

► LGBTQ Youth Theater



Empowering
Youth &
Inspiring
Audiences

Mukti Fund
2008 - 2017 Report



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I got a sense of community and safety that I never got anywhere else. When I came here, I was homeless. I had been through a lot and I didn't belong anywhere, but here I did. I got more confidence here and I learned that my stories matter, they're worth sharing.




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Thank you. Our son was in the play. It's the first time we really listened and we've never been able to hear him. We never realized he'd been bullied or understood all of the pain he's been experiencing. We realize how much we love our son and how little we have listened and understood him.



After watching one of the youth theater performances, I now have greater empathy for how different their life experience may be from mine. I am a cisgender heterosexual and it is giving me more insights into the daily issues faced by queer youth and people of color.



Mukti Fund

www.Muktifund.org

Dear friends of queer youth,

The quotes you've just read convey how queer youth theater experience can make a difference in the lives of youth who participate, in the lives of adults who volunteer, the parents of those involved in the programs and those in the audience.

As you'll see in the pages that follow, the theaters Mukti Fund have supported are unique - some are general theaters with a queer youth program, some are part of a larger queer theater operation, and some are just a theater for queer youth. A few are run only by volunteers and others have paid professional staff. Some have been around for many years and some for only a couple of years. They all share a vital commitment: to encourage youth participants to reach their full potential.

Mukti Fund has had the honor of funding these theaters for almost a decade. Our interest and enthusiasm continues but we are a modest sized private foundation that has spent down most of its endowment at the time of this writing.

As you read the stories of these organizations, we hope you will be inspired by the great gifts these theaters and the Pride Youth Theater Alliance (PYTA) provide to the youth participants. Please consider the individual and institutional donors you know who might be able to carry on the support of Queer Youth Theatre that we no longer can provide. Your support could create the same kind of understanding and breakthroughs – powerful validation of the important place that Queer Youth Theater can have in the lives of our youth.

Michael Dively

Michael Dively
Mukti Fund founder
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MUKTI FUND ◀

Our Queer Youth Theater Journey

After two decades of funding historic preservation and environmental concerns on the Caribbean islands of St. Kitts and Nevis, the Mukti Fund trustees agreed to shift our focus to domestic projects relating to Gay and Lesbian concerns and begin to spend down its endowment.

In fall 2008, the trustees gathered in Key West and refined their focus to support the empowerment of queer youth. After exploring options for where the limited resources of the foundation could be most effective, we agreed upon a vision of empowering LGBTQ youth to reach their full potential through engagement with queer youth theaters.

Nine queer youth theaters were identified, and each were offered the opportunity to apply for a Queer Youth Theater Fund (QYTF) grant. Grants totaling \$105,000 were made in spring 2009. That set of grants marked the beginning of eight years of Queer Youth Theater grants totaling \$1,764,000 to date. Several thousand LGBTQ youth have been directly involved in theaters supported by QYTF, and their performances have reached a variety of audiences totaling tens of thousands.

The QYTF program also led to the development of three other programmatic areas which Mukti Fund nurtured to support the theatres and the youth benefiting from them.

Annual Conferences

In making the QYTF grants, we realized the initial nine theaters had minimal communication with each other. So, in

summer 2010 the Mukti Fund sponsored the first weekend conference of Queer Youth Theater directors, covering their travel, lodging and meals. Those present had the opportunity to network, share best practices and exchange theater presentation ideas. Their enthusiasm lead us to fund a second conference at the Rose Theater in Omaha, a conference totally organized and run by the theater directors.

Since then, the foundation has continued to underwrite annual conferences, with the generous co-sponsorship of the Arcus Foundation in 2016. There were 10 theater directors at the first conference and over 55 directors and youth attended the 2016 conference, which also included a racial justice component. The eighth program will be in August 2017 in Ann Arbor, MI at the Neutral Zone Teen Center.

Incubator Fund

After two years of QYTF grants, we recognized the potential for new theaters in communities across the country. So, for several years we funded small “incubator grants” to local groups wanting to start a theater. These grants included a small grant award plus mentoring from other youth theater directors via telephone calls and on-site visits. Many of these new theaters continue today, and some participants have attended their second or third conference.

Pride Youth Theater Alliance

The cohort of directors, educators and activists attending the first conferences recognized the need for a formal structure to enhance their networking ability,

better share ideas, and promote youth theaters. In 2012, the Pride Youth Theater Alliance (PYTA) was born with our initial financial support. Since then, it has been housed at The Theater Offensive in Boston. In late 2015, we made a four-year declining grant to encourage the PYTA to become self-sufficient with individual and foundation backing.

In the pages that follow you will learn more about the Queer Youth Theater Fund, specific queer youth theaters, the Pride Youth Theater Alliance, and the PYTA Conference.

These last years have been a wonderful opportunity for the trustees of a small foundation to nurture our grantees, to watch them grow, and through them to truly empower queer youth to reach their full potential. As Mukti spends down its endowment, the trustees hope that other funders will see the value and future potential of this program and step up to the opportunity to develop the leadership potential of queer youth by funding youth theater which helps them find their authentic voice.

Mukti Fund
Mike Dively
Martin Dupuis
Weston Milliken
Jon Allen

Pride Youth Theater Alliance

MISSION

The Pride Youth Theater Alliance is a growing network that advances the practice of Queer Youth Theater by providing emerging and established leaders in the field with resources and opportunities to exchange, collaborate, and learn.

PURPOSE

A national network of arts organizations from across the U.S. and Canada with programs focused on lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and allied (LGBTQA) youth theater have teamed up to form the Pride Youth Theater Alliance (PYTA). PYTA was formed to provide and promote successful models for LGBTQA youth theater programming, both nationally and internationally. Many youth development theater programs that are not LGBTQA specific do not address the serious issues that LGBTQ youth face, including bullying, rejection by families, homelessness, discrimination, violence, depression, and suicide. PYTA provides the Queer Youth Theater field with an outlet to deeply share knowledge, resources, and experience with each other and contribute to the field of theater by and for queer youth. By coordinating these organizations and documenting and sharing the impact of their work, PYTA is positioned to influence the wider movement of theater for young audiences.



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2010

The First Queer Youth Theater Director's Retreat convenes nine funded organizations in Orlando, FL with the following attendees:

- Add Verb's Cathy Plourde
- Dreams of Hope's Susan Haugh
- Fringe Benefits' Norma Bowles
- New Conservatory's Sara Staley
- Pride Players' Brian Guehring
- QSpeak's A. Beck
- Rainbow Youth Pride Alliance's Carolyn Mattson
- Theatre Askew's Jason Jacobs and Tim Cusack
- The Theatre Offensive/True Colors' Evelyn Francis

2011

Twelve queer youth theaters around the country and one in Canada receive grants from the Mukti Fund. Pride Players in Omaha, NE hosts the second annual Queer Youth Theater Director's Retreat.

2012

Fourteen organizations receive grants from the Mukti Fund. The Queer Youth Fund community launches the incubator program for new QYTs. Incubators for the 2012-2013 season include three organizations.

True Colors: OUT Youth Theater hosts the third annual Queer Youth Theater Director's Retreat in Boston, MA with multi-track workshop opportunities. At this conference, attendees formally name and establish the Pride Youth Theater Alliance (PYTA). PYTA establishes five committees to help it operate: Conference, Communications, Governance, Executive, and Mentoring with Brian Guehring and Evelyn Francis as the PYTA Co-Chairs and Trina Jackson as the newly hired PYTA Coordinator. PYTA institutes monthly conference calls for the five committees and the full Alliance.

