

Connecting. Creating. Reimagining.

OPEN DOOR ARTS | HIGHLIGHTS REPORT

2020-2021





MANAGING DIRECTOR

*Nicole Agois*

## Reflections

Years like this test you in ways few things do. What really matters? What should we prioritize? What change do we want to see in the world? We've asked ourselves all of these questions this past year, and engaged in a constant exercise of what Maxine Greene would call "imagining things as if they were otherwise".

We reimagined what it means to stay engaged while we're separated, we rediscovered the true magic of collaboration and community, and we learned that even a small organization can have a big impact.

The arts were our greatest asset through it all—our tools and our teachers. They gave us the power to imagine and to create new possibilities. They kept us together, gave us comfort and solace, and allowed us to see ourselves and each other in the midst of incredible uncertainty and pain.

We prioritized equity—addressing racial and disability justice in everything we do at the programmatic and organizational levels. And we kept ourselves and each other accountable through hundreds of hours of training, staff meetings, and institutional systems work.

This year, we grew, and you were right there with us. With gratitude, I invite you to read this Highlights Report that shares the ways we Connected, Created, and Reimagined this year.

# PROGRAM IMPACT



## Students

884 students with and without disabilities in 68 classrooms at 9 partner schools received accessible and engaging virtual arts programming and art supplies to create at home and in school.

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## Artists

50+ adults with disabilities received virtual art classes through our partnership with the Worcester Art Museum, and hundreds viewed our virtual gallery tours while our Open Door Galleries remained closed.

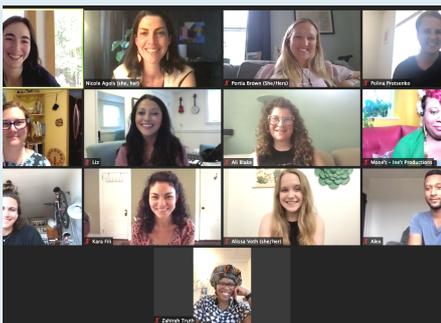
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## Arts and Culture Organizations

Staff from 5 arts and culture organizations received training and consultancy services to implement inclusive practices, policies, and programs.

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## Arts Educators

75+ arts educators learned anti-racist, anti-ableist, and trauma-informed practices through SPEAC, a professional development program created in partnership with the Eliot School and Wheelock Family Theater.

# CONNECTING



*The many complex needs our students brought into the learning space as a result of COVID this year meant we needed to adjust our instructional approach to remain responsive. Our Director of Education, Mia Branco, shares our journey.*

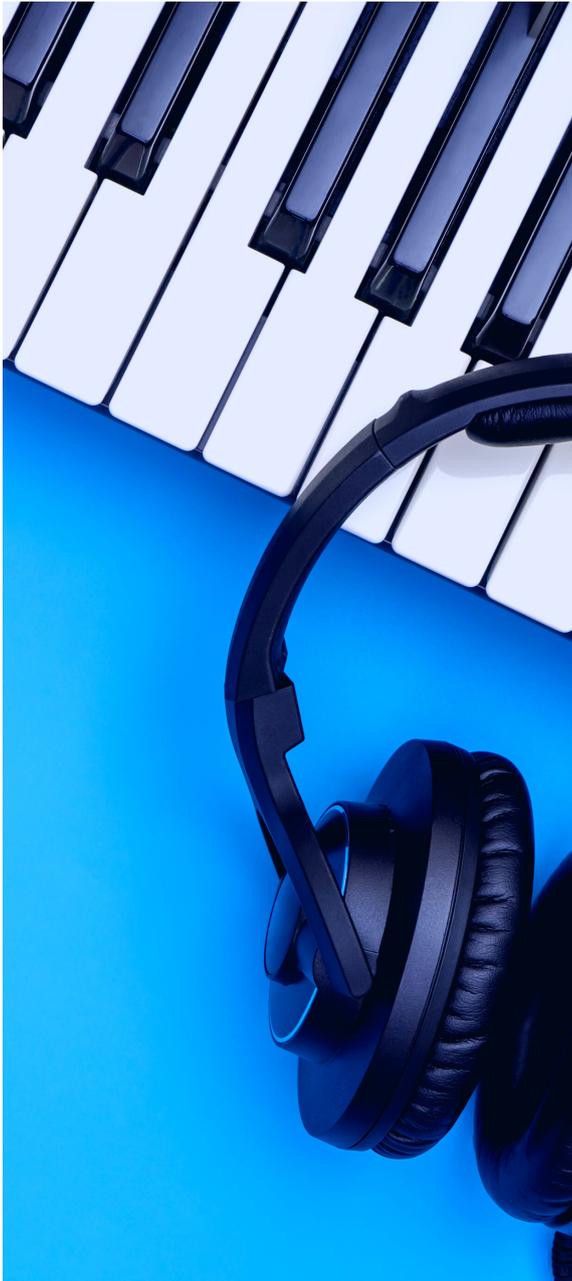
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*We created  
togetherness  
even while  
we were apart.*

