

2016 - 2017 report

A COMPANY OF GIRLS

portland, maine

The paints and supplies have been put away. The props and costumes are back in storage. The school year has ended, but the impact continues in the hearts and minds of the young artists who make up A Company of Girls.



CURTAIN CALL



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

Providing girls with an added measure of support, A Company of Girls knows the tremendous power of art and mentorship to transform lives. We have seen it. For 20 years.

As we celebrate the hallmark of two decades of supporting girls in Greater Portland to succeed, we recognize that what we do would not be possible without the generosity of the community, and our collective belief in uplifting and educating our city's girls.

Thank you.

A Company of Girls' (ACOG) intensive core after-school program, coupled with our outreach efforts during the school year and summer, provide a depth and breadth of exposure to the arts — visual, culinary, and performing—as tools for self-expression and empowerment — opening new horizons, building resiliency, and developing social-emotional and 21st century skills. By offering programs free of charge, and providing transportation, we are able to reach youth most in need, developing imaginative capacity and nurturing future leaders with a spirit of inclusiveness and a desire to excel. Our mission is to “strengthen and empower girls and their families and foster community through the arts.” Our programs result in palpable transformations that last long past curtain call as we give girls the chance to believe in themselves and to positively impact their lives, schools, communities and futures.

Over the last nine months, ACOG's staff mentors have worked with 25 elementary, middle and high school girls in our core afterschool program, meeting twice a week for 2-3 hours per session, totaling approximately 225 hours of afterschool enrichment per girl. Additionally, we worked with 30+ girls through our outreach programming at Portland High School and Riverton Boys and Girls Club. Months of rehearsals led to first-rate productions where the girls performed *The Wizard of Oz* and *The Secret Garden* for the public. Both plays spoke to the power of what is possible when we believe — in ourselves, and in each other. In much the same way, we use the arts to cultivate a strong capacity for self-assessment and an assured sense of young people's own ability to plan and work toward a positive future.

Ultimately we help girls be “bold.” Girls are often discouraged from taking risks – but life is full of risks; navigating through them effectively fosters confidence. Adolescence is a critical period in a girl's life when significant physical, emotional and social changes shape her future. It is a time of vulnerability but also an ideal time to leverage development, and empower girls for better futures. When given the support and space to take positive risks they flourish, and the result is a stronger community for all of us. Stepping onto the stage before a live audience can be terrifying. But as Eleanor Roosevelt once said, “you gain strength, courage and confidence by every experience in which you really stop and look fear in the face.”

OUTCOMES + DATA

From improving literacy through script reading and analysis, to multimedia arts explorations threaded with contemporary issues, we focus our curriculum on the four common traits of resiliency: independence, problem solving, optimism and social connection. Small ratios of instructors to participants allows for much needed individualized attention and “high touch” transformative impact. We work closely with each girl to watch for and address factors that might be a barrier to her success. We formally measure the impact of our programs with surveys initially created by DHHS and an independent evaluator. This year, after working with the Data Innovation Project at the University of Southern Maine, we have further refined our surveys with the aim of better capturing our impact on social-emotional learning and important 21st century skills. Additionally, grades and attendance for girls are requested mid-year, and at the end of the school year, to ensure collaborative impact and monitor progress and attendance rates (girls are not able to attend ACOG if they have not attended school).

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



What we learned:

In 2016-2017,

91% of youth attended more than **90%** of sessions, and **75%** of girls have been in the program two years or longer.

91%

reported feelings of improved self-worth and self-confidence after being in ACOG programming

82%

developed and/or are showing improvement in team-building and problem-solving skills

80%

plan to graduate high school and continue on to college or some other type of post-secondary education

91%

feel more confident to speak up in class or in front of people after participating in ACOG

80%

feel ACOG has helped them develop leadership skills

100%

reported that being in ACOG has positively influenced the choices they make

**“I was quiet
and then I just wasn’t”**

Furthermore, we monitor girls mid-year and end of year grades and attendance. This year:

83%

improved their grades from the beginning to the end of the year and and/or maintained high-grade standards (A/B's / 3/4's)

82%

attended school on a regular basis (missing less than 14 days throughout the school year)

We further expanded our connections with parents, engaging the participation of 87% of parents in some aspect of volunteerism for the program.

