



ANNUAL REPORT 2019 | 2020



Healthy **Attitudes**, Emotional **Harmony**,  
and Lifelong **Achievement** for Teens

## AHA! Five Pillars

### Mindfulness

We bring our attention and deep appreciation to the present moment.

### Resilience

We persevere to overcome and grow in the wake of hardship. We take healthy risks, knowing we have the strength to recover when we fail.

### Empathy

We practice seeing and feeling the world through others' eyes and hearts, recognizing the common values and needs we all share.

### Awareness

We witness our own emotional states and observe our thoughts. We listen deeply and are responsive to social and emotional factors in other people's lives.

### Connection

We recognize that we are stronger together: united in our similarities and celebrating our differences with respect.

**AHA! has provided social-emotional education to over 20,000 teens and youth care providers since 1999.**

## MENU OF SERVICES

1. **Educator Training** – Training of teachers, administrators, and school employees in evidence-based best Social Emotional Learning (SEL) practices to build positive classroom and campus climates.
2. **Youth Programs** – AHA! works with junior high and high school students for one hour per week for 6-10-week sessions to build emotional intelligence, communication and listening skills, skills for conflict resolution, and celebration of diversity.
3. **AHA! Peace Builders** – Junior high and high school AHA! Peace Builders are supported in developing positive relationships with each other, healthy mindsets, effective self-care, and tools for supporting others.
4. **Adult/Parent SEL Training** – Helping parents learn to recognize red flags in their child, intervene in cyberbullying and digital addiction, and develop strategies for coping and self-care.
5. **Responding to Tragedies** – Helping youth, educators, and parents recover from trauma with resiliency.

AHA! is pleased to announce the appointment of dynamic duo Rand Rosenberg and Bobby Shand as its new board co-presidents. They began their term on July 1, 2020.

## LETTER FROM AHA!'S CO-PRESIDENTS

We want you to know how much we value your support of this vital organization.

The COVID-19 pandemic has created an extremely challenging environment for all – especially children. In AHA!'s 21 years of service to our community, we have never faced a more critical time for providing social and emotional learning to enable well-being among our youth. We are extraordinarily proud of the boundless creativity and energy of our staff and leadership as they've worked to reinvent already-impactful programs to meaningfully and powerfully meet the community's current needs.



Highlights include:

- The Littlest Little Farm, modeled after the Biggest Little Farm (made famous by the award-winning documentary); the LLF engages youth in the joyful experience of developing self-sustaining food systems.
- Five after-school groups meeting weekly on Zoom.
- Seven in-school AHA! Peace Builder programs in junior high and high schools, as well as in-school delivery of SEL content in classrooms at Carpinteria Middle and High Schools.
- Zoom “How to Be a Hero in the 21st Century” assemblies, which will be delivered to 3000 students in grades 7-12 by the end of November 2020. Youth participants are encouraged to find the hero within themselves by connecting through video stories from inspiring artists, leaders, and real-life heroes who live among us. These assemblies include small breakout rooms facilitated by highly skilled AHA! staff, who promote meaningful conversations that allow open and powerful connection between students.

As we look forward to the upcoming year, we have complete confidence that we will continue reaching ever more students, teachers, and families in the delivery of our programs.

We want to acknowledge our incredible board members, donors, and the wider community—all of whom we've seen rise during a most difficult moment in history to support AHA! in its ongoing mission to promote social-emotional learning and skills in youth, families, and educators.

In gratitude,

Rand Rosenberg

Bobby Shand

# THE AHA! TEAM

## 7/1/2019–6/30/2020

Special appreciation to Marla McNally Phillips who stepped down as President of AHA!'s Board of Directors this year. Marla brought passion, perseverance, and perpetual play to the role, delighting and inspiring us all.

### BOARD OF DIRECTORS

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Marla McNally Phillips

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Marla McNally Phillips

Cyndi Richman

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Jenna Tico

# ALUMNI PROFILES



**Name:** Cynthia Estrada

**Years in AHA!:** Two years as a teen; hired as an AHA! facilitator for the Heroes Assemblies

**Current Status:** Third year Communications and Marketing student at SBCC; plans to transfer to a CSU; social media intern for the SBIFF.