2013

New Conservatory Theatre Center hosts the fourth annual gathering re-branded as

the PYTA Conference in San Francisco, CA with attendees from twenty-one organizations including three new incubators and three new organizations in attendance. The conference prompts greater dialogue about racial justice in the QYT field that will shape future conferences.

2014

interACTionZ hosts the fifth annual PYTA Conference in Orlando, FL where attendees redraft the mission statement and a vision for PYTA's future. Peter Meacham joins the staff as the PYTA Coordinator. During this year PYTA drafts core values. The values include: **Youth Voice:** youth voices are necessary for QYT leadership. We collaborate with youth to create opportunities for them to become advocates for themselves and leaders in their community. **Liberation:** Dismantling oppression based on race, gender, age and sexual orientation to achieve justice for intersectional queer identities. **Queer:** Reclaimed from its discriminatory roots, we use this radical self-identification to honor complexity and intersectionality within and beyond the LGBTQIA+ spectrum. **Artistic Expression:** We value artistic expression as a vehicle for youth to understand the complexities of personal identity, build community, and inspire meaningful systemic change. **Community:** The impact of our work is strengthened by sharing our skills, knowledge, and experience through creative partnerships in the network.

2015

This year Marte Siebenhar helps draft a strategic plan that the PYTA Board approves at the conference. Company Q hosts the sixth annual PYTA Conference in Lexington, KY as the first incubator program to host the conference.

2016

Playhouse on the Square hosts the seventh annual PYTA Conference in Memphis, TN. This conference includes a day-long Racial Justice Pre-Conference.

2017

Neutral Zone hosts the eighth annual PYTA Conference in Ann Arbor, MI which incorporates theatrical antiracism work; Vic Quintanar joins staff as PYTA Manager.

TESTIMONIALS

The retreat in Boston made a huge impact on my work as a director, exposing me to other ways of devising theater, and an incredible impact on my youth, exposing them to queer youth from around the country.

The love and support of PYTA colleagues has been instrumental in helping us get through what has been a challenging period. Having a community who cares about your success is an incredible resource in and of itself.

[PYTA] gave me a whole framework with which to handle traumatized youth. I could not be more grateful.

The PYTA Conference is not your typical conference where a few "experts" deliver seminars to an audience. This is a conference in which we are all experts, and will each be contributing to the conference agenda both in planning and content in some way. It is designed to allow for peer to peer learning, consequently, it requires a high level of participation from everyone attending.

The biggest impact that PYTA has had on our programming has come from peer-to-peer mentorship among the theater directors. For example, through sharing best practices and seeking the advice of others in similar positions in the field, True Colors staff changed the structure of the True Colors Troupe entirely. We went from producing 2 separate plays per year to focusing on 1 play that allows youth deeper, more meaningful participation.

PYTA has challenged me to explore how positions of power and privilege are affecting my [fellow youth]. 4



About Face Theatre
Chicago, IL | \$98,000

Add Verb
Portland, ME | \$45,500

Carolina's Pride Theatre Ensemble
Freedom Center for Social Justice
Charlotte, NC | \$15,000

Company Q
Lexington, KY | \$15,500

Creative Action
Austin, TX | \$42,500

The Door
New York, NY | \$40,000

Dreams of Hope
Pittsburgh, PA | \$106,000

ENCORE
Cooperative Innovation Consultants
Denver, CO | \$15,000

Fringe Benefits
Los Angeles, CA | \$90,000

GLBT Center
Denver, CO | \$20,000

Identity Matters
New Conservatory Theater Center
San Francisco, CA | \$110,000

interACTIONZ
Orlando, FL | \$50,000

Lifeworks at LA Gay and Lesbian
Los Angeles, CA | \$25,000

LOUD
New Orleans Queer Youth Theatre
New Orleans, LA | \$7,500

Out and Allied
Waterville, ME | \$22,500

Playhouse on the Square
Memphis, TN | \$15,000

Pride Players
The Rose Theatre
Omaha, NE | \$115,000

PrideCab
Buddies in Bad Times
Toronto, ON | \$52,500

Project Pride
The Coterie Theatre
Kansas City, KS | \$22,500

Proud Theater
Art & Soul
Monona, WI | \$82,500

Q Speak
Phoenix, AZ | \$15,000

Rainbow Pride Youth Alliance
San Bernardino, CA | \$43,500

Riot Youth
Neutral Zone Teen Center
Ann Arbor, LA | \$67,500

Spectrum
Richmond Triangle Players
Richmond, VA | \$10,000

Theater Askew
New York, NY | \$70,000

True Colors: OUT Youth Theater
Theater Offensive
Cambridge, MA | \$100,000

YOUunify Theater Company
Oakland Center
Youngstown, OH | \$10,000

About Face Theatre ◀

About Face Theatre (AFT) was founded in 1995 to create exceptional, innovative, and adventurous theatre that advances the national dialogue on sexual and gender identity.

About Face Theatre is committed to developing and premiering new work showcasing the broad spectrum of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, and allied (LGBTQIA) community.

This commitment is perhaps best represented by the formation of the theatre's youth education program in 1999.

AFYT member Kyla explained, "The work here is healing and AFYT continues to be a family and artistic home in which to heal, despite the things going on in my life. In every way, AFYT is the reason I am able to look at, reflect on, and work through a lot of stuff while also feeling valued and supported."

This program, including the award-winning About Face Youth Theatre (AFYT), conducts free weekend workshops that teach theatre skills and social justice

perspectives, devises original material for the development of a new play, publicly performs new work, and uses innovative theatre to teach anti-oppression skills to schools and community centers in the greater Chicago area.

"Before AFYT I felt very alone and depressed. I didn't have a queer family or a sense of self love. I had just come out and I felt very lost," said Elliott, AFYT member. "After joining AFYT I very quickly found my voice and a family. AFYT changed my life and saved my life."

In addition to offering youth mentoring, leadership, and professional development opportunities, About Face's educational programming is tailored to meet the artistic, emotional, and community needs of LGBTQIA youth throughout the greater Chicago area, ages 13 to 24, who come from diverse familial, cultural, and socio-economic backgrounds. Annually,



AFT reaches between 4,000 and 6,000 youth.

Support received from the Mukti Queer Youth Theater Fund has been intrinsic to the success of their youth education and outreach programming year after year. Mukti has awarded AFT a total of \$98,000 since 2010.

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The support garnered as a result of Mukti and the PYTA has been invaluable for the growth of our department and the young people that make up our Youth Theatre. - Ali Hoefnagel, Education & Outreach Director



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Carolinas Pride Youth Theater Ensemble

Freedom Center for Social Justice

Carolina's Pride Youth Theater Ensembles (CPTE) consists of 12 youth and young adult artist-activists ages 13-25 committed to impacting social change through the Theatre Arts. Since its establishment in 2013, CPTE has participated in over 45 community-based events involving HIV/AIDS awareness, Transgender Justice, Human Trafficking, Cancer Awareness, Youth Homelessness, Mental Illness and Domestic Violence.

Roughly 15,000 individuals throughout the Carolinas have seen a CPTE original performance penned by their Ensemble members, and double that amount have likely seen clips of CPTE on local news programs and social networks.

