

# ANNUAL REPORT 2021

Storycatchers  
Theatre



"but we still made it to our  
plays and they went  
extravagant."

- Word Warriors Ensemble Member, 2022

# A NEW ERA

## PRESERVERANCE AND ADAPTIBILITY DURING A TIME OF TRANSITION

This past year marked the end of one era and the beginning of another for Storycatchers. We said farewell to our remarkable founder, Meade Palidofsky, whose visionary leadership guided us for 37 years. Meade will always be a part of the Storycatchers family. We are so grateful for her commitment to the elevation and amplification of youth voices, and for the power of the methodology she developed and passed on. Meade spent the year before her departure preparing our teaching staff to continue the work she began and to keep moving it forward.

And move forward we will. This year, we are asking everyone to join us in living in possibility – the possibility embodied by every one of the young people we serve.

At Storycatchers, we believe in the chance to build a better future. We meet young people wherever they are in the system. We know that their lives are full of promise and that their stories are powerful. We understand that far too often, they are caught in the justice system due to systemic inequities and societal failures. Despite the obstacles they face, these young people have tremendous capacity to grow and succeed. All they need is encouragement, support, and a community ready to listen. And Storycatchers will always be here to make that happen.

A handwritten signature in white ink, reading "Priya Shah". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal flourish underneath the name.

Priya Shah, Executive Director

# COMMUNITY NEED

**At Storycatchers, we dedicate all of our resources to meet the needs of adolescents and young adults who have become involved in the justice system.**

We have developed our unique program model in response to challenges that are shaped by decades of racial and economic inequalities. In Illinois and across the nation, justice-involved youth are disproportionately impoverished, poorly educated, exhibit high rates of exposure to trauma, and lack positive social networks. Their ACE (Adverse Childhood Experiences) scores range from 4-7, reducing life expectancy by an average of 20 years. They are also overwhelmingly people of color. In Illinois, the population of incarcerated youth is 71% African American, 9% Hispanic, and 2% Biracial. Most have grown up in neighborhoods suffering from generations of disinvestment and then come of age in prisons and detention centers. Following release, they face overwhelming obstacles. But we know that every young person has enormous potential with the right support.

The past two years have exposed the disparities in our systems as never before. Storycatchers is committed to being a part of forward movement in addressing these inequities and injustices. We believe in the possibilities that each young person represents and will do all that we can to help them envision and pursue a better future.





# IMPACT ON INCARCERATED YOUTH

During normal times, each residential program meets two-to-three times per week and generates presentations of the developing work every eight-to-ten weeks. Since March 2020, our access has been unpredictable. The Illinois Department of Juvenile Justice and the Cook County Juvenile Detention Center have worked diligently with us to ensure ongoing engagement, remotely when necessary, in person whenever possible. In recent months we have returned to live performances for small groups at Illinois Department of Justice facilities while maintaining remote interactions with youth at the Detention Center. We share our partners' commitment to the health and well-being of detained and incarcerated youth, and anticipate gradual resumption of in-person activities while exploring digital alternatives as needed.

## AUDIENCES:

**24**

IN-PERSON

**247**

DIGITAL

**92**

YOUTH PARTICIPANTS

**217**

SESSIONS

(109 in person, 108 remote)

**4**

LIVE PERFORMANCES

**7**

DIGITAL PERFORMANCES/  
AUDIO RELEASES/ MUSIC  
VIDEO PRODUCTIONS

27

YOUNG PEOPLE  
EMPLOYED

305

SESSIONS  
(86 in person, 219 remote)

707

DIGITAL AUDIENCE  
LISTENERS

2

FOR

50

IN-PERSON  
PERFORMANCES

AUDIENCE  
MEMBERS

# IMPACT ON THE COMMUNITY

Our Changing Voices jobs program employs young people recently released from the justice system in a performing arts development, job readiness curriculum for up to 30 hours per week in eight-month program cycles.

We have adjusted the program in order to accommodate the extraordinary challenges of the past two years. We extended the enrollment period for the cohort that began in March of 2020, holding their completion ceremony in December. A second cohort that began in late January completed Changing Voices in September 2021. These young people committed to the creative process while learning critical life and job skills, and left our program with individualized action plans to pursue next-step employment and / or education opportunities. Moreover, Changing Voices offers ongoing case management to all youth for a minimum of three months after they complete the program – and in some cases, for even longer – to provide them with their best chance of success as they move ahead.

