



**Rising Above  
the Storms**



# **2024 ANNUAL REPORT**



**WHY WE  
RISE**

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# Letter from our founder



## Alphonsine Anderson

Founder & CEO

Every story of transformation starts with a moment — a moment where hope wins.

This year, you were part of those moments. 2024 was a record-breaking year for Rising Above the Storms (RAS), a year where your generosity and belief in our mission lifted more young lives than ever before, and reminded us why we rise.

From welcoming two of our supporters traveling from the U.S. to meet our students, to hosting fundraising events like Topgolf events in different cities across the country, to watching our community grow in strength and numbers — every step forward was a testament to why we rise: to give every child the chance to dream, to heal, and to build a future of possibility.

For me personally, ending the year in Rwanda at our annual student retreat brought it all full circle. Sitting among our students, hearing their testimonies of resilience, courage, and hope, I was deeply moved. Their voices, their dreams, and their victories are why we rise — and why we will keep rising.

Thank you for standing with us, for believing in them, and for being part of this journey.

With gratitude,

*Alphonsine Imaniragasha Anderson*

# Street Children Program

The Rwanda Learning Center stands as a pivotal point for a range of programs aimed at serving two primary groups: at-risk and former street children, and a focal point for high potential students from low-income neighborhoods and families.

The street child program, RAS' cornerstone initiative established in 2017, offers two distinct pathways tailored to meet the specific needs of each child: 1) basic needs assistance, which includes warm meals, counseling, and specialized enrichment activities; and 2) educational assistance, providing for school fees, medical care, group tutoring, and vocational training for those students dedicated to furthering their education or skills training.

In the development of the street program, recognizing that rehabilitation and support require a personalized approach has been fundamental. Acknowledging the unique challenges faced by each child, the teams in Rwanda deliver individualized support plans. These plans encompass counseling, quality time spent together, and engagements with family members, all while maintaining access to essential basic needs assistance that is critical to their success.

Your contributions go to covering the following for each street child.



# Scholarship

## Program

The scholarship program is designed to bridge the opportunity gap by empowering high-potential children in Rwanda with the necessary financial support and educational opportunities to excel. Teams are dedicated to identifying children from elementary through high school who have demonstrated high academic potential. In collaboration with families and teachers, these teams develop tailored financial support plans to foster success based on the individual needs and goals of each student.



Your contributions go to covering the following for each scholar.



Tuition



Uniforms



Backpacks



Books



Transport

# Higher Learning Program

The higher learning program was established to ensure that students from our RAS grade school support programs receive the financial support they need to succeed at university and prepare for the job market. The program is currently being rolled out, with the primary focus being on financial support for room and board. As the program expands, internship assistance and a mentorship program will be included.



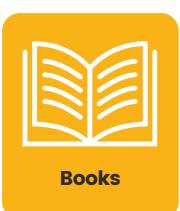
Your contributions go to covering the following for each student.



Tuition



Room & Board



Books



Transport



Laptops



Counseling

# RAS programs at a glance

## Street children

Children are rescued from the street, rehabilitated through counseling, and reintegrated into schools and their communities.

## Scholarships

Scholarships and financial aid are awarded to high-aptitude children from low-income families, enabling them to attend grade 1 – 12.

## Higher learning

Financial aid – and eventually mentorship and internship placement assistance – for bright students from low-income families who are currently attending university.

## Why we rise: paving the way to a brighter future

Driven by our commitment to continuous improvement, Rising Above the Storms evaluates, adjusts, and expands its programs to ensure they deliver maximum impact, align with sponsor expectations, and fulfill the needs of our students. Embodying the theme "Why we rise," this year we launched the higher learning program, recognizing the importance of extending support to our students who are university-bound. This initiative ensures that basic needs like room and board are covered, enabling students to concentrate on their studies and rise to new academic heights.

As funding permits, we extend our support beyond current program offerings, providing annual clothing donations for vulnerable participants, sponsoring sports teams with regular equipment updates, and awarding top-performing students. Each initiative reflects our unwavering dedication to rising above challenges and nurturing a future where every student can thrive.

