

2015 - 2016 report

A COMPANY OF GIRLS

portland, maine

The curtsies have been taken. The lights blacked. The props and costumes put away. The shows have closed, but the impact continues in the hearts and minds of the young artists who make up A Company of Girls.

CURTAIN CALL

Over the last nine months A Company of Girls (ACOG) worked with 14 middle and high school girls in our Ensemble group and 10 girls in our elementary Fledgling group, meeting twice a week for 2-3 hours per session. Totaling more than 210 hours of after school enrichment, we gave these girls the chance to experience the arts, with a mission that goes beyond excellence on stage to motivate and inspire youth to pursue excellence in life.

As the flowers came up this spring, we watched the girls' blossom as they shared their art with the community. In May, the girls performed *Holes* and *Charlotte's Web*, plays that explore the importance of character, the power of friendship and the poignancy of creative problem solving. Along the way, our young artists experienced each of these aspects first-hand, bonding with each other and our artist-mentors through enriching after-school experiences in the visual, performing and culinary arts.

Additionally, we worked with girls from Portland High School in collaboration with the Portland Mentoring Alliance. These girls, primarily from Portland's refugee and immigrant population, met once a week for a curriculum of dance and cooking. The act of gathering together in a kitchen coalesced bonding between girls and mentors and provided support that these girls craved and needed. They were able to literally mix together bits from their homelands and bits from their new home, almost as if paralleling their own internal experiences. Baking cakes and cookies, dinners and appetizers, they discovered an important sense of self alongside an equally important sense of community. For immigrant



PO Box 7527, Portland, ME 04112 / 207-874-2107
www.acompanyofgirls.org

and refugee youth, these two pieces —self and community— are most critical and most vulnerable. They were able to overcome insecurities, set aside the tumultuousness of their daily lives to find joy and opportunity in an environment where their talents and contributions to the community are relished

Our program corroborates what research has demonstrated, that the arts help young people achieve heightened academic standing, a strong capacity for self-assessment and an assured sense of their own ability to plan and work for a positive future. The arts are an indispensable part of a complete education – complimenting other disciplines and establishing a foundation for success in school and for a lifetime of learning. And as NEA research shows, the impact of the arts may be even more critical for disadvantaged youth.

Many of our girls face economic, educational, experiential and logistical barriers such as domestic instability, food insecurity, learning disabilities, and other challenges. We broaden their horizons and nurture optimism and imagination helping girls to develop their individual voices while creating a sense of belonging and community vital to girls who might otherwise consider themselves isolated or alone. Adolescence is a tumultuous time, and for too many of our city's young girls brutal criticism, bullying and societal pressures can be devastating. We offer an antidote, giving girls a safe place to express themselves through art, building leadership, teamwork, communication and other life skills.



OUTCOMES + DATA

We intentionally bring girls together from across Portland so they are likely to encounter personalities, perspectives, and ideas that they might not find in their own neighborhoods – this year our Ensemble program drew girls, ranging in age from 11 to 16, from King and Lyman Moore Middle Schools, Memorial Middle and Windham Middle School and Portland High School, as well as three home schooled participants. Our elementary-school aged Fledgling program drew girls from East End Community School, Lyseth and Presumpscott Elementary Schools, Breakwater School, and one homeschooled participant.

Through our programs we strive to enable girls to:

- ⇒ develop creativity, critical thinking, problem solving and other related skills
- ⇒ practice leadership and decision making
- ⇒ feel empowered through positive risk taking and recognition
- ⇒ build meaningful relationships with peers, adult mentors and community members

We measure outcomes through year-end surveys initially created by DHHS and an independent evaluator. Additionally, to encourage empowerment and build self-awareness, self-confidence, problem solving and introspection, the girls create their own goal sheets at the beginning of each year in the areas of the arts, family, school and self, which are reviewed and reflected on at the end of the program year.

PO Box 7527, Portland, ME 04112 / 207-874-2107
www.acompanyofgirls.org

What we learned:

96% reported wanting to pursue higher education.

100% set goals for themselves at the beginning of the program year, and **71%** reported achieving those goals.

87% reported feelings of improved self-worth after participating in ACOG programming.

100% demonstrated improved problem solving and team-building skills.

84% reported having developed methods for dealing with conflict situations after being involved in ACOG programming.

100% exhibited improved confidence and skill at reading aloud during the theatre rehearsal process.

Furthermore, we monitor girls mid- and end-of-year grades as well as school attendance.

In 2015-2016:

92% improved their grades from the beginning to the end of the year and/or maintained high-grade standards (A/B's or 2/3's).

94% attended school on a regular basis — missing less than 14 days throughout the school year.

