

# Annual Report Rural Arts Collaborative

# 2022/2023



Nature Weaving with Beth Meachem, Craftsbury Green Space

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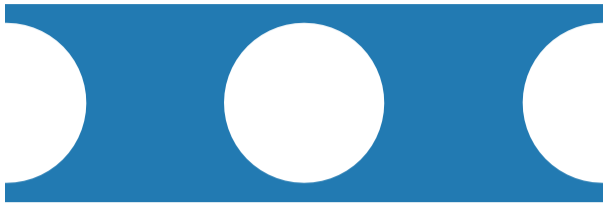
# Free Art—Or *Is It?*



**HOW OUR ARTS PROGRAMS PLAY A ROLE  
IN THE CREATIVE ECONOMY**



## Over 40,000 Vermonters contribute to the production and distribution of cultural goods, services, and intellectual property.



Vermont's celebrated natural beauty has played muse to artists for millennia. In its history, indigenous peoples created the petroglyphs in Bellows Falls and wood and stone crafts more than 10,000 years ago. American masters, like Frederick Edwin Church and Norman Rockwell, have depicted the landscape and small town life. Contemporary artists continue to explore Vermont from their perspectives, such as Winocha Steele and William Ransom as artists in residency at Clemmons Family Farm, and countless others. Vermont has deep roots in what is now considered a vibrant creative economy.

More than 9% of all jobs in Vermont are in the creative sector. This means that over 40,000 Vermonters contribute to the production and distribution of cultural goods, services, and intellectual property. As reported by the Vermont Arts Council, a survey revealed that in 2015 alone, organizations in this sector spent \$79 million to "employ people locally, purchase goods and services from local establishments, and attract tourists [and] also leveraged a remarkable \$44 million in additional spending by cultural audiences."

Understanding the creative economy relative to Vermont's own GDP provides an important context against which to consider the cost of providing the products and services that 85% of Vermonters feel is "an important element of life in [their] community." In order to keep Vermont vibrant for youth, adults, and elders, careers in the creative sector must be viable and lucrative. Yet, the arts must remain affordable to the masses. How do we pay for the arts and keep them free to the consumer? Every experience offered for free has an associated cost. The materials, the instructor's time, advertising and promotion, the person handling registration and logistics, the venue—none of it is free.

As a Vermont organization within the creative sector, Rural Arts Collaborative employs artist

and non-artist employees who together produce these valuable cultural services. Between July 1, 2022 and June 30, 2023, we spent \$184,617 in payroll to employ 34 artists and 10 non-artist employees who provided 131 in-person programs to our patrons. 90% of that programming was completely free to participants, even though 100% of the people organizing those experiences were compensated for their time.

We've been able to achieve this using a combination of earned income and subsidy. In our last fiscal year, we generated more than \$10,000 by offering memberships to, rentals of, and services from within our co-working, creative tech, and studio spaces. Private donations to support our mission generated more than \$50,000. Tuition payments for fee-based classes were negligible, accounting for less than \$2,500, demonstrating that the vast majority of our arts experiences were funded by Vermont Afterschool, Vermont Arts Council, Vermont Community Foundation, and Vermont Humanities, with a large portion of those grant funds derived from the State of Vermont and the National Endowment of the Arts. (A full list of the granting organizations that supported our work is available on page 10 of this report.)

Last year, our "free" art experiences included camps, classes, and afterschool programs for children, performances for community, and workshops for adults. Below is an overview of some of our most popular offerings.

**\$79**  
**million**  
paid to employ people  
in the creative sector



**Bees and Friends** was presented by Ballet Vermont on Craftsbury Common on August 4, 2022. Catch Peggior, the choreographer, is a classically trained ballet dancer who envisioned a new way of enjoying ballet: outdoors, on the grass. Set to Vivaldi's Four Seasons, the Vermont-based ballet company brings this art form to the masses with accessible, outdoor performances.



**One Man's Trash** was presented by Cirque Us on August 24, 2022 in Greensboro at Circus Smirkus. This lively performance featured circus artists depicting junkyard characters who transform discarded objects into treasures through wonderful feats of agility and imagination followed by circus and origami workshops.



