

PHILANTHROPY SPOTLIGHT: THE ALL STARS PROJECT

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By Chris Latham, Contributor

If a company that is active in the philanthropic space strives to get more out of it than a good photo opp, that business should take special care to partner with nonprofit organizations whose mission reflects the firm's values and whose initiatives demonstrate measurable results.

One such organization is the **All Stars Project** (ASP), which uses performance-based "Afterschool Development" initiatives, such as community talent shows and internship training programs, to address poverty by helping inner-city youth and their families lead more successful lives.

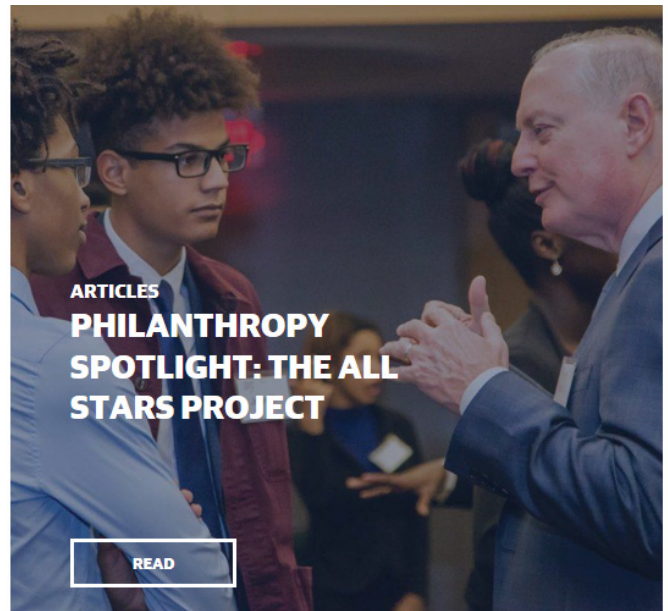
Street Cred

Founded in 1981 in New York City, the All Stars now also has programs in Newark, Jersey City, Chicago, Dallas, and San Francisco. It has more than 2,300 volunteers nationwide and reaches more than 53,000 youth and community members each year. But the "street cred" does not stop there.

The nonprofit is completely funded by private donations from individuals and corporate partners in virtually every business sector. Approximately 180 major firms — such as **JPMorgan Chase, Viacom, Hunt Consolidated, CBRE, Johnson & Johnson, Goya Foods, EY, and MetLife** — have all contributed to the All Stars. ASP engages in involvement philanthropy, where corporate partners and sponsors do more than donate — they get involved in the programs themselves.

Despite accepting no government money, the organization's Afterschool Development programs have received praise from top public figures across the political spectrum — most notably former New York Mayor Michael Bloomberg, U.S. Supreme Court Justice Sonia Sotomayor, and President George H.W. Bush.

"Over the last 38 years, thousands of caring adults across the country have embraced the All Stars model of 'involvement philanthropy,'" explains ASP President and CEO Gabrielle Kurlander. "Forward-thinking corporate leaders and philanthropists are building active partnerships with, and providing real-world, real-time



training and employment opportunities, for thousands of inner-city youth in our Afterschool Development programs across the country. And what we've found is that everyone grows. Business leaders tell me all the time that their lives are also transformed because of these very personal and positive connections."

All Stars Talent Show Network

The original program, which remains core to ASP philosophy and outreach, is the **All Stars Talent Show Network** (ASTSN). Open free of charge to young people between ages 5 and 25, ASTSN is a performance venue for all levels of talent, with a hip-hop atmosphere. Young people can perform and help produce the talent shows, whether through song, dance, rap, and poetry, or offstage roles such as audiovisual, security, ticket sales, outreach, and publicity.

ASTSN shows are often held on weekends in school auditoriums to enthusiastic and supportive crowds of family and friends, neighbors, donors, and other volunteers. Every young person who auditions gets a spot. The point is to show them a safe path into a supportive community, instead of the risks they face as a result of growing up in low-income areas.

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A typical ASTSN show may have as many as 20 acts. For many corporate executive donors who attend, this is the first time they have stepped foot in an inner-city school building and sat beside local residents. It also is the first time many of those donors have seen such youth themselves in a positive manner.

“Though I had stayed active in philanthropic giving as I progressed in my 20s, I had simply lost true one-on-one contact with youth from disadvantaged neighborhoods. The All Stars addresses this common logistical barrier head-on,” says **Hunter Hunt**, CEO of Hunt Energy in Dallas.

“I will never forget the first All Stars talent show I attended in the Bronx in New York City in the 1990s. What I experienced that day was amazing. Young people were producing the show and performing on stage, and they were being cheered on by an incredibly diverse audience of family, neighbors, volunteers, and business supporters,” Hunt continues. “It was a transformational event, not just for the youth involved, but for me as well. The All Stars creates a new type of community, one where everyone comes together on a ‘level playing field’ to create something positive.”

Development School for Youth

In 1997, ASP launched the **Development School for Youth** (DSY). This program consists of a series of free weekly afterschool workshops for young people ages 16 to 21, introducing them to workplace culture and skills. After completing the workshops, each participant receives a paid summer internship working at one of the corporate sponsors.

The only requirement for securing the internship is that each young person must fulfill every step of the process: filling out the DSY application, meeting with the All Stars for pre-workshop orientation, showing up on time to each workshop, dressing professionally, and behaving respectfully. Since the workshops occur at the offices of corporate sponsors, for many of these young people, the DSY gives them their first exposure to a business setting.

Common workshop topics include resume writing, conducting job interviews, networking, and public speaking. During their internships, the young people may perform any number of tasks — from answering phones for executives and taking notes at a meeting, to creating presentations and pitching their own recommendations for business initiatives. Some of the young people go on to take full-time jobs at the companies where they intern.

“The DSY gave me a chance that I never thought possible,” said Glenroy Wason, who lives in West Orange, N.J., and interned at US Power Generