



ARYSE 2019- 2020 Annual Report





**Message from
Jenna Baron,
Executive Director**

**To our friends, partners,
volunteers, donors, and
ARYSE supporters,**

We could not have made it through this year without your support. Every single one of us has been challenged in ways that we'll remember for a lifetime. Between the trauma, grief, and uncertainty of dealing with a global pandemic, a tumultuous and stressful election season, and our nation's overdue reckoning with generations of state-sanctioned violence against Black lives, it's no exaggeration to say that we are living through an incredibly historic moment.

In the midst of these unimaginable challenges, the ARYSE team and program operations have grown. Thanks to the generous support of state agencies, local foundations, and donors, we now have a dream team of 4 full-time and 4 part-time staff, 2 Americorps members, and 15 Youth Steering Committee leaders who drive our vision forward every day. We have also doubled the size of our board of directors, made up of impressive and thoughtful people who are deeply passionate about the ARYSE mission. I am so proud of this team, as well as our brilliant students, for the love, determination, hope, and creativity they have shown as our world has been turned upside down. They are the heart and soul of this organization and our city is becoming a better place for everyone because of them.

Back in the spring, our team was skeptical about transitioning to virtual platforms; long story short, we have been amazed by what can be accomplished virtually! While a virtual After School Club and PRYSE Academy session are no match

for the transformational experiences we facilitate in person, the virtual program option has, unexpectedly, made our programs more accessible for students who are limited by competing responsibilities, location, and/or transportation barriers. By no means does this represent the majority of our students who are struggling each and every day due to the inequities of remote learning, but considering the dozens of our students who have benefited from this option, we anticipate that ARYSE virtual program offerings are here to stay.

I could not reflect on 2020 without feeling immense gratitude for the ingenuity of our agency partners who have risen to the challenges of this time in extraordinary ways. These include Jewish Family and Community Services, Duquesne University's Center for Community-Engaged Teaching and Research, Global Wordsmiths, Open Field, A+ Schools, and Computer Reach (to name a few). Navigating this year would not have been possible without the support we received from these agencies as well as the dozens of individuals who dedicated their personal time, energy, and expertise to ARYSE to ensure our students are given the resources they need to thrive.

At ARYSE, we believe that our students have the power to create the change they wish to see in their communities and that our job is to work alongside them to actualize their vision, advocate for their well-being, and make Pittsburgh a more welcoming place for them and their families. I know that there is a very long road ahead of us in the pursuit of peace, equity, and justice, but thanks to the incredible young people our team has the privilege of interacting with and supporting each day, I feel very hopeful about the future that lies ahead.

Thank you for taking the time to review this report and learn about how our team navigated 2020. My hope is that when you receive our Annual Report next year, you'll have the pleasure of seeing fewer screenshots of Zoom meetings and a lot more action shots from our students' dance performances. Let's believe that there are many more good things to come for our communities in 2021.

**With love,
Jenna**



On June 5, 2020, ARYSE published a statement in support of the Black Lives Matter movement. Below is an excerpt from that statement, which can be read in full at this webpage: www.arysepgh.org/black-lives-matter

Our hearts are so heavy and this statement feels overdue. Our entire team is grieving and enraged by the murders of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Arbery, Tony McDade, Sandra Bland, Antwon Rose II, and so many others whose lives were taken, most at the hands of police. For hundreds of years, Black people have been fighting for justice on all of our behalf and still, in 2020, their lives are not protected. There are not enough words to describe how disgraceful it is that this is still the reality.

ARYSE stands with everyone taking to the streets to demand justice and that police be held accountable for their racist and violent actions that jeopardize Black lives. This racist violence is a constant threat to the physical and emotional safety of Black people. At ARYSE, our mission and commitment to our students — immigrant and refugee youth — is that alongside them, we pave the way for them becoming engaged, confident, and celebrated members of our communities. The truth is, this mission will never be achieved until real justice, real safety, and real equity exists for people of color, and especially, our Black communities. We are failing the youth we serve if we are not in a constant, committed, and intersectional fight for their futures.