**Sankofa! Building Community from Then to Now** was a showcase of performances that explored the African concept of Sankofa. In the Akan language of the Ashanti people of Ghana, Sankofa literally translates to "go back and retrieve." Hosted Edwin Owusu, five young hip-hop performers told stories of what it is like to be a young black artist in Vermont through their music. The event ended with a multi-racial, multi-generational dance party.



**What's Past is Prologue** was an afternoon writing workshop at the Hardwick Municipal Building. Peter Gould, Brattleboro-based artist, author, performer, teacher, and activist, guided students through a practice in memoir. The evening ended with an intimate reading. After the experience, one participant told Peter Gould that the act of writing her memories and reading her story was an important step in her recovery from her battle with the health care system.



**WonderKids Afterschool Program** at Craftsbury Academy helped kids in grades K-6 explore literature, crafts, theater, journaling, and movement through the themes of Winter Wonderland and Going on a Bear Hunt. Supporting the whole child through nutrition, play, creativity, and rest, the WonderKids program encourages children to exercise their own imagination and develop into creative, resilient young people.





WonderArts Outdoor Adventure Camp, July 2022. Children explored the intersection of arts and nature through cyanotype printmaking, fairy house building, and more.

Are we suggesting that we should all be paying to participate in quality arts programming in our community? No! We simply recognize that the creative sector is busy, vibrant, and valued, and believe the key to sustainability is art for everyone. The work of the Rural Arts Collaborative is an important part of the equation

**creativity + kids + community = vibrant Northeast Kingdom.**

This is why we will continue to work for you to find the resources to facilitate the experiences that bring us all joy. ■

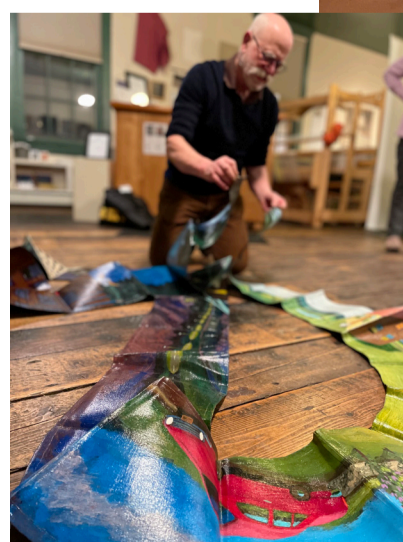
**90 %**  
of programs were free

**100 %**  
of all artists were paid

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Joanne George's Watercolor Batique Class

Ken Leslie's Introduction to Coptic Bookbinding class





# Community Stories



"Erin, a consumer from LCMHS, and myself have attended Thursday afternoons at GRACE for the last eight years. We greatly enjoyed learning

new art techniques, being creative and meeting new people during our two-hour sessions. Before Covid we worked with Marcie, who showed us how to make macaroni art, life drawing by drawing ours or others hands and feet, and comic strip art. After Covid we worked with Beth who showed us wood art structures based on architecture artists, how to make water scenes with tissue paper based on landscape artists, and fabric and paper flowers. Both Marcie and Beth tried to use recycled items for their art projects so that we could do them at home at little expense. Without people like Marcie and Beth we couldn't have enjoyed learning about the art that is found all around us. GRACE brings people together who have the common interest of art and enjoy meeting new people. Thank you."

