The Power
to Transcend

2009 VSA Annual Report

vsa
The International Organization on Arts and Disability
As president of VSA, I get to witness every day the capacity of the arts to transform lives and lift the spirits of students, artists, and audiences. The power of art transcend the parameters of age, gender, and genre. Thanks to the VSA program continuum, which embraces this transcendent flow across all artistic mediums—from youth education, to emerging artists, to professional careers in the arts—anyone with passion and a desire for self-expression can create something meaningful and share it with the world.

VSA is privileged to have the means to provide high-caliber programs, thanks in large part to the generous support of the U.S. Congress and sponsors including Amway, CVS Caremark, MetLife Foundation, and Volkswagen Group of America, Inc. Yet there is always more work to be done. As an arts organization, we are blossoming with new ideas to expand our programs. We also want to continue to maintain the amazing opportunities we have offered for more than 35 years. As you look through these pages, you will see how this valuable funding enables VSA to reach its goals of providing opportunities and making the arts accessible to people of all abilities.

VSA flourished in 2009—changing lives through the transcendent power of art. With continued support, VSA will continue to ensure that all people can participate side by side in the arts and education in the years to come.

Sincerely,

Soula Antoniou
Transcending the Classroom: VSA and Education

VSA understands the transcendent power of the arts. Nowhere is this power more apparent than in the lives of children. An essential avenue of growth and independence in the education of persons with and without disabilities, the arts transform lives. In fact, a 12-year study, Doing Well and Doing Good by Doing Art by Professor James Catterall of the University of California at Los Angeles, found that intensive involvement in the arts resulted in higher levels of achievement and volunteerism. That’s why a critical part of VSA’s mission is to provide inclusive educational resources and professional development opportunities for educators through a network of national and international VSA affiliates.

Andrew Rasmussen’s artwork was chosen for the 2009 All Kids Can...CREATE! exhibition, which was on view at Union Station in Washington, D.C. “I was so proud of him, and he was so proud of this picture,” recalls his mother, Jeannette. Andrew says it all: “I am a superhero.”
Because learning through the arts takes place in and out of the classroom, VSA marked the fifth year of its funding program with MetLife Foundation’s Arts Connect All, which helps support organizations like 2009 recipients AXIS Dance Company and the Tampa Museum of Art. This support helps the grantees to continue to provide high-quality inclusive educational programs that engage students with and without disabilities.

VSA’s international classroom exchange program, ArtLink, continued to enthral elementary school-aged students. Each year, students make an artistic creation based on a theme and then write a brief description of their artwork. They then exchange their creations across cultural and geographic borders. An exhibition of the work that grew out of this program, Windows: Looking out, Looking in, was displayed at the U.S. Department of Education as part of the celebration of International Education Week.

Through the VSA Writing Project, the works of nine aspiring short story writers and poets were selected for publication in VSA’s online literary journal, Infinite Difference. The interactive journal is a publication for middle- and high school-age writers.

Water’s fluidity and mystery have moved generations of artists. VSA’s educational resource, The Artistry of Water (launched in 2009), encourages students to think critically about the connections between the visual arts and science—specifically, the study of our most important natural resource: water.

The resource profiles the work of Gregory Burns, a contemporary artist, athlete, and motivational speaker who uses crutches and braces due to contracting polio. Though he was not inherently interested in science, Burns explains that art helped spark his interest in science assignments and hopes The Artistry of Water will have a similar effect on students.
**Experience of a Lifetime**

Susan Bivona, a kindergarten through fifth grade art teacher, came to Washington, D.C., with her student, Matthew, whose work was exhibited through All Kid’s Can...CREATE! In addition to being awarded $1,000 for her efforts to create inclusive arts programming at her school in Basking Ridge, New Jersey, she was awarded the experience of a lifetime: She got to see the way her efforts and VSA’s program impacted the life of her 10-year-old student Matthew. “He was on cloud nine; actually, he’s still on cloud nine,” she says. “To tell a child that he can do it, that he can achieve that level of success—I truly believe that’s changed his life.”

The arts can foster inclusion across ages, cultures, and abilities. VSA’s ongoing partnership with CVS Caremark’s All Kids Can...CREATE! program is committed to improving the lives and learning of children with and without disabilities by expanding the role of the arts in inclusive education. The artwork of 51 children, created around the theme of celebrating their dreams and talents, was selected for an exhibition in Union Station in Washington, D.C. The three-pronged All Kids Can... program contains an in-class learning component for which VSA affiliates provide support; a participatory creation element that uses an online gallery to gather artwork from children around the nation; and a chance for CVS Caremark associates to volunteer.

