

# RESILIENCY, INNOVATION & IMPACT IN TIMES OF CRISIS

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# GRANTMAKER CASE STUDY: ALL STARS HELPING KIDS

## RESILIENCY, INNOVATION & IMPACT IN TIMES OF CRISIS

### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

All Stars Helping Kids, a grantmaker located in Santa Clara, CA, invests in emerging nonprofits working to disrupt the cycle of poverty for Bay Area youth. As the COVID-19 crisis ripped across the Bay Area, the All Stars' grantees, like many nonprofits, were facing a 'perfect storm' with the cancellation of fundraising events, financial and economic uncertainty, and an increase in demand since the people being hit the hardest by the economic disruption were the very families and communities served by their grantees. By March 12<sup>th</sup> – 5 days before the Bay Area shelter-in place order and 8 days before the statewide shelter-in-place order – All Stars had already launched a Rapid Response Fund and a robust set of support for its grantees. And that was just the beginning. By partnering with their grantees, All Stars was able to deploy funding and provide capacity building support that addressed the real-world and rapidly changing needs of nonprofits in times of crisis. This case study examines how small, lean-staffed grantmakers can respond to a crisis in a way that drives meaningful impact and provides some lessons learned from COVID-19 crisis.

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*“Winners play tough and champions are born in adversity. It is in adversity where you find true character, it reveals us. During COVID, our best moments were exhibited from nonprofit leaders not knowing if they could do it and finding a way to deal with the challenges around them and be a champion. It is what’s made this country and it’s in adverse moments that we find a way to change and make things better.”*

*— Ronnie Lott, Founder, All Stars Helping Kids*

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### BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

Pro Football Hall of Famer and venture capitalist investor Ronnie Lott, and his wife Karen, founded All Stars Helping Kids thirty years ago modeling his philanthropic efforts on the lessons learned playing football and investing in technology start-ups. So much like how venture capitalists invest in start-ups, All Stars invests in emerging nonprofits with innovative solutions to disrupt the cycle of poverty for Bay Area California youth and increase the effectiveness of those organizations so that youth thrive regardless of where they live.

But it was not just about the financial investment. The philanthropic approach that undergirds All Stars was borrowed from Ronnie’s experience playing football, where a coach, a scout, or team would recognize a rookie, a player with potential, and provide them with supports—coaching, mentorship with a veteran player, and training—to transform that rookie to an All-Star.

When Ronnie and Karen started their organization, they approached their philanthropy by getting in the trenches with the nonprofits, building relationships with the leaders they were funding, and recognizing what they brought to the table. They were comfortable taking risks on early stage, start-up organizations with innovative program approaches and recognized quickly that not all their bets would pay off. They focused on organizational leaders with real potential to address the needs of youth in poverty. To this day, that core approach sets All Stars apart from other funders.

Ronnie's post grid-iron experience as a venture capital investor in Silicon Valley also influenced his philanthropy and he turned to what he knew: how early stage enterprises grow and succeed. "If you are an investor, do you just give one-year of funding and walk away?"

reflected David Greco, Executive Director of All Stars Helping Kids. "No. You recognize it will take time and you provide multi-year funding, you offer training and capacity building, you open doors to networks, funders and other investors.

David, who created and led the Full Cost Project in California to increase the number of grantmakers providing full cost funding support to nonprofits, joined All Stars Helping Kids ten months ago. His prior work at the Nonprofit Finance Fund and Northern California Grantmakers helped organizations and grantmakers alike adapt their funding practices to better support nonprofit sustainability and impact. This approach is baked into All Stars' philanthropic model.

## THE ALL STARS PLAYBOOK

All Stars believes that driving change on complex societal problems takes more than simply providing a grant to nonprofits. Their approach is grounded in four key concepts-- Cash, Coaching, Capacity Building, and Connection—that helps build the strength and capacity of grantee partners to drive their financial health, scale, and impact.

All Stars Helping Kids annually funds a cohort of 5 Bay Area nonprofits whose missions focus on providing youth, particularly those living in poverty, with access to education, career readiness, and health and wellness programs. This networked support helps build an ecosystem of community-based organizations to push social justice work forward and help youth break out of a cycle of grinding poverty.

Each cohort partner receives 3 years of unrestricted, general operating support coupled with one-on-one coaching and targeted technical assistance. In addition, All Stars offers quarterly capacity building activities like trainings and workshops and other learning opportunities through a peer network of

## Grounded in Equity

- ★ Supports underrepresented leaders in organizations which are disrupting the cycle of poverty in innovative ways
- ★ Seeks to support organizational leaders who are rooted in communities they serve and trusted by community members
- ★ Works with organizations in marginalized and vulnerable communities that typically may not have access to resources, support, and connections

former grantees and strategic partners. All Stars opens its extensive networks to grantees, making introductions, and connecting them to people, business, and other funding opportunities.