"Carolinas Pride Theatre Ensemble is the only LGBT/ALL-affirming youth theatre ensemble in North or South Carolina. CPTE is uniquely poised to impact the way in which social justice is manifest in the city of Charlotte and the Carolinas," said Jermaine Nakia Lee, Founder/Artistic Director. "There is no greater common denominator than the theatre arts, and no more resounding voice than that of our Youth."



CPTE is excited to be featured artists for the city of Charlotte's OPEN STREETS FESTIVAL during the months of June, July and August, 2017.

"The word Theatre comes from the Greeks. It means the seeing place. It is the place people come to see the truth about life and society. By participating with CPTE, I see myself and my community more broadly," said ensemble member, Kaitlyn Crenshaw.

Undoubtedly, the Mukti Fund has been the lifeline of Carolinas Pride Theatre Ensemble since 2013. Funding for the performing arts has decreased dramatically in North Carolina. The conservatism and religious oppression that exist in the Carolinas can also be a hindrance to a LGBT/ALL-affirming youth theatre ensemble which tackles social justice issues.

Mukti has awarded CPTE a total of \$15,000 since 2013. Having the Mukti Fund as a sustaining partner makes their existence possible; creates once-in-a-lifetime creative opportunities for their communities most

disenfranchised youth and young adults and affirms the dignity of those considered "other."

Mukti Funds have provided resources for CPTE members to attend the annual Pride Youth Theatre Alliance conference, the annual CREATING CHANGE Conference, participate in Theatre Arts workshops instructed by Master Teaching Artists, attend Broadway touring productions and produce original theatre works for their local community.



Theatre was my first love. I can't take the theatre out of me, and I wouldn't want to. Carolinas Pride Theatre Ensemble is home for me. - Christopher Jacobs, ensemble member



Founded 2013

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Company Q ◀

We believe in the transformative power of storytelling, the importance of youth voice and leadership, and the dismantling of power structures inherent to our society.

Company Q exists to be a safe space for queer, trans, and allied young people to explore their lives through art. In their brief history, Company Q has written and produced three full length plays, performed at the Lexington Pride Festival, co-hosted events for the community during Trans Week of Remembrance and Celebration, and worked with numerous local gay, straight, trans alliances at area high schools and universities.

Company Q's youth come from several surrounding counties, ages 14-22. The ensemble consists of rural, urban, and

suburban youth from a broad variety of cultural, economic, and educational backgrounds.

"My entire life I have been a theatre artist, which means I never needed to discover what I was meant to do. I knew I was supposed to create theatre, but for a long time I had no great aspiration of my dream, other than being an actor for the rest of my life. But when I began working with Company Q, my eyes were opened up to a whole new way of living and creating as an artist," said Company Q ensemble member.

They are an all-volunteer organization, and thrive with robust community support. They are proud to represent Kentucky and the American South in all that they do, showcasing the diversity and pride of their region while challenging oppressive and narrow-minded points of view.

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"As I began making art with Company Q, I began to become whole. As soon as the first meeting was over, I had found my dream," explained Mead Ryder, Company Q Alum and founding ensemble member. "From that point forward, I knew that I am here to use theatre as a means to heal and change the culture of hate, judgment, and indifference that so many queer youth are growing up battling."

Company Q was founded as part of Mukti's Incubator program in 2013 and has been supported fiscally ever since. Simply put, without Mukti Funding, Company Q would not have ever come into existence. Mukti has awarded Company Q a total of \$15,500 since 2013.

Through the grant program and the Pride Youth Theater Alliance conference, they were able to connect with other theatres across the country and Canada, learn best practices, and share joys and successes of the work they do.

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Serving as a Director of Company Q has been a life changing experience for me. Through Q, I have not only had the joy to watch young people change the world around them, I myself have been changed by their passion and heart. I am honored to work with the young people and cherish the space they create." - Theodore Meacham, Company Q Director



Creative Action

► In partnership with SAFE Alliance since 2003, Creative Action's Changing Lives Youth Theatre Ensemble employs up to 30 young people ages 14-18 as artist-activists who tour area middle schools with original theatre addressing teen dating, domestic violence, cyber-bullying, sexism, homophobia and more.

More than 3,000 middle school youth see their show each year. The program meets two nights per week, year-round for an intensive theatre arts experience guided by professional artists. The objective of this dynamic program is to put the powerful tools of peer education and theatre in the hands of youth and adults who want to encourage healthy relationships among young adults.

After the program, 93% of audiences said the play helped them know how to help a friend who is being harassed or abused; 83% reported that the show increased their understanding of abusive and respectful relationships; and 89% said the play increased their motivation to help someone being hurt, abused, or harassed.

Changing Lives Artistic Director Noah Martin said, "What makes Changing Lives special is that it's not a single show, it's a collaboration of youth who believe in something bigger than themselves. We're not just rehearsing for the show, we're rehearsing for the people we want to be

the changes we want to see in the world."

The words of the Changing Lives cast members attest to the power of the program: "I learned that performing theatre can really change people's minds about sexual harassment. I can use my voice and actions to educate people. I've made lots of new friends in Changing Lives, but I've also learned how to spot the 'red flags' and choose friends more carefully."

Many youth in Changing Lives self-identify as LGBTQ and allied youth, and every year students share about how Changing Lives gave them a safe, supportive space to be themselves, explore their personal identity, and even come out to their peers.

As one Changing Lives participant shared this year, "I learned that I am a really strong person. This year, I finally was able to come out, and without Changing Lives, where I had so many supportive friends and a space where I could be myself, it wouldn't have happened."

Support from the Mukti Fund has been



critical for helping Creative Action grow their programming and opportunities for LGBTQ & allied youth in the Austin community.

In 2012, The Mukti Fund gave Creative Action its first grant of \$2,500 to support Outside the Lines, an artist-in-residency program that engaged LGBTQ and allied teens in creating original short plays to educate peers and adults while developing leadership skills. The Mukti Fund subsequently provided a \$12,500 grant in 2013 and a 3-year \$30,000 grant in 2014.

In 2016, the Outside the Lines program culminated in an original performance for Austin area high school faculty and staff about how educators can better support LGBTQIA youth in their schools, delivered in partnership with the Austin ISD Social & Emotional Learning Department.

Today, their Outside the Lines project has merged with the Changing Lives Youth Theatre Ensemble, which now places a stronger focus on exploring LGBTQIA rights and issues with teen artists in the program as they create and tour an original play each year to thousands of area youth.



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processing exercises, and the fundamentals of theater creation. Overall, through the program, The Door developed a platform for LGBTQ youth and allies to find their voices, develop as leaders, and shape their larger community into a more inclusive space.

Support from the Mukti Queer Youth Theater Fund has been critical to the success of The Door's Queer Youth Theater program. Mukti has awarded The Door \$40,000 since 2013.

The Door

► *The Door was founded in 1972 as a multi-service youth development agency, providing a full range of integrated services at a single site, and free of charge to anyone between the ages of 12-24.*

The Door's mission is to empower young people to reach their potential by providing comprehensive youth development services in a diverse, supportive, and caring environment.

They offer a range of strengths-based holistic programming, including health care, mental health counseling, legal assistance, nutritious meals, educational support, college access services, career development, job training and placement, supportive housing, and the arts. They serve 10,000 young people each year through this range of services.

The Door's Arts Program reaches over 1,500 youth annually, providing a safe space for skills development in a variety of disciplines, creative expression, and the chance to artistically engage and investigate identities and experiences.

They offer courses, activities, and showcase opportunities in nearly 20 disciplines across visual arts, fashion and design, performance arts, music, and literary arts.

