

# Wye River Upper School

# CONNECTIONS

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## Inside

Why I Serve

Alumni Spotlight :  
Amanda Boone

Your Impact

Nurturing Success,  
Supporting Our Students

Fall 2023

# Why I serve

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## Meet Our Board Members



“I serve because I believe in the mission of Wye River, and to that end want to ensure that our students continue to receive a high level and specialized program where the faculty and staff are in a position to provide the environment that makes life at WRUS so invaluable and special.”  
- Nikki Williams, Board Chair



“I serve because I believe that school should be an exciting, enriching, and positive space for students to grow both academically and in self-esteem. Many mainstream schools are not offering that to students. Wye River is that space.”  
- Katie Theeke



“I serve because I believe in the mission of this school. A loving and supportive environment can make all the difference for a teenager! Each day, Wye River provides a place where kids have fun and are motivated, encouraged and believed in. “  
- Robyn Green



“I serve because Wye River Upper School is a safe and encouraging space for our children to become lifelong learners, where they are accepted and celebrated for their unique talents, and where they come together to create a strong “forever” community.”  
- Lori Ramsey, Treasurer of the Board



“I serve because my experience with the School provides me the opportunity to assist in making wise decisions to further the Mission and ensure the focus remains on the students and their needs. And I love and appreciate the unique individuality of all the students. These kids have so much unlocked potential!”  
- Tom Mendenhall, Secretary of the Board



“I serve because I believe in the potential of Wye River students and the commitment and dedication our faculty and staff bring to the school community. I serve because the Wye River leadership needs a network of individuals who want to see growth and excellence for the team that directs the school community. I serve because these students are our future. I believe some of the skills in my toolbox can assist with the growth of this outstanding educational environment. I serve because its the best feeling to be part of something bigger than yourself. I am so ready for a great year as part of this exceptional team.”  
- Michele Defreese

## Why I'm Ready

### Meet Lydia Antonelli, Class of '24

Finding out about Wye River Upper School really steered my academic life in the right direction.

Before I was a student at Wye River, I truly felt that I was never going to make it through high school because of my learning differences. Since I've been here, I have grown in ways my fourteen-year-old self would have never thought I could, and I am beyond grateful for the school believing in me and for having given me the chance to surprise not only myself but my family with how far I've come. I'm a senior at Wye River, and I'm very excited for my academic future because I feel prepared with the skills that I've acquired from my time at Wye, not only from my teachers but from the helpful staff. These years in school are the building blocks for our future, and Wye River has really made me believe that I am ready to take on challenges that come my way.

-Lydia '24

Lydia Antonelli '24





# CULTIVATING PEACE OF MIND

## An Alumni Success Story

By Katie Lillard, Director of Enrollment and Communication

If our outer reality is a reflection of our inner world, then Amanda Boone '15, is living in a state of zen. Surrounded by natural light, intentionally arranged crystals, and ambient music, Boone peacefully dwells within Queenstown's newest health spa, Salt Wellness, during business hours. Since July, Amanda has managed the day-to-day operations at Salt Wellness with her sister and spa owner, Tiffani Galli. Salt Wellness offers Salt Cave Halotherapy, Detoxifying Foot Baths, Reiki, and more. Far from the typical 9-5, Amanda's professional life mirrors the very characteristics of tranquility and healing that she has devotedly developed in her personal life over the last decade. So, how did she get here?

In 2013, having attended her Freshman and Sophomore years at two different high schools, Amanda enrolled as a new student at Wye River Upper School, in what would become her third high school in 3 years. In the face of anxiety and emotional exhaustion, Amanda braved yet another change, hoping to find an environment where she felt nurtured and secure. Like many, Amanda and her

parents believed that Wye River's small size and inclusive community would provide the comfort and support she needed to survive high school.

**"If it weren't for Wye River, I know for certain that I would not have graduated high school. There wasn't a single teacher there that I couldn't go to for help."**

Her journey through the next two years was not easy, but with each passing day, Amanda built a foundation of trust that led her through the end of her senior year. "If it

weren't for Wye River, I know for certain that I would not have graduated high school," Boone shared. "There wasn't a single teacher there that I couldn't go to for help."

