



# IMPACT REPORT 2018–2019

**Urban Improv**

**Freelance Players**





“Urban Improv makes me want to do something more than just stand by and watch the world dissolve into chaos. I want to try and fix that somehow. I get to practice doing that at Urban Improv. Thank you for making that possible for me.”

— Zahir, 7th Grader Urban Improv Student, Freelance Player

## Dear Friends,

As the social activist and theater-practitioner Augusto Boal stated, “we must all do theater to find out who we are, and to discover who we could become.”

The transformative impact of Rehearsal for Life’s creative youth empowerment programs would not be possible without supporters like you. The 2018-2019 year has been one of change and growth, and a time of reflective practice as we honor the past, build on our strengths, and embrace the change needed for the future.

Our largest program, Urban Improv, continued to serve 1,100 4th-8th grade Boston Public School students as we strengthened collaboration with our five Boston Partner schools through shared goals, new curriculum development, and on-site school workshops. For students like Joslyn, our safe and creative space is what allows her to make thoughtful choices: “Once a classmate really made me mad on purpose, but Urban Improv taught me to use my head not my hands, so I didn’t start a fight.”

Our Freelance Players program, going on 45 years(!) continues to be led by founder Kippy Dewey and Narcissa Campion. The Freelance Troupes offer artistic spaces of connection and creativity for budding performers and community-builders across Boston, Brookline, Newton, Needham & Dover. We are proud to have provided 24 students tuition assistance.

This past year, we have invested in significant capacity building. This has included: honing our theory of change, contemporizing our curriculum, restructuring our staffing model, and improving our data and evaluation systems. We have no doubt these investments will yield high returns for the youth we support in the years to come.

In a world of growing adolescent stress and anxiety across all zip codes, and where social and emotional supports and the creative outlets necessary to foster hope, connection and imagination are egregiously under-resourced in Boston schools or simply inaccessible, Rehearsal for Life remains a critical and empowering lift for young people. We are proud to share this work in the this year’s impact report.

Thank you again for your ongoing support.

Sincerely,

**Francie Karlen**  
Executive Director

**James Benenson**  
Board Chair



### P.S. Save the Date!

Our signature fundraising event Banned in Boston will be Thursday, April 16, 2020!

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# Theory of Change

Rehearsal for Life uses theater as a vehicle for social change and has served over 80,000 young people in Boston and beyond through our two creative programs: Urban Improv and Freelance Players.

We are proud to present our updated Theory of Change, which will guide our work to grow and deepen our impact in years to come.



# Darrus Sands Alumni Story

Darrus remembers being a 5th grader on the bus to the Reggie Lewis Center for an Urban Improv workshop to witness “some really, really powerful programming.” He still remembers the actor-educators, their songs, and the scenes that sprouted his passion for his work today. Darrus has been diligently working for the Boston Public Health Commission’s Division of Violence Prevention for more than 10 years, teaching and mentoring young people in the areas of Healthy Relationships, Conflict Resolution and Media Literacy. Collaboration with Urban Improv has been a constant in his work:

“I have witnessed young people make some powerful choices on the stage, and in turn make those choices in their lives. It has a lot to do with the investment Urban Improv has been making in students for years.”



## Youth Unscripted #dontjudge

From October through May, 13 teens and our actor-educators tackled tough topics, through improvisational scenes that covered the issues of bystanders, racism, reputation and more. The final week culminated in a powerful performance *#dontjudge*. The 30-minute, seven-act play was conceived, written and performed by the teens about a day in the life of a teenager in a new school. Everyone also enjoyed a photography exhibit *First Impressions*, and a corresponding spoken word piece by one of our teen participants. The performance concluded with a vibrant Talk Back with the audience.



# Our Year By the Numbers

Urban Improv, our flagship program, serves 4-8th graders in five Boston Public Schools each year in multi-year partnerships. Actor-educators create realistic scenes and then at a pivotal moment, the facilitator calls “FREEZE!” students are invited to jump into the scene, use their minds, bodies and creativity to resolve a conflict, experiencing the consequences of their choices first-hand.