Support from the Mukti Fund has allowed them to build on this array of opportunities with a Queer Youth Theater Program.

Since 2013, their Queer Youth Theater Program has taken on a variety of instructional formats that included discussion,

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The Queer Youth Theater has been such an amazing addition to our community. It has provided a platform for young people to have their voices heard and discuss shared experiences in a supportive environment. It's been such a pleasure to watch participants come out of their shells! – Bailey Huguley, Director of Programming



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Dreams of Hope

► *Dreams of Hope was founded in 2003. Through the power of the arts, they provide the region's lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, queer, questioning, asexual, and allied (LGBTQA+) youth, ages 13-21, a welcoming environment to grow in confidence, express themselves, and develop as leaders.*



Each season, Dreams of Hope reaches 2,000-3,000 people, approximately 75% of which are youths. Their three programs, theatriQ, sQool and Qamp: provide safe spaces and communities for youth; raise youth voices; develop youth leaders; educate young people to create art to tell their own stories, facilitate conversations about identity; and educate people on LGBTQA+ topics to increase understanding and acceptance.

“Mukti has help make it possible for us to support and learn from the incredible LGBTQA+ youth at Dreams of Hope. It’s an honor to be a part of creating safe spaces, and empowering young folks to transform their environments. We are grateful for Mukti’s help in increasing the visibility of conversations important to young LGBTQA+ people, and in creating more accepting and inclusive communities,” explained Program Director, Adil Mansoor.

“This program has helped me become more aware of how to get things done in my local community, to be more involved and helpful in the LGBTQA+ community, and has helped me think more creatively about the things that I myself might be able to do to help make LGBTQA+ lives better,” said theatriQ troupe member.

Support from the Mukti Fund has been indispensable as Dreams of Hope has transitioned from a founder-led program to a sustainable organization. Mukti has awarded Dreams of Hope \$106,000 since 2010.

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Qamp taught me new lessons about sharing space with people.
– Qamper, summer 2016



**DREAMS
OF
HOPE**
QUEER YOUTH ARTS

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ENCORE ◀



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Cooperative Innovation Consultants

ENCORE is not only a youth led project supporting LGBTQ youth in the community but also LGBTQ youth in facilities operated by Systems of Care (behavioral healthcare, child welfare, and juvenile justice).

E NCORE was originally founded as Rainbow Alley Youth Theater in January 2010 under The GLBT Community Center of Colorado. It was the creative genius of a group of drop-in center youth and adult volunteers who wanted to develop a vehicle to share their stories, priorities, and passions with the general Denver community. This project was launched with the idea that its first work, "Its Personal", would be a collection of self-scripted monologues and consisting of 8 cast members.

"As a cast member I got to engage in two of my passions. I love acting and supporting the LGBTQ community. This program allowed me to do both and I am very grateful," said Cody, a community cast member.

The production was an incredible success beyond all expectations. It sold out the 100 seat black box studio and patrons were eager to know when the next show would be scheduled. Suddenly a project became a program in the youth services department. Additional productions were produced including *Queertopia*, a creative work from a fellow queer youth theater *About Face*.

In July 2014, Rainbow Alley Youth Theater moved under the umbrella of Cooperative Innovation Consultants (CIC) and re-branded as ENCORE Youth Theater.

ENCORE embodies the following values:

E – Youth are **EDUCATORS** for their peers and adults about their lived experiences. **N** – Youth should be the **NAVIGATORS** of their future endeavors with

collaborative support from the adults in their lives. **C** – Youth are **CREATORS** of artistic works that reveal what is important to them and how they view the world. **O** – Youth as **ORGANIZERS** are a fundamental asset to advancing the movement of the LGBTQ Community. **R** – Youth sharing their stories will be the catalyst to the **REVOLUTION** in Systems of Care. **E** – Youth devising and producing theater is highly desired **ENTERTAINMENT** and a vehicle for teaching.

"When the program came into my residential treatment facility, I just assumed it would be something different to do while locked up. However it was much more than that. I was able to share about what I think is important and become an actor which I had never done before. I love all of the time that we got to spend together and my treatment team said it was a good healthy outlet for me," said Kelly, facility cast member.

"Utilizing theater as a recreational outlet, a skill building tool, and a clinical intervention has been one of the most rewarding and effective programs that I have ever had to pleasure of producing," said Cory Barrett, Executive Director of CIC and Executive Producer of ENCORE Youth Theater. "I got the opportunity to witness the transformation of young people to recognize that they have a voice that deserves to be heard and that their presence in their communities is just as valuable as anyone else. When young people, who have been abandoned in government systems, recognize that they can be contributing members of society, their potential transcends their circumstances."

The four years of Mukti funding was a major contributor to transitioning a project into a program, enhancing the quality of life for numerous youth in the Denver Metro community. Mukti has awarded ENCORE Youth Theater \$15,000 since 2015.



Fringe Benefits

▶ *Fringe Benefits is a groundbreaking educational theatre company with a 26-year track record of collaborating with school and community groups to create theatre that promotes constructive dialogue about diversity and discrimination issues.*

Since 1991, Fringe Benefits has brought together hundreds of diverse groups of students, faculty and staff, and community organizations to create and tour plays addressing social justice issues including: racism, sexism, classism, homophobia, immigration rights and marriage equality. The plays they have produced have reached over 100,000 people in the United States, Canada, Australia and the United Kingdom, changing hearts, minds, behavior... even votes.

Fringe Benefits' theatre activism workshops and residencies, the two published anthologies of their plays, *Friendly Fire* and *Cootie Shots: Theatrical Inoculations Against Bigotry*, their scholarly anthology, *Staging Social Justice*, and the award-winning documentary film about their work, *Surviving Friendly Fire*, narrated by Sir Ian McKellen, have earned the commendations of artists, activists, educators, and community leaders. They received PFLAG/LA's "Oscar Wilde Award," "for promoting tolerance through original theatrical productions," Cornerstone Theater Company's "Bridge Award" for "building bridges within and between communities," and the Association for Theatre in Higher Education's first "Award for Leadership in Community-Based Theatre and Civic Engagement."



Fringe Benefits has helped launch Theatre for Social Justice programs at a number of universities throughout the United States. Their workshops, residencies and play tours have introduced LGBTQ issues and history to school audiences, Kindergarten through 12th grade, and have inspired numerous schools to integrate these subjects permanently into their curricula.

Recently, their Southeast Middle School theatre activism team's show tackled anti-LGBTQ and other forms of discrimination at school, in cyberspace, and from the Oval Office.

The youth activists they worked with in Ohio used their play to help draw press and progressive allies to a demonstration against a Right Wing Senator who had come on campus to speak against the university's health benefits for domestic partners.

Brief Encounters, a play addressing anti-LGBT discrimination developed in collaboration with the Royal Central School of Speech and Drama, toured UK schools for three years.

No Offense..., the Forum Theatre play they developed with Sarasvati Productions theatre artists and Aboriginal youth and adults, toured Winnipeg, Manitoba Canada high schools, helping promote constructive dialogue about racism.

A team of youth and adults in the "Deep North" of Australia toured their play about LGBT issues to local high schools, and garnered an unprecedented level of positive press and support for LGBT youth.



"Interning with Fringe Benefits has benefited me immensely. I created IQ+ - Indigenous Queers Plus - a student group at the Institute of American Indian Arts, learned how to create and lead workshops, collaborated with my peers and with professional artists and activists, and in the process, I've become a stronger person! Working with Fringe Benefits has been an unforgettable experience that I will carry with me throughout my life and career," said Anangookwe Wolf.

