

A.B.L.E.
artists breaking limits & expectations

ANNUAL REPORT

.....
FISCAL YEAR 2017



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PROGRAM OVERVIEW

A.B.L.E. – Artists Breaking Limits and Expectations – is a Chicago-based nonprofit organization offering young adults with Down syndrome and other developmental disabilities the chance to collaborate on theatre and film projects. Supported by a staff of professional teaching artists and volunteer facilitators, actors work together and support each other while building lifelong skills like communication, cooperation, concentration, and creativity. Since its inception in 2010, A.B.L.E. has produced 3 film projects and 11 plays ranging from devised performances to pieces from the classical canon, including a collaboration with Chicago Shakespeare Theater at Navy Pier to produce *Twelfth Night* as part of *Shakespeare 400 Chicago*. A.B.L.E. has been featured in *The Chicago Tribune* and *Apostrophe Magazine*. Our feature film *The Curse of the Tempest Jewel* was highlighted on "Your Chicago" on the *CBS Evening News*, received an Award of Merit from the Accolade Global Film Competition, and was an official selection for The Chicago Onscreen Showcase. We have grown steadily, and have our sights set on expanding programming for adults with special needs in the Chicago community and beyond!

Mission Statement:

We believe that everyone is A.B.L.E.
A.B.L.E. to create.
A.B.L.E. to connect.
A.B.L.E. to contribute.
Our mission is to provide artistic experiences through which individuals with developmental disabilities feel accepted and empowered to discover their own unique voices, and develop the confidence and skills to share who they are what they are truly A.B.L.E. to do!

Program Goals:

- ▶ Empower the performer
- ▶ Create a safe and respectful space
- ▶ Enhance speech and communication skills
- ▶ Encourage movement and physicality
- ▶ Build focus and concentration
- ▶ Celebrate creativity and spontaneity
- ▶ Strengthen social skills by developing positive peer relationships
- ▶ Value teamwork and cooperation
- ▶ Share our experiences with each other and the community
- ▶ Have fun!

A MESSAGE FROM OUR FOUNDER & PRESIDENT

This past year marked the start of an exciting new journey for A.B.L.E. After several years functioning under umbrella organizations, we officially incorporated in May 2016 and obtained our charitable 501c3 status in August 2016. We are grateful to our friends at **GiGi's Playhouse** (2010-2014) and **Chicago Children's Theatre** (2014-2016) for nurturing the program and providing invaluable administrative support as we solidified our structure and mission. Thanks to the momentum from our May 2016 partnership with **Chicago Shakespeare Theatre** at Navy Pier and the funding from a successful **Hatchfund Campaign**, we hit the ground running as a new organization and launched a busy season of programming that you can read about in the following pages.

As some of our more devoted followers may know, I also embarked on a personal journey this year and took a sabbatical from A.B.L.E. to pursue a Masters in Applied Theatre from **The Royal Central School for Speech and Drama** in London. This program offered a fabulous opportunity to learn from other arts organizations and practitioners, and offered valuable perspective and inspiration for how A.B.L.E. can continue to grow. I am grateful to **Kendra and Peter Van Kempen** and our **Board of Directors** for their leadership in my absence. I return to Chicago invigorated and excited to see where we go next.

In rehearsal, we tell our actors all the time that we have to work together and support each other as an ensemble to create a show. We are lucky to be a part of a community that exemplifies this attitude, and I am continually amazed by the generosity of the many individuals and organizations who champion our ensemble. **Lawyers for the Creative Arts**, **Afable Consulting**, and **The Arts & Business Council of Chicago** offered invaluable expertise during our transition to becoming a 501(c3), and we look forward to building relationships with them in the years to come. We rely heavily on our **roster of volunteers**, and so our massive thanks go to everyone who gave their time and energy to our ensemble each week. And we are always grateful to the **parents and families of our ensemble** for their continued support in this program through its many incarnations over the years.

As we continue to navigate this transition, there are a number of ways to get involved with our organization. Please don't hesitate to get in touch to learn more.

Thank you for believing, like we believe, that everyone is ABLE to connect, ABLE to contribute, and ABLE to create, and for taking this journey with us. With your support, A.B.L.E. can continue to develop our methodology, build our profile, and solidify our status as a leader in inclusive practice. Together we can build a platform for people with special needs to share who they are and all that they are A.B.L.E. to do.




Katie Yohe

MEET OUR TEAM

Our artistic staff and teaching artists bring a range of experience in education and the performing arts.

