

Young Audiences

Creating Inclusive Arts Programs for Students with Disabilities

Michele Russo

Young Audience's mission is to inspire young people and expand their learning through the arts. For so many kids, and especially kids with disabilities, it can be really hard to find success in a school setting, and the arts offer a way for students to participate that is inclusive, that values their creativity and their voice and their vision and all of their capacities, and just allows them to be freely supported to express themselves.

Erik James Montgomery

I want to give them the ability to know that they can express themselves as a human being and not as a caricature of what other people think they should be.

It's all about them telling the world who they are visually. So through photography it allows them to take a snapshot of themselves at the moment where they feel the most empowered and by doing so they are taking control over their own narrative as opposed to having other people tell them who they are.

David Harrell

I see a growth of acceptance. In the most personal way that I can explain it, when I walk into a new school, and I have kindergarten to second or third, fourth and fifth graders walk in, and they see this, they point, and they cover their mouths, or they whisper to their friends, and they're pointing. And they're doing this. And that's fine, because I want them to see this. I want this to be a surprise. I want this to be different. But when they leave, they don't point anymore. They don't look at this anymore. They don't stare at this anymore. They've seen my humanity through the course of my work.

Michele Russo

We've heard over and over again from teachers that we work with that there are students that just were not engaged previously. And then when they're working with one of our

teaching artists or seeing a performance of ours, that the students are now engaged, are seeing themselves, are expressing themselves, are participating more.

Erik James Montgomery

I've seen students' lives change from the inside out. Their self-esteem grows leaps and bounds. I've seen where they are able to stand taller, smile more. They find out who they are. They find out what they like about themselves. They find out that they're just like everybody else and they really take pride in that.

Michele Russo

Our experience with the IHC program has been just phenomenal. To have the support and community and engagement from an organization that is looking at disability in our entire society is huge.