# 2024 Highlights

In 2024, Rising Above the Storms embraced a transformative year, reaffirming Alphonsine's mission and breathing new life into our founding vision. The successes of this year reflect our dedication to uplifting communities and driving impactful change. With renewed focus and purpose, we have recentered our efforts on the goals set back in 2017, achieving key milestones that highlight our progress and resilience. This year stands as a testament to the power of rising above adversity and building a brighter future for those we serve.

Some key highlights included:

## Record-breaking fundraising year

The nonprofit achieved its second consecutive record-breaking fundraising year, surpassing previous milestones and reinforcing its commitment to making a meaningful impact.

## Established the Higher Learning program

The launch of the Higher Learning program expands RAS' reach and impact to university-aged students, supporting their pursuit of higher education and equipping them for eventual success in the workforce.

## Experienced the first annual retreat at the Center

In December 2024, the first retreat to the Rwanda Center took place, focusing on engaging with scholarship program students, building relationships, and gaining firsthand insights into their needs and the program's impact. The retreat serves as the one time each year where our students across the country come together and connect and share the impact RAS has had on them with peers and RAS leadership.

# 2024 Highlights continued

## **Welcomed our first donors to visit the Center**

In July and August 2024, two generous donors not only raised funds to support Rising Above the Storms but also took the inspiring step of visiting our Center in Rwanda. Their journey allowed them to witness firsthand the profound impact of their contributions, as they engaged with the local community and connected with the individuals whose lives are being transformed.

## **Expanded the Scholarship program**

In September, 30 new students were onboarded into the scholarship program, bringing the total to over 90, broadening the financial support provided to promising students.

## **Achieved stellar National Exam results**

This year, twenty one students took the National Exam, with the majority —primarily from the scholarship program—achieving scores above 80%.

## **Celebrated 5 new graduates going to university**

RAS celebrated five exceptional graduates who are heading to university, marking a significant milestone in their academic journeys. Their dedication and hard work have earned them places in higher education, where they will pursue their aspirations and continue to excel.

## **Enhanced support beyond core pillars**

The nonprofit successfully raised funds for back-to-school initiatives, extending support beyond its core pillars to include essential items like sanitary goods, mattresses, bedding, and buckets, alongside tuition and school materials. Dormitory expenses are common in Rwanda since many high schoolers go to a boarding school away from home.

# RAS communities: supported children

In total, the 131 children supported in RAS programs reside in 18 different districts across Rwanda, spanning 5 provinces: 21 reside in Kigali City, 32 in the Eastern Province, 5 in the Northern Province, 5 in the Western Province, and 11 in the Southern Province.



NO	DISTRICT	CHILDREN
01	Muhanga	3
02	Kicukiro	70
03	Gicumbi	2
04	Bugesera	5
05	Rwamagana	15
06	Ngoma	8
07	Gasabo	4
08	Kamonyi	7
09	Rurindo	1
10	Nyamasheke	2
11	Kayonza	3
12	Nyarugenge	1
13	Musanze	2
14	Karongi	1
15	Nyagatare	2
16	Ruhango	2
17	Gisagara	1
18	Rusizi	2

# Meet the team

Full-time paid employees in Rwanda

7



US board members

7



US-based volunteers

12



## Rwanda staff

The organization has seven full-time employees on staff in Rwanda supporting the children and facility. Over the next 3 to 5 years, the strategy includes growing this number to 30 full-time employees supporting over 500 children.

## US volunteers

RAS is supported by 12 volunteers across the United States, specifically California, Florida, New York, North Carolina, Tennessee, and Illinois.

# Board of Directors



**Alphonsine  
Anderson**

Chief Executive Officer &  
Founder



**Harry  
Cocciole**

Board Member



**Michele  
Day**

Board Member



**Kathryn  
McTighe**

Board Member



**Ken  
Kula**

Board Member



**Anisha  
Sivakumar**

Board Member



**Tschudy  
Smith**

Board Member

# RAS partners

## Cisco Foundation

This philanthropic institution, established by Cisco Systems, is dedicated to supporting programs and projects that address significant social challenges and strengthen communities around the world. Contributions made by Cisco employees to Rising Above the Storms (RAS) are matched up to \$25,000 annually. Furthermore, Cisco employees who volunteer can generate donations of \$10 per hour from the Cisco Foundation to RAS. The Time2Give program, which allocates 40-80 volunteer hours per year to employees, has been of great benefit to RAS.