Teacher Susan Bivona works with her student Matthew, whose artwork was selected for the All Kids Can...CREATE! exhibition.
There is no better way to educate the public about the importance of inclusive arts programming than through quality art activities and presentations that are fun for all ages. The 2009 Start with the Arts Family Festival offered a weekend of hands-on arts workshops—many of which were lead by VSA Teaching Artist Fellows (see sidebar). The festival also featured dynamic stage performances that highlighted the talents of performing and teaching artists with disabilities. The 2009 audience enjoyed performances by The Dancing Wheels Company and the Tony Award®–winning Little Theatre of the Deaf. Interactive activities also incorporated environmental awareness, as participants made musical instruments from recycled household materials.

VSA’s Teaching Artist Fellowship is the premiere program of its kind in the nation, providing teaching artists with disabilities with the networking support and professional development they need to advance their diverse work in the classroom. Five fellows were selected in 2009.

The 2009–2010 Teaching Artist Fellows were:

Kemlyn Tan Bappe, a visual artist
Tom Harmon, a multi-media artist
Richard Jenkins, a cartoonist and illustrator
Marquetta Johnson, an artist who creates hand-dyed textiles and collectibles.
Sharon Leary, a potter
VSA Institute Continues Its Global Reach

The VSA Institute gives participants the tools they need to be advocates for inclusive education, to teach as teams, and to enhance their ability to assess the results of arts-based teaching and learning practices. In July, the Institute once again proved its global reach when it convened in Hong Kong at the fully accessible, state-of-the-art Hong Kong Federation of Youth Groups Building.

VSA Institutes Across America

In the United States, VSA affiliates in North Dakota, Ohio, Tennessee, Michigan, and New York brought Institutes to their communities.

Artist in Training

In 2009, seven-year-old Jalyn participated in a cartoon workshop through VSA of Tennessee. Since then, Jalyn, who is on the autism spectrum, has shown his art in multiple venues and makes a point of talking about his work with other children and adults. According to his mother, Pamela, “VSA is incredible. It’s really all about being given the opportunity.”

VSA Tennessee is just one of the many VSA affiliate organizations throughout the United States and the world.
Transcending Genres: VSA in the Arts

A brushstroke in a painting, the movement of a dancer, the touch of a bow to the strings of a violin, a moment in time captured on film—these move audiences with the intangible influence that is artistry. To define the way art captivates the individual spirit is like capturing a cloud because art defies conventional borders—like the artists themselves.

Both the International Young Soloists program and Playwright Discovery program celebrated their 25th anniversaries in 2009. Both programs, in which VSA affiliates participate annually, have contributed to the successful careers of many artists and increased awareness about how disability touches all our lives.
VSA's tradition of presenting high-quality artistic work begins with childhood education and outreach, but art is not outgrown. Rather, it is something that matures, which is why VSA's programs extend to adolescents and adults. For example, 2009 marked the New York debut of Inside/Out... voices from the disability community. The play, which was commissioned, funded, and produced by VSA and which premiered at the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts in 2008, brought together a cast of seven individuals (each with a personal experience with disability) and the acclaimed creative team at Ping Chong & Company.

VSA also supports emerging artists. The Williamstown Theater Festival is one of America’s preeminent summer theaters with a strong focus on training theater artists. For the fourth year, VSA supported the participation of two students with disabilities as apprentices in their 2009 season: actor Michael Randazzo and actor/playwright Anton Spivack. Randazzo, who is legally blind, and Spivack, who has Asperger’s syndrome, spent more than two months engaged in this hands-on, fully immersive introduction to the world of professional theater.

VSA Artists Debut at The Armory Show

Artist Emily Eifler, 24, explains that her whimsical fabric sculptures are, “about exerting control over things that cannot be controlled and the monumentalization of time.”

Eifler had the chance to bring her artist's statement to the public as one of 16 VSA artists who participated in The Armory Show in New York—America's leading contemporary art fair. This was VSA's debut at the event as well.

“It is so rare for someone my age to have this experience at this point in my career,” says Eifler, a San Francisco resident with a progressive neurological disorder resulting in limited mobility. “VSA is breaking the stigma of what it means to be an artist with a disability because they’re discerning about the work…[VSA] is doing the work behind making people with disabilities legitimate participants in contemporary art.”

