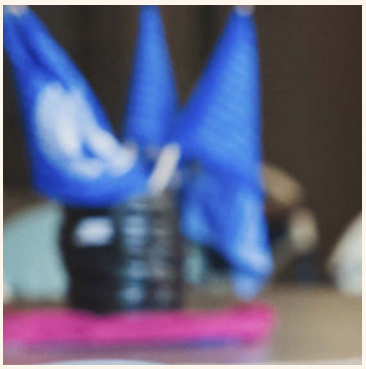
Accola
COMMUNITY. SPIRIT. JUSTICE.

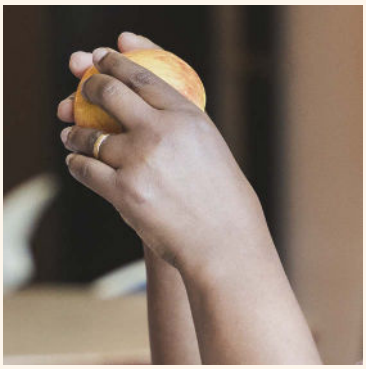
2025–26

Annual Report

Dear Neighbor:

A Year of Solidarity







OUR MISSION

Accola welcomes neighbors, cultivates community, and fosters justice by responding boldly to **the needs of the time.**



1851 Sisters of St. Joseph of Carondelet arrive in St. Paul.

1960s The sisters focus their work around peace, justice, and advocacy, helping immigrants and other disenfranchised people.

1992 Sisters of St. Joseph Ministries Foundation is established to carry out the work.

2018 Wanting to remain responsive to community needs, the Foundation starts conversations on how best to carry out their vision.

2023 Accola is formed, encompassing Learning in Style School, Sarah's... an Oasis for Women, and Wisdom Ways.

MAKE AN IMPACT Give. Volunteer. Connect.

DONATE





VOLUNTEER

Our work is driven by a quest for justice, Accola's name is derived from Latin and translates to "neighbor." Just as good neighbors look out for one another, Accola responds to the needs of our communities, addressing pressing issues with empathy and action.

There are many ways to be part of this work. Give a gift at any level. Volunteer your time and talents. Attend a program or bring a friend. Advocate for the neighbors we serve. Every helping hand strengthens the community we are building together — **and your generosity, in whatever form it takes, creates real and lasting change.**

Visit: **www.accolamn.org** to get involved.

Letter From The President

Inspiring Action

When the Sisters of St. Joseph of Carondelet arrived in Saint Paul in 1851, they began with a simple question: What does our neighbor need? Three years into Accola's life, that question still guides us. **This year, you helped us answer it together.**

That question took on new urgency last winter, when Operation Metro Surge brought thousands of federal immigration agents into the Twin Cities. Many of our students and residents were afraid to leave home. Staff and volunteers delivered groceries, drove residents to appointments, raised emergency funds for families who could no longer safely go to work, and stood watch at our doors. Teachers taught hybrid classes so students could keep learning by any means available. Even through four months of disruption, Learning in Style students achieved their fifth straight year of growth in level gains.



President Matt Halley alongside Daphne and Nedicson, Learning in Style Students

Together, we welcomed 295 adult learners from 28 countries to Learning in Style School, building skills in English, math, computers, and citizenship. Together, we ensured 34 women at Sarah's had a safe home and a path forward — 23 residents employed, 11 residents in vocational or post-secondary school, and one resident now holding two jobs with hope to reunite with her children soon. At Wisdom Ways, we actively tended the spirit. 364 people gathered for retreats, contemplative practice, and conversations on faith and justice that built community and called us deeper into solidarity with our neighbors.

None of this happens alone.

To the Sisters of St. Joseph: your founding vision remains our foundation. To our donors: more than 360 of you filled our first-ever Impact Breakfast, 270 gave for the first time, and 34 made five-year Impact Circle pledges. To our 80 volunteers: your 5,222 hours brought warmth to every classroom and gathering. To our board, our staff, and most of all our students and residents: your courage and commitment inspire everything we do.

