PLAT FORM A

REPORT 2019

Platform A is Art Starts, ArtReach, Children's Peace Theatre, CUE, Kapisanan Philippine Centre for Arts and Culture, Jumblies Theatre, SKETCH, and VIBE Arts, a collaborative learning network sharing tools to build an interconnected, equitable, and diverse arts sector.

ABOUT PLATFORM A

We began in 2013 as a strategic initiative inaugurated by the Toronto Arts Council that brought Art Starts, CUE, Jumblies, SKETCH, and VIBE Arts together to support artists outside of the council's reach. With the support from a 3-year Ontario Trillium Foundation Grow Grant, in 2017 Platform A continued independent of the TAC to focus on the growth of mentorship programs led by Art Starts, Jumblies, SKETCH, and VIBE Arts. The initiative also evolved into a collaborative learning and resource sharing network with ArtReach, Children's Peace Theatre, and Kapisanan Philippine Centre for Arts and Culture.

Ontario Trillium Foundation

ARTREACH

ART STARTS

CHILDREN'S PEACE THEATRE

CUE

Fondation Trillium de l'Ontario

An agency of the Government of Ontario
Un organisme du gouvernement de l'Ontario

Jumblies

kapisanan
for arts + culture

sketch

VIBE ARTS
FOR CHILDREN AND YOUTH

INTRODUCTION

This report shares our learnings based on the assessment of select mentorship programs delivered by Art Starts, Jumblies Theatre, SKETCH, and VIBE Arts as well as our collaborative activities with Children's Peace Theatre, CUE, and ArtReach funded by the Ontario Trillium Foundation over the duration of 2017 - 2019. While this evaluation utilized a logical model of select programs and activities, mentoring permeates throughout Platform A organizations via informal channels that by nature evade metrics as they involve longer engagements, occur organically in unstructured time, and include other funders and various stakeholders such as grassroot organizations and emerging leaders beyond the scope of this assessment. Expressed through testimonies and staff observation, these less quantifiable outcomes incur impact equally for the organization, mentees, and the sector as a whole. The quantitative data presented here thus, represents a fraction of Platform A mentorship activities and occur in formalized and structured programs.

EXECUTIVE
SUMMARY

2017 - 2019

Total programs: 14+

Total number of emerging artists mentored: 1,843+

Average hours of mentorship in one year: 3,210 hrs+

Area of mentorship offered the most: Creative Practice (1,000hrs+)

Number of paid opportunities created for emerging artists*: 308+

Average amount of time artists retain mentorship relationships: 1-3 years

INSIGHTS:

Trends across all activities have taught us that Platform A mentorship:

• Involves collaboration not without conflict

• Is a constantly shifting geography

• Models a culture of empathy and care for the sector

• Yields reciprocal growth between the organizations and emerging artists

• Fosters a model of horizontal learning that is potentially sustainable

• Can yield more meaningful professional development when resources are dedicated to the mentorship of a few, rather than more broadly

Emerging artists are our primary stakeholders and are defined differently by each organization: Art Starts engages with youth, emerging and/or newcomer artists from across the GTA. Jumblies Theatre works with artists from various professional levels developing a practice working with community. VIBE Arts supports emerging artists who identify as youth. SKETCH Working Arts serves youth who are living homeless or otherwise navigating the margins. Youth is defined as ages 16 - 29.

OUR
EVALUATION
FRAMEWORK

METHODS, CHALLENGES, AND LIMITATIONS:

This report is based on data from staff observations, interviews, focus group conversations, and program surveys that was coded, aggregated, and then interpreted by the Platform A Project Manager, Annie Wong, who operates as a semi-external evaluator. It is important to note that mentoring permeates throughout Platform A organizations via informal channels that are difficult to track. As such, the analysis is limited to select activities and represents a general, albeit limited, view of the larger learning pathways across Platform A.

