraiser in early March. From that point forward, we canceled all in-person programming and events, and all staff moved to remote work. After these initial decisions were made to prioritize health and safety, our first step was to connect with our students and families to communicate changes and assess educational and personal needs.

We began sharing supplies and food immediately as well as reimagining our programming in virtual settings. Writing prompt videos, virtual field trips, letter writing, lending devices and headphones, virtual tutoring with the help of incredible volunteers, and so many other thoughtful pivots kept us connected to our young writers this spring. Even after shifting to distance-learning, we still had strong retention from registered students, demonstrating the high need for academic support to combat times of prolonged learning loss and feelings of isolation.

By the end of the 19-20 school year, we successfully transitioned all of our programs to a distance-learning format. As relationship-building between students and staff, volunteers, peers, and educators is the foundation of our work, we found new ways to stay connected. Despite many challenges, we have tried to find silver linings wherever possible. Virtual programming breaks down the (frequently arbitrary) walls of "professionalism" in that we are now called to text, email, speak on the phone with, and deliver supplies directly to the homes of students, and even see into their homes through virtual meeting modalities. As whole-family engagement is key to serving students optimally, we are heartened by the enhanced relationships, trust, and sense of partnership we have developed this year amidst unprecedented challenges.



SOCIAL DISTANCING



TWIN CITIES UPRISING

Community Impact

On May 25, when George Floyd was murdered by Minneapolis Police not far from our South Minneapolis-based youth writing center, it significantly and painfully impacted both our staff and our young writers and their families. The majority of the students we serve identify as Black, African American, or East African. Systemic racism has always impacted their lives, but the layers of social isolation combined with police brutality in this visceral form left us all reeling. We responded by creating opportunities for students to use writing to process experiences, such as the virtual healing circle facilitated through our Writers' Room for South High students and staff, and focused on being as responsive to emergent needs as possible.

As we moved into the summer and the pandemic raged on in conjunction with the Black Lives Matter uprising, it felt urgent to provide summer programming that both focused on academic skill-building, so critical during this time of potential learning loss, and gave students space to engage in the social justice issues currently important to our community. In July, we launched an online summer camp called "Outdoors Outspoken" for twenty of our young authors. The camp engaged students in creative writing activities focused on environmental justice, and students learned about water quality, endangered species, equity in our park system, and the naming (and re-naming) of our lakes and monuments. Our young authors are always writing a future for our world that is more just than the one we currently inhabit, and the events of the summer have led us to recommit to making our organization a part of their vision.



