



Urban Improv | Freelance Players

IMPACT REPORT 2019-2020

Change & Resilience

To view the entire report, visit
rehearsalforlife.org/impactreport2020



Dear friends,

It has been a year of change, challenge, and separation – and a year of growth, community, and resilience. Last fall and winter, which seem like a lifetime ago, our programs were thriving, alive with energy and creativity.

School closures in March in response to the Covid-19 pandemic presented us with new, unforeseen obstacles to reach our remote learners, including delivery methods, accessibility, and equity of opportunity.

We pivoted quickly to continue to serve our students, adapting all of our programming to the screen. Our Urban Improv actor-educators innovatively shared with our partner schools digital Classroom Care Packages that applied our model to video-based songs, scenes, and discussion prompts. Our Freelance Players' creative staff moved their rehearsals online to successfully debut six video productions, including one performance that was live-streamed on Youtube and Zoom. In April, our annual fundraising event Banned in Boston became one of the first virtual events in the city – an event reimagined completely, yet still capturing the spirit of our robust, caring community of donors, supporters, artists, and friends.

June brought another big change this year in our Rehearsal for Life community. Executive Director Francie Karlen stepped back into her former role on the Board after four years at the helm of our administrative team. Francie has been a force of good in serving the young people of our city and a force of change in building up our organization. Her vision of a better world brings all of us in. We are grateful for her contributions, which will continue to be felt for years to come.

Please join me in welcoming artist, educator, and activist Elena Velasco into her new role as Executive & Artistic Director. As we prepare Rehearsal for Life for growth with new vision and leadership, we are building the future together – with purpose, joy, community, gratitude, and hope. Thank you, Elena, for moving forward with us.

Thanks to the support of so many in our community. We would not be poised to face this year ahead without all of the people who comprise our community of creatives.

Sincerely,
James Benenson, Chair, Board of Directors

Our Programs

Our dynamic programs embody the following Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) Key Measures: Creative Self-Expression, Empathy, Conflict Resolution, Relationship Building/Community, and Diversity & Inclusion.



Urban Improv: Our flagship program serves 4-8th graders in five Boston Public School partners each year in multi-year partnerships. Actor-educators create realistic scenes about such topics as bullying, peer pressure, racism, and bystander issues. Then, at a pivotal moment, the facilitator calls “FREEZE!” Students are invited to jump into the scene, using their minds, bodies and creativity to resolve a conflict, experiencing the consequences of their choices firsthand. Following school closures in spring 2020, we innovated “Classroom Care Packages” that translated our Urban Improv model to video to reach our remote learners. Our BPS partner schools are Nathan Hale in Roxbury; the Murphy in Dorchester, BTU Pilot School and Mission Hill Grammar in Jamaica Plain, and Haley Pilot School in Roslindale.

635 students served through March 2020

9 Boston neighborhoods represented

24+ topics explored

272 live performances

10 Classroom Care Package videos produced
(894 views & counting!)

50+ submissions to our first-ever GROUP SCENE FESTIVAL,
featuring original, student-written scenes



Youth Unscripted: Our afterschool program for Boston teens builds self-efficacy through creative exploration of themselves, their community, and social change.

15 student leaders

5 scenes explored

15 sessions before March 2020

22.5 hours of creative collaboration & conversation

100+ Fruit Snacks consumed

Re:Action Assemblies: Interactive assemblies jumpstart healthy dialogue on challenging topics at schools and community groups in New England and beyond.

~1670 students served

10 topics addressed

2 additional out-of-school-hours
trainings (coming back for more!)

8 towns visited:

Boston

North Reading

Cambridge

Groton

Belmont

Scituate

Brookline

New Bedford



Freelance Players: Our afterschool, tuition-based musical theater program fosters imagination, self-expression, empathy, and community across socioeconomic boundaries.

Players: *The Dreammakers* & *Mystery at the Hopeless Hotel*

Driscoll / Brookline: *Tortoise vs. Hare* & *Buzz On*

Jamaica Plain: *Mything Links* & *America's Next Top Monster*

Charles River / Dover: *Shakespeare's Daughters* & *Clam's Casino*

Needham: *Great Expectations* & *Shakespeare's Daughters*

Newton: *X Marks the Spot* & *Mything Links*

6 troupes in **5** towns

305 student-actors

21 in-person performances

6 video/streaming productions

1 live-streamed performance



Our People

Our community is our strength and foundation. Here, we make a special introduction to some of the people who have helped us this year (and some for many, many years): among them, Murphy School teacher **Diane Ly-Leahy**; our first donor and former board member **Amo Houghton**, Youth Unscripted alumna **Kayla J'Kayah Williams** (below); Freelance Players parent **Lisa Ahn**; Birch Meadow School

Principal **Julia Hendrix**; Freelance Players alumnus **Howard Chaffey**; new members of our Board of Directors **Skye Morrison Kramer** and **Faith Soloway**; Urban Improv alumna **Jesenia Cortes**; and Banned in Boston all-star **Jimmy Tingle**. Meet the whole cast at rehearsalforlife.org/impactreport2020.

