YOUTH FIRST MENTORING

ANNUAL REPORT 2026

Dear Friends and Neighbors,

As summer winds down, I find myself reflecting on my nearly four years as Program Director at Youth First Mentoring. In that time, we expanded our program to Barre, strengthened partnerships, supported more young people and families, and continued to build meaningful, lasting mentoring relationships. Throughout that time, important questions guided that work: How can we strengthen the way we support mentors and families? How can we serve more young people? And how do we build a stronger, more sustainable organization for the future?

Those questions have shaped much of our work this year. In February, I attended the National Mentoring Summit, where I connected with mentoring professionals from across the country, learned from innovative programs, and brought new ideas home to Vermont. I also had the opportunity to meet with members of Vermont's federal delegation to advocate for legislation and national investments that recognize the importance of mentoring. These experiences reminded me that while YFM is deeply rooted in Central Vermont, the work we are doing is part of something much bigger.

Looking toward the coming year, we know where our work is needed most. **We need more mentors.** We also want to reach more young people in our rural communities, where access to consistent, supportive relationships can be more difficult. As we grow, we will continue to center equity and work toward making mentoring accessible to more youth and families throughout Central Vermont.

Whether you simply tell someone about the importance of mentoring, become a mentor, make a financial contribution, or advocate for youth in our community in your own personal way, **you are part of this work.** Mentoring matters because relationships matter. A caring adult who shows up, listens, encourages, and sticks around can make a lasting difference in a young person's life.

Thank you for being part of the YFM community. We are excited about where we are going, and we are grateful to have you with us.

Sincerely,

Sally Russell

Sally Russell, program director

Program Highlights FY25–26

Our mentees are at the heart of everything we do, and with the generous support from the Vermont Children's Trust for a second year, our **Enrichment Program** brought mentors and mentees together to build community, try new things, and have fun. From exploring old-growth forests at Marsh-Billings-Rockefeller National Historical Park (at left) to enjoying the opening of the Farmers Night music series at the state house, these experiences helped youth discover more about Vermont while deepening their connection to their community.

The Enrichment Program also provides families with stipends for high-quality extracurricular opportunities. This summer, six mentees attended overnight camp at **Camp Downer** in Sharon, VT, a longtime YFM partner that has welcomed our youth for over a decade. Stipends supported a

see **PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS**, *p.2* ▶

Celebrating Our Mentor-Mentee Pairs!

This year, eight more caring adults in our community stepped forward to become mentors—creating **eight new mentoring relationships** that will bring connection, encouragement, and new experiences to children and their families. We look forward to matching the 12 youth on our waiting list in the year to come!

Scott and Garrett celebrated their 7th year together!

Jane and Maliah have been together since March of 2024. Here they are enjoying a Lake Monsters Game sponsored by Mentor Vermont.

From left, Garrett and Scott, Maliah and Jane, and Paige and Mustafa.

PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS, *continued from p.1*

wide range of youth interests, from soccer and basketball camps to art classes and violin lessons. They also helped provide safety equipment, including bike helmets and life jackets, so youth could participate safely in the activities they enjoy. These opportunities give young people the chance to build skills, explore new interests, develop confidence, and see new possibilities for themselves.

We were also pleased to welcome **Mark Billian** to our Advisory Board. As longtime YFM mentor, Mark brings firsthand experience and a deep understanding of the impact of mentoring relationships, and we are grateful to have his perspective and commitment guiding our work.

Youth Committee Work

This year, YFM made youth voice a priority in program development, recognizing that young people are more engaged and invested when they have a meaningful role in shaping the programs designed for them. Creating opportunities for youth to share their perspectives also helps build trust, strengthen self-advocacy, and develop confidence and leadership skills.

This year, a three-member Youth Committee met six times throughout the year to help develop YFM's Enrichment Group Activity calendar. The Youth Committee researched venues, developed budgets, engaged in thoughtful discussion, and ultimately created a group activity calendar shaped and designed by youth, for youth. They did an amazing job! Look for us on our first group activity as we participate in the Montpelier Alive's October Art Walk!

