



## AOK Year One Report

### September, 2017

*“AOK has been my visit to a better future, more powerful than any political tract about what we need next.”*

—David Brooks, New York Times

It’s hard to believe that it’s been a year since Kathy and David, sitting on the beach in Cape Cod, made the decision to create an organization to better support the aspirations of the growing family of young artists they’d gathered around them. They realized they could not keep their promises to these amazing kids on a part-time basis. And what an incredible year it has been since David left his job to commit to AOK full-time last September.

You can read about the impact we’ve had and the markers of organizational health and growth below, but what the numbers don’t capture is the sense of community, of trust and growth, creativity and passion, joy and laughter that bonds everyone in the AOK family together, regardless of age or background. All of us have grown over the past year, experienced triumphs, made mistakes and learned from them. And through it all, everyone has come to know on a deep-down level that we believe in each other, that we have each other’s backs, and that we are right to believe in ourselves. This is the true magic of AOK: we create an environment in which all of us, with each other’s support, aspire to be better versions of ourselves.

We couldn’t have done any of this without the ongoing support of a growing family of donors. We are grateful for the faith you have placed in us, and we look forward to many years of working together to ensure that the light our kids have inside them is released out into the world.

### Impact.

*“AOK motivates me to stay on the right path and be productive and positive in my life.”*

—James Drosin, AOK Kid

We made a big difference in the lives of our young artists in our first year. Here’s the lowdown:

- **Number of Young People Served:** 30 and growing.
- **Education.** When our kids go off to college, participate in vocational programs or take classes, we provide everything they need to focus on learning and succeed. We help them find the educational path that best meets their needs, assist them through the application process, help them navigate the financial aid process, cover gaps in tuition, provide allowance and phone plans, pay for trips home during breaks, and make sure they have the supplies they need. Our community makes it possible to meet these expenses and allow a growing number of AOK kids to pursue their educational dreams without financial stress.
  - In August, 2016 we sent 6 kids off to 4-year colleges

- In January, 2017, 2 kids started community college here in DC
- In February, 2017 we helped one of our kids get into and pay for barber school. He is finishing in September and is planning a trip to Sacramento to network with barbers he's met online with an eye to starting his career on the west coast
- This fall we have 14 kids returning to or starting college
- We worked with 2 of our young artists to create custom-designed plans to set them on a path of independent learning that will allow them to achieve artistic excellence
- 12 of our young people attended the first in what will be an ongoing series of financial literacy workshops designed to develop healthy financial habits
- **General Support.** We provide the resources our growing community of young people needs to negotiate every-day life, including food, clothing, phones, chargers, phone plans, health insurance, computers, bikes, art supplies, a safe place to do and get help with homework, laundry facilities, internet service and help applying for college, vocational programs, jobs and internships. Not to mention things you just can't put a price tag on: love, joy, trust, advice, high expectations, laughter and community.
  - We served more than 1000 meals at Thursday Night Dinner
  - We provided hundreds of meals to our kids on a daily basis throughout the year
  - We have found therapists for 4 of our kids
  - We helped 4 young people with health care needs and expenses
  - We're helping 6 kids get their drivers licenses
  - We have 9 kids on the AOK phone plan, providing new phones for all of them
  - We provided computers for 4 young people
  - We provided external hard drives for 2 of our young photographers
  - We provided art supplies for 6 of our young artists
- **Work/Internships.** We assisted a number of our kids successfully apply for jobs and internships.
  - 3 of our young artists have internships with AOK to produce and post content on our social media and website
  - One got a job at the Air and Space Museum
  - One was commissioned by friends of AOK to paint family portraits
  - The same artist created paintings as a thank you to Joshua Bell for hosting a fundraising dinner and as an AOK wedding gift to David and Anne Brooks
  - One did a summer internship at a prestigious civil rights law nonprofit
- **Special Experiences.** We are always on the lookout for special experiences to enrich the lives of our young people and to make them feel special. Here's a sample of what we provided in our first year:
  - 14 of our kids joined us in Cape Cod in July. For many it was their first vacation ever, and the week was described by many as 'transformational' and the best week of their lives. (Here's a link to a [video](#) about the trip.)
  - 18 had specially-chosen presents to unwrap last holiday season, thanks to AOK Holiday Angels. For too many of them, it was the first time they'd ever received gifts in the holiday season
  - We celebrated more than 20 birthdays with special dinners, presents and shout outs at Thursday Night Dinner
  - 3 of our young people participated as ambassadors of AOK in podcasts. They were each articulate and confident representatives of AOK (Links below)
  - 14 participated in AOK fundraising receptions as youth ambassadors of AOK. These two experiences helped AOK youth become more confident speaking in public and allowed

them to participate in sustaining the organization. (Here's a link to a [video](#) about the first AOK fundraiser at our home last fall.)

