2016 ANNUAL REPORT

Art from Ashes exists to empower struggling youth by providing creative programs that facilitate health and hope through expression, connection and transformation.

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Creative Expression, Personal Transformation

For 13 years, Art from Ashes (AfA), a Colorado nonprofit, has continued the work started in 1992 by founding director Catherine O'Neill Thorn. AfA is the first youth arts agency in Colorado to use a process of creative expression specifically designed to facilitate personal transformation. AfA's empowerment workshops transcend standard arts programming by encouraging some of our most neglected members of society to embrace their creative identity, rather than one founded on negative experiences and circumstances.

Since 2003, Phoenix Rising, the foundational empowerment program that launched the agency, has utilized poetry and

> "Students not only enjoyed themselves and grew emotionally during AfA but also saw academic gains in language arts as a result.
>
> *Brian Sleevy, New America High School Writing teacher*

Rachel Icolari, 17

Participant, Poet, and Youth Board Representative

Art fom Ashes has completely changed my life. I was thinking of dropping out of school, but after I started going to the workshops every week, I decided that wasn't a good idea, because I was shown that I have a future. Art from Ashes has not only shown me how to better my future, they have bettered my life. Everything said by us youth holds value to the adults. We are never put into a box or labeled; our creativity is allowed to roam free. At Art from Ashes everyone matters, everyone is loved and valued, and our differences are what bring us together. There is no limit to our potential. Due to this, I am going to college after I graduate and will be majoring in special education with a minor in creative writing. Without being told that my voice matters, my story matters – and that I matter – I would not be here today.

artfromashes.org • bit.ly/PayPal-AfA • bit.ly/donateafa

Proof in the Pudding

In 2016, AfA worked with 28 community partners. We had 2,275 youth contacts with the 607 youth served by our creative programs.

Of the youth surveyed in 2016, pre- and post-surveys results showed:

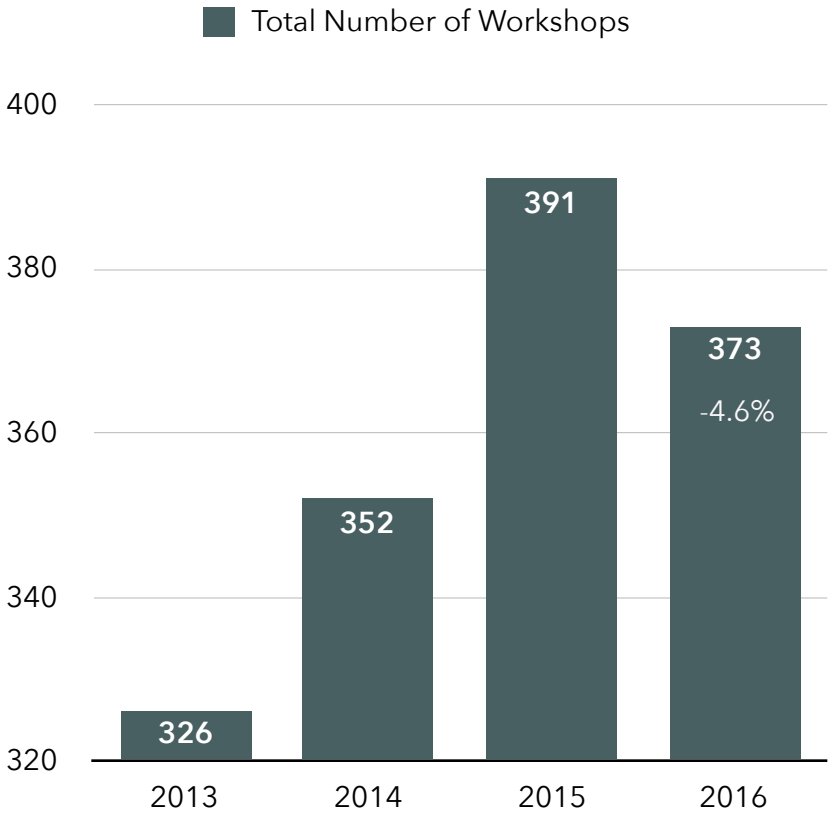
- an increase of 61% in the number of youth who strongly affirmed "I can express myself through poetry."
- an increase of 74% in the number of youth who strongly affirmed "I feel comfortable performing in front of others."
- an increase of 22% in the number of youth who strongly affirmed "I do well in school."
- 36% more youth strongly affirm they make good decisions
- 23% more youth strongly affirm they stay away from violence and fighting

