Arts Midwest Announces 2019-2020 Shakespeare in American Communities: Juvenile Justice Grants

National Endowment for the Arts and Arts Midwest Expand Long-Standing Theater Arts Program to Reach Young People in the Juvenile Justice System

Minneapolis, MN – Arts Midwest today announced the first seven grantees in an initiative to expand the National Endowment for the Arts’ long-standing Shakespeare in American Communities program into the juvenile justice system. Shakespeare in American Communities: Juvenile Justice will provide $170,000 in federal funds specifically earmarked for programming for young people in the U.S. criminal justice system over the next year.

The program seeks to expand upon the success of previous inter-agency partnerships with the Department of Defense (2003) to present plays on military bases, and with the Department of Justice (2009-2011) to reach young people in the juvenile justice system through artistic programming. Although Shakespeare in American Communities has funded theater companies who have partnered with the juvenile justice system in the past, this is the first time that dedicated federal funds have been set aside specifically for supporting juvenile justice programing.

“Since 2003, the National Endowment for the Arts has brought professional performances of Shakespeare’s plays to millions of middle and high school students in cities and towns across the United States. Not only has the initiative had a cultural impact in our nation’s schools, the program has proven to be transformative in the juvenile justice system,” said Mary Anne Carter, acting chairman of the Arts Endowment.

Arts Midwest conducted a panel review of arts organizations with proven track records of teaching the works of William Shakespeare within the juvenile justice system.

“Support from the National Endowment for the Arts gives these theater education programs space to grow, provides artists the opportunity to deepen their practice, allows for continued partnership between arts organizations and the justice system, and while helping young people develop social and emotional skills important to their success,” said Christy Dickinson, senior program director at Arts Midwest. “The program would not be possible without the amazing artists and practitioners who dedicate themselves to this work. These organizations provide valuable opportunities for incarcerated young people to discover themselves through the characters and words of Shakespeare.”

Arts Midwest’s previous work with partners in criminal justice facilities and the NEA’s research into the impact of arts programming for youth and adults in the criminal justice system have both demonstrated great potential for the program to help with some of the underlying causes of vexing problems such as re-entry from prison to community and reducing recidivism.
“Quantifiable research demonstrates that prison arts programs – such as the agency’s Shakespeare for American Communities: Juvenile Justice program – build self-confidence, self-discipline, and creative thinking in participants. We know that the longer someone is involved with a prison arts program, the more likely they are to show positive behavioral changes.” said Mary Anne Carter.

“If we do not consciously work to transform our unresolved pain, we will most likely pass it on to others, for most assuredly, hurt people hurt people,” said Curt L. Tofetland, founder and producing artistic director, of Shakespeare Behind Bars, a 2019-2020 program grantee. “The Shakespeare in American Communities: Juvenile Justice program is an opportunity for highly-skilled and experienced prison arts practitioners to enter the world of juvenile corrections to create a circle of trust in which we can learn to grieve for our losses and harms; to give voice to our suffering; to listen deeply to others; to find the compassion we need for ourselves and others.”

2019-2020 Shakespeare in American Communities: Juvenile Justice Grantees

These grantees will conduct programs within the juvenile justice system between August 1, 2019, and July 31, 2020.

**Actors’ Shakespeare Project (Somerville, MA)**
This long-standing partnership between Actors’ Shakespeare Project and the Department of Youth Services began in 2006. Twice a week, with the help of teaching artists from Actors’ Shakespeare Project, young people participate in performances, workshops, rehearsals, and written reflections based on Shakespearean texts.

**Delaware Shakespeare (Wilmington, DE)**
Through a partnership with the Department of Services for Children, Youth, and their Families, Delaware Shakespeare will use *Romeo and Juliet* and *The Tempest* to help young people identify universal human themes in Shakespeare’s plays and find parallel experiences in participants’ own lives. The company is planning on working with one juvenile justice facility and four sites working with young people who are transitioning back into their communities.

**Kentucky Shakespeare (Louisville, KY)**
Kentucky Shakespeare’s long history of serving incarcerated and at-risk young people began in 1995 and continues to be led by Program Director and Producing Artistic Director Matt Wallace. They will partner with the Louisville Metro Youth Detention Services to build a multi-disciplinary residency exploring Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*. Programming will include teaching artists specializing in live performance, playwriting, visual arts, and conflict resolution. Incarcerated youth will have the opportunity to dialogue with adult inmates at Luther Luckett Correctional Complex.

**Marin Shakespeare Company (San Rafael, CA)**
Marin Shakespeare Company’s programming will support young people at Alameda Juvenile Hall in San Leandro as part of the facility’s formal academic instruction. Programming will be led by a team of teaching artists, including Suraya Keating, a drama therapist who uses creativity as a tool for individual and social transformation, and Dameion Brown, a community ambassador, inspirational speaker, and actor who participated in Marin Shakespeare Company’s Shakespeare at Solano Prison program while serving a 23-year sentence.
Shakespeare & Company (Lenox, MA)
Shakespeare & Company’s Shakespeare in the Courts program was created in partnership with the Berkshire Juvenile Court in 2001. The company’s teaching artists receive theatrical and DEI training from internationally-renowned Center for Actor Training under the leadership of Founding Director of Education Kevin G. Coleman.

Shakespeare Behind Bars (Macatwaw, MI)
Shakespeare Behind Bars, led by Founder & Producing Artistic Director Curt L. Tofetland, a mentor and leader in the field, will take the company’s “Circle of Trust” model to young people in the Illinois Juvenile Center in Chicago. This approach to teaching Shakespeare immerses students in a comprehensive and experimental examination of Shakespeare’s text through a creative, developmental, and instructional program called “We Know What We Are, But Know Not What We May Be.”

Tennessee Shakespeare Company (Memphis, TN)
Tennessee Shakespeare Company will partner with Jail East in Memphis and Shelby County Criminal Complex Jail in a 12-week program culminating in a performance of Henry V for participants’ peers, families, correctional officers, attorneys, and local officials.

About Arts Midwest
Arts Midwest promotes creativity, nurtures cultural leadership, and engages people in meaningful arts experiences, bringing vitality to Midwest communities and enriching people’s lives. Based in Minneapolis, Arts Midwest connects the arts to audiences throughout the nine-state region of Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Michigan, Minnesota, North Dakota, Ohio, South Dakota, and Wisconsin. One of six nonprofit regional arts organizations in the United States, Arts Midwest’s history spans more than 30 years. For more information, visit artsmidwest.org.

About the National Endowment for the Arts
Established by Congress in 1965, the NEA is the independent federal agency whose funding and support gives Americans the opportunity to participate in the arts, exercise their imaginations, and develop their creative capacities. Through partnerships with state arts agencies, local leaders, other federal agencies, and the philanthropic sector, the NEA supports arts learning, affirms and celebrates America’s rich and diverse cultural heritage, and extends its work to promote equal access to the arts in every community across America. For more information, visit arts.gov.