This year we also invested in Accola's future, completing studies on new earned income sources and connecting the three separate programs we were gifted by the Sister's into one Accola.

In the pages that follow, you will find inspiring stories and program data from this year. Accola's ability to invest in meeting the needs of our neighbors, in our community, is directly tied to your support. **Thank you for believing in the transformative power of compassion in action — and for putting it into action with us.**

With gratitude,

Matt Halley

Matt Halley
President, Accola

Siraad's Story

Finding Home, Finding Community

Siraad left Somalia as a young girl, spending several years in Kenya before arriving in the United States in 2003. She came, like so many, for the things that are easy to name but hard to find: opportunity, safety, free education, and the chance to support her mother and siblings still living back home.

Her journey here has not been without grief. In 2012, she lost her father and younger brother on the same day. Through it all, she kept going. She raised her younger sister like a daughter. She worked meat factory shifts in Willmar, drove shuttles at the airport, and supported residents at a group home.



Students in a Digital Literacy Class at Learning in Style School



Siraad found Learning in Style (LIS) the way many immigrants do: through the network of neighbors and friends who know that LIS is something special. She had attended other schools before, but LIS felt different. The flexible scheduling worked around her driving shifts. The teachers knew her name. The community room, with its coffee and conversation, felt less like a classroom and more like a home. "More than a school," she says simply.

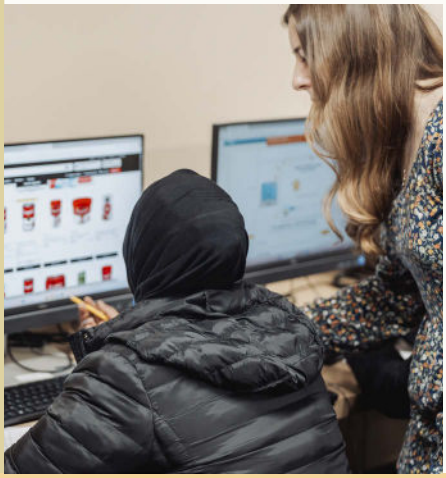
LIS just offers more. Donated items are offered to students: coats, food, books, and more. Staff goes beyond just teaching English; they give students what they need to become established. From where to look for resources to how to apply to jobs – every step of the way, LIS was there.

> **She had attended other schools before, but LIS felt different. *"More than a School"* she says**

In her time at LIS, Siraad has grown in ways she is proud to name: expanded vocabulary, formal writing skills, and the confidence to connect ideas on the page with clarity. She has also found people, mothers, neighbors, fellow learners, who have become part of the community she carries with her. A community she gives back to, from speaking to landlords on neighbors' behalf to teaching them how to drive.



She now has her sights set on becoming a nursing assistant, saving and working her way to take on any challenge in her way. For someone who has built a life across multiple continents, Siraad knows what it means to belong somewhere. And at LIS, she does.



Today she drives a van for Bille Bus Transportation, and has even picked up some Spanish along the way — learned not from a textbook, but from the parents she sees every morning and afternoon. These moments of connection remind us that community is built in small exchanges as much as the large ones.

Learning in Style School

Building Independence Through Education

Learning in Style is a free adult education school in Minneapolis offering English, math, computer literacy, and citizenship preparation to immigrants and refugees. With professional teachers, small class sizes, and deep community partnerships, LIS meets each learner with respect, connecting them to the resources and relationships they need to thrive.

19.7%

More students enrolled in 25-26

34.2%

Of eligible students advanced by at least one language proficiency level — a 4% increase!

Ruthie's Resilience
Daring to Dream Again

Sarah's... an Oasis for Women

Healing and Dignity in a Safe Community

A home and sanctuary where immigrant women surviving violence and displacement find safety, dignity, and community. More than shelter, it is a place of healing and love, honoring culture where women are welcomed and given the stability and support to build toward the lives they deserve.

