We didn’t just survive... we thrived!

Now, I’m not someone who usually loves poring over financial statements. But this year those statements seemed to come alive, each number telling a story of what it has been like to operate in a pandemic: what we grieved, what we learned, and how we will forever be changed.

I see the numbers that represent the loss of camp income, and suddenly I’m reliving the grief and loss of knowing for certain it wasn’t safe to hold camps. I see the PPP loan and remember the flood of relief when we knew we could retain our staff. I see the lower-than-planned travel expenses and think about planes that didn’t take off, cars that didn’t head out for a dance, friends who couldn’t be together for so many months.

I see the line for contracted labor—reduced but not empty—reminding me of work we were able to move forward, the completion of our tech transition, and the ongoing journey of our Board and staff to better educate ourselves about cultural equity and appropriation. Seeing the salaries line, I am filled with gratitude for the dedicated perseverance of the CDSS staff. And then I look at the number that represents contributed income—your memberships and donations—and I am overcome. Support from state and federal sources helped us to survive last year. But we didn’t just survive, we thrived. We thrived and we dared to dream in the darkness because of our members’ and donors’ generosity.

Photo: Doug Plummer

Thanks for All the Ways YOU Gave in 2020!

We’re grateful to everyone who maintained their membership through a challenging year—knowing you were there from the start gave us courage to carry on when the outlook was uncertain!

Friends who donated part or all of your camp refund, and those who gave so generously to our Spring Appeal, you blew us away. You made it possible for us to offer our camp staff half of their would-have-been pay and to create brand new resources to serve the needs of the moment.

We’re incredibly grateful to the dear friends whose bequests came at the most opportune time possible, and to those of you who gave so generously to the Fall Appeal throughout the darkest days of the year.

All of you who stepped up to hold your communities together, contributing time, energy, and wisdom locally and adding to the community resources we were gathering and sharing—you held the traditions we cherish together and made our work possible.

See the full list of donors at cdss.org/donors

Katy German, Executive Director
Folklore Society of Greater Washington used a CDSS grant to help its callers develop online calling skills.

After the pandemic shut down FSGW’s in-person dances, Donna Rogall saw on the CDSS website that Toronto ECD had started running their event online, and wondered whether CDSS might help her local ECD to do the same. FSGW applied for and received a CDSS grant to fund a workshop aimed at helping their ECD callers transition to running dances online. Melissa Running and Carrie Rose developed and led the workshop.

Donna writes, “Thanks to the confidence building and other tangible outcomes of the workshop, we have been able to continue to hold a weekly Wednesday evening dance. Each of the callers who attended the workshop has now called for us online and the attendance has been excellent. Converting to a virtual venue may have helped inspire the organizers of other FSGW events to make a similar transition.

“We are thankful for the financial support provided by CDSS for our workshop. Also valuable was the access to CDSS’s connections and resources, including the Send Love to Freelancers page, Web Chat materials, Resource Portal, and email groups.”

In usual times, CDSS’s Community Resource Grants are primarily awarded for in-person events and projects. In 2020, as many CDSS-grant-funded events and projects were cancelled or postponed, we offered timely new grant streams suited to the moment, including funding for:

• equity and anti-racism training for organizers or communities
• online workshops to support callers, musicians, etc.
• publication of instructional materials (print, web, audio, video)
• related endeavors that will have a lasting effect on dance, music, and song communities

Find all these resources and more at cdss.org/portal Read more about grants at cdss.org/grants
In 2020, for the first time in more than 75 years, we cancelled our in-person dance, music, and song camps. It was heart-breaking. Then we took a deep breath and got to work with our dedicated and imaginative Program Directors, co-creating 81 different online programs, offering alternative opportunities for folks to gather during each of our nine camp weeks.

And, like many of you, we surprised ourselves with the breadth and range of what’s possible online!

Our traditions will always be about human togetherness, set to music and song. But our big epiphany in 2020 was that the magic can happen even when we can’t be together. In fact, online programs can reach many more people and offer moments of connection and opportunities for learning year-round. So we’ve expanded the Robust Camp Programs focus area in our strategic plan to include immersive, joyful learning experiences at in-person summer camps and year-round online and regional programming.

In 2020, we started Contra Pulse, a high-quality and well-received podcast featuring interviews with contra dance musicians to document the evolving history of our traditions and capture the state of the artform. Julie Vallimont, with support from CDSS, produced 24 episodes in 2020, with over 4,000 downloads across five countries. We’re excited about using this new format to document and steward living traditions, one of our priority focus areas.

Above: Windborn teaches “Which Side Are You On” during Harmony of Song & Dance.
Right: Over 1300 participants in our online camp programs joined from 41 states and provinces, plus Australia, France, Ireland, and the UK.

Read the CDSS News at cdss.org/news and listen to Contra Pulse at contrapulse.cdss.org
Adding CDSS to our estate plans this year was a natural step in setting up our legacy, because we trust CDSS to carry forward the things that matter most to us far into the future.

When we began dancing in our home communities in Massachusetts, we were focused on our own challenges of becoming competent dancers and thoroughly appreciated the patience and skill of our local leaders. Thanks to Helene Cornelius in the ’70s and Robin Hayden in the 2000s! We focused on our local groups and were not very aware of CDSS.

Over time, we traveled and danced more widely and in 2013 moved to the Carolinas and began leading ECD groups there. Then we better appreciated what CDSS offers to groups and dancers nationally: both resources and chances to connect! We also realized how important CDSS and CDSS Camps were to sustaining and reinvigorating our beloved local leaders.

