Amigos de las Américas

IMPACT REPORT 2023

Looking Towards the Future
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Letter from our President &amp; CEO</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2023 Programs</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peer-to-Peer Community Building</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partnerships and Enrollment</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partnership with Princeton’s Novogratz Bridge Year</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Youth Ambassadors Program Spotlight</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Events: Adelante Benefit</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Events: Lifelong Leaders Luncheon</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership and Awards</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Donors</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
This year marked an important juncture as we continue to rebuild from the setbacks caused by the pandemic. Enrollment increased for middle and high school students, and we launched new partnerships to reach more youth from underserved backgrounds. Thanks to the work of our supporters, educator advocates, and community partners, 2023 was a year where we could begin to look towards the future again.

Partnerships allow us to do what we do best in tandem with impactful organizations and schools that share in our mission. These partnerships widen our reach and strengthen our programs with new perspectives and possibilities. It is an honor to work alongside our partners, including CollegeTrack regional offices, Princeton University, The Boys and Girls Club of Houston, Prep for Prep, The Jesuit School Network, The Houston Independent School District, and more. I am proud to see these partnerships grow so that we can reach more young leaders.

We further developed our Alumni Program to reconnect with alumni from our 60-year history. We launched two new awards to recognize outstanding AMIGOS alumni. Tomás Magaña, MD, MA received the 2023 Lifetime Leader Alumni Award, and Julia Cedarholm was awarded the 2023 Rising Social Entrepreneur Award. Both were presented with their awards at the year’s headlining event, the Adelante Benefit in San Francisco.

I enjoyed reconnecting with so many community members at the Adelante Benefit in San Francisco and the Lifelong Leaders Luncheon Benefit in Houston. These gatherings mobilize philanthropy for AMIGOS and are impossible without our committed sponsors and event leadership. As we commence celebrations for our 60th anniversary in 2024, I look forward to more opportunities to come together, celebrate, and reflect.

This year, we took a tremendous step forward by launching The Fund for the Future. This campaign will build a brighter future for AMIGOS. Its efforts are rooted in two objectives: 1) to expand programming to reach more youth and 2) to provide access for all. The campaign will establish the organization’s first Sustainability Fund to ensure future generations of youth will benefit from these transformative experiences in leadership and service. Thanks to an energized Steering Committee and our Board of Directors, we are ready to take a historic leap forward and meet today’s challenges with commitment and fervor.

I am steadfast in my belief that the next generation of leaders must be compassionate and courageous—perhaps more so now than at any other time in our 60-year history. This is the idea behind our bold dream to ensure that our programs are accessible to every young person who wishes to join AMIGOS, and I am proud of all that we accomplished in 2023 to realize this dream.

Gracias,

Sara Nathan
President & CEO
2023 Programs

- 615 volunteers
- 7 countries
- 46% of students received financial assistance
- 20,640 service hours
Summer Program
- 3-6 week-long programs for students ages 13-19
- Service topic themes: Conservation and Climate Justice, Indigenous Rights, and Food Security
- Group service and community homestay program formats
- Students and staff from across the Americas
- Location: Costa Rica, Ecuador, Panama

Youth Ambassadors Program
- 9-month program with 3-week exchanges for high school students
- Funded by U.S. Department of State
- Students and mentors from across the Americas
- Location: Colombia, Ecuador, Paraguay, The U.S., and Uruguay

Community Impact Project
- The program operates in partnership with the Houston Academy of International Studies
- The hybrid program prepares to become environmental changemakers
- Location: Houston, Texas

Gap Program
- Semester or year-long program for high school graduates
- Accredited by the Gap Year Association
- Internship placements with local service partners
- Custom Program: The Princeton Novogratz Bridge Year Program
- Location: Costa Rica, Ecuador

Social Impact Accelerator
- 16-week virtual follow-on program for high school alumni
- Seed funding for service projects in students' home communities
- Funded by Capital Plus Financial
- Students from across the Americas
- Student Location: Costa Rica, Ecuador, Panama, and The U.S.
Peer-to-Peer Community Building at AMIGOS

2023 New York City Marathon

AMIGOS participated in the TCS 2023 NYC Marathon for the first time as a charity partner. The marathon challenges all charity runners to push beyond their limits and to make an impact within their community. Team AMIGOS was comprised of five runners who raised more than $20,000 for AMIGOS programs! AMIGOS hopes to make this an annual tradition moving forward.

Chapter Fundraising in Full Swing

Peer-to-peer fundraising through our chapters was back in full swing this year. Our chapter students engaged in the long-standing tradition of writing letters to spread the word about AMIGOS and crowdfund for financial assistance of future chapter volunteers. Supporters were encouraged to donate online through our fundraising platform CauseVox, shifting from the traditional practice of sending in checks.

In 2023, our 10 active chapters received $485,000+ in donations from their letter-writing campaigns.
In 2022-2023, AMIGOS increased the number of its partnerships for recruitment. Our team implemented a variety of different models which resulted in more students enrolled from in more diverse geographic areas. These efforts are made possible by our generous donors, Scott and Catherine Roberts, whose commitment of $250,000 over five years inspired and launched this newly refined and robust strategy starting in 2020. We are honored to have their support and are energized by these burgeoning relationships with like-minded organizations.

In 2023, AMIGOS initiated new partnerships with seven organizations including the Boys and Girls Club of Greater Houston, and College Track San Francisco, and sustained partnerships with five organizations including Prep for Prep, KIPP NYC, and College Track DC Area.

Josh Espinoza
2023 Prep for Prep Partnership Volunteer
4-week project in Cocle, Panama

Josh reported that AMIGOS was “definitely a life-changing experience.” He loved his staff and got along well with his partners, but the connection he developed with his host family was the highlight of his experience. He said they came to be “another family” to him and “will always be in his heart.” In the words of Josh’s supervisor, “I can confidently say that in my opinion, Josh had the best experience and got the most out of the program than any other volunteer. He went above and beyond for everything he was involved in since the very first day and made lifelong friendships and bonds with most of the people he had the pleasure of meeting. From firsthand conversations, the whole community will miss him dearly.”
In 2023, we launched our first year of partnering with the Princeton Novogratz Bridge Year Program in San Isidro, Costa Rica. This academic year-long program is centered around the AMIGOS pillars of cultural humility, ethical service, and leadership development.

Gap Program students explored topics like the relationship between people and the environment, how local agencies address environmental conservation and climate change, and how they can get involved in these issues themselves. Costa Rica is an ideal place to learn about these topics, and AMIGOS has strong partnerships with government institutions, NGOs, and cooperatives in the country because we’ve operated in the country for over three decades. Students live with host families while interning with a local organization to support ongoing community projects. We are honored to provide this programming for Princeton University and look forward to continuing this program.
Since launching this program in 2012, the Youth Ambassador Program (YAP) has provided young leaders from five countries unique opportunities for personal growth, community engagement, and international collaboration. The program is fully funded by the U.S. State Department’s Bureau of Education and Cultural Affairs. YAP offers community service-minded students the opportunity to stay with a host family and begin training on a community project they design. All exchanges run for approximately three weeks and share a core curriculum of workshops and activities. After the international exchange, students return home where they carry out their community project with support from local mentors.

In 2023, the students and mentors from Ecuador and Colombia traveled to Austin, Texas, for their exchange for the first time. The program rotates locations every few years. Past locations included Houston, Texas; San Francisco, California; and Madison, Wisconsin.

Students and mentors from the United States traveled to Cuenca, Ecuador, for their program in 2023. The ambassadors reported feeling more confident in their ability to work effectively with people from diverse ethnic and cultural backgrounds. Upon completion of the program, they also reported feeling more confident in their ability to inspire others to become leaders.
The 2023 Adelante Benefit was held on Saturday, September 23rd, at the Julia Morgan Ballroom in downtown San Francisco. It was an incredible evening of connection and celebration of AMIGOS’ resilience and excellence for nearly 60 years. Funds raised from the benefit support our transformational youth leadership programs and financial assistance for students across the Americas. Thank you to the event Host Committee and sponsors for making this event memorable and impactful.

During the event program, the recipients of our newly created alumni recognition awards were honored.

Julia Cedarholm ('11, '12, '13, '14) was presented as the recipient of the AMIGOS 2023 Rising Social Entrepreneur Award for an outstanding alumnus. This award recognizes an alum under 40 who is a pioneer in addressing social issues facing our global community.
Tomas Magana, MD, MA ('80, '88) was our 2023 Lifetime Leader Alumni Award recipient due to his exceptional leadership and service in the medicine and advocacy fields. Dr. Magaña co-founded the FACES for the Future Program in 2000 to improve health outcomes for at-risk adolescents, respond to imperatives for building a diverse and culturally responsive healthcare workforce, and address workforce shortages in healthcare professions.