Mukti Fund has supported Fringe Benefits since 2009 with grants totaling \$90,000.

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I am a supporter of Fringe Benefits because I share their belief that through theatre, we can get to know and understand each other in all of our diverse beauty, and work together to create a peaceful and loving world.
- Joanne Woodward, Fringe Benefits Advisory Board.

Founded 1991
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Identity Matters



New Conservatory Theatre Center

► *The mission of New Conservatory Theatre Center is to champion innovative, high-quality productions and educational theatre experiences for youth, artists, and the queer & allied communities to effect personal and societal growth, enlightenment and change.*

Led by its Founding Artistic Director, Ed Decker, NCTC provides the San Francisco Bay Area with high-quality youth education programming, Queer & Allied theatre, children's theatre, and new work commissions that support local and national artists.

"We face turbulent and seemingly regressive times ahead in this country. Matters of identity are especially potent in this tilting political landscape that seems designed to make many good people slide off into the abyss," explained Ed Decker, NCTC Founder & Artistic Director. "NCTC's Identity Matters (IM) theatre residency program is dedicated to teaching and supporting young people as they come into their own identities. We continue to be resolute in promoting understanding, acceptance, and unity."

Identity Matters (IM) is a free, theater-based residency program that helps young adults, ages 14 -20, to explore identity and to better understand and appreciate the experiences of one another. Through theatre techniques and peer collaboration, participants create scenes, monologues, songs, comedic sketches and movement pieces based on their life experiences, interests and views of the world.

"I came to IM to learn about other people. The stories we shared helped me to understand perspectives that are different from mine," said Elijah, IM member.

A comprehensive spectrum of topics relating to the manifestation of identity, empathy and sense of self including

gender diversity and expression, romantic freedom, ethnicity, family, sexual diversity, stereotypes, religion, social status, geography, politics, among others form the basis for the students' performance showcase at the conclusion of each residency.

IM residencies are tailor-made, staffed and facilitated in partnership with host sites in order to best serve the needs of their students. In-school, after-school, weekend and summer residencies serve 30-50 diverse young adults annually throughout the Bay Area.

The Mukti Queer Youth Theatre Fund has been critical to IM's success and evolution, taking it from an experimental pilot to the dynamic and transformative residency program that it is today.

Mukti Fund has supported NCTC since 2010 with grants totaling \$110,000.

”

I learned a lot about myself throughout [IM]. I finally could look deep down inside and celebrate who I am. I haven't ever felt this way before.

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interACTionZ

interACTionZ provides enriching and inclusive arts opportunities for youth to explore identity, youth-advocacy, and social justice topics, while cultivating safe and inclusive spaces to connect, create, and share in ways that impact the community.

interACTionZ allows teaching artists to work collaboratively with both classroom teachers and their students, addressing social justice topics including bullying, LGBTQ+ justice, identity, and youth advocacy, while also addressing Florida Standards.

“It always excited me to see a young person take control of their story and feel confident to engage with their peers, collaborate, and become an advocate of their own stories and experiences.”

On average interACTionZ works with approximately 110 young people each year, 13-24 years old as of now, with a current focus on High School age youth

“I see so much beauty within these projects, and I believe everyone can see that as well. I have learned so much, and on top of that we have a world with such hatred and anger and when you come and see something like this or become a part of creating it, you know there is still beauty in the world, and I find that so inspiring and I am so thankful for interACTionZ

[and] for this experience.”

“I loved being able to perform and express my ideas with people who cared about what I was talking about and wanted to listen.”

Over the past four years the program has continued to evolve in exciting, innovative and at times challenging ways to ensure the young people whose mission the program is to serve are able to access and engage with programming offered by interACTionZ.

“Being exposed to what they challenged us to do during residency is what showed me what I not only love about performing, but also love about people. The human race is hard to understand solely because we are too afraid to open up and be understood. Yet they made it easy for me to bare it all on my sleeve and show the people around me, no matter how close we were, what I felt.”

Since 2013, Mukti Fund has provided \$50,000 to interACTionZ Programming.



If not for Mukti Fund, interACTionZ would not exist. It was solely because of the Queer Youth Theatre grant that interACTionZ was able to launch in 2013.

The support from the Pride Youth Theater Alliance (PYTA) which Mukti Fund also funded the launch of, is an incredibly valuable resource for new organizations to network and connect with other leaders in the field to learn, grow, and assess programming offered in our own communities.

interACTionZ continues working to create safe and inclusive spaces to connect, create, and share in ways that impact the community.



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LOUD New Orleans Queer Youth Theater

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LOUD is a radical queer youth theater for youth ages 14–21. Their ensemble is guided by four core values: undoing oppression, youth leadership, solidarity, and a commitment to devised theater.



LOUD's ten member, majority people of color, ensemble is supported by four adult co-directors, as well as guest artists and activists from their community. They develop an inter-sectional analysis of power, privilege and oppression through ensemble-facilitated workshops, guest speakers and popular education. Throughout this process they learn multi-disciplinary theater techniques, and ultimately write and produce one full-length performance. All of their members are paid a stipend for their work.

"My work at LOUD has been integral to my growth and development as a teacher and a youth ally. Working with this group of young artists has pushed me to understand the importance of safe spaces for LGBT youth, especially youth of color, to commune, learn and create together. Without these spaces, some of these young folks would not be alive," explained Indee Mitchell, LOUD co-director.

Their mission is to utilize ensemble theatre to cultivate tools for self-expression and build community through devising and producing original theater. They create space for dynamic leadership development, arts activism and support that addresses the lack of safe space, creative outlets and community building opportunities for LGBTQIA youth in New Orleans.

LOUD's community outreach and education is primarily through performances, workshops and talk backs at national gatherings, public libraries and their annual performance. They directly serve 10-15 youth each year and reach audiences of 300-400 annually.

"When I first joined LOUD, I was at the time a gay Vietnamese cisgender male. My first year at LOUD, I was introduced

to so many things such as inter-section- alism, privilege and oppression, black lives matter, and gender vs sexuality. As I've gone through LOUD, I learned so much about myself, especially my gender. Three years later, and I'm someone new. Thanks to LOUD, I can talk about what justice is from an inter-sectional lens of social identities such as race, class, gender, sexuality, sex, body, and citizenship. LOUD has connected me to so many wonderful queer and trans people and organizations that changed my life. I now have friends, sisters, brothers, and more. Thanks to LOUD, I realized that theatre is more than just acting. It's a form of art that inspires and transforms things, from thoughts, identities, and beyond. LOUD taught me more than just theatre, it taught me that as a queer, transgender, femme, first-generation, Vietnamese-American child of refugees of the Vietnam War Refugee I have an obligation to fight for liberation & justice," said Nicky Cao, third year member of LOUD.

The Mukti Queer Youth Theater Fund has been a tremendous supporter of our work from the very beginning with the incubation fund. Since 2013, we've been awarded \$22,500 and have leveraged additional funding to support our programming.

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LOUD has helped me become more myself," explained Kyran McKay, second year member of LOUD. "It has helped me become more social with the LGBTQ community and has helped me to become more political and knowing of my rights as an LGBTQ person.

► Out & Allied Youth Theatre

Out & Allied Youth Theatre is a troupe of artists who use theatre to share their stories, build community, and address issues of social justice.

Out & Allied members include students in grades 4-12, college students, and other college-aged adults. Studio 93, a small black-box theatre, is Out & Allied's home in downtown Waterville, Maine.

