

ARTISTS FIRST^{STL}

AN OPEN ART STUDIO FOR PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

Annual Report Fiscal Year 2015-2016

An Artful Year in Review



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www.artistsfirststl.org

Our mission

is to foster growth in each individual through creative self-expression.

Our values

reflect the behaviors that shape the tone of how we work with each other as well as with the larger community.

Our Story is About ART, not Disabilities.

We believe in



acceptance



respect



trust

To Our Stakeholders,

Artists First – the artists, the staff and the studio -- has continued to grow over the last 12 months. We have welcomed new members to the Board of Directors, increased the number of art exhibitions, increased community integration and enjoyed great media exposure.

Our Adult, Youth and Veterans programs are gaining in popularity and many of our artists tell us how important their time at the studio is to them. Our artists are growing both artistically, socially, emotionally and personally. Artists with abilities, rather than artists with disabilities, are what people see at Artists First: the abilities to meet, head on, whatever challenges may be in the way, to create beautiful, thought-provoking, meaningful art.

As a valued Artists First team member, your support helps us continue providing our artists with the quality art instruction and nurturing of their creativity they have come to expect, and upon which they thrive. More shows, more events, more exhibits, more programs, and even more of the same, are happening daily in the studio and are in the works for this coming year.

Please join with the board members, the dedicated staff, and the hardworking volunteers in celebrating our artists. We are Artists First!

In gratitude,

Anne

Anne Hollin
Board President

Sheila

Sheila Suderwalla, MSW
Executive Director

Program Highlights

"Nowhere else can you be treated like a human being 100%."



"I'm excited when I get to come here because I get to do new challenges."



"Artists First opened up a whole new world for my son, he's now able to communicate."



"This is a wonderful program...I am a better person today."

The benefits of Artists First's programs reach beyond the physical works created by the artists. The creative process present in all programs promotes decision making, task follow through, physical, emotional and behavioral adaptation, and self-worth.

Adult Open Studio Self-advocacy and collaboration have been strong themes during this past year in the Adult Open Studio program serving adults with disabilities. As artists increase their sense of worth, they have become self-advocates in many areas of their lives. Some have even secured community art shows for the studio!

Over \$5,000 in commissions were paid to artists contributing to their sense of worth and financial advancement.

During this past year, participants in the Adult Open Studio have collaborated on group projects and public installations of art including Mannequins on the Loop, Ameren Diversity Day, Piano in the Park and Park(ing) Day.

The Regional Arts Commission approved a grant this year for our new project Arts in Unity which allows local musicians of various genres to perform in our studio. As the musicians perform, our artists create work inspired by the music vice versa.

Lifeworks: Supported Employment Program

Within this year, participation has tripled in the Lifeworks program, which supports artists with disabilities to have a profitable career in the arts. By the year's end the Lifeworks program outperformed its original goals and objectives. Currently serving 16 individuals the program has a growing waitlist of 11.

For 90% of participants the Lifeworks program is their first work for pay experience.

Unfortunately, this highly impactful program suffered an unexpected budget cut from a Public Funding Source. Artists First is determined to continue the program at the same level of effectiveness despite losing a large amount of funding. Through our art shows and

"At Artists First you have the freedom to be your own person to expand your mind in the world of creativity."



"I wish all those people who said I could do nothing, be nothing, could see me now."



"I want to understand the world to find where I fit in and Artists First helps me with that."



"At Artists First, he, she, or they won't be denied with disabilities and that's a real place"

community outreach we have been able to create new financial support. To keep our current Lifeworks artists on their same path, and to grow, substantial financial donations must be a priority.

Youth Open Studio Lessons of partnership and empathy through this integrated program for youth with and without disabilities has grown to reach other areas of Artists First. During the summer months, many of the youth in the program volunteered during the Adult Open Studio. Teamwork was also developed through collaborative art projects among the youth.

Artists First for Veterans Artists First's newest program serving current and former Armed Service members was officially launched during this past year. Using the evidenced based model of other Artists First programs, Artists First for Veterans has been able to help veterans express their unique experiences in a safe and creative way.

Exhibitions Artists First takes steps to create positive social change specifically developing a community in which every member can participate freely and equally despite ability. Through creative self-expression, Artists First aids individuals who have been stereotyped, limited and sidelined to actively engage in meaningful community activities such as community exhibitions. During the past year over 15 exhibitions were curated helping to dismantle stereotypes about individuals with disabilities while giving the artists full participation in the vibrant arts community.

6 artists won juried shows

Artists First won an exhibition proposal for next program year at Lambert Gallery, Saint Louis International Airport.

Community Partnerships Artists First has been fortunate to partner with University of Missouri-St. Louis, Washington University, Saint Louis University and Webster University in addition to over 10 other partner agencies.

