



**A B L E**

artists breaking limits & expectations

# ANNUAL REPORT

*FISCAL YEAR 2019*

*July 1, 2018 - June 30, 2019*



# A MESSAGE FROM A.B.L.E.

Hello A.B.L.E. Family,

Writing this report was really hard. I mean that in the best way possible. It was hard to narrow down the highlights for this report and still keep it at a readable length! **If I had to sum up FY19 in one word, it would be GROWTH.** A.B.L.E. celebrated our 3<sup>rd</sup> birthday as a 501c3 organization this year. We are growing up. Our ensemble members are growing up. And we are growing out to better serve our community. You'll see this growth reflected in numerous ways throughout this report including:

- ▶ Expanding our core ensemble program to serve adults over the age of 22
- ▶ Spreading A.B.L.E.'s distinctive performing arts methodology for individuals with disabilities through new outreach initiatives and specialized workshops
- ▶ Reaching new audiences for our theatre and film projects in Chicago and across the country
- ▶ Deepening our knowledge through learning opportunities for our staff and volunteers
- ▶ Widening our professional network through strategic partnerships with likeminded organizations, increased media presence, and presenting at local and national conferences

None of this could happen without also growing our incredible base of supporters. Though the non-profit sector has seen a decrease in giving nationwide, **A.B.L.E. donors increased giving by over 67% this year compared to FY18.** I think it's particularly meaningful that **the majority of our individual gifts are under \$100** – this shows how many people share our belief that everyone is A.B.L.E. to connect, to contribute, and to create, and how much we can accomplish when we all work together.

The challenge, of course, is to sustain this growth. We cannot increase our impact without also increasing internal capacity. This includes training new teaching artists and facilitators who can lead projects, and building our administrative staff to support our day-to-day operations. We've shared just a few of our programmatic priorities with you on page 6-8 of this report. We will count on your continued support as we dream towards an ambitious future.

**Each A.B.L.E. actor is on their own journey of individual growth. Through their teenage years and into adulthood, our goal is to create a supportive environment to help them reach their goals - whether it's the confidence to stand in front of an audience, the interpersonal skills to work constructively with a group, or strengthening skills in verbal and nonverbal communication. Thank you for securing this vital creative and social outlet, and making it possible for all of us to grow.**

With gratitude,



Katie Yohe, Founder & Executive Artistic Director

## OUR 2018-2019 SEASON TEAM

### Board of Directors

Nancy Buchanan  
Greg Desmond  
Jenny Fisher  
Matt Maxwell  
Kendra Van Kempen  
Katie Yohe

### Ensemble Actors

Colleen Altman	Matthew LaChappelle*
Quincy Bane	Emily Lavin
Marissa Bloodgood	Anna Luzadder
Christian Boyd*	Mila Medina
Alena Brown	Maria Meyer
Emma Burkhalter	Lucas Miezal
Jack Butler	Claire O'Leary
Sandia Coleman*	Madeleine Perez*
Benjamin Collins	Justice Peters-Farrell*
Martin Conway*	Sam Petri
Samuel Floersheimer	Sam Radinsky
Peter Grzeslo	Jake Solworth*
Natalia Janik	Hannah Vilic
Andrew Kosnik	Lucy Walsh
Emily Kwidzinski	

### Teaching Artists

Braden Cleary  
Kaylie Honkala  
Lawrence Kern  
Emma MacLean  
Sean Okerberg  
Katie Yohe

### Facilitators

Nette Angelini*	Arin Mulvaney*
Somer Benson	Alison Perrone
Rosie Bross*	Jenna Rapisarda
Nate Buursma*	Michael Russell
Claire Chrzan*	Beth Sherwood
Braden Cleary	Susan Sjodin
Kara Davidson*	Dana Smith*
Shannon Diegel	Lindsay Stock
Mary Feigenbutz*	Kendra Van Kempen
Chelsea Hosler*	Peter Van Kempen
Aaron Latterell*	Adele Wilhelm
Matt Maxwell	Polly Yukevich

\*denotes first season with A.B.L.E.