This customized funding approach, inaugurated in 2012, has helped scores of nonprofits serve over 132,000 youth across five Bay Area counties. Not only did All Stars grantees see their revenue increase by 230% because of participation in the program, they increased the number of youth served by more than 400%. They created more than 300 new jobs to support their work and built local and national partnerships including the Gratitude Network, New Schools Ventures Fund, the Mason, San Francisco USD, Oakland USD, and Outward Bound. Funded organizations have demonstrated more sustainability, more resiliency, and increased effectiveness. These supported nonprofits have been able to adapt and innovate as the economic, cultural, and environmental landscape shifts and changes.

This methodology aligns with the current “trust-based philanthropy” movement in grantmaking. All Stars approaches its work with deep listening and high touch engagement, coupled with curiosity, humility, and honest two-way communication. Staff follows the lead of the partner organizations by responding to their needs. The results are authentic partnerships grounded in a mutual relationship of trust and co-creation.

## **COVID-19: A PUBLIC HEALTH EMERGENCY AND ECONOMIC CRISIS**

In early March of this year, adversity challenged us all in ways for which we were not prepared. The COVID pandemic hit nonprofits particularly hard, especially those working with youth. As the crisis mounted, All Star’s staff doubled down on the monthly check-in calls with grantees and learned that many of them were postponing fundraisers, cancelling programs, and struggling with how to move forward.

“Our grantees were running very lean, they are small, emerging organizations with not a lot of financial resources, and not hosting an event, not being able to meet with donors, or generate revenue from school contracts would significantly impact their ability to continue their work,” reflected David Greco. “We recognized that we needed to create a rapid response fund—a speedy infusion of cash—to give our grantees space to step back to help keep doors open and lights on, and provide some breathing room to figure this thing out.”

## All Stars Playbook

Provides Comprehensive, Flexible, and Timely Support

- ★ **Cash:** 3 years of general operating support to give organizations time and flexibility to implement innovative strategies
- ★ **Capacity Building:** quarterly capacity building training and workshops to drive sustainability and scale
- ★ **Coaching:** Customized coaching based on identified needs from a trusted network of business leaders and professionals
- ★ **Connection:** Makes connections to other funders, resources, corporations, and board members

The Rapid Response Fund was quickly created and distributed \$160,000 to current and past grantees. For All Stars, who awarded a total of \$510,000 in grants in 2019, this was a significant investment on top of its existing grantmaking—for grantees, this was a vital lifeline.

This support helped the nonprofits continue the services and programs that address the challenges that underserved youth face in the midst of a pandemic—stressors on health and mental well-being, limited or no access to technology, food insecurity, unsafe home situations, and parents with little to no current income due to job loss.

As JG Larochette, Executive Director and founder of the Mindful Life Project in Richmond, California, shared “I had to go into triage mode in a short amount of time to make up the gap we lost in contract revenue due to the shut-down. All Stars recognized quickly that we needed rapid, flexible cash and got it to us.” This Bay Area nonprofit supports the mental and emotional wellness of underserved children through mindfulness-based social-emotional skills programming in schools to gain confidence, manage stress, and be resilient.

JG went on to say, “This is hardest time in history of the U.S. to be nonprofit, and to stay in business, we had to innovate and pivot to online programming, use videos, get practice packets to families at home. We were able to adapt to online programming quickly due to the timely support received from All Stars and help keep our students and their families healthy and practice mindfulness amidst all the uncertainties. They not only helped with a Rapid Response grant, staff offered advice with our fundraising efforts. They stepped up and showed up, so we’re not feeling isolated rather connected to what we needed.”

John Glover, founder and CEO of Alpha Public Charter School in East San Jose, stated that his grant assisted with the distribution of much needed technology so that students could learn from home. “This grant was so important because access is an equity question. We were able to serve those students who were least able to get tech resources and keep them learning during COVID. All those expenses were unbudgeted. This grant funded 100 hot spots and computers to students who were without home internet access or a computer.” These types of interventions helped keep learners on par academically while schools were teaching remotely, not letting them fall behind. John added, “We also learned that some families were experiencing food insecurity due to a job loss, so we pivoted our programming and started daily distribution of over 200 breakfasts and lunches.”

## Develops Authentic Relationships

- ★ **Listens** to grantees: regularly, often, and deeply
- ★ **Partners** with grantee organizations as equals, each bringing what they know and can do to table
- ★ Treats grantees as a part of the All Stars Helping Kids **family**
- ★ **Trust** emerges because of these relationships and organizations share the good and the bad without fear of judgement
- ★ Hosts regular, check-in conversations with grantees to determine what is needed and **adapts approach** to assist

## GOING BEYOND THE GRANT TO SUPPORT NONPROFIT RESILIENCY

Once the CARES ACT was introduced, All Stars staff started hearing from grantees about additional challenges: cash shortfalls, uncertainty in applying for SBA loans, questions about managing remotely. In quick order, All Stars responded with just-in-time technical assistance including a nonprofit survival toolkit, a webinar on cash flow management and liquidity, tips for managing stress and wellbeing, and fundraising support. All Stars established a Help Desk, manned by board members and trusted financial advisors, to assist current and past grantees with the application process for a PPP loan.