93%

Capacity, a total of 34 Women Served

81%

Working Full and Part-time Jobs

When Ruthie arrived in the United States, she was thinking of only one thing: finding a safe place to lay her head.

Ruthie had spent years working in Liberia on a national governance initiative called Vision 2030, a project designed to help shape the nation's future through community consultation. It was important work, but dangerous. The project drew threats, forcing Ruthie to keep moving to stay safe. When she returned home for her father's burial in 2020, the danger she thought she had outrun caught up with her. A group of men descended on the gathering. In the chaos that followed, Ruthie's brother was killed protecting her. She barely escaped. She could not go back.





Within months she was on a plane to the United States, a country where she knew no one and had no plan beyond surviving. She came to Minnesota in the dead of winter, staying with a French-speaking couple she barely knew while she found her footing. She applied for asylum on her own, made her way to the International Institute of Minnesota, enrolled in the leadership program, and began the slow, disorienting work of building a life from nothing.

A friend she met told her about Sarah's. Ruthie filled out the forms. What happened next she still speaks about with disbelief

> ***"You get to dream your dream," she says, "and you can fulfill what you want."***

Sarah's staff sat with her and asked not just what she needed to survive, but what she dreamed of. And Ruthie, who had spent years simply trying to stay alive, found herself saying it out loud: she wanted to go to school. She wanted to be the first in her family to earn a university degree in English.

Sarah's helped her pass the required English language test and covered the cost. When her acceptance letter arrived for the University of Minnesota's Civic Engagement master's program, Sarah's helped fund her education through a flexible, no-pressure loan built around her pace. While navigating graduate school, she secured a job at the Minneapolis-St. Paul International Airport on her own. Cross-training for the next level typically takes five to six months. She completed it in four.



Flags of All the Nationalities of the Women Who Call Sarah's Home.

Ruthie is still in awe that Sarah's has done so much for her. Their support has been an integral part of reestablishing herself, and aspiring to give back to her community.

But that is exactly what Sarah's does. They show up fully, faithfully, and without reservation for women who have run out of options, so they can begin to imagine new ones.

She came here thinking only of safety. She is leaving with a master's degree and a vision for what comes next.

Christine's Experience
We're All Works in Progress

Christine Treanor did not plan to stay in Minnesota. She arrived in 1980 with two young children and a three-year timeline. That was over four decades ago. What kept her was not a plan, but people, community, and a growing sense that she had found something she had been searching for without quite knowing it.

She found her way to Wisdom Ways by first applying for a staff role, and then accepting two weeks later. What she encountered changed her, not through lecture or prescription, but through example. A community of spiritual, feminist women living thoughtfully, expansively, and together.

> ***"Do I make it a habit to learn... To learn from our community?***

"I wasn't being lectured at," she recalls. "I was seeing people live a lifestyle I knew I wanted."

Wisdom Ways became a home base for Christine's ever-deepening engagement with the world, feeding her hunger for what she calls educational spirituality. Events that ran until 10 PM with no one willing to leave. Rooms full of people who simply needed to be together. She has never forgotten what that feels like, and she keeps coming back for it.



Joan Mitchell Teaching an Engaging Hedgerow Class.

Indigenous justice is something she speaks about with both urgency and specificity. This past summer, when author and poet-storyteller Kaitlin Curtice opened the Summer of Soul

Wisdom Ways Center for Spirituality

Guiding You Through Life's Transitions with Empathy and Respect

Wisdom Ways Center for Spirituality makes welcoming spaces where people gather for reflection, connection, and justice. Through small group circles, shared practices, and programming that honors the richness of diverse traditions, Wisdom Ways holds the conviction that nurturing the spirit is essential to building a more just and compassionate world.

series, it brought both together. Curtice's work at the intersection of Indigenous identity, belonging, and spiritual life speaks directly to questions Christine has carried for years. She takes her grandchildren regularly to Birchbark Books, Louise Erdrich's Ojibwe-owned Minneapolis bookstore. She reads widely. She believes learning from other cultures is not a preference. It is a practice.