Last year, Youth First Mentoring . . .

Served

27

youth

with over

1300

hours

of direct 1:1 support.

Provided over **$6,000** in Enrichment Scholarships thanks to Vermont Children's Trust funding. The fund helps to close the opportunity gap many of our mentees face! Thank you, VCT!

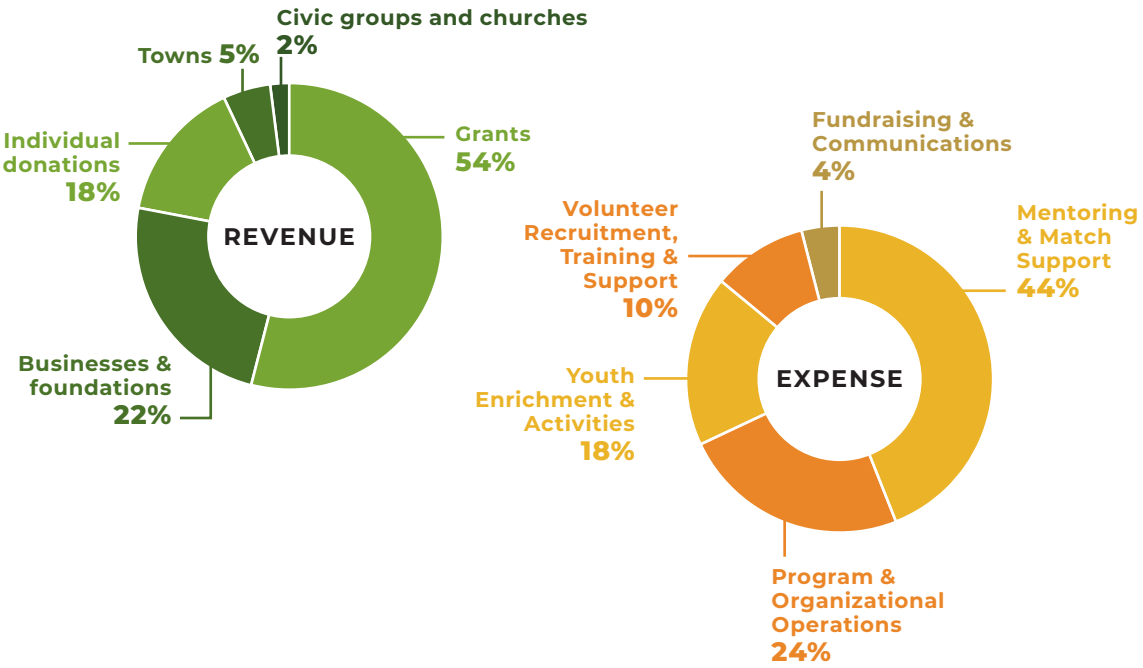
Celebrated the **10-year anniversary** of our 'oldest' mentoring pair, Brian and Landin! They have spent over 800 hours together, and Landin has grown about two feet!

Brian and Landin

*"Having my mentee tell me I was **one of the people she felt safest talking to** really showed me the impact I've had on her life."*

—adult mentor

Financials FY25–26



*"My child sometimes struggles with confidence and problem solving through a hard situation. His mentor has helped to **increase his self-confidence.** "*

—parent of a mentee

*"My mentor makes sure he makes time for me and **makes me feel important.**"*

—youth mentee

Youth First Mentoring **Advisory Board**

STEPHEN KLEIN
Retired Chief Legislative Fiscal Officer for Vermont
Montpelier

JOYCE MANCHESTER
Retired Senior Economist, Vermont Legislative Joint Fiscal Office
Waterbury

GARET ALLEN-MALLEY
Retired University of Vermont Faculty
Montpelier

MARK BILLIAN
Retired owner of Design Build Vermont
Montpelier

DEBORAH WOLF
WCFE Treasurer & Former Executive Director
Middlesex

Young people need **all of us.**

There is a role for everyone in creating a community where young people feel seen, supported, and connected.