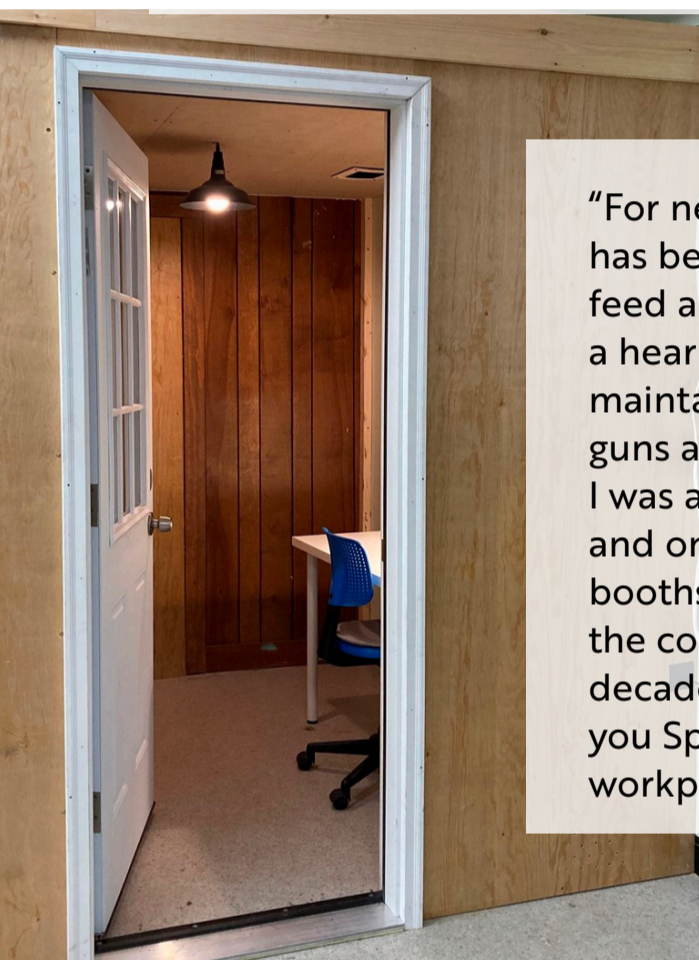
— Candy and Erin





“OSSU is thrilled to be partnering with Rural Arts Collaborative to deliver afterschool and summer enrichment programming that supports our students’ learning and growth in out-of-school hours. WonderKids’ emphasis on movement, creativity, outdoor adventures, and connection establishes a valued and necessary educational supplement for our participating students. Anecdotally, we know that students are engaged and take part in a way that positively boosts their overall educational experience. We are grateful for this partnership.”

– Annie Houston, OSSU Grants Manager



“For nearly twenty years my employer, the American Feed Industry Association, has been advocating for modernization of federal policy regarding animal feed and as luck would have it, the Food and Drug Administration scheduled a hearing during my house remodeling project. There was no way I could maintain the required focus to draft written comments and the sounds of nail guns and skill saws would certainly drown out my verbal comments. Luckily, I was able to work from Spark for two months as I developed our position and on the big day I presented our comments from one of the soundproof booths. Over 1000 people subscribed to the hearing and listened live to the comments. I am pleased to say that FDA heard our points and after two decades of work we are making real progress on the needed changes. Thank you Spark for providing me with a professional, affordable and convenient workplace.”

– Louise Calderwood, Spark Member

“Neighbors in Action has a very prominent location in the center of town in Lyndonville. However, we were struggling to let the community know that we had food available at our food share. So, this past summer, Executive Director Elizabeth Vitale worked with Rural Arts at Spark to create a large banner for our space. We spent several hours one afternoon selecting a font, a background color and aligning everything just right. Luke Dewees and other staff at Spark were spectacular to work with - very attentive and receptive to suggestions. We have been hanging the finished banner in front of our building during our food shares and we have received so many positive comments and feedback from clients! We love our new banner and have seen participation at our food share increase every week! Thank you again for all of your help in creating this signage for our organization.”

– Elizabeth Vitale, Neighbors in Action





# Agile Arts

In the words of Bon Jovi: the more things change, the more they stay the same. This timeless sentiment was expressed in their song as the band evolved in the face of an ever-changing music industry. It is easy to see how this is true, even in the Northeast Kingdom of Vermont, as trends and appetites shift but the issues facing our community remain the same. Youth still need creative enrichment to become resilient; seniors still need places to gather to fight isolation; and adults still seek connection and community. For a nonprofit that strives to address these needs, observing our ecosystem and developing new partnerships is crucial for dealing with the pace of change.