- David Brooks and Anne Snyder made AOK a central part of their wedding. 8 of our young women were flower girls and 6 young men were ushers. 2 AOK artists performed at the reception. Thanks to the generosity of a donor, we outfitted all the kids with new dresses and suits. They were extraordinary ambassadors for AOK. Plus, all the guests had way more fun on the dance floor because AOK kids were there!
- We funded and arranged 5 trips for kids that they would not have otherwise been able to make, including one to SXSW in Austin and another to New Orleans to make connections with artists there
- We arranged 2 guided tours of PBS
- We took 12 young people on a field trip to the National Museum of African American History and Culture
- 6 went on a field trip to an exhibit at the National Textile Museum
- We attended two demonstrations with groups of young people; one in support of the Standing Rock protesters and also the Women's March
- A number of AOK kids attended DC Pride in June
- Thanks to the generosity of two very special donors, we were able to renovate our basement so that the kids living with us had comfortable rooms to call their own and a full bath on the same floor as their rooms
- **Community.** Via our [Thursday Night Dinners](#) and in order to assemble the resources our kids need, AOK has created a diverse and growing community, including individuals, other nonprofits, faith communities and businesses that benefits all involved. AOK is rooted in the conviction that we all bring value to the table, we can all inspire others and we can all aspire to be better versions of ourselves.
  - Number of involved adults: Over 50 and growing, providing all kinds of support
  - Number business partners: 7 and growing (Target, Chipotle, Verizon, Dolphin Fleet Whale Watch, Ptown Bikes and Mac's Shack)

## Development.

***"I don't see our financial support of AOK as a donation—it's an investment in our future. We need the creative spirit, entrepreneurial drive and civic commitment of the young people around the AOK table."***

—Kaethe Shapiro Zellner  
Evergreen Partners Giving Fund

AOK surpassed all fundraising expectations for a brand new organization. We worked hard to build our donor base throughout the year. One big task as Year 2 begins is to renew as many donors as possible at current or higher levels of support.

- Total raised: \$350,000
- Total number of donors: 662
- Smallest donation: \$5.00
- Largest: \$50,000
- Donor Break-down:
  - \$1-\$49: 137
  - \$50-\$99: 135

- \$100-\$249: 224
- \$250-\$999: 112
- \$1000-\$4,999: 31
- \$5,000-\$50,000: 23
- Percentage of resources raised from:
  - Individuals: 88.6% (\$310,000)
  - Foundations: 11.4% (\$40,000, from family foundations)
- 5 fundraising receptions (lowest amount raised: \$7,000; highest amount raised: \$22,000)
- 2 Tea Dance fundraisers (more for building community than raising money at this point; here's a [video](#) that shows how much fun an AOK Tea Dance is!)
- 3 online fundraising campaigns (we're still learning about what works and what doesn't in online fundraising)
- Current major donor (\$5,000+) prospects: 19
- Fundraising receptions in the planning stages: 4 (including first iteration of awards gala; David Brooks and singer/songwriter Citizen Cope have both agreed to accept awards.)
- We established a board Development Committee in May. We hope to recruit 3-4 more members (mostly non-board members with development experience) by the end of the year.
- AOK is set up to receive gifts of stocks and securities.

## Financials

- Total amount spent: \$305,628
- Percentage of resources spent on:
  - Programming: 72% (\$217,901)
  - Administration: 13% (\$41,113)
  - Fundraising: 15% (\$46,614)
- A Year Two objective is to bring the combined cost of admin and fundraising down to 20% of spending.

## Communications

- **Press.** AOK garnered a remarkable amount of press, much of it national, for a brand new nonprofit.
  - David Brooks' [column](#) in the New York Times appeared in October, 2016
  - NBC Nightly News [segment](#) aired in November, 2016
  - 'Crazy Good Turns' podcast [episode](#) went live in February, 2017
  - BBC World Service 'Outlook' [segment](#) (segment starts at 34:45) aired in June, 2017
  - 'Through the Noise' podcast [episode](#) dropped in June, 2017
  - 'Add Passion and Stir' podcast [episode](#) dropped in July, 2017
  - A [segment](#) on the ABC cooking show 'The Chew', with Carla Hall, aired in September, 2017
- **Social Media.** AOK has a regular presence across social media platforms, including [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#), [YouTube](#) and [Twitter](#). The AOK social media team is made up of AOK kids, which provides a wonderful opportunity for them to learn about planning, scheduling and posting content, as well as producing content.
- **Website.** AOK put up the first iteration of its [website](#) in September, 2016. It was replaced by the current version in May, 2017. The new website is a dramatic improvement over the first site and tells our story much more compellingly. The reaction to the new site has been overwhelmingly

positive. We update the site regularly with new blogposts, photos and videos and updates to keep it fresh and give supporters a reason to go back to it.