We recognize that as an organization, we have not done enough to advocate for the safety of Black lives. As the staff and Board of Directors, we are committed to becoming a better and fiercer advocate when it comes to dismantling white supremacy and demanding an end to police brutality of Black communities. We refuse to work with or accept offers from the police or ICE.

We stand in solidarity with Black Lives Matter and other organizations that call to #DefundThePolice and #AbolishICE and for investment in Black communities so that they “not only survive, but thrive.”



Message from Morgan Puterbaugh 2019 PRYSE Reunion

In January, 2020, we hosted our first-ever PRYSE Academy reunion to bring students together to have a day of reconnecting with old friends, dancing, playing games, making art, and checking-in with ARYSE staff. Our friends from Open Field and Duquesne University’s Center for Community-Engaged Teaching and Research came by to facilitate activities and connect with students. Additionally, our resident teaching artist, Hana Swift, held a screen printing workshop for students to create their own t-shirts in commemoration of the event. Thanks to CitiParks, we were able to host the event free-of-charge at Phillips Recreation Center located in Carrick. With the help of the many volunteers, Compass Americorps members, PRYSE counselors, and ARYSE staff it was a safe and fun day for the 50+ students that attended!



University of Pittsburgh Partnership of Distinction Award

Thanks to the nomination made by our board member, Holly Hickling, ARYSE was one of 5 organizations to receive the Senior Vice Chancellor for Engagement’s

Award for Partnerships of Distinction, which recognizes outstanding University of Pittsburgh partnerships that are exemplars of community engagement. ARYSE was awarded this distinction because of its partnership with two Pitt student-led organizations, Keep it Real and FORGE. ARYSE was presented the award, which includes a gift of \$2,000, alongside other community organizations at the University’s Community Engaged Scholarship Forum in March, 2020.





Message from Obadah Alfaham, K-8 ASC Program Director

At the K-8 After School Club, our main focus is to provide a safe and supportive space for our students — youth with refugee backgrounds living in Crafton Heights — to flourish. The program kicked off for the 2019-2020 school year in September and enrolled 60 students representing 5 countries of origin — Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan, Democratic Republic of Congo, and Burma. Thanks to our partners at JFCS, we had access to a space in the neighborhood to host the program and the support of 10+ volunteers at each session who provided mentorship and 1-on-1 homework help.

On a typical day before the pandemic, upon arrival, students received a snack and time to decompress from school. After snack time, I facilitated movement and mindfulness activities like deep breathing, stretching, dancing, and games that require physical activity. From there, mentors facilitated small group Circle Time, a short period of mindful communication for students to reflect, process the day, and build rapport with mentors and peers. Then came Homework Time and enrichment activities which were led either by me, mentors, and/or agency partners like Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh (West End Branch) and Open Field.

Student-led and play-based learning became a huge part of the After School Club. We set up craft corners where students built structures with legos, created illustrations, wrote comics, and read stories with friends. Thanks to help from mentors, students who rarely spoke at the beginning of the school year grew to feel comfortable showing their natural confidence and creativity.

The limitations of virtual programming made it difficult to keep the ASC going in the spring. Even now, we are still reconnecting with many of our students to ensure they have support to achieve their academic and personal goals. For example, we've facilitated one of our student's connection to Hope Academy, an Arts Education Outreach Program, to prepare for an acting audition for Pittsburgh's Creative and Performing Arts School. We also witness and promote our students' original online content, where they are showcasing cultural dances, making comedic skits, and practicing their English skills.

We really miss being with our students in person. Unfortunately, these circumstances have exacerbated the unfair expectations and academic barriers our students face in regular times. Our team has been communicating with local school districts and teachers more than ever to address these challenges and believe this has enabled ARYSE to become more effective in advocating for systemic change.

Our students have given us hope and energy to push through these tough times. Thanks to them, we have laughed, danced, learned, and grown our way through the uncertainty. One of the lessons we've learned this year is, so long as our students have a safe space that allows them to express their true personality and culture, they will always find joy and hope no matter the challenges.