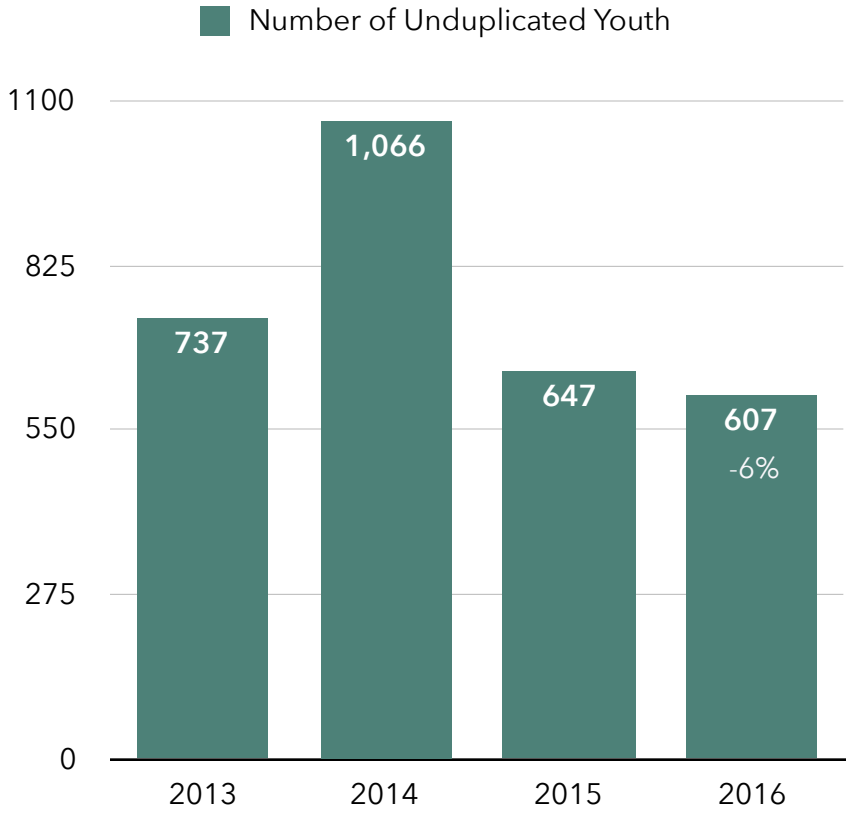
spoken word to help over 11,000 youth recognize the power of language in perception and self-development. The Phoenix Rising program has provided poetry and spoken word workshops that use right-brain techniques and cutting-edge scientific information on creativity, neurology, youth development and behavioral psychology to address risk factors among struggling young people.