Katie Yohe - founder & artistic director

Lawrence Kern - co-founder & filmABLE coordinator

Lindsay Stock - community outreach coordinator

Kaylie Honkala, Sean Okerberg, Kendra Van Kempen, Peter Van Kempen - teaching artists

Margaret Shiels & Daisy Bentley - programming interns

Our volunteer facilitators are an integral part of our ensemble. They rotate in and out of rehearsals each week and ensure that all of our actors receive individual attention and support. Most have fond memories of performing at some point in their lives, and love sharing their experiences and talents with our ensemble. This year, we welcomed six new volunteers to our active team, and, combined, they volunteered over 200 hours of their time with our ensemble!

Braden Cleary - joined fall 2016

Matt Maxwell - joined fall 2016

Beth Sherwood - joined fall 2015

Elizabeth Elliott - joined fall 2016

Sarah Menke - joined fall 2016

Susan Sjodin - joined fall 2013

Parker Guidry - joined spring 2017

Alison Perrone - joined summer 2016

Lindsay Stock - joined spring 2013

Our board of directors each bring varied expertise to the organization and are committed to helping A.B.L.E. grow

Katie Yohe - President, A.B.L.E. Founder & Teaching Artist with varied experience as an educator and performing artist

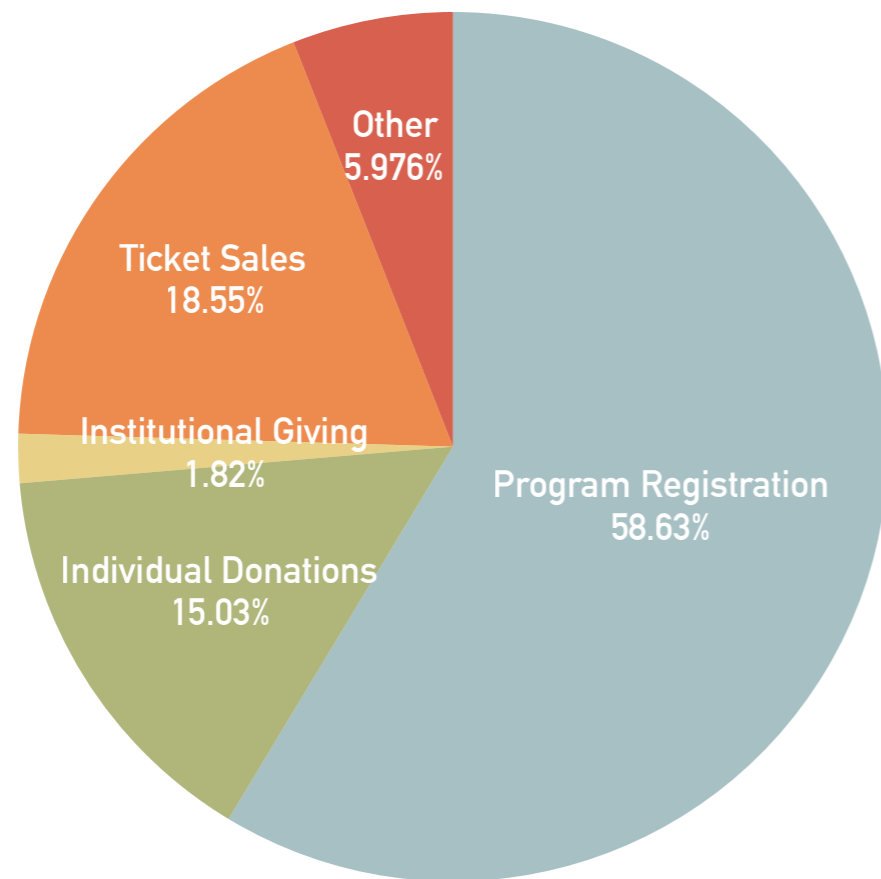
Matt Maxwell - Secretary, A.B.L.E. facilitator, with experience as a lawyer and performing artist

Nancy Buchanan - Treasurer, A.B.L.E. parent with experience as a small business owner