## Amahoro Builders

As a local NGO in Rwanda, Amahoro Builders plays a crucial role in overseeing operations for RAS. The organization is committed to assisting vulnerable families and serves as the local executing entity for programs and management of the centers in Rwanda.

## Westcon-Comstor

As a global technology distributor, Westcon-Comstor actively supports the programs and youth of RAS through donations and annual visits to the children. The company also assists the local partner in Rwanda by aiding single women with micro-financing opportunities.

## Trans-Expedite

A worldwide transportation and logistics company that has generously shipped over \$10K worth of soccer gear, notebooks, and other educational materials to Rwanda during the COVID pandemic.

**Gratitude is extended to all partners for their generosity and dedication to fostering a brighter future for the youth in Rwanda!**

# Meet our newest graduates



**Honorine  
Promise Irakoze**  
Networking



**Fabrice  
Ngirakamaro**  
Math, Computer  
Science and Economics



**Hope Brenda  
Iturize**  
Social Studies Teaching



**Charlotte  
Umutoni**  
Math, Economics and  
Geography



**Assouman  
Uwimana**  
Agronomy

# Spotlight: Honorine Irakoze



In Kigali, Rwanda, Promise Honorine Irakoze's life took a challenging turn when her family's financial stability was upended. Her father, once a driver, suffered an accident that destroyed his goods and damaged his vehicle. The ensuing debts forced the sale of their home, plunging the family into hardship. Despite these obstacles, Honorine's determination to excel academically never wavered. She consistently ranked first in her class, earning tuition exemptions during her early schooling years. However, by the 10th grade, the mounting costs became insurmountable, and she was sent home, missing two critical weeks of education.

It was during this pivotal moment that Rising Above the Storms (RAS) intervened, covering her school fees and allowing Honorine to focus solely on her studies. With RAS's support, she achieved her aspiration of becoming the top Information Technology student in the country, passing Rwanda's National Examination with a 94%. This remarkable accomplishment led to a scholarship at Kepler College, where she now pursues a degree in Business Analytics. Honorine's story exemplifies the transformative power of education and the critical role that organizations like RAS play in nurturing potential. By investing in students facing adversity, RAS not only changes individual lives but also fosters future leaders who will contribute meaningfully to their communities. Your continued support ensures that more students like Honorine can rise above their circumstances and achieve their dreams.



# Success stories

## Welding warriors

Once struggling on the streets, Jean D'Amour Izabayo and Dieudonne Izabayo have embarked on an inspiring journey toward becoming skilled welders. With the support and rehabilitation provided by Rising Above the Storms (RAS), these young men discovered their passion for welding—a critical trade in Rwanda. Now, as they work diligently toward earning their trade certifications, Jean and Dieudonne are forging a brighter future, not only for themselves but also for their community, fulfilling a vital need and demonstrating the transformative power of hope and guidance.

**Jean**



**Dieudonne**



# Success stories

## Checking in on Idrissa

Today, Idrissa Dusengimana is a soon-to-be graduate of Rwanda Polytechnic-Kigali College, set to complete his studies in May 2025. With the support of RAS through Amahoro Builders, he not only overcame financial and emotional hardship but also earned a government scholarship through strong academic performance. Idrissa is proud of how far he's come and deeply grateful for the role RAS played in helping him reach this milestone.



## Class of 2028

Congratulations to the three program graduates who have successfully completed their first year at university! This milestone marks a significant achievement in their academic journeys, showcasing their dedication, perseverance, and hard work. As they advance to the next phase of their studies, we celebrate their accomplishments and look forward to their continued success in reaching their educational and personal goals.

**Patience Bizimana**



**Jacques Irikumwenatwe**



**Jacques Byiringiro**



# Divine's journey

## Resilience and the power of support

At just 14 years old, Divine Ishimwe has faced adversities that many cannot fathom. Abandoned by her parents—her mother attempting to end her life as an infant and her father absent until his deathbed—Divine's early years were marked by profound challenges. Raised by her aunt, she carried the weight of a complex family history, including the haunting legacy of the 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi, where her maternal relatives were perpetrators against her paternal family.