When Amanda graduated in 2015, she obtained more than a high school diploma. She gained confidence from accomplishing more than she thought possible. She witnessed her own ability to conquer obstacles, overcome anxiety, and exceed expectations.

Amanda maintained her forward momentum after graduation, initially continuing her studies at Anne Arundel Community College, and later giving herself permission to explore other career paths, including hospitality, retail management, animal services, and finally a role as Classroom Assistant with Anne Arundel County's School District at Rolling Knolls Elementary. In these chapters between high school graduation and present day, Amanda took advantage of her freedom to explore through trial and error, and took away valuable insight into her capacity for organization and leadership, as well as her desire to help others.

**“Expose yourself to your anxieties. Don't shy away from them, even if you have to ease your way in. And lean on your friends and teachers at WRUS- they're there to help.”**

At the same time, Amanda implemented other skills she learned at WRUS. Newly independent, Amanda remembered lessons from her Wye River finance class, especially around budgeting and planning.

“We had one assignment in particular where we had to envision our ideal reality,” Boone remembers, “The car we wanted to drive. The size and location of our ideal home. Most of the other kids dreamt of fancy sports cars like Lamborghinis and mansions to live in. I remember choosing practical things- a Toyota 4 Runner and a 3 bedroom home.”

Now, at 26 years old, Amanda's grasp on budgeting and financial planning enabled her to purchase her first home. And once again, in accomplishing her goal, she leveled-up her self assuredness.

“I realize now that I don't have to limit my dreams to what is practical. I still want that 4 Runner, and I know that it's not out of reach. I can aim for a nice house on the water, too, if I want. The sky's the limit.”

Call it good karma, manifestation, or perseverance, but after years of working to feel secure and safe in herself, Amanda has found a daily environment that aligns with and supports continuous self care and personal growth. In the future, Amanda hopes to pursue training in Reiki and other healing modalities, as she feels called to the healing profession and helping others. In the meantime, Amanda offers this advice to our current students:

“Expose yourself to your anxieties. Don't shy away from them, even if you have to ease your way in. And lean on your friends and teachers at WRUS- they're there to help.”

Be sure to say hello to Amanda in person and learn more about Salt Wellness during Wye River Upper School's Wellness Festival this spring. More information about the spring event can be found online at [www.wyeriverupperschool.org/events](http://www.wyeriverupperschool.org/events)



Amanda Boone '15 at Salt Wellness



Avery '24 enjoys her first day of Senior English.

## *A Message from The Director of Advancement*

### Dr. Jennifer Palinkas

Philanthropy at its best is rooted in gratitude, so it is fitting that my first note as the new Director of Advancement at WRUS accompanies this Giving Report.

This Giving Report presents donations made to the school during the 2022-2023 fiscal year, July 1, 2022 to June 30, 2023. These gifts bridged the gap between tuition income and the actual cost of educating each student, and so much more. A few standout moments from the 2022-2023 year, supported by these gifts, included more field trips to Washington, DC, supporting student wellness by adding yoga to the morning sports, and celebrating the 20th anniversary of Wye River Upper School.

