

# Country Dance & Song Society ANNUAL REPORT 2023



*We connect and support people in building and sustaining vibrant communities through participatory dance, music, and song. We steward the living traditions of English country dance, contra and square dance, morris and sword dance, and the music that is an integral part of these traditions.*





## A Look Back at 2023...

**You know that deep sense of satisfaction** you get after you reorganize your garage? You see things fitting together so well, everything you need is accessible, and you just know you've set yourself up for successful future endeavors... that's what 2023 felt like for me.

Internally, the staff made several adjustments to increase efficiency, improve customer service, and reduce expenses. We upgraded our phone systems, making it easier to reach us. We overhauled our camp registration process, making registering for camps smoother and faster. In the face of rising operational costs, we judiciously reduced our rented office space and staffing hours. And we cross-trained staff in our powerful data management software to make our organization nimbler.

And while all of this was going on, the board was hard at work, preparing for a smooth leadership transition and leading the effort to create our new five-year

strategic plan. With an eye to both the present and future, the new plan calls us to respond to our community's needs, embrace new ways of engaging the broader dance, music, and song communities, and nurture the living traditions we love.

**I am exceedingly proud** of the staff and board's dedication this past year and their diligence in making 2023 a success. These are exciting times for the broader community we serve. At CDSS, we are challenging ourselves to reenvision how we operate so that we can meet community needs now and for years to come.

**We have important and joyful work ahead** of us, and a lot more magic to create! **Your support** is what makes it all possible. Thank you!

Katy German, Executive Director



## Thank You!

We at CDSS are deeply committed to our work to make the world a better place through music, song, and dance. This would not be possible without your continued financial backing, for which we are keenly grateful. 2023 had its challenges, but with your community effort to support our mission, we're able to report on our amazing successes in 2023.

One of the ways we receive support is from planned giving. When we receive a bequest after a beloved community member has passed on, it's a monumental inspiration for our work. John Dexter set a great example of how this sort of legacy giving can have a lasting impact in our community. John's words here say it all:

**"I was given the gift of dancing by CDSS.** And that gift has actively influenced my life every day since 1965. I am SO grateful for this, and I was SO lucky to have been given it... people like me would be dramatically different people were it not for CDSS and its lasting influence in my life.

**"So, THANK YOU CDSS!** Thank you for everything you do and have done over the years. As we used to say in the morris, **'May you continue to flourish!'**"

And thanks to supporters like John, and you—our beloved board members, donors, affiliates, and members—we will continue to flourish into 2024 and beyond.

If you're interested in adding CDSS to your legacy giving plans, please reach out to me at [cslaven@cdss.org](mailto:cslaven@cdss.org) or 413-203-5467 x107.

Charmaine Slaven,  
Director of Development





# Camps & Online Programs

*Reuniting at camp, staying connected the rest of the year*

**2023 was a year of celebration and hope**, as more people returned to in-person gatherings. Attendance at our nine week-long camps grew to pre-pandemic levels. It was a big year for our sessions at Pinewoods, too, as we on-boarded our first new camp operations manager there in more than 30 years!

**1,145**  
campers and  
camp staff from  
**51** states and  
provinces

**295**  
online program  
and web chat  
attendees



Photo by Luke Donforth.

Family Week at Ogontz moved from New Hampshire to Agassiz Village in Poland, Maine.



**Podcasts continued to thrive in 2023, with 5,234 downloads across all listening platforms.** We published **9** new episodes of From the Mic, featuring interviews with American dance callers across the US and Canada.

*Seeing the community that exists around this dancing—seeing how much it means to people and looking back and seeing how many of the close friendships and relationships in my life have come from this community—I want to do whatever I can to support it and help it grow and thrive.*

—**Ben Sachs-Hamilton**, From the Mic, episode 19

# Grants & Scholarships

*Expanding our reach & impact*

CDSS Community Grants and camp scholarships are made possible by a combination of your donations and our investment earnings. Despite our 2022 investment losses and the need to reduce expenses, we prioritized steady funding for these important services through 2023. In 2023, our grants supported new events, post-pandemic comebacks, special research projects, and individuals tapping into important trainings and resources, no matter where they are.



