



2020 Annual Report

IT GETS
BETTER
PROJECT

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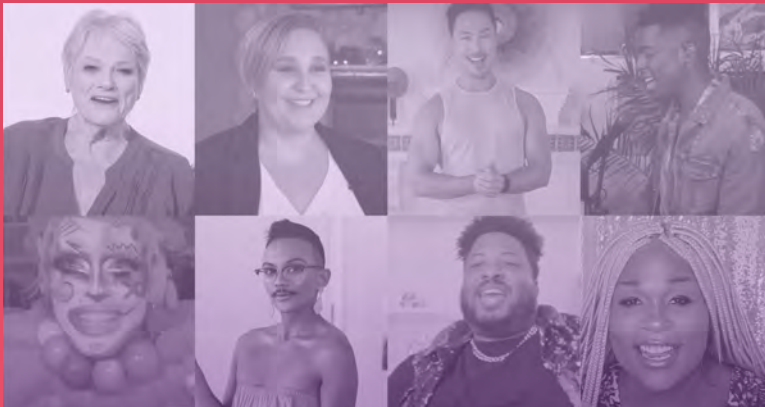


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People Magazine kicks off the It Gets Better Project's 10-year anniversary with a feature spotlighting queer hero Lark Doolan, a principal and school superintendent who worked tirelessly with staff to get food and supplies to his students during the pandemic.

Letter from Leadership

The It Gets Better Project has been uplifting, empowering, and connecting LGBTQ+ youth for more than a decade.

In that time, we've widened our reach, taking root in countries all over the world in the hopes of inspiring societies everywhere to move toward the acceptance of all people. As major population centers like India begin to understand and appreciate the value of their queer communities, laws are changing, and LGBTQ+ people across the globe are benefiting from employment protections, marriage equality, and the decriminalization of their lived experience.

This is the kind of news we like to shout from the rooftops. Yet despite this progress, even in the most progressive countries, cultural obstacles continue to threaten the ability of LGBTQ+ people to realize their full potential.





Andrea Gonzales works to give Black and Brown young people a voice in the fight for gun control in the original docuseries, "Out in Front: Queer Youth Changing the World."

Queer youth experience higher rates of bullying and harassment, peer and family rejection, and homelessness than their non-queer counterparts do, all factors which contribute to higher rates of depression, anxiety, and other mental illnesses. What makes this even harder is that young people are facing these difficulties during an already complicated phase of life: adolescence. And, for the last year, this reality has been compounded by a global pandemic, which has isolated many from their supportive peer networks. The youngest of us, Generation Z, are now labeled as the most depressed and lonely generation of our time.

Despite the fluctuations of the world, the It Gets Better Project is still here, stronger than ever, lighting the path to a brighter future. We're leveraging the power of our stories, harnessing their educational and empathy-building value, and collaborating with activists to realize our vision of a world where all youth are free to live as equals in society and understand their inherent worthiness and power as individuals. This momentum is made possible by the thousands of like-minded donors and volunteers who've helped us inspire future generations of queer people by equipping them with the tools needed to navigate an increasingly complex world.

Last year demanded a shift in the approach to our work, but it did not weaken our resolve. The challenges we encountered in 2020 pushed us to make a greater impact than we thought possible. For LGBTQ+ youth, hope is always in high demand, and the It Gets Better Project delivered.



- Seth Levy
Chair & President, Board of Directors



Programs



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*It Get's Better Project's Youth Voices, Class of 2021
(clockwise from top left: Zach K., Jace D., Uma F.,
Isabella G., Hammy H.)*





Storytelling & Media

The It Gets Better Project kicked off its 10 year anniversary with the video series "10 Years Better." Here, YouTube sensation turned actress and activist Gigi Gorgeous looks back on her original It Gets Better video.

Since the *It Gets Better Project* began in 2010, it has become the world's largest storytelling non profit that empowers LGBTQ+ youth.

While visibility and cultural acceptance of our community has grown tremendously over the last decade, there is still a lot of work to be done. Nearly 85% of the world does not recognize same sex marriage, 69 countries have laws that criminalize homosexuality, and transgender people continue to face unprecedented threats to their basic human rights.