"Out and Allied gives me community. It gives me the chance to meet very different people who I still find a lot in common with," said member, Kai. "It is a place to express yourself; to be who you truly want to be with a group of wonderful people who are so open minded. I have made amazing friendships here," said member, Rory. "It provides community. It has really helped me open up," said member, Sullivan.

"It's a great place to be, and it is a safe place you can talk about anything. It's a great place to express yourself – be who you are. I find it awesome," said member Katie.

"Out and Allied is a safe and supportive

environment where everyone is encouraged to voice their opinions and take on new roles and responsibilities. The only condition for getting your voice heard is being in the room," explained Lily Fernald, Artistic Director.

The Maine Community Foundation and the Maine Humanities Council have provided funds totaling \$29,500, beginning in 2011.

Out & Allied Youth Theatre is very excited to share that Colby College's Center for the Arts and Humanities is, for the second year, funding two Colby students to direct summer theatre camps for students in grades 4-12, through their arts summer internship program. Without very significant in-kind contributions from Colby College's Education Program, Waterville Opera House, Waterville Senior High School, Colby College's Center for Arts and Humanities, Waterville Creates!, Colby College's Theater and Dance Department, and other organizations Out



& Allied Youth Theatre would not be where they are today.

"It's my privilege to know and be around these creative, open, compassionate, and always accepting folks," said Mark Fairman, Executive Director.

The Mukti Fund initially funded Out & Allied as an Incubator in 2013. They subsequently provided funding for three additional years. The total amount for the four years was \$24,500.

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Whenever I feel down or out-of-sorts, I invariably find myself in Out & Allied's meeting room – looking at the large chalkboard, touching the wall where everyone has signed their names.



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Pride Players has performed for over 12,300 people, helped raise over \$36,000 for community partners: GLSEN-Omaha and PFLAG-Omaha, been honored by the Rockefeller Foundation with a Performing and Community Transformation National Grant, the National Education Association with a 2006 Human and Civil Rights Leadership Award, and Heartland Pride as Grand Marshalls of the 2011 Heartland Pride Parade.

"In 2011, I came out as gay to everyone. My father had a lot of negativity towards homosexuals in my childhood, so I never planned on coming out. A fellow student told our drama department about Pride Players, so I decided to audition. I found acceptance and expressed a lot of my inner self through the characters I created while doing what I loved," said Pride Players member.

Pride Players has also awarded \$14,000 in college scholarships through the Tracy Iwersen Pride Player Scholarship Fund. They have toured to the Iowa State School Counselors Conference, the Iowa State Conference for LGBT safety in schools, the 2006 LGBT Task Force Creating Change National Conference in Kansas City, a national theater education conference in Utah, and several local colleges, high schools, conferences, events, and community meetings.

"From the moment you first enter the Rose for the start of rehearsals, there is a presence there that is unlike any I have ever experienced. Part of it comes from the people, a group of individuals who are throwing away all inhibitions to form a synergistic collaborative straight from the heart. Part of it is the message, which may



Pride Players

The Rose Theatre

► *Pride Players is an award winning teen theater troupe from the Omaha Theater Company for Young People. Now in its 18th year, the teen cast members use improvisation to create original skits, scenes, parodies, poetry, songs, and true story monologues exploring issues facing gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, queer and straight allied teens.*

be focused on queer issues but expands to the broader concept of inclusiveness and togetherness," said Pride Players member.

"When Tracy Iwersen and I started Pride Players, it was supposed to be a one year project. Eighteen years later, Pride Players has grown beyond our wildest imaginations," explained Brian Guehring, director and co-founder of Pride Players. "Our company of Pride Players is a collection of inspiring, creative, and dedicated teen activists who are going to change the world. Every year, these teens renew my hope in the future of America and remind me why I must continue to fight for what is right."

Pride Players has received generous support from the Mutki Fund over the years. They have received \$115,000 since 2010 to support their annual project and their local touring. They've also received project grants to perform at the American Alliance for Theater Education as the key note ad-

dress, to collaborate with Project Pride in Kansas City, to collaborate with Dreams of Hope from Pittsburgh and True Colors in Boston for a Youth Summit. They also received a grant to host the second annual Queer Youth Theater Conference. Mutki has also supported our attendance at the annual retreat.

The support of Mutki has allowed them to grow their program to have a strong emphasis on community outreach and touring, to connect to other queer youth theaters, and continue to improve their work both artistically and as activists. They've been able to dream big, help other younger queer youth theater groups grow, and improve the quality of their programming.



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Project Pride has a troupe of youth participants ages 13 – 18 who work together from November through February to devise a show based on current events and the experiences they are having in Kansas City.

“The work we are able to do at Project Pride may not have affected large numbers of youth, but the youth it works with have shown remarkable changes! The high-quality arts experience we give to our youth could not happen without the amazing support we received from Mukti Fund and the challenge we always receive to push harder, dig deeper, and dream bigger,” said Amanda Kibler, Project Pride co-director and Coterie Education Director

Each year they tackle new issues and create new work that, all of which is generated by the youth with guidance from local, professional queer artists who challenge the youth to create high-quality art with a strong, balancing information without being didactic or admonishing.

“Project Pride has changed me. I came out a year ago but I wasn’t that person who was always ‘out.’ When I got here, I started being a lot happier and a lot more joyful,” said Chloe, Project Pride participant.

They perform on The Coterie’s professional stage for one weekend in March each year. They have had a total of 62 participants in Project Pride since it began in 2013, with total audience attendance at 659.

“I chose to participate in Project Pride because I wanted to empower queer youth by equipping them with knowledge to help survive the difficulties of being mar-



Project Pride

The Coterie Theatre

Project Pride is a group of LGBTQ and straight allied teens creating theatre that gives voice to their experiences, culminating in a production that challenges the assumptions and celebrates the diversity of the participants and audience.

ginalized,” said Rasheedat “Ras” Badejo, Project Pride co-director. “Through this work I witnessed teenagers from every corner of the city come together and allowed themselves space to be vulnerable, creative, learn from one another, and ultimately create community.”

Project Pride participant, AJ said, “I came [to Project Pride] because I was needing more of the LGBTQ+ community in my life. At my school, we have a GSA, but we’re not allowed to call it a ‘gay-straight alliance.’ We’re not privileged enough to be able to be out at our school.”

“[Project Pride] has changed me a lot. I became happier. My year started off rough and I was being bullied a lot. I was anxious and depressed. I really feel

comfortable around them. This past season of Project Pride has made me realize how much people care,” said Lili, Project Pride participant.

Project Pride could not have sustained those first few years without the support of the Mukti Fund. The funds to start Project Pride has allowed them to bend their entire education department to be more civically minded, with more space for young queer artists to make their mark. Mukti supported us with \$22,500 since 2014.



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PrideCab ◀

Buddies in Bad Times

PrideCab is an annual queer youth arts project run by Buddies in Bad Times. Through PrideCab, a group of 12–15 queer youth were selected to create an original, theatrical piece based on Toronto's incredible queer history.

Participants take multi-disciplinary performance creation workshops with established queer artists in order to support the creation of an original cabaret-style show, which is then presented during Buddies' Queer Pride Festival in June. Participants are not required to have any previous experience in theatre, writing, or performing and are selected based on their desire to learn about queer history and passion for sharing stories with their community. The PrideCab group meets twice weekly for the duration of the project, which runs from March to June annually.