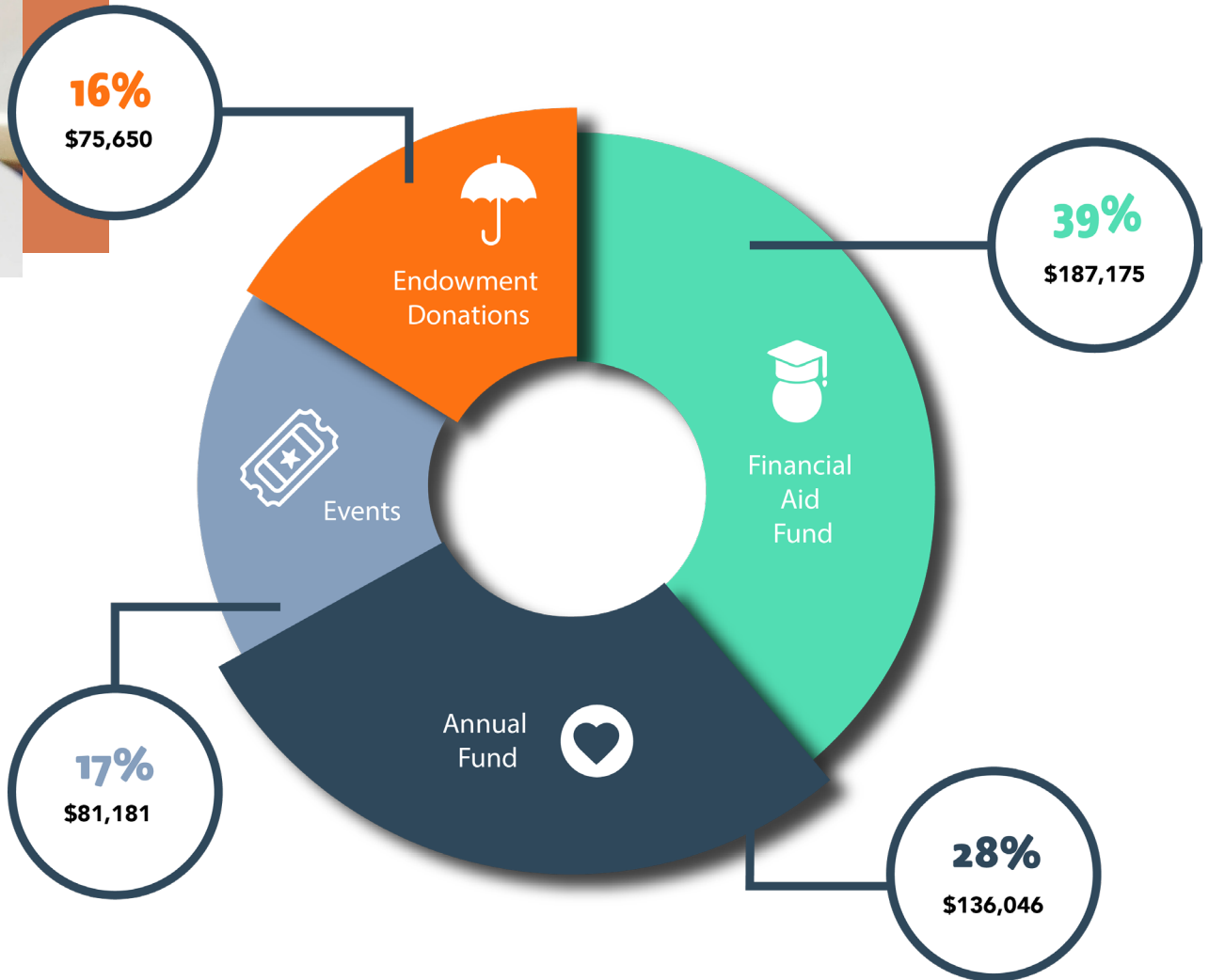
For corrections (or a conversation), contact me directly at [jjpalinkas@wyeriverupperschool.org](mailto:jjpalinkas@wyeriverupperschool.org)





# 2022- 2023 Giving Report

Philanthropy at its  
best is rooted in  
gratitude



The Giving Report includes a list of donors, who are recognized for the total amount given to WRUS during this period. The list is organized into giving levels, each with a name that honors the legacy of WRUS and the strength of its community:

Founders Circle, leadership level gifts that honor Chrissy Aull and Patricia McGlannan, two remarkable and inspiring women whose love for their children channeled into a vision for a school that changes lives

Head's Circle, major gifts that honor the head of school, Stephanie Borges Folarin

2002 Society, gifts that honor the founding year of school, 2002, when it began in a handful of classrooms at Chesapeake College

Armory Ally, gifts that honor the home of WRUS, the Centreville National Guard Armory built in 1926 and transformed into the Wye River Upper School in 2014

Blue & White Ambassador, gifts that honor the school colors of WRUS

Raptors League, gifts that honor our mascot

### **Founders Circle (\$5,000+)**

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### **2002 Society (\$1,000-\$2,499)**

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Mrs. Folarin leads students during her weekly Upper School Seminar.