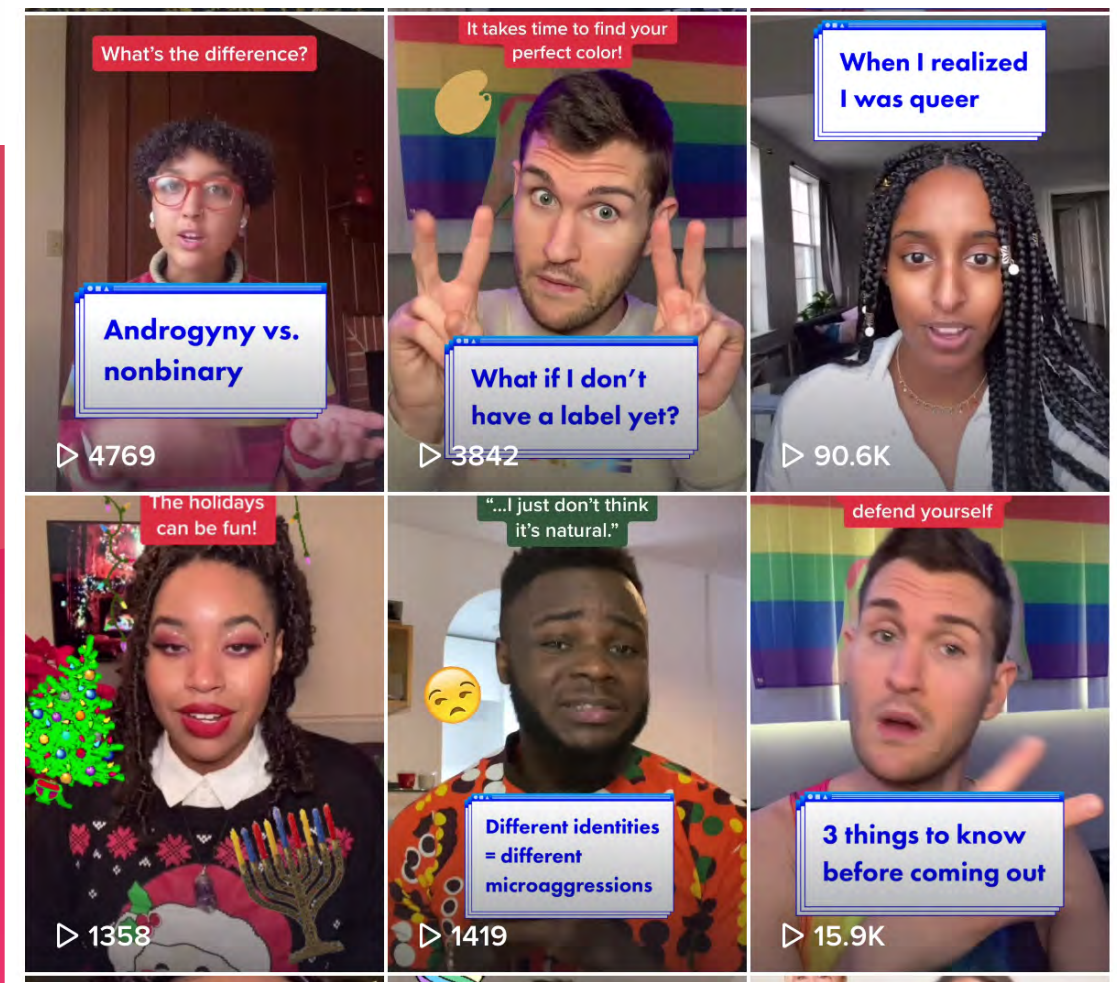
The very real risks facing millions of young people give rise to higher rates of depression and other mental health challenges.

Coupled with the world's health concerns during the pandemic were its concerns about equality and justice following the death of George Floyd. As a result, many young queer people found themselves quarantined in potentially toxic and unaccepting environments, grappling with complicated and emotionally taxing issues without the support of their accepting communities.

More than 2 million high school age students in the US identify as LGBT — 69% of them have experienced verbal harassment and 25% have been physically harassed.

2020 created record demand for the It Gets Better Project as a digital resource. Because of our history as a strong online presence, we were poised to engage our audiences virtually. We sustained our position at the forefront of digital outreach and pushed our mission to new heights. On September 21, 2020, our tenth anniversary, we celebrated not with a party, but by making major investments in the digital expansion of our mission to uplift, empower, and connect LGBTQ+ youth.