PrideCab's primary aims are to facilitate a cross-generational exchange between the activists who shaped LGBT history and the young artists who will tell our stories of tomorrow. They develop the skills of tomorrow's queer artists by exposing them to a range of creative approaches with a variety of performance-based artists and to encourage and provide opportunities

for youth to share their discoveries, both about themselves and queer history, with the greater LGBT community.

"We believe there is an infinite power in sharing our personal stories through creative expression. Buddies' PrideCab Project allows us to serve as a bridge between the older, established queer arts and activist communities and a generation of queer youth. By bringing these stories to light through artistic expression, and by providing cutting-edge theatre training, we help to manifest a healthier LGBT community and nurture a vibrant, innovative artistic community," said Program Coordinator, Chy Ryan Spain.

PrideCab is a part of Buddies' Queer Youth Arts Program, which serves over 700 youth each year and provides free year-round training and performance opportunities. Their youth program engages queer youth aged 15–30 and supports the development of early-in-craft artistic voices through



activities including QueerCab (a monthly open mic night), free theatre tickets, skill building/sharing workshops, and the Emerging Creators Unit.

"I have never been part of a collective that is strictly queer, and that kind of unspoken bond is unbelievably powerful. I know I have created friendships that will last many years," said Spencer Smith, PrideCab Participant.

PrideCab and Buddies have been supported by The Mukti Fund since 2011, receiving \$52,500 in grants. Aside from the immeasurable qualitative impact on PrideCab participants, this funding allowed the PrideCab program to grow consistently for a period of five years.

"I cannot begin to express my gratitude for having a project like PrideCab available. I only hope I'll be able to participate in years to come," said Michael Lyons, PrideCab Participant.

During the funding period they grew their core leadership team from one to three artists and increased the supports to program participants in the form of longer workshop periods, more guest artist appearances, and greater production support during their final presentation. Their partnership with Mukti marked one of the brightest periods for this program that made a positive difference in the lives of so many young people.



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Proud Theater

Art and Soul Innovations

► *Proud Theater was founded in 1999 in Madison, Wisconsin, as a way to foster self-expression and self-empowerment in Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer/Questioning (LGBTQ+), allied youth, in order to create change through the power of theater.*

Nationally recognized for its' innovative approach to youth leadership development and its' unique artistic process, Proud Theater works with LGBTQ+ and allied youth to create original theatrical works out of their own experiences, develop strong leadership and artistic skills, share their stories, and engage in education and advocacy within the greater community.

The youth tackle issues of racial, economic, gender, and queer justice, as well as educational/societal equity through advocacy and civic engagement.

"[Proud Theater] opens my eyes to new perspectives, reminds me what's important, encourages me to check my privilege, re-inspired me to get involved in the community, and opened my heart," said Proud Theater audience member.

In 2011 the Proud Theater program reorganized under Art and Soul Innovations,

a non-profit established by core members of Proud Theater to create further opportunities for LGBTQ+ youth within the community and allow for expansion into under-served parts of Wisconsin.

Since then, chapter organizations have opened throughout Wisconsin, including Wausau, Milwaukee, Sun Prairie, and a new group for young adults aged 18-24 year olds, Proud Theater Beyond, began in 2014 with chapters in Madison and Milwaukee.

"Proud Theater was life changing for my son - it literally saved his life," exclaimed a parent of Proud Theater Youth.

The mission and unwavering commitment of Proud Theater continues to be, to change the world through the power of theater and the theater arts, and to make a positive difference in the lives of LGBTQ and allied youth through the tenets of art, heart, and activism.



Proud Theater audience member stated, "The angry hurt child of 40 years ago wanted a voice, you awakened him and gave him solace."

Support received from the Mukti Queer Youth Theater Fund has allowed our program to flourish throughout Wisconsin, and potentially beyond. Mukti has awarded our theatre a total of \$82,500 since 2010.

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Proud Theater to me is power. Proud Theater is taking my anger and my pain and making it into something important. It is the first time I have really felt I could change my life and the world.

Founded 1999
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Rainbow Pride ◀

The mission of the Rainbow Pride Youth Alliance is to provide a safe, healthy, and enriching environment for gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, queer, questioning, and intersex youth of the Inland Empire.

Rainbow Pride's after-school performance workshop, FIERCE is a peer-led wellness strategy designed to introduce youth and their families to the power of art, enhancing communication across generations and building a stronger community and neighborhood.

"Fierce Theater" saved my life. I really felt lost, trapped and alone in my group home and after a few hours with the group," said member Drake, "I was like Yasss. I met so many people who were into anime and Cos Play, I feel normal for the first time."

While incorporating aspects of acting technique (including voice, IMPROV and movement), the focus is on individual creative expression and performance in a safe, collaborative environment. The overall goal is to "decrease health risk behaviors in Inland Empire LGBTQI adolescents."

Theater is used as a tool for enhancing self-esteem, developing language and communication skills, strengthening cultural identity, increasing academic and vocational skill sets, and promoting literacy.



RAINBOW PRIDE YOUTH ALLIANCE

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"This program inspired me so much, it offered me hope, a way to get connected, and a will to live," said member, David.

Member Simone explained how, "now when I look in the mirror, I see my own beauty and self-worth."

Since its inception, the Rainbow Pride Players Theatre Program, has engaged 350 youth in 4 major projects. These include performance outreach through: creation and performance of original, often true monologues and scenes dealing with issues of importance to LGBTQI teens and young adults such as coming out stories and relationships, a five-day summer queer youth theater day camp, field trips to local and regional theater productions, and community building through collaborative theater & leadership development workshops with Kaiser High, Arroyo Valley High and Cal State San Bernardino Theater programs.

Rev Benita Ramsey, President of The Rainbow Pride explains, "The Mukti fund investment in Rainbow Pride Youth Alliance was instrumental in the development in this space to create, to be seen & heard. After 8 seasons, 30 performances, 4,500 audience members later, we are still

standing strong because of this shared vision. The energy and community building that takes place through theater and the arts makes it possible for young people in San Bernardino County to heal through music, improvisation dance and the arts."

Mukti has awarded our theatre a total of \$43,500 since 2011.



This is my family, because of the folks here. Theater has become the most important part of my life. Participating in theatre has taught me so many special lessons that have and will continue to help me be the absolute best person I can possibly be.

- Daniel, Alumni Mentor





Riot Youth ◀

Neutral Zone

Riot Youth is a youth-led, safe space for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered, queer, questioning youth and their allies (LGBTQQQA) at the Neutral Zone, a youth-driven teen center.

Through leadership skill building, community organizing, networking, support and socializing, Riot Youth connects youth to build an inclusive community. Riot Youth draws from throughout Washtenaw County and Southeast Michigan. They have about 70 youth participants from area high schools; typically 30-50 youth attend a youth-led weekly program on Fridays at the Neutral Zone. All LGBTQQA and allied youth are welcome.

Riot Youth also is a space for youth to talk and find support about their struggles as LGBTQQA youth. They have workshops on various issues such as gender identity/ expression, intersections of LGBTQQA identity with race and other social identities, LGBTQQA history and writing workshops. They also play theater games, host movie nights, and have parties. Riot Youth also host a Queer Prom every Spring which was attended by over 250 youth last year from throughout the region. Through the support of the Mukti Fund, Riot Youth has been able to empower

youth in participatory action change projects through research, storytelling and performance. Over the past seven years, Riot Youth has completed two county wide school climate surveys, developed a theater project – Gayrilla Theater and most recently a digital storytelling project. The artistic performances have been a critical component to support youth to understand and talk about their identity, address many of the challenges related to community awareness, education inclusivity, and harassment and bullying in schools.