*This Sterling College student is designing wooden decorations to cut on the laser cutter at Spark in a collaboration with Sterling College Library.*



Rural Arts Collaborative looked very different on June 30, 2023 than it did at the beginning of the fiscal year. As the appetite for tuition-based arts classes declined, we reduced the number of adult art programs that required a fee. In the community, these needs were met through concerts at Highland Center for the Arts, plays at Civic Standard, and storytelling performances like the Blackfly Story Hour, reflecting that people in our community were thirsty for performance art, social gatherings, and sharing food together, and preferred to invest in those activities rather than visual arts classes. As more Vermonters and visitors to our region needed access to reliable internet, video conferencing, and professional meeting spaces, we responded to that need with additional membership benefits in our co-working space. As the need to compete in digital spaces became undeniable, we increased our capacity to display artwork in front of online-audiences. And when the only comprehensive afterschool program in the Supervisory Union collapsed, our arts enrichment program took its place.

Disruption to our way of being is necessary to achieve extraordinary impact. Our portfolio of programs may look different, but our reach is farther and our outcomes are stronger than ever.

## Spark

The Makerspace has seen increased engagement thanks to the efforts of Luke Dewees, our new Spark Coordinator. Luke's

work, funded in part by the Pleasant's Fund of the Greensboro United Church, has focused on building Spark's identity as a place where creatives can learn to use technology to expand their projects and turn their ideas into reality.



## WonderArts

WonderArts is known for providing a wide variety of community workshops and events. This year, we made the decision to narrow our offerings based on the community's needs. Orleans Southwest Supervisory Union (OSSU) has entrusted us with providing quality arts education through our WonderKids Afterschool and Summer Enrichment Program. Between October 2022 and June 2023, we regularly provided arts enrichment in Craftsbury to an average of 10 kids every Monday and Tuesday. At the Albany Head Start Center, we provided a new program called Tiny Masters, in which 16 preschoolers learn about a variety of art genres and materials through exploring the work of famous artists in history.



## GRACE

The massive collection of artwork housed at GRACE's Old Firehouse is now easier to browse than ever. Our Digital Curator Assistant, Ed Lemery, completed the GRACE Digital Archive, supported by grants from Vermont Humanities and Vermont Arts Council. The Digital Archive displays the artwork of more than 30 artists of GRACE's Heritage Artists online for anyone with an internet connection to access and explore. GRACE's inclusive art workshops have been slow to recover from the pandemic, but with new community partnerships and the support of our dedicated donors, these workshops have found their footing once again and are seeing the highest participation in these workshops since pre-pandemic times. Maintenance planning of the Firehouse building is underway, generously supported by volunteer Bill Chidsey, and board members Stephen Ferber and Amelia Fritz, funded by Preservation Trust of Vermont. ■

RURAL ARTS  
COLLABORATIVE

Home About

# MEET THE ARTISTS

THE GRACE  
ARCHIVE  
COLLECTION



Dot Kibbee



Gayleen Aiken



# GRANT AWARDS

Digital Capacity Grant (Vermont Arts Council)  
Spark Connecting Communities Grant (Vermont Community Foundation)  
Northeast Kingdom Fund (Vermont Community Foundation)  
Expanding Access Grant (Vermont Afterschool)  
Landon Award (Turrell Fund)  
Arts Partnership Grant (Vermont Arts Council)  
Operating Grant (Greensboro Association)  
Operating Grant (Allen Hilles Fund)  
Pleasants Fund Grant (Greensboro United Church of Christ)  
Free Arts Grant (Forward Philanthropy)  
Head Start Arts Grant (Vermont Arts Council)  
On the Job Training Grant (Department of Labor)  
Creative Futures Grant (Vermont Arts Council)  
Project Grant (Vermont Humanities Council)  
Project Grant (Vermont Electric Coop)

# SPONSORS

Richard Rubin  
Calderwood Insurance  
Hill Farmstead Brewery  
Whistle Emporium  
Willey's Store  
Smith's Store

