



CIRCESTEEM

2024 ANNUAL IMPACT REPORT

(773) 732-4564 | WWW.CIRCESTEEM.ORG | 4730 N. SHERIDAN RD.



WELCOME LETTER FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



Dear Friends and Supporters,

As I reflect on 2024, I am filled with pride at the transformative year CircEsteem experienced. From youth-led performances to the opening of our renovated building, we witnessed remarkable growth and impact in our mission to unite youth through circus arts.

Our youth's creativity shone brightly in our Spring and Winter shows, exploring themes of identity, belonging, and self-discovery, while entertaining over 1,400 audience members.

In May, we celebrated the opening of our newly renovated headquarters, the first of its kind in the U.S., designed to provide equitable access to circus arts for all youth.

We expanded our reach through the CirEsteem Around Chicago Summer Tour, partnering with the Chicago Park District and Chicago Public Libraries to bring free shows and workshops to communities citywide. In Gage Park, we deepened our impact through cultural events, youth performances, and family-friendly activities, distributing over 700 backpacks at our Back to School event.

While CircEsteem has made great strides in providing vital programming for youth in Chicago's underserved neighborhoods, we acknowledge that Chicago youth continue to face significant challenges. With nearly 320,000 students in Chicago Public Schools, representing 17% of the city's population, their experiences and opportunities shape the broader community. Sadly, since 2021, we've seen a troubling increase in violence affecting youth aged 0-19, with nearly 1 in 5 youth exposed to increased violence in 2023.

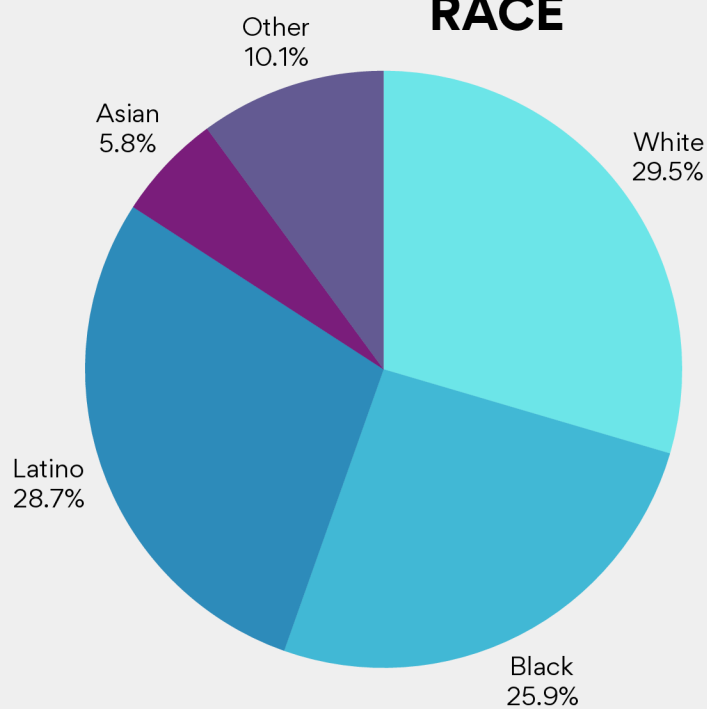
CircEsteem's mission directly addresses these challenges by offering a transformative alternative. Our programs foster self-esteem, collaboration, and social-emotional learning, creating safe spaces where young people thrive. We're not just teaching circus skills; we're empowering youth to build resilience, develop leadership skills, and envision a brighter future.

As we move forward, I am grateful for the incredible youth, families, staff, and supporters who make this work possible. Together, we've built a robust community that believes in every child's potential to succeed. Thank you for being part of our journey and for your continued support as we reimagine what's possible through circus arts.