Who We Serve

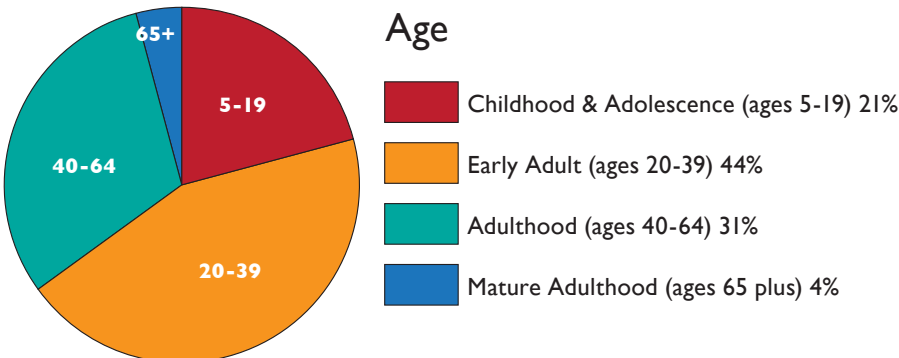
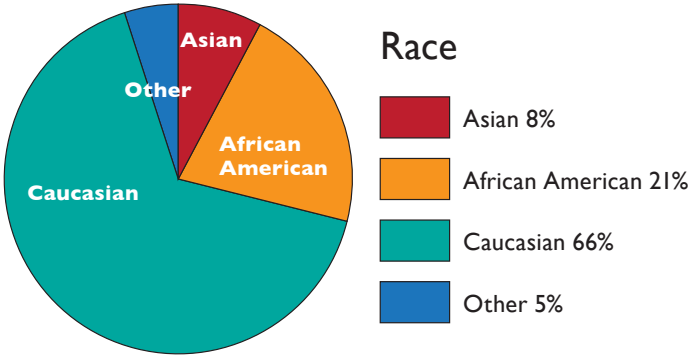
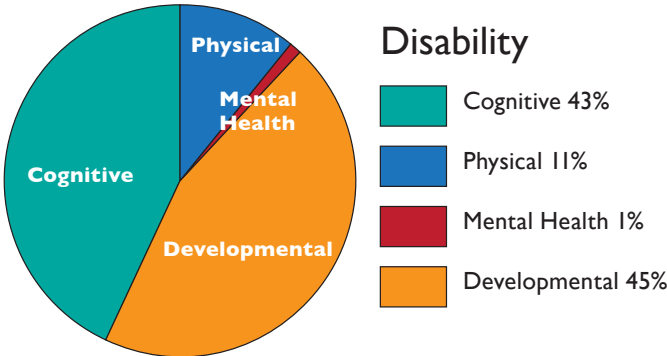
A Year in Review (2015-2016):

More than 193 individuals with disabilities were directly served by the Artists First Open Studio programs.

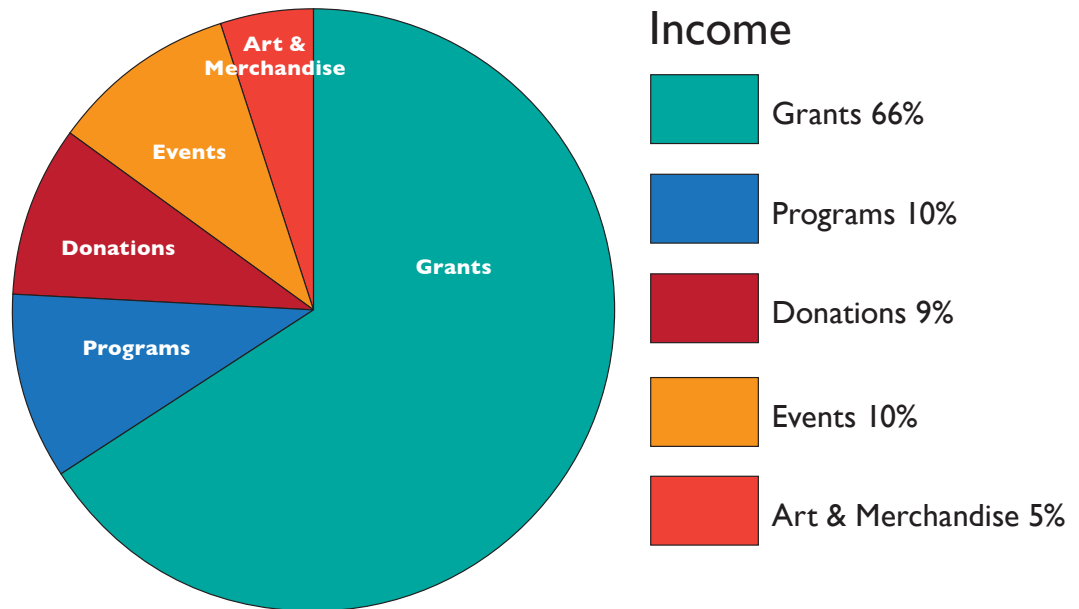
More than 20 current and former Armed Service members were served by the Artists First for Veterans program.

