



**RISING** TO THE  
**CHALLENGE,**

**ROOTED** *IN Community*

FY2025 IMPACT REPORT

# CONTENT

- 01 Letter from May Vaughn, Executive Director
- 02 Mission & Vision Statements
- 03 Key Accomplishments and Impact
- 04 Program Expansion and Reach
- 05 Stories from the Field
- 06 Financial Summary
- 07 Donor Recognition
- 08 Leadership Team
- 09 Board of Director
- 10 Closing Remark

## Pictured on the cover:

Ajaneé, in her junior year of high school and third year with Girls' LEAP, a reminder of the lasting impact your generosity creates.



## LETTER FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

As I reflect on this past year with Girls' LEAP, one word comes to mind: **gratitude**. I am thankful for the incredible young people who show up eager to learn and lead. I am thankful for our staff and mentors who give their all. And I am grateful for you, our community, and all of those whose support makes everything we do possible.



Our theme this year, Rising to the Challenge, Rooted in Community, truly reflects what I've observed every day. Our Teen Mentors rose to the challenge in such powerful ways, especially with the launch of Media Mindset. They didn't just participate; they created. With help from experts, they researched, developed the curriculum, and trained to facilitate sessions on their own. Through this process, they discovered their voices. Melanie, one of our mentors, expressed it best in an NBC10 Boston interview: "I've learned so much... not only the physical and emotional skills, but how to work with other teens and adults. I learned that community and leadership are a big part of the role." Hearing her say that on live television filled me with pride.

We also reached a milestone that reflects our core mission: serving more than 500 girls and gender-expansive youth this year. It was a goal in our three-year plan, and we achieved it a year early.

"I've learned so much... not only the physical and emotional skills, but how to work with other teens and adults. I learned that community and leadership are a big part of the role."

Melanie - Teen Mentor

Each of those young people now has new tools confidence, and a sense of safety that will ripple out into their families and communities.

And while we celebrated these successes, we also planted seeds for the future. This past year, we built and secured funding for our 5th Quarter Summer Learning Academy, which officially launched this summer in partnership with Boston Public Schools and Boston After School and Beyond. It's an exciting new way for us to stay connected with girls and gender-expansive youth beyond the school year and our regular summer programs, and it wouldn't have happened without the dedication and belief of our partners.

As we look ahead, I feel optimistic and energized. We will keep growing Media Mindset, strengthen partnerships, and find new ways to make sure that every girl and gender-expansive youth we serve leaves Girls' LEAP feeling stronger, safer, and more confident.

Thank you for standing with us. Together, we are rising to the challenge and building a brighter future, rooted in community.

# OUR VISION

A world where all girls and gender-expansive youth grow into powerful, capable adults, realizing the power of their aspirations.



## OUR MISSION

To disrupt the violence that surrounds girls and gender-expansive youth by amplifying their voices, emboldening their courage, and imparting critical life and self-defense skills so they can thrive in the face of challenges.

## OUR FOUNDING

In the mid-90s, there was a spike in sexual assaults in Cambridge, MA. Deborah Weaver and Peggy Barrett, then Cambridge residents, found no resources available to empower and protect girls. In response, they created an original curriculum with experts from around the country to meet the needs of this population.



## ROOTED IN LEADERSHIP, RISING TOGETHER

May Vaughn, the Executive Director, has brought fresh vision and steady leadership since joining in 2024. With experience at Sitters for Scholars, Roxbury Tenants of Harvard, and the YMCA of Greater Boston, May's work has always focused on strengthening communities and empowering young people. She also serves on the Boston Children's Hospital Community Advisory Board, sits on the Board of Philanthropy Connections, and is a Site Visit Leader for the Cummings Foundation—roles that expand Girls' LEAP's voice and impact across Greater Boston.

This year, Director of Operations Lynn Carberry Masterman continued to provide critical leadership behind the scenes, ensuring that the systems and structures supporting our growth remain strong and sustainable.

