

2018-2019 ABOUT FACE THEATRE EDUCATION IMPACT REPORT



ABOUT FACE THEATRE

MISSION STATEMENT

ABOUT FACE THEATRE (AFT)

creates exceptional, innovative, and adventurous theatre and educational programming that advances the national dialogue on sexual and gender identity, and challenges and entertains audiences in Chicago and beyond.

STAFF

ARTISTIC & PROGRAMMING

Megan CarneyArtistic DirectorAlana Parvey ZalasManaging Director

Katie Klemme Interim Managing Director

Mia Vivens Associate Director of Education and Outreach (through April 2019)

Donny AcostaAssociate Director of About Face Youth Theatre

Amy Sheahan Education Associate

Benjamin Rezko Operations Coordinator

DEVELOPMENT

Dave (Dylan) Toropov Director of Individual & Major Giving and Special Events

Benjamin Sprunger Director of Institutional Giving

MARKETING & PUBLIC RELATIONS

Will Rogers Marketing Coordinator & Graphic Designer (through June 2019)

Charles Riffenburg Marketing Coordinator & Graphic Designer (since June 2019)

David Rosenberg Public Relations

Matt Schutz Communications Coordinator

INTERNS

Micah Manternach, Tricia Schmitz, Alyssa Cokinis, Mateo Hernandez, McKenzie Wilkes

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Becky Huinker, *President*Aaron Kacel, *Vice President*Derek Blin, *Treasurer*Ophelia A. Harkness, *Secretary*

Simon Chavez Angelica Grace Charles A. Jackson Maxwell Koziol Delia Kropp Geoff D. Robinson Luke Sokolowski Ed Talideh

BOARD FELLOWS (EX OFFICIO)

Carlyna Carvalho Amartya Chatterjee

HONORARY BOARD

Rob Abernathy
Jim Andrews
Pat Ewert
Ted Grady
William W. Greaves
Chris Landgraff
Michael Leppen
Dwight A. McBride
William J. Michel
Mary Morten
Mike Sullivan
Denis Weil

ARTISTIC ASSOCIATES

Patrick Andrews William Boles **Scott Bradley** Sheldon Brown Mikael Burke Philip Dawkins Scott Duff Scott Ferguson **Armand Fields** John Francisco Keira Fromm Delia Kropp Bob Kuhn Elizabeth Ledo Lexi Saunders Kelli Simpkins Benjamin Sprunger Paul Oakley Stovall Mieka van der Ploeg Alex Weisman

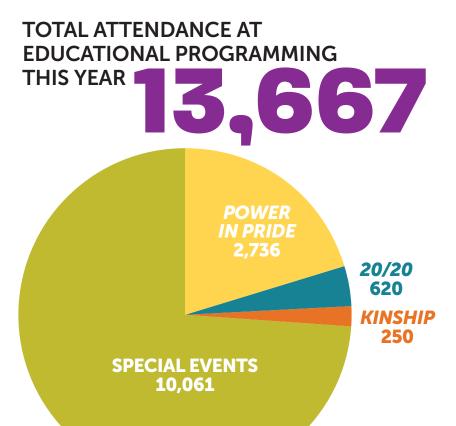


ABOUT FACE THEATRE EDUCATION

About Face Theatre's Education Department has three main areas:

- ▶ ABOUT FACE YOUTH THEATRE (page 5)
- ► OUTREACH AND ENGAGEMENT (page 14)
- ▶ YOUTH TASK FORCE (page 20)

Together, these programs increase the safety and leadership capacity of LGBTQIA+ youth and their allies, and catalyze youth-led theatre making and civic dialogue within schools and communities.







ABOUT FACE YOUTH THEATRE

About Face Youth Theatre (AFYT) is an award winning and nationally-recognized Youth Theatre program. Through original ensemble plays, created in dynamic collaboration with accomplished adult artists, we encourage and support LGBTQIA+ youth and their allies to become powerful agents for change.

As a result of this program, AFYT has developed and performed **16 original mainstage productions**, including this year's retrospective play about the last 20 years of the program: **20/20**.

In 2018, AFYT also developed a new performance series called *KINSHIP*. Alongside the mainstage production, *KINSHIP* performances happened throughout this year giving young artists previously unaffiliated with AFYT the opportunity to perform new and experimental pieces in an intimate variety-show format.

