

2019

HEArts



**RMHF**

RICHMOND MEMORIAL HEALTH FOUNDATION

RMHF HEArts 2019:

# EQUITY IN ACTION!

Health Equity and Arts



# Welcome

Few people have a clear understanding or vision of equity. It is a difficult concept to define, and harder still to explain in terms of what it means to have equity in our communities. When RMHF launched the Health Equity and Arts (HEArts) program in 2017, our Trustees and team knew that artists could play a crucial role in elevating the conversation about health equity in the Richmond region, helping people understand how life expectancy and health and wellbeing can vary dramatically from neighborhood to neighborhood. Over the past two years, on paper and canvas, in streets and on stages and in conversations and classes, RMHF HEArtists have advanced health equity and unleashed the imagination of our community.

In the first cohort of HEArts in 2017, RMHF awarded eight artists and artists collectives' funds for projects that helped fill in the blank canvas of what health equity looked like to the community. These artists considered the following questions in tandem with their creative works:

1. What does it mean to be well?
2. How do aspects of identity, such as race, ethnicity, gender, age, migrant status and socioeconomic status, relate to health outcomes?
3. What structural barriers exist to achieving states of physical, mental, and social well-being?

Each of the eight received awards ranging from \$1,500 to \$10,000 to support their individual projects lifting different voices and perspectives in the community.



In 2019, RMHF launched the second cohort of HEArts called Equity In Action!, integrating the arts into the Foundation's core work by funding cross-sector, nontraditional partnerships of nonprofit organizations partnering with artists. RMHF took the recommendations from external evaluators and made improvements to the program by funding nonprofit organizations who could serve as the team behind the artists to advance health and housing equity. By taking on the necessary, but time-intensive administrative tasks, the nonprofits freed up artists to focus on leading participatory sessions with the community to name creative solutions to the problems communities named. To accomplish this work, the Trustees increased support for HEArts to grants of \$20,000 each for five grantee partners.

A key activity for HEArts grantee partners has included bi-monthly co-learning sessions with national and local field experts on topics ranging from health equity, housing equity, racial equity and arts as research.

After only a few years into this journey, RMHF is awed both by the works being produced and even more so by the work going on behind the scenes. On the following pages, you will see projects from HEArts 2019: Equity In Action! that prove the power in the process and demonstrate how creativity can fuel the solutions we need to foster a more equitable and healthy Richmond region. We hope the work and creativity of the artists featured inform, inspire and give hope.

**Mark D. Constantine**  
President & CEO

**Kendra J. Jones**  
Director for Health Equity, Arts & Culture

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#### RMHF'S DEFINITION OF HEALTH EQUITY

**Health equity means everyone has a fair and just opportunity to be as healthy and well as possible. This requires engaging communities and partners to reduce health disparities by removing obstacles to health such as poverty, discrimination and their consequences.**

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# Meet the Program Director



Kendra Jones

Director for Health Equity, Arts & Culture,  
Richmond Memorial Health Foundation

Kendra Jones received a degree in Accounting from Virginia State University and her MBA from Averett University. She serves as the director for health equity, arts & culture for Richmond Memorial Health Foundation (RMHF) located in Richmond, VA. She also directs RMHF's Health Equity and Arts program, better known as HEArts. The goal of the HEArts program is to lift up community voice and perspective to foster creative solutions for achieving health and/or housing equity.

Kendra's personal interests include reading, writing for stress relief, and volunteering and advocating on behalf of finding a cure for Type 1 Diabetes.



# 2019 Grantees

**Art 180**

## Rethinking Ourselves and Our Story: Alter Egos and Other Worlds

► [www.art180.org](http://www.art180.org)

Teens explored mental health equity, self-empowerment, and self-actualization through the use of invented characters, alter-egos, and re-imagined narratives. The goal was to foster discussion about teen mental health struggles and to discover ways, through multiple creative mediums, to express feelings about mental health so that teens could better understand these issues and advocate for their peers dealing with these struggles. Art 180 achieved this by working with teens, social workers, and artists that facilitated group dialogue and brainstorming sessions. Teens completed writing exercises that informed a creative performance in a concluding immersive theater experience for the community.



ARTIST

Ian Gerson

## **Family Lifeline**

# **Dare To Care: Women in Direct Care**

↳ [www.familylifeline.org](http://www.familylifeline.org)

Family Lifeline undertook a photo-narrative project to uplift the voices of certified nursing assistants (CNAs) and personal care aides (PCAs), whose care allows older adults and people with disabilities to live independently. Artists facilitated conversations with 8-10 women in exploring wellness, identity, and care through story, poetry, and image. Together, artists and providers produced large-scale black and white portraits accompanied by stories of self and care. Dare to Care will launch a website and exhibit in November 2019. In 2020, it will travel around the region with the aims of 1) awakening the community to the lives of care providers and 2) initiating a surge of appreciation.