Despite these hardships, Divine exhibited exceptional academic promise. Her consistent performance led to her acceptance into Rising Above the Storms' (RAS) scholarship program in Rwanda, aimed at supporting bright students facing financial difficulties. However, during her 9th-grade national exams—a critical juncture determining progression to 10th grade—Divine's world was once again shaken. Meeting her estranged father for the first time as he lay in a coma, only to lose him days later, left her emotionally devastated. This turmoil understandably impacted her exam results.

RAS recognized that Divine's potential couldn't be measured solely by one setback. Understanding the profound personal challenges she faced, RAS continued their support, emphasizing both educational and emotional assistance. This holistic approach underscores RAS' commitment to nurturing not just scholars, but resilient individuals poised to overcome life's storms.

Divine's story is a poignant reminder of the profound impact compassionate support can have on a young life. By choosing to support RAS, donors play an instrumental role in transforming the trajectories of students like Divine, offering them not just education, but hope, healing, and a brighter future.



# Fundraising: broadening our reach

## Sponsors going above & beyond

Lynette and Larry Rambo are living proof that RAS sponsors do more than donate—they deeply invest in the lives of the children they support. As part of the Sponsor A Child initiative, they provide 1:1 support and follow each child's journey personally. In 2024, they took that commitment even further—raising over \$7,000 and traveling to Rwanda to visit the RAS Center. There, they met the four children they sponsor and connected with many more, leaving a lasting impact on everyone involved. [Read more about their experience.](#)



## From one city to five states

Following a successful Topgolf fundraiser in Nashville in 2023, RAS expanded the initiative nationwide in 2024. The organization hosted five Topgolf fundraising events across the U.S., raising over \$30,000. A total of 184 individuals attended—marking a 275% increase in attendance compared to the previous year. These events offered attendees a chance to connect, learn more about RAS's mission, and enjoy a fun, engaging round of golf—all in support of a powerful cause.



# Fundraising: broadening our reach

## Gear that gives back

To strengthen the Rising Above the Storms (RAS) brand and boost funding, RAS has expanded its branded merchandise, now available on the Cisco Store website and at fundraising events. During one event, \$1,085 worth of merchandise was sold. This initiative aims to increase visibility, engage supporters, and provide a tangible connection to the mission, fostering a community of brand ambassadors and generating additional resources for the organization's impactful work. Visit the Cisco Store: <https://merchandise.cisco.com/featured/rising-above-the-storms.html>



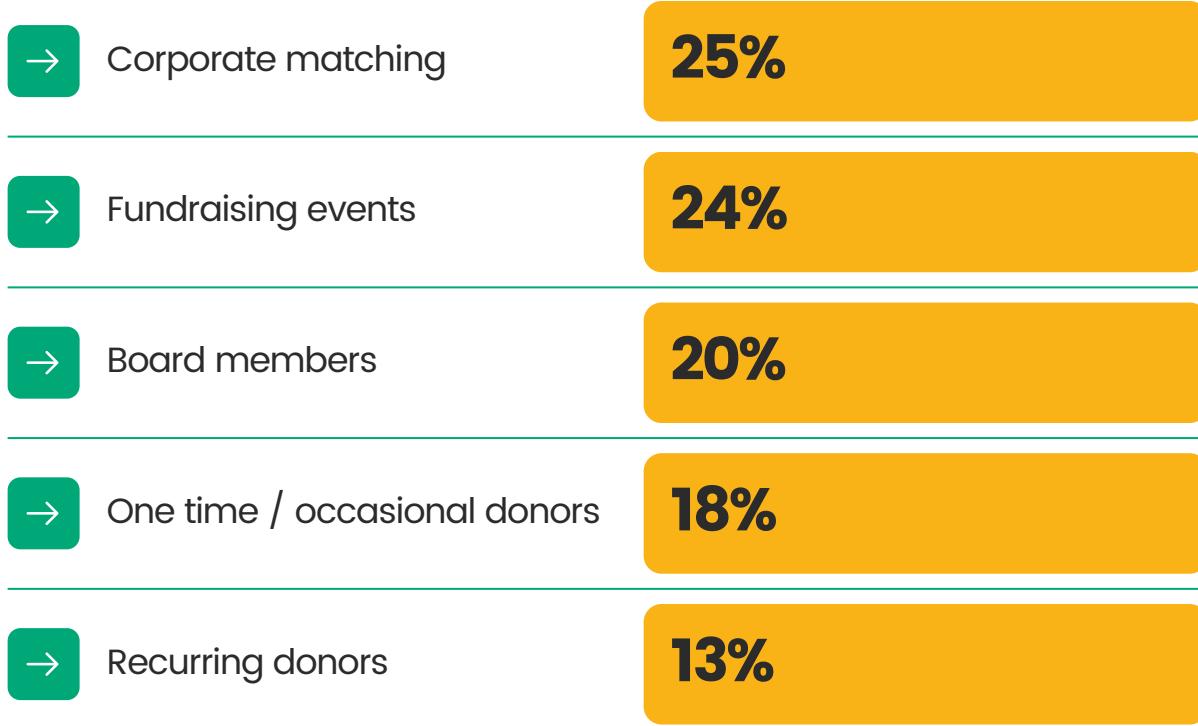
## Limited availability at RAS in-person events