AFYT Program Highlights and Benefits

- Connections with a diverse network of peers
- Rigorous artistic training with professional artists
- Access to professional mentorship from local leaders and activists
- Connections to resources for support in different areas of your life
- Lessons about social justice and LGBTQIA+ history
- Leadership training and opportunities
- CTA cards and snacks at weekly workshops



AFYT BY THE NUMBERS

NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS









FINAL ENSEMBLE DEMOGRAPHICS





IDENTIFY AS TRANSGENDER, NONBINARY, AND/OR GENDER FLUID







AFYT STORY-SHARING WORKSHOPS

For the fall sessions of AFYT workshops, the company brought in 10 incredible queer teaching artists from around Chicago to share their stories and teach the ensemble different theatrical and story-telling skills. Workshops consisted of an activity led by each guest artist, ranging from character development exercises to creating a timeline of queer political resistance in Chicago, to focusing on how to tell a personal narrative through dance and movement.

Each workshop also featured an extended personal interview with the guest artist of the day, where they were asked questions such as "What was coming out like for you?" "How does being both a performer and an activist affect your work?" and "What is your hope for the future of queer youth?"









AFYT WORKSHOP TEACHING ARTISTS



ZAHRA BAKER

(she/her/hers) is a singer, musician, and spoken-word artist. She used music interwoven into her personal narrative of how AIDS affected her and her long courtship story with her wife. Zahra helped the ensemble write a song based off their own experiences.



SCOTT DUFF

(he/him/his) is an AFT Artistic Associate, past AFYT Director, and stand-up comedian. Scott discussed growing up in a small town in the 80s where being gay was unacceptable, and led the ensemble in a character development exercise.



AMIGAS LATINAS

(she/her/hers) Three founding members of Amigas Latinas met with AFYT and spoke about the early days and creating safe spaces for Latinas Lesbians in Chicago.



MAMA GLORIA

(she/her/hers) Gloria Allen is a 73-year-old black trans woman from the South Side who used to run a charm school at the Center on Halsted for mentoring other trans women. This interview was filmed by a crew for an independent documentary being produced on her life.



MOISES VILLADA

(he/him/his) is a former AFYT member and staff member at UIC's Gender and Sexuality Center. He told stories of his time with AFYT, his first romances, and what coming out to his family was like.



DARLING SQUIRE

(she/her/hers) is a dancer and choreographer who led a workshop on how movement can teach self-love and acceptance.



E. PATRICK JOHNSON

(he/him/his) is a professor of African American studies at Northwestern University. E. Patrick has written books about growing up as black and gay in the South, and spoke to the ensemble about those stories.



BENJI HART

(they/them/theirs) is an activist and mover. They helped AFYT create a timeline of queer and trans political resistance in Chicago, and spoke about the history of police brutality against the queer and PoC community.

SCRIPT-WRITING WORKSHOPS

In the spring, AFYT members gathered for five intensive script-writing workshops to brainstorm and write their show for the summer. The format of these workshops was inspired by Gloria Allen, one of the final guest artists who visited AFYT in the fall.

Mama Gloria had told AFYT that her one regret was that she never got to host all of the trans girls in her charm school for a tea party. So, in honor of Mama Gloria's story, the script-writing workshops were set up as tea parties. Tea and snacks were available every time as ensemble members sat together and spoke about their personal narratives, writing stories from their lives and weaving them together with the stories of their peers.

Additionally, as this show was designed to be a retrospective on the last 20 years of the program of AFYT, the ensemble looked through archival writings of past AFYT members.

Everyone who has been a part of AFYT has kept a journal of personal writings during the program, which they are told at the beginning of the program will remain with About Face, be read by AFYT's director, and could be used as material for a show.

So with large cardboard boxes overflowing with spiral notebooks, loose-leaf paper, and even napkins with writings on them from ensembles from the last 20 years, this year's ensemble dove into the archives to find stories they connected with that they wanted to share onstage.

Some of these writings, along with the ensemble's personal narratives and the stories they heard from guest artists in the fall, were woven together to create the script for their summer show: 20/20.







AFYT'S 20/20

This play marked the **20th anniversary** of About Face Youth Theatre, and **AFYT's 17th mainstage production**. For the occasion, AFYT wrote and devised a show that was a retrospective not only of their own lives, but of their fellow community members, past AFYT ensemble members, and guest artists whom they had interviewed.

Immersed in a timeless club atmosphere, 20/20 explored the resilience of chosen families, the generational impacts of AIDS, and the evolution of gender. Inspired by true stories of today's youth, program alumni, and master storytellers, this performance and all ages party drew out powerful lessons from the past to envision a vibrant and affirming future for queer lives.

