



**CONNECTING AND Re-CONNECTING**  
**with**  
**Our Students, Their Families, Our Partners, Ourselves**  
**A Virtual Conference**

Organized in 2007, (as The Arts in Special Education Consortium), Arts for All Abilities Consortium provides means by which professionals and key stakeholders involved in Arts Education for students with disabilities in New York can share perspectives, determine needs, develop ways to meet them, and deepen practice and understanding. Our purpose is to bring together constituencies, and engage them in meaningful conversation and exploration in order to ascertain barriers to and opportunities for providing quality arts education to special education students.

[www.ArtsSpecialEd.org](http://www.ArtsSpecialEd.org)

The Steering Committee meets on a monthly basis, collaborates on events, makes decisions on focus, goals and mission, and carries out the necessary tasks to succeed in reaching our goals.

**Steering Committee**

Stephen Yaffe, Chair  
Elise May  
Rachel McCaulsky  
Maryann Polesinelli  
Wema Ragophala  
Lindsay Tanner

The Support Committee consists of individuals with a high interest in the goals of the Consortium, but without the time needed for participation on the Steering Committee. Support Committee members may take on individual tasks as needed for specific functions of the Consortium.

**Support Committee**

Lisa Dennett  
Adam Goldberg  
Patricia Freer  
Jordana Mendelson  
Linsey Miller  
Erica Rooney

If you are interested in joining the Steering or Support Committee please  
send an email to [info@ArtsSpecialEd.org](mailto:info@ArtsSpecialEd.org)



**We wish to extend our thanks and appreciation to the following organizations and individuals for their support and help**

New York City Department of Education, District 75, Citywide Special Education

New York City Department of Education, Office of Arts and Special Projects

Barbara Vaccaro

Lisa Dennett

Erica Rooney

Marissa Shadburn

New York State Council on the Arts

And with much gratitude for past conferences and future ones at  
Museum of Jewish Heritage

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Arts for All Abilities Consortium is a sponsored project of Fractured Atlas, a non-profit arts service organization.



**You can tag us at @arts\_sped using the hashtags**

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**DAYS AT A GLANCE**

Sunday, December 5, 2021

1:00-1:15PM **Welcome/Overview**

1:15-1:45PM Keynote, *POSITIVE EXPOSURE: A Celebration of the BEAUTY that connects and unites humanity*, by Rick Guidotti, followed by Q & A

Sessions

1:50-3:05PM

- Creating Best Practices for Connecting and Reconnecting through the Arts – with Ourselves, SWDs, Colleagues, Families, and Organizations  
*Community Connections*

3:10-4:25PM

- Playful Lives: Processing trauma through stories, mythology, and games
- Already Enough: Using the Inherent Creativity of Black Culture to Serve Black Children with Autism Spectrum Disorders

4:25PM **Closing**

Monday, December 6, 2021

4:00-4:10PM **Welcome/Overview**

Sessions

4:15-5:30PM

- Trauma-Informed Practices as a Tool for Reconnection
- Digital Art: Making Connections, Staying Connected

5:35-6:35PM

- Building Community Through Mindfulness

6:35-7:10PM

- *Community Connections*, Next Steps, Closing



**PLEASE NOTE** that photographs & video will be taken throughout this conference. Your likeness may be used for documentation purposes, reporting, or appear on our website. No compensation will be received, given or expected by any party. If you have objections to having your photo/video taken, please turn your video off.



**Day 1**  
**Sunday, December 5, 2021**  
1:15 PM

**Keynote Address**

**POSITIVE EXPOSURE:**  
**A Celebration of the BEAUTY that connects and unites humanity**

Rick Guidotti, a former fashion photographer, is the founder and director of POSITIVE EXPOSURE, a non-profit organization that promotes a more inclusive world through award-winning photography, films, exhibitions, lectures and educational programs.

