

PULSE

 StandUp
for kids

FALL/WINTER 2021 | SECOND EDITION

THE BEAUTY IS IN THE
DIFFERENCE

DEEPENING COMMITMENTS

TO SOCIAL JUSTICE, DIVERSITY, AND INCLUSION

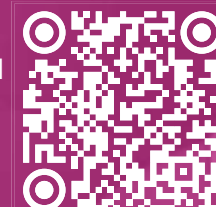
EVERY VOICE MATTERS

There are events in our lives that have lasting impacts long after the event has passed. The death of George Floyd was such a moment. StandUp for Kids' values are, and always have been, rooted deeply in being inclusive to all regardless of race, ethnicity, sexuality, gender identity, religion, and other identities. But since that tragic event, as an organization, we are engaging in deeper self-reflection and challenging ourselves to ask difficult questions about who we are and how we show up for others. How does an organization whose existence is grounded in caring for the most vulnerable of all, homeless youth, ensure that we create an open, affirming, and safe environment? StandUp for Kids is committed to the work of social justice and internally, we are walking toward a deeper commitment to inclusion and equity.

SUPPORT PULSE

BE PART OF OUR NEXT ISSUE

Help us to elevate the voice of homeless youth and bring StandUp for Kids' content to the world. Awareness is the mother of change. This magazine tells stories of our youth and our work. Our National Marketing & Creative Think Tank would love to collaborate with you.



CONTACT US TODAY:

ThinkTank@standupforkids.org

CONTACT US

A SAFE PLACE TO BE YOU

The numbers are startling. Nationwide, nearly 40% of homeless youth identify as LGBTQ, with many on the street because their parents kicked them out.

To create a safe place for youth to connect and share their stories, our Hampton Roads chapter launched YOU, an LGBTQ+ youth group, this past summer with a generous \$3,000 grant from Kia.

Open to youth ages 12-18, meetings are held every third Wednesday from 7 to 9 p.m. in Virginia Beach, with the kids recently voting to meet more often. At one meeting a girl commented at 8:30 p.m., "Oh no, I don't want it to be done yet!"

"It's one of my favorite nights," Nicole says. "Honestly, I look forward to it. We're doing it right." There was nothing like this going on locally before. Kids could travel to a center in Norfolk, but it's far away. The meetings are co-facilitated by Nicole

"We try to bring in special guests who identify to show these kids that you can be anything you want to be."

- Nicole Pixler,
Co-Executive Director, Hampton Roads



~40% OF HOMELESS YOUTH IDENTIFY AS LGBTQ

Nicole Pixler feels it's even higher at the beach, closer to **70%**

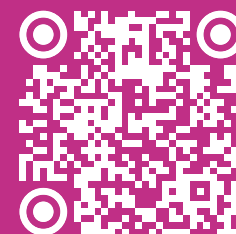
"It's hard to say why it's so prevalent here. I know that we live in a very transient community and a lot of people come from all over."

- Nicole Pixler,
Co-Executive Director, Hampton Roads

and Casey Butler from LGBT Life Center. The first 15 minutes are a time for snacks, drinks and getting to know each other, with name tags and pronoun stickers provided. There's usually one activity to bring everyone together and then smaller groups break off to work on things like team building or learning to trust. City Councilman Michael Berlucchi and the LGBT liaisons from the Virginia Beach Police and Sheriff's Departments have stopped by. Recently, when a mental health counselor held a breakout session with the kids, "It was both riveting and heartbreaking. Some of the things they said... we weren't ready to hear it. But we were ready to deal with it," shared Nicole.

The flyer promoting the meetings reminds youth that "You are loved. You are smart. You matter." They further get the word out through social media, school guidance counselors (who see which kids are falling through the cracks),

WTKR-TV spoke with Hampton Roads' Co-Executive Director Mark Stevens about the YOU meetings.



LEARN
MORE

and the youth just talking to one another about how awesome the meetings are. "In May, we had five kids. In June, we had twenty-six. We've started something here," Nicole says.



OUR FALL ISSUE OF PULSE CELEBRATES THE SPOKEN WORD ARTISTRY OF MARQUESHA BABERS

KEKE

At 15, she was living on the streets of Hollywood, when the filmmakers of American Street Kid first met her. Today, she empowers and inspires women around the world with her poetry. Her words are raw and real and capture growing up homeless and other life experiences with true passion. After a recent Q&A Zoom session with Keke, we were awed by her enthusiasm, infectious laugh, tireless efforts to help others, and her singular, commanding voice. Keke's words are compelling on paper and equally mesmerizing when she performs them live. Take a look and a listen. We're convinced once you do that you will agree she is food for the soul.



Marquesha Babers "Keke"

Artist, Entertainer, Poet, and StandUp for Kids Ambassador

Q&A *with KEKE*

Q: When did you realize you could live another kind of life?

The first time I went to NYC, I opened the 2015 Women in the World Summit at Lincoln Center with my poem "That Girl". It gave me a new sense of power. I can do more than I am doing. **Getting to know different people and cultures and places, it opens up your world to more possibilities** and opportunities to make something of myself.

Q: How do people react when you tell them you grew up homeless?

They just assume every single day of my life was misery. I have to correct people on that. Even though I grew up homeless, and things were hard, there was a certain point I did not know. **I didn't know I was homeless at 3.** It wasn't like I was just a sad child. In the face of anything, it depends on what you make of it. There were times we'd have to sleep in the car. So we'd say, let's just go to the park, get some snacks from the dollar store, and play at the park all day and make it like we did this on purpose.

Q: When did you start writing?

I had been writing poetry since I was 9, but I didn't know until age 11. I was just writing and writing and one day something happened to me, and I never told anyone. A few days before my 11th birthday, my great aunt told me to get it off my chest before I was 11 or it would stay with me forever. So I shared what I wrote with my mom, because I couldn't say it. "So you can read it. So you can understand," I told her. She read it and said, "And you've been writing poetry?"

Q: What made you realize the power of poetry?

When I turned 15, there was a poetry organization that came to our school, but it was just for boys. I was so upset. I am the only person that writes poetry in the world! It was just my thing. I had no community. So I

wrote a poem for my English teacher and he let me perform it at the ending showcase for the boys. After that, the organization came back the next year... COED. **That was the first time I'd seen change because of my poetry.**

Q: Do you write every day?

Just about. Sometimes not physically writing. Sometimes mentally writing. Hard to pinpoint how many poems I have. I have memorized every single poem I've ever written, but I haven't written down every single poem I have memorized. **The poems I have in my head come when I need them for something.**

Q: You are so inspiring to others. What inspires you and your creativity?

The thing is, I write in the moment when I am going through something really hard, because writing is also my sanctuary. **Without writing, I couldn't get through the day.** I get to perform a piece when I've dealt with the situation. If I made it through, it's my duty to show people the process. If I got through it, I don't want anyone else to go through it.

Q: You're so powerful when you're performing live. Did you know you had that in you?

My mom started taking me to church to perform – my first chance to get on stage. When I first started, I didn't think I had it in me to be a performer. It wasn't because I didn't think I had the talent, because every time I did it, people were really engaged. I didn't believe in myself well enough. I know I can probably speak really well, write really good poetry, write music, songs for friends... but no one wants to look at me so I can't be a performer. I was in that space for a long time until I realized that was absolutely not true.

“ DOESN'T MATTER WHAT YOU LOOK LIKE, WHAT SHAPE YOU ARE, WHAT COLOR YOU ARE, HOW LONG YOUR HAIR IS... NONE OF THAT MATTERS. YOU ARE A PERSON. YOU ARE A HUMAN BEING WHO DESERVES TO BE TREATED AS SUCH. ”

Q: What projects or partnerships are you excited about?

Right now, I have 8 projects going on. Super excited about a short film based off one of my poems, "Devil's Hand", where I'll be writing and acting. Think it's going to be an amazing, powerful piece and a great way to connect as an art form. Just started a new collective with four friends, **wearepoetic.com**. It's L.A.-based poets and artists from various communities aligned in the values of storytelling, empathy, and social impact – and helping artists not only create, but also create revenue for themselves and their art form.

Q: What advice would you give a homeless youth today?