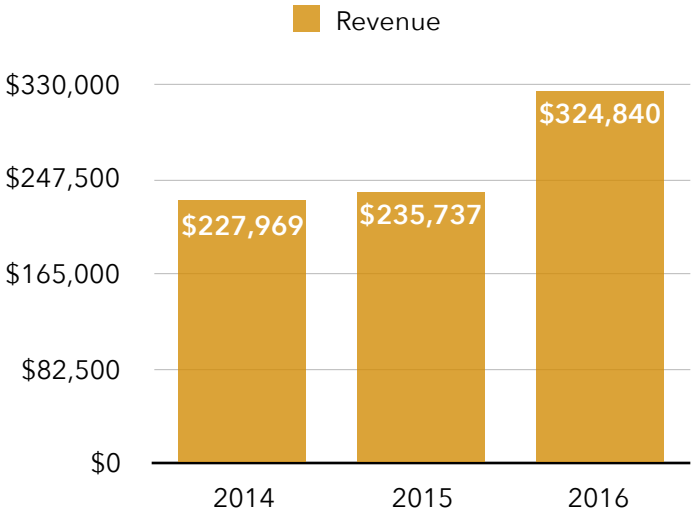
Studies show that factors contributing to juvenile delinquency include a lack of activities for youth that provide constructive developmental experiences; disconnect between youth and adults; and the lack of personal resiliency that results from low self-esteem/self-efficacy. Our creative workshops are focused on positive, interactive activities that are designed to promote healthy thinking and behaviors; offer an opportunity for youth to connect to adult facilitators, poets and artists, each other and the community; and survey results attest to the powerful impact of the program on self-esteem.

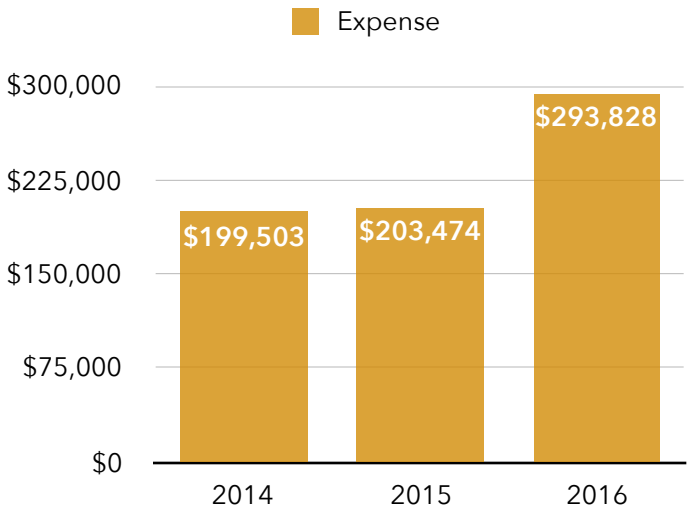
Expression, Connection, Transformation

The core principles of all AfA programs, including Phoenix Rising and those under development, are Expression, Connection and Transformation. EXPRESSION facilitates a safe way for youth participants to tell their story, primarily using the symbolism and metaphor of poetry, and subsequently through other expressions of creativity; CONNECTION offers a safe space and healthy method of expression that allows understanding, acceptance and empathy to develop with peers, adults and the larger community; TRANSFORMATION helps youth discover and express their creative genius and thereby recognize it is within their power to choose a healthy, productive life.


Total Number of Workshops
400
380
360
340
320
326
352
391
373
-4.6%
2013
2014
2015
2016