For nearly 25 years, POSITIVE EXPOSURE has collaborated globally with non-profit organizations, hospitals, medical schools, educational institutions, advocacy groups, museums and galleries to promote a more equitable and compassionate world where individuals and communities at risk of stigma and exclusion are understood, embraced and celebrated.

Rick will highlight several programs that create opportunities for individuals and their families living genetic, physical, behavioral and intellectual differences that support a common human need that *connects* us all; the need to be seen, to be heard and to belong.

**Speaker**

*Rick Guidotti*, an award-winning photographer, has spent the past twenty five years collaborating internationally with nonprofit organizations, hospitals, medical schools, educational institutions, museums, galleries, advocacy groups and communities to effect a sea-change in societal attitudes towards individuals living with genetic, physical, behavioral or intellectual difference; his work has been published in newspapers, magazines and journals as diverse as Elle, GQ, People, the American Journal of Medical Genetics, The Lancet, the Washington Post, Atlantic Monthly and LIFE Magazine.

**Sessions**  
1:50 PM

**Creating Best Practices for Connecting and Reconnecting through the Arts  
with Ourselves, SWDs, Colleagues, Families, and Organizations**

A panel of master educators – a Teaching Artist/Arts Therapist, a District 75 School Administrator, a District 75 Arts Specialist, and an Author – delve into the challenges of



reconnecting; dealing with uncertainty, strategies, failures and successes, supports given and needed, and more. After the initial discussion, each panelist will facilitate breakout community conversations – *Community Connections* – to share strategies, activities, and action points, all to be shared when the group reconvenes.

### **Panelists**

*Rachel McCaulsky* (MSEL, MST, BFA) is an Assistant Principal at P4Q, a District 75 school serving children diagnosed with severe to profound disabilities. Prior to this she spent seven years at P396K where she was the Arts Coordinator, Mindfulness Coordinator and Unit Coordinator. There she incorporated The Arts into the school's curriculum. Her units have been published in the NYC Department of Education Blueprint for Teaching and Learning in Dance. Rachel is a member of the Arts for All Abilities Steering Committee.

*Michael Pantone* is an actor, director and theatre arts educator. He spent the first half of his career working as a professional actor, and has been working as an educator and director for almost twenty years. He received his theatre training from the American Academy of Dramatic Arts, CUNY's Applied Theatre Program, and City College's Educational Theatre Program. His studies in Special Education at Pace University led Michael to focus his work on theatre with students with disabilities.

*Nysheva-Starr*, a native Brooklynite, is an educator, facilitator, acting aficionado, activist, curriculum and apparel designer committed to improving the overall quality of life for Black Americans by enhancing identity, social mobility and presence. Through her comprehensive and progressive rites of passages, Safari Kwenye Nafsi (Journey to Self), her Parent Circle Series parenting workshops, her Toddler Parade & Interactive E.A.S.E.(L.) event which focuses on enhancing social-emotional learning in 1-3 year-olds, and her BLACK WOMEN Learn Live Love HAIR RETREAT, which aims to provide tutelage, affection and acceptance of one's whole Black being-ness.

Nysheva-Starr is the mom to a 13 year old daughter and 5 year old son. Her first year parenting journey with her daughter was the inspiration for the principles of her first complete work, *Raising the 'Perfect' Black Infant: A Guide to the First Twelve Months*. (<https://nysheva-starr.me>)

*Erica Rooney* is a poet and a visual artist. A Master Teaching Artist, Licensed Creative Arts Therapist and Coach, she has worked with teachers, paraprofessionals, students, parents and families in a variety of settings: Montessori, HeadStart, public and private schools, colleges. Her commitment to the power of the arts, to provide both practical tools and vision, infuses her work. Professional Development initiatives – EASE (Everyday Arts for Special Education) and TATI (The Teaching Artist Training Institute) are integral to Erica's vision. The home-school connection, a crucial though often under-served part of good education, is an abiding concern for her. Erica has an MFA in Poetry from Cornell University and an MPS in Creative Arts Therapy from Pratt Institute.