**Why AHA!:** I joined AHA! my sophomore year of high school and it helped build my self-confidence. I was able to figure out who I am, what I value, and what is important to me. When I was asked to come on board for the Heroes Assembly, I was ready! The challenges of 2020 have taught me who and what is essential—it is the younger generation. They are the heroes of today—willing to uphold what is right and raise their voices in support of change. If I can help the future heroes discover their most authentic self, I will do my best to support them.

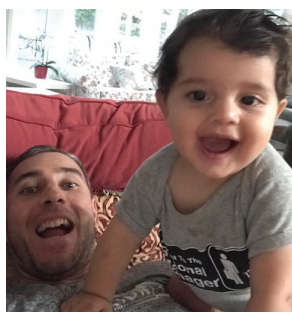
**Name:** Merline Flores

**Years in AHA!:** Four years as AHA! Peace Builder

**Current Status:** Finishing final prerequisite classes for a degree in nursing.

**Why AHA!:** AHA! is a safe environment, and a great resource—providing students with life-long connections with influential and productive community members. In AHA!, I was able to meet open-minded students like me. The energy of their dedicated staff is incredible and they encourage the teens to be better, do better, and really allow members to thrive.

I have never met a more dedicated team than the AHA! staff. Their energy and kindness is contagious. The AHA! team is very diverse and heavily invested in the well-being of its members. I wear my AHA! shirt with pride, and when I see another AHA! member, I go out of my way to say hi. The connections I made in AHA! are forever embedded in my life.



**Name:** Paul Lewis

**Years in AHA!:** Four years as a teen; three as staff.

**Current Status:** Father to my son Liam, husband, graduating from Sacramento State next year with bachelor's in Kinesiology, real estate investor, businessman.

**Why AHA!:** Joining AHA! as a young teen provided me with multiple creative outlets to channel my emotions in a positive way. I was very shy, self-conscious, and timid, and AHA! established an environment that was perfect for self-growth and interpersonal development. I would not have been able to strengthen my emotional intelligence without AHA! - or even known that this was something I needed.

**Name:** Hailey Simmons

**Years in AHA!:** Two years in Peace Builders in high school, recently back to facilitate the Heroes assemblies.

**Current Status:** Campaign organizer for a local ballot initiative; will soon be transitioning to a Virtual Assistant position at a PR firm that specializes in non-profits.

**Why AHA!:** High school can be a scary environment, and when I was a junior I was desperate to connect with an empathetic, socially conscious community. AHA! Peace Builders provided that community, and along with it came self-confidence, lots of fun, and a love for my fellow students. I'm thrilled to be involved with AHA! as an adult because I love watching kids come out of their shell just like I did! On top of that, AHA! staff and facilitators operate with such grace and care and it is a joy to watch them work their magic.



**Name:** Azalea Kemp

**Years in AHA!:** Four years as a teen, hired as staff fall 2020.

**Current Status:** Graduated from the American Musical and Dramatic Academy in New York in 2017; performing off-Broadway since, as well as doing art therapy for kids with special needs; now that COVID has limited performing arts jobs, returning to school to study computer science and working as an alumni facilitator with AHA!

**Why AHA!:** AHA! has a special way of reaching people on a personal level and avoiding destructive conflict to understand each other which I think makes a HUGE impact on social justice in the long run. I love everything about that and I love everything about connecting with people genuinely on a deeper level.

## Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) Research\*

Research spanning more than two decades demonstrates that education promoting social and emotional learning (SEL) gets results. The findings come from multiple fields and sources, including student achievement, neuroscience, health, employment, psychology, classroom management, learning theory, economics, and the prevention of youth problem behaviors.

### SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL LEARNING

#### Leads to Academic Outcomes and Improved Behaviors

SEL interventions that address CASEL's five core competencies increased students' academic performance by 11 percentile points, compared to students who did not participate in such SEL programs. Students participating in SEL programs also showed improved classroom behavior, an increased ability to manage stress and depression, and better attitudes about themselves, others, and school.

#### Impact Is Long-Term and Global

SEL programming can have a positive impact up to 18 years later on academics, conduct problems, emotional distress, and drug use.

#### Improves Lifetime Outcomes

There are statistically significant associations between SEL skills in kindergarten and key outcomes for young adults. SEL decreases the likelihood of living in or being on a waiting list for public housing, receiving public assistance, having any involvement with police before adulthood, and ever spending time in a detention facility.