**Celebrating Our BPS Partnerships!** Hale since 1998, Murphy since 2013, Haley since 2017, Boston Teachers Union since 2014, Mission Hill since 2004

### Urban Improv

- 48 classrooms and teachers
- 1,110 students
- 864 hours of school learning time
- 1,296 social conflicts explored
- 9,963 Urban Improv performances
- 432 school bus rides (round trip)
- 42 pizzas (336 slices!), and dozens of donuts eaten at End of Year Student & Family Celebrations

### Youth Unscripted

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

- 13 Boston high-school students from 5 schools
- 27 improv games
- 13 identity presentations
- 1 public performance

### Re:Action Assemblies

Our interactive assemblies jumpstart healthy dialogue on challenging topics at schools and community groups in New England and beyond.

- 3,419 students
- 15 topics
- 18 towns: Belmont, Boston, Braintree, Brookline, Cambridge, Concord, Groton, Lexington, Marblehead, Needham, New Bedford, Norwood, Reading, Salem, Sheffield, Waltham, Weston, Worcester

### Freelance Players

Our afterchool, tuition-based theater program fosters imagination, self-expression, empathy and community across socio-economic boundaries.

- 6 troupes in 5 towns
- 373 student-actors
- 273 rehearsals
- 323 costume changes
- 99 original scores
- 10 original plays
- 32 performances (32 standing ovations)

### 2018-2019 Plays

The Players *Norton Beany Is Action Man! & Where There’s A Will* • Charles River/Dover *America’s Next Top Monster & Monopoly* • Driscoll/Brookline *Mything Links & Great Expectations* • Jamaica Plain/Boston *Monopoly & Tortoise vs Hare* • Needham *Food For Thought & Mything Links* • Newton *Mother Goose Inc. and Buzz On*

# Our Year Measuring Impact

Rehearsal for Life assesses each program’s impact on the social and emotional skills of participating youth including: self-awareness, self-management, social relations, and decision-making. Urban Improv evaluations are informed by the University of Chicago Consortium on Chicago School Research/Wallace study titled “Foundations for Young Adult Success: A Developmental Framework” and are aligned with Boston Public Schools SEL curriculum framework.

## Urban Improv

### 4th & 5th Grades

87% of students said they gained self-awareness knowledge and self-regulation skills after participating in Urban Improv.

### 6th-8th Grades

74% of students in 6-8th grades said they gained knowledge and tried new positive behaviors after coming to Urban Improv.

### All Grades

95% students were glad Urban Improv was part of their regular school week, and 100% teachers would recommend Urban Improv to other teachers.

### Highlights

- 87% better understand self-esteem
- 81% used confidence to try something new
- 85% better able to recognize and resist peer pressure
- 90% used de-escalation strategies learned through practice at Urban Improv in real life
- 95% of teachers felt their classes showed increased ability to identify emotions

### Highlights

- 80% can acknowledge how another person feels even if they are different from them
- 84% think more often about how their decisions are affected by their emotions
- 96% have gained ways to positively deal with a bystander situation
- 75% have made a choice that helped “improve a relationship with a classmate, friend or adult in their life”
- 98% feel it is important to think about the consequences when making a decision

## Youth Unscripted

- 89% of students achieved meaningful growing in their critical thinking skills
- 100% report they collaborate better with others in a group
- 100% report they are more confident that they can find a solution to a problem

## Re:Action Assemblies

- 94% of teachers would recommend a workshop to other educators
- 79% of schools want us back for the upcoming year



## Freelance Players

- 99% have improved their acting and singing skills
- 89% better understand people “who are different than me”
- 94% have more confidence

## Amina Michel-Lord

### BPS Teacher & Urban Improv Parent

Amina has called Roxbury her home for over 40 years and it's where she has raised her two children, Ayanna and James, both Urban Improv alumni. Amina has taught grades K through 4 at Mission Hill Pilot School for 20 years. She believes that the Urban Improv program helps fight the "attack on childhood," by teaching the simple act of interacting. In her own words: *"Play is so important to continual learning, and it is what Rehearsal for Life's model continually reinforces."*

**Amina continues:** "One of my favorite scenes is "Nutrition." By grade 4, children know what's healthy and unhealthy. In the scene, the main character skips breakfast, then makes unhealthy food choices. My students see and identify how tired he is, and how he crashes during recess. By the time my students enter the scene, they connect and deliver. It's rewarding to see them demonstrate self-awareness of their choices."