This year, we formed a partnership with social media platform TikTok, which has given us a new and exciting way to engage with youth. Through TikTok's Creative Learning Fund, we produced dozens of short-form, knowledge-infused stories designed to support a young queer person's sexual orientation and/or gender identity journey.



Highlights from the It Gets Better Project TikTok channel take a deep dive into topics of importance to LGBTQ+ youth.



Queer talent including Meg Salter, Harper Watters, Zoey Luna and more participate in Queerbook Class of 2021.



Peppermint and Rebecca Black are among the featured performers at It Gets Better. A Digital Pride Experience.



Cynthia, Jude and Stephon are among the activists profiled in the docuseries "Out in Front: Queer Youth Changing the World."

The partnership brought heightened visibility to our annual Queerbook campaign, which encourages youth to recognize and embrace their greatest potential as they get ready to go back to school.

The campaign generated more than 48 million views, helping to propel the It Gets Better Project to become the largest LGBTQ+ nonprofit on the platform. With more than 150K followers and a growth rate of nearly 10K followers per month, TikTok has become one of the most reliable and effective ways for us to speak directly to young people.

In June, we moved our usual in-person Pride event series online. It Gets Better: A Digital Pride Experience took place over the course of three days and was live-streamed to YouTube, Facebook, and Twitch. With Pride marches and festivities cancelled, we brought the spirit of Pride to youth all over the world with an impressive roster of influencers from a wide variety of realms, including music, drag, cooking, painting, makeup, fitness, DIY, dance, and more.

The event attracted more than 350,000 viewers who expressed that they would have otherwise missed out on Pride celebrations altogether. Thanks to the incredible turnout, we'll be hosting another digital Pride party next year!

One in six Gen Z adults identifies as LGBTQ and 75% of Gen Z'ers come out in the digital space before coming out in real life.

In response to the urgent social justice issues that became a major focus for everyone in 2020, we launched *Out in Front: Queer Youth Changing the World*, a five-part original docuseries that follows the lives of five young LGBTQ+ activists who are using their power to create the change they seek in the world. These incredible community leaders — students, artists, and creators — are taking action on a variety of issues ranging from gun violence to immigration to racial justice and more.

The digital space allows young people to explore their identities, cultivate relationships, access resources, and experiment with self-expression while controlling the level at which they self-disclose. For these reasons, it is an exciting time for those who have access to digital communities. The It Gets Better Project will continue to improve efforts to inspire and empower LGBTQ+ youth through its website, social media, and other forms of digital outreach.