Neutral Zone's Program Director and Riot Youth advisor Suzie Stanley shares, "Gayrilla/Digital Storytelling has given our youth a platform to advocate and champion for themselves. It has created safe and supportive space where our queer identifying young people can be exactly themselves, always. It's been a powerful tool in helping teens see that they have efficacy, that they matter, and that they belong."

Since 2010 Riot Youth teen have presented to over 1,000 educators and 800 students coupled with panel discussion and student led dialogues. Additionally, Riot Youth has drawn on these performances to advocate for school change including advocating for gender identity and expression as part of three area school districts anti-discrimination policy, advocating for an statewide anti-bullying policy – Matt's Law, and advocating for passing the most recent Guidelines for the State of Michigan to support safe and inclusive spaces for LGBTQ students.

"It sounds dramatic, but the Neutral Zone served as a life saver when I first joined. I was an awkward, introverted teenager who didn't really know how to express myself. After four and a half years at the Zone, my self-confidence boosted significantly and I formed relationships that still stand. I came out of my shell; I began telling my story, always looking for an opportunity to make a difference, and always finding something new to learn about," said Leo Sheng, recent teen.



"Not only did I grow into a young adult, but I grew as an activist and a leader," explained recent teen Yoni Siden. "It is one of the foundational experiences of my life, a key reason I am where I am today."

Neutral Zone is grateful for \$67,500 of support for the Riot Youth Theater and Performance Project since 2010.

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SPECTRUM ◀

TheatreLAB & Richmond Triangle Players

With an expertise in devised theater and ensemble work, TheatreLAB (founded in 2013) creates unique theatrical experiences that spark a collaborative exchange of ideas between artist and audience. The TheatreLAB ensemble cultivates an environment that fosters emerging talent and challenges artistic norms through experimental devices on new and thrilling works. Founded in 1993 as the only full-time professional theater in Virginia (and now throughout the mid-Atlantic) with mission focused exclusively on works important to LGBTQ issues and audiences, Richmond Triangle Players is now one of the major cultural institutions in Richmond, VA, and has been nationally profiled for its work.

Spectrum is the result of a unique collaboration between these two theater companies, and equally supported by both. Spectrum offers its participants and the Richmond community at large an opportunity to see how theatre can truly change lives. Often times, telling our own personal stories can be intimidating; the goal of this project is for each ensemble member to express their truth in a safe,

supportive, and creative environment. Through a series of master classes and workshops, the participants learn the basics of storytelling and performance, production and playwriting, as well as marketing as they collectively produce their original piece of theatre.

“Leading the Spectrum ensemble has been one of the greatest joys of my life. Spending every Sunday working with these students and helping them develop theatrically and personally never ceases to inspire me,” explained Spectrum Program Director, Chelsea Burke. “Seeing sparks of curiosity, empowerment, confidence, activism, and self-actualization in each member of my ensemble from the outspoken comedian to the [previously] silent visual artist confirms the power of this kind of work.”

Now in its third year, the collaboration has resulted in a program serving teens in the 9-12 grades and into early college years, who come together once a week to learn about the creation of a theatrical work through writing, acting, directing and behind-the-scenes production work, with the result a two-performance run of



their devised work at Richmond Triangle Players. Still in relative infancy, Spectrum leadership is constantly refining its curriculum and working to expand its reach into area schools. To date, Spectrum has served almost 50 youth, and has impacted the lives of hundreds more in the Richmond area.

“Getting to write my own piece and collaborate with others has been so amazing. I never thought I would get a chance to really tell my story,” said 16-year-old Spectrum ensemble member.

“Spectrum has been such an influential part of my life. I’ve learned how to deconstruct pervasive attitudes towards the LGBTQIA+ community by unpacking hurtful comments with the people who say them. Having the conversation is what changes minds and opens hearts. Getting to perform for an audience willing to sit and educate is a great feeling. Spectrum is a safe haven. It provides a space every week where we can drop whichever mask we’ve been holding all week long. The devised work introduces us to the influential and transformative parts of theatre,” said 18-year-old Spectrum ensemble member.

Support received from the Mukti Queer Youth Theater Fund has been the cornerstone of the Spectrum program and has leveraged other local and state funding to support the program. Mukti awarded Spectrum a three-year grant of \$10,000 in 2014.



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True Colors

Theater Offensive

True Colors: OUT Youth Theater is a rigorous out-of-school program in which at-risk lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and straight allied youth are trained in Community-Engaged Theater Arts and leadership skills.

Participants in True Colors create and tour original performances based on their stories to local schools and community organizations. The majority of participants are youth of color, ages 14-22, most of whom come from neighborhoods that deal with violence. In this safe space, LGBTQ youth and their allies are supported and challenged to engage fully in their own personal, social, and artistic development, as they become role models in their communities.

True Colors serves 150 youth annually to develop their performing skills and present their original works to over 5,000 audience members annually in schools and community organizations across Massachusetts, most of whom are 18 or younger.

“True Colors’ cultural impact over a generation has been instrumental in helping create not only a safe space for LGBTQ youth to express their creativity and tell their stories, but has also contributed to the progress and advances we have seen for the entire LGBTQ communi-

ty,” explained Abe Rybeck, True Colors Founder and Theater Offensive Executive Artistic Director. “This inclusive group of talented youth exemplifies America’s dynamic cultural intersections. These are the creative young leaders our overlapping communities need to overcome bigotry and jointly build a more harmonious future.”

The program’s youth development goals are that participants will demonstrate a deeper sense of identity; increased sense of belonging and membership; increased level of responsibility and autonomy; and an increased level of social and civic ability. Based on increased demand for programming, True Colors recently underwent a youth-led expansion to include three additional programming components: Studio, Creative Action Crew, and the Leadership & Inclusion Council.

These new efforts allow True Colors to serve double the number of youth, and to reach over 20% more audience members. This expansion also allows True Colors programming to serve youth in a deeper

way through a variety of workshops, leadership development opportunities, and performances year-round.

“Over my years within the program, my confidence has blossomed and I now feel comfortable in my own skin,” said ViQuan, True Colors Participant.

In 2016, the life-changing accomplishments of True Colors were recognized by the U.S. President’s Committee on the Arts and the Humanities with the National Arts and Humanities Youth Programs Award, the nation’s highest honor in the field of Creative Youth Development. Representatives from True Colors received the award in November 2016 from First Lady Michelle Obama at the White House. True Colors is both honored and proud to be the first-ever LGBTQ-based program to win this award.

“I got a lot of out being in True Colors - A sense of belonging, a purpose, the chance to be myself. I came into my own as an actor, performer, woman, and found a family that I will have forever,” explained



True Colors participant, Alyssa. Since 2009, the Mukti Queer Youth Theater Fund has supported the life-changing work of True Colors: OUT Youth Theater, providing \$100,000 in grant money over the 7 year period. These funds have directly supported youth programming, serving hundreds of LGBTQ youth and tens of thousands of audience members.



OUT YOUTH THEATER
Founded 1994

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Being part of our theater troupe gave me support, role models, and an outlet that makes me feel like I actually have talent and potential. Today I'm much more confident! It's made my life 100 times easier, and a hundred times happier, it's transforming.

**Queer Youth Theaters
Need Your Support**



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Now when I look in the mirror I see my own beauty and self-worth.