At Step Up, we believe all girls should have the opportunity to fulfill their potential.

To transcend the obstacles Step Up girls face, we build skills in self-efficacy and resilience, create access to opportunities, mentorship, and life-long community and support.

Step Up girls, more than 97% of whom identify as being a woman of color, represent a multitude of races, ethnicities and identities, all emboldened through meaningful mentoring relationships to use their voices and skills to address inequities, reject racism, and build coalitions that strengthen their abilities to be future leaders.

Step Up knows that when all girls have the opportunity to fulfill their potential, our communities will be more just and will flourish. Through our social emotional curriculum and mentorship programs, Step Up provides a comprehensive approach to supporting the whole girl, and wellbeing is a key aspect of the need of girls and young women of color, especially during 2020.
Girls in the United States, particularly girls of color living in underserved communities, face significant barriers to equity and the opportunity to fulfill their potential. Nationwide, about 9 million youth facing systemic barriers will turn 19 without ever having had a mentor, and are much less likely to reach important milestones like high school and college graduation.

To meet this need, Step Up implements a unique blended mentorship model. Its hallmark, short-term, group exposure to a community of women, allows teens and alumnae to exercise their ability to relate confidently to adults, learn to network successfully, and reap the benefits of a powerful “village” of support.

Step Up mentors represent a variety of industries and backgrounds, bringing a depth and diversity of experience and expertise that increases the likelihood every teen will meet at least one woman whose persona or career resonates with her own idea of who she might become, or whose past experiences are similar to hers supporting the teen to see a realistic model for her own path. By filling potential gaps in a young woman’s support system, Step Up makes it possible for them to navigate college and career exploration confidently.

*The Mentoring Effect, 2014*
A New Strategic Plan for Step Up

In fall of 2019 with the leadership of new CEO Delores Druilhet Morton, Step Up launched a multi-year strategic planning process. Through this process, the organization sought to establish a strategic plan for the next five years that would enhance organizational effectiveness and impact through a refined program delivery model, improved membership engagement, and sustainable growth.

Research has proven that college or continued education ensures long-term financial stability, career satisfaction, success outside the workplace, and a desire to be an engaged and contributing citizen. Education beyond high school, is one of the best tools we have to bring about equality and an end to poverty, and it is this possibility that Step Up wants help make real for girls from underserved communities.

Step Up’s 2020-2025 Strategic Plan focuses on ensuring that more girls are provided with the opportunity to achieve their full potential with a focus on deepening social emotional skills, supporting teens as they plan for post-secondary education, and ensuring their success after high school. Hundreds of thousands of Black and Hispanic students are earning credentials that are likely to offer less labor market value than the bachelor’s degrees received by their white peers. Whether it’s a university, community college, trade school, or certificate program, Step Up knows that that post-secondary education strongly increases upward economic mobility.

Step Up’s vision calls for providing a continuum of support that begins with high school and deepens during post-secondary pursuits and the earliest career stages. Over time, Step Up girls and young women become a part of a persisting ecosystem of supportive women leaders. This cadre of leaders supports one another and equips girls through a wide array of mentoring activities and experiential career exploration. Data shows that students with different sources of support and information are more likely to stay in school and make better decisions.

*The Mentoring Effect, 2014*
I've been with Step Up for three years now and this year will be my last during high school. Step Up has been a great experience and it helped me navigate high school. I am so grateful for all of my coordinators and the bond that I was able to create with them. Step Up gradually gave me more confidence and it was a safe place for me to express my thoughts freely. Sometimes after a long day of school, Step Up was all I needed to help me decompress the stress and anxiety. Also, Step Up made me self-aware of things that I didn’t learn in school. For instance, we learned about budgeting, scholarships, finances, mentors, and even about resumes. Step Up’s trips are also a great opportunity for us to explore our career interests, meet professionals, and to experience a new environment. The list goes on. But all I have to say is that I am very grateful to be part of such an amazing program.