# ENSEMBLE UPDATES

The core of A.B.L.E.'s programming are its Ensembles. Supported by a staff of teaching artists and volunteer facilitators, ensembles work together in weekly rehearsals to create a show staged at a professional theatre. Throughout the process, actors strengthen lifelong skills including communication, confidence, and cooperation. This year, A.B.L.E. expanded our ensemble program to include opportunities for adults ages 22+ with Down syndrome and other developmental differences. Combined, A.B.L.E.'s teens and adults created 5 unique performances for audiences this season.

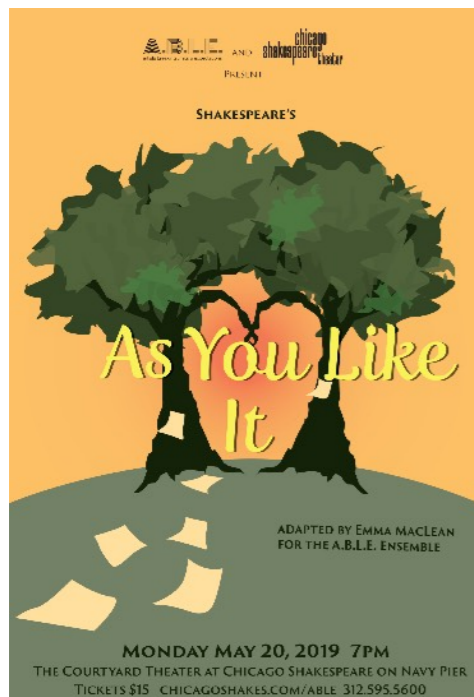
## TEEN ENSEMBLES

This season, A.B.L.E.'s ensembles for performers ages 14-21 focused on stories about change and transformation.

In the fall, A.B.L.E.'s Monday and Friday ensembles produced two unique nights of storytelling. *Thereby Hangs a Tale* featured monologues, scenes, and movement pieces inspired by the actors' own lives. Equal parts humorous, thought-provoking, and touching, these personal tales allowed actors to reflect on growing up and all the messy, wonderful things it entails.

In the spring, the two ensembles joined forces to present an original adaptation of Shakespeare's "wonderful, wonderful, and most wonderful" comedy *As You Like It*. Adapted and directed by A.B.L.E. teaching artist, [Emma MacLean](#), the script was tailored to the individual strengths of the cast. The forest of Arden came to life through scenes, monologues, and, for the first time, puppetry!

Thanks to our producing partner, [Chicago Shakespeare Theater at Navy Pier](#) for hosting all 3 performances.



