



In 2025, a young man from the South Bronx photographed world leaders at the UN General Assembly.

In Iraq, a teenage girl in a refugee camp was asked by government officials to propose improvements to the camp she lives in.

A young woman from a conflict zone in Congo had her work published in The New York Times.

This is what happens when you stop telling people's stories for them.





75 students in 2025

Lens on Life has sustainable programs working directly with refugee, displaced, and justice impacted youth around the world. Our mission is to empower youth facing significant adversity through photography and digital literacy training. We help them heal, reclaim their narratives, and harness their inner brilliance to build their own futures and foster positive change within their communities.

Each location operates a year-round photography program in a dedicated media lab with cameras, computers, printers, and wifi. Students graduate with a certificate, DSLR camera, portfolio, are featured in a local exhibition, and receive further mentorship upon graduation. Our students come from:

Zaatari Camp, Jordan – Home to Syrian refugees, of which many unable to return home, in one of the world's largest refugee camps

Arbat Camp, Iraq – Kurdish and Syrian refugees displaced by regional conflict, partially ISIS violence

Yaoundé, Cameroon – Refugees and youth displaced by the Anglophone crisis

Bujumbura, Burundi – Congolese refugees who fled violence in eastern DRC, and Burundian youth facing extreme poverty.

South Bronx, NYC – Justice-impacted and homeless youth facing systemic barriers

These are young people navigating trauma, instability, and a world that often shuts doors on their futures. We give them tools to shine in a once gate-kept space. Tools to make it, against the odds.



From Subject to Author



Narrative Control

Arlette graduated from Lens on Life in 2022. Before joining, she had never used a camera. Today, she is a photojournalist covering Eastern, Central, and West Africa for The New York Times and The Washington Post.

Self Advocacy Through Art

Students from Arbat refugee camp exhibited their work in Sulaymaniyah, where Kurdish officials asked one of the students to draft a proposal for improving living conditions in the camp. In a region where discrimination between Syrian and Iraqi Kurds remains prevalent, Lens on Life students are breaking barriers.



From Training to Career

Professional Opportunities

NYC graduates who were formerly incarcerated now work as professional photographers at the UN General Assembly, documenting world leaders on the world's most prominent stage.



Academic Advancement

Three alumni from Cameroon received full university scholarships in journalism and digital marketing. Two of them now work as instructors, teaching the next generation of Lens on Life students.

From Student to Teacher



Graduate Instructors

In Iraq, our full-time instructors were among the first cohort of students in Arbat refugee camp. They now work as paid photographers inside and outside the camp, and teach the next class of Lens on Life students.

Sustainable Model

In Zaatari, graduates cycle into teaching roles every two years. In NYC, alumni intern as co-instructors. In Burundi, our lead instructor graduated from our pilot program in Congo. In Cameroon, students are taught by program grads. Leadership grows from within every community we work in.



Access to New Spaces

Gallery Openings

In New York City, students from our South Bronx program who experienced incarceration and homelessness exhibited their work to a full house at Benrubi Gallery in Chelsea. Students earned upwards of \$1,500 each in sales that evening.



Fair resources

Lens on Life labs offer equipment, investment, exposure, and opportunity historically gatekept from the communities where we work. Each lab has Mac computers, printers, wifi, and security—and every student graduates with a Canon camera.