### **Moderator**

*Elise May*, a Teaching Artist/Arts Administrator, educator, actor/singer, writer/storyteller and conference presenter, works with school districts, libraries, community centers and corporations. Her original award-winning Arts-in-Education programs use theater arts for



communication empowerment and community development with all populations. Her writing appears in *Teaching Artist Journal*, *Teaching Artist Guild Quarterly*, and she is a contributing author of *"In It Together – How Student, Family, and Community Partnerships Advance Engagement and Achievement in Diverse Classrooms."* Elise is on the board of several arts organizations including *Stage the Change* and a Steering Committee member of the *Arts for All Abilities Consortium*. A Teaching Artist for Tilles Center for the Performing Arts, Elise is honored to be part of the creative team for *Branching Out*, a new sensory immersive play for those on the autism spectrum.

## Sessions

3:10 PM

### Playful Lives: Processing trauma through stories, mythology, and games

Embark on a playful, guided journey through self and discover your inner superhero. Understand trauma through the development of characters, narrative storytelling, and community-building. Cultivate essential life skills to deal with obstacles through meditative practice, mindful movement, **cathartic** creativity, **dynamic puppet-making**, and student-centered social emotional learning. We'll open challenging conversations in compassionate communities, and explore culture, global myths and archetypes, and personal experiences to build new stories and become the heroes of our own journeys – so we can help our students to do the same.

#### Presenters

*Seánan Forbes* (they/them; born and reared on unceded Munsee Lenape/Wappinger ancestral lands) is a writer, poet, storyteller, and photographer. Seánan's art forms encompass anything it takes to bring a story from dream to stage. A lifelong activist, Seánan followed their Masters degrees in writing with meditation-teacher certification courses, and training in restorative justice, community-building, and trauma awareness. London-educated, Seánan has led workshops and residencies for people from five to eight-five years of age, from Croatia to Japan, collaborating with international artists and local populations, and has nourished creativity and community in inclusion, District 75, and ELL classrooms. Seánan works as a teaching artist with Marquis Studios, LEAP, Community-Word Project, and Shadow Box Theatre.

*Zennie Trieu* (she/hers) is a NJ native, NYU Tisch graduate, and NYC-based actor, writer, and teaching artist with several nonprofits, including: Marquis Studios, the 92nd Street Y, America Reads/America Counts, and Naked Angels. She has taught in-person and virtual residencies in visual, performing, and digital arts for kindergarteners, elementary/middle/high schoolers, and young adults transitioning out of school, including students with disabilities and non-native English speakers. In addition to live performance and online publication, her artistry involves workshop presentation and volunteering with organizations, including: the Church of the Ascension, CityMeals on Wheels, and the Brooklyn Botanic Garden.



**Already Enough: Using the Inherent Creativity of Black Culture to Serve  
Black Children with Autism Spectrum Disorders**

Using creative expressions that already exist within the cultural context of Black communities across the diaspora, we will explore how to develop collective wellness, agency, and internalized belonging for Black students with exceptionalities. We employ a healing and joy-centered framework to call attention to existing and global Black artistic expressions that school communities can leverage to promote social and emotional skills, autonomy, and community engagement. The target population for this work is Black students along the autism spectrum in NYC schools and those that work with them, focusing on those within the ASD Nest program.

All those looking to build upon the inherent creativity rooted in their students' culture and backgrounds are welcome!

**Presenters**

*Chloe Diggs* is a passionate advocate for improving overall wellbeing for children and their caregivers. She recently earned her master's in Human Development and Psychology from the Harvard Graduate School of Education, studying research methods and the intersections of public health and multi-generational and community-centered frameworks as tools to create healing spaces for families. She supports mixed-methods research at the Harvard TH Chan School of Public Health, assisting with implementation evaluation research for an early childhood education and youth development program, writing on community engagement drivers. Chloe is currently learning massage therapy with plans to contribute to research about parent-child interactions, specifically regarding perinatal and child health and educational outcomes.