87% of girls attended **92%** of available ACOG programming days.

Additionally, we expanded our connections with parents, engaging the participation of...

92% of parents in some aspect of volunteerism for the program.

And...

90% of girls have been in the program two years or longer.



a place to call **HOME**

This year we took the important step of moving the program to a more prominent location on Forest Avenue that offers greater exposure, more room to breathe and create, better visibility and accessibility, and gives us the potential opportunity to expand on our current programming.

Critically the move helps us to grow each of our key program areas:

- **Visual Arts:** we now have a gallery space to display local artists to inspire the girls and to give them the added boost of confidence of seeing their own work on the walls!
- **Performing Arts:** we have rehearsal space where girls are able to practice for their performances
- **Culinary Arts:** we have our own kitchen area and are mastering delectable recipes each week.

At ACOG we encourage our girls to dream big. This new space allows our organizational imagination to dream big as well. In the coming year, we will begin exploring the growth possibilities that this new space affords, to reach more young people and to widen community engagement. In our new space, we can provide the recognition young people crave and deserve while offering unique opportunities for the youth (and families) from different schools/programs to connect and learn from each other.

WANT TO VISIT?

671 Forest Ave, Portland
call today for a tour: **207-874-2107**

WANT TO SEND US A GIFT?

PO Box 7527, Portland, ME 04112

WANT TO LEARN MORE?

www.acompanyofgirls.org

the dress project

This year we formed a new partnership with the Portland Museum of Art to develop "PROJECT ACOG: A Study in Dress as Art" where our Ensemble girls selected a work of art from the PMA's permanent collection to inspire the design and fabrication of a dress—their own, unique creation of wearable art. Many of these girls didn't know how to turn on a sewing machine before the year began. More than the skills they acquired, they learned to conquer new challenges in new ways, to persevere through obstacles, to innovate and to explore—using muslin to achieve the look of the distressed sea, tediously painting patterns to evoke the emotion they desired, inventing new straps to mimic the concentric circles that inspired them, testing unconventional materials, and combining patterns to create something altogether different and new.

The girls paired their works in progress with their culinary delights at a tea they hosted for supporters at the esteemed restaurant 555 where they offered a peek into the intersection of the three key program elements by showcasing their dress sketches and works in progress, telling the audience about their efforts with courage earned from their theatrical endeavors and delighting the crowd with delectables they had cooked through their culinary undertakings.

The girls then donned their remarkable creations for a public showing at the Portland Museum of Art. There they stood, in their own art amid the artworks that inspired them, earning the regard of the public and fueling a budding confidence and the continued desire to grow and learn. They also ran a workshop for younger youth, developing their own leadership by sharing their enthusiasm and connecting more youth to our city's museums and to the creative thinking that will shape all of our futures.

THANK YOU:

five fifty-five



PORLAND MUSEUM of ART





ART *in* the PARKS with A COMPANY OF GIRLS

locations

For the summer of 2015 we expanded our "Art in the Parks" program to include one additional site and located our programs in the following neighborhoods:

- ➡ Riverton Park
- ➡ Kennedy Park
- ➡ Sagamore Village

These neighborhoods are served by the Portland Housing Authority and have some of the highest poverty rates within the city of Portland.

summer programming

A little chalk or a dab of paint can open countless creative possibilities.

Our summer outreach program "Art in the Parks" helped turn idle summer afternoons into imaginative wonderlands, bringing art to under-resourced neighborhoods by offering free weekly arts programming to hundreds of local children, helping fill their summers with creativity and inspiration, instead of isolation and loneliness. **Over the summer of 2015 over 190 youth (both boys and girls) participated!**

Our "Art in the Parks" curriculum helped strengthened kids connection to literacy by aligning our projects with popular children's books. We created frightful monster puppets through the inspiration of *Where the Wild Things Are*, designed whimsical rainbows and patchwork elephants for *Elmer and the Rainbow* and took a magical journey with *Harold and the Purple Crayon*.

Additionally, to maintain our connection to girls who participate in our school year program, we offered them opportunities to volunteer as interns and art assistants.



Over the course of the summer over 168 volunteer hours were logged between ACOG girls and community volunteers.



thank you



We believe every girl deserves support to succeed and we thank you for making that support possible.

"I have witnessed firsthand the power of this amazing after school program. A Company of Girls provides a safe, fun environment for girls, while surrounding them with caring, supportive and encouraging adults and peers. Their close knit groups foster much needed social skills for girls who may struggle with connectedness, inclusiveness and belonging. A Company of Girls also helps encourage and increase girls' feelings of confidence and competence, thus positively affecting academics." – LCSW at Spurwink & School Social Worker at Lyseth Elementary