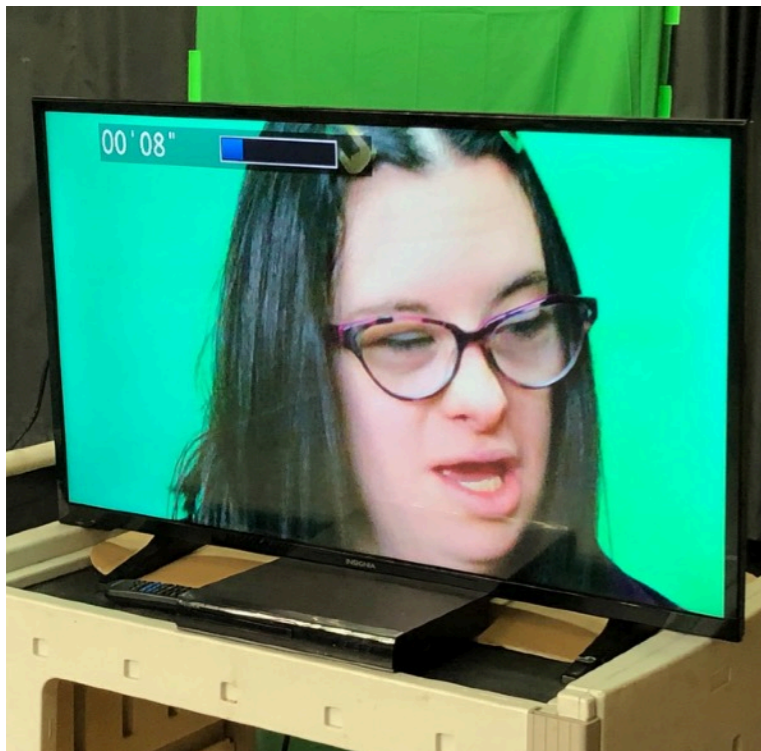
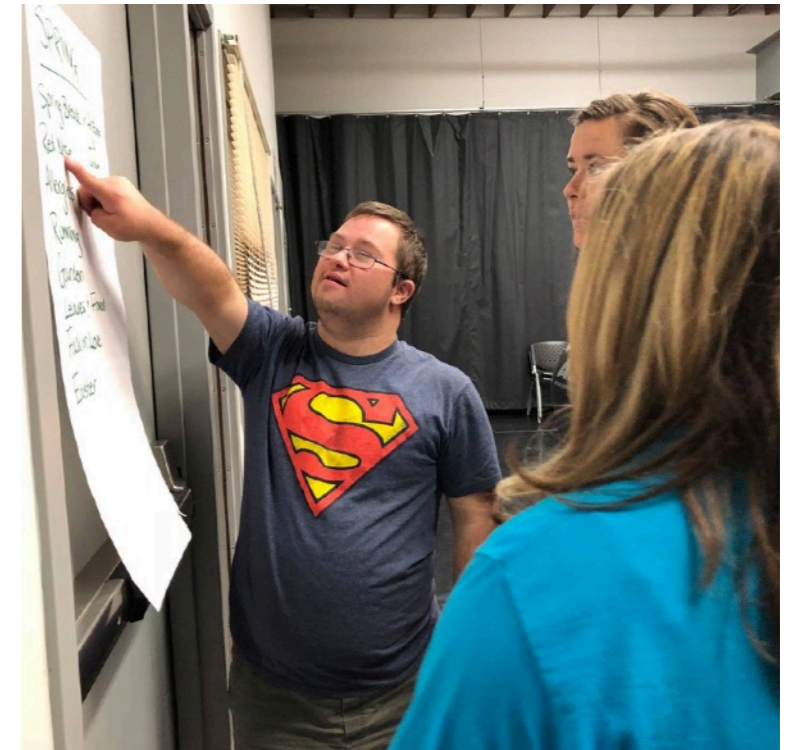
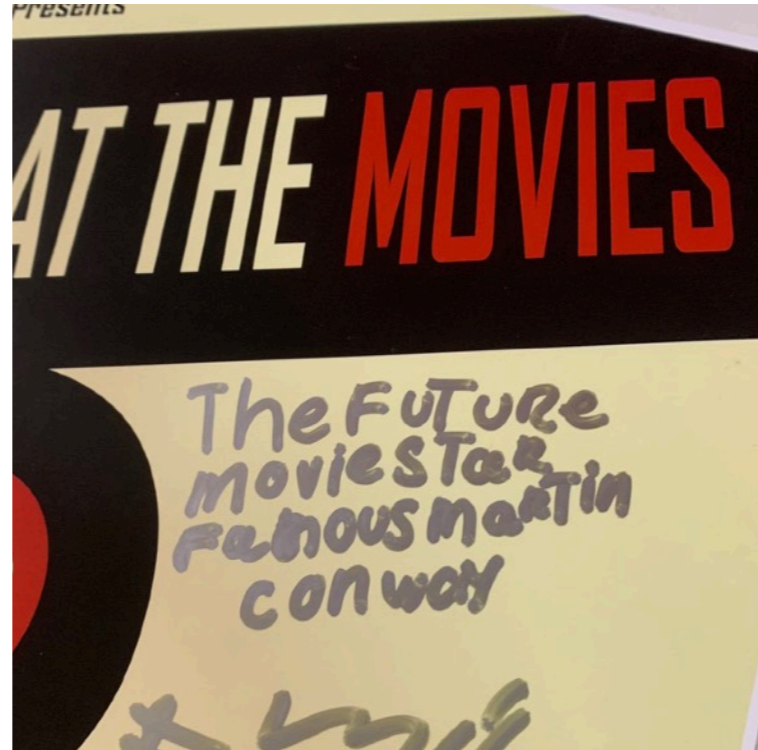
## ADULT ENSEMBLES

For their inaugural season, A.B.L.E.'s adult ensemble devised original productions to share their hearts and minds with the audience.

In the fall, actors developed *The Most Sensational Inspirational Celebrational A.B.L.E.tational Variety Show* about the artists who inspire them. The show featured everything from beloved pop culture characters, to Shakespearean classics, and even an original scene penned by actor Matt LaChappelle!

In the spring, actors built a performance about the movies that have made a difference in their lives, the actors they admire, and what makes film the ultimate escape. *A Night at the Movies* featured original monologues alongside scenes from some favorite screenplays. Actors also showed off their on-camera skills in a special green screen sequence.

Thanks to our venue partner, [The Menomonee Club Drucker Center](#) for hosting both of these sold-out productions in the Fasseas Studio.



*During the FY19 season, A.B.L.E.'s ensembles collaborated on 5 productions. In addition to focusing on classical characters from famous works, actors also wrote and developed their own stories to share with audiences. The ensembles were introduced to new techniques including puppetry and on-camera acting, which allowed them to hone skills in nonverbal communication and teamwork.*

# SEASON HIGHLIGHTS



## LEARNING WITH FRANTIC ASSEMBLY

Frantic Assembly is a UK based theatre company that has developed an international reputation for collaborative physical approaches. Guest practitioners Sean Hollands and Amelia Cardwell led a variety of sessions for A.B.L.E. this fall aimed at teaching skills for storytelling through movement. This included:

- ▶ A 6-hour [Professional Development Masterclass](#) for A.B.L.E. teaching artists and facilitators.
- ▶ [2 student workshops](#) for our adult ensembles
- ▶ A [Creative Residency](#) in which A.B.L.E. actors and volunteers worked together to develop a special performance in just 3 days!



## INCREASING AWARENESS

In August 2018, we had the good fortune to connect with local news anchor Jon Hansen. Inspired by his own formative experiences in the theatre, Jon connected quickly to A.B.L.E.'s mission and helped us reach new audiences across multiple platforms this year including:

- ▶ Two segments on [The Jam Morning Show](#)
- ▶ A 30 minute feature on [WCIU's Now.Chicago](#)
- ▶ Multiple spots on WGN Radio

One family drove over 3 hours to see *Thereby Hangs a Tale* because they heard us on the radio! Many thanks to Jon for championing our programs and helping to spread the word about who we are and what we do.



## REACHING OUT

This year, A.B.L.E. shared our distinctive approach to inclusive theatre in several formats:

- ▶ A.B.L.E. teaching artists led a [6-week residency with 30 students from PACE program at National Louis University](#).
- ▶ Teaching artists [developed new workshop curricula](#) for physical theatre, puppetry, on-camera acting, improvisation, classical theatre, and devising.
- ▶ Ensemble members led 2 interactive presentations for the next generation of teaching artists at the [Inclusive Theatre Festival at Northwestern University](#)
- ▶ Katie presented on the panels *Rethink, Revamp: Giving Your Old Curriculum New Life* for [Communities in Schools Chicago](#) and *A City of Contradictions: A Discussion with Chicago Theater Makers* at the [Literary Managers and Dramaturgs of America Conference](#).



## ACCLAIM FOR THE SPY WHO KNEW ME

Following a red carpet premiere in September 2017, A.B.L.E.'s second feature film has received local and international recognition:

- ▶ Shown in multiple parks around the city as an official selection for the [Chicago Onscreen Showcase](#)
- ▶ Received the [Audience Choice Award for Best Narrative Feature from the Awareness Film Festival](#) in Los Angeles.
- ▶ Named semi-finalist for the [Courage Festival in Berlin](#) and an official selection of the [Great Lakes International Film Festival](#).
- ▶ Profiled in [The Reader's annual Film Issue](#)