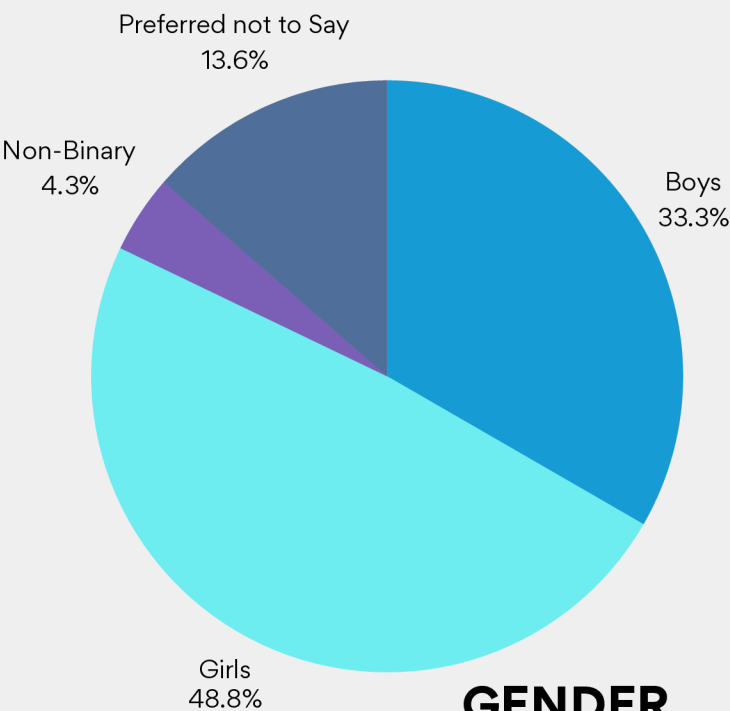
With gratitude,
Dan Roberts
Executive Director, CircEsteem

OUR 2024 MISSION IN NUMBERS

RACE



DEMOGRAPHIC BREAKDOWN



TOTAL NUMBER OF YOUTH SERVED:

1,328



GENDER IDENTITY

30% OF CIRCESTEEM YOUTH SPEAK A LANGUAGE OTHER THAN ENGLISH AT HOME, HIGHLIGHTING THE DIVERSITY OF COMMUNITIES WE SERVE AS WE LIVE OUT OUR MISSION TO UNITE YOUTH OF ALL IDENTITIES AND BACKGROUNDS.

BUILDING RESILIENCE... ONE SKILL AT A TIME

93% of
Chicago Youth
Circus
participants
agree that
**CircEsteem is
a safe space.**

98% of
Chicago Youth Circus
participants said
**staff and peers
support
their goals.**

Pre-program
assessments
reflected only 61%
of HomeWork &
CircusWork youth
said that they
generally
**felt proud of
themselves.**