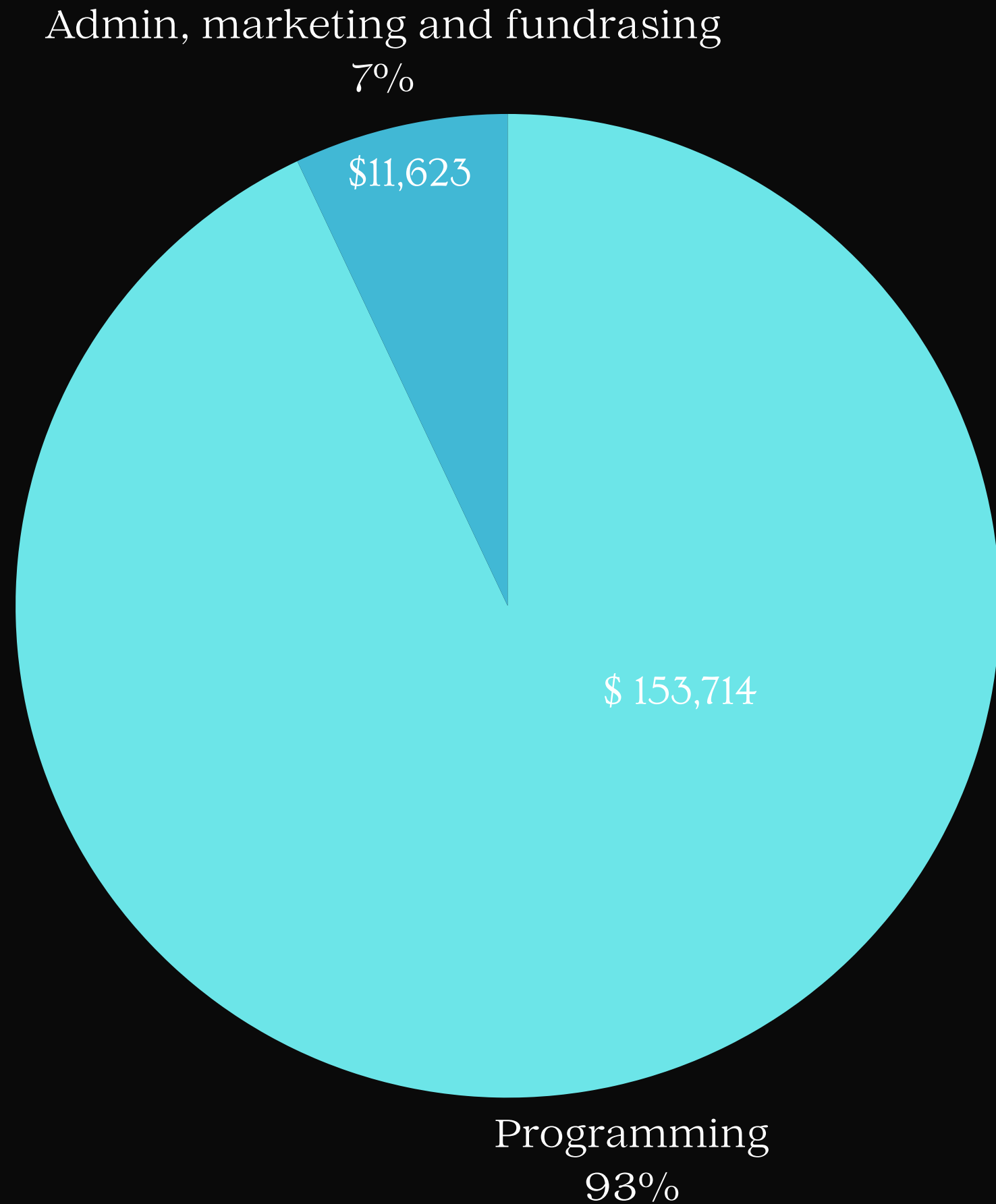
Financial Overview

Revenue 173,022

Expenses 165,337

Lens on Life operates entirely through volunteer leadership, with no paid staff in the United States. In 2025, we successfully raised \$173,000 through a combination of student photo auctions, our annual bike ride, and contributions from individual donors, foundations, and corporate partners.

Thanks to the dedication of our board and volunteer team, we have directed 93% of every dollar raised toward our 5 programs, including equipment costs, classroom improvements, and salaries for local instructors



What's Next

When crises leave the headlines, so does the support. We've watched NGOs and governments move on to the next emergency, leaving behind the communities where we work—places still navigating displacement, trauma, and recovery long after the world's attention has shifted.

Lens on Life is staying and growing. Since our first workshop in Congo in 2016, we've built five year-round programs across three continents—all through volunteer leadership. After a decade of building this foundation, we're ready to bring on our first full-time Executive Director to deepen our impact and expand our reach.





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To view student work , please visit our online gallery at
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