Find something that you love to do. Because it's really hard to tell someone to just go out and work hard. There are lots of limitations – you need an I.D., birth certificate, social security number. But if you find something you can do no matter what your circumstances are, that you are passionate about, that you love to do for the right reasons, it will become your happy place. **Once you're okay with who you are and just being on this planet, once you stop giving yourself expectations and you just live, everything else just falls in line.**

Q: This issue of PULSE celebrates "The beauty is in the difference." What do those words mean to you?

I think we focus too much on how to try to blend in with each other, and how to make ourselves seem the same as one another. I love everything different. Let's talk about how we don't have

to be the same to love one another. I love the differences in people. It's very true in everything I do and everyone I involve myself with. My best friend and I, we're the same and different all at the same time. And that's what I love.



***I am doing so well.
I can navigate the world
and not let it break me
on a daily basis.***



WHERE I'M FROM

Im from backseat bedtimes

Gas station shower

The smell of uncertainty —
a burden on my senses

Three schools one year

Wet dew on the grass —
lets me know its time for school

Im from late night cuddles —
with the family to beat the force
of the piercing night winds

Im from trauma

From I get it from my momma

Feeling expanding guilt —
for wanting a better life
than my momma

She did her best now I do the rest

Im from breaking down barriers

Why are there barriers anyway

White people who never —
went to college

Tell me I have to go —
to college to be somebody

Cause black girls work harder

Black girl be smarter

Average doesn't make it

You have to be amazing

Don't ever be an angry...

Black girl

Im from crying —
the first time I saw a "C"

From fear never shown always felt
inside

Don't show the what's inside

A little girl who never —
got a chance to live

Im from rainclouds —
hit different in my neck
of the woods

Im from the hood

Where I never seen a rainbow

Or the silver lining

No crying

Unstable

Always fighting

Mislabeled

Black girl make magic from pain

Remember your name —
hand crafted so you always
have your family

Remember your family

Remember the only thing —
that saved you was Love and
writing & The love of writing

Don't stop writing

Im from unknown heritage —
I indulge in

My ancestors sit heavy
in my soul

They mastered the arts —
that run through my blood

Healed wounds —
with laughter and love

And I am still learning

I AM FROM THE WOMB...
OF A GODDESS

THE INSPIRATION

We were writing together as a community and the topic was "Where I'm from." I was trying to change the way that I wrote because I had gotten some criticism that had me doubting my creativity. The poem was supposed to be about Texas and funny and come out completely different. As soon as I started writing, I wrote the first line of the poem: Im from backseat bedtimes. When I am supposed to write something, I can't write anything else. It was at a point in time where I had gotten stable. I had my first ever Christmas tree. All this stuff was happening and I couldn't help but pay homage to where I came from.



- Marquesha Babers



WATCH KEKE

NEW OUTREACH CENTER, NEW LEADERSHIP.

"I CAN'T MAKE A
DIFFERENCE IN EVERY
YOUTH'S LIFE, BUT
ANY DIFFERENCE I
CAN MAKE IS A BIG
DIFFERENCE FOR ME."

- Adrian Ramirez, Co-Executive Director,
San Antonio

SAN ANTONIO

COMMUNITY WELCOMES NEW OUTREACH CENTER

With just a few months under their belt as Co-Executive Directors of our San Antonio chapter, the dynamic duo of Adrian Ramirez and Christal Campbell are looking to do even more for the area's homeless youth. He handles operations and finances while she deals with outreach and services offered. They took over from the two previous EDs, Bev Caraballo and Melody Bentley who had been with StandUp for Kids for 15+ years and still offer training and resource support to Adrian and

staff, helping them to figure out ways to make things happen. StandUp for Kids sends out a big thank you to them both for their incredible dedication and service over the years and we welcome their continued mentorship from afar.

They're all still buzzing from the Open House held on June 26, 2021, for their new outreach center, located in the Ella Austin Community Center. The team of 15 volunteers "came together as a family" to decorate and enjoy a breakfast with StandUp for

Kids' National Executive Director, Greg Smith, so he could see them in action. The day was a real celebration, attended by the district councilman, with a big welcome from the community and people asking how they can help and make donations.