"Life will be all about your habits," she says. "Do I make it a habit to learn from other cultures? To learn from our community?"

What she comes back to most is not any single event. It is the community itself, educated, thoughtful, willing to sit with hard questions without flinching. A place where justice and contemplation are not in tension, but inseparable.

In a year when the world gave plenty of reasons to despair, Christine Treanor is choosing something else. Hope — not naive, but practiced. Chosen. Tended carefully, in community, the way Wisdom Ways has always taught her.

"Make time for what gives us life," she says. "What helps fuel us into our commitments."

> ***"We're all works in progress,"* she says. *"So let's invest our time into what brings us creativity, hope, and love."***

11
Thought Provoking Programs



Renowned Author, Kaitlin Curtice Presenting at Summer of Soul.

364
Total Program Participants



Summer of Soul Performance by Imnížaská Drum Group

Staff

Note: For a current list of Accola staff and Board, visit accolamn.org/who-we-are

Leadership

Andree Aronson, CFRE
Vice President, Advancement

Cheryl Behrent
Director of Sarah's... an Oasis for Women

Haven Green
Director of Wisdom Ways Center for Spirituality

Matt Halley
President

Tiffany Grandchamp Melnik
Vice President, Administration

Elisabeth O'Toole
Co-Director of Learning in Style School

Janine Capelle
Co-Director of Learning in Style School

Operations

Peggy Summers
Systems Administrator

Audrey Blue
Controller

Milton Woodard
Maintenance Technician

Indira Bryand
Maintenance Technician

Stephen Melink
Maintenance Technician

Sarah's... an Oasis for Women

Erin Bontrager
Systems Support Lead

Mila Centrella
DOJ Accredited Representative

Zarmeen Jumani
Housing Support Coordinator

Kaitlyn Lafferty
Resident Support Lead

Megan Leys
Resident Support Lead

Advancement Office

Lacy Sietsema
Communications & Development Assistant with Executive Support

Sam Fernandez
Marketing and Communications Manager

Julie Pinomaki
Individual Giving & Grants Manager

Leslie Aktan
Community Engagement Program Manager

Mimi Pizzi
Development Officer - Events

Paul Tatro
Development Officer - Grants

Wisdom Ways Center for Spirituality

Danielle Clausnitzer
Interim Director

Katie Cornet
Programs and Events Specialist

Learning in Style School

Lindsey Albrecht
Volunteer Coordinator

Tamika Garscia
Office Manager

Sarah Sage
Lead Teacher & Curriculum Coordinator

Melody Stapleton
Computer Lab & Digital Literacy Program Coordinator

Kim Zabala-de Hetterick
Childcare Coordinator

English Instructors

Sofia Lozada

Mike McKeever

Eva Moline

Jen Schreifels

Jennifer Stockdale

Katie Andersen

Peter Giebink
Substitute English Instructor

Michelle Weiss
Substitute English Instructor

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Financial Report

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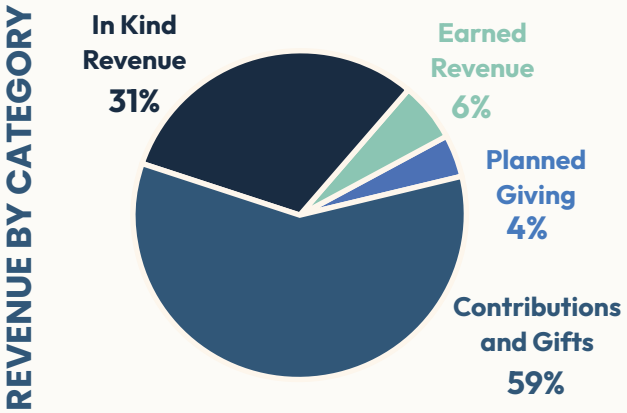
Current	
Cash and Cash Equivalents	$190,946
Accounts Receivable	$1,000
Prepaids	$16,575
Long Term Assets	
Fixed Assets	$24,900
Pledges Receivable	$1,889,674
Investments	$22,263,444
TOTAL ASSETS	$24,386,539