Our Board of Directors, chaired by Alkia Powell, includes fourteen members with expertise spanning public health, education, communications, DEI, and business operations. In keeping with our commitment to inclusivity and youth empowerment, the Board includes a Teen Mentor with full voting rights—a powerful reminder that young people belong not only in our programs but also in leadership and decision-making spaces.

Beyond leadership, our whole team reflects both the breadth of our programming and the strength of our community: a Program Director, two Program Managers, eight part-time Lead Teachers and Trainers, twenty paid Teen Mentors, ten paid Teaching Assistants, and many dedicated interns and volunteers. Together, they ensure that Girls' LEAP continues to meet young people where they are—with compassion, expertise, and care.



OUR LEADERSHIP AND STAFF  
REFLECT THE COMMUNITIES  
WE SERVE.

**64%**  
of Board members

**81%**  
of our full team

**100%**  
of our part-time  
Teen Mentors

**ARE PEOPLE OF COLOR.**

# PROGRAM EXPANSION & REACH

In 2025, Girls' LEAP reached a powerful milestone, **serving over 500 girls and gender-expansive youth** across Boston and surrounding communities. This achievement fulfilled a significant goal of our three-year strategic plan one year ahead of schedule. It reflects not only the dedication of our staff and Teen Mentors, but also the strength of the partnerships that underpin our community-based work.

Building on our core empowerment and self-defense programs, we continued to expand outreach, bringing Girls' LEAP to new schools, neighborhoods, and community organizations. These partnerships deepened our reach in underserved communities and strengthened our impact in places where youth need it most.

Our Teen Mentor Program flourished, engaging over 20 girls and gender-expansive youth in summer workshops on leadership, career and college readiness, financial literacy, and self-care. These young leaders developed skills that extend beyond the classroom. These skills will foster confidence, resilience, and community impact. As one Cummings Foundation reviewer shared after a site visit, "The message I walked away with was that you are producing leaders!"

A highlight of the year was the launch of Media Mindset, a youth-led initiative that empowers teens to critically analyze the impact of social media on their mental health. Our Teen Mentors researched, designed, and piloted the program in partnership

with industry experts. This experience provided them with hands-on experience in curriculum design, facilitation, and public speaking. With separate offerings for middle school, high school, and parents/youth workers, Media Mindset will continue expanding in FY2026 and beyond.

We also laid the foundation for our new 5th Quarter Summer Learning Academy, which officially debuted in summer 2025. This program deepens our work into the summer months providing academic and social emotional support to rising 3rd to 6th graders during the critical "fifth quarter" of learning. Summer learning loss is the decline in academic skills and knowledge that students experience during summer breaks (1). Some sources estimate that up to three months of reading loss and one month of math loss can occur, while low-reading students may fall a full grade level behind after several summers. Furthermore, students of low social and economic status experience greater reading loss than their peers in middle to high social and financial status. (2) These gaps can translate into persistent educational inequality and restricted opportunities. Impacting graduation

rates and access to higher education. Programs, such as the Fifth Quarter Summer Learning Academy, offering academic enrichment, especially those aimed at low-income students, can help reduce or reverse this type of learning loss. (3)

Independent evaluators from Boston After School and Beyond consistently rated Girls' LEAP in the top quartile again this year, with some perfect 4.0 scores in key areas such as Social-Emotional Environment, Staff's Positive Guidance of Behaviors, and Youth Relationships with Adults and Peers.

Like many nonprofits, we navigated economic pressures this year by implementing new funding strategies and cultivating new partnerships.

These efforts helped us strengthen our foundation for growth while keeping our mission and programs intact.

Together, these accomplishments reflect the resilience of the Girls' LEAP community. By staying rooted in our community and rising to new challenges, we ensure that every girl and gender-expansive youth we serve can grow stronger, safer, and more confident.

"Every day, we are privileged to learn with and from the youth at Girls' LEAP. They teach us, challenge us, and amaze us."