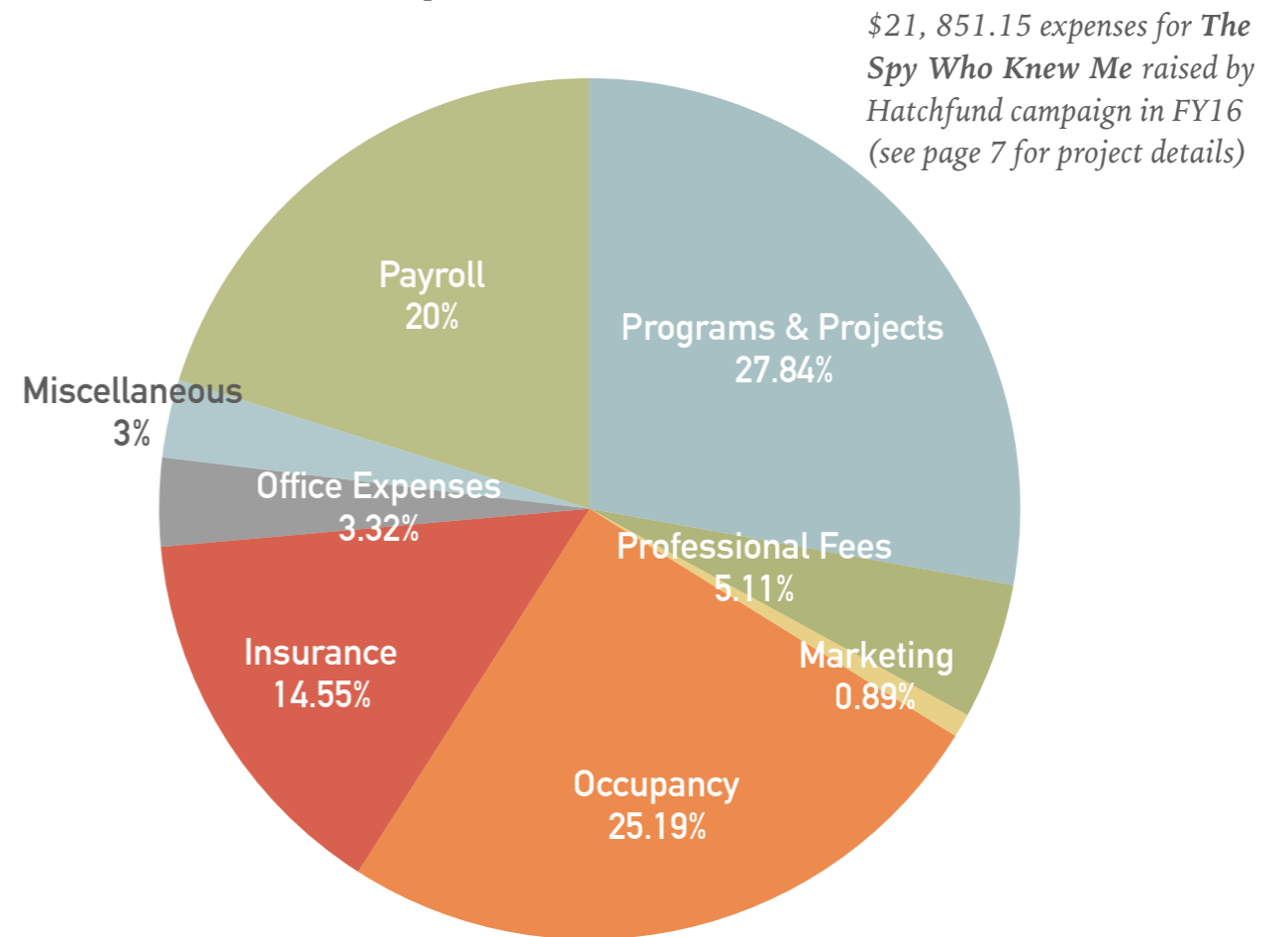
Kendra Van Kempen - Trustee, A.B.L.E. Teaching Artist with experience in non-profit development and events

FINANCIAL OVERVIEW

FY 17 Income = \$19,200.45



FY 17 Expenses = \$43,995.49



FY16 Net Revenue = \$28,184.52

FY17 Net Revenue = (\$24,795.04)

Active Balance Carried to FY 18 = \$3,389.48

FILM PROJECT DETAILS: THE SPY WHO KNEW ME

Building on the lessons from our 2014 film, THE CURSE OF THE TEMPEST JEWEL, A.B.L.E.'s second feature film promises to be our biggest adventure yet!

A riff on the classic spy-adventure genre epitomized by James Bond, THE SPY WHO KNEW ME features an ensemble cast of 20 young adult actors with Down syndrome playing some unique characters in an action-packed story. The plot follows super spy Tabitha Link and the ladies of the all-female agency U.N.I.T.E. Following an anonymous tip, Tabitha winds up at the scene of a jewelry heist where she sees a familiar face from her past. She and her fellow spies must race to find the connections between a series of thefts, a top-secret military experiment, and several missing operatives before they lose themselves completely to the evil organization E.C.H.O.

A.B.L.E. co-founder and teaching artist Lawrence Kern, crafted the screenplay for THE SPY WHO KNEW ME with each actor's individual strengths and personality in mind. Kern, who also directed the film, incorporated monologues the cast wrote themselves about who they are, what they love, and what they can do. The story celebrates differences and stresses the importance of holding on to what makes us unique. "People are more than one thing," Tabitha reminds us. "A world where everyone's the same isn't worth living in."