*Shanae Irving* is a recent Masters in Human Development and Psychology graduate from Harvard Graduate School of Education, where she studied the intersections of neuroscience, art, and education. In bridging gaps between theory and practice, Shanae has committed the past eleven years to working with Art's House Schools of Music, Dance, and Fine Art in New York, serving within a variety of roles from mentorship and administrative to design capacities for both on-site and off-site programs. She has also been working for the New York City Department of Education to push forth utilizing social-emotional learning and art-infused interventions within K-12 classrooms to support varied learning styles for students with and without exceptionalities over the past four years.

*Chiamaka Ikpeze* is a current Masters in Human Development and Psychology student at Harvard Graduate School of Education where she's studying the intersectionality of critical participatory action research and wholeness-centered pedagogy of understanding healing, SEL, and community building structures. Her background includes crisis and conflict intervention counseling, restorative justice mediation and counseling, diversity and equity inclusion consultation, and nonviolent communication facilitation. She is currently an SEL and Professional Development consultant and has worked on both international and national SEL projects.





**Day 2**  
**Monday, December 6, 2021**

**Sessions**  
*4:15 PM*

**Trauma-Informed Practices as a Tool for Reconnection**

New York City Children's Theater leads theatre and music residency programs for literacy and social-emotional development that are rooted in trauma-informed, culturally-responsive and anti-racist principles. Our healing-centered lesson plans feature literary texts which honor the identities and feelings of our students, and active exercises are scaffolded with mindfulness breathing and physical exercises which help to regulate students' nervous systems. As we transition back into the classroom after a year of remote facilitation, how can we create meaningful and engaging theater based experiences for our students? How can we support our students through this transition?

**Presenters**

*Madeline Calandrillo* is New York City-based applied theater practitioner, teaching artist, and theatre-maker with ADHD and dyslexia. She is drawn to creating accessible and diverse theatrical experiences for young audiences and their families. Madeline has created curriculum for various organizations and non-profits such as CO/LAB Theater Group. At New York City Children's Theater, Madeline works in the Education Department as their Education Associate. Madeline received her Masters in Applied Theatre from the City University of New York. Madeline is also the co-founder of an Upper Manhattan-based multilingual theater company called Jugando N Play.

*Andrea Palma* is a classically trained singer, voice teacher, educator and arts advocate. She is currently working with New York City Children's Theater as an Education Associate and was formerly a teaching artist with the Metropolitan Opera Guild where she created a video series on song creation using colors instead of traditional musical notation. Andrea will continue to develop and lead workshops on this topic so that non-musical educators across the state can incorporate songwriting into their classrooms. Andrea strives to make music and the arts more accessible especially for multi-lingual learners.

*Caitlyn McCain* (she/her) is a teaching Artist and Artistic Associate with New York City Children's Theater. She holds a BFA in Drama from New York University's Tisch School of the Arts with a minor in Child and Adolescent Mental Health Studies. She is currently pursuing her MA in Applied Theatre from the City University of New York. Caitlyn has served a wide range of student populations, including young people in transitional housing, neuro-diverse populations, and teens across all five boroughs of NYC. Her work centers on social-emotional growth through a trauma-informed lens with the goal of fostering a generation of critical thinkers who have the tools to mindfully and meaningfully engage with the world around them.



## **Digital Art: Making Connections, Staying Connected**

Arts education has transformed to meet the ever-changing landscape of our schools. Using Digital Art, the possibilities are endless. From interactive whiteboards to music and movement games to full musicals performed on livestreaming services. This is just the beginning of what Arts can look like today. Going beyond traditional arts and crafts, this presentation will show you how to combine traditional art techniques with digital platforms to make the Arts accessible to all students and families.