May Vaughn - Executive Director



# KEY ACCOMPLISHMENTS & IMPACT

500+

girls and gender-expansive youth served – reaching our three-year strategic plan goal one year early.

20

Teen Mentors participated workshops on leadership, financial literacy, college readiness, and self-care.

# TOP RATED

Earned top quartile ratings from Boston After School & Beyond with some perfect 4.0 scores in Social-Emotional Environment, Staff Guidance, and Youth Relationships



## FY25 PROGRAMS INCLUDED

- BCYF Perkins Community Center
- BCYF Blackstone Community Center
- BCYF Hennigan Community Center
- BCYF Mattahunt Community Center
- Codman Square Academy
- Dearborn STEM Academy
- Dudley Street Charter School
- Girls, Inc
- G.R.O.W. (Girls Reflecting Our World)
- JFK Elementary School
- Mother Caroline Academy
- Riverside Elementary School, Dedham
- Somerville Parks and Recreation
- YWCA Cambridge

“What I gained from LEAP was the courage to say no and the courage to stand up for myself, physically and mentally.”

Tiffany L. - Teen Mentor



## NEW PROGRAMS



We launched Media Mindset, a youth-led initiative that empowers teens to explore the impact of social media on mental health, and we formed a coalition with Children's Hospital of Boston, Sociedad Latina, Madison Development Corp, Young Man with a Plan, and Friends of Children Boston.



5th Quarter Summer Learning Academy debuted, a free 5-week summer program that helps students prevent summer learning loss while building confidence, leadership, and academic skills.

# STORIES FROM THE FIELD

## MELANIE'S STORY: RISING TO THE CHALLENGE

When Melanie joined Girls' LEAP as a Teen Mentor, she wasn't sure of her voice. Through training and mentorship, she gained confidence in public speaking, facilitation, and leadership.

This year, she helped shape Media Mindset, a youth-led program addressing the impact of social media on mental health. Melanie researched with experts, co-developed a curriculum, and trained to lead sessions with her peers.

Her growth came full circle when she appeared on NBC10 Boston with Executive Director May Vaughn, sharing how Girls' LEAP has shaped her journey.



"I've learned so much... not only the physical and emotional skills, but how to work with other teens and adults. I learned that community and leadership are a big part of the role."

**Melanie Herrera Cardenas**  
Teen Mentor

## AJANEE'S STORY: ROOTED IN COMMUNITY

Ajaneé first joined Girls' LEAP as a freshman in high school and continues with us today as a junior at UMass Boston, pursuing her undergraduate degree and an accelerated MBA. Over the years, she has held various roles, including Teen Mentor, Lead Teen Mentor, Board Member, and, currently, Project Manager. She is growing as both a leader and a mentor to others.

Her journey reflects the impact of Girls' LEAP on both personal and professional development. This year, Ajaneé entered into the prestigious Harvard Aspire Leaders Program, a global academic and professional development opportunity for first-generation and low-income college students. With participants from more than 100 countries, the program offers coursework in project management and data analytics, helping her continue building the skills.

From guiding younger peers to stepping into behind-the-scenes leadership, Ajaneé has turned challenges into opportunities. She embodies what it means to rise to the challenge while staying rooted in community.

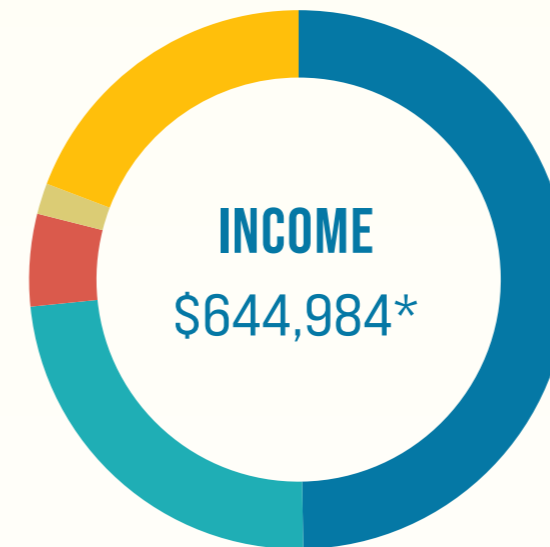


"Girls' LEAP transforms fear into courage, silence into self-advocacy, and uncertainty into confidence. It has done that for the girls and nonbinary youth it serves, and it has done that for me."