Working with a professional film crew led by cinematographers Andrew McNally and Brock Alter, filming took place in August 2016 at a variety of locations around the city including The Field Museum, Chicago Shakespeare Theater, Formally Modern Tuxedo, Fey & Co. Jewelers, and The Union League Club. The spies also got to drive cars and fly jetpacks using the green screen facilities at Space Stage Studios.

Funding for the film was made possible through a campaign on crowd-funding platform, Hatchfund in FY16. Donations ranged from \$10 to \$2000, and 142 individual donors contributed a total of \$22,035 in exchange for exclusive project "perks" including autographed scripts, film props, and invitations to an exclusive staged reading of the screenplay with the cast and crew.

The finished film will be about 75 minutes long and is scheduled to premiere September 16, 2017 at The Landmark Century Center Cinema. After the premiere, the movie will be shared at schools and community centers around Chicago, and on the local and international film festival circuit to help raise awareness and show what individuals with Down syndrome can do when they are given equal access to creative opportunities.

50.5
hours on set

11
filming
locations

20
actors

11
days of
filming

17
crew
members



For more behind the scenes photos and a detailed production log, please visit our blog at www.ableensemble.com/blogable

STAGE PROJECT DETAILS

Winter 2016: A Dickens Christmas Carol

Saturday, December 17, 2016
Victory Gardens Biograph Theatre
1pm and 3pm

Working with a script adaptation by local Chicagoan Gary Peterson, 17 actors tackled this classic story about compassion, memory, families, and forgiveness. Our ensembles presented two separate shows, giving each actor more stage time and the opportunity to play several different characters. This production also marked the final bow for program veteran and founding member of the troupe, Andrew Kosnik. This marked Andrew's eleventh performance with A.B.L.E. His mother Catherine says, "A.B.L.E. has helped Andrew make enormous social and cognitive developments. Watching Andrew onstage, I don't see Down syndrome, I just see perfection and purity of heart and soul."



Spring 2017: Gilbert & Sullivan's Pirates of Penzance

Saturday, May 20, 2017
Victory Gardens Biograph Theater
1pm

Filled with memorable tunes including "I am the Very Model of a Modern Major General," *The Pirates of Penzance* brought the musical abilities and comedic timing of the A.B.L.E. Ensemble to the forefront. This production marked the first time that A.B.L.E. produced an operetta. Longtime teaching artist and program musical director Peter Van Kempen adapted the libretto and tailored it to the individual strengths of the ensemble. We also welcomed two new new actors to the ensemble - Emma Burkhalter and Anna Luzadder!

18
actors

106
hours of
rehearsal

43
dance
parties

9
volunteers

3
shows

305
tickets sold



Special Thanks to Brock Alter, Neal Bader, Andrew Heckman, Jack Horwich, Andrew McNally, Alex Palma, Alison Perrone, Gary Peterson, Alex Sokol, Kiefer Szumlas, and Eric Van Tassell for sharing their expertise on our film and theatre projects this season.



LOOKING FORWARD

A.B.L.E.'s core ensemble program has progressed rapidly, and we are keen to build on this growth. In addition to continuing this vital programming, A.B.L.E. has identified 2 key goals to continue our success and provide additional opportunities for individuals with disabilities to share their voices.

1) Strengthen internal operations

As a young company, we are still solidifying our organizational structure, and working to create reliable revenue streams. A.B.L.E.'s Board of Directors enrolled with The Arts & Business Council of Chicago. Throughout FY18 we will work with them to receive training on best practices for governance, staffing, and development.

2) Create programming for adults with special needs

This season, two of A.B.L.E.'s longest-standing actors - Rachel & Andrew - turned 22 and graduated from CPS and from our teen program. School provides a reliable routine, social interaction, and a sense of community, and transitioning from this safe space can be difficult. A.B.L.E. recognizes its responsibility to enhance engagement for adults with disabilities. Throughout FY18 we will seek guidance from parents of current and former actors, community partner organizations like Aspire and Misericordia, to develop plans for a sustainable adult program, with the aim of launching a pilot in Fall 2018.

2016-2017 FUNDERS

Our heartfelt thanks to the following organizations and individuals for their generous support this season



\$500 and up
The Collins Family
The Butler Family

\$250 and up
Ruth Sharps

\$100 and up
Gary Peterson
Cornelis Van Kempen
Gregory Desmond
Kate Magon

Up to \$99
Neal Bader
David Barnes
Colleen Evert
Marilyn Halperin
MJ Quinn
Oscar Medina
In Memory of Jack Mayer








REACH OUT

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