Tomás’ journey with AMIGOS began in 1980 when he volunteered in Honduras. He then served on the Project Staff Team in Paraguay in 1988. Over the decades, he has worn many hats in AMIGOS as a chapter leader, national board member, and parent. He has always lifted our mission and purpose with his calls for action towards greater accessibility to our programs. We were honored to receive his presence and hear him speak at the event.
2023 Lifelong Leaders Luncheon

The 2023 Lifelong Leaders Luncheon, held on Friday, December 1st, at the Houston Country Club, engaged nearly 200 guests for an afternoon of impact and celebration. The event raised over $100,000 for AMIGOS programs and financial assistance funds. Thank you to all the event sponsors, donors, host committee members, and attendees. We are encouraged by your support of AMIGOS programs and students.

Co-Chair Committee
Viviana and David Denechaud
Kellie and Chad Motsinger
Laura and Steve Otillar
Samantha Schnee and Michael Hafner

Scott and Catherine Roberts were recognized with the 2023 Amigo Para Siempre Award, which is granted to a member, or members, of our community who go above and beyond the call of service and who demonstrate a lifelong commitment to AMIGOS.

Keynote Speaker Chris Weekley ('98), speech centered on the importance of empowering young people and the impact his AMIGOS experience had on his life.
Leadership

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AMIGOS Insights from the Board of Directors

As we reflect on the state of the organization in 2023, it is with immense pride and gratitude that I share the remarkable progress made possible by the dedication and passion of our Board of Directors, staff, and supporters.

In the face of unprecedented challenges, our organization has demonstrated resilience and adaptability. We have continued to uphold our commitment to providing exceptional programming and accessibility to youth across the Americas and have increased enrollment nearly back to pre-pandemic levels. Our goal and vision for the future is to provide as many students as possible with an AMIGOS experience. This journey and transformation are life-changing for the students. I know because my three children are alumni.

I believe that the resilience of the organization is more important now than ever before. In an increasingly fragmented and divided world, AMIGOS introduces our youth to more that is not like them – and they learn from those experiences – solve problems with new colleagues who are also learning from new experiences – and ultimately understand that there are similarities across cultures. This is the power of our programming and the reason the Board is energized and motivated to continue our work.

From the Board’s perspective, we are pleased to see the organization poised to grow powerfully in the coming years. With new programming partnerships like Princeton’s Novogratz Bridge Year Program and new fundraising initiatives like the Fund for the Future campaign, the future looks bright for AMIGOS.

As we are on the cusp of celebrating our 60th anniversary, we look forward to advancing growth in our programs, building back from the pandemic with sustainability at the forefront, and cultivating partnerships for access and program excellence.

Thank you for being an essential part of our community and joining us on this journey of impact and transformation. We are grateful that you recognize the importance of investing in youth development and cultural immersion today so that these leaders can solve the problems of tomorrow.

In Service,

Kevin Lanier
Chair, AMIGOS Board of Directors
The Bill Arnold Leadership Award was created to remember a cherished member of our AMIGOS community. Each year, we select a volunteer or project staff member to become a Bill Arnold Fellow. The award provides fellows with a stipend to pursue an educational or civic engagement opportunity.

Meet the 2023 Bill Arnold Fellow, Wesley Nesbitt, a 2022 Summer Program alum from San Diego, California.

“As I started high school during Covid, I was looking for ways to stay engaged and give back to the community. I heard about the AMIGOS and was lucky enough to be chosen for the virtual Community Impact Project my freshman year and this experience got me hooked on the program. In my sophomore year, I was a member of the Young Alumni Council, and that summer I went to Costa Rica helping families run coffee farms. It was an amazing cultural and volunteer experience, and I improved my language skills.

I plan to put this award to use in civic engagement, as well as a unique educational experience. I have wanted to start an Ultimate Frisbee club at my high school, so I would use a portion of the stipend to aid in the startup of this venture, supplying equipment and working with the other schools to coordinate games. In addition, I would put a larger portion of the money towards Casa de Amistad. I plan to work with my advisor at Casa de Amistad to put the money to work in the Dreams + Tech Initiative, which allows children to focus on STEM outside of school hours and helps provide technology resources to the students and parents."

–Wesley Nesbitt, 2023 Bill Arnold Fellow
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POWERFUL SERVICE AND IMMERSION PROGRAMS FOR YOUTH ACROSS THE AMERICAS

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