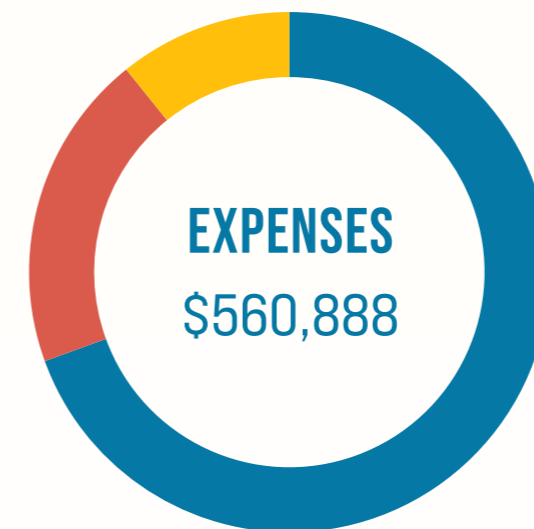
**Ajaneé Igharo**  
Teaching Assistant and Project Manager



# FINANCIAL SUMMARY FY 2025



Foundations & Govt Grants	\$309,690
Individual Donations	\$147,439
Corporate Donation	\$34,500
Earned Income:	\$11,550
Other/ERC Refunds:	\$119,640



Program	\$508,187
Administration	\$144,713
Fundraising	\$78,925

**Note:** Girls' LEAP received an additional \$170,937 in In Kind Services including Youth and Youth Leader wages from the City of Boston/SuccessLink; Management Consulting from Community Teams Consulting (CTC); and Fellows from College of Social Innovation

# DONOR RECOGNITION

In 2023, Girls' LEAP was chosen as one of 150 local nonprofits to receive a **three-year grant from the Cummings Foundation**. By 2025, we are proud to share the impact of that award. With this support, we expanded youth-led initiatives like Media Mindset, strengthened our Teen Mentor Program, and launched our new Fifth Quarter Summer Learning Academy. This funding has been truly transformative—helping us serve more than 500 girls and gender-expansive youth this year, and allowing us to reach a primary strategic plan goal one year ahead of schedule.

We also thank our other major funders whose multi-year commitments help sustain and grow our work: the Boston Foundation, through the two-year Boston Safety Net Grant; the Anna B. Stearns Foundation, with a two-year grant; and many others who stand with us in making sure every young person we serve can become stronger, safer, and more confident.

Together, this community of funders empowers Girls' LEAP to meet the challenge while remaining rooted in community—equipping the next generation of leaders to succeed.



“We are grateful to the Cummings Foundation for placing their trust in Girls' LEAP. Their support offers us the flexibility to direct funding where it's most needed. We can continue to expand our core programs and reach more girls and gender-expansive youth across Greater Boston. Multi-year backing isn't just helpful—it's transformative, enabling us to plan confidently and act with purpose.”

May Vaughn - Executive Director

# CALL TO ACTION

This year, Girls' LEAP has demonstrated what's possible when we **Rise to the Challenge, Rooted in Community**. Together, we reached over 500 girls and gender-expansive youth, expanded youth-led initiatives, and created new opportunities for growth and leadership. None of this would be possible without the strength of our community and you. As we look ahead, we invite you to stand with us in continuing this momentum. Your support ensures that even more young people can grow safer, stronger, and more confident.