# Fundraising snapshot

**\$137,103**

total donations in 2024. below is a breakdown of the osource of funds received



Note: Revenue in this annual report is recognized when payments are processed, not when deposited into RAS' bank account. Some payment sources take up to 2 months to deposit.

# Financial highlights

**\$137,000**

total consolidated revenue in the past fiscal year compared with \$124K in 2023. Net income for 2024 was approximately \$49K, representing 36% of RAS total revenue.

## 2024 Investments

**\$88,000**

Total operating expenses

**\$63,400**

Rwanda Learning Center (72% of OpEx)

**\$10,600**

Fundraising events (12% of OpEx, primarily TopGolf events)

**\$9,000**

Marketing (10% of OpEx, primarily swag)

**\$5,000**

Other general & administrative expenses

## Net assets

→ 2024

**\$154,000**

→ 2023

**\$132,000**

→ 2022

**\$81,000**

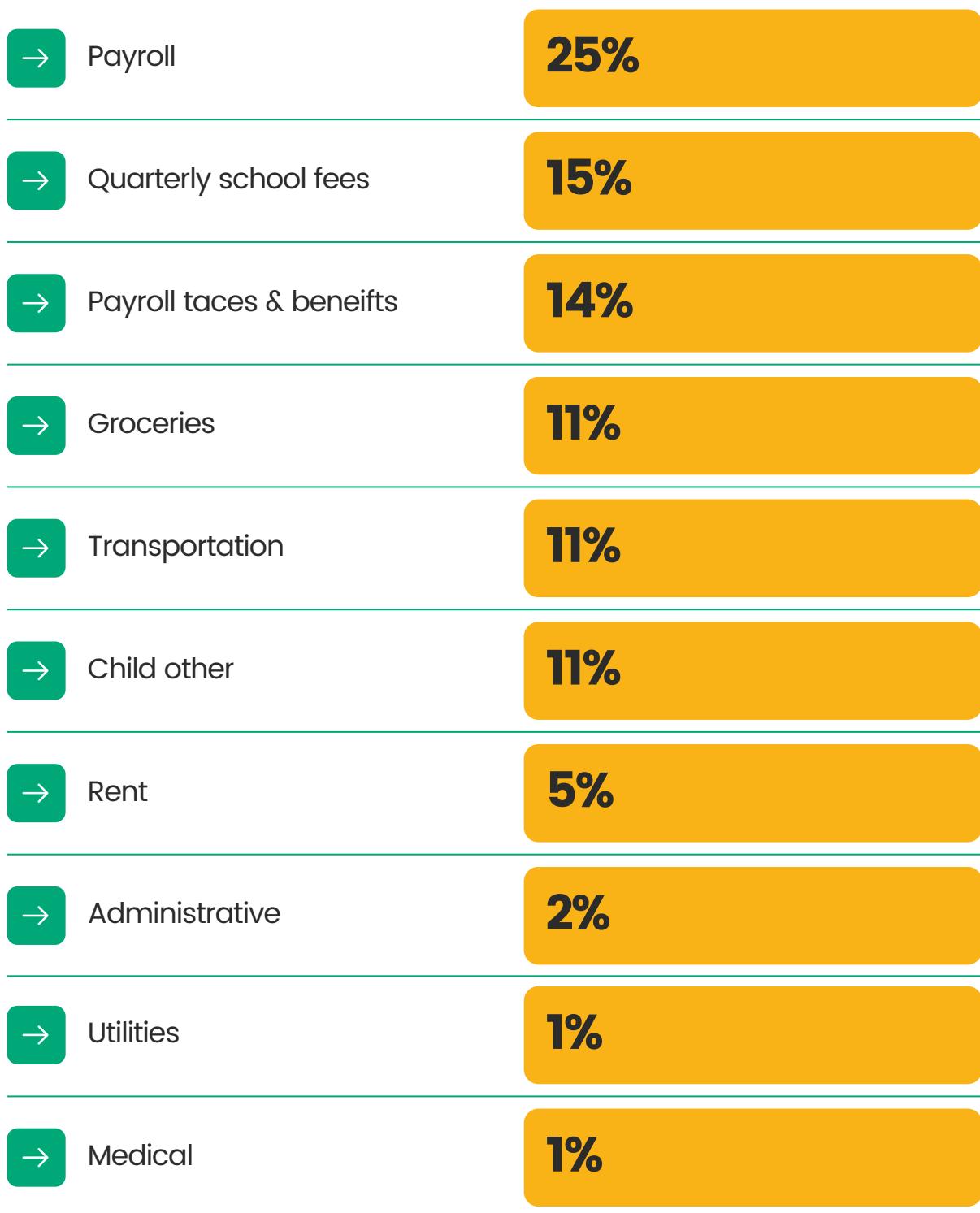
→ 2021

**\$78,000**

# Allocation of program expenses

## How much are we spending on... (%)

The following expenses are based on the \$63.4K budget for the Rwanda Learning Center. These do not include costs for operating the fundraising arm in the US.



# Allocation of expenses

**\$88,000**

total expenses (100%)

**\$63,400**

Rwanda Learning Center (72%)