**Unexpected benefit:** "Urban Improv is a place where students learn about giving people space, and not holding on to annoyances, and it's ok if it's 'not your turn'! Teaching others by seeing other people's perspectives through singing and acting integrates the mind and body to learn."



## Zahir

### Urban Improv student & Freelance Player

"At Urban Improv, we were able to create our own scenes that really spoke to me spiritually and emotionally. Each week, we're shown scenes that deal with our real life and not just another unrealistic Hollywood thing. Instead of preparing for a show, it's preparing me for the real world by acting out everything that's going to happen to me or might happen to me. I like being told the truth, and Urban Improv just does that."

Urban Improv helped me open my eyes to the things I might be doing that might offend someone. Sometimes I can come off as rude when I am just not feeling good. But now, after coming to Urban Improv, I realize that sometimes that can be hurtful. And it's made me think more about the world too. Seeing real issues being acted out right in front of me, it puts into perspective the different opinions people have.

I now want to bring people together regardless of their opinions or what they identify as their race or ethnicity, or their sexual orientation. Urban Improv makes me want to do something more than just stand by and watch the world dissolve into chaos. I want to try and fix that somehow. I get to practice doing that at Urban Improv."

## Re:Action Assemblies

Re:Action Assemblies jumpstart dialogue on challenging topics at schools and community groups in New England and beyond. Of our fifteen topics, **Prejudice and Racism, Bullying/Cyberbullying and Mental Health** were the most sought-after in 2018-2019.

"The actors and facilitator were highly skilled at responding to students' unpredictable comments and actions in a respectful way while at the same time taking opportunities to provide insight, clarify and educate as needed. The facilitator had a great command of the room."

—Chenery Middle School, Belmont, MA

“

We were hoping to get strategies about resilience and coping with peer pressure; and were pleased to see to see the kids who struggle academically were very engaged and volunteered to participate.

—Chenery Middle School, Belmont, MA



Re:Action Assemblies with School students.

## Freelance Players

### Laurie Glassman, Parent

"Freelance theater and Players throughout my son's lifetime has tapped his creativity, given him confidence to take risks and perform, built his personal character, and most importantly provided a wonderful sense of community and familial connection with kids of all ages. I will be forever grateful to Kippy, Cissa, and the staff of Freelance for welcoming, inspiring, educating, supporting, and loving my son!"

Nicky was Norbert Beany in 2019 production of *Norbert Beany is Action Man!*





## Carol Fulp Take a Bow

Since 2007, Carol Fulp has served faithfully on the Rehearsal for Life board, and is the ultimate connector. The President and CEO of The Partnership, empowering others has been Carol's life work. As she retires from her long time role as a board member and cast member of Banned in Boston—check out the photo of Carol as a cat at Animal Career Counseling—join us in saying a mighty thank you! We are proud of all she has done to support Rehearsal For Life. And, she is not slowing down. Carol will be spending her time touring the country and speaking on her new book, *Success Through Diversity: Why The Most Inclusive Companies Will Win*.

“

Carol is a rock star. All that she has done is nothing short of remarkable, such service to our community. As for Rehearsal For Life, we were honored that you were a part of our team—and brought your star power to Banned in Boston.

—  
Lisa Schmid Alvord,  
Founder & Board Member



## Lee Hewitt Donor Story

“There are many reasons why I support Rehearsal for Life's Urban Improv program. For one, it made me a good teacher.” Lee recently retired after a career of teaching in Boston Public Schools at Madison Park Technical Vocational High School.

“I have always been interested in the link between creativity and language acquisition. I believe the best skill a teacher can have is an ability to listen to what a student is saying, or to bring out what a student desires to express. Urban Improv is all about asking open-ended questions that help students access their ideas about a topic or situation.”