## WAYS TO RISE WITH US

### Tax-deductible Donations

Your generosity fuels our programs, ensuring that more girls and gender-expansive youth can access the tools they need to stay safe, build confidence, and lead with strength. Every gift—big or small—helps us rise to the challenge together.

### Volunteer Your Professional Skills

From graphic design to event planning to mentoring, your unique talents can strengthen our work. By sharing your skills, you help us stay rooted in the community while creating meaningful opportunities for young leaders.

### Partner Through Corporate Sponsorships

Corporate partners play a key role in sustaining and expanding our programs. Sponsorships not only make a tangible impact in the lives of youth but also connect your company to a mission of empowerment and equity.

### Be an Advocate for Girls' LEAP

Your voice matters. By spreading the word, whether on social media, in your workplace, or within your networks, you help amplify our mission and bring new allies into the Girls' LEAP community.

When you contribute, you're not just giving, you're helping to create safer, stronger futures for girls and gender-expansive youth. Thank you for believing in their power, and in ours.

## A SPECIAL THANK YOU TO OUR FY2025 MAJOR SPONSORS!



# LEADERSHIP TEAM



**May Vaughn**  
Executive Director



**Lynn Masterman**  
Director of Operations



**Jennyde Dessius**  
Program Director



**Danielle Dottor**  
Teen Mentor  
Program Coordinator

## BOARD OF DIRECTORS

**Alkia Powell** – Board President; Community Outreach Specialist

**Cynthia Maltbie** – Board Clerk, Retired Girls' LEAP Co-Executive Director, Former CHRO Partners in Health

**Andrea Haddad** – Board Development Chair; Principal at Ernst & Young, LLP

**Melanie Herrera Cardenas** – Girls' LEAP Teen Mentor

**Philip J. Carver** – Director of Community & City Relations, UMass Boston

**Jennifer Flanagan** – Partner, Mirick

**Neva Coakley-Grice** – Retired BPS Executive Director of Safety, Security & School Crisis Response

**Aisha Miller, Ph.D.** – VP, Community & Corporate Engagement at Related Beal

**Raquel Sáenz Ortiz, Ph.D.** – Professor of Education at Southwestern University

**Nyacko Pearl Perry** – Managing Partner, All In Consulting; Co-founder, Comfort Kitchen

**Loreen Watts** – Operations Manager & HR Specialist at Greater Boston Chamber of Commerce

**Wendy Rue Williams** – Global Wellbeing Strategy Leader at Manulife

**Delaney Woodfield** – Vice President, Goldman Sachs



# LETTER FROM THE BOARD PRESIDENT

As we close this remarkable year at Girls' LEAP, I am filled with deep pride and gratitude. Serving alongside such a dedicated community of staff, mentors, board members, and supporters has been an incredible honor. Together, we've not only navigated new challenges but strengthened our connection to the young people and neighborhoods at the heart of our mission.

This year, we reached an extraordinary milestone—empowering more than 500 girls and gender-expansive youth across Greater Boston, surpassing our three-year strategic goal a full year ahead of schedule. From the launch of Media Mindset, a youth-led media literacy initiative, to the debut of our 5th Quarter Summer Learning Academy, our programs continue to expand in both reach and impact.

What inspires me most is the confidence, courage, and leadership I see growing in every participant. Their voices remind us why our work matters—and why community partnerships are so essential to creating lasting change.

On behalf of the Board of Directors, thank you for your unwavering support and belief in Girls' LEAP. Because of you, we are building spaces where every girl and gender-expansive youth can rise with strength, safety, and self-assurance.

Together, rooted in community, we will continue to lift one another and create a future where every young person has the tools to thrive.

With heartfelt appreciation,  
**Alkia Powell**  
Board President &  
Community Outreach Specialist  
Girls' LEAP

# CONTACT INFORMATION

1452 Dorchester Avenue,  
Dorchester, MA 02122

**GIRLSLEAP.ORG**

---

## FIND US ON

 Girls' LEAP Facebook

 @girlsleap\_boston

 @GirlsLEAP