ARTIST

Gigi Amateau



ARTIST

Penelope Carrington

## **Girls For A Change**

# **Girls' Stories – Our Voices – Trauma & Triumph!**

↳ [www.girlsforachange.org/about-us/who-we-are/](http://www.girlsforachange.org/about-us/who-we-are/)

This program explored with girls of color the different aspects of visual art, storytelling, and narratives while considering their connection to conflicts, reconciliation, and peace building in their personal lives and communities. The program served 15-20 girls and exposed them to different forms of self-expression including several types of visual and performing media. The goal was to present to the community the realities of trauma in the lives of girls of color in our midst and to reaffirm the importance of embracing these young women who are crucial to the community's future. Girls For A Change demonstrated the healing and inspiring properties of art to affirm how exploration of issues like trauma are responsive to art interventions.



ARTIST

Hamilton Glass



ARTIST

Austin Miles

## Sacred Heart Center

# Casa Lapiz Art Program

↳ [www.shcrichmond.org/en/causes/family-programs/](http://www.shcrichmond.org/en/causes/family-programs/)

Casa Lapiz consists of three 8 week sessions of art classes for Latino youth from Boushall Middle School. The students work with several art languages during the 8 weeks. Bilingual conversations focus on housing and health challenges that face the students, their families, and their community. They imagine solutions to these problems, and express these solutions through their art work. At the end of each session, an exhibition is held, to which the community is invited. The goal of the project is multilayered: increase access to art classes, give space for these conversations, and allow the students to explore issues of identity, equity, and their role in their community.



ARTIST

Alfonso Perez Acosta

## Thriving Cities Group

# ARCA (Art, Racial Reconciliation and Civic Advocacy) Pilot

↳ [www.thrivingcitiessgroup.com/rva-thrives-arca](http://www.thrivingcitiessgroup.com/rva-thrives-arca)

The goals of ARCA are for Latinx and Black youth to 1) deepen cross-cultural relationships; 2) practice community building skills; and 3) develop civic advocacy skills. The project added value to the community by enhancing the beauty and safety of neighborhoods along the corridor through street art as well as bike path advocacy. Through weekly facilitated meetings, youth discussed what in/equitable practices look like, explored the history of racial and economic divisions in Richmond, learned about social determinants of health, affordable housing, bike paths and public health, and how to advocate for more equitable practices at the local government level.



ARTIST

Alfonso Perez  
Acosta



ARTIST

Hamilton Glass



# Meet the Artists



ARTIST

Ian Gerson

Ian Gerson works across various mediums including sculpture, video, painting, and performance. Ian's installations often use aesthetics found in nightclubs and queer party spaces, referencing and further imagining the potential of these spaces to build alternative communities and foster radical re-envisionings of culture. Ian attended Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture, received a NYFA Fellowship for Environmental Structures, and participated in residencies at The MacDowell Colony, Millay Colony, Bronx Museum's AIM Program, Snug Harbor, AIR Gallery, LMCC's Swing Space, and Socrates Sculpture Park. Ian is a founding member of community-based arts and culture collective Junte, working primarily in Adjuntas, Puerto Rico.



ARTIST

Austin Miles

Austin "Auz" Miles, originally from Durham, North Carolina, began attending Durham School of the Arts at the age of eleven. Austin relocated to Richmond in 2012 to attend Virginia Commonwealth University's School of the Arts. During her time at VCU, Austin discovered her passion for painting and held her first solo exhibition in 2016. She was first introduced to murals in 2017, while collaborating on Richmond's first mural created by and specifically for black girls. Miles graduated from VCUarts in December 2017. Austin uses color, texture, and distorted human and animal figures in her work to embody her own stories—all in an effort to contribute to the conversation about black female experiences.

**ARTIST****Gigi Amateau**

Gigi Amateau's first book for young adults, *Claiming Georgia Tate*, was published by Candlewick Press in 2005. That title was selected as a New York Public Library Book for the Teen Age and hailed by author Judy Blume: "It's rare and exciting to discover a talented new writer like Gigi Amateau." The Wall Street Journal called the book "an ambitious push into the young adult market." She is the author of six other books, including *A Certain Strain of Peculiar*, a Bank Street College Best Children's Book of the Year and *Chancey of the Maury River*, A William Allen White Masters list title. *Come August, Come Freedom*, her first work of historical fiction, won the Library of Virginia's People Choice Award for fiction, was chosen by Bank Street College as a Best Children's Book of the Year, and by the Virginia Library Association as a Jefferson Cup Honor book.

Gigi earned a Bachelor of Science degree in urban studies and planning from Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU) and a Master of Science in gerontology, also from VCU. She has worked in the health and human services sector for thirty years and is currently working toward her PhD in health-related sciences at VCU.

In 2012, Gigi received a Theresa Pollak Prize for Excellence in the Arts from Richmond Magazine. She was selected as the recipient of the YWCA Richmond's Pat Asch Social Justice Fellowship in 2017. With author Meg Medina, Gigi co-founded Girls of Summer, a summer reading program for girls in partnership with Richmond Public Library. Gigi lives with her family in the city of Richmond.

**ARTIST****Hamilton Glass**

Hamilton Glass's career as an artist stems from his architecture and design background. Despite working in the architecture field for 7 years, his passion for public art pushed him to start a career as an artist. Public art has always been a big influence and inspiration of his, because of its power to influence and inspire the surrounding community. With every project he is given to create, a message is built in that connects the work to the community to in which it lives. Hamilton's work usually distinguished by his use of architectural elements with bright vivid colors and sharp lines. The colors and unpredictable lines are used to convey a certain energy and movement in each piece.



ARTIST

Penelope Carrington

Penelope M. Carrington spent 20 years chasing a variety of stories as an award-winning writer and editor, and later, a multimedia producer. She is an alumna of the Multimedia Reporting and Convergence Workshop hosted by the Knight Digital Media Center at the U.C. Berkeley Graduate School of Journalism, where she has also been a guest speaker.

She continues to tell stories as an art director, photographer, and filmmaker for a variety of clients. Her work has been featured by the Richmond Times-Dispatch, U.S. Airways, Boomer, Time, CNN, NBC News, and Vogue Italia's PhotoVogue, among others.

She served as art director, photographer and designer of multiple fiction books and one of her portraits is included in Read 180 Universal. The global, high school-level reading program will be launched in March 2019 by Houghton Mifflin Harcourt Publishing.

Penelope's work is also part of the permanent collection at the Virginia Treatment Center for Children.



ARTIST

Alfonso Perez Acosta

Alfonso Perez Acosta was born in Colombia in 1980. He studied Fine Arts in Bogotá from 2001 to 2006. In 2007, Acosta started teaching at Los Nogales school in Bogotá, as a drawing and sculpture instructor. From 2007 to 2012, his artistic work focused on drawing and creative communication practices. From 2009 to 2011, he studied Education for a Masters Degree. In 2013, he moved to Medellin to work as an Integrated Arts Teacher for an international school. In 2015, Alfonso and his family moved to the United States and settled in Virginia. Alfonso currently works at the Sacred Heart Center and on different art projects about history and community building through portraits with the American Civil War Museum, Richmond Memorial Health Foundation and the Valentine Museum in Richmond.



# Meet the External Evaluator



**Alison T. McNeil**

Founder & Chief Creative Officer  
External Evaluator

Alison T. McNeil is a nationally recognized award winning strategic thinker and creative entrepreneur with nearly 20 years of experience in performing arts and education. She leads with the intention of creating resources, removing roadblocks and designing roadmaps to make arts and culture accessible to all. With technical expertise in nonprofit management, grantmaking, assessment and program evaluation, Alison has led multi-million-dollar change efforts that have directly informed policy, grantmaking, and strategic partnerships. Her efforts have also fortified leadership and secured grants that expand equity and access for women, emerging leaders and communities of color. Every effort she's contributed to is in service to the communities noted above including launching McNeil Creative Enterprises and co-founding Third Eye Cultural Collaborative, Women of Color in the Arts (WOCA), and the Maynor Biggers Artist Fund. Alison's talent has resulted in accolades both inside and outside of the arts and culture sector. She has served as a thought leader on numerous grant panels, boards, conference panels, and advisory committees including the National Endowment for the Arts, Americans for the Arts, the Heinz Endowments, Association of Performing Arts Professionals, Step Afrika!, FRESHH Inc. Theatre Company, DC Commission on the Arts and Humanities, Arts Council of Fairfax County, Alexandria Commission for the Arts and Emerging Practitioners in Philanthropy. To support the arts in her local community, Alison was previously appointed by Arlington County's Board to serve as an Arts Commissioner. If you really want to get Alison to smile, ask her about her nephew or her favorite Stevie Wonder song.



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