“Twenty-first century skills include creativity, critical thinking, and problem solving, and that is what Rehearsal for Life's Urban Improv does. The actor-educators are amazing: joy and care emanated from their work. The students always were energized too, before (in anticipation of) and after attending the school workshops.”

“

Urban Improv gave us a common language and helped with classroom management: we were all engaged in problem solving real conflicts. I loved that students used to call it urban improve!

—  
Lee Hewitt

## Collin Knight Thank You & Live Like a Local

For 10 years, Urban Improv students have had a front row seat watching an amazing actor, Collin Knight. What they don't know is he started as a young student from the city, just like them. Growing up in 1990s Roxbury was tough and he was a bit of a class clown. Collin considers himself fortunate to have found mentors that helped to keep him safe, learning and involved in the community. Most importantly, it taught him to be a part of something bigger than himself. He found his way to Freelance Players when he was 12, where he developed and honed his acting skills.

**Teaching moment:** "In my second year as a Freelance Player, I missed the sign ups and Kippy told me 'sorry, you are late and there are no more spots.' She was right and I was upset. I could not believe there wasn't even a single small background part that I could be in! The production was *Who's Who's in the Hood*. A few weeks later, Kippy and Cissa called me. The main actor had dropped out two weeks before the show. Kippy offered me the part. I was only 12, I could have had an ego and said, 'No you didn't let me in the first time.' I realized we are all family, and I had a chance to do this for them, and an opportunity to

be the lead. It was a teaching moment for me. It taught me about community, if there is something we can all do for each other, we do it."

**Breakthrough moment:** "Toby [Urban Improv founding Artistic Director] taught me to challenge myself to become a better actor. There was so much to learn when I was an intern. Being an actor-educator for the Urban Improv ensemble is a hard job; talent is not all of it. I learned so much about acting from Merle Perkins, Kevin Smith, and Ron Jones. Hearing them tell me 'get over yourself, it's the stuff we do on stage that matters.' I found the focus is on how we, as actor-educators, make these kids grow, and am I being as realistic as I can be."

**Favorite scene/curriculum:** "Imagination" and 4th grade is the best! The scene with Bobby and his imaginary friend Dustball reminds all of us that with our imagination, there is no limit to what we can do. It's a tough scene for the actors, but there's a sense of accomplishment when the kids are clapping. Every year I learn from these scenes, the closing circles, and from the students."



### Rehearsal for Life Staff

**Yaa D. Acheampong**  
Artistic & Education Director  
**Narcissa Campion**  
Managing Director  
**Kippy Dewey**  
Founding Director  
**Francie Karlen**  
Executive Director  
**Amanda M. Klein**  
Marketing & Development Associate

**Lisa McColgan**  
Office Administrator  
**Joel Mueller**  
Director of Finance  
**Kristen Sherman**  
Director of Development  
**Jamie Ullrich**  
Senior Program Manager

### Actor-Educator Ensemble

**Tory Bullock**  
**Jadira Figueroa**  
**Emily Holland**  
**Edward Freeman (intern)**  
**Jeffrey Kimball**

**Collin Knight**  
**Marios Nicolaides**  
**Merle Perkins**  
**Holly Tarnower**  
**Veronica Wells**

### BPS Partner Schools

**Nathan Hale School, Roxbury**  
**The Murphy School, Dorchester**  
**BTU Pilot School, Jamaica Plain**

**Mission Hill School, Jamaica Plain**  
**Haley Pilot School, Roslindale**

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**Driscoll School, Brookline**  
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**Hope Church, Jamaica Plain**

**Hyde Square Task Force, Jamaica Plain**  
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**Parish of St. Paul, Newton**  
**Park School, Brookline**

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**Roxy's Grilled Cheese**  
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*\*Annual Report Photo Credits*

# BANNED IN BOSTON

We Got Away With It, Again!