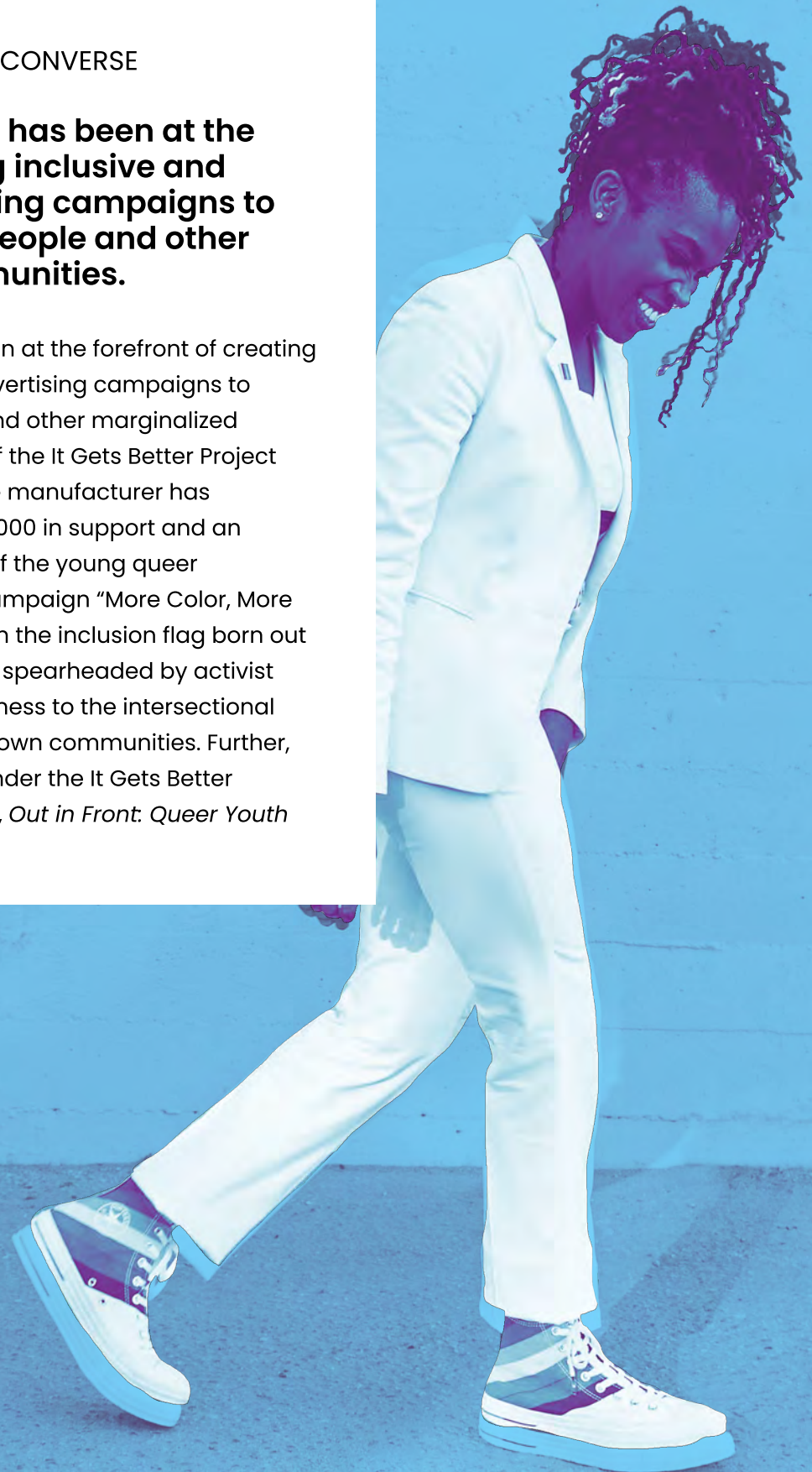
Jen Richards and Trace Lysette, cast members of the acclaimed documentary Disclosure, share their experiences as transgender actors at the It Gets Better House during the 2020 Sundance Film Festival.



PARTNER RECOGNITION: CONVERSE

For years, Converse has been at the forefront of creating inclusive and innovative advertising campaigns to celebrate LGBTQ+ people and other marginalized communities.

For years, Converse has been at the forefront of creating inclusive and innovative advertising campaigns to celebrate LGBTQ+ people and other marginalized communities. A supporter of the It Gets Better Project since 2017, the beloved shoe manufacturer has generated more than \$450,000 in support and an immeasurable awareness of the young queer experience. Its 2020 Pride campaign “More Color, More Pride” pulled inspiration from the inclusion flag born out of a Philadelphia campaign spearheaded by activist Amber Hikes to draw awareness to the intersectional experiences of black and brown communities. Further, Converse’s 2020 support funder the It Gets Better Project’s original docuseries, *Out in Front: Queer Youth Changing the World*.





It Gets Better EDU

Students around the world spend an average of 40 hours or more each week in school.

Schools offer students opportunities for vital connections with peers, counseling and mentorship, access to physical and mental health support, and so much more. And, for many students, schools offer space away from a toxic home environment and a potentially unaccepting outside world.

In the last year, the It Gets Better Project has increased its reach in the education space through It Gets Better EDU, which provides essential support for a variety of issues facing educators today. Our free-to-download EduGuides give teachers materials that can be easily integrated into their existing curriculum. This year, we added four new EduGuides to our slate, including the Oscar-winning film *Moonlight*, as well as our original docuseries, *Out in Front: Queer Youth Changing the World*.

California, New Jersey, Colorado, Oregon, Illinois, and Nevada have laws requiring K-12 instructional materials to include and represent LGBTQ+ people and identities. But there is more work to be done — six states (Alabama, Louisiana, Mississippi, Oklahoma, South Carolina, and Texas) have “No Promo Homo” laws that effectively ban the discussion of homosexuality and transgender identity in public schools.

In total, It Gets Better EduGuides were downloaded by more than 2,000 educators in 2020, reaching an estimated 48,000 students nationwide.

Our online glossary consistently ranked as one of the top five most visited pages on our website in 2020. This resource, along with our Get Help service database and original articles like “How to Make Your Digital Classroom More LGBTQ+ Friendly” provided invaluable resources for students and teachers during a disconnected year. And through it all, our education staff continued to offer online presentations to classrooms and GSAs across the US.

Another recent achievement was the launch of the organization’s first ambassador program, Youth Voices. After a competitive recruitment process, we onboarded an inaugural group of diverse and accomplished LGBTQ+ teens to serve as inspiration for their peers across the world.



EduGuides introduced in 2020 include “Outside Voices,” “Out in Front,” and “Moonlight.”

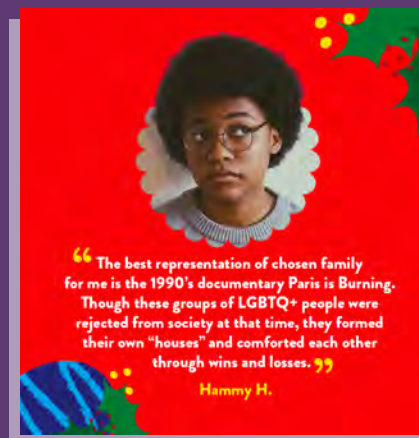
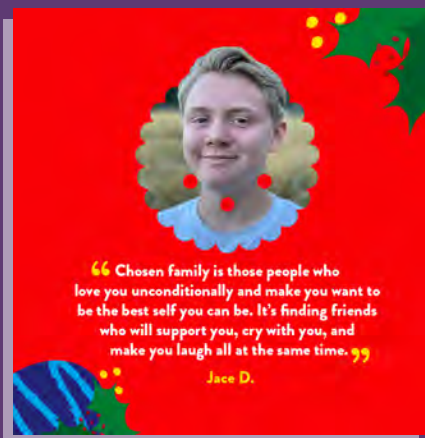


The 2020/2021 cohort has participated in a variety of rewarding experiences, including Pride celebrations, speaking events, holiday campaigns with *PBS American Portrait* and Ritz, our 2020 Global Summit, and a number of conference appearances, including an LGBTQ+ Community Initiative Summit by Teach For America (TFA) and SXSW EDU 2020.

Youth Voices is now a major focus of It Gets Better EDU, one that we'll continue to prioritize in 2021 and beyond.

How can we serve more students and educators and what additional resources might we start offering to reach as many LGBTQ+ young people as possible? These are the questions we are asking ourselves as we look toward the future.

Youth Voices participated in holiday campaigns for brand partners including *PBS American Portrait* (above), *American Eagle* (right), and *Ritz* (below).





It Gets Better Global

The It Gets Better Project's Global Affiliate Network now spans 18 countries across four continents, and with the addition of a new affiliate in Hungary, now delivers life-affirming programming in eight languages.

Our independently organized affiliates constantly seek out new opportunities to bring the It Gets Better message of hope and empowerment to local communities of LGBTQ+ young people around the world.

We support members of this burgeoning network through continuing education and networking opportunities, in addition to strategic guidance and grantmaking initiatives.

The It Gets Better Project has granted more than \$400,000 over the last five years to assist our global affiliates in their storytelling efforts and other mission-related work unique to their respective regions.

Last year, more than \$50,000 was awarded to affiliates in Mexico and Canada for capacity building, Greece for a new storytelling initiative, and the United Kingdom in support of a photography/video initiative to show the importance of creating safe spaces for the LGBTQ+ community.

Because gathering in person was not an option this year, we produced our first-ever digital Global Summit, a five-day event that brought together 135 of our Global Affiliate Network's most dedicated volunteer storytellers, activists, and nonprofit professionals. Attendees representing 18 countries gathered for a variety of workshops covering topics like mental health and self care, diversity and representation in gaming, reaching communities in crisis, and leveraging storytelling through fundraising.



Bestselling Young Adult authors Leah Johnson and Aiden Thomas join the It Gets Better Project's Ariella Assouline for a conversation about queer representation in YA fiction for the 2020 Global Summit.