**\$24,600**

US operations (28%)  
admin, marketing, & website



# Donor information

**\$137,103**

total donations

**\$80,000**

Total donations from individuals

**\$57,108**

Total donations from corporate matches



**347**

Number of known donors in 2024

**196**

One-time  
donors

**25**

Recurring  
donors

**22**

Child  
sponsors

Number of total donations

Average one-time donation

**1,059**

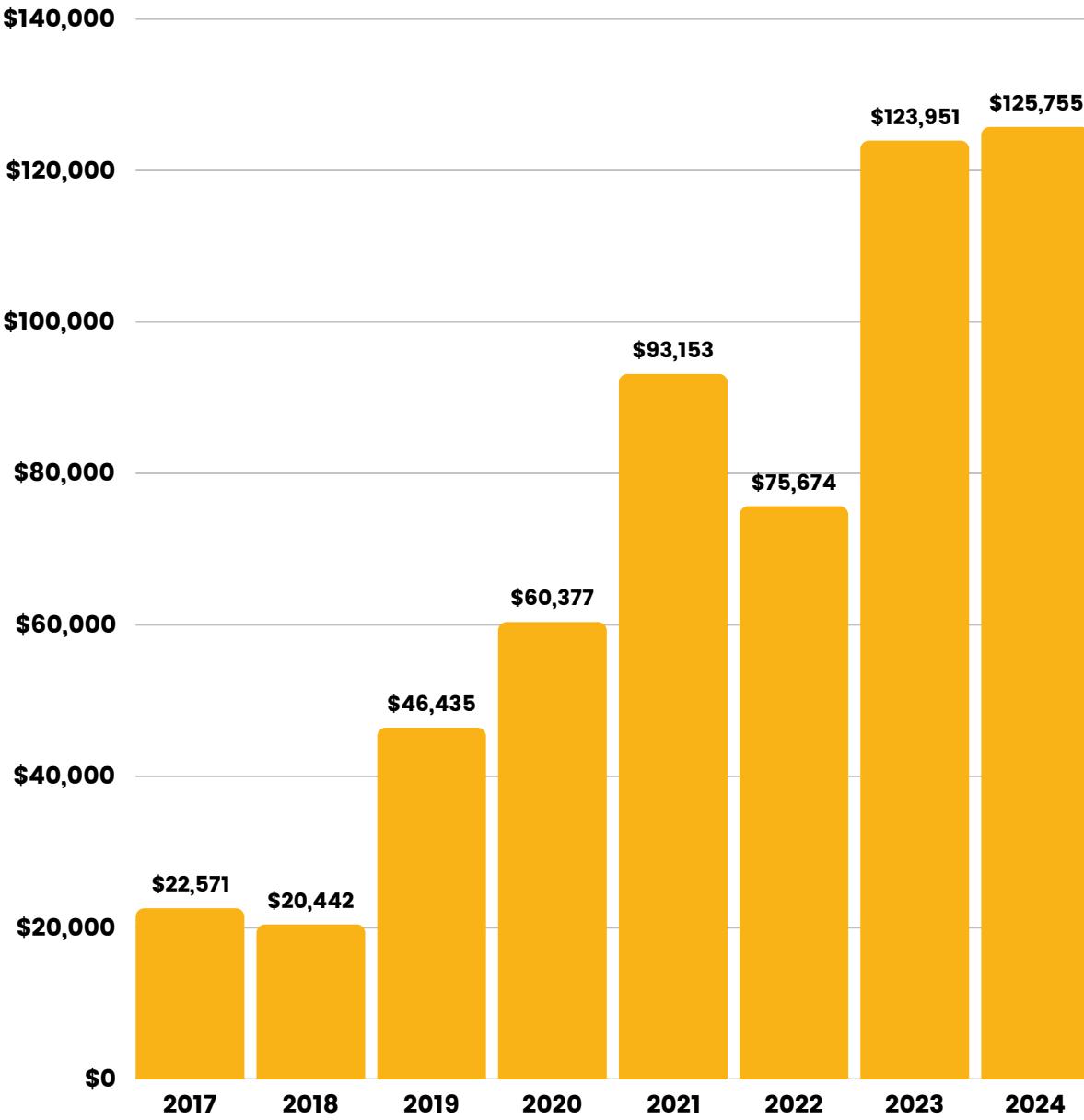
**\$167**

Note: The top 20% of donors contributed 82% of individual donations (\$), with 9% of these donors giving over \$1,000.

# 8 year revenue growth

The chart below illustrates annual donations since RAS launched the program in Rwanda in 2017, as recorded in QuickBooks. Donations are recognized on a cash basis, meaning revenue is recorded when funds are deposited into RAS' bank account (note that one corporate matching source can result in up to a two-month delay). On an accrual basis, RAS processed \$137,000 in donations in 2024 and \$127,000 in 2023.

**Total Donations 2017–2024**



# A look ahead

In 2025, RAS' target goal is to raise \$350K in funding. To accomplish this, the team is focusing on 4 key areas:

1. Identifying ambassadors to raise funds individually – peer to peer fundraising,
2. Hosting Topgolf (or similar) events,
3. Securing large donors,
4. Gala or private events to increase donations.



## RAS 5 year strategy: 2023–2027

- Raise and maintain a yearly operating budget of \$1 million (USD) to support our programs
- Fund payroll for paid staff in the USA
- Expand our services into one country beyond Rwanda
- Increase total number of children served year over year (see below)

Target annual increase in number of supported children

	2025	2026	2027	2028	2029
Students	150	262	312	350	400
Street kids	100	140	180	220	260
<b>Total</b>	<b>250</b>	<b>402</b>	<b>492</b>	<b>570</b>	<b>660</b>

# Alphonsine's closing letter



## Why we rise

The impact we made together in 2024 is only the beginning. As we look to the future, we are guided by a clear vision and a bold heart — and by the constant reminder of why we rise.

In the coming year, we plan to welcome 60 new students into our scholarship programs, strengthen our dedicated team by introducing a U.S. payroll system, and continue building the momentum of steady, intentional growth.

Every new goal we set, every life we touch, is anchored in the same truth: we rise because hope must be louder than hardship, and because every child deserves a chance to thrive.

At Rising Above the Storms, we believe that every success story is not just a victory — it's a reason, a calling for a celebration of why we rise.

Thank you for walking this journey with us. The next chapter is just beginning — and together, we will rise even higher.

With hope and determination,

*Alphonsine Imaniraguhra Anderson*

# Connect with us



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