**GRADUATED TO NEXT  
STEP OPPORTUNITIES:**

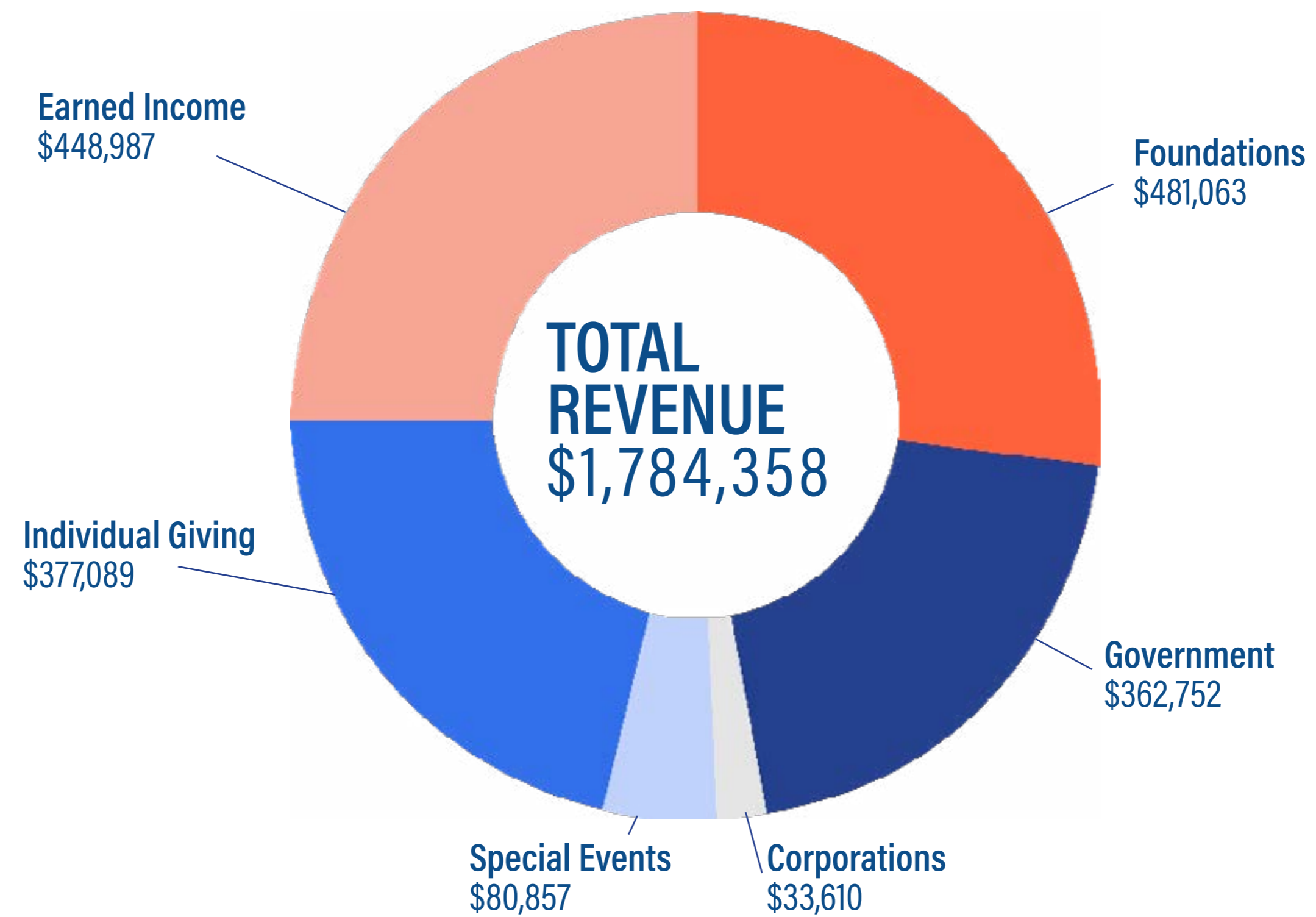
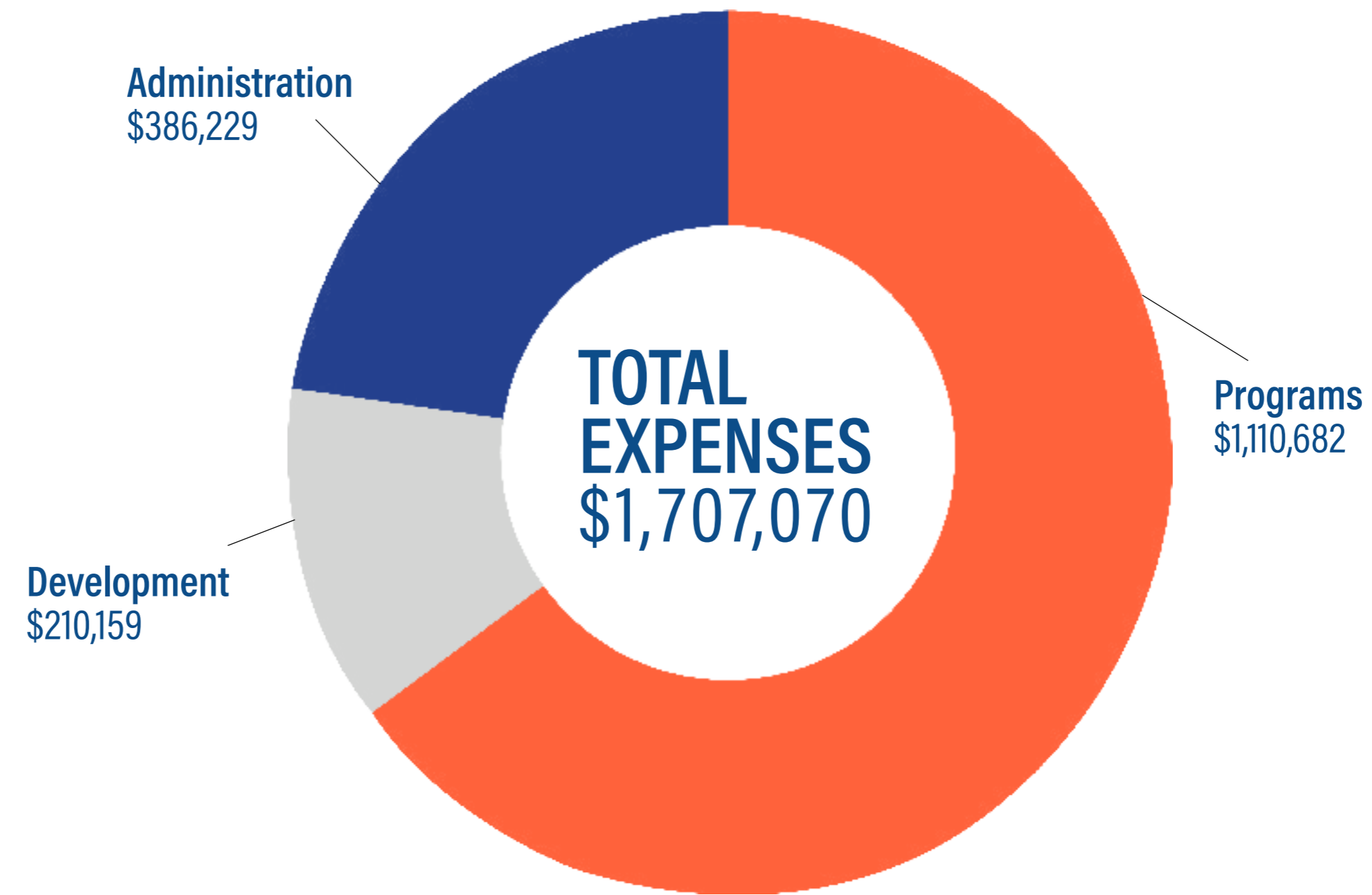
11