-Step Up New York City Teen Program Participant, 2019-2020
A New World + A Nod to What’s Essential

In Deloitte’s 2018 Global Human Capital Trends report, companies around the world described the profound shift they were undertaking in how they define their organizational purpose, how they interact with stakeholders and consumers, and how they define success or failure. This shift, from business enterprises to social enterprises, means their success is not only measured in terms of profit, product quality, or consumer satisfaction, but by “the basis of their relationships with their workers, their customers, and their communities, as well as their impact on society at large.”

In addition to this shift for businesses, the overwhelming consensus among employers is that too many young people lack essential foundational skills such as leadership and critical-thinking skills, the ability to communicate effectively, solve problems, work collaboratively and adapt to changing priorities. In fact, 86% of Deloitte’s respondents cite leadership development as their biggest workforce challenge.

The COVID-19 pandemic disrupted education and the economy in ways no one anticipated. As the nation considered what is needed for long-term recovery, Step Up fills a critical gap and helps ensure its alumnae are entering the workforce with the essential, foundational leadership skills and behaviors to drive innovation, growth, and sustainability, as well as with the desirable citizenship skills that are necessary to drive today’s social enterprises.
Our Response

How surreal is it to look back at those early weeks of 2020 programming?! In addition to after-school programs in January and February, Step Up held its first mentorship conference of 2020 in partnership with Mattel’s Barbie. The multigenerational “I Dream To...” conferences took place in Chicago, Dallas, Los Angeles and New York during February. Shortly after these conferences that reached nearly 500 girls and women of all ages, stay-at-home directives issued by city, state and national officials alike halted future Step Up mentorship programs happening after-school and on weekends.

Slowing the spread of COVID-19 came at a steep price for emotional well-being, especially for youth. Girls, especially those from marginalized communities, were impacted as the pandemic exacerbated the long-standing socioeconomic gap.

For many Step Up teens, the early days of the pandemic meant not having someone to help them navigate post-secondary decisions - to decipher the complicated financial aid packages, calculate out-of-pocket costs, and to weigh the best offer. In addition, many Step Up teens were asked to balance their needs with those of younger siblings, becoming at-home caregivers for families who do not have other options.

While physiological needs such as food, were undeniably important during this crisis and were addressed by many entities and partners, emotional well-being is also a critical need that is frequently overlooked. Step Up not only provided our essential social emotional programming and mentorship virtually during this time to maintain supports for our teens, but also launched new programs to provide a continuum of care throughout the crisis and beyond.
Since launching virtual programming in April of 2020, Step Up took down the walls of our organization to expand programming to any teen anywhere. Teens had the opportunity to participate in multiple virtual programming opportunities: cohort check-ins with Step Up staff, college and career preparation workshops and conferences, mentoring hours, Instagram Live sessions with mentors, and Pathways to Professions virtual field trips, allowing Step Up teens to explore a diversity of careers and industries.

It was too early to predict the long term impact COVID-19 would have from an economic and opportunity standpoint, but Step Up knew that girls of color who are already vulnerable with limited financial resources, food insecurity, and unstable housing would fare the worst and would need the most support. Managing without sufficient supports, girls of color are likely to face the greatest impact on their emotional and academic wellbeing. Step Up believed what was needed in this moment was a comprehensive approach to supporting needs of teen girls of color - an approach that considered the physical, academic, and psychological. Step Up was uniquely positioned to provide solutions that support psychological safety through our focus on social emotional learning, mentoring, and providing safe and brave spaces where teens can be vulnerable and feel supported.
During the 19-20 school year, Step Up programs supported girls in becoming confident, college-bound and career-ready. What did this look like?

We aimed for Step Up girls to identify with the following statements after participating in Step Up mentorship:

• I speak up in class with thoughts, opinions and questions
• I value graduating high school and going to college
• I take on leadership roles in school projects, clubs and more
• I am open to feedback from my peers
• I am open to feedback from adults like teachers, parents/guardians and my Step Up mentors
• I have set short and long term goals
• I have strong organizational and time management skills