She adds that the shows gave her the confidence to apply to graduate school. She is now pursuing a masters of fine arts at the California College of Art.
“I have always been inspired and fascinated by the individuality of humans. Discerning the miniscule features that create the whole of a person’s face or body has always driven me to record those details and produce portraits.”

— Niamh Butler

Emerging artists face many choices about their future. VSA continues to encourage and support the passion of young artists at this critical juncture by providing the tools they need to succeed: financing and venues. For the eighth year, VSA and Volkswagen Group of America, Inc., partnered to recognize emerging artists with disabilities who demonstrate promise in the visual arts. The 15 artists were awarded a total of $60,000. Their works, organized by the theme “Accelerate,” were on view at the Smithsonian Institution’s S. Dillon Ripley Center from September 2009 to January 2010 and are now on tour around the United States.
Like VSA, Discovery Channel SilverDocs Documentary Film Festival supports diverse voices and free expression. VSA was honored to kick off an annual apprenticeship with the internationally recognized independent film festival by sending three emerging filmmakers with disabilities to participate in the educational conference.

Application to the apprenticeship opportunities was open to filmmakers with disabilities between the ages of 18 and 30. Matthew Clark, Don Edler, and Elizabeth Dena Sorkin were selected to literally walk the red carpet, enjoy screenings, and participate in educational workshops including a fundraising session with PBS and an important course on how to pitch a documentary.

Edler, who has cerebral palsy, was thrilled by a Q&A session with filmmaker Albert Maysles after the screening of his film, Salesmen. "In past experiences I have learned that meeting my heroes will almost certainly end in a heartbreaking letdown, but with Mr. Maysles it was different. …It was truly an inspiring moment."

Sorkin met a hero of her own at a screening with educator Erin Gruwell, whose classroom experiences inspired the film Freedom Writers. "I enjoyed listening to people’s comments and feedback and opinions afterwards," she recalls. "I would have never thought I’d meet her. Thanks to VSA and SilverDocs, I had that opportunity."

The third apprentice, Matthew Clark, explains that the program gave him unprecedented access. "I was literally sitting in conferences with the program directors of Discovery Channel telling producers what they’re looking for," he recalls. "That business insight was invaluable. …The VSA-AFI apprenticeship gave me a great opportunity."

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"Lights, Camera, Apprentice!"

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"Lights, Camera, Apprentice!"
The appreciation and enthusiasm for art, as well as the skills required to cultivate it at the highest level, begin in childhood and are nurtured over a lifetime. VSA wants to ensure that all individuals who aspire to careers in the arts have the opportunity to develop appropriate skills and reach their potential. That’s why VSA offers a continuum of programs such as educational resources and inclusive learning opportunities for students; recognition and support for emerging visual, performing, and media artists; and resources and information about employment opportunities in the arts for people with disabilities.

Transcending Careers: VSA and the Workplace

An Ideal Partnership

VSA Utah’s PARTNERS program links adult artists with disabilities with professional artists in a program that helps the apprentice artists to fine-tune their techniques and widen their invaluable network within the art community. Five mentor-apprentice partnerships took place in 2009, culminating in an exhibit of their work.
For those with the talent and tenacity to pursue a career in the arts, VSA builds a bridge between education and viable employment. This is demonstrated in VSA’s commitment to fund (in conjunction with the National Endowment for the Arts [NEA]) statewide forums related to careers in the arts for people with disabilities. The statewide forums are coordinated through the National Arts and Disability Center in Los Angeles, California. Since 2002, 26 states have conducted statewide forums. In 2009, the Illinois Arts Council convened two forums on careers in the arts for people with disabilities.

The statewide forums bring the VSA affiliates together with the state art agency to advance the platform of employment in the arts for people with disabilities. Just look at VSA Indiana, which used its career forum grants to launch ArtsWORK, in partnership with the Indiana Arts Commission and the Indiana Institute on Disability and Community. The focal point of this highly collaborative initiative is its Web site (artswork.org), a hub for artists to receive encouragement and access to resources, such as training, job openings, and online and in-person networking opportunities.

Despite the availability of careers in the arts, people with disabilities continue to face barriers to career advancement. VSA contributed to the NEA’s National Summit on Careers in the Arts for People with Disabilities at the Kennedy Center, which was first held in 1998. The 2009 summit convened individuals from the arts, education, government, research, employment, and disability fields to evaluate the progress made on this issue since its last meeting. In addition, it addressed the remaining obstacles and created a strategic plan to alleviate those roadblocks and ensure that people with disabilities are fairly represented in the cultural arena.