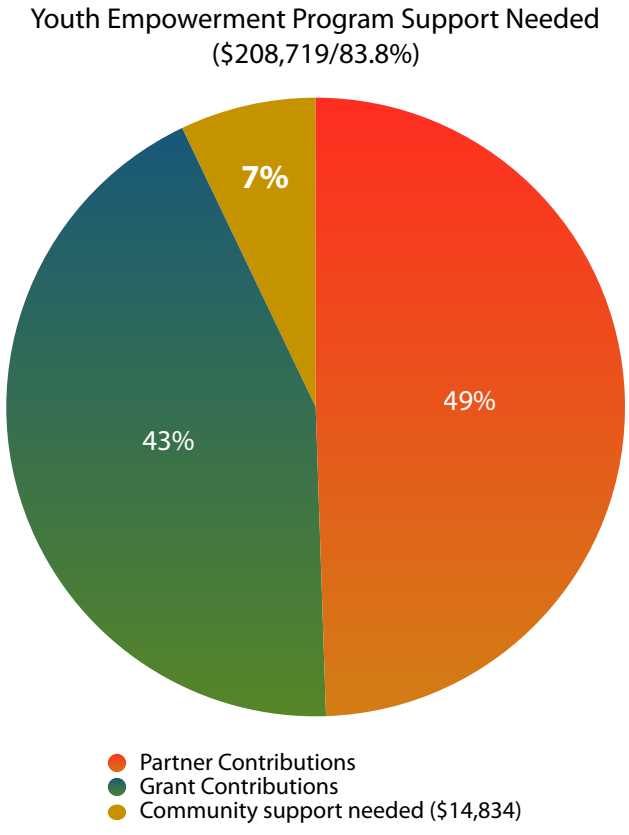

Number of Unduplicated Youth
1100
825
550
275
0
737
1,066
647
607
-6%
2013
2014
2015
2016

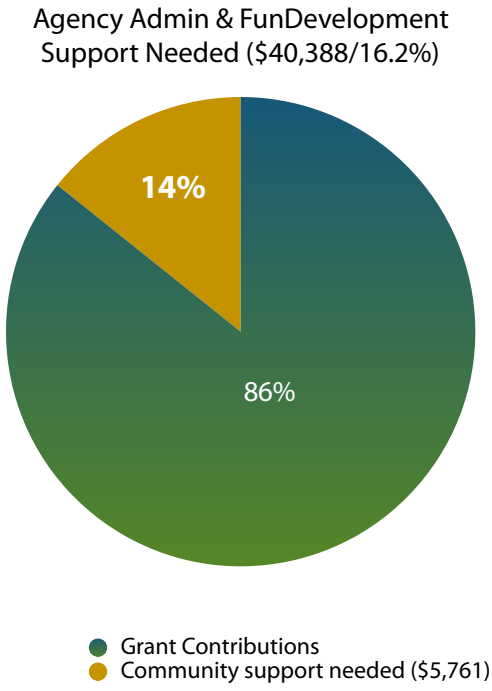




In April 2016, AfA underwent a transitional period when then-Director of Programs left the agency to pursue a graduate degree at the University of Denver. AfA hired the existing Program Manager to enhance management, leadership, program development, facilitator training, youth outcome tracking procedures, and increase community partnership opportunities. As anticipated, this key position produced valuable growth and stability for AfA.

In 2016, the new Director of Programs focused on partnership relationships and community presence, increasing the number of workshops sold, including an increase of 5.9% partner retention and 10 new partnerships. As a result, there was a significant increase in performance/event participation, conference opportunities, and drop-in workshop attendance. The combination of increased program exposure, an increase in fundraising revenue, including grant funding, and individual/business donations, resulted in total net assets of **$217, 358.**





*Poem written in 3 minutes by **Manual Perez, 17***
New America School–Thornton

What is Success?

What is success?
Is it the big mansion and the shiny sports cars?
Is it the millions in the bank and the shirt and tie?
Or is it finding yourself?
Is it reaching a goal that you long struggled for?
Is it doing what you want
without caring about what others will say?
Breaking the barrier of society that wants you to
Walk a fine line without stepping out.
A line set by the followers and not the leaders.
Success is being the owner of your thoughts and values
Which you guard with your sharp sword,
Without letting society push you to fit in.

*Poem written in 3 minutes by **Savannah Arterburn, 19***
Art from Ashes weekly drop-in workshop

I get that you just want to impress
and not admit that you're a mess.
I know 'cause I can see the tears your soul disappears.
Beauty's pain and beauty's in everything
but we are just here to learn–
don't forget to breathe.
If need be lean on me
and don't forget what makes you, you.
It's crazy but you don't have to know exactly who you are
your friends will help with that part.
Feeling unnoticed is how you go
and it hurts 'cause we all know.
You're not alone with all your pain
forget the world just whip it all away.
You deserve it 'cause it's not about the surface
yes, you're still perfect and always worth it.
So let me be your mirror so you can see a little clearer.
'Cause you're beautiful and you don't even know.