"Anything that we can do to help foster the intellect and spirit of our fellow human beings, that is our job. Those of us who have this particular vision must continue against all odds. Life is for service."
~ Fred Rogers

After School Club K-8



One major highlight from the After School Club in 2020 was in one of our students, Dieudonne, who created his own original interview show by doing a social media takeover on Instagram. Dieudonne would take the camera and walk around the program to interview students and mentors about their homework, interests, and art. Drawing and coloring turned into dancing, singing, and acting out their funny stories. After School Club became a garden of growth where our K-8 students felt safe enough to explore their potential.



Message from Mike Sirera, 9-12 ASC Program Director

After School Club launched for its first full academic year of programming in September 2019. Just a few months removed from the pilot semester in the spring, none of us were quite sure what to expect on the first day. We were pleasantly surprised - and grateful we ordered extra food! - when 27 students showed up on the first day. Just to put that number into perspective, the daily average for students that attended was 8 during the pilot program. Throughout the in-person portion of the year, the program continued to grow and we were able to serve a total of 54 students. Given the tremendous increase in the number of enrolled students, a lot of the fall semester was spent adjusting the model to fit the growing enrollment and demand for the program.

After School Club met on Tuesdays and Thursdays on Duquesne University's campus. Each day at the program, students shared a meal together, received mentor support while working on their homework, and participated in an educational activity. Once a week, the activity portion focused on college and career readiness with our partners from the Career Development Center at JFCS. The other alternating days' activities focused on the program's other goals: academic success, community building, celebration of culture and identity, social and cultural integration, civic engagement, and life satisfaction. Some of the highlights from the year were the Duquesne Psychology Clinic tour, ice skating at PPG Place, volunteering as mentors at the K-8 After School Club, and discussing the census with Feyisola Akintola, the Special Initiatives Manager for the office of Mayor William Peduto.

When the realities of the pandemic began to set in, it became clear that the needs of the students were changing during remote learning. Students required significantly more assistance with their schoolwork and faced several substantial barriers to completing their classwork. We transitioned our program online in a reduced capacity through Zoom in order to support the students. As a result, we were able to provide two full days of homework assistance and a third day for college and career readiness programming. Throughout the virtual portion of the program in the spring, we prioritized seniors, students that more recently arrived in the United States, and those actively seeking assistance. We were able to invite 11 students to the program during the spring and have been able to expand this even more to serve 20 students this fall.

COVID-19 has disrupted so many different aspects of life for everyone, but it has exacerbated all of the barriers and challenges the students face on a daily basis at school. If there is a silver lining to be found, it is that we are more keenly aware of the struggles the students face and this has allowed us to step more firmly into a role of advocacy. I am infinitely proud of Zahara and Mahamudi, our two regular-attending seniors last year, for working hard to graduate amidst the surreal circumstances, and I can't wait to celebrate with this year's seniors when they graduate in June. This year has only reinforced the degree to which I am amazed by our students; they are hardworking, driven, and able to steal away moments of silliness and laughter, even in the face of the impossible.

After School Club 9-12

Congratulations to Zahara, one of our amazing seniors, who began her studies at the Community College of Allegheny County and soon became the co-chair of the International Club student organization on campus. We are so proud of you, Zahara!





Message from Erica Hughes, Girls Group Co-Facilitator

This past year at Girls Group, we worked together to create a magazine project. Though things were cut short due to restrictions following COVID-19, we were able to make a great deal of headway on this project, learn about art and activism, and cultivate a fun and safe environment where we support each other's experiences and aspirations.

There were 15 youth who participated in Girls Art and Maker Group, ranging in age from 13-17 years old. Prior to the pandemic reaching the U.S, the girls would use bus passes we gave them to attend our bi-weekly Girls Group meeting on Saturdays which took place at the Department of Human Services in Downtown, Pittsburgh.

The girls live in various neighborhoods through Pittsburgh, including Crafton Heights, the Northside, Greentree, Brentwood, and Sheridan.