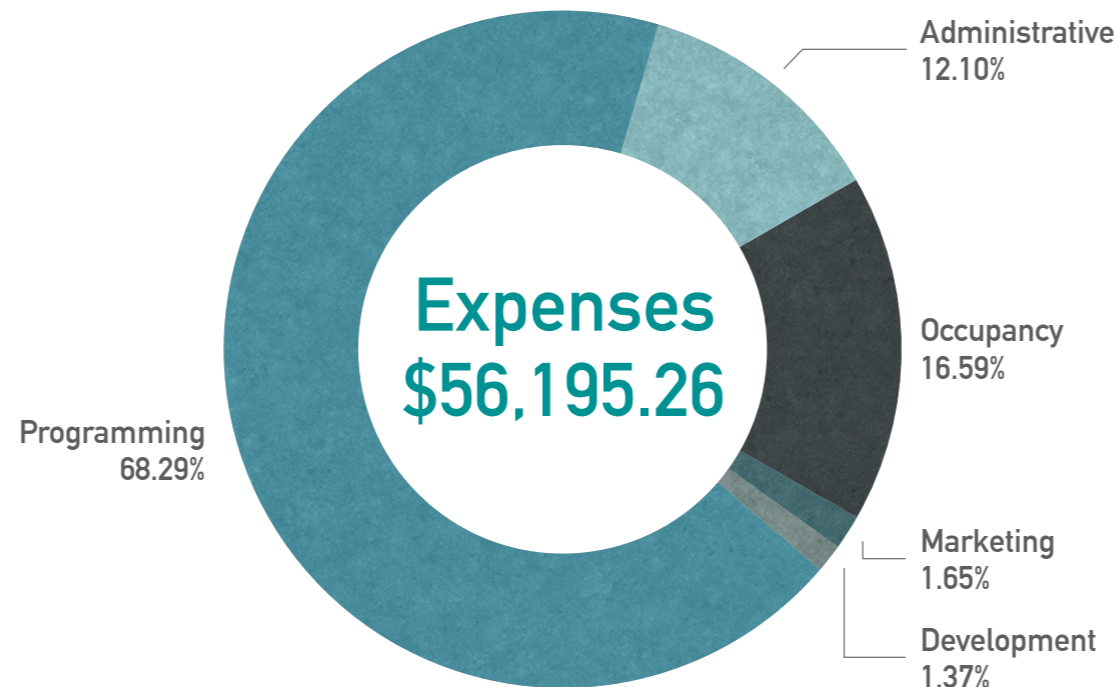
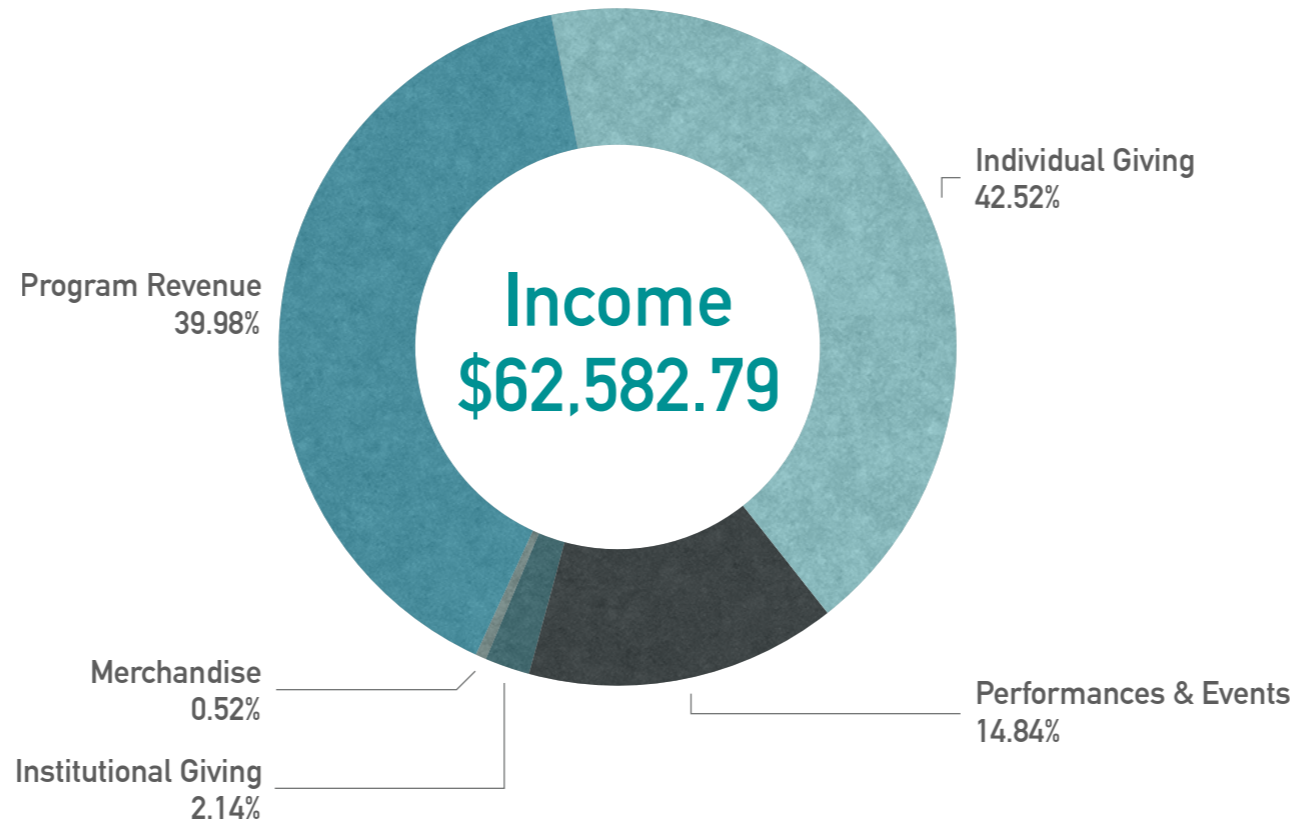
A.B.L.E. continues to share our films in special screenings for community organizations. They are also available to stream through the online platform, Vimeo.