- **Mailing List.** Our current mailing list has over 1000 contacts, including over 600 donors. This is very robust for a first year organization. High on our list for Year Two is regularizing contact with our mailing list with a monthly newsletter to keep supporters up to date with all things AOK.

**Volunteers/Advisors.** We have assembled a diverse community of volunteers and partners to create webs of support for our young people. Our roster of more than 20 volunteers provide a range of support to our kids including:

- Friend
- Mentor
- Tutor
- Life Coach
- Therapist
- College application assistance
- Financial aid assistance
- Job and internship application assistance
- Assistance negotiating the health care system
- Drivers Ed.

## Board

*“Being a part of the AOK family has become a center piece of my life.  
I can’t imagine my life without AOK.”*

—Sara Pratt, AOK board member

- We’ve gone from a 3-member ‘starter’ board when we incorporated in May, 2016, to a diverse, 7-member body. The board meets every other month and advises on all aspects of the organization. (Learn more about our board members by visiting this [link](#).)

## Organization

- AOK’s Executive Director, David Simpson, started full-time last September, and he was joined by Program Manager Carolyn Thompson in March, 2017. AOK staff is strongly supported by a highly-engaged board of directors and a growing roster of volunteers helping with social media, communications, development, mentoring and administration.
- We have developed systems in all areas of the organization, including program management, accounting, donor management and communications.

**Lessons Learned.** Of course, as a new organization, we’ve learned many lessons over the past year, and part of our work in Year Two is to integrate these lessons into our organizational habits, culture, policies and procedures and objectives. Lessons learned include the following:

- Clarity of expectations is key, in all our relationships: between AOK and kids, mentors, volunteers, partner organizations and board members. By doing the up-front work of establishing clear, mutually understood expectations, we are setting everyone up for success.

- To ensure that we consistently meet the needs of our growing community of young people, we need a solid bench of well-prepared mentors that can provide a wide range of support and a robust system for finding, training and supervising mentors.
- Our young artists often lack consistent access to the space and resources they need to create and show their work, and build community with fellow creatives. They would greatly benefit in many ways from an arts space that offered such space and resources.
- There is hunger in all corners of the country for the diverse community found at Thursday Night Dinner and in the AOK community. After David Brooks' column last October, we were inundated with inquiries from people interested in creating something similar in their communities.
- We need increased capacity to effectively steward all of our donors, not just our top givers. This will help ensure that we get as many current donors as possible to renew and even increase their support.
- To ensure the stability and predictability of our operating budget, we need to develop a special reserve to deal with short term unexpected expenses, like tuition shortfalls, medical issues, broken computers, etc.

**Year Two.** As you can see, AOK has had an incredible first year. And we're just getting started. In Year Two, we aim to:

- Grow the family of young people we're able to support through significantly growing our mentor/volunteer system and other youth support strategies
- Amplify the range of resources we offer to our young people through the development of a broad community of nonprofit and business partners
- Consolidate and grow our donor base and deepen our capacity to steward current donors in order to stabilize our finances and facilitate growth
- Improve our communications systems to raise the profile of AOK and better share our work and impact with donors and potential donors.
- And we are very excited by an emerging partnership with [Independent Sector](#) which will focus on replicating the diverse community found at Thursday Night Dinner in communities across the country and creating an arts space for our young artists at the Independent Sector building in downtown Washington, DC. Stay tuned for updates on this incredible opportunity.

We can only accomplish these ambitious objectives with your continued support; we count on you to be the wind beneath the wings of our incredible young artists. Thank you for your generosity; it has a direct impact on the lives of our young people, their sense of themselves and their ability to live up to their potential. We look forward to working with you to continue this crucial work in Year Two and beyond.

***"The AOK family gives me the strength and courage to see myself in a completely new way.  
I deserve a future"***

—Tahrook, AOK artist

For more information about AOK, or to make a donation, please visit [aokdc.org](http://aokdc.org). You can also email us at [info@aokdc.org](mailto:info@aokdc.org) or call us at 412.508.0411.