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“In the midst of so much uncertainty, we asked ourselves, what matters most for our students this year? The answer was loud and clear: our programs should provide students with opportunities to experience joyful learning, process and express their thoughts and feelings, and connect with peers and community through the arts. To center this work, we developed a teaching and learning framework that supported our teaching artists in promoting Joy, Expression, and Connection in their classes. Focusing on these three critical goals inspired instruction to be relevant and responsive to our students and the changing reality of the world around them, while centering the shared joy and comfort that the arts cultivate. This helped us balance educational objectives with the need to connect and deepen relationships with students.”

-Mia Branco, Director of Education



*Listen at:*

[bit.ly/CHSspacesongs](https://bit.ly/CHSspacesongs)

## CREATING

*Teaching arts remotely meant our teaching artists had to show innovation, creativity, and resourcefulness to create engaging and exciting virtual learning opportunities. ODA Teaching Artist Alissa Voth shares the story of how she was able to use technology to compose and record original music with her students this year.*

“This year, students with disabilities at Charlestown High School and I worked on two recording projects together. The songs were based on the themes of outer space and celebration, and reinforced music concepts and notation skills that they were learning in class. We used online music software called Bandlab to find beats, synths, and fx, and determine our song structures and compose our pieces.

Next, colleagues of mine in Boston and Chicago volunteered their time and skills to record parts written by the students for the flute, violin, trombone, cello, clarinet, and harp. The students and I then spent classes putting the songs together through Bandlab, making decisions about when to layer instrumental parts on top of each other, what midi instruments to use (while I played the keyboard), and other creative choices. Our resulting songs were undeniably joyful and collaborative, and it was wonderful to know that every student had a part in their creation.”

-Alissa Voth, ODA Teaching Artist

# REIMAGINING

*As we reimagined the ways in which our work centers access and equity at the individual and institutional levels, conversations and collaborations with partners emerged to collectively impact access and equity within the arts and culture field.*



## *Institutional Equity Work*

ODA staff engaged in significant personal and institutional work to center the intersection of disability justice and racial justice in every aspect of our organization and programs, including:

- Participating in the 16-week Cultural Equity Learning Community
- Holding weekly anti-racism and equity staff meetings
- Developing an organizational plan to implement anti-racist and anti-ableist practices and policies throughout every area of our work
- Conducting robust professional development on anti-ableist, anti-racist, and trauma-informed teaching for our teaching artists

## *Impacting the Sector*

“Open Door Arts worked collaboratively with the Mass Cultural Council's Universal Participation (UP) Initiative in 2021, providing direct training to our Learning Network organizations, and supporting UP Designated organizations with much-needed follow up training and consulting services. As our desired outcomes on the region's Disability Justice movement are in line, this relationship is critical to determine priorities, connect networks, and develop strategies to advance access in arts and culture. The partnership is expected to deepen in 2022, as the UP Initiative looks to broaden impact and align with the Council's Racial Equity Plan.”

-**Charles Baldwin**, UP Program Officer,  
Mass Cultural Council

# THANK YOU

To our team, funders, artists, students and families, advisors, and donors—all the incredible people who showed up for us and each other this year\*!

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Mass Cultural Council  
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Stoddard Charitable Trust  
UniBank  
Webster Five Foundation  
Wellington Management Foundation  
Worcester Arts Council

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## Team

Nicole Agois, Mia Branco, Portia Brown,  
Ali Blake, Alex Conley, Moe Finnerty,  
Kara Fili, Mone't Ledbetter-Glaude,  
Liz Lohnes, Zoe Nadal, Polina Protsenko,  
Zahirah Nur Truth, Alissa Voth,  
Aaron Cruz, and Juman Kekhia

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## Donors

George Abrams, Marianne Adams, Enrique Agois,  
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Fatou-Carol Sylla, Tim Van Egmond, John Voci,  
David Waldman, and Heather Watkins

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## Advisory Board

Jeremy Alliger, Charles Baldwin, Tom Keane,  
Elaine Fallon, Robin Foley, Martha McKenna,  
Ruth Mercado-Zizzo, Carl Richardson, and  
Heather Watkins



*"Art must show the world as changeable  
and help it change forever."* - Ernst Fischer



"Imaginary Playground" created by one of our school program students