The focus of Girls Group in 2019/2020 — the magazine project — was inspired by the nature of Girls Group as a creative and safe space for femmes from programs of ARYSE. Through the magazine, our students had the opportunity to grow as writers, visual artists and creative directors. Above all, the magazine was an outlet that let their innate storytelling abilities shine.

Girls Group visited several creative events between October, 2019 and February, 2020. Namely we saw a show at Pittsburgh Public Theater called, "School Girls; Or the African Mean Girls Play" and visited the Zine Fair at the Ace Hotel where dozens of artists showcased their zines and art. The group also went to a collective artworking space where they saw the interplay of art and community activism and the power stories have to make change.

Due to the pandemic, as of March 14th, 2020, Girls Group was put on hold for the remainder of the 2019/2020 school year. The culmination of their art making has not yet taken the form of a finished magazine, but the girls are excited to pick it back up this year through our virtual meetings on Zoom.

Girls Art & Maker Group



Girls Art & Maker Group 2019-20

“ Going to a girls group has helped encourage friendship building among us girls and to interact with people with different backgrounds and stories. We learn not to judge people because they're different, it helps us understand each other.”





**Message from
Maryam Nader,
Youth Steering
Committee
Co-Facilitator**

activities and engaged in discussions to help inform the writing process of City Theater’s resident playwright, Jim McManus.

Unfortunately, the “Building Bridges” project, our in-person YSC meetings, and our annual trip to Harrisburg to meet with elected officials had to be put on hold due to COVID-19. While this was disappointing, it didn’t stop us from staying connected and helping with the planning for PRYSE Academy 2020, which we had to navigate for a virtual program for the first time.

After adjusting to life in quarantine, we hosted regular meetings to discuss possible outcomes for PRYSE Academy 2020 — would it be virtual or in-person? — as we weren’t sure how long it would take for things to turn normal again. As we became sure that staying virtual was the only safe way to hold programming, we began brainstorming activities and troubleshooting problems that might arise.

In the 2019-2020 school year, the Youth Steering Committee consisted of 16 members who ranged in age from 15-20 years old, attended 5 different high schools, and represented 10 different countries of origin. At both our in-person and virtual meetings, we engaged in community projects, met with local leaders, and learned from presentations on topics that members identified interest in, e.g. resume building, applying to college, how to study in college, banking 101, and how to file taxes.

We kicked off the year with a workshop at City Theater for the “Building Bridges” project which “explores and celebrates immigrant and refugee populations in Pittsburgh: past, present and future,” — a project supported by the Allegheny Regional Asset District’s RADical Impact program. Our YSC members did improv



The YSC members were especially involved in the process of interviewing candidates for the 2 PRYSE Academy Co-Director positions. Having recently been campers, we knew that our judgment would be essential for choosing the best candidates. We would not have been able to make PRYSE Academy 2020 as great as it was without the hard work and creativity of who we ultimately hired to be our Co-Directors, Shalom Haileselassie and Rachael Cohen!

In 2021, we’re looking forward to growing our committee to allow for more students to get support, gain leadership skills, and take on official positions within our organization. One of our major goals for this year is discovering new and effective ways to support our YSC members who have graduated from high school and who have begun their journey to college or other career options. We are immensely proud of our Youth Steering Committee leaders who actively show up to meetings to talk about how to best support ARYSE youth, even during these hard and stressful times.



Tomi Highlight

In September, the Youth Steering Committee connected with a. k. payne, a playwright and poet, through a City Theatre initiative to create monologues about the importance of the US Census.



UPitt Panel Highlight

On September 29th, Jenna and 3 Youth Steering Committee members, Niraj, Tomi, and Aisha, shared their experiences with students at the University of Pittsburgh during an Honors College Café Series event. When asked about her experience at ARYSE, Tomi Taiwo shared that, “ARYSE gave me a place to use my voice. ARYSE being there is helping solve the identity crisis that a lot of people are going through, because if you can’t get yourself to know who you truly are, how can you progress?” Niraj Nepal, a freshman at Duquesne University who joined ARYSE as a camper at PRYSE Academy in 2013, described what he loves and would like to change about the Pittsburgh community. He said he loves there’s many resources, but acknowledged they are often difficult for people to access.



