

2020 IH Grantee Spotlight with:
**JACQUELINE RUSSELL, Artistic Director at
CHICAGO CHILDREN'S THEATRE**

PROJECT: *Trauma-Informed Arts Education for a Trauma-Informed Chicago* (approved Dec. '19)

LOCATION: Chicago, IL

ORGANIZATION:

The Chicago Children's Theatre (CCT) was founded in 2005 with the notion that a great theater city needs a great children's theater. Nearly 15 years later, it has produced 20 world premieres, mostly from award-winning literary works. CCT has received six NEA Art Works grants, and in 2017 became the first theater for young audiences in the U.S. to win a National Theatre Award from the American Theatre Wing, creators of the Tony Awards. CCT also continues to grow its education programs, offering classes, workshops, winter and spring break camps, and summer camps for children up to age 13.

PROJECT:

"Trauma-Informed Arts Education" is a collaborative approach to discussing and delivering high-quality support services for families experiencing trauma and its residual effects. CCT's primary partner for this project is Lurie's Center for Childhood Resilience. The initiative includes discussion sessions, a public forum, and workshops, all with the goal of creating a network of arts organizations and arts educators who are trauma-informed and draw upon the same strategies, best practices, curricula and methodologies.

UPCOMING EVENTS:

 Learn about the organization at www.chicagochildrenstheatre.org

 Learn more about Lurie Children's CCR at:
www.luriechildrens.org/en/specialties-conditions/center-for-childhood-resilience/
www.childhoodresilience.org/p-p-resources/2018/5/25/trauma

**chicago
children's
theatre**



Q&A SESSION:

***The Q&A session was moderated by Mark Hallett, Program Manager, Grants on March 9, 2020.*

Question: What is the most important thing people should know about your work at Chicago Children's Theatre?

Jacqueline: *Chicago Children's Theatre is a unique arts organization with an equal commitment to access and artistic excellence. For over 15 years, CCT has filled a void as the city's premier nonprofit professional theatre company for young people, with a focus on reaching underserved CPS students throughout Chicago's 77 neighborhoods. We provide free and greatly reduced-price admission to tens-of-thousands of low-income community members annually. We are an industry leader in developing innovative programs for youth with special needs, including the internationally-known The Red Kite Project (theatre and arts education for young people on the autism spectrum). Through exciting new partnerships, most recently with the Center for Childhood Resilience housed at Lurie Children's Hospital, we explore how access to high-quality arts education can positively impact individual and community quality of life for young children exposed to trauma.*

Question: Who makes your work possible?

Jacqueline: *CCT is a 501c3 charity, and earned income represents less than 40% of annual revenue. We rely on an ever-growing list of over 550 individual, corporate, foundation and government supporters to fulfill our mission. Local partners include: Polk Bros Foundation, Paul M. Angell Family Foundation, The Pritzker Family, MacArthur Fund for Arts and Culture at Prince, ComEd, The Crown Family, US Bank, The Elizabeth Morse Charitable Trust, The John Buck Co, The Butler Family Foundation, Illinois Arts Council, Illinois Humanities Council and Chicago DCASE.*

CCT also engages in cross-sector collaborations with the city's leading nonprofit institutions, including the Center for Childhood Resilience housed at Lurie Children's Hospital, the Greater Chicago Food Depository, Ounce of Prevention and Ingenuity Chicago. These partners provide expertise and resources that assist CCT in mobilizing the theatre arts to address pressing community issues, from hunger to poverty to trauma to education support. CCT also partners with over 200 CPS schools each year to empower and impact neighborhoods all across Chicago.

Question: How do you see the arts, culture and humanities as being essential?

Jacqueline: *Theatre and arts education have a dynamic correlation with individual and community wellness indicators. The lengthy list of essential benefits to arts education includes promoting self-expression and instilling a sense of identity. Theatre gives people, and particularly children, the chance to see others and be seen. When youth are exposed to diverse stories, performed by diverse artists, they gain social/cultural competencies along with cultivating a sense of empathy. Another example of the positive impact of the arts is in its proven ability to instill hope. Recent research conducted by the Wolf/Brown Firm with The New Victory Theater in New York reveals young students, traditionally labeled as "at-risk," who are regularly exposed to live theatre performances and arts education services are more optimistic about their futures than those who are not. What is more essential than hope?*

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Question: Anything else?

Jacqueline: *CCT operates out of its recently opened, first-ever permanent home in Chicago's historic West Loop neighborhood. In 2017, CCT transformed the former 12th district police station into a performing arts and education center. A place once reserved for confining human spirit is now a home for amplifying creativity and expression. CCT's "The Station," is located at the geographic crossroads (100 S. Racine Avenue) between the vibrant Loop and marginalized communities to the south and west, ideally positioned to continue the company's tradition of access to high-quality, diverse theatre and arts education programs. CCT invites families of all means, backgrounds and abilities to join us at The Station for a performance, class, camp, or community gathering.*

In the wake of the COVID-19 crisis, CCT's industrious staff have been hard at work creating online and virtual content including: Play@Home Zoom classes, Red Kite Fly@Home classes for youth on the autism spectrum, the Ralla Klepak Play at Home Contest, Virtual Spring Break Camp, Social Media Sing-Alongs, the Audra Tutto Bene (Everything will be Okay) Window Campaign, and a new Youtube channel (CCTv---Virtual Theatre & Learning from Chicago Children's Theatre) that features the FREDERICK virtual puppet show narrated by Michael Shannon. <https://youtu.be/qd2zaLyaCJM>

Additionally, CCT recognizes that as the COVID-19 pandemic continues and (eventually) passes, the crisis will have levied a great deal of trauma and its residual effects on our community. This makes our partnership with the Center for Childhood Resilience at Lurie Children's all-the-more timely, relevant and urgent. As we keep momentum working on this project, CCT and the CRC will be incorporating how theatre and arts education can be leveraged to help us learn, heal and grow from this traumatic event.