DECEMBER 2020

14

SEPTEMBER 2021

# 2021 FISCAL YEAR







# A COMMITMENT TO PARTNERSHIP

Storycatchers has always flourished in collaboration. Our partnerships with the Illinois Department of Juvenile Justice and Cook County Juvenile Detention Center have long been critical to our ability to serve youth at all stages of court involvement. More recently, we are profoundly grateful for the community-based partners that facilitated dynamic spaces once we were able to re-engage our post-release youth in person.

Port Ministries provided a space that enabled us to conduct Changing Voices sessions while observing recommended COVID-19 safety protocols. It was profoundly moving after more than a year in shutdown to be able to welcome the Changing Voices youth into a shared space where they could collaborate and create together.

We are also grateful to our friends at Ignition Community Glass, who introduced the youth of Changing Voices to the art of glass-blowing. They also provided a beautiful outdoor space for the youth ensemble's first live performance in over a year, and allowed us to use that same space to celebrate the ensemble's completion of the Changing Voices curriculum with the Step Up & Step Out ceremony in July 2021. Storycatchers greatly appreciates Innovation 80, one of our generous funding partners, for facilitating the introduction to Ignition Community Glass and launching this new relationship for us.

As we cautiously imagine a world beyond the pandemic, we look forward to reconnecting with our community and rekindling our many partnerships that have long sustained our ability to introduce the young people we serve to the resources they need.

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"Sometimes the cards that  
you're dealt aren't cool, but  
you gotta play by the rules."

Excerpt from LIFE'S GAME  
by the 2021 Firewriters Ensemble

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*Storycatchers Theatre was founded by Meade Palidofsky in 1984 and has served youth involved in the justice system since 1990. The company has received numerous honors and awards, including the National Arts and Humanities Youth Program Award from the President's Committee on the Arts and Humanities in 2013.*