#### Impact Is Long-Term and Global

SEL programming can have a positive impact up to 18 years later on academics, conduct problems, emotional distress, and drug use.

**Columbia University found that every \$1 invested in Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) programs produced an \$11 return**

// This program has impacted my self esteem and confidence tremendously. It has taught me how to grow—like a little seed growing into a beautiful flower. With my mind and soul I fell in love with Mother Earth. I also appreciate being able to work alongside others—learning and watching—but mostly having fun! //

- GK, AHA! Peace Builder, After-school, and Littlest Little Farm participant

# PROGRAM UPDATES

As AHA! welcomed in 2020, our staff was deep into preparations to begin eight spring after-school groups—including the selection of 10 youth to be part of the popular Sing It Out group, reserving campgrounds for a summer camping trip, and launching into the spring semester of the AHA! Method Teacher Trainings. In-school programming reconvened at five junior and three senior high schools. No one could have foreseen the disruption, anxiety, and fear we would experience in the coming months.

By mid-March 2020, AHA! staff swiftly convened to assess the current situation and address the most pressing needs of our constituency. Some of our programs (Teacher Trainings and some groups for youth) were completed, or close to completion, as COVID-19 restrictions were put into place. Once in-person programs became impossible to conduct, AHA! mobilized to strategize the most effective ways to transition our programs to the online Zoom platform, finding ways to preserve key components of AHA!’s high-touch social-emotional learning (SEL) curriculum. We maintained contact with our teen participants, keeping tabs on their emotional and physical health via phone calls and email questionnaires; these points of contact aided us in re-designing AHA! programs during shelter-in-place. Our staff distributed headsets to teens who did not have them to maintain confidentiality of group discussions. We produced several dozen “AHA! Minute” videos for social media, delivering tips on healthy relating, mindfulness, and self-care during quarantine. As “Zoom fatigue” set in – affecting teens, teachers, and AHA! staff alike – facilitators found creative ways to retain authentic check-ins and mindfulness, and placed increased emphasis on self-care strategies. We used breakout sessions for more intimate connection circles and shared healthy ways to navigate conflicts with loved ones when sheltered in close proximity.



## EVENTS

Due to restrictions posed by the pandemic, our beloved Sing It Out, scheduled for May 2020, was cancelled. We are profoundly grateful for the generous support of event sponsors and look forward to the day when we will cheer for our courageous participants in person at the glorious Lobero Theatre.

## PANDEMIC PIVOTS

By April 2020, AHA! had transitioned to the Zoom platform for all existing programs. In addition, we added weekly AHA! Connect Zoom groups for teens AND adults not already enrolled in our programs. New groups were added as requests mandated. A monthly AHA! for Adults group in Spanish and English focused on topics specific to the needs of parents and educators, and we offered a series of webinar workshops promoting the advancement of 21st century competencies critical to the needs of today’s world. One beauty of these additional groups was that we were able to engage folks beyond our immediate community, from around the world.

To support AHA! staff with the challenges they faced, Chief Content Officer Jennifer Freed and Clinical Director Rendy Freedman offered weekly staff support groups (on Zoom). These groups enabled the team to stay connected, give voice to concerns and adversities, and maintain relationship bonds.

A hybrid model of the summer program engaged teens both on Zoom and once a week in-person at Alice Keck Park Memorial Garden. Outdoor gatherings adhered to safety protocols, with teens and staff wearing masks, keeping a safe distance, and using microphone headsets to amplify their voices.

Although we were unable to hold the much-anticipated camping trip in the summer, a generous grant from Arbonne Charitable Foundation combined with discounts from REI enabled AHA! to purchase much-needed camping gear. We are well-stocked for future outdoor adventures!

# DONORS

7/1/2019 - 6/30/2020

Thank you for believing in us, and for elevating our entire community through your generosity.