In operation since 2006, the chapter offers street outreach, housing support, and mentoring. Adrian is a full-time city employee and says StandUp for Kids is like having a second job – one he embraces with a vision to offer more complete youth services,



Opening Day

"Everyone has something they bring to the table. We tap into those talents. We can't do it alone." - Adrian Ramirez, Co-Executive Director



and through local partnerships he is, including expanded access to a computer lab, auditorium, showers, and mentoring. With a real desire to help kids grow and succeed, Adrian says, "I am really passionate about working with kids. If I didn't love it, I wouldn't be holding down two full-time jobs."

The biggest challenge now is finding more volunteers – "We need three times as many!" His team splits duties between running the center and helping with social media, special projects, event planning, and fundraising.

Bumping up name recognition is also key, as is getting the word out, building up the mentoring program, getting to know and participating in the local community, and figuring out where their homeless kids are so they can reach them. The center is currently open two days a week in an area where many youth identify as LGBTQ+ and come through its doors.



KENS5
SCAN TO WATCH
NEWS CLIP

GIVING BACK IN ANY WAY SHE CAN

Protect Your Skin • Protect a Life

Susan Dudas first joined StandUp for Kids around 5 years ago as a trained volunteer, offering mentoring support through the Atlanta chapter's school program. She and her husband Dave "love to mentor young people and we're all about getting them stable homes." First paired with a high school senior, Susan could see that she just wanted to make it in life, but was in a tough predicament couchsurfing and needing a new place to stay come graduation. "At 18, she was trying to navigate life on her own. Nobody should have to do that." Susan arranged a visit to a college in Michigan that her mentee fell in love with, eventually becoming president of her sorority and receiving numerous accolades. Now at University of Michigan graduate school, she's become like a third daughter to the family, spending holidays and birthdays together.

It was a natural move to serve on StandUp for Kids' Executive Board, which Susan did for three years, meeting "some really hardworking people at all levels." Traveling to board meetings in different cities allowed her to visit outreach centers and experience street programs firsthand and understand what the volunteers were doing on the ground. "It's so powerful and this is why I really wanted to support StandUp for Kids in any way I can, I know the dedication level."

When she launched a new business one year ago, she had a goal of partnering with nonprofits. "I know what it's like to always beg for money. You're always starting over. The donor list is always changing. It's hard to grow that." With its tagline "Suncare that is skincare," My Day Screen™ is committed to providing clean, plant-based sun

care products that protect and feed your skin. The website includes "Protect Your Skin • Protect a Life" messaging about their commitment to helping young people in America who struggle every day with protecting and feeding themselves.

My Day Screen donates a total of \$2 for every product sale of at least \$30 through the website that is shared by Kidsave International and StandUp for Kids - "Two organizations that are dear to me," says Susan.

Getting My Day Screen to market took two years, with the pandemic making it a bit of a stop and start process. But with October 2021 marking its one year anniversary, Susan is excited about taking things to the next level. She hopes to grow her donations as her business grows, too.



I selected StandUp for Kids as a partner, having been a part of the organization and knowing the people that work in it and for our kids. It was an easy choice.

- Susan Dudas,
Founder of My Day Screen™



Learn more at MyDayScreen.com

10 ARTISTS. 10 MURALS. 10 DAYS.

StandUp
for kids
HAMPTON ROADS



VibeCreativeDistrict.org

"We wanted an artist that matched our mission. We wanted faces."

- Nicole Pixler,
Co-Executive Director,
Hampton Roads



Ambassador Inn -
Cypress Ave, Virginia Beach



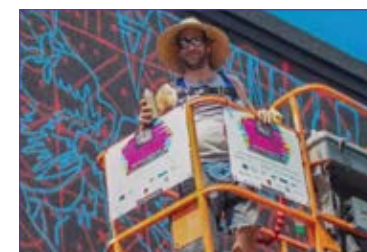
Watch the
making of
the mural



SCAN TO WATCH



Line by line, it all comes together as artist Dustin Spagnola spray-paints his creation on a three-story wall at the annual ViBe Mural Festival.