Photo courtesy of Virginia Varland.

## Traditional American Dance & Music Society

Richmond, VA

Hosting workshops for dance musicians

Funded by the Chuck Ward Musicians Training Fund

**\$8,850**  
in grant funding  
to **19** projects  
in **13** states  
(plus one in  
France!)

**\$53,720**  
in scholarships  
to **122** diverse  
recipients from  
**29** states and  
provinces



*I had so much fun dancing, swimming—even dancing a square, a contra, and a waltz IN the pond! I enjoyed learning flatfooting and trying out a voice lesson. I met so many cool people, enjoyed stargazing, board games, and hearing from contra organizers from different parts of the country. Thank you so much! I will certainly make my way back someday and keep working to help our local dance stay alive and thriving.*

—**Grace Mueller**, American Dance & Music Week at Pinewoods  
Affiliate Matching Scholarship (with CD\*NY)

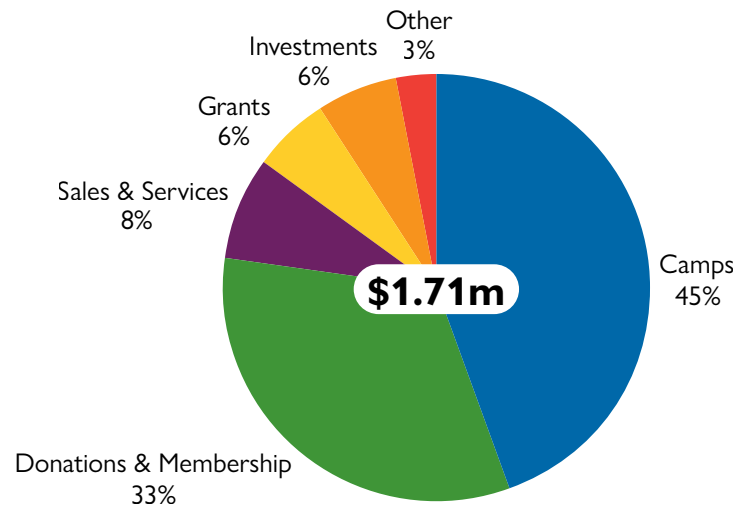
See more grant-funded projects and contribute to special funds at [cdss.org/grants](https://cdss.org/grants).

# 2023 Financials

We were pleased to see our overall income return to pre-pandemic levels in 2023, thanks to strong camp enrollment, improved stock market performance, and growth in support income. Our negative income to expense ratio in 2022 qualified us for a state economic recovery grant through the Massachusetts Cultural Council. And our incredible donors and members gave generously, despite the difficult economic conditions we were all navigating.

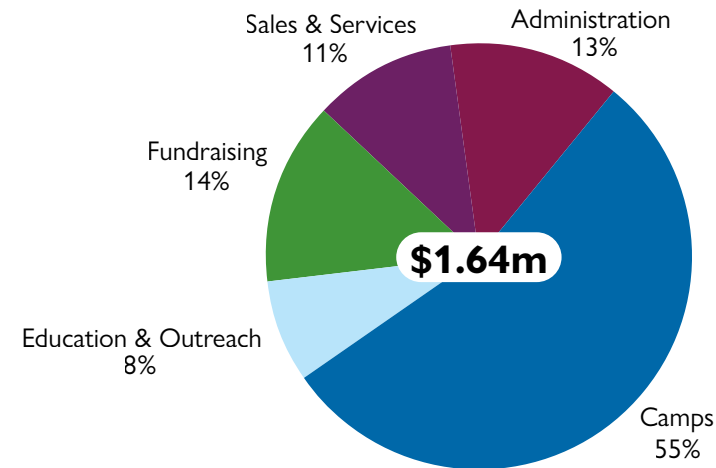
On the expenses side, economic inflation drove up the general cost of operating. And with increased camp enrollment, we had increased facility fees. To keep expenses from climbing beyond what we could manage in the coming years, we downsized our office to reduce our annual rent. We also reorganized to modestly reduce our staffing for the year. We succeeded in reducing expenses where possible while maintaining funding and support for our mission-aligned programs.