THE WORDS OF OUR YOUNG WRITERS PROTECTING OUR YOUTH WRITING CENTER

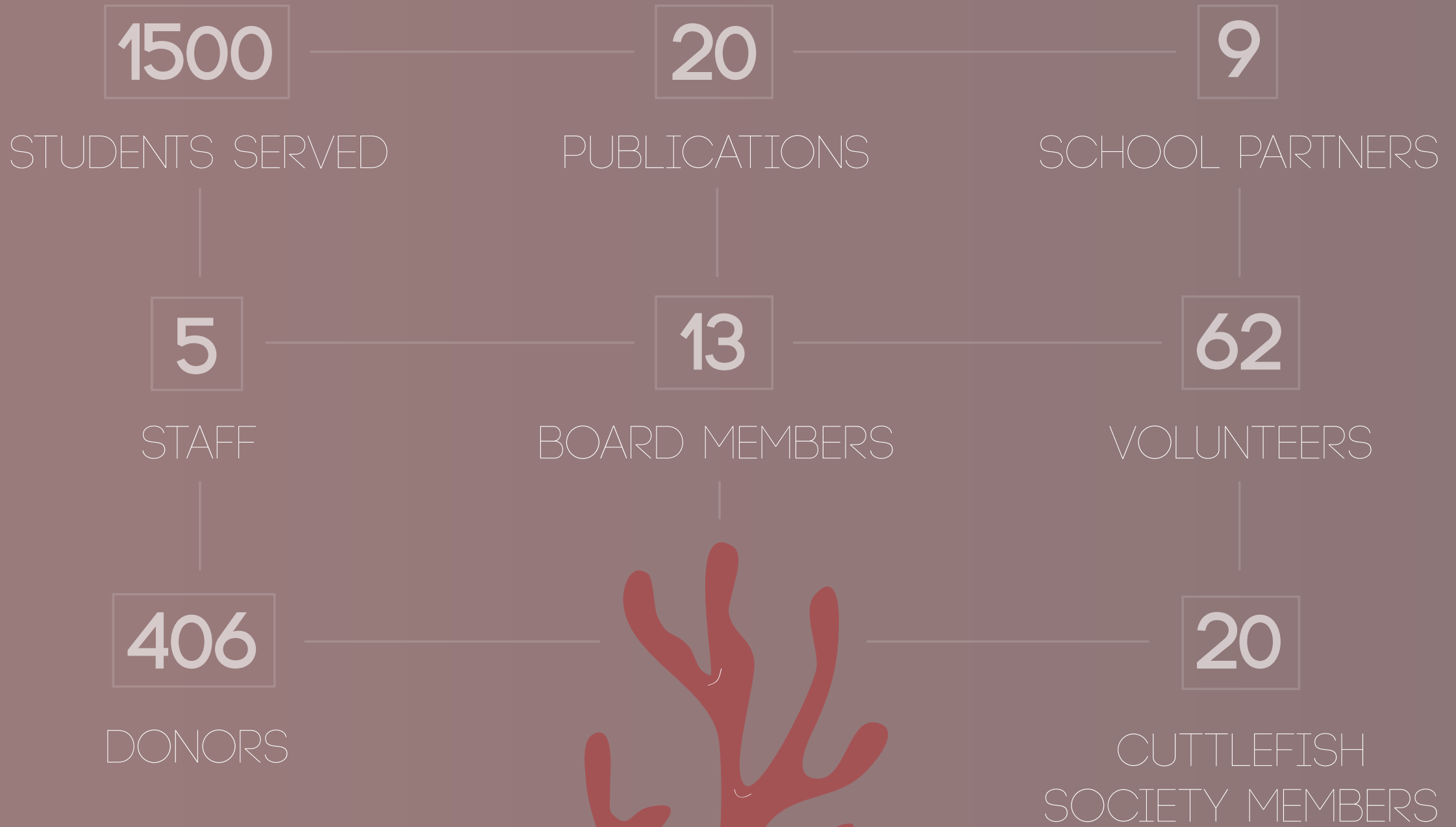


STATISTICS

826 MSP

ANNUAL REPORT

2019/2020





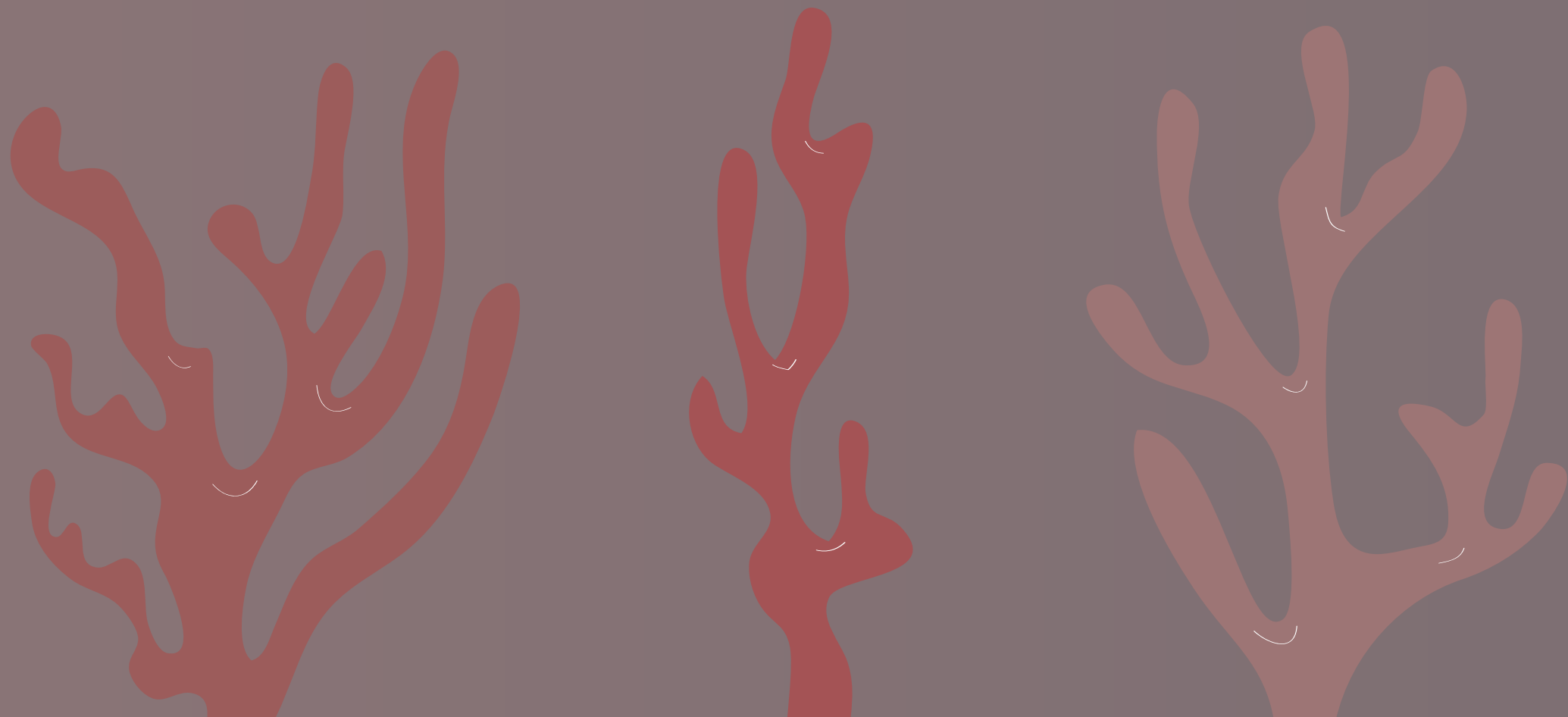
BOARD MEMBER

Jeff

QUICK FACTS:

- *Volunteered at 826 Michigan*
- *Cuttlefish Society member (monthly sustaining donor)*
- *Joined 826 MSP's board in 2019*

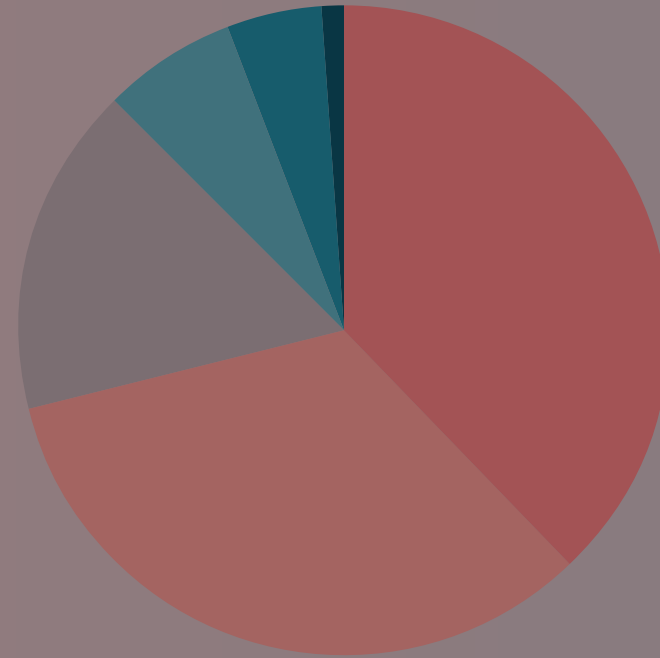
"I serve on the 826 MSP board because I believe our organization truly makes a difference in the lives and well-being of our students in the Twin Cities. In the most challenging school year of our lifetimes, I know our work helps students stay engaged, and their families feel supported. As we continue to champion anti-racism in education, I hope that we will continue to meet the challenges of this year head-on."