This past August, artists transformed downtown Virginia Beach with street art – and StandUp for Kids Hampton Roads was front and center at the 4th annual ViBe Mural Festival. **Over 10 days, 10 different national and local artists painted 10 new murals at properties throughout the creative district.** Five of the murals had a connection to local non-profits, including StandUp for Kids' Homeless Youth Outreach, that persevered during the pandemic and provided vital services. To create their mural, Nicole Pixler, Hampton Roads' Co-Executive Director, said they chose Dustin Spagnola from a selected list of artists who applied to be part of this amazing event. He's a contemporary visual artist and painter, whose

current work explores portraiture, the human form and light through the mediums of both spray paint and oil. Working alone, "just him, just spray paint and his electric lift," **Dustin created an inspiring visual statement featuring two of our youths on a three-story wall of the Ambassador Inn.** Locals could explore and engage with the artists as they worked, and enjoy free public programming and events sponsored by businesses to promote growth and community. Nicole says they have already seen what participating in the fest can do, with people reaching out to volunteer and find out more. Dustin's mural, the biggest of the event, will be permanently on display – keeping our youth top of mind around town.



Hampton Roads' Mark Stevens and Nicole Pixler with artist Dustin Spagnola.



www.dustinspagnola.com
[@dustinspagnola](https://www.instagram.com/dustinspagnola)

HOW DO YOU FUNDRAISE DURING A PANDEMIC?
YOU GET MOVING!



STANDUP AND MOVE FOR KIDS

\$78,566
TOTAL FUNDRAISING

152 PARTICIPANTS
341 DONORS
12 SPONSORS

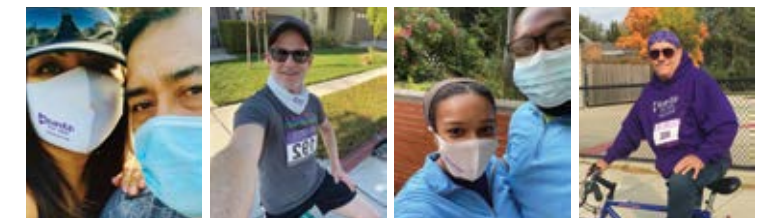


In October 2020, we launched “StandUp and Move,” a new fundraising event to bring all our chapters and supporters together to celebrate our 30-year history of saving lives and giving youth second chances. Our goal was to build a virtual community of walkers, runners, cyclists, and movers around the country, all focused on ending the cycle of youth homelessness. Our inaugural event attracted hundreds of participants and donors, 8 sponsors, and raised \$59,605!

Over Labor Day, the 2nd annual “StandUp and Move” remained virtual, with 152 individuals and families joining to help raise awareness and foster community involvement. With our youth counting on ALL of us – more during this pandemic than ever before – we set a lofty goal of raising \$75,000. As of November, our total fundraising stood at \$78,566, a 31.8% increase. Our National team led the way with just over \$37,500, while our Silicon Valley program brought in \$18,673, the most of all participating chapters. We’re so grateful to the 341 donors and 12 national and local sponsors who provided financial support this year.

What we do would not be possible without our amazing volunteers and supporters. You have been at the heart of our work for more than 30 years. You’ve shown up. You’ve given big. We are so happy you joined us — arm in virtual arm — across the country, to lift up the lives of very special young people. See you in ‘22.

#StandUpAndMoveForKids



WE LOVE OUR SPONSORS



SCAN NOW TO GET HELP

When a youth is in need or in crisis, or newly homeless, it can be the loneliest feeling wondering where to turn. For many years, the Atlanta Chapter of StandUp for Kids has posted a notice with their toll-free number around downtown Atlanta, in restaurants (like Dunkin' Donuts, which allows patrons to come and sit if they don't have a place for the night), and university buildings, so they can call someone and feel they're not alone. Recently, they realized the need to tap technology to make it easier for kids to get help.

As part of a 2021 Youth Resources Initiative, they're launching a new "Get Help Now" page on their website. Replacing the old notices will be colorful window clings announcing, "Sleep. Eat. Safety," and featuring a scannable QR code. Now, youth can simply scan with their smartphones to go directly to the site and click on category resources for food, shelter, medical, clothing, jobs, and identification.