### **Presenter**

*Danielle Nacht* teaches the Arts to students identified with Autism Spectrum Disorders and related disabilities in early childhood and elementary 6-1-1 and 8-1-1 classes at Sid Miller Academy, a District 75 school in Brooklyn, NY. She is also a 2021- 2022 Arthur Miller Theater Foundation Fellow who has had the great opportunity to use digital art in visual and performing arts instruction. As an AASEP Board-Certified Special Education Teacher, Danielle utilizes her expertise to develop coherent instruction that is responsive to the diverse cultural and learning needs of her students and families, while broadening their experiences through the Arts.

## **Sessions**

*5:35 PM*

## **Building Community Through Mindfulness**

During this session participants will gain an understanding of Mindfulness and how it can be integrated into Arts education for students with and without disabilities as a tool to support social emotional learning, build community and practice self-care.

Participants will have the opportunity to connect to self through mindfulness and movement. They will learn breathing methods, guided imagery, and other practices to relax the body and mind, help reduce stress and experience their thoughts and emotions with greater balance and acceptance. Participants will also journey into Rachel's Mindfulness sessions at her school and explore the following questions:

- What is Mindfulness and how can it be used to build community?
- What are Mindfulness focus areas that can be integrated into Arts education?
- How does Mindfulness encourage & support Arts education?



**Presenter**

*Rachel McCaulsky* (MSEL, MST, BFA) is an Assistant Principal at P4Q, a District 75 school serving children diagnosed with severe to profound disabilities. Prior to this she spent seven years at P396K where she was the Arts Coordinator, Mindfulness Coordinator and Unit Coordinator. There she incorporated The Arts into the school's curriculum. Her units have been published in the NYC Department of Education Blueprint for Teaching and Learning in Dance. Rachel is a member of the Arts for All Abilities Steering Committee.

**Sessions**

6:35 PM

**Community Connections**  
**Next Steps**  
**Closing**

**Facilitators**

*Rachel McCaulsky* (MSEL, MST, BFA) is an Assistant Principal at P4Q, a District 75 school serving children diagnosed with severe to profound disabilities. Prior to this she spent seven years at P396K where she was the Arts Coordinator, Mindfulness Coordinator and Unit Coordinator. There she incorporated The Arts into the school's curriculum. Her units have been published in the NYC Department of Education Blueprint for Teaching and Learning in Dance. Rachel is a member of the Arts for All Abilities Steering Committee.

*Wéma Ragophala* is a leader in access, equity, diversity, and inclusion in the arts. She is an arts administrator, performing artist, director, and educator working at the intersection of arts and community for over 20 years, creating interactive arts experiences for people of all abilities. She provides professional development training for teaching artists in the schools and other cultural institutions nationally and internationally. Wéma has been recognized for her work in arts education and community partnerships supporting children and families with physical disabilities and neuro-diverse individuals. She is on the Steering Committee for the Arts for All Abilities Consortium. She is also an adjunct professor at The New School, teaching a course she designed, *The Power of the Artist in Culturally Responsive Pedagogy*. Wéma wrote, performed, and toured her theatrical solo performance work, *Roots, Rhythm and Revolution* and founded *Bridges: A Pan-Afrikan Arts Movement* which provides opportunities for arts exchange, global partnerships, and advocacy.

*Stephen Yaffe* is an arts and education consultant, evaluator and former professor. His professional development (PD) has been praised as "brave, visionary, smart" (Corp of Public



Broadcasting). He's mentored classroom teachers, teaching artists and arts administrators in inclusive practices nationally, served as the VSA/The Kennedy Center Teaching Artist Fellows coach and provided PD to those working in the field of disability on five continents. Stephen is a co-founder and the Chair of the Arts for All Abilities Consortium, the 2018 VSA NYC Arts Advocate of the year, and serves on the Arts Committee to the Panel on Educational Policy (PEP), New York City Department of Education.