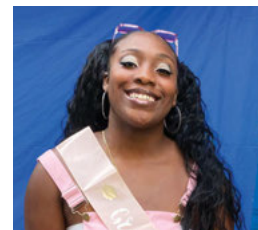
Kayla J'Kayah Williams

"Hi, my name is Kayla J'Kayah Williams. In the fall I will be attending UMass Dartmouth. After school, I want to be a gynecologist. My favorite color is yellow, and I love all animals, especially dolphins and dogs. My family describes me as an outgoing, caring, silly, sarcastic, adventurous, and lovable eighteen-year-old.

Youth Unscripted made me feel like I belong. It is a place where anyone can be their best self and not have to deal with judgment. I believe that everyone deserves this.

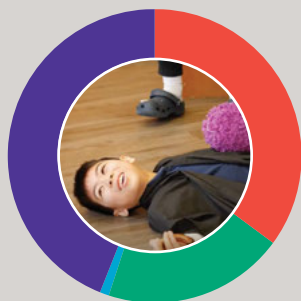
When I first got to Youth Unscripted, it was like I was coming home to a family. Everyone was so open-minded, and I liked the encouraging vibe and the way everyone was there for each other. Improv, for me, served as a safe space where I could talk to people about things I had never admitted to out loud before, open up, and have a weight lifted off my shoulders that I didn't even know I was carrying. It helped me become outgoing and confident with who I am.

Youth Unscripted made me more open-minded, and it has also shown me how to stop and assess issues rather than reacting, which usually leads to trouble. I also learned to be okay with the unknown – to try something even if I don't know if it will work out. You won't have any growth if you don't do anything new or try to see things from a different perspective. You can't go through life close-minded."



Financials

Thank you to the many individuals, organizations, and institutions that have contributed to Rehearsal for Life in the 2019-2020 fiscal year. We had a smaller budget than previous years and a goal for a modest surplus to replenish reserves. We are appreciative of the generosity of many that helped us reach our financial goals in a very difficult fiscal year.



Revenues

Philanthropy: **\$589,247**
Grants/Government: **\$469,686**
Earned Revenue: **\$264,393**
Donated Goods & Services: **\$16,365**
FY20: **\$1,339,691**



Expenses

Youth Programs: **\$972,861**
Fundraising: **\$205,741**
General & Admin: **\$102,793**
FY20: **\$1,281,395**



Banned in Boston

While we were heartbroken not to be able to present Banned in Boston onstage at the House of Blues due to the pandemic, we rallied to focus on Urban Improv. And we did it! Our socially-distanced community "came together" to raise **\$632,852** for our young people!

A HUGE thank you to **Jim Braude** and **Margery Eagan** for their introduction to "Virtually Banned," and to **Jimmy Tingle** for his impassioned appeal to our audiences and his good humor throughout a tumultuous time. Heart and humor win again!



MISSION, VISION, VALUES

MISSION: To strengthen young people's social and emotional skills for every stage in life, through dialogue, creativity, and performance.

VISION: Empowered youth building diverse and inclusive communities where all voices are heard.

VALUES: As an organization working toward a socially just and equitable society through youth enrichment and empowerment, we uphold these values: Creativity, Empathy, Respect, Cooperation, Empowered Self-Expression, Diversity & Inclusion, and Positive Social Change.

STAFF

Narcissa Campion, *Program Manager: Freelance Players*
Kippy Dewey, *Founding Director*
Emily Duggan, *Marketing & Development Associate*
Francie Karlen, *Former Executive Director*
Lisa McColgan, *Office Administrator*
Kristen Sherman, *Managing Director*
Jamie Ullrich, *Senior Program Manager: Urban Improv*
Elena Velasco, *Executive & Artistic Director*

ACTOR-EDUCATORS

Tory Bullock, *Associate Artistic Director*
Cooper Evello
Jadira Figueroa
Jeffrey Kimball
Merle Perkins
Anna Richardson
Holly Tarnower, *Associate Education Director*
Veronica Wells

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

James Benenson, *Chair*
Lisa Schmid Alvord, *Co-Vice-Chair*
George Bennett, *Co-Vice-Chair*
Levin H. Campbell, Jr., *Treasurer*
Katie Kulikoski, *Clerk*
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Lisa Case
Ted Clark
Susan Bredhoff Cohen
Tari Dagogo-Jack
Kippy Dewey
Ron Druker
Ann Hall
Jillian Hirsch
Skye Morrison Kramer
Kristina Hare Lyons
Thalia McMillion
Tom O'Rourke
Faith Soloway

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For the full story, visit
REHEARSALFORLIFE.ORG/IMPACTREPORT2020

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