



May 1, 2024

Dear Friend,

This year marks Roots & Wings' 25th anniversary serving the needs of youth who have aged out of the New Jersey foster care system. As we celebrate this milestone, we are filled with gratitude for the successes of the past 25 years as well as anticipation for the future of Roots & Wings.

We honor our founder, Irene deGrandpre, who had the incredible foresight to recognize the vulnerability of foster youth transitioning to adulthood on their own - and was moved to act! She started Roots & Wings by taking young people into her own home and convincing her friends to do the same. Irene's mission has evolved into a professional 501c3 organization, offering fully funded scattered-site housing and support to those aging out of foster care in NJ.

Roots & Wings made great strides throughout 2023. We welcomed a new Senior Program Director, a part-time Business Manager, and three new Board members, adding tremendous depth of experience across our leadership team. We acquired and began implementing a national, evidence-based, trauma-informed model, Mobility Mentoring, to which our program members have responded very positively. The integration of this framework complements and strengthens our curriculum, enabling us to provide an even better overall experience for our current program members and those to come.

Most importantly, we have witnessed personal growth and positive achievements in each of our program members. You will see in the enclosed summary some of their 2023 accomplishments as well as highlights of two of our program members. We finished the year financially and operationally strong and are well-positioned to continue strengthening the critical services we provide.

Many thanks to those who attended and supported our Authors' Lunch, just held on April 18<sup>th</sup>. We hope to see you all at our Rise & Fly Gala on October 17, 2024! These events are a wonderful way to reconnect and remember the tremendous impact your support makes on the lives of this often-unseen population.

As a non-profit organization that is almost entirely funded by private and corporate donations, we are eternally grateful for the dedicated support that we receive from our loyal donors and volunteers. You are the reason Roots & Wings exists and is able to provide these life-changing services.

Thank you for your past support! May is Foster Care Awareness Month. Please consider making a contribution today to help support aged-out foster youth while they gain the skills they need to embark on a path toward financial independence and self-sufficiency.

To donate to Roots & Wings, please scan the QR code or visit <https://give.classy.org/2024Annual-Appeal>.



With heartfelt appreciation,

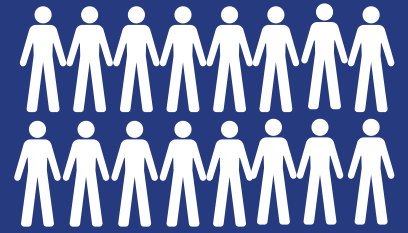
*Edith Villacampa Fiato*

Edith Villacampa Fiato  
Executive Director, Roots & Wings

# May Is Foster Care Awareness Month

Roots & Wings is a 501c(3) non-profit based in Denville, NJ, with scattered site housing in Morris and Union Counties. The RISE program provides free housing and support services, including access to educational/vocational training, life skills, and emotional support, to individuals aged 18-24 years old. Our goal is to empower young people who may lack the resources and skills necessary to embark on a path toward economic self-sufficiency.

By providing safe housing and the guidance of a highly trained staff, Roots & Wings enables program members to focus on setting and achieving their educational/vocational goals. Monthly house meetings and life skills groups strengthen social connections and provide opportunities to learn about financial literacy, job readiness, effective interpersonal skills, time management, and physical/mental well-being. Roots & Wings also offers tuition assistance, transportation, books, and an in-house pantry stocked with food, toiletries, and cleaning supplies. As the program members progress through the program, they gain marketable skills and strengthen the executive functioning skills (problem-solving, decision-making, coping skills) necessary to transition into adulthood successfully.



**16**  
**YOUNG**  
**ADULTS**  
Served in  
2023

## STATISTICS

- Nationally, more than 19,000 youth left foster care in 2021 without the support of a biological or adoptive family.
- More than 1 in 5 will become homeless within 18 months of emancipation.
- 1 in 4 will become parents between the ages of 19 and 21.
- Almost 50% of inmates in our prison systems have spent time in the foster care system.
- Only half of aged-out foster youth obtain their GED or High School diploma by age 19.
- Just 6% go on to earn a 2- or 4- year degree.

\*Sources: The Annie. E. Casey Foundation, National Conference of State Legislatures, and National Foster Youth Institute

## R&W MEMBERS ARE BEATING THE ODDS IN 2023:

- 4 members graduated from RISE into safe and stable housing.
- 100% have a High School diploma.
- 94 % were employed.
- 88% maintained a savings account.
- 81% attended an educational, vocational, or certificate program.
- 75% have their driver's licenses.

To donate visit  
<https://give.classy.org/2024Annual-Appeal>  
or scan the QR code,



Our mission is to provide safe housing, emotional support, life skills, and educational opportunities for youth aging out of foster care; empowering them to rise toward their greatest potential.



## Jamani

Jamani joined Roots & Wings two years ago. Despite attending four different high schools, she graduated on time and currently attends Caldwell University. She is studying for her BS in Chemistry and Secondary Education, and has maintained a GPA of 3.0 or higher every semester. Her ultimate goal is to become a Chemistry teacher in a high-needs school district.

“It is my hope that upon securing an opportunity to teach and assist others, that I can become a part of their story as Roots & Wings is a part of mine.”

We are inspired by Jamani’s hard work and admire her dedication to her dream!

**“Roots & Wings saw the best part of me, and they encouraged me when I needed it most. Their message is not just about today but the many tomorrows, and I am forever grateful.”**



**“Having a safe home while at R&W allowed me to focus on my aspiration of becoming an attorney; gaining legal experience, receiving help with LSAT prep, and learning how to save for the future. I am so grateful for all the support!”**



## Diana

Congratulations to our most recent graduate of the RISE Program, Diana! She earned her bachelor's degree from Montclair State University in Justice Studies and is working full-time as a paralegal in a healthcare company. A responsible and dedicated employee, Diana maintained her job at the same firm throughout her participation in RISE. She plans on taking the LSAT and applying to law schools soon. While at RISE, Diana worked very hard and saved enough money to be able to afford to rent the beautiful apartment she recently moved into.

Congratulations, Diana! We wish you much success as you continue to pursue your dream of working in the legal field.