SETTING OUR FRAMEWORK: *THRIVE FIVE*

While an initial goal, we've learned that "consolidating and streamlining" learning pathways is counter-productive, mimics institutionalized learning, and does not authentically reflect the learning experiences of emerging artists in the sector. This goal intended to address the seeming inefficiencies of redundant programming. However, we learned that repeated services is needed in the sector as each organization serves specific demographics and learning styles distinctively. Rather than eliminate perceived "redundancies," we approached our programmatic similarities by looking at the distinct ways to whom and how they were delivered. *Thrive Five*, a tool that helped imagine a continuum of learning based on shared principles, emerged from this new direction. Based on Naty Tremblay's Five Pillars of Community Arts and Leah Burns' Platform A Mentorship Scan (2017), five key skills were identified as consistently requested and offered areas of mentorship. This framework provided the requisite versatility as a navigational tool to collectively build and assess programs. Because it is based on sector-wide data, *Thrive Five* is an adaptive approach to compare, link, and understand emergent patterns among different mentorship initiatives. In this evaluation, it is used to set flexible indicators that operate less as definitive values of impact but as signposts in a continuum of learning.

THRIVE FIVE:
AREAS OF MENTORSHIP IN COMMUNITY ENGAGED ARTS

CREATIVE PRACTICE:

A creative practice involves the technical skills required to express new ideas and interpretations of the world.

Hours dedicated to Creative Practice training: 1000 hrs+

Skills learned: Painting, graphic design, illustration, printmaking, graffiti, ceramics and pottery, sculpture, foundry, installation art, photography and image-based digital arts, video and film, spoken word, jewelry, fashion, music and recording arts, dance and movement, performance art, creative writing, zine art, theatre making, acting, interdisciplinary arts, community-engaged art making, digital and electronic arts, curation, and creative land acknowledgement.

LEADERSHIP IN THE ARTS:

Broadly defined, leadership skills in this context refers to the confidence and capacity to deliver outcomes through a range of professional skills such as securing funding, strategic planning, and managing projects.

Hours dedicated to Leadership in the Arts Training: 529 hrs+

Skills learned: Project and time management; outreach, marketing and brand development; public presentation and communication skills; writing professional CVs, resumes, project proposals and artist statements; entrepreneurial skills; event planning, budgeting and financial management; grant writing and fund development; evaluation; administration and organizational development; strategic planning; articulation of artistic concepts and practices; and decision making with different groups of people.

RELATIONSHIP BUILDING:

Developed through long-term and intentional commitments, relationship building involves the capacity to build professional, intellectual, and emotional networks of support.

Connections made: Art organizations and staff; peers, mixed communities of various intersections including BIPOC and LGBTQ2S+; leaders in the sector and professional artists; funders; and city councilors.

ANTI-OPPRESSION LENS:

An Anti-Oppression lens is an understanding and commitment to challenging complex systems of oppression through behavioural changes as well as advocating for systemic reforms.

Hours dedicated to Anti-O training: 864 hrs+

Skills learned: An understanding of how systems of oppression affect groups differently; strategies for creating accessible, inclusive/exclusive safe spaces; language usage; knowledge of how to address cultural appropriation in artwork and artistic integrity; harm reduction tools and conflict resolution; tools for transformative, restorative, and healing justice initiatives; hosting conversations with specific groups about issues that matter to them; hands-on tools for working with communities within a decolonial framework; and self care.

*Average amount of hours spent across Platform A in one year

FACILITATION SKILLS:

The art of facilitation involves skills in building dynamic and inclusive spaces for people to come together, collaborate, and participate in the art-making process.

Hours dedicated to Facilitation Skill training: 817 hrs+

Skills learned: Lesson planning and workshop design; best/common practices for community engagement; art-based project evaluation; collaborations with non-artists; creating participatory art experiences; implementing healthy food in programs creatively; and hands-on skills facilitations of activity-based art workshops.

WHILE IMPLEMENTE DIFFERENTLY ACROSS THE PARTNERSHIP, THRIVE FIVE RESOURCES INCLUDE:

Ongoing 1:1 mentorship, consultation by request, apprenticeship with professional artists; one-off workshops; drop-in programs; internships; studio space and material resources, spaces for peer critique and knowledge exchanges, dialogue and collaboration; studio visits with other artists; access to artist talks; exhibition opportunities; e-resources; staff initiating connections; opportunities to work directly with organizational staff and community members through programs artists build; one-off events; networking events; central creative hub for artists to meet on a casual basis; and field trips to other community artists spaces.

WHAT
WE DID

COLLABORATIVE PROGRAMS AND ACTIVITIES

PLATFORM A GRANTS and A SHOW

(annual showcase of Platform A projects) (2017 - 2018)

12 grants | 18 Artists | 200+ people engaged by artist projects

It was very meaningful to have validation for an idea that has been stewing with me for many years. I wanted to do this project before I got this grant, but did not have the push and institutional backing to bring this idea to life.
- Platform A Grant Recipient

A TALKS:

A series of artists talk curated by Platform A partners (2018 - 2019)

8 events | 40 artists | 263 attendees

When we have these platforms to share, it makes us feel that we aren't invisible doing this work.
- A Talks speaker

CO-LEARNING AND RESOURCE SHARING

Staff from Platform A partners routinely came together to share knowledge, produce collaborative projects, and learn from each other's leadership.

The collective met face-to-face for a 100hrs+, sent each other 500+ emails, created a series of events and $12K of grants, and managed one part-time employee. Shared resources include offering equipment, space, staff, expertise, and social media marketing platforms.

"As a younger person in this role [of General Manager] Platform A has helped me understand what other organizations do, in a holistic way."
-Jumblies Theatre Staff

"In a siloed sector that conditions us to compete, [this learning network allows us to] be connected with other organizations and feel proud of the work we all do in the sector as a whole."
-SKETCH Staff

"The generosity in the group has given me a greater understanding of the strengths and the constraints that each organization also face. As someone new to the sector, it's reaffirming to have a network and learn from a conversation among a group."
-Art Starts Staff

INSIGHTS

1 COLLABORATION IS NOT WITHOUT CONFLICT

Platform A is not immune to conflicts intrinsic to negotiating power dynamics within an intergenerational group of emerging and established leadership, particularly when the latter is homogeneously represented. Within the group, there is a lack of diverse representation while younger and racialized members have expressed feelings of underappreciation.

The experience has taught us that rigorous allyship to prioritize the stewardship of Black, Indigenous, and People of Colour (BIPOC) leaders is needed to share power.

We have learned equitable participation among diverse membership is contingent on resolute actions embracing radical *generosity and trust*, an approach that may seem counterintuitive to typical processes of organizational decision making.

SELECT MENTORSHIP PROGRAMS IN ORGANIZATIONS

Based on the assessment of fourteen unique mentorship programs across **Art Starts** (Arowana Training and AS Workshop Series), **Jumblies Theatre** (Internships and Artfare Essentials), **VIBE Arts** (Emerging Arts Educator), and **SKETCH** (Indie Studio, Community Arts Program, and Shared Platforms), these key learnings from emergent patterns has provided us with highlights of a few of our mentorship practices.

This involves taking risks on new ideas from younger or new people in leadership roles, allowing for disagreements, embracing the unfamiliar and unconventional, and compromising for flexibility even if failure appears to be an eventual outcome.

2 THE MAP OF MENTORSHIP IS A CONSTANTLY CHANGING GEO-GRAPHY

In 2017, Platform A commissioned Leah Burns to conduct a sector-wide scan of mentorship programs to better understand other models and to strategize ways of centralizing activities for efficient collaboration. This included mapping our mentorship activities across Platform A to produce a publishable navigational tool for emerging artists. As we carried out this work, *we learned that the landscape of mentorship among Platform A is a constantly shifting geography where programs change, end, new ones begin, and access vary.* This dynamism occurs because of changes in leadership, program evaluation, and limited funding.

Also, consistent throughout the organizations are intrinsic forms of mentorship maintained over the years that involve less-mappable inputs, such as trust. Having carried out this research, we learned that a centralized and navigational public map would require constant updates and be an experience of unwieldy data contradictory to our intended outcome. Instead, we arrived at Thrive Five, a tool based on skills all Platform A partners distinctively practice and offer training in.

Available on the Platform A website, this paradigm functions for both public and organizational audiences that has helped us better understand the intersections of our practice while appreciating our own distinct maps of mentorship.