ARYSE Youth Steering Committee



Message from Rachael Cohen & Shalom Haileselassie, PRYSE Academy Co-Directors

PRYSE Academy 2020 was held virtually for the first time in the program’s 8 year history. Despite the pandemic, the program supported over 80 students thanks to the help of ARYSE administrative staff and a diverse group of 15 lead counselors and 16 counselors-in-training (CITs are current high schoolers who are PRYSE Academy alumni). Through the use of digital platforms like Zoom and GroupMe, we were able to keep many of the traditions and goals of PRYSE Academy alive by playing games, developing English language skills, and building lifelong friendships with each other.

In order to make virtual activities as engaging as possible, all students were placed in classrooms based on their age, length of time in the U.S., and personal needs and interests. Each classroom met for 1-2 hours, 4 days a week on a live Zoom call. We offered 3 options for virtual classrooms: 1) Traditional, 2) Newcomer, and 3) Soccer with Open Field.

The Traditional Classrooms were recommended to students who had previously participated in PRYSE Academy, or for those who have lived in the U.S. for at least 3 years. The Newcomer Classroom enrolled students who have lived in the U.S. for 1 year or less and/or those who expressed interest in focusing their time at PRYSE on English language learning. In total, we had 4 newcomer classrooms that were organized by language and grade level. In addition to senior counselors and CITs, these classrooms had the support of a professional ESL teacher and interpreters. Last but not least, the

Soccer Classroom, which was facilitated in partnership with our friends at Open Field, was offered to students who demonstrated an interest in pursuing professional or collegiate-level soccer.

On Fridays, we held virtual, program-wide assemblies on Zoom. This was an opportunity to bring all of the students together, hear camp announcements, highlight students who went above and beyond, and to hear from guest speakers. After assemblies, students attended a 2-hour storytelling workshop led by our creative partners at City Theatre Company, MCG Youth & Arts, and SLB Radio. Whether it was through flowers and fabric, a camera lens, or microphone, every student had a project and a story to share.

Despite the circumstances of a global pandemic and the challenge of adjusting to virtual programming, PRYSE Academy 2020 was able to facilitate one-of-a-kind experiences for everyone involved, especially the students. One of our favorite memories was hosting Njaimeh and Saihou Njie, local Pittsburgh artists. They presented on the importance of



building community, how they honor their Gambian and American roots, and shared the nuances of how their identities, experiences, and visions for the world intersect with their artwork.

On Saturday, August 1st, we hosted the PRYSE Academy Final Showcase — a beloved ARYSE tradition! Traditionally, the Final Showcase takes place at the end of the program for students to present their stories, creative projects, and personal talents to an audience of family and friends. To keep this tradition alive, our talented videographer friend, Anna Brewer, created a [Final Showcase video which premiered on YouTube](#) and featured interviews with students, recordings of classrooms and arts workshops, and special messages from counselors to campers. Follow this link to experience the brilliance!

Co-directing PRYSE Academy 2020 was a true opportunity to collaborate with youth in meaningful ways. Throughout this experience, we were able to consult the Youth Steering Committee (YSC), a group of youth who have grown into

positions of leadership within ARYSE. The YSC regularly provided feedback on how to approach summer programming, engage with campers, and create culturally competent and impactful curricula.

This past summer, we saw first-hand how energetic, unique, and compassionate ARYSE youth really are. It became clear that over the years, ARYSE has cultivated an inclusive environment that honors diversity and uplifts everyone to stand in their agency and uniqueness. Curious about the world around them, ARYSE youth ask questions that challenge staff and peers to grow their perspectives in a multitude of ways; these life skills are reinforced through PRYSE Academy programming which fosters confidence through public speaking and critical thinking. ARYSE youth are true stakeholders and valued contributors to the organization. The importance of this summer program as a safe space for self exploration, connection, and compassion cannot be overstated.



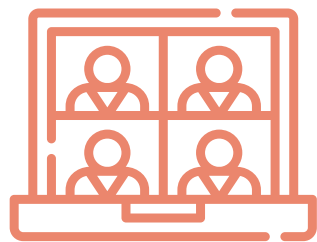


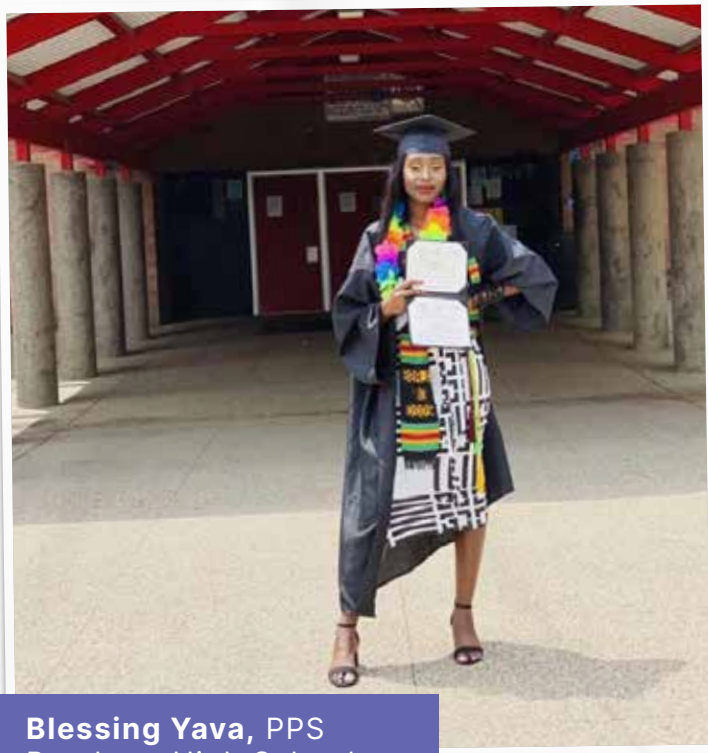
“ At PRYSE, I have learned all people should be treated the same, there is no difference. For example, there is no difference between being Afghan, Asian, or English. We are all one, we are humans. They have taught us that you can do whatever you want. You can never say that I won’t be able to do it. You can do anything if you try. ”

- Pouya, age 15



PRYSE Academy 2020





**Blessing Yava, PPS
Brashear High School**



**Asia Mada, Fox Chapel
High School**



**Jeneba Bah, Urban
Pathways Charter School**



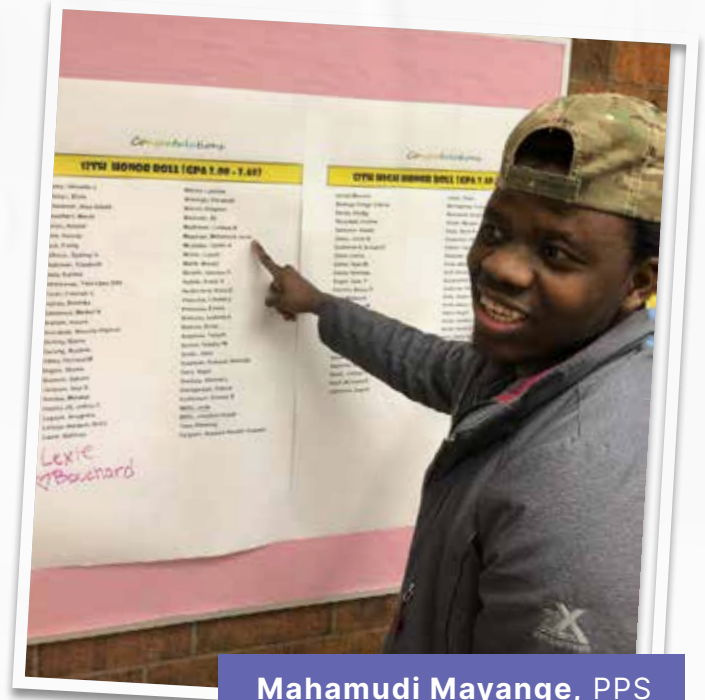
**Zahara Hussein, PPS
Brashear High School**



**Niraj Nepal, PPS
Carrick High School**



**Maryam Nader, PPS
Brashear High School**



**Mahamudi Mayange, PPS
Brashear High School**

Congrats to ARYSE 2020 Seniors!