• I am committed to my academic success
• I am confident facing dilemmas independently
• I feel confident about the college search and application process
• I feel comfortable interacting with adults in a professional environment
• I am confident in my ability to communicate my thoughts, opinions and questions
• I am confident working in teams
2020 Impact Highlights
Innovation, Reach + a New Audience
“I DREAM TO...” MENTORSHIP CONFERENCE
Step Up hosted our first multi-generational conference when the “I Dream To...” Mentorship Conference launched in February 2020. In partnership with Mattel and Barbie, we created mentorship conferences for adult women, teen, and young girls in Chicago, Dallas, Los Angeles and New York. The conferences reached just under 500 participants and it was the first time Step Up used a synthesized conference curriculum across all four locations.
VIRTUAL PROGRAMMING
We pivoted to an all-virtual model in April 2020, expanding our programming to any teen anywhere. Teens had the opportunity to participate in multiple virtual mentorship opportunities: check-ins with Step Up staff, college and career preparation workshops and conferences, virtual mentoring hours, and corporate “field trips” to explore a plethora of careers and industries.
ENROLLMENT

Despite unexpected shifts in program delivery due to the Covid-19 pandemic, Step Up concluded the school year 94% to our enrollment goal of 1,367 teens. Our Dallas and New York chapters exceeded their enrollment goals, and Los Angeles ended the school year 99% to goal.
While studies show that high school teens often experience a decline in confidence and uncertainty around college and career aspirations, Step Up teens overwhelmingly reported maintaining or growing their levels of confidence, desire to go to college, and career ambitions as a function of their participation in Step Up.
SAFE SPACE
During July 2020, 97% of Step Up teens reported experiencing Step Up as a safe space. Qualitative feedback from teens at the end of the year echoed this sentiment. Despite the physical distance forced by the Covid-19 pandemic, teens who joined virtual programming continued to experience Step Up as a safe space.
EXPANDING OUR SERVICES

Less than a year after joining Step Up, CEO Delores Druilhet Morton led the launch of what is sure to be one of her most impactful contributions to the organization.

During 2020, Step Up introduced “Next Step Up” – a continuum of support as our high school students transition to life after high school and enter their careers. This new set of programs serving young women ages 18-23 expands Step Up’s services and constituents, and ensures that mentorship is available to Step Up mentees beyond the four high school years.
Step Up Speaks Up
Meet Our Community Members
Through Their Own Words

STEP UP TOGETHER

Valeria Gonzalez
Everyone was crying. It was a three day conference meant for young Latinas, and we were spending the last night outside sharing things we wanted to let go of. Huddled and shivering in a tight circle, we surrounded a small but fierce flame— the fire seemingly emitting boldness alongside heat as it blazed away against the cold air. One by one, we shared our stories until it felt like we had exhausted all of the weight in the atmosphere. Like the defiance of the flames, we cast away shame and fear as we opened ourselves to a few hours of the rawest vulnerability I had ever known. We felt seen.

Throughout most of my life, genuine connection has often felt elusive. In fact, I used to sit in either a restroom stall or the office every day of school during breaks, and many times, I would continue that spell of isolation at home in my room. I was introverted, reserved, lonely, insecure, scared. I know, not exactly adjectives you would think to describe an activist. Though a consistent inconvenience, stability and contentment more or less endured. As the eldest child of two immigrant parents from Mexico, I had been raised to be independent and perseverant. Naturally, I felt that I could neglect this need for connection and belonging- until I couldn’t.
On December of 2017, my aunt died by suicide. This event triggered earlier childhood trauma of sexual abuse and alienation for me, and the consequences were devastating: my grades dropped dramatically, my health declined, my relationships suffered, anxiety skyrocketed, and my self-esteem plummeted. Depression kept me in its grip for about a year, and as hellish as all aspects about the experience had been, the most intense was undoubtedly the loneliness. However, it was this conference that helped me remember we all share a common humanity. People were far more than glances and small talk. They were molded, each with baggage and hopes of their own, and capable of change. At our core, we all wanted to connect and be loved, and what a gift it was for me to recognize that.

I wanted to find more spaces where vulnerability was celebrated and embraced, and my school social worker recommended Step Up’s after-school program. Along with everything I learned professionally and for college at Step Up, I developed emotionally as well. The atmosphere was inclusive and encouraged openness. Empathy was a core capacity that was nurtured, and when I was constantly empathizing with others’ experiences, I could see that I wasn’t alone. I had the privilege of seeing my peers as they truly were.