More than 31 different disabilities were represented in the population of artists served.

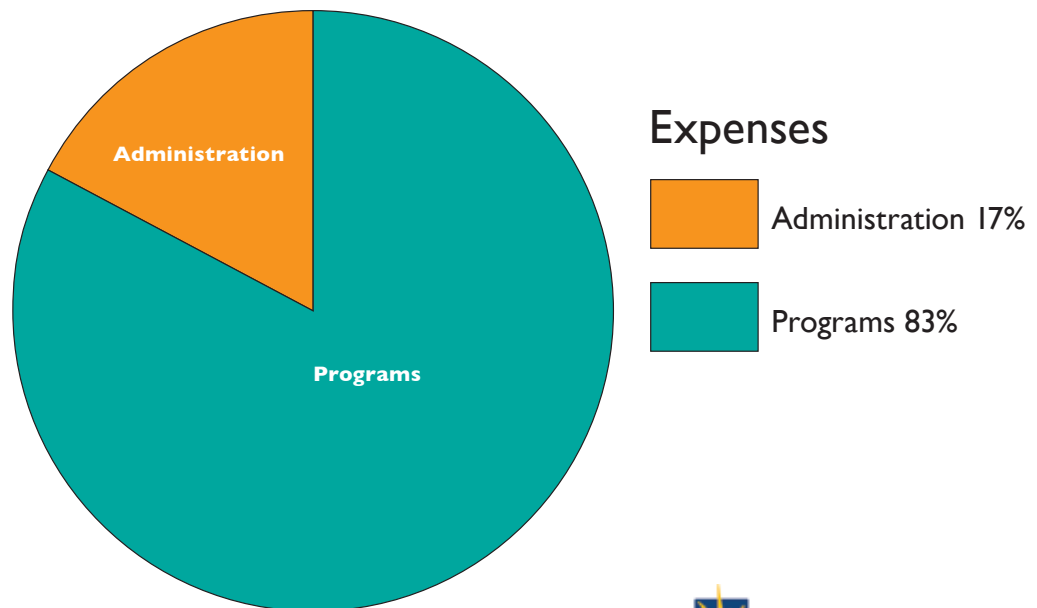
50% of artists were St. Louis City residents and 50% were St. Louis County residents.



Financial Summary Fiscal Year 2015-2016



In addition to our wonderful individual donors we thank the following for their financial support:
Shanahan Foundation, Blue Gator Foundation, Regional Arts Commission,
Developmental Disabilities Resources of St. Louis City.



Artists First's financial integrity earned a Gold Star rating on Guidestar.



Artists First's Open Studio programs address specific needs for adults with disabilities, youth and veterans in our community. Too often, barriers are created among different abilities, ideologies, races, and socio-economic status. Through various art mediums, and in the social setting at the Artists First studio, participants are empowered and provided a strong sense of belonging.

Using a creative approach, disenfranchised individuals are provided with economic and genuine community integration opportunities. The creative process also fosters self-sufficiency and promotes cultural and artistic enrichment in the community.

Bryan's family first brought him for a tour of Artists First because they wanted more for him. They were not pleased with him being in an adult daycare setting where he was watching television all day. Bryan's frustrations manifested in destructive behavior (throwing televisions out the window) and in running away. His family knew there was more opportunity for him, that he had abilities that needed to be nurtured and maximized. The first day Bryan came to Artists First, his family knew they had found a place where he would have respect and opportunities. At Artists First, Bryan is among his peers, growing artistically and personally. Bryan's award-winning artwork has been exhibited throughout the St. Louis community. His mother affirms that through Artists First her son who for 35 years had been non-verbal is today communicating more than he ever has.



Artists First has helped John in his substance abuse recovery by providing an outlet away from an environment where substance abuse is rampant. At Artists First, John can express himself through his art, talk to staff and other artists, and gain a sense of belonging and accomplishment that deters his substance abuse. His distinctive art style is recognized and appreciated throughout the St. Louis area and beyond.



Janice's diagnosis of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and depression were starkly evident upon joining Artists First. Through creative self-expression Janice has developed an increase in self-esteem and self-advocacy skills.

Contact Information



Staff

Sheila Suderwalla, MSW	Executive Director
Tim Jordan	Lead Art Facilitator
Heather Sharpe	Art Facilitator
Cathy O'Brien	Administrative-Studio Assistant

Accounting services

Randy Howe, CPA, MBA RCH Tax & Financial Services



Board of Directors

Jimauria Evans	Co-President
Anne Hollin	Co-President
Honorable David Lee Vincent III	Secretary
Kimber Mallet, MFA	Member
Stephen Zegel, MSW LCSW	Member
Dan Nace	Member
Nancy Newman-Rice, MFA	Member
Daryl Rosen-Huitt	Member
Neil Suthar	Member

Advisory Board

Debora Davidson, Phd