ARYSE Staff



Jenna Baron,
Executive
Director



**Morgan
Puterbaugh,**
Operations
Manager



**Obadah
Alfaham, ASC**
K-8 Program
Director



Mike Sirera,
ASC 9-12
Program
Director



**Anamaria
Ortiz,** Program
Intern



Maryam Nader,
Youth Steering
Committee
Facilitator



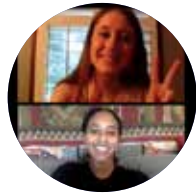
Hana Kimura,
Girls Group
Coordinator
& Media and
Communications
Specialist



Erica Hughes,
Girls Group
Co-Facilitator



Aisha Saleh,
Girls Group
Co-Facilitator



**Shalom
Haileselassie
& Rachael
Cohen,** PRYSE
Academy Co-
Directors



Jeff Zeng,
PRYSE
Academy
Counselor-
in-Training
Supervisor

ARYSE Board

Khair Mugwaneza, Board Chair
Program Manager, Center for Inclusion and
Immigrant Health, Allegheny Health Network

Dana Gold, Chief Operations Officer, Jewish
Family & Community Services

Holly Hickling, Associate Program
Evaluation Specialist, University of Pittsburgh
School of Pharmacy

Leigh Solomon Pugliano, Founder
and Director, Barrels to Beethoven and
Straightforward Consulting

Jane Voros, Director of Publication Services,
American Economic Association (retired)

Kristen Hochreiter, Compliance Specialist,
Partner4Work

Faduma Saleh, Student, CCAC

Barbara Johnson, Director of Race and
Gender Equity, YWCA of Greater Pittsburgh
Phoenix Le Nguyen, Audit Manager, PNC
Financial Services

Maya Ragavan, Assistant Professor of
Pediatrics, University of Pittsburgh/Children's
Hospital of Pittsburgh

Jonathan Muscatello, VP Employee
Benefits, USI Insurance Services

Mark Nakhla, Psychiatrist, UPMC Western
Psychiatric Hospital

Erica Kelly Curren, Attorney, Gorden
and Rees

Thank you, Hana Kimura!