# FY19 BY THE NUMBERS

A.B.L.E.'s Board of Directors is committed to a multifaceted strategy to diversify our revenue and build towards a sustainable future, including:

- Applying for local and national grants.
- Cultivating relationships with local businesses for sponsorships.
- Raising funds and awareness of A.B.L.E.'s mission through special events such as quizABLE Trivia Night, spearheaded by our volunteer-led development committee.
- Hiring a part-time Development Associate in FY20 who will strengthen our fundraising strategy and donor relations.
- Building cash reserves to support new staffing levels and programs.

Longterm, we hope to decrease our reliance on program registration fees, and ease the financial burden currently placed on participants.



**1000+**  
audience members at our 5 public performances and 15 film screenings.



**840**  
hours volunteered across all programs and special events



**25%**  
of all participants received free or reduced-rate registrations



participants come from  
**17**  
Chicago neighborhoods, 8 surrounding suburbs, and 3 states!



**7**  
new ensemble members, supported by 10 new volunteer facilitators



**105**  
dance parties as we kicked off various rehearsals, and workshops, and trainings



# OPPORTUNITIES FOR LIFE

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A.B.L.E. started in 2010 as a small volunteer-run program. Our very first class had 6 actors - Sam, Emily, Colleen, Quincy, Rachel, and Andrew. These individuals and their families stuck with us through numerous shifts as we established the organization. We watched these actors grow up onstage. The 2018-2019 season marked a bittersweet milestone - all of these founding members have now turned 22. This means they aged out of both the Chicago Public School system and A.B.L.E.'s teen ensemble.

By the fall of 2021, more than half of A.B.L.E.'s current teen ensemble members will turn 22 and face this same transition to adulthood. They are not alone. There are so many adults with disabilities looking for a way to fill their days. Without the routine of school, and the youth programs they've grown to depend on, where will they go?

A.B.L.E. nurtures a safe space for creative exploration and social development. This is a necessity at every age. We recognize our responsibility to serve the adult population with disabilities. **Looking forward, we are committed to shaping programming that will serve individuals throughout their lives, including:**

- Deepening relationships with our adult ensemble.
- Expanding workshops and outreach to provide opportunities year-round.
- Researching programming to support individuals living with Down syndrome and dementia.
- Developing new initiatives, including inclusive employment schemes that would allow veteran actors to serve as teaching assistants.

# LOOKING AHEAD

*In the years ahead, we look forward to creating new opportunities for individuals with Down syndrome and other developmental differences to share who they are and all that they are A.B.L.E. to do. Here are just a few of A.B.L.E.'s programming plans for FY20:*



## 4 ENSEMBLE PERFORMANCES AROUND THE CITY

A.B.L.E.'s teen and adult ensembles will produce a mix of devised and classical productions throughout the year. This will include a brand new adaptation of Shakespeare's *Comedy of Errors* directed by teaching artist Braden Cleary, hosted at Chicago Shakespeare Theater on May 14, 2020.