However,
after they spent
time at
CircEsteem,
that number
**increased
to 77%.**

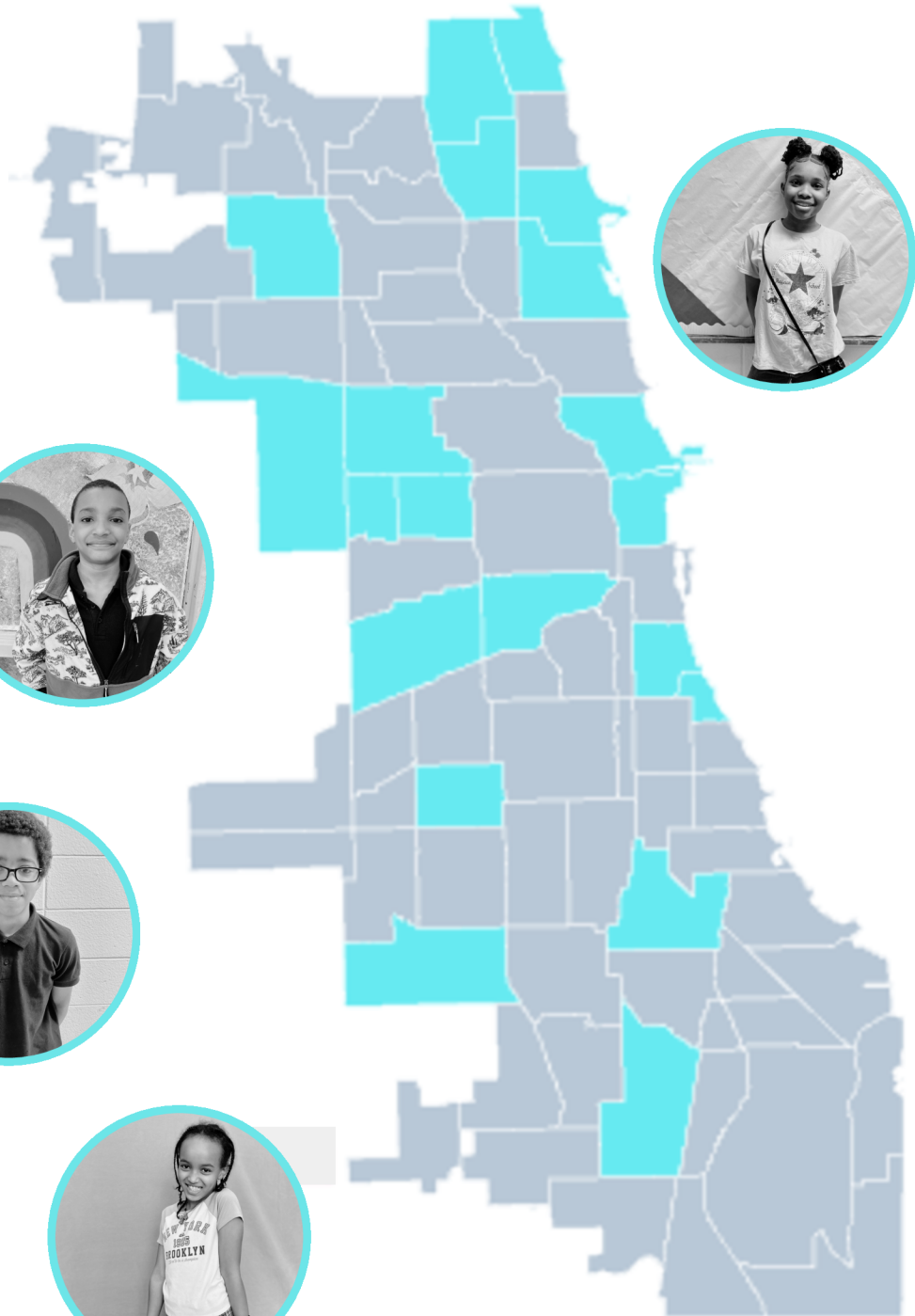


EMPOWERING YOUTH...

ONE NEIGHBORHOOD AT A TIME

Neighborhoods where we had free HWCW and free performances:

- ★ Ashburn
- ★ Austin
- ★ Douglas
- ★ Gage Park
- ★ Garfield Park
- ★ Greater Grand Crossing
- ★ Humboldt Park
- ★ Lake View
- ★ Lincoln Square
- ★ Loop
- ★ Lower West Side
- ★ Near North Side
- ★ Oakland
- ★ Portage Park
- ★ Rogers Park
- ★ Roseland
- ★ South Lawndale
- ★ Uptown
- ★ West Garfield Park
- ★ West Ridge



PROGRAMMATIC IMPACT

291 days out of the year had programming, consistently providing safe spaces for youth in neighborhoods with high rates of crime and victimization

PERFORMANCE METRICS

- Total Performances Hosted: 61
- Audience Reach: 7,891 audience members

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

**HOMEWORK
CIRCUSWORK
SITES:**
6

**CHICAGO YOUTH
CIRCUS &
PERFORMANCE
TROUPE
SITES:**
2

**WORKSHOPS
AT MIGRANT
SHELTERS:**
2

ACCESSIBILITY AND EQUITY METRICS

**\$290,700
in
financial aid
awarded
in
2024**

**68% of CircEsteem
youth access free
programs, ensuring
equitable inclusion
to the performing
arts.**





2024 HIGHLIGHTS

CircEsteem's Bold New Home

In May 2024, CircEsteem celebrated the grand opening of its newly renovated headquarters in Chicago's Uptown neighborhood. This \$10.8 million transformation of a historic theater created a state-of-the-art facility featuring a performance center, 23-foot aerial studio, and a library for academic support. Designed as a “forever home,” the space doubles program capacity, offering accessible arts education to youth of all backgrounds and serving as a national model for inclusivity and empowerment.

Bridging Communities Through Circus Arts

The Chicago Youth Circus program continues to grow on the West Side, providing rotating circus skill development and tailored skill building to youth in Humboldt Park. Our advanced-level North and West Side Performance Troupes collaborated to design and perform the Around Chicago Summer Tour in Chicago Parks and Libraries citywide. Performances took place at 16 parks and public venues, and five Public Library branches, reaching approximately 6,727 audience members. These youth-led shows exemplified CircEsteem's mission of uniting young people across identities and neighborhoods, showcasing their talents and fostering connections citywide.

Empowering Gage Park

CircEsteem deepened its support and presence in the Gage Park community through the Homework and Circus Work program and My CHI My Future community engagement project. Community events, such as the Youth Talent Show, Mobile Library Fair, Back to School Fair in which over 500 free backpacks were distributed, and Día de los Muertos celebration, engaged over 1,000 residents, showcasing local talent and providing vital resources. Programs address systemic challenges with culturally relevant activities and bilingual support, fostering a safe, empowering environment for Gage Park's predominantly Latinx community. Our community organizing efforts have fostered connections with key stakeholders in Gage Park, who have since become valuable partners in advancing our mission.



Building Resiliency Through Cultural Connections

CircEsteem's New Arrivals program, launched in 2024, provided vital opportunities for intergenerational connection, physical activity, and joy for vulnerable migrant families in Chicago. The program offered circus-themed workshops at two shelters, focusing on skills like plate spinning, juggling, tumbling, and clowning. Led by a diverse team of bilingual staff with backgrounds in psychology, education, and circus arts, the program created a safe space for families to bond and experience moments of relief during uncertain times.