PARTNERS & BEYOND

We partner with other arts organizations to provide opportunities to amplify girls voices and share their work with the community – for example, last year we exhibited at the Portland Museum of Art and performed at the Portland Ballet Studio Theater and Mayo Street Arts, as well as partnering with the Portland Symphony Orchestra by having one of our girls featured in a PSO Discovery Concert. Additionally, we are very proud to have been awarded a Partnership Grant from the Maine Arts Commission.

We also work closely with educators and the after-school community to attain a wider reach. ACOG's Executive Director Jennifer Roe currently serves on the Board of the Maine Alliance for Arts Education (MAAE) where she was a Cumberland County liaison for Arts Education Advocacy Day at the State House. Last year, six ACOG girls (as well as two representatives from Deering High School) accompanied Jen to the State House and voiced their feelings, directly to the Representatives from their districts, about the importance and impact of the arts on their educational success. The message was that not only does every student in the state deserve access to quality arts education, but also that the community at large has a part to play in making sure that access is achieved. Additionally, we partnered with LearningWorks Afterschool to produce the 2016 "Lights On Afterschool" Rally at Portland City Hall, drawing attention to the importance of out-of-school time programming.

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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

what's new

the ambassadors

By giving adolescent girls the chance to discover new talents and competency, to step outside of the box, we are creating the next generation of female leaders—confident in themselves and connected to their communities. This year, driven by the interest and requests of the participating girls, ACOG developed the "Ambassador" program for high school girls who have been in the program for two or more years. This group meets weekly and enables these young women to take a more mature role in the organization, strengthening their leadership development through community engagement and broadening their horizons. The Ambassadors ran our annual wreath sales fundraiser, baked concessions for performances, participated in community projects such as speaking at the "Lights On Afterschool" Rally at City Hall and marching in the Portland Pride! Parade, and represented ACOG by speaking at the Maine Bankers' Association's "Women in Banking" conference.

outreach expansion

In 2013, we piloted "Art in the Parks" and have continually expanded to provide free weekly programming for hundreds of children (ages 2-17, with the majority under 9) linking the visual arts with literacy to combat summer slide through open-studio style enrichment for hundreds of children in Kennedy and Riverton Parks, as well as Sagamore Village and Front Street, neighborhoods with some of the greatest poverty rates in the area. Locating our programming outside sites providing free lunches through the USDA's Summer Food Service Program and by working in tandem with the City of Portland's ConnectED initiative and "Summer Success Project," we are able to directly reach youth (both boys and girls) most in need of free, safe and positive activities during summertime, helping to lessen the achievement gap between low and high-income youth.

This year we've expanded our outreach to offer monthly arts programming at the Riverton Boys and Girls club where we can engage younger youth in our programs, and stay connected to many of our "Art in the Park" participants throughout the school year – building a bridge from our program to their community.





Confronted with new challenges, girls rise to the high bars we set, showing just what is possible when youth are given the support they need to achieve their fullest potential. For example, one of our girls came to us as a timid fourth grader, reticent to speak up. Her single parent family lives well below the poverty line and as the oldest of five, she has a tremendous amount of responsibility in the home for caring for her younger siblings. ACOG is one place where she can focus on her own strengths, passions and desires, and is surrounded by staff mentors who inspire, encourage and support her.

As it is ACOG's 20th anniversary, we asked the girls where they see themselves in twenty years. This was her response:

"Because of ACOG I can see myself achieving my goals and having followed my dreams in twenty years. ACOG has given me insight on what I want to do and has prepared me for the real world. I hope to help and inspire people, just as everyone in ACOG has done for me."