Power of Performance

Matthew Joffe is accustomed to stares and even jeers. That all changes when he takes the stage. The 57-year-old amateur actor and playwright, who performed at the Kennedy Center in Inside/Out… voices from the disability community, says the experience was akin to being a celebrity and allowed him to talk to the public about Moebius Syndrome and its impact on his life.

“I bare my soul on stage without the fear I sometimes have walking the streets,” he says.

In addition to acting, Joffe was the play’s consultant on disability. (Joffe has more than 30 years’ experience as an educational therapist and psychotherapist and is senior director of the Office for Student Services and Disabled Students Programs, at LaGuardia Community College/CUNY.) He has co-written and acted in two original plays with The Inner Faces Players, a New York City–based support group for individuals with cranio-facial conditions, and appeared in several documentaries. Look for Joffe next on YouTube where he will appear in a public service announcement, part of a series on raising consciousness about people with differences.
From Exhibitor to Employee

Michelle Herman, 25, is first and foremost a professional artist. She is a painter, though her recent work is in the medium of large-scale multimedia installations. She is now the interactive media designer for ArtsEdge, a program in the education department of the Kennedy Center. She credits VSA for providing her quality networking opportunities to connect with the Kennedy Center for employment.

"VSA is an amazing organization that really cares about the success of their artists and provides them countless opportunities to achieve it," she explains.

Herman, who was born with ectrodactyly-ectodermal dysplasia-cleft syndrome, first connected with VSA when she was named an award of excellence winner in the 2008 VSA and Volkswagen Green Light exhibition for her film Healing. She explains that her participation in VSA programs has given exposure to her art, fueled her creative spirit, and opened doors.

"Not many fresh-out-of-college young artists can say they have shown their work in the Smithsonian or the Kennedy Center. Those additions to my resume have greatly helped me when applying to shows."

— Michelle Herman
**VSA Affiliate Network**

Each year 7 million people participate in VSA programs through a nationwide network of affiliates and in 52 countries around the world. VSA affiliates deliver arts-based educational programs for students with disabilities in four programming areas: educational programs including teaching artist residencies; professional development; cultural access and inclusive arts services; and public awareness and outreach.

**VSA Affiliate Network**

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Fiscal Year 2009 Statement of Activity

Year ended September 27, 2009

Operating revenues:
- Publication income $13,793
- Ticket income -
- Registration income 205
- Other income 8,776
- Total operating revenues $22,774

Program services:
- Affiliate and education services expenses $4,198,586
- Public awareness expenses 2,178,430
- Other program expenses 800,749
- Total program services $7,177,495

Administrative expenses $994,883
Fund-raising expenses 87,070
- Total operating expenses $8,295,718

Operating expenses in excess of operating revenues before contributions $(8,236,944)

Contributions, grants, and other support:
- Government grants and contract income $7,300,232
- Corporate, foundation, and association income 1,524,543
- Individual and board income 158,185
- Total contributions, grants, and other support: $8,982,960

Operating expenses in excess of operating revenues and contributions, grants, and other support* $(746,016)

Non-restricted net assets - beginning balance $982,099
Addition based on fiscal year operations to date 746,016
Ending balance $1,728,104

*The Schedule of Operations does not include income earned from temporarily restricted contributions of $645,000 received during fiscal year 2009. As of the end of fiscal year 2009 VSA arts Inc. had $779,774 in temporarily restricted net assets.

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VSA, the international organization on arts and disability, was founded more than 35 years ago by Ambassador Jean Kennedy Smith to provide arts and education opportunities for people with disabilities and increase access to the arts for all. With 52 international affiliates and a network of nationwide affiliates, VSA is changing perceptions about people with disabilities around the world. Each year, 7 million people of all ages and abilities participate in VSA programs, which cover all artistic genres. VSA is an affiliate of the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts. For more information, visit www.vsarts.org.

To learn more about VSA, visit our Web site: www.vsarts.org.

VSA
818 Connecticut Avenue NW, Suite 600
Washington, DC 20006
202.628.2800 • 800.933.8721 (Voice) • 202.737.0645 (TTY) • 202.429.0868 (Fax)

Alternative formats of the VSA 2009 Annual Report are available upon request.

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