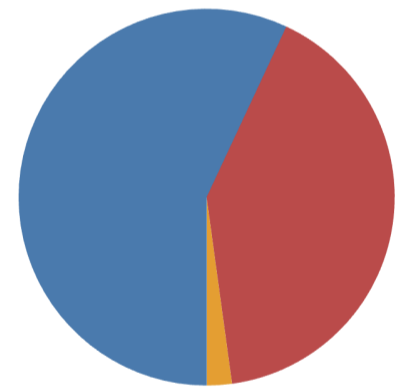
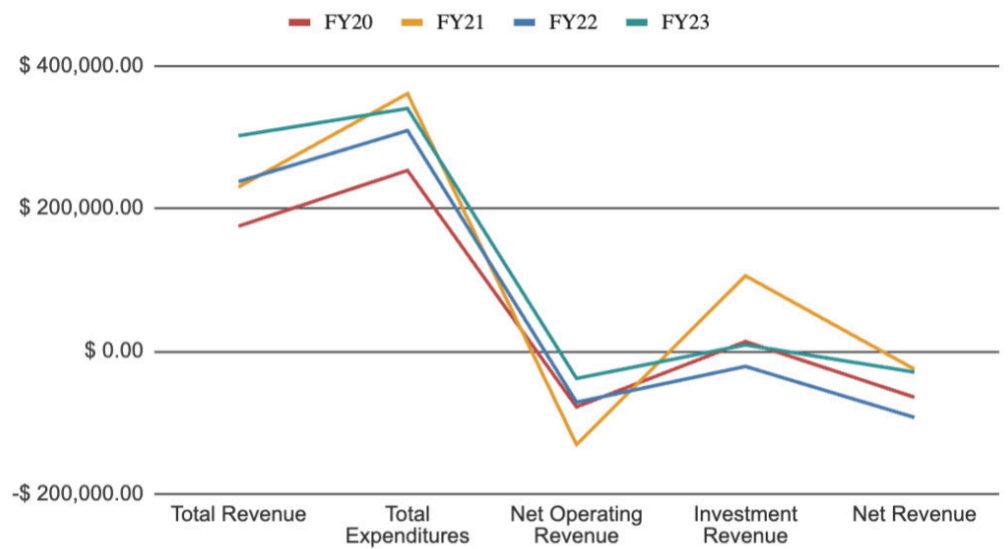


# FY23 By the Numbers

## FINANCIAL REPORT

Net operating revenues are at their highest point in four years and investment revenues have rebounded after the low period in FY22. Program expenses remain the highest category of spending, at 57% of the annual expenditures. Although payroll expenses are high, with wages accounting for \$184,617 in FY23, this investment is the result of hiring qualified and reliable staff and 100% of those wages have supported year-round households in our immediate community.

Revenue & Expenses Four-Year Comparison

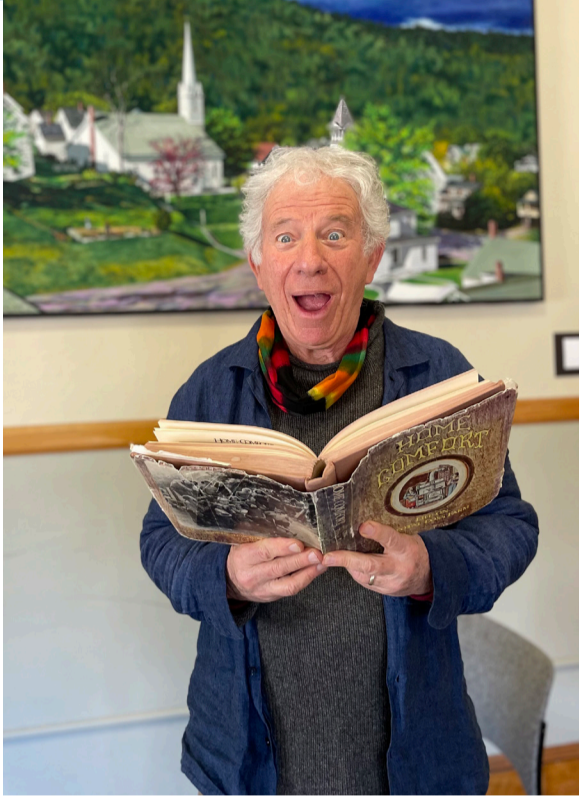


57%	\$193,725	Program Expenses
41%	\$138,978	Administrative Expenses
2%	\$73,666	Fundraising Expenses