# Nurturing Success, Supporting Our Students

## Building Academic and Emotional Resilience

By Stephanie Borges Folarin  
Head of School

Education is not one-size-fits-all. This truth is especially evident when it comes to students with unique learning profiles. For children and adolescents with ADHD, High-Functioning Autism (HFA), and executive function challenges, specialized schools, like Wye River Upper School, provide an invaluable support system tailored to their needs. These schools are designed to help students thrive academically and personally throughout the year, offering a range of strategies and interventions that foster growth, independence, and success.

At Wye River Upper School, we take a student-centric approach. We craft Student Support Plans that outline specific goals and strategies tailored to each student's unique needs and abilities. These plans serve as roadmaps for teachers, ensuring that the curriculum and interventions are aligned with the student's developmental stage and learning style. These support plans evolve with student growth and eventually are no longer needed. The ultimate goal with these plans is that our students learn to use all the tools and techniques they need to be successful academically and socially. Our Student Support Plans are the avenue we use to map the progress toward measurable goals for each student.

We also have an intentionally low student-to-teacher ratio. Smaller class sizes allow for more individualized attention and support, reducing distractions and helping students with ADHD or HFA stay engaged in learning. Our teachers are trained to understand and accommodate the needs of students with ADHD, HFA, and executive function challenges. They use evidence-based teaching

methods, sensory-friendly classrooms, and structured routines to create an optimal learning environment. We are dedicated to making our school feel like a home away from home for all of our community members. When people feel comfortable, they work harder and smarter; our students are no exception.

We prioritize social skills development for our students with HFA because we fully understand that social interactions can be challenging for them. We provide targeted interventions, such as social skills groups during lunchtime, to help them build meaningful connections with peers and adults.

Many of our students with ADHD, HFA, or executive function difficulties are sensitive to sensory stimuli. We support them by providing sensory rooms throughout the school and tools, like fidget tools and noise-canceling headphones, to help them regulate their sensory experiences and remain focused.



Learning Specialist, Dr. Amy Littlefield, works with Silas '28 during her 8th grade Communication Skills class.



School counselor, Shawna Buckley, meets with Zoey '28.



Mrs. Schoon checks in with Dylan '26 and Jausaan '26.

We offer dedicated training programs to strengthen executive function skills during our support periods and seminar groups. These programs teach students time management, organization, and planning skills, helping them become more independent and effective learners. Our students get at least an hour of explicit instruction and direction daily in these areas per day.

At Wye River Upper School, we recognize the importance of collaboration between educators and parents. We facilitate regular communication and meetings to ensure that parents are actively involved in their child's education and can reinforce strategies at home. Teaming with parents and students can only lead to better understanding and outcomes for everyone involved. We host Zoom conversations and in-person planning sessions, and we even have clinicians and educational events throughout the year to support our teaming with parents.

Together with the outstanding parents at Wye River Upper School, we support students academically and prepare them for transitions to higher education, the armed forces, or straight into the workforce. We offer guidance on college applications, vocational training, and job readiness, ensuring a smooth transition to adulthood. Our students take tours of colleges, have career day events, and can dual enroll at a local college in academic and trade fields while completing their high school career. We regularly update our social media pages with stories of our alumni and how they are changing their communities and the world.

At Wye River Upper School, we know that by providing personalized student support plans, small class sizes, specialized instruction, and a range of support services, we empower students to overcome obstacles, build essential skills, and achieve their full potential. Our school is a second home for our students and parents, dedicated to positively transforming their lives.

## Definitions

**ADHD (Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder):** Students with ADHD often struggle with maintaining focus, impulse control, and organization. They may be highly intelligent but have difficulty effectively channeling their energy and attention in a traditional classroom setting.

**High-Functioning Autism (HFA):** HFA is a form of Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) where individuals have average to above-average cognitive abilities but face challenges in social communication, sensory processing, and rigid thinking patterns.

**Executive Function Skills:** These skills encompass planning, organization, time management, and task initiation. Weak executive function skills can hinder a student's ability to complete assignments, follow routines, and adapt to new situations.



**Wye River**  
UPPER SCHOOL

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