Learn more at
StandUpForKids.org/Atlanta

Would your community benefit from this initiative?

Contact:
ZoeW@standupforkids.org



GETTING RESOURCES IN THE HANDS OF MORE YOUTH ON THE STREETS IS WHAT STANDUP IS ALL ABOUT – AND OUR ATLANTA CHAPTER IS MAKING IT EASIER THAN EVER.

"The Get Help Now page taps into our knowledge base of all the different possible referrals and resources in the area," explained Zoe Webb, Director of Street Outreach. "It's a large part of what we do. We vet all the listings to make sure they're 100% accessible." The web page also features a hotline number kids can call if they don't find the help they need, or require assistance navigating resources. Sometimes when a kid calls a listed number, they get a voicemail, or find out the place is closed for Covid-19, or are told they need some identification that they don't have.

YOUTH IN NEED CAN SCAN OUR QR CODE FOR QUICK ACCESS TO LOCAL RESOURCES



CAN WE STILL HELP THESE KIDS BLOOM IN DARK TIMES?

Our youth are always in the process of becoming. Last year challenged us to find new ways to allow them to grow and thrive in a different world. Our 2020 Annual Report captures all the heart, hope, and effort we put into cultivating a new normal.

2020 ANNUAL REPORT



9,914▲

STREET & OUTREACH
CENTER TOUCHPOINTS

32,801▲

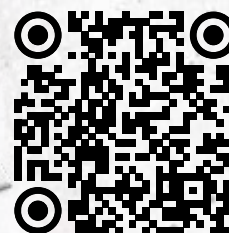
MEALS PROVIDED

32,947▲

VOLUNTEER HOURS

2,320▲

KIDS IN MENTORING
PROGRAMS



SCAN TO READ
THE REPORT

NEW BOARD MEMBER SPOTLIGHT: KEDRIC SLEDGE

Bringing a new perspective and great enthusiasm, Kedric Sledge joined our Board of Directors earlier this year, after ten years of being a mentor. He is a state licensed mental health professional who has turned around some of the lowest performing schools in metro Atlanta. As a social worker, he connects home, community and school. Originally from Saginaw, Michigan, Kedric traveled his own rocky path through school, not really buckling down until 12th grade. Kedric not only understands troubled youth, he knows firsthand how to encourage them to get better results. "Let me help," he tells them. "Let's learn from this and keep moving forward." For him, "Relatability really works to my benefit coming from a similar community. I meet students where they're at." Many of the youth he works with come from broken homes and the majority don't have fathers. "Just talking to a positive, professional male every day is an advantage. I talk from a place they don't often get – to finish school, to get a diploma." He likes going into students' homes, making an impact and having the kids see him out doing his job.



LEARN MORE



"I put on a suit and say I am coming in... in the name of education to keep these kids in school. That cuts through every time. There goes Sledge. They recognize me."

- Kedric Sledge

A+ FOR KITSAP

BACK-TO-SCHOOL EFFORT

Kudos to our Kitsap County chapter in Washington State and Executive Director Margaret Rodriguez for being a mainstay for eighteen local schools, particularly during the pandemic. Their back-to-school efforts just this fall alone resulted in the donation of hundreds of filled backpacks, in addition to 300 food bags with breakfast, lunch, and dinner, and 150 hygiene bags. The chapter also provides and restocks snack boxes in the counseling departments of middle and high schools throughout the county.



STAY UP-TO-DATE

Subscribe through email to the StandUp for Kids National Newsletter, where you'll stay in tune with the latest Pulse issues, stories, and events.

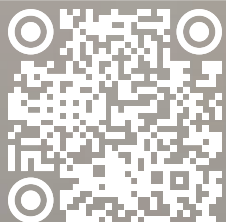


SCAN TO
SUBSCRIBE



"I AM DREAMING
THAT LEAVES ARE NOT—
FALLING
AND THAT THEY ARE
A CORNUCOPIA OF BRIGHT COLORS
AND NOT—
JUST SHADES OF
BROWN."

- David Verastegui,
Creative Contributor
& Donor, StandUp for Kids



DONATE NOW



One life at a time.

StandUp for Kids National Office:
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