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*Every effort has been made to ensure that this is an accurate list of donors who made charitable contributions to AHA! between July 1, 2019 and June 30, 2020. If you notice an error or omission, please accept our apology and let us know so we can update our records. [molly@ahash.org](mailto:molly@ahash.org)*

**A generous, multi-year grant to AHA! covers all administrative costs which means 100% of your donation goes directly to support AHA! programs.**

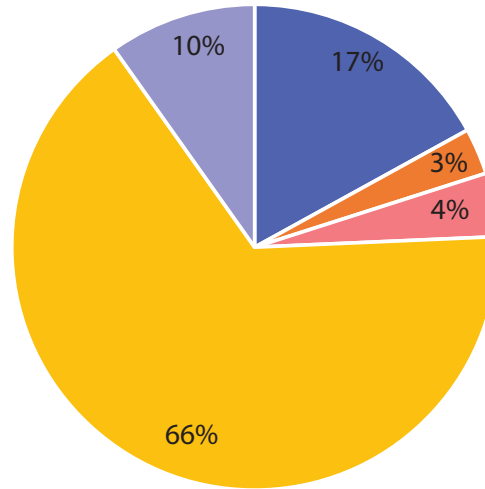


“ This program has helped me feel safe. It’s a place I go to where I know I will have fun and I can be myself without any judgment. The Littlest Little Farm shows me that things take time to grow and improve. I feel confident that I can achieve my goals in life because this program has given me the support and motivation I need. My self-esteem has changed a lot since I first joined this group—I’m no longer afraid to talk about myself. I know what my strengths are. I know not to care about what others think because at the end of the day, my AHA! family will be there to support me. ”

- QN, AHA! Peace Builder, After-school, and Littlest Little Farm participant

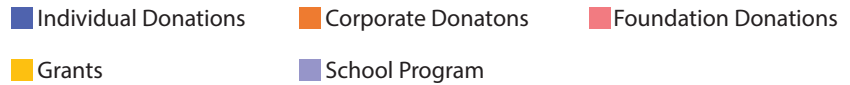
# FINANCIAL STATEMENT

**AHA! 2019-2020 Revenue**

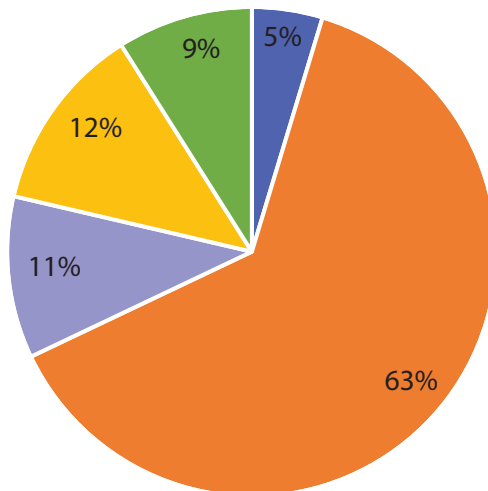


**AHA 2019-2020 Revenue**

Individual Donations.....	\$241,860
Corporate Donations .....	\$43,934
Foundation Donations .....	\$60,222
Grants .....	\$937,697
School Program.....	\$139,800

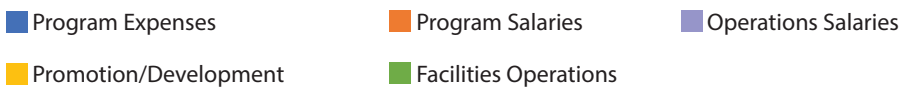


**AHA! 2019-2020 Expenses**



**AHA 2019-2020 Expenses**

Program Expenses.....	\$63,824
Program Salaries .....	\$864,970
Operations Salaries.....	\$146,353
Promotion/Development.....	\$169,198
Facilities & Operations .....	\$122,715



# NEW AND EXCITING!

## LITTLEST LITTLE FARM

Since its inception in November 2019, AHA!'s Littlest Little Farm has transformed a dry acre of land into a thriving, vibrant biodynamic farm teeming with life. Biodynamic farming, like AHA!, prizes regenerative relationships and healthy communities; it expands typical organic farming to integrate soil fertility, plant health, and livestock maintenance as interrelated tasks, and recognizes the practices and legacy of indigenous peoples. Three-month sessions are ongoing with 24 teens participating in each session. (When a summer spike in COVID-19 cases necessitated a brief hiatus in youth participation, AHA! staff filled in to maintain upkeep of the Farm.)