Moving forward, I could not deny the power of vulnerability. I wanted to share it with the others around me, as I knew those feelings of loneliness were not unique to me. So, my activism began as I started using my own social media (Instagram) to connect with others. I sought to utilize this platform that was often criticized as a space that encouraged filtered presentations. I would offer my vulnerabilities, reflections, and observations, often with poetic language, hoping others could relate. Soon after, people I had never talked to before were suddenly reaching out. I had thoughtful messages and conversations, a peer warmly writing to me, “Thank you for seeing me.” I needed to share my stories, so that others could feel safe sharing theirs.

I was so happy to have helped others in a way I felt was needed, and I soon realized that in doing so, I had been helped as well. Looking back, I think I struggled with feeling misunderstood. And I’m not sure if there is anything you can actually do about that, until you find the people that support you. But what we do have more control over, is feeling seen. So, if I couldn’t always be understood, I wanted to be seen for who I was. I was proud to share myself in that way. I felt connected, because I was being authentic.

With every caption posted, I also became more self-aware. I could recognize judgmental and self-occupied ideas within myself and challenge myself to remain true to my story. And just as I had strived to be more of an understanding human being to others, I learned how to offer myself the same grace. Realistically, I would continue to face challenges,
and I would continue to be flawed—we all are. The important thing to remember was that I was capable of growth. I could get better, and I would.

Compassion thus became a day-to-day responsibility to myself and others, and it spread onto my leadership as I began to commit myself to activism. To be clear though, embracing vulnerability, empathy, and compassion was not necessarily tied to social justice; it was tied to feeling capable. I was already the freshman that always raised her hand during sociology class and had participated in some advocacy opportunities. My transformation was in fact self-actualization. I became an activist because I believed in myself. I know the experiences I had with Step Up helped me gain the confidence and esteem to get to that place.

Even as a youth leader in my programs, I saw the need for spaces that Step Up and the Latina conference offered. For instance, in my Junior State of America chapter, as newly elected president, I established our JSA theme for the year as “Educational Inequalities,” and we started off our efforts with a ‘thought talk’ during our first meeting. One by one, my peers voluntarily shared their earlier school experiences as students in under-resourced and underrepresented communities. The experiences were characterized by trauma and inequity, and the release felt like a step towards healing. And not only was it an opportunity for them to have let go of what they had been carrying, it also motivated us. We all had our stories to tell, and our reasons for being there, and when we shared them, we strengthened our collective purpose, belief in ourselves, and sense of community.

Less than a year later, in partnership with their Student Advisory Council, we passed a Student Bill of Rights for the Los Angeles Unified School District with a unanimous vote. It contained many basic rights one would expect every student to have, but are not actually always fulfilled. For example, universal access to resources and recent technology, or due process, or the right to influence decisions in their school. It also would help students become their own advocates, because in giving them the awareness and expectation for what’s rightly theirs, they now can advocate for themselves if things are ever lacking. As Andrew Solomon has said, building identity is about changing the world, and this experience both highlighted to me the importance of safe spaces and their impact.

Such revolutions depend on ourselves and the people around us. So one of my asks is that we all be courageous in our authenticity. Vulnerability is necessary. It is about your truth, and we cannot grow or move on if we are not honest. Why shouldn’t the world see your grief, your joy, your growth. Because that’s reality, and when this image of what constitutes a person becomes more realistic, we will grow to believe in it more and
Nowadays, I'll see my little sister, Jimena, at our dining table drawing. She’s already filled up a couple sketchbooks, the same Canson mix media brand that I used when I was her age. Seeing her reminds me of what this is all for. It’s for her, it’s for the next generation, not just me.

That is the future I am supporting. As an education equity activist, I am fighting for arts to be a part of her schooling too, because I didn’t really have that growing up, and she deserves that experience. And as a student of vulnerability, I aim to leave her a good example of what it means to be authentic, so that she too may develop and grow into her identity as she continues to get older.

As I start my first year at UC Santa Cruz, as a political science major, I intend to keep these mantras as I study the political and social systems I will engage in, and strengthen my purpose in serving my communities as a young activist.