LIABILITIES

Current	
Accounts Payable	$55,704
Accrued Liabilities	$149,530
FHFO and Annuities	$29,082
TOTAL LIABILITIES	$234,316
NET ASSETS	$24,152,223
NET ASSETS & TOTAL LIABILITIES	$24,386,539

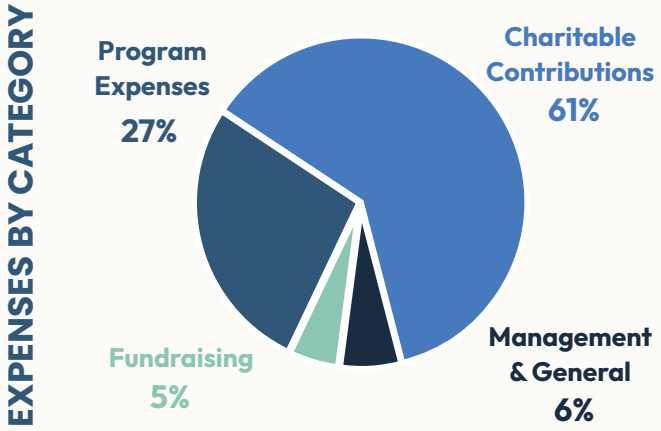
REVENUE

Support	
Contributions and Gifts	$1,083,460
Service Fee Income	$107,085
Annual Distribution	$1,036,584
In-Kind Rent	$570,067
Total Support	$2,797,196
Planned Giving	
Estate Proceeds	$53,556
Endowment	$18,137
Total Planned Giving	$71,693
Investments & Other Income	
Investment Income - Net of Fees	$3,237,524
Change in the Value of Split-Interest Agreements	$2,127
Other Income	$10,362
Total Other Income	$3,250,013
TOTAL SUPPORT & REVENUE	$6,118,903



EXPENSES

Program Expenses	
Sarah's ...an Oasis for Women	$1,149,712
Learning in Style	$1,107,889
Wisdom Ways	$437,716
Total Program Expenses	$2,695,318
Supporting Services	
Management and General	$642,285
Fundraising	$512,795
Total Supporting Services	$1,155,080
Charitable Contributions	$6,092,177
TOTAL EXPENSES	$9,942,574



Note: The report includes unaudited financials at time of publications. Final figures are subject to change. Please direct questions to: **tmelnik@accolamn.org**

Our full donor list is available at: accolamn.org/who-we-are

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Your recurring gift provides year-round support for the education, healing, and empowerment of immigrant and refugee women, adult English learners, and community members seeking belonging and opportunity.

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$5,000 per year for five years

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$2,500 per year for five years

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$1,000 per year for five years