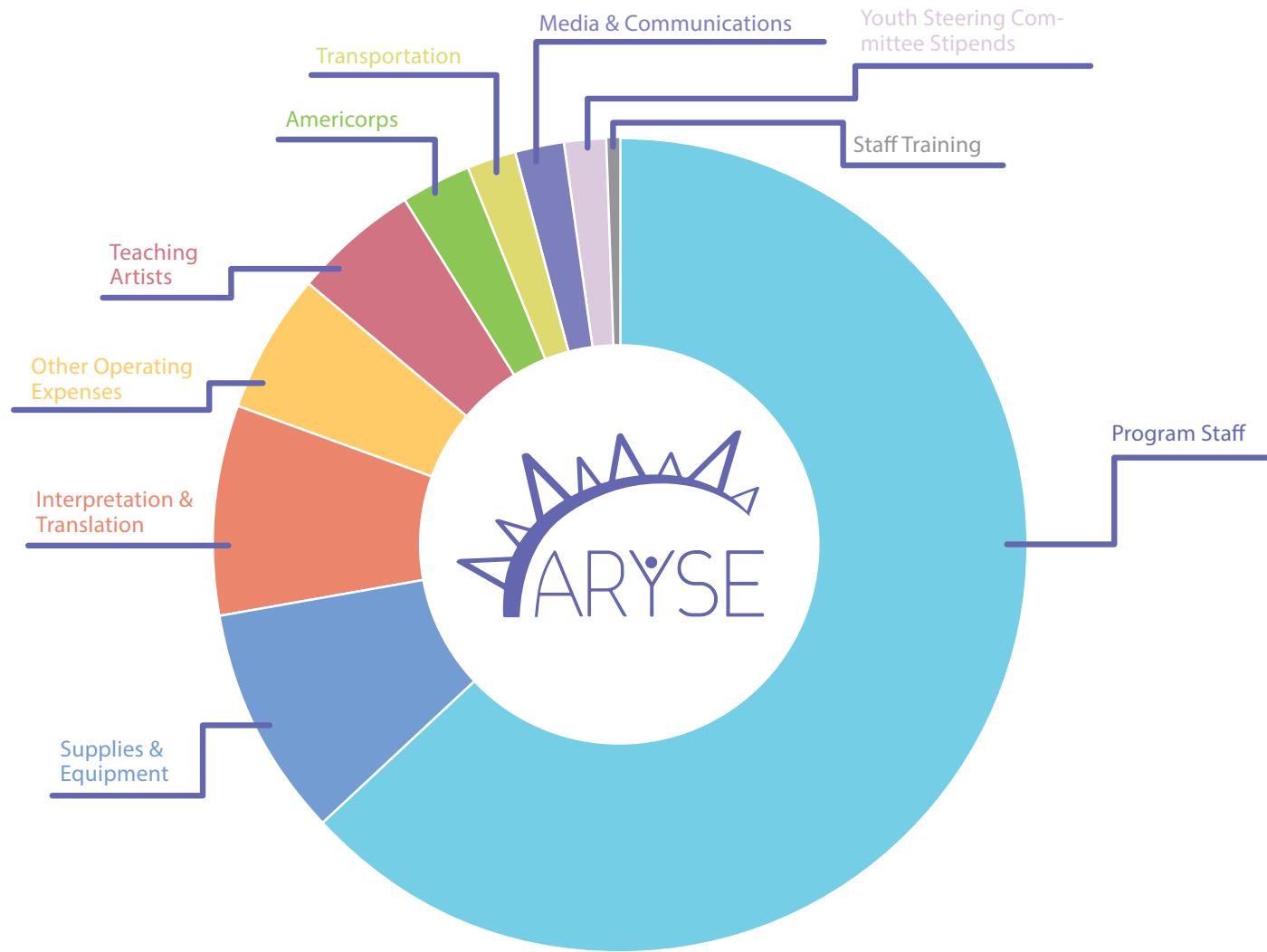
After 5+ years of volunteering, working, and sharing their time, energy, and love to lay a strong foundation for ARYSE, Hana Kimura will officially transition off the team at the end of 2020.

There are so many reasons our team is grateful for Hana. She has been with ARYSE from the beginning, working as a PRYSE counselor in 2016 and then co-director in 2017. Hana then proceeded to create and implement the Girls Art and Maker Group and has consistently been one of the most significant influences in building a culture of courage, youth voice, creativity, inclusion, and anti-racism at ARYSE. It feels impossible to measure the invaluable impact and relationships that Hana has cultivated among our team, students, and organization.

To Hana: we know there are so many exciting adventures ahead of you! Thank you for all that you have done for ARYSE and continue to do to make our community a safer, more welcoming place for everyone. We love you!



Financials



Program Staff \$174,608.63	Americorps \$7,250.00
Supplies & Equipment \$25,912.36	Transportation \$5,917.21
Interpretation & Translation \$23,156.78	Media & Communications \$4,973.53
Other Operating Expenses \$15,574.35	Youth Steering Committee Stipends \$4,767.50
Teaching Artists \$13,800.00	Staff Training \$1,400.00

Donors

242 Give Big 2019 donors
 188 Virtual Marathon 2020 donors
 Kevin's Deli
 Bernita Buncher Educational Advancement Fund

Francis V. and Almeda M. Breeze Trust Fund
 Paul Franke Foundation
 Beach-Westmoreland Fund

Foundations



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