## 2023 Income

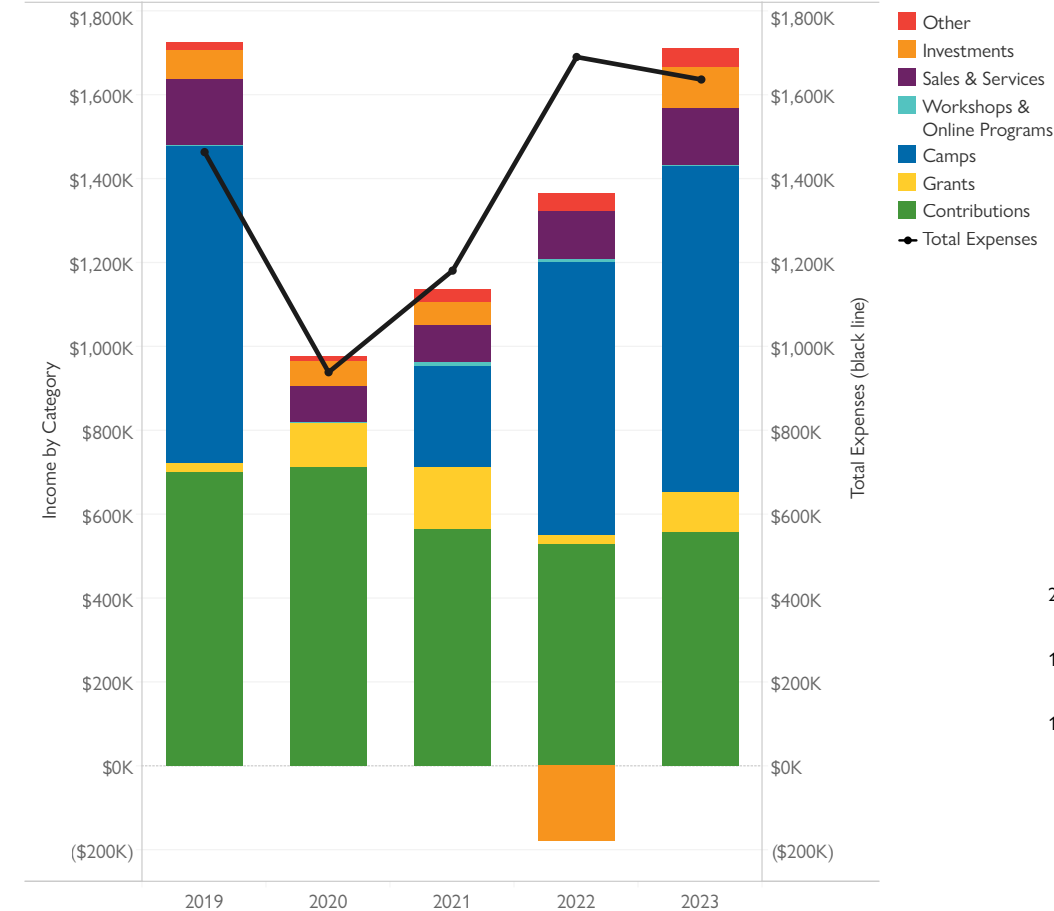


Our fundraising and administrative expenses make it possible to provide community grants, scholarships, podcasts, online programming, and a robust webpage that is home to wealth of online resources.