The Farm has allowed teens to connect deeply with nature and one another at a time when stress, anxiety, and depression are at alarmingly high rates—providing a much-needed respite from crowded homes, limited access to nature, and an inordinate number of hours spent on devices. Numerous studies have provided evidence supporting the link between time spent in nature and improved mental health; time outdoors in natural settings improves emotion regulation, reduces impact of stress and fatigue, promotes healthy risk taking, and improves self-confidence, resiliency, and creativity. AHA! has 21 years' experience promoting youth social-emotional development, building skills for self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, responsible decision making, and healthy relationship; the addition of more nature-based learning in recent years through hikes, camping trips, and now the Farm has proven a potent ingredient for promoting regenerative relationships and healthy communities.

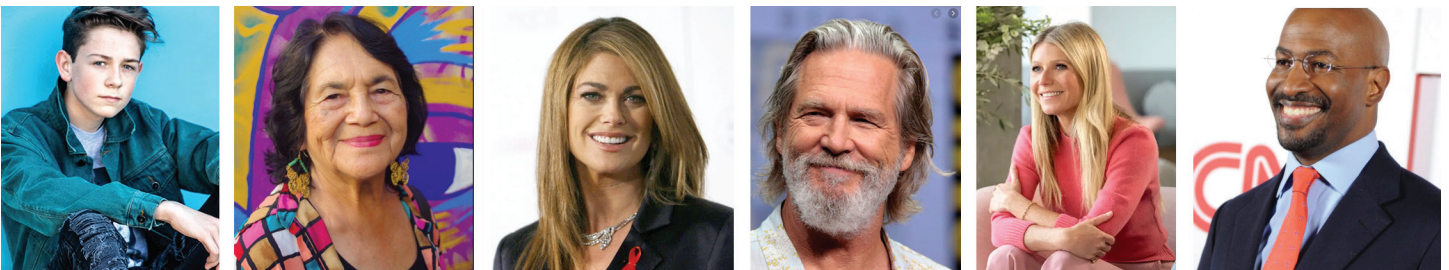


## CULTIVATING A COMMUNITY OF HEROIC YOUTH

As COVID-19 shut down the possibility of in-person connection, AHA! visioned a way to bring students together virtually for much-needed hope, connection, inspiration, positivity, and sense of purpose. From their vision came the AHA! Hero Assemblies.

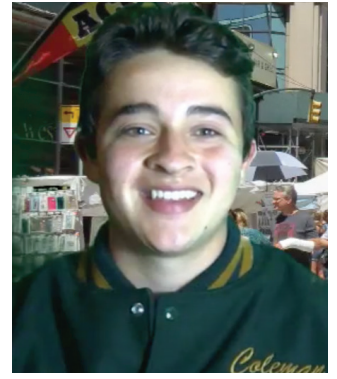
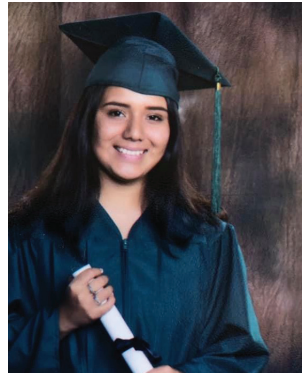
Countering an increased sense of isolation, a soaring mental health crisis, and extreme divisiveness and intolerance at all levels of society, AHA! Heroes Assemblies provide a positive alternative, empowering students to find the hero within themselves. Connection circles—small group breakout sessions held within the assembly—give every participant an opportunity to voice their truth and explore the many ways they can be a hero to themselves, their school, and the wider community.

These virtual assemblies include videos from such luminaries as Mary Louise Parker, Jeff Bridges, Dakota Lotus, Van Jones, Gwyneth Paltrow, Kathy Ireland, Dolores Huerta, Shaun Tomson, Valarie Kaur, and dozens more, all giving heartfelt (and non-politically-partisan) answers to the question: “What does a hero look like to you these days?” Then, in small breakout groups, highly trained AHA! facilitators lead students and teachers in addressing related questions about character, facing adversity, social inclusion, and community.



## SPANISH LANGUAGE SEL CERTIFICATION WORKSHOPS

Thanks to a grant from the Fund for Santa Barbara, AHA! offered five SEL workshops for our Spanish-speaking community. Each session focused on one important competency—self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, responsible decision making, and relationship skills. The sessions will be offered again in 2021.



Congratulations to  
 AHA! 2020 High School Graduates.  
 Graduation celebrations were not  
 what any of us had hoped for—  
 nevertheless, we are bursting with  
 pride at your accomplishment!

*Please stay in touch!*