The show used a format inspired by research on queer ballroom culture, with categories that contestants "walked" (or performed stories in) and received scores from judges (exlusively positive affirmation and validation). The ensemble rehearsed the art of voguing for this play and the show's choreography drew heavily on historical and contemporary vogue-style from queer underground ballrooms artfully interwoven with the show's central narratives. The show's categories ranged from stories of coming out, to first loves, to dealing with family, to mental health and hopes for the future.

PERFORMANCES (ALL SOLD OUT)

AVERAGE ATTENDEES PER PERFORMANCE

POST-SHOW TALKBACKS

620 TOTAL ATTENDEES





PRESS REACTIONS

"...Joyous and painful, humorous and angry, sexy and shy—and always honest and authentic. The dozen cast members are talented and poised. More important, they are **brave**, **curious**, **intelligent**, **and eloquent**. 20/20 is powerful stuff." –Chicago Reader

"A living, breathing queer retrospective." -Chicago Tribune

AUDIENCE REACTIONS

Post-show Survey Responses

"The best youth production I have seen! Loved it."

"Truly incredible"

Post-show Talkback Comment

"I think your play does a very good job of explaining everything that needs to be said. But I just wanted to say, as a queer youth who's growing up wanting to know more about queer history, and how to help improve queer lives around the world and in the future: thank you. Being able to see a show and be, like, excited to see theatre and see queer lives and queer history, and me learning in the process while I'm not sitting mindlessly watching old people throw jokes at me that I don't understand; me hearing language that I use in my every-day life, slang that I use in my everyday life and seeing it on stage is, I don't know, that's pretty cool to me. Y'all are really fierce people who I really want to get to know better. When else are we going to see each other? Take me with you! Thank you for everything you've done for us. I just feel very touched and emotional over here"

REFLECTIONS FROM AFYT

"In terms of artistic skills, I gained confidence in work and writing. Taking out the unnecessary details to get to the point more directly."

"Without information, you can't be an activist. This show was so informational, it allowed me to recognize different topics in my community that could use some attention and places to find resources."

"I have become a much more confident writer and a much more comfortable deviser."

"I can definitely say that this process has made me less afraid to speak my truth."

"I learned a lot through my research on HIV/AIDs. I also feel I have a much better understanding of what it was like to be queer in the past."

"This has been a big year for me personally and artistically, and AFYT has done a lot to contribute to that growth."

"I learned that your words can be in many forms and they don't have to be complicated for it to be considered art." "I feel so much more supported, seen and heard than I ever have in any other theatre space. It was so nice to not be in a space full of straight white men."

"I feel more aware on racial issues, queer racial issues, queer issues, etc."

"Now, I bother to correct people when they use my wrong pronouns. I also speak out more in school."

"I was new to Chicago during the Fall and AFYT provided a safe place for me to convene weekly and create and hear from people who felt the same but weren't new to Chicago to make me feel as if what was happening to me was normal."

"I feel like I have found a safe place for me to express myself."

"AFYT definitely made me feel like my desire to create, perform, and be who I've been wanting to be is more possible than ever. Before, I used to wait around until my work was "perfect" before I shared it, but now I know "perfect" is a way to protect myself from going for it."





OUTREACH & ENGAGEMENT

For the last twenty years, About Face Theatre Outreach Ensemble has toured productions and workshops to schools, organizations, campuses, churches, and conferences around Chicago to deliver LGBTQIA+ stories and advocate for safe and equitable environments. Our performances and discussions provide opportunities for people of all ages to have important conversations about

gender, sexuality, and intersecting identities while exploring ways to be a better ally and support healthy relationships. Offering a touring show, customizable interactive workshops, and guest speakers, our Outreach and Engagement program is a flexible means by which to build community, allyship, and foster understanding of LGBTQIA+ expressions and experiences.





OTHER LOCATIONS:

Anderson Park, Unity Park, Washington Park, Gill Park, Berger Park, Canadian Imperial Bank of Commerce (CIBC)





SPECIAL OUTREACH EVENTS

CHICAGO IDEAS WEEK at the MUSEUM OF CONTEMPORARY ART

A public program monologue led by one of the Outreach actors.