Black is beautiful. Black is me.

Black History Month is the best time of the year.

It may be the shortest time of the year, but it is the most exhilarating.

Black History Month is important to me because it reminds me how far we have overcome in our community. The good and the bad, but most of all, it shows that we are courageous and we are strong.

Not only does it show everything we have and will continue to overcome, but we also get to celebrate the culture. Our culture shows in the way we are with our art and music.

It also gives us the time to pay respect for our ancestors for paving the way for us. Even though it may seem like we are taking things for granted, we are thankful for everything.

We continue to strive and continue to show Black Excellence and that is what Black History Month is all about. It is a constant reminder that we are and still rising.
It might seem a bit inappropriate to talk about selfishness on Giving Tuesday. But some things are both generous and selfish at the same time – like mentoring.

As our Michael Stars team was preparing to launch this year’s campaign in support of Step Up, an amazing mentoring organization for high school girls, I was reflecting on how personally rewarding it’s been to be a mentor.

In case you’re not familiar with Step Up, it’s a nonprofit organization that propels girls, living in under-resourced communities, to fulfill their potential by empowering them to become confident, college-bound and career-focused through mentoring.

I’ve learned that if you mentor someone in an effort to be generous, but don’t experience any personal joy from it, then chances are you won’t continue to be a mentor. What a loss that would be, not only for those new generations of women and men, but also for you.
The Generous Part: Changing the World Through Mentoring, One Mentee at a Time

In the fashion industry, the lack of mentorship for women is contributing to a significant gender equity gap. Consider these startling facts from the groundbreaking 2018 "Glass Runway Report," sponsored by the Council of Fashion Designers of America, Glamour Magazine, and global consulting firm, McKinsey:

Only **14 percent** of leading womenswear brands are run by a woman CEO.

**18 percent** of men in the fashion industry at senior levels report that they get promoted without asking, as compared to 5 percent of women.

**100 percent** of women said that gender inequality is a problem in the fashion industry, while only **50 percent** of men thought it was a problem.

Here’s the kicker: women receive less career advice than men do.

Only 22 percent of women, vs. 33 percent of men, report getting advice to advance their careers. The gap widens at the VP level, with 27 percent of women getting advice vs. 45 percent of men.

That’s a gap that you’ll see mirrored in other industries. Good mentoring can help close that gap. I’ve already witnessed the ripple effect mentoring is having on the young women that organizations like Step Up work with. Imagine what’s possible if each of us commits to becoming a mentor.

The “Selfish” Part: Evolving Yourself, One Mentee at A Time

My first serious mentor came to me through a mutual friend. I credit her with helping propel me into the fashion business.

I was very inexperienced and showed up to our first meeting in casual “hippie wear,” (which today would be called boho chic). She was ultra-fashionable and formidable. I expected her give me a few words of advice and show me the door.

She did just the opposite. She listened to my ideas. She showed me everything about the fashion business from pricing a fashion line to building relationships with buyers. She always took my calls.

And most importantly, she helped me believe in me - validating my own sense of style and my knack for spotting fashion trends. She stuck with my fledgling business because she saw her advice being put to good use and had fun listening to our ideas and experiencing our energy and enthusiasm.
I knew I wanted to pay that mentoring experience forward. But it wasn’t that easy to find the time, nor was it clear to me how exactly to be a mentor. But, as with most things in business, you learn by doing. And as I started to do more, I realized how rewarding it was for me.

One of my most recent mentoring experiences started through a friend who contacted me to see if I could provide a loan to an emerging fashion startup, the Cesta Collective.

Cesta partners with women artisans in Rwanda, Africa, to create and manufacture unique, stylish handbags using locally-sourced, renewable resources. Their goal is to create a thriving business making quality products that will create economy and opportunity in the developing world, promote women’s empowerment, and utilize sustainable materials.

My intention was to simply figure out whether I wanted to give them a business loan. But, I had an immediate connection with the company’s founders, Courtney Fasciano and Erin Ryder, and soon became one of their advisors and mentors. At the same time, I started learning great things about how they shaped, developed and promoted their brand.