## 2023 Expenses



## 2019-2023 Income and Expense Comparison



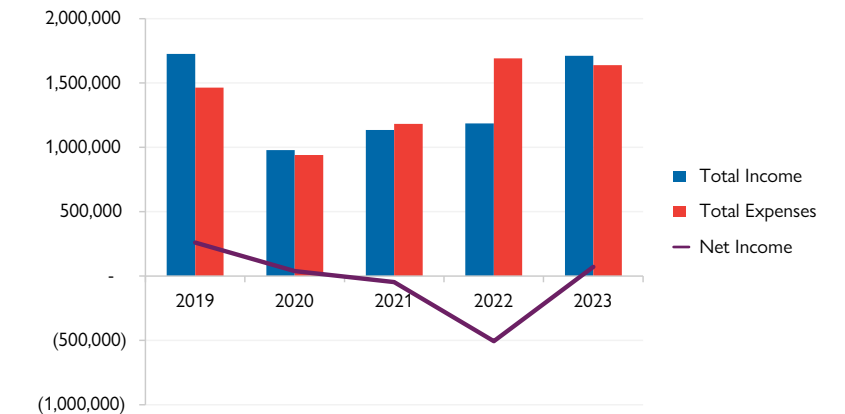
The Bright Futures gift in 2019 boosted annual contributions and enabled us to launch online programming. The increased grant income in 2020 and 2021 represents the federal PPP grants available during the first two years of the COVID-19 pandemic.

In 2023, our strategic expense reduction efforts combined with camp attendance growth, strong donor support, and state funding to significantly improve our bottom line.

In the graph to the left, the colored bars represent income categories, and the black line represents annual expenses. The graph below shows total annual income and expenses, overlaid with net income.

As inflation increases operating costs, we are committed to maintaining quality mission-aligned resources and programming that the broader community needs right now. So we adapt, adjust, pursue new funding sources, and embrace new ways of operating.

## 2019-2023 Annual Net Income



We were able cover the 2022 deficit and keep our reserves intact thanks to a low-interest federal COVID-19 Economic Injury Disaster Loan (EIDL).

See more 2023 financial information at [cdss.org/annual-report](https://cdss.org/annual-report).





*Individuals nourished and communities strengthened  
by dancing, singing, and making music together.*

## 2023 GOVERNING BOARD

### Officers:

President: Gaye Fifer, Pittsburgh, PA  
President-elect: David Smukler, Syracuse, NY  
Vice President: Luanne Stiles, Asheville, NC  
Secretary: Michael Bean, Ann Arbor, MI  
Treasurer: Joel Bluestein, Arlington, VA

### At Large Members:

Jenna Barron, Easthampton, MA  
Margaret Bary, Brooklyn, NY  
Jeremy Carter-Gordon, Concord, MA  
Susan English, Wooster, OH  
Norman Farrell, Ridgefield, WA  
Alice Kenney, Leyden, MA  
Glenn Manuel, Richardson, TX  
Robbin Marcus, Stonecrest, GA  
Craig Meltzner, Santa Rosa, CA  
Avia Moore, Montreal, QC  
Justin Morrison, Burlington, VT  
Marni Rachmiel, Cambridge, UK/Seattle, WA  
Diane Silver, Asheville, NC  
Juliette Webb, Nashville, TN

## 2023 OFFICE STAFF

Kathryn German, Executive Director, Asheville, NC  
Robin Hayden, Director of Development, Greenfield, MA  
Joanna Reiner Wilkinson, Director of Programs, Cheltenham, PA  
Julie Brodnitzki, Director of Finance, Barkhamsted, CT  
Sarah Pilzer, Director of Technology, Winooski, VT  
Anna Mach, Accounting Manager, West Springfield, MA  
Nicki Perez, Gifts & Database Coordinator, Northampton, MA  
Audrey Jaber, Membership Coordinator, San Diego, CA  
Sarah Babbitt Spaeth, Programs Coordinator, Burlington, VT  
Ben Williams, Publications, Sales, & Services Manager, Northampton, MA  
Kelsey Wells, Marketing & Communications Manager, Murfreesboro, TN  
Janet Brown, Office Assistant, Easthampton, MA

## 2023 CONTRACTORS

Anne Campbell, Webmaster, Orlando, FL  
Anna Gilbert-Duvenek, Designer, CDSS News, Framingham, MA

**SPECIAL THANKS** to Robin Hayden for her 36 years of service!  
(Robin technically retired at the beginning of 2024, but we miss her already!)



CDSS is funded in part by generous grants from the Massachusetts Cultural Council. [massculturalcouncil.org](http://massculturalcouncil.org)



Photo by Hamish Swanson