Completing our 5-Year Strategic Plan

Despite the unprecedented challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, CircEsteem has successfully completed its ambitious 5-year strategic growth plan initiated in 2019. Over this period, we not only navigated a time of uncertainty, but also achieved significant milestones that reflect our resilience and commitment to our mission. We have tripled our full-time staff, expanded our programming to three times as many neighborhoods, and increased the number of youth we serve weekly by threefold. Additionally, we have more than doubled our annual operating budget and nearly doubled the amount of financial aid we provide to participating families. These accomplishments are a testament to the dedication of our team, the support of our community, and the unwavering commitment to empowering youth through circus arts, no matter the challenges we face.



CIRCESTEEM LEADERSHIP

CircEsteem Administrative Leadership

Dan Roberts
Executive Director

Renee Bell Werge
Programs Director

Jessica Berger
Director of Development

Azahdi Williams-Babi
Director of Operations

CircEsteem Board of Directors

Alvin Boutte Jr., President
Chris Rooney, Vice President
Abraham Nalin Bhutt, Secretary
Chris Gagel
Jack Gomberg
Meredith George
Jefferson Park
Ben Blair
Steve Bynum
Dr. Judith Allen

CIRCESTEEM STAFF

Managers

Katie Adams
Grants Manager

William Dole
Outreach & Partnerships Manager

Izzy French
Office Manager

Susy Garcia
Communications Manager

Kristin Schoenback
Programs Manager

Randelle Villaber
Learning & Development Manager

Samantha Royal
Engagements & Events Manager

Coordinators

Ashley Allen, Program Coordinator
Nat Cisneros, Program Coordinator
Beka Marhoefer, Program Coordinator
Izzy Sandoval, Facilities Coordinator
CJ Williams, Program Coordinator
Devon Light Wills, Program Coordinator

Full-time Teaching Artists

Iris Flemming
Tehilah Hobbs
Cup Oso
Kim Martin
Dimitri Ngashani
Amanda Rodriguez
Elsa Thompson
Clarissa Villagomez
Cassidy Wilson



Part-time Teaching Artists

Julia Baker
Sophie Baker
Sarah Farrell
BeLove Freaney
Maxwell Gale
Douglas Grew
Caleb Hays
Alizé Hill
Scott Merchant

Antoinette Mpawenayo
Rachel Reizburg
Georgette Riziki
Eric Robinson
Samuel Sake
Jessica Smoot
Aiken Thompson
Sasha Vulovic
Tate West

Reception

Corey Baker
Rowen Light Wills
Marhawit Tekle

Thank You Volunteers!

We are deeply grateful to the dedicated volunteers who give their time, talent, and heart to CircEsteem. Whether supporting programs, performances, events, or behind-the-scenes efforts, your involvement makes our work possible. Community participation is the foundation of our mission—and the reason we can continue to uplift youth through the power of circus arts.

Want to get involved? Visit our website to discover how you can be part of the social circus movement and help make a lasting impact! www.circesteem.org

Acknowledgements

CircEsteem is dedicated to creating safe and supportive spaces where youth can thrive, reducing their exposure to violence and fostering long-term well-being. Our evidence-based programs are recognized by the Chicago Department of Family and Support Services (DFSS) and Illinois Department of Human Services (IDHS). These transformative outcomes are made possible by the generosity and commitment of our donors, partners, and community supporters, whose contributions empower us to make a lasting impact in the lives of young people.

SPONSORS & PARTNERS



CIRCESTEEM ACKNOWLEDGES
SUPPORT FROM:

Illinois
ARTS
Council



Baskin Family Foundation



Col. Stanley R McNeil Foundation,
Bank of America, N.A., Trustee

LLH/LHM Foundation, Margaret Baird Trustee

The Maurice R. and Meta G. Gross Foundation,
Bank of America, N.A., Trustee



THE
SIDLEY AUSTIN
FOUNDATION



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CircEsteem, established in 2001, is a non-profit organization dedicated to fostering social change through the innovative approach of social circus. By using the dynamic and engaging medium of circus arts, CircEsteem empowers Chicago's youth to build self-esteem and develop valuable life skills in safe and inclusive environments. Our programs offer a unique blend of physical activity and creative expression, helping young people to grow in confidence, collaboration, and perseverance.

CircEsteem strives to make circus available to all students regardless of financial means. To serve this mission, we offer financial aid to eligible participants.

**DONATE
TODAY!**