Over time, most of my mentoring, whether I am doing it with emerging business or nonprofit leaders, has evolved like my relationship with Courtney and Erin - a great blend of give and get.

**Our Giving Tuesday Campaign: Equal Parts Give and Get**

You can see our give/get “algorithm” at work in our Giving Tuesday Campaign for Step Up. Our partnership with this amazing organization is going on five years. In that time, our team has mentored nearly 100 girls.

This year, our goal is to provide 300 girls from under-served communities with the opportunity to participate in Step Up’s Pathways to Professions Program, which introduces girls to new career options and mentors. To make that happen, we’re donating 25 percent of sales from all tees sold on 12/3 to StepUp, up to $10,000.

It’s so exciting for me and the Michael Stars team to spend time with these bright high school girls. Their enthusiasm, curiosity, and hope remind us all why mentoring is so important and rewarding.

When you create your own give/get algorithm this season, consider mentoring. Change the world and change yourself!
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Marta Martinez
director, agency platforms, Google

Delores Druilhet Morton
CEO, Step Up

Suzanne Norr
chief operating officer, AvatarLabs

Barri Rafferty
executive vice president, head of corporate communications, Wells Fargo

Sonya Rosenberg
partner, Neal, Gerber & Eisenberg

Andrya Smith
partner, PwC

Hilary Smith
executive vice president, corporate communications and social impact, NBCUniversal
2020 Step Up Staff

Nickie Acero  
director, organizational effectiveness

Kate Baxter  
executive director, teen programs

Morgan Commet  
manager, partnerships

Alissa Zito Cruz  
executive director, communications

Ryann Denham Deveney  
chief external relations officer

Amanda Flores  
senior manager, events

Hollis Heath  
director, alumnae programs

Jamie Kogan  
executive director, development

Sofia Lilly  
senior manager, alumnae programs

Venus Devnani McClelland  
chief program officer

Delores Druilhet Morton  
chief executive officer

Elle Lynn Quimpo  
manager, teen programs

Mayra Ramirez  
manager, teen programs

Melissa Stumpf  
manager, finance

Cordelia Tullous  
executive director, community engagement
2020 AmeriCorps Volunteers in Service to America (VISTA)

Juliet Wallace
community engagement associate

Anne-Margaux Angelov
membership associate

Tracey Wilkins
membership associate

Amanda Hayes
community engagement + curriculum associate

Alexandra Folsom
community engagement associate

Noelle Correa
data science associate

Susy Gomez-Barajas
membership associate

Kathlyn Carney
community engagement associate
Financials

**Income**

$2,403,413

- **DONATION** $858,048
- **SPECIAL EVENT** $530,789
- **INTEREST DIVIDENDS** $9,274
- **GRANTS** $1,005,302

**Expense**

$2,716,631

- **PROGRAMS** $1,907,038
- **F&D** $485,578
- **ADMIN** $324,015

**Inkind**

$17,756

- **PROGRAMS** $12,829
- **SUT** $4,927
Hope for our Collective Future

Now and in the future, companies will need a workforce comprised of diverse leaders who demonstrate competency in communication, collaboration, problem solving, critical thinking, persistence, flexibility, and professionalism, and also promote the values of good citizenship which include teamwork, empathy, equity, and a clearly articulated purpose to serve.

In the 2020-2021 school year, Step Up will continue to provide thematic content focused on social emotional learning which will allow teens to explore their identities, strengths, and goals; harness their emotional intelligence and develop a growth mindset; and learn tools for building resilience through wellness, mindfulness, and self-management.

Additionally, Step Up will continue to provide industry focused mentor experiences through its corporate field trip program, expanding to new industries such as STEM and Entrepreneurship. Our programming will ensure teens have the skills and confidence to thrive in virtual learning by really leaning in on their social emotional, time management, and personal organization skills.

Step Up’s social emotional curriculum and mentorship programs offers a unique opportunity for the philanthropic community to invest in a workforce development program that aligns with the social enterprise of the 21st century, while simultaneously ensuring young women of color from underrepresented communities have the resources, support, and network to graduate high school, navigate their academic post-secondary pursuits, and successfully enter the workforce.