REVENUE

\$381,073

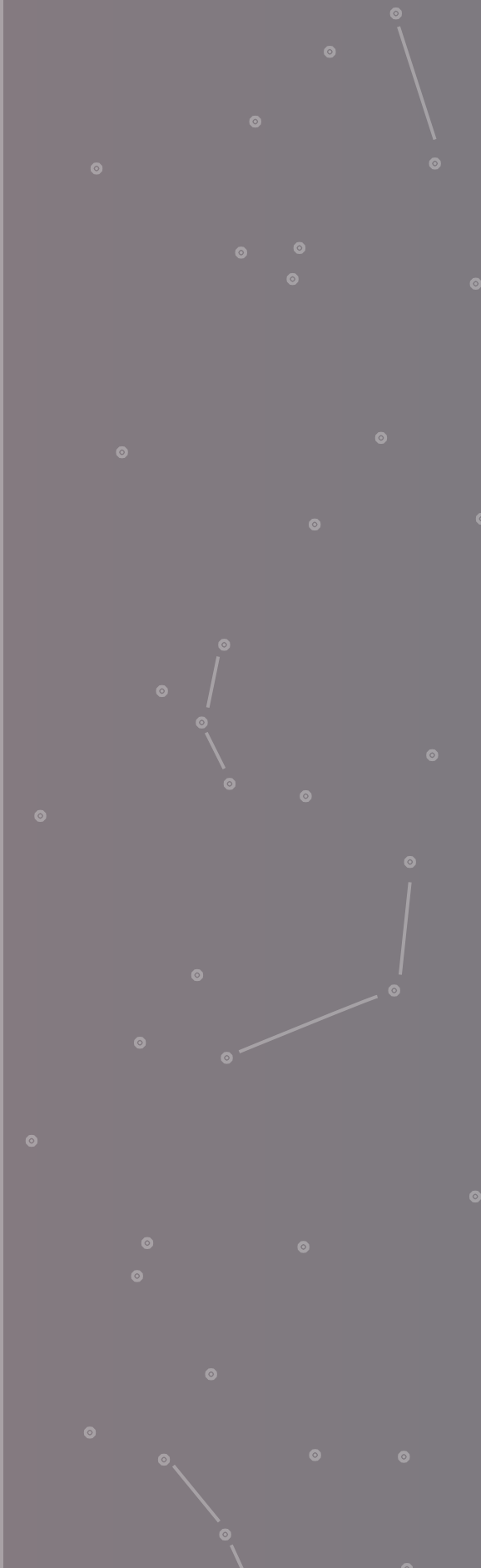
- **Foundations:** \$144,508
- **Individuals:** \$126,933
- **Corporations:** \$63,036
- **Government:** \$25,000
- **Events:** \$17,451
- **Earned Revenue:** \$4,139



EXPENSES

\$311,113

ALL EXPENSES SUPPORT 826 MSP'S FREE PROGRAMMING.





WHAT'S NEXT

Distance Learning in the 20-21 School Year

As we move into the 2020-21 program year, we will be starting both our in-school and out-of-school programs online, and our center will remain temporarily closed. Amidst the twin pandemics of COVID-19 and systemic racism, we are reimagining our programs to ensure that the young writers of the Twin Cities have the educational support and writing platforms they need to maintain community amidst social isolation, access academic support to combat learning loss, and make their voices heard for positive change.

UNTITLED

Quarantine is so boring that when I look at my homework, I know I won't finish it in a day. Quarantine is so boring that I'm getting tired staying in the house and riding bikes in the park. Quarantine is so boring but interesting because you finally get time to be with your annoying family, which I love so much sometimes, but at the end of the day, quarantine shows you how much you should appreciate every little thing because many people are dying, and we are here complaining about being bored or having slow wifi while others have to be home praying for their loved ones.

- Selama, Grade 6

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