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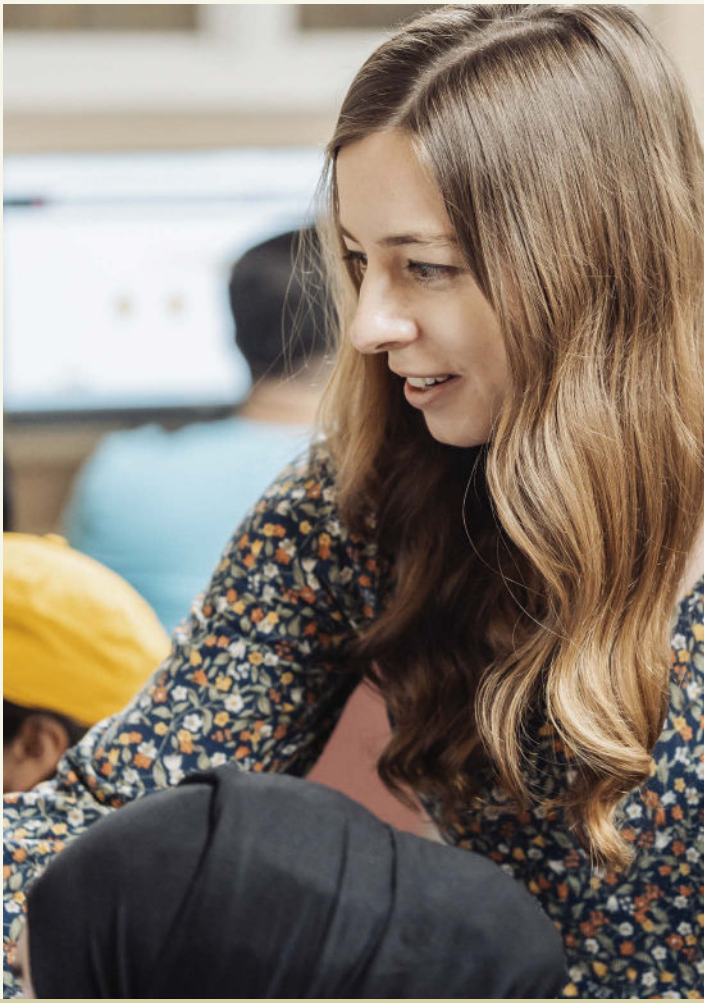
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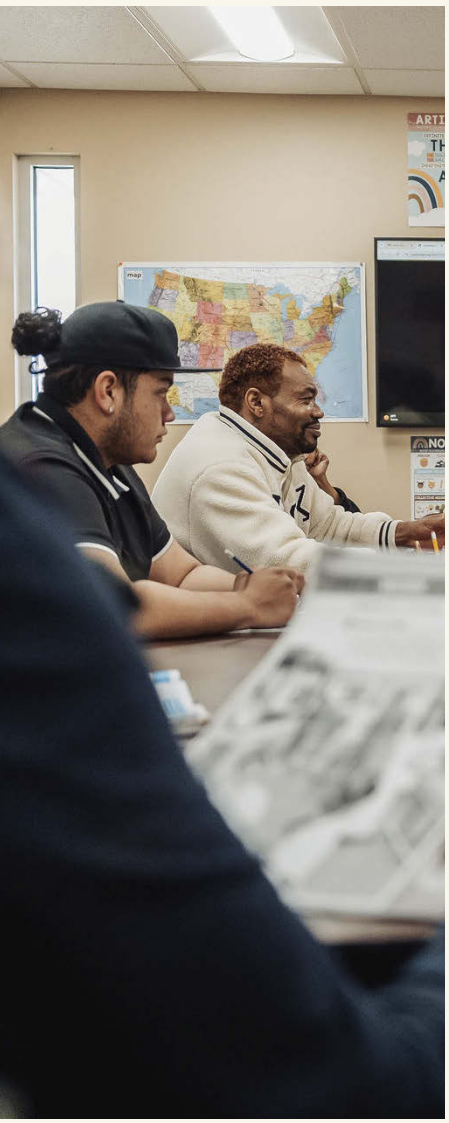
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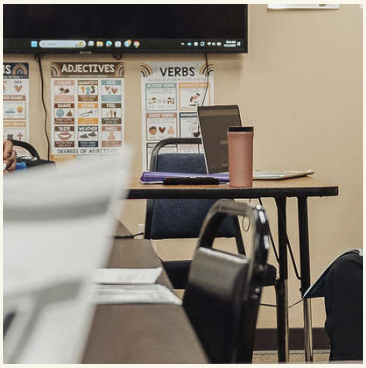
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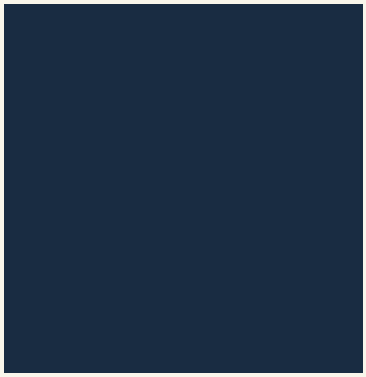














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