## INVESTING IN TEACHING ARTISTS

We can't do what we do without a talented team of teaching artists who shape curricula and deliver programs. A.B.L.E. is supporting the artists who make our programming possible by providing professional development workshops such as sign language and behavior management led by industry professionals, and by raising compensation to achieve parity with the field.



## EXPANDING OUTREACH PROGRAMS & WORKSHOPS

We continue to broaden our impact by sharing A.B.L.E.'s unique methodology with other organizations that serve individuals with disabilities. Upcoming collaborations include with Northside Special Recreation Association and National Louis University.



## PRE-PRODUCTION FOR A NEW FILM PROJECT

A.B.L.E. is developing a documentary-style web series that will showcase individuals with disabilities in the workplace and highlight inclusive employment opportunities in and around Chicago. The series will be hosted by veteran ensemble members, and will be available to a global audience.



# THANK YOU TO OUR FY19 SUPPORTERS!

## INDIVIDUAL SUPPORT

### \$1000+

The Buchanan Family  
Greg Desmond & Michael Segobiano  
Scott Floersheimer  
TrueQuest Communications

### \$500+

The Bane Family  
The Butler Family  
Chicago Corinthian Yacht Club  
The Kosnik Family  
Katherine Magon  
Charene Nagel  
Katie Yohe & Lawrence Kern  
Tom & Maria Yohe

### \$250+

Margaret Fahey  
Jenny Fisher  
Good Jami  
Suzette Kern  
Cathy Leonis  
Matthew Maxwell  
Jennifer Peters  
Ruth Sharps  
Nancy Tuohy  
John & Jo Dee Walsh  
Don Wiener  
Adele Wilhelm

### \$100+

Sue Anzaldi  
Neal Bader  
Somer Benson  
Justin Bodary  
Marlene Bodary  
Stacey Buck  
Jayne Chorpash  
Dominic Cianciolo  
Ron & Lisa Cocco  
The Collins Family  
Michael & Eileen Conway  
Mary Cooke  
Natalia Danak  
Joan E Desmond  
Anne Doyen  
Charles Finn  
Marguerite Goldman

The Grzeslo Family  
Kolton Honkala  
Kathy Kennedy-Kartheiser  
Eric Kicherer  
Tom & Mary Kons  
Jack & Kathy Lavin  
Philip Loftus  
Monte & Tricia Luzadder  
Anni Mabie  
Thomas McGuire  
The Meyer Family  
Ken & Mary Claire Moll  
Caryn Palewski  
Kevin & Joyce Pancratz  
Dheeraj Panjwani  
Anne Phillips  
James Sharp  
Stacey Smith  
Rebecca Tinkler  
Jerry Toomey  
The Tortoise Supper Club  
John Tuohy  
Terry Tuohy

### \$25+

Jane Altman  
Allen Arthur  
Christopher Bratton  
Michelle Buchanan  
Kate Buczek  
Markay Bunn  
Paul Callahan  
Candice Casazza  
Evelyn Cato  
Braden Cleary  
Christopher Comes  
Esther Davis  
Christi Debrauwere  
Mike Donovan  
Kathy Dunn  
Tony Fleming  
Danielle Gilman  
Martha Gottlieb  
Hillary Hansen  
Cathryn Hartman  
Rebecca Hawkes  
Patricia Hereau  
Scott Hildebrand  
Sarah & Devin Horne  
Daniel Hurley  
Rosalind Hurwitz