# HOW MUCH DID WE DO?

131	In-person programs held
747	People served
34	Artists employed
10	Non-artists employed
\$185K	Paid to Vermont resident employees



Peter Gould, What's Past is Prologue, April 2023

# HOW WELL DID WE DO IT?

We sourced materials locally whenever possible and increased natural and post-consumer supplies

We added meeting spaces, cubicles, and storage as additional membership benefits at Spark

We increased community partnerships for sustainability, including using one building for multiple purposes at GRACE



Beth Meachem, Nature Weaving, June 2023



# HOW ARE PEOPLE BETTER OFF?

All GRACE artists are now represented on our website so that anyone with an internet connection can view the body of work and read the artist's story.

.....

Children living year round in Craftsbury, Greensboro, and Hardwick—and beyond—have access to high-quality arts experiences for free

.....

Seniors and people with disabilities have a place where they can gather and be creative together

.....

Creative entrepreneurs and remote workers have an affordable workspace available to them 24/7



Audience and performer group photo at Sankofa! From Then to Now, Hazen Union, February 2023



## THE YEAR TO COME

2023-2024 plans from Executive Director, Sarah Mutrux

Since my arrival on the scene in November 2021, the board and staff here have worked hard to find a sustainable path forward. In our small Vermont communities, the arts are explored on stages from the Hardwick Town House, to the bars at the VFWs, to the state-of-the-art facilities at the Highland Arts Center in Greensboro; libraries host bookmaking, poetry writing, and art talks; artists form practice and critique groups to create and learn together. It isn't up to Rural Arts Collaborative to host and organize something for everyone, but to work in concert with all these outlets and to add to the fabric of our creative landscape. Therefore, moving forward we will let our capable community partners host the one-time concerts, workshops, and performances.

People who have participated in the Spark, WonderArts, and GRACE programs for many years will notice a downturn in the amount of individual classes and workshops on our calendar. Narrowing our scope to focus on the places where the need is most significant will stabilize our organization and build ongoing relationships between artists and students of all ages, particularly in afterschool enrichment, preschool arts, and gatherings for isolated seniors. We will lean heavily on collaborations with the Orleans Southwest Supervisory Union, the Vermont Arts Council, and our generous donors to continue to provide these valuable arts experiences widely and affordably in Greensboro, Hardwick, Craftsbury, and surrounding communities. In FY2023-2024, will offer and make advancements, such as the following:

### Memberships

Make the Spark Co-working and Makerspace into a brighter, more comfortable working environment. Renovations and improvements mean that co-workers will enjoy increased privacy, additional meeting space, and new equipment

### Creativity

Expanding the WonderKids program from one site to three sites to serve more than 65 children through nature- and creativity-based experiences that foster social emotional skills and imagination. We have already successfully completed our first Summer Enrichment Program, serving 103 kids for 30 days of summer camp that explored arts, cultures, and cuisine from around the world

### Early Arts

We will continue to provide the Albany Head Start Center with our Tiny Masters program and plan to expand services to more centers

### Partnerships

We will strengthen our relationship with the Craftsbury Community Care Center and Northeast Kingdom Human Services, and connect more seniors and people with disabilities to arts and community

Rural Arts Collaborative is more than a name—it is a strategy. Collaboration can be hard work, but cross-sector partnerships have been strengthening since 2021. In my first year here we looked back at our roots and carried important lessons forward. In my second year, we came together to find a new way of serving our community. And in this third year, we're going to put that new way of being to work for us. Our theme for this year will be "Shoulder to the Grindstone." Let's see what kind of future our artists and administrators can mill out for our community. ■



# Thank You!

Thank you to all our participants, donors, funders, and community partners who helped us cultivate a more vibrant Northeast Kingdom this year through arts, recreation, technology, and with sustainable practices! **We can't do this work without you.**







GRACE



WonderArts



spark