Youth in Latin America

We know the best way to ensure authentic and impactful storytelling that resonates with queer youth is to **connect and engage with local storytellers** who can reflect their experiences through the lens of their culture.

Since the launch of our first global affiliate in Chile in 2011, we have seen exponential growth both throughout Latin America and in Spanish language programming. Affiliates in Latin America comprise more than half of the network. The fact that most of these affiliates speak the same language has created opportunities for multi-faceted storytelling initiatives and other programming with the capacity to cross borders without compromising relevance.

While Latin America has seen a progressive shift in LGBTQ+ issues over the last decade, many young people still face challenges on their sexual orientation and/or gender identity journey. Physical and emotional violence, homelessness, and discrimination in education and healthcare, particularly for trans and nonbinary youth, are still of great concern.



Dani Villegas, Lina Bravo, and María Angélica Arango Gómez from It Gets Better Colombia, the It Gets Better Project's 7th Global Affiliate founded in 2015.
Bottom: Volunteers with It Gets Better Paraguay at the annual LGBTI Pride Parade in Asunción. Paraguay is the It Gets Better Project's 2nd Global Affiliate, founded in 2012.



Headlines from throughout Latin America show that the LGBTQ+ community has made a tremendous amount of progress but there is still a substantial amount of work to be done.

According to a study conducted by several non profits and spearheaded by GLSEN and It Gets Better Global Affiliate Todo Mejora, between 47.4% to 80.6% of LGBTQ+ students said they felt unsafe because of their sexual orientation, while 58.2%–79.1% percent of respondents heard homophobic remarks from teachers or other school staff.

This is where the work of It Gets Better Project’s Global Affiliate Network becomes particularly vital in connecting members of our community to the resources they may not have access to at school or at home.

Over the last year, as Covid-19 ravaged the world, LGBTQ+ youth found comfort in the It Gets Better Project’s uplifting and inspiring stories, educational content, and crisis life-lines like the Safe Hour program, a mental health resource for queer youth currently active through our affiliates in Chile, Colombia, Mexico, Paraguay, and Peru. In 2020, these Safe Hour programs collectively assisted over 12K users and reached tens of thousands of young people through their Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter channels.

Our work has flourished in Latin America because of the progress being made in public policies throughout the region, from Costa Rica becoming the first Central American country to legalize marriage equality to Argentina establishing a 1-percent employment quota for trans people in the public sector. With It Gets Better Español, our latest initiative to engage Spanish-speaking audiences, we aim to not only speak to the fastest growing demographic in the US, but also to proactively reach out to youth in Spanish-speaking countries where the Global Affiliate Network has yet to establish a presence.

Statement of Activities for the Year Ended December 31, 2020

with comparative totals for the year ended December 31, 2019

	2020	2019
Revenue & Support	\$ 2,302,564	\$ 2,215,523
Expenses	\$ 1,541,130	\$ 1,243,672
Change in Net Assets	\$ 761,434	\$ 971,851
Net Assets - Beginning of Year	\$ 1,466,700	\$ 494,849
Net Assets - End of Year	\$ 2,228,134	\$ 1,466,700

Statement of Financial Position, December 31, 2020

with comparative totals at December 31, 2019

	2020	2019
Assets	\$ 2,369,845	\$ 1,507,327
Liabilities	\$ 141,711	\$ 40,627
Net Assets	\$ 2,228,134	\$ 1,466,700

Statement of Functional Expenses for the Year Ended December 31, 2019

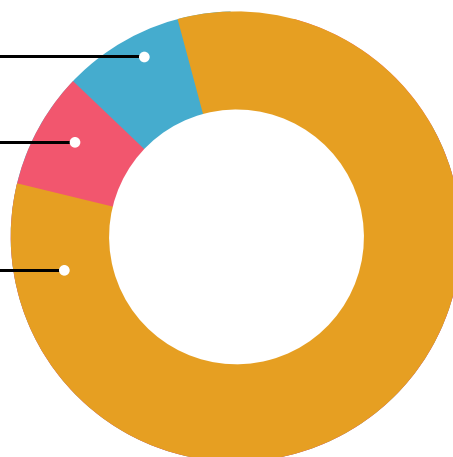
with comparative totals for the year ended December 31, 2019

	2020	2019
Programs & Services	\$ 1,279,523	\$ 1,068,662
Administration	\$ 145,183	\$ 107,482
Fundraising	\$ 116,424	\$ 67,528
TOTAL	\$ 1,541,130	\$ 1,243,672

Fundraising 7.6%

Administration 9.4%

Programs & Services 83%



2020 Catalyst Club Members

The It Gets Better Project exists because a foundation of investors believes in the potential for a world where all LGBTQ+ young people are free to live equally and know their worthiness and power as individuals.