Trina Iore  
Victoria Jackson  
The Janik Family  
Kurt Kern  
Mindy Kisner  
Anna Langdon  
Julie LeClerq  
Catherine Le Pape  
Becky Liefman  
Francine Llerena  
Catherine Loftus  
Michelle Ludwig  
Cindi Mack  
Joni Manuel  
Chris Mars  
Chris Mathews  
Ross Mau  
Max Maude  
Bri McCabe  
In honor of Mila Media  
Marta Miezal  
In honor of the Miezal Family  
Claire Minnis  
In honor of Sergio Mobili  
Mamta Nagaraja  
Shan O  
Barbara Okerberg  
Tim & Anne O'Leary  
James Osborne  
Beverly Patt  
Isaac Alarid Pease  
Mark Pounovich  
Lindsay Quinn  
Ben Raanan  
Amelia Rapisarda  
Mark Richard  
Lynn Rissman  
Raquel Rochelle  
Hal Ross  
Doreen Sayegh  
Linda Scheiber  
Wende Schott  
Lauren Secrist  
Jeffrey Shepard  
Matthew Slaughter  
Randy Smith  
Hank Snedeker  
Ginger Szala  
Sue Toomey  
Tiffany Topol  
Tina Unbehaun  
Susy Solis Vasquez

Faneequa Vazquez  
Enoe Victoria  
Emily Weiland  
Gail Weiland  
Janice Wheeler  
Richard Willett  
Charles Wright  
Christina Wurst  
Alyssa Yohe  
Christina Zeman

### under \$25

Jennifer Altheide  
Jonathan Andersen  
Tom Bacon  
Olivia Barkoff  
Chris Bashen  
Stephanie Beasley  
Eliza Beckwith  
Colleen Berg  
In Memory of Paul Buursma  
Franceanna Campagna  
Naomi Counter-Ohiri  
In Memory of William Craig  
Jackie Dempsey  
James Doherty  
Adam Dornbusch  
Jennifer Jacobs  
Allison Lott Grabow  
Brittney Grant  
Teresa Groat  
Jess Hanebury  
Jon Hansen  
Meenah Harbaugh  
Philomena Paulisick Harbaugh  
Karen Jones  
Mary Kirwan  
Derek Koshinski  
Morgan Manasa  
Amy Maniscalco  
Dorothy Milne  
Jennifer Nash  
Adrian Natal  
Johnny Nguyen  
Jennifer Nicole  
Lindsey Nordmark  
Linda Medina Palma  
Paul Pearce  
Jenna Rapisarda  
Paul Rescigno  
Caitlin Roberts

Ken Robkin  
Breanna Rollings  
Brynne Schultz  
Molly Shade  
Julie Smyth  
Heather Suffron  
Ross & Sandra Talbot  
Charlotte van Coevorden  
Nancy VanDevender  
Armando Vasquez  
Phyllis Zegers

## INSTITUTIONAL SUPPORT

Amazon Smile  
The Chicago Park District  
E-Bay for Charity  
PayPal Giving Fund  
The Royal Central School for Speech & Drama

## IN-KIND SUPPORT

Ben & Carly Settle

AUDITORIUM  
THEATRE  
OF ROOSEVELT UNIVERSITY



HARMONY  
MIND BODY FITNESS



## ADDITIONAL CREDITS

### Properties

The Butler Family  
Alison Perrone  
Lifeline Theatre  
The Theatre School at DePaul Prop Department

### Lighting Design & Stage Management

Danny Fender  
Claire Chrzan  
Maggie Hoffecker

### Puppet Design

Cynthia VonOrthal  
Stephanie Diaz  
Julianne Eisele  
Folkmanis

### Graphic Design

Maddy Ward

### Venue Partners

Menomonee Club Drucker Center  
The EDGE Theater  
Ruth Page Center for the Arts  
YMCA Lakeview  
Chicago Shakespeare Theatre

### Front of House Volunteers

Somer Benson	Amy Martello
Emma Burkhalter	Tara Murphy
Erin Folan	Sean Okerberg
Martha Francoeur	Mary Petri
Andrew Ganem	Sam Petri
Judith Henry	Ben Raanan
Emily Kwidzinski	Susan Sjodin
Eva Kwidzinski	Katie Svec
Aaron Latterell	Julie Toll
Emma MacLean	Maria Yohe
Kate Magon	Polly Yukevich

### Special Thanks

Amelia Cardwell	The House Theater
Andrea Gronvall	Johnsonese Brokerage
Jon Hansen	Rags of Honor
Andrew Heckman	Hannah Stanley
Sean Hollands	Sara Thiel



# REACH OUT

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**A.B.L.E. – ARTISTS BREAKING LIMITS & EXPECTATIONS**

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