Attendance: 400

NORTH PARK UNIVERSITY AXELSON CENTER EQUITY CONFERENCE

A university conference in which Outreach led a workshop. Attendance: 10

NIGHT OUT IN THE PARKS PRESENTS LOVE, SIMON at MILLENIUM PARK

A film screening before which AFYT and Outreach introduced themselves and AFT's programs and performed short monologues before the movie. *Attendance: 9,000*

COLUMBIA COLLEGE CHICAGO PANEL

An outreach actor spoke at a university panel on LGBTQ activism and inclusion. *Attendance: 20*

PASO: WEST SUBURBAN ACTION PROJECT

One outreach actor performed monologues and personal stories drawing on our Outreach show. *Attendance: 60*

HAVAS WORKPLACE

At Havas ice cream offices, two actors performed a modified version of the Outreach show. *Attendance: 400*

CHICAGO HUMANITIES FESTIVAL: The History of Drag with Frank DeCaro

An actor performed at a panel hosted by one of our neighboring theatres. *Attendance: 75*

THEATRE ON THE LAKE

A panel featuring our Outreach cast. *Attendance:* 6

GENDER REVOLUTION IN THE WORKPLACE

A presentation by AFT Artistic Associate Delia on trans rights and inclusion at the workplace Yello. *Attendance: 40* "As a writer and performer, [Outreach] challenged me to be genuine in my vulnerability. Not just emotional. But genuine. I think that's what kids respond to the most profoundly: honesty from an adult figure. Especially a queer person. It became so clear to me that these kids have so many unanswered questions that they don't know where to begin until we start sharing ourselves. Then, the floodgates open and some of the most powerful and honest discussions about identity, confidence, self worth, and origins occur between audience and performers. Queer magic at its finest."

-Xander, Outreach Ensemble Member 2018





CONSULTATION, EVENT, TALK-BACK, FOLLOW-UP

These are the steps of an Outreach event with About Face Theatre!

PRE-CONSULTATION is an essential part of our process, by which we determine the needs of the school or community organization we're coming to, and we also get to learn about the environment in which we'll be performing.

THE EVENT can feature a performance of our touring show, a performance and a **TALKBACK**, or another kind of interactive workshop or guest speaker.

With each event, we aim to:

- Model community building and allyship through LGBTQIA+ representation and storytelling on stage.
- Increase understanding of evolving gender and sexuality experiences with regard to language, identities, and expressions.
- Embolden individuals and communities to identify actionable strategies for cultivating inclusion.

FOLLOW-UP on our event consists of a brief survey filled out by the school or performance venue to let us know how best to continue our partnership! We also provide access especially in schools for students to follow-up with us in case they would like to join our Youth Ensemble.

POWER IN PRIDE

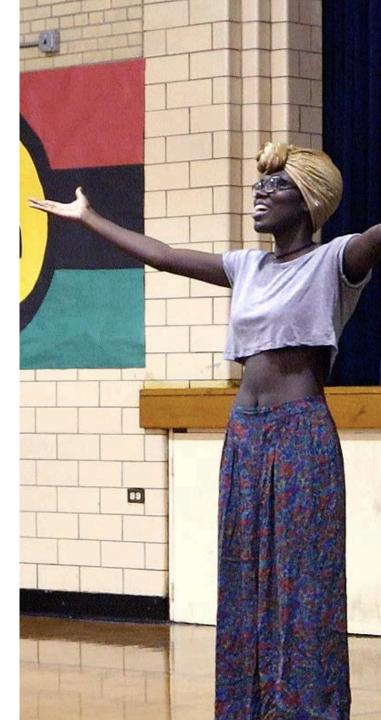
This touring show from 2018-2019 was a 30-minute play and interactive discussion, featuring five actors. Every actor in this show was a person of color, allowing for greater connection and diversity of representation when visiting schools where student populations are similarly diverse.

Based in true experiences of building chosen family, maintaining self care, being a strong ally, and finding personal joy, *Power in Pride* invited audiences into positive dialogue to create more equitable and inclusive environments for all.

Following a workshop last September led by Dr. S Simmons of University of Illinois-Chicago, About Face's Outreach model shifted this year to make room for a new role: a stage manager who accompanied the Outreach tour to all their performances. This stage manager, AFT Artistic Associate Lexi Saunders, went to every Outreach performance with the cast and documented qualitative feedback about the questions that were asked in talkbacks and the reactions the audience had to each show.

One such story our stage manager was able to tell was that of how a student. who was on their phone at the start of the show, became more engaged as the performance went on to the point where they turned to the person behind them and asked "Why am I crying?" in response to the actors' pieces about self-care. We know questions were asked of our actors like "How did you know when was the right time to come out?", "What does gendergueer mean?", and "As an activist, I can make a difference. As an 18 year old, I cannot. What can we do?" Our Power in *Pride* cast had the opportunity to address each of these questions, and their direct conversation with the youth they met on tour enacted all of About Face's goals for our program.

