

THE ALL STARS PROJECT TALENT SHOW COMES TO THE TENDERLOIN “OPERATION CONVERSATION: COPS & KIDS”

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Connecting youth with opportunity on and off stage, the **All Stars Project (ASP)** is a 35-year-old, privately funded national nonprofit, which harnesses the power of performance to develop leadership in young people from low-income communities.

ASP was founded in the South Bronx by a team of volunteers who would hold development workshops in a church basement. Back then the staff went about surveying young people on street corners, asking them for suggestions about what they'd like to see in their community. The youth recommended a talent show. Thus the All Stars Talent Show Network was born. On August 6th, the Bay Area chapter of ASP will be hosting their first ever Talent Show in the Tenderloin at PianoFight (144 Taylor Street.)

ASP came to the Bay Area in 2002. They hold about three talent shows a year, but the core of the program is comprised of a workshop series called the **Development School for Youth**, or DSY. DSY offers young people—ages 16-21—a series of professional development workshops, which then culminate into six-week paid internships at Fortune 500 companies. The most recent cohort of thirty students began internships on July 6th 2016 at such companies as Silicon Valley Bank, J.P. Morgan, Wells Fargo, MetLife, and Latham & Watkins among others.

Dr. Elouise Joseph, City Leader for ASP and the local **recipient of a Jefferson Award** for her work in the community, says that the ASP looks to “engage poverty in a different way.” The DSY places underserved youth alongside corporate volunteers, and uses “silly theater games” to break down barriers. Beyond the games, students receive help with résumés, mock interviews, and other soft skills while maintaining the lens of performance, where the corporate attire is a costume and the interview a scene to be acted out.

The organization has previously worked in Oakland, Bayview Hunters Point, Excelsior, Visitation Valley and Mission among other areas, but the upcoming talent show is part of an effort to introduce their work to the Tenderloin, says Program Coordinator Adam Odsess-Rubin. He adds that for most DSY students, the workshops are their first encounter with the corporate world. He describes the transformation he sees in the participants.

“At the beginning we see students very shut down, very isolated. So we play drama games. Over time, they start to break out of their shell.” Adam, who happens to perform regularly at PianoFight, adds that observing students enter corporate offices in San Francisco’s Financial District is one of his favorite things. “They instantly walk to the windows that overlook the whole bay. They’re blown away. I think it instantly gives them a sense of ‘I belong here. I can be here.’ It’s really powerful. More than we can tell them about how we can format their resume, it’s a tactile experience.” Dr. Joseph adds that it’s a two-way street. For corporate partners, who are often vested donors to ASP, they can engage with students and learn to

engage with poverty in ways that would otherwise remain ignored. She says many times the executives have personal stories of overcoming obstacles; further building confidence and possibility for students.

“I came from Louisiana for medical school at Stanford, and got into the community because I realized the clinic wasn’t where the action was,” she says with a self-reflective laugh. Asked what motivates her to do her work, she said, “It bothers me to be in a place where it’s easy to ignore poverty and strife having experienced it and feeling like an outsider. We bring poor kids into the mainstream. Nothing will change from the periphery.”

Recently, Dr. Joseph hosted an Afterschool Development Roundtable Discussion with key leaders in the field. One of those leaders, Dr. Bonny L. Gildin will take the role of Executive Director for ASP Bay Area in the fall. Dr. Gildin has worked one special projects with ASP for several years. ASP President and CEO Gabrielle L. Kurlander recently **wrote an article in *Philanthropy Journal*** calling for a fundamental shift in approaches to after school programs, focusing more on development over remedial approaches.



Dr. Joseph (3rd from left) poses with students at DSY kickoff event in February

Part of what makes the program unique, says Dr. Joseph, is that despite growth, they haven’t strayed from their original models. “We’re grass roots, standing on corners, knocking on doors, and we are looking to bring people together who don’t normally come together.” Using a radically inclusive model, ASP does not consider DSY candidate’s GPA or enrollment in school when deciding if they are a good fit for the workshops. Similarly, you won’t find censorship among the rules of the talent show. What ASP does instead is challenge performers to reframe and articulate why, and to what end their frustration with a system or community has brought up the need to curse in their lyrics. During the talent show, they provide an opportunity for parents with younger attendees to step away from the auditorium before a potentially offensive performance.

As for the format of the August 6th talent show, performers will arrive at 11:00am. Some have had correspondence with All Stars but walk-ins are welcome. After completing a registration form, each performer will pay \$3 to cover production costs. Each act will have a one-minute audition, which gives ASP a chance to scan the routine. One thing that is not tolerated, says Dr. Joseph is dissing or insulting others. Before the general audience is invited to attend at 2:30pm, performers will engage in a workshop. They are asked to come prepared to make a statement about what they’d like to see change in their community. “It helps them to think broader about what’s happening around them.” interested in becoming a partner, mentor or donor, contact the offices at 415-986-2565.



All Stars Talent Show, 2015, ASP Facebook



Graduates of a recent DSY series with volunteer partners and ASP staff, ASP Facebook