Thanks to the generosity, hard work, and support of our sponsors and volunteers, Banned in Boston '19 raised an incredible \$748,000 benefitting Boston youth. It was kicked off by 20 restaurants partners, who served 450 guests between Lansdowne Pub and House of Blues' Foundation Room. What Boston special event would be complete without the ubiquitous street musician Keytar Bear?

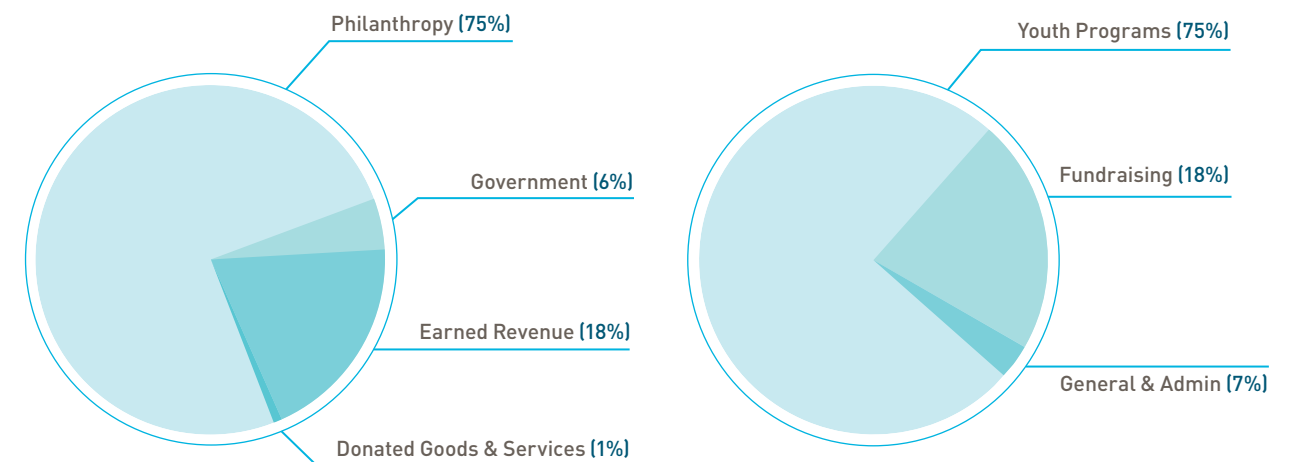
As the show opener, our teen actors joined the Urban Improv ensemble, and everyone "entered" a classroom with an abbreviated version of our classic curriculum "The Snitch." The demonstration grounded the evening, and dramatically showed what our youth and actor-educators practice in the classrooms each day.

Our All-Star cast checked their egos at the door, for skits that included "The Great Congressional Baking Show," "Animal Career Counseling," "Boston Sports Radio" and more. Keith Lockhart put down his Boston Pops baton, and picked up a mic, joining singer/actor Mark Linehan, in a crowd-pleasing version of "My Favorite Crimes," both resplendent in prison-orange jumpsuits.



## Financials

Thank you to the many individuals, organizations and institutions that have contributed to Rehearsal for Life, Inc. in the 2018-2019 fiscal year. We had an ambitious budget as part of our FY18-FY20 Strategic Plan, which included significant investments in program enhancements and capacity building.



### REVENUES

Philanthropy: \$1,067,709  
 Government: \$85,300  
 Earned Revenue: \$249,511  
 Donated Goods & Services: \$14,287  
**FY19 : \$1,416,807\***

### EXPENSES

Urban Improv: \$897,667  
 Freelance Players: \$256,797  
 Fundraising: \$281,090  
 General & Admin: \$116,181  
**FY19 : \$1,555,735**

# Thank You to Our Donors

The generosity of our donors has allowed Rehearsal for Life to deliver programs to over 4,300 participants this year. Thank you to the following supporters who contributed between July 1, 2018 and June 30, 2019.

## \$50,000 & ABOVE

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Thank you to the many supporters who gave gifts of all levels.  
We apologize for any errors or omissions.

\*Thank you to our supporters who have pledged multi-year commitments.



## 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 and Inclusion, and Positive Social Change.



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