BECOME A **MENTOR**

Share your time and interests with a young person through Youth First Mentoring.

REFER A YOUTH

Know a young person who could benefit from a caring adult mentor? Connect them with Youth First Mentoring and **help open the door to a meaningful relationship.**

ADOPT THE **MENTOR MINDSET**

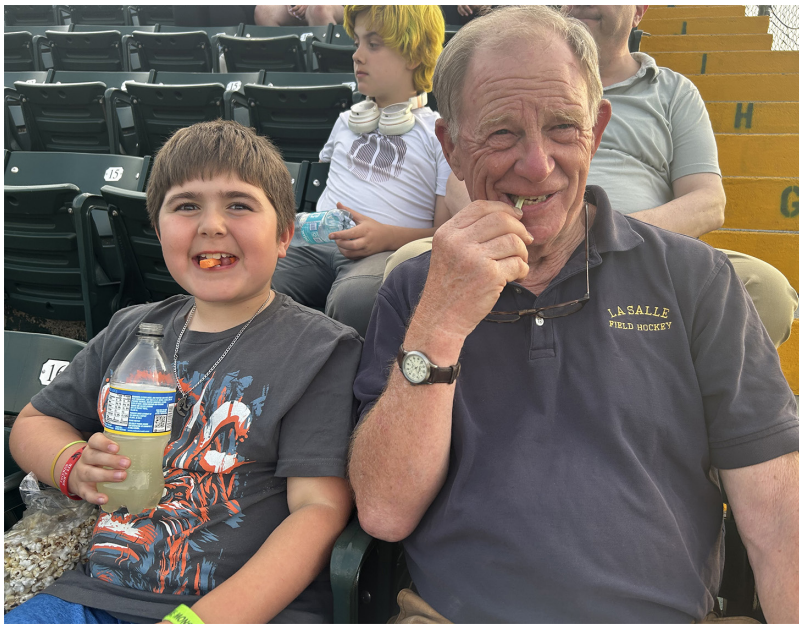
Be the **caring, encouraging adult** young people need in your own family, school, neighborhood, or community.

INVEST IN MENTORING

Your gift helps make quality mentoring possible for more young people and families.

SPREAD THE WORD

Tell others about Youth First Mentoring and help us build a community where every young person has the opportunity to thrive. The more people who know, the more young people we can reach.



Wesley and Mark catching a ball game.

Scan to learn more or get involved — or visit youthfirstmentoring.org

With Gratitude

None of this would have been possible without the dedication and support of our volunteer mentors and advisory board, families and children who open their hearts to mentoring, and our many individual, business, civic, and grant donors who heed the call to invest in local children.

And a special thanks to these grantors, corporate sponsors, and large individual donors:

Barre City
Ben & Jerry's
Charles Rubner
Concept II Rowing
Old Meeting House
Diane Derby
Deb Wolf & Anthony Pollina
Fred & Susan Skeels
Georgia Valentine
Joyce Manchester and David Stapleton
Lawson's Finest
M&T Bank
Mentor Vermont
Velco
Kiwanis Club
National Life Foundation
Northfield Savings Bank
Sarah and Scott Van Beck
Priscilla Fox and Stephen Klein
S&C Harvest Foundation
Green Mountain Power
Everett Insurance
Town Fair Tire
Towns of Calais, Worcester, Middlesex, East Montpelier, Barre City, and Montpelier
United Way Lead Prevention Grant
Vermont Children's Trust
Vermont Community Foundation
Vermont Mutual
Jan & Rupert Thouron
Bridget Asay
Nancy & Bob Pope
Garet Allen Malley & Wally Malley
Susan Ritz

802-552-0249 • director@youthfirstmentoring.org • youthfirstmentoring.org