As a grantee stated, “They helped us sort all that out and were helpful at a critical time. We got a \$3 million loan that I wasn’t sure I was even eligible for.” Twelve current and former grantee organizations which received Help Desk assistance were awarded PPP loans. “All Stars was quickly able to notice what was needed because when you think of your work as being the work of family and community, you don’t wait till someone asks for help. Ronnie and Karen built a culture, an organization that responds as if their family were experiencing and struggling with it...in a crisis we lean on those who know us best, those who are closest to us, and with whom we have the deepest connection. All Stars is set up in that way and is how they feel about their grantees.”

We also helped connect grantees to valuable resources.

For example, All Stars partnered with San Francisco Achievers – an organization that provides college scholarships, leadership training, and mentoring for black youth – to help them secure Dell Laptops from Computacenter, laptop cases and backpacks from Amazon for 25 of their graduating high school students so they could start college in the fall with the digital tools they need to thrive.

WriterCoach Connection, an East Bay nonprofit which places coaches in schools to strengthen high school writing skills, had to adapt programming quickly because of school shutdowns caused by COVID. With funding provided by the Rapid Response Fund, the organization piloted and tested online coaching. A week later they rolled out coaching to students at several schools with whom they had contracts and recently expanded countrywide with a writer’s café for students needed coaching in writing resumes for work and college application essays.

## Adapts to meet needs of grantees

- ✦ Extends funding, customized technical assistance, and other supports to current and past grantees during times of crisis
- ✦ Is unafraid of pivoting and changing course as needed to meet current and emerging needs of organizations
- ✦ Constantly scanning the grantee landscape to better anticipate needs and responses

## Sees nonprofits as experts

- ✦ Views grantee partners as experts over their work and in their approach to solving the problem
- ✦ Invests in the nonprofits’ theory of change and supports their methodology and approach
- ✦ Recognizes the skills, insights, and assistance that nonprofit leaders can provide to one another and supports a network of opportunities for sharing and learning

As Beverly Roberts Charles, J.D, WriterCoach Connection CEO shared, “We had been talking about this for years and we seized this moment. When you find yourself under a lemon tree with dropping lemons, you catch them before they hit the ground and make lemonade. She added, “We learned in our distance coaching sessions that students really need and want to be connected to a caring adult as they feel disconnected from their teachers, classrooms, and friends. Our writing sessions have helped students process their feelings and concerns around the issues following the murder of George Floyd and others.”

Julie Brown, Program Director at All Stars, shared that their philanthropic method is a “blueprint for any situation, any crisis, so that our nonprofit partners remain relevant, strong, and moving forward to address their missions. Our ecosystem approach is long-term and takes time. Keeping that work going amid COVID and now racial injustice protests brought about because of the death of George Floyd and others is more vital than six months ago.”

The nonprofits that All Stars support are addressing the long-term systemic conditions that contribute to racial and social injustice. “To ensure equity, to ensure opportunity for all youth, means having access to a quality education and that is where grantees Alpha Charter School, SF Achievers and WriterCoach Connection come in. It means helping to prepare youth for living wage jobs like TEAM Inc and Youth Impact Hub do. It means helping keep youth mentally healthy and resilient through the work of grantees like the Mindful Life Project,” added Greco. “The work all our grantees are doing is seeking to fundamentally change the conditions and circumstances that keep vulnerable and marginalized youth from achieving their true full potential”

As Ronnie Lott reflected, “Everyone has rookie moments in your early years, nine out of ten times there’s a mentor to help. The essence of our VC inspired approach to supporting nonprofits is more than giving money-- it is support, encouragement, heart, courage, and inspiration and suddenly you find your way to being a great organization. We need more innovation, to inspire people to be stewards to help others. That rookie, that says ‘I can help my community, all I need is a little help’, that is all we are doing.”

## ABOUT ALL STARS HELPING KIDS

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### MORE THAN 132,000 BAY AREA KIDS REACHED SO FAR!

Our mission is to disrupt the cycle of poverty and encourage innovation by seed funding start-up nonprofits in the Bay Area.

### OUR SOLUTION: WHAT WE FUND

We invest in emerging Bay Area nonprofits with innovative solutions that move youth from poverty to prosperity.

- ✦ ACCESS TO EDUCATION
- ✦ CAREER READINESS
- ✦ HEALTH & WELLNESS

### OUR PLAYBOOK: THE FOUR C's

Driving real change takes more than just money. It takes a network of strong, impactful nonprofits working across boundaries to ensure that all youth are able to thrive regardless of where they live. Our program utilizes our Four C's to accelerate growth and outcomes:

- ✦ CASH - 3 Years of General Operating Support
- ✦ CAPACITY BUILDING - Education, Training & Workshops
- ✦ COACHING - One-on-One Coaching & Technical Assistance
- ✦ CONNECTION - Peer Network & Strategic Partnership

### THE ALL STARS ACCELERATOR PROGRAM

Each year, All Stars selects a cohort of innovative Bay Area nonprofits to participate in a three-year intensive program that is designed to help build the organizational capacity, financial sustainability and community impact of those organizations working to disrupt the cycle of poverty for Bay Area youth.

This is not just a grant program – we are looking for organizations that are willing and able to fully participate in the program. This includes not only attending all program trainings and completing all necessary reports, but also actively engaging with fellow program participants, All Stars Helping Kids, and program partners.

### CONTACT US

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