Members of the Catalyst Club make annual contributions of \$1K or more to support the life-affirming work of the It Gets Better Project.

<i>Ground Shaker</i>	\$100,000 – \$999,999
<i>Thought Leader</i>	\$50,000 – \$99,999
<i>Social Innovator</i>	\$25,000 – \$49,999
<i>Catalyst</i>	\$10,000 – \$24,999
<i>Change Agent</i>	\$5,000 – \$9,999
<i>Influencer</i>	\$1,000 – \$4,999

Ground Shaker

Procter & Gamble
Tarte Cosmetics
TikTok Inc.

Thought Leader

American Eagle
Bungie Inc.
Converse Inc.
Mattel Inc.
MeUndies, Inc.
Reebok

Social Innovator

The Annenberg Foundation
Fabletics
Fossil
New Ark Fund
Riot Games Inc
SoulPancake Productions, LLC

Catalyst

County of Los Angeles
D Squared Foundation Inc
Dashing Diva Franchise Corp
e.l.f. Cosmetics
Funko Pop
Golden Gate Performing
Arts Inc
Hopelab

Innisfree

Lexus

Blake Neely

Netflix

Rastaclat

The Rona Jaffe Foundation

Susan Crown Exchange

Ten Fingers Foundation

Tenga Co., Ltd

Teva

Together Labs

Change Agent

Charities Aid Foundation of
America

Experian

Taner Halicioglu & Vicki Brown

The OUT Fund

Rogers Family Foundation

SOHO Publishing

Sunday Riley

Influencer

Arthur J Gallagher Co.

Christine Barbour

Terry Belanger

Lisa Choules

Community Foundation of New
Jersey

DAVIDsTEA Inc

Derek Fields

Disclosure Films LLC

Game Attack

Deirdre Grace

Seth Levy & Brian Pines

Jeffrey & Susan Lubetkin

Nicola Maguire

Scott & Jairo Parra-Matthews

National Cable

Communications LLC

Pershing LLC

Stephanie Ruyle

David Schleicher

Patrick Schriver

Schwab Charitable

Lauren Shane

James Smith

Spare the Rock Records LLC

John Sparling

Sub City (dba Take Action!)

Timothy Sullivan

Universal Music

Justin Wee

Reese Weiden



Author, Marvel writer and LGBTQ+ youth activist Gabby Rivera reacts to her original It Gets Better video for the series "10 Years Better."

Looking to the Future

As the world struggles to rebound in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, we are only beginning to see progress towards a return to normalcy in many parts of the world.

It will take years for our global society to recover from the events of the last year. We are forever changed, but that change will spark our imaginations to continue innovating and identifying new and exciting ways to empower LGBTQ+ youth through technology and a reimagining of what it means to be truly connected to one another.

The future is digital, the future is better, and the road to get there has been paved with the knowledge that all LGBTQ+ young people deserve to find joy in who they were born to become. We want our young people to not just survive but to thrive! Our work has only just begun, and the It Gets Better Project will continue to be a beacon of hope for queer youth everywhere.



Brian Wenke
Executive Director
It Gets Better Project

Staff

Brian Wenke - Executive Director
Eboni Munn - Director, Brand Marketing - Content and Creative
Brett Peters*** - Director, Media & Strategic Partnerships
Justin Tindall - Director, Programs and Operations
Ross von Metzke - Director, Communications & PR
Jimmy Ancheta-Tilley Jr. - Development Manager
Hannah Martin*** - Media Manager
Ariella Assouline - Operations Coordinator
Olivia Laura - Social Media Strategist
Alex Orué - Coordinator, Global Programming
Rae Sweet - Education Assistant

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* Board President as of April 1, 2021

** Board Vice President as of April 1, 2021

*** No longer with organization

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