Dancing has infinitely enriched our lives. John returned from a decades-long dance hiatus in the ’90s and was relieved to find that the dance was still there. We met dancing! Sylvie, John’s daughter, found great joy and comfort as a teen in the dance community. She is in her 30s and now on her own dance hiatus. By giving to this vital organization we hope the dance will be there for her when she chooses to return!

We encourage you to include CDSS in your financial planning. It takes only a few clicks to make CDSS a beneficiary on a brokerage account or life insurance policy!

2020 was a year of awakening to systemic racism, cultural equity, cultural appropriation, and how they manifest within the folk scene. CDSS Board and Staff began deeply reflecting on the history of our organization, the roles that we unintentionally play in upholding unjust systems, and the work we must do to become a more inclusive and equitable organization. We invested in training for ourselves and provided grant funds to organizations doing the work locally.

And we recognized the need for more perspectives and greater representation in our decision-making processes. We convened a Cultural Equity Advisory Group that will advise us in the short term, and will continue our efforts to bring broader representation onto our board and staff, and into our programs.

Working now to dismantle systemic injustice within the folk scene is the best way we can ensure the traditions we love will thrive in the future.

2020 invested in organizational anti-racism trainings
$3,200

$10,000 committed to continued cultural equity work in 2021

$10,000

Our Shared Legacy
What We Do Today Matters

“After moving to the Carolinas, we better appreciated what CDSS offers to groups and dancers nationally: both resources and chances to connect!”

—Luanne Stiles & John Lam

Read more about the advisory group at cdss.org/ceag

Find out more at cdss.org/legacy

Lu Anne Stiles & John Lam

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—Luanne Stiles & John Lam

Read more about the advisory group at cdss.org/ceag

Find out more at cdss.org/legacy

Lu Anne Stiles & John Lam
We started 2020, the last year of the Sage Foundation transformational gift, with some important goals: complete our tech transition to Salesforce and fill our Reserves.

The onset of the pandemic and the cancellation of camp programs threatened to derail those goals, but strong donor support, the federal PPP loan (forgiven and considered a grant), and a well-timed major bequest kept us on track.

We ended the year fully operating in Salesforce, with funds to cover expenses, and with healthy reserves to set us up for successful program expansion in 2021.

Our resiliency amidst an incredibly tumultuous year was possible because of donor generosity, and because CDSS is an organization that takes stewardship of funds and financial management very seriously.

The staff and Finance Committee worked closely throughout the year to evaluate our financial position, secure the organization, and ensure that CDSS was able to meet the changing needs of our community.

See more 2020 financial information at cdss.org/2020-annual-report

At the end of 2020, knowing the year was secure, we began looking ahead to the uncertainties of 2021.

Every financial year is the continuation of a previous year, and the foundation for a year that lies ahead. At the end of 2020, we knew the time was right to invest in expansion of online programs and digital resources. At the same time, we wanted to ensure the financial stability of CDSS in future uncertain years.

We looked at our assets and liabilities, as well as the continuing pandemic and uncertainty of camps in 2021, and though we were ending the year in a strong financial position, we saw that it was prudent to apply for an Economic Injury Disaster Loan (EIDL). This loan, a program made available to nonprofits during the pandemic, provided us with extra cash should we have a second year of lost camp income; it is reflected in long-term liabilities (purple bar) in the chart on this page.

The EIDL ensures financial stability in future years and allows us to put our money into our mission now when our community needs it most.
2020 GOVERNING BOARD

Officers:
President: Gaye Fifer, Pittsburgh, PA
Vice President: Nikki Herbst, Amana, IA
Secretary: Pam Paulson, Waukesha, WI
Treasurer: Joel Bluestein, Arlington, VA

At Large Members:
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Nancy Barbour, Monmouth Junction, NJ
Jeremy Carter-Gordon, Marshfield, VT
Karl Colón, Yellow Springs, OH
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Juliette Webb, Nashville, TN
Chris Weiler, South Burlington, VT

MISSION STATEMENT: We connect and support people in building and sustaining vibrant communities through participatory dance, music, and song traditions with roots in English and North American culture.

CDSS OFFICE

Kathryn German, Executive Director, Asheville, NC
Robin Hayden, Director of Development, Greenfield, MA
Steve Howe, Director of Camp Programs, Florence, MA
Julie Brodnitzki, Director of Finance, Barkhamsted, CT
Sarah Pilzer, Director of Operations, Greenfield, MA
Anna Mach, Accounting Manager, West Springfield, MA
Linda Henry, Community Resources Manager, Amherst, MA
Nicki Perez, Membership Coordinator, Northampton, MA
Crispin Youngberg, Office & Registration Manager, Greenfield, MA
Ben Williams, Sales & Insurance Manager, Northampton, MA
Kelsey Wells, Marketing & Communications Manager, Murfreesboro, TN
Anne Campbell, Webmaster, Orlando, FL
Emily Addison, Community Resources Consultant, Ottowa, ON*
Ezra Fischer, Special Projects Consultant - Salesforce, Arlington, MA*
Anna Gilbert, Designer, CDSS News, Framingham, MA

* We have had the great pleasure of working with two fabulous consultants—Emily Addison for five years and Ezra Fischer for three years. We want to say a huge thank you to Emily for all her amazing work with Community Resources and Ezra for his important contributions to our Salesforce infrastructure. These consultant positions were funded by our grant from the Sage Foundation.

CDSS 116 Pleasant St., Suite 345 Easthampton, MA 01027 413-203-5467 cdss.org

Photo: Doug Plummer