Conversations like these help us in our mission to build LGBTQIA+ community, foster intergenerational mentorship relationships, further the dialogue on gender and sexual identity in schools and work environments around Chicago, and provide strategies and encouragement to those seeking to cultivate inclusion and advance justice for the LGBTQIA+ population.



REACTIONS FROM STUDENTS

"I appreciated the self-care piece more than anything and it's a really important thing to resonate with everyone in this room. I wish I had heard that and seen this when I was younger. It would have been a game changer."

"I absolutely love y'all's confidence. It's actually inspiring. A couple times I wanted to cry. You guys are amazing performers. **Just, thank you so much.**"

"I've been out since I came out of my mother. But I'm friends with so many brightly colored people. I've gotten to watch them come out and it's hard. I want that for myself and for them to have everyone around them love them. In this day in age, it today's climate, it feels like we are taking steps backwards. As an activist, I can make a difference. As an 18 year old, I cannot. What can we do?" (Performer response: "Don't underestimate the power and impact of you being OUT on those around you.")

"This is exactly what we need right now."

"We're from Jamaica, which can be a very dangerous place for LGBTQ community. I have not come out to my family and I think they're very ignorant. I try to speak up for people and for myself because I do want to come out to them. I love my family and I love my country and I want to go back. I have so many friends who are planning trips to go back to Jamaica. I don't want to tell them "okay don't act gay today. But also you might get killed. You might get stoned." I have close friends who have been stoned, who have been burned alive. I want to protect my people but also be part of my country and my culture. How do I do that?"

"I'm glad I saw this because I can use some of these stories to talk to other people."

"When you were talking about losing your grandfather, I had something similar. My nana wasn't a fortune teller but she was an Italian matriarch and she had her ways. Losing her 2 years ago was really hard for me because the rest of my family thinks being gay is wrong and she was the only one who was more flexible. It was nice to have something similar in your piece."









YOUTH TASK FORCE

The fierce and fabulous Youth Task Force (YTF) is made up of a team of returning ensemble members who have trained with AFYT and are ready to take on additional responsibilities as leaders. YTF members assist in facilitating workshop activities, organizing social excursions, and curating a special event each year.

This year, YTF members held leadership roles within the cast and production team of 20/20, led post-show discussions and talkbacks with audiences of 20/20, and served on About Face's Board of Directors.



ANGELÍCA GRACE (she/her/hers) was the choreographer and host/ MC of 20/20. She also performs in AFT's touring show Power in Pride and serves on AFT's Board of Directors. Angelíca is also a co-founder and producer of KINSHIP.



MICAH
MANTERNACH
(he/him or they/them)
was About Face Theatre's
summer Production
Assistant and Props
Designer for 20/20. They
are also a co-founder and
producer of KINSHIP.



SHARON PASIA (she/her or they/them) was a dance captain for 20/20. They are also a co-founder and producer of KINSHIP.



KINSHIP

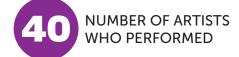
KINSHIP is a new performance series from AFYT created by the Youth Task Force. An **all-ages queer variety show series**, *KINSHIP* creates brave space for storytelling, drag, spoken word-poetry, monologues, music, and connection for people across the city of Chicago. Prioritizing young artists of color, most performers are youth under 25 years of age, and many are previously unaffiliated with About Face Theatre. It is a performance series aimed at curating a safe, supportive, and creative space for queer artists to experiment with their performance crafts and share in a dance party.

All proceeds from KINSHIP (pay-what-you-can with a suggested \$5 donation) went directly to paying the young artists who were showcasing their work.

MILESTONE

KINSHIP packed the house at Steppenwolf's 1700 theatre space, making it the most well-attended Look-OUT series performance Steppenwolf has ever hosted!

NUMBER OF PERFORMANCE IN 2018-2019











LOOKING AHEAD

As KINSHIP has grown exponentially in popularity and attendance since its inception, About Face Youth Theatre will be allocating more resources towards the program in the coming year. We hope to allow the program to be hosted more frequently, and to gear our workshop trainings towards supporting the young artists looking to showcase their work. Keep an eye out for our name as we continue to sweep the city!

"A highlight memory of the year for me was when I performed at KINSHIP. It was my first time ever performing in drag and I was so nervous but I think it went really well."

-AFYT member













THANK YOU!

Your ongoing support makes our critical work possible.



5252 N Broadway Ave, Fl 2, Chicago, IL 60640 (773) 784-8565 • AboutFaceTheatre.com

- f /AboutFaceTheatre @ @aboutfacechi
- @aboutfacechi
- /aboutfacetheatrechicago