

## WELCOME



My favorite daughters, with the youngest as Annie

About eight years ago, I took my then six-year-old daughter to a local children's theater performance of *The Wizard of Oz*. During intermission, she made it clear to me that, next time, *she* wanted to be on stage. So began an incredible journey into the dramatic arts that was topped off last January with her final youth theater performance.

Having very little theater experience myself as a child, I was overwhelmed to see how much my daughter and her peers grew through their program. Putting together the 10 or so shows they performed during that time sparked tremendous social, emotional, and creative growth. When, at age 10, my daughter took center stage in the lead role in *Annie*, I cried as she sang out the hope and determination of the lyrics, "I'll just stick out my chin and grin, and say, the sun'll come out tomorrow."

My daughter and the other child actors didn't write those words of hope and determination, but they did bring their own grit and joy to their songs and lines. So much of what happens on stage in a youth theater program is really about how the individual young people express themselves in their roles to make their characters come alive. In the process, they build communication skills and the confidence and persistence that are critical to success in school and in life.

Children need opportunities to work together and push each other to develop their creativity. Theater is one of just many ways in which out-of-school time programs can help to fulfill that need. Whatever the focus of our afterschool programs, we should be looking to make space for youth to create. With support and the right structure, young people can create rich, meaningful activities and a powerful environment for learning—more powerful than anything adults can offer based on our own ideas and expectations.

Over the next couple of issues of *Afterschool Matters*, we are including a special focus on creative youth development (CYD). We are thrilled to partner with the Clare Rose Foundation in this important work. According to the Creative Youth Development National Partnership ([creativematters.org](http://creativematters.org)), CYD "is a recent term for a longstanding theory of practice that integrates creative skill-building, inquiry, and expression with positive youth development principles, fueling young people's imaginations and building critical learning and life skills."

Quoting these words in the essay that opens this issue, Adam Jacobs goes on to show how his CYD program not only fosters creativity but also builds peace in participants' relationships. With this strong beginning, we look forward to bringing you more stories and ideas about the intersection between creativity and youth development.

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