PLATFORM **A** FOSTERS A CULTURE OF EMPATHY AND CARE

"When [a participant] came into the Community Artist program, they had their own analysis about experiencing barriers, but was not connected to the language/framework [of anti-oppression]. They also showed some resistance around concepts that they had not experienced. Through the program [...], they were able to see [and validate] their experiences through this framework [and] cultivate an intersectional analysis to build empathy/understanding around experiences they hadn't had, but others were navigating. Later in the season when they were visiting other organizations [...], they noticed a lack of anti-o analysis [...]. This spurred the development of an event series called "Courage Labs", which aimed to host critical conversations about anti-o, power/privilege, intersectionality, equity in the community engaged arts sector." - SKETCH staff

1 TRAINING TO DEVELOP EMPATHY IS A REQUIREMENT IN THE SECTOR

Across Platform A, testimonies consistently shows that emerging artists strengthen their Facilitation Skills after receiving Anti-Oppression training when working with communities, specifically when they are not members of those communities. In interviews with Platform A alumni from vastly different socioeconomic, racial, age, and educational backgrounds ranging from university to highschool, newcomers to youth, all indicated that training in Anti-Oppression was imperative to building confidence in their artistic practice, community-engaged or otherwise. In staff observations, Anti-Oppression training was identified as a requisite skill equally for leadership and expressed the importance for organizational-wide training as a requirement for the sector.

2 LIVED-EXPERIENCE IS VALUABLE KNOWLEDGE THAT CAN BE USED TO TEACH OTHERS EMPATHY

In programs that invest in Anti-Oppression Training, **participants learn how to transform their lived-experiences of oppression into processes of knowledge-exchange that in turn teaches others empathy.** The conditions for empathetic learning and transformative experiences are realized through the reflexive manner where staff approach vulnerability as learning opportunities not only for artists, but for the sector at large (as indicated by the above testimony).

3 PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT IS CONTINGENT ON PERSONAL TRANSFORMATIONS.

Professional relationships are nurtured by staff who generously offer emotional as much as professional support. **Strategies for retention is linked to the emotional support for intrinsic self-development (such as building confidence) where personal transformation leads to professional transformation.** This dynamic is often sustained over the course of 1 - 3 years, and operates in a structure of care that is integral to models of knowledge exchange.

4 SUPPORTING EXPLORATION AND DISCOVERY

If I didn't do photography and project management I wouldn't be in the film world [...] in the moment it seems like it didn't make sense [but I was] following this unseen map that I didn't know existed [...] I applied everything I learned about grant writing and am looking for bigger grants [...] I would never would have thought about [doing this] before.
- Platform A alumnus

A crucial phase early in an emerging artists career is the opportunity to explore and discover artistic and professional potential through hands-on experiences. This is not limited to a creative practice, but other Thrive Skills that build a spectrum of skills to realize ambitious goals. Based on Platform A alumni interviews, this occurs through a delicate balance between 1:1 and arms-length mentorship.

RISK AND RECOMMENDATIONS:

Burn out: While a structure of care is fundamental to the mentorship of emerging artists from the communities we serve, staff risks severe burnout. Fostering internal leadership is also severely compromised as staff begin to prioritize the emotional support of mentees over their own professional development and psycho-emotional wellbeing.

Prioritize Anti-O training: a culture of care is important to recognize and properly support as it requires formal training in Anti-Oppression. Currently, in the Platform A ecosystem SKETCH and Jumblies Theatre provide the most Anti-O resources. Learning from our concern with "redundant" programming, more avenues for Anti-O training are requested and needed for effective mentorship.

RECIPROCITY

1 **ORGANIZATIONAL GROWTH IS LINKED TO THE GROWTH OF MENTORED ARTISTS**

KEY OBSERVATIONS:

1 Art Starts' manages relationships with emerging artists as investments back into **the organization so that they grows as the artists they mentor professionally grow.** This reciprocity manifests as wider outreach to new communities, new strategic partnerships, access to diverse artists, and new programs for the organization. In some cases, some opportunities are specifically created to retain or deepen pre-existing relationships with those who demonstrated promise and long-term commitment.

2 A participant's commitment to SKETCH is long-term (1-3 years) and invested in individual learning as much as to **the collective advancement of learners in the community.**

3 The primary outcome of VIBE's mentorship program is the transition of emerging artists to VIBE's Established Artists roster. **This shows investment into the mentorship of their Emerging Arts Educator roster is linked to enriching VIBE's programming resources via a roster of expertise.**

5 Jumblies Theatre's programming receives production support from interns and apprentices and in return, they receive deep learning in this reciprocal show of trust.

2 MAKING PROGRAMS ACCESSIBLE SPARKS COLLABORATION AND RECIPROCAL LEARNING

All organizations implement different outreach strategies to ensure they are engaging diverse and marginalized groups and offer if not free, affordable access to programs. The participation of these groups have shown to affect the future design of programs as organizations learn from and respond to their needs and interests. Incentives such as compensation and transportation are effective, but retention is most effective through programmatic changes. For example, as Art Starts decentralized their workshop series to reach communities in the GTA, staff reported an approximate 5 percent increase in participant retention.

3 TRUST IN STAFF MAKES FOR PROGRESSIVE AND BETTER PROGRAMMING

In a few instances across Platform A, staff involved in delivering mentorship programs are also given some influence to directly affect executive programmatic decisions to end, change, or begin new programs or projects with the support of the organization. These changes often resulted in positive outcomes such as wider outreach, better use of resources, and healthier work conditions for staff.

We have diversified our workshops a lot! We have been able to take this to the next level by partnering with small arts organizations and one Local Arts Service Organizations to ensure we are reaching out to many other community groups we have not had the chance to work with.
- Art Starts staff

RISK AND RECOMMENDATIONS:

Flexible evaluation tools: An organization's agility to respond quickly to staff observation however, requires experimental evaluation measures to capture positive or negative changes. Evaluating and documenting these changes become part of organizational memory and keep a practice of adaptability constant.

HORIZONTAL MENTORSHIP THAT OCCURS IN COMMUNITY IS POTENTIALLY SUSTAINABLE

I was both mentored and a mentor to others, which I found an incredibly rich learning experience.
- Jumblies Theatre intern

IN PEER-TO-PEER LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS, EMERGING ARTISTS INVEST IN INDIVIDUAL LEARNING AS MUCH AS THE COLLECTIVE ADVANCEMENT OF LEARNERS IN THE COMMUNITY

Emerging artists often commit long-term to their learning and are invested in individual growth as well to the collective advancement of learners in the community. Observed in reflexive peer-to-peer learning environments such as SKETCH and Jumblies Theatre, artists share knowledge, internal and external opportunities, and resources with each other. These peer-to-peer learning networks are sustained through relationships built by artists and often continue independent of the organization.

These environments are ideal mentorship hubs as the networks and learnings are foster by but can live beyond the resources of an organization.

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Art Starts has helped [us] in so many ways [...]: from offering workshop space when we most needed it (we had no space and everywhere in Toronto was hard to afford), inviting us to the A Show, Art Starts Symposium, informing us about TakingIT Global's Canada Service Corps Grants – which we applied to and won a $750 grant to offer a free "Resume Critique Workshop For Hispanic Newcomers". This ended up earning us an invitation to #LeadersToday Global Youth Service Summit the summer of 2018, where we made a key connection that ended up taking us to Malaysia to do a TEDx Talk [...]
- Art Starts mentored artists

LESS IS MORE

All Platform A partners have at least one program in which mentorship resources are invested on a select few rather than broadly. These programs result in consistent testimonies of meaningful professional development and often led **to internal and external paid leadership opportunities of various scales (from one-off engagements to leading larger projects)** and become part of a trackable learning trajectory within a constellation of support received across Platform A. This was particularly true in the acquisition of Leaders-in-the-Arts. The concentration of inputs such as hours towards 1:1 mentorship, consultancy and workshops, responded to testimonies of applied learning and transferable skills. The few who received mentorship through these inputs expressed satisfaction reaching immediate and future goals.

RISK AND RECOMMENDATIONS:

Be ready for failure:
When a professional opportunity is offered as an input rather than an outcome of mentorship, organizations must allow for a margin of generous failure and be ready to absorb the repercussions in the context of public programs.

LAST THOUGHTS

This evaluation demonstrates a coordinated effort to understand and respond to the collective impact of four leading arts service organizations and their collaboration with ArtReach, CUE, Children's Peace Theatre, and Kapisanan Philippine Centre for Arts & Culture. With deeper knowledge gained through re-evaluating our goals of collaboration, models and methods of mentorships, Platform A is moving forward by initiating new and less formal modes of organic collaboration with grassroots and smaller community-engaged arts initiatives. After seven years of partnership, the future for Platform A remains bent on learning how to best serve the needs of emerging artists in ways that foster holistic, cooperative and diverse leadership. No longer tied to rigid deliverables, this open format is a new chapter of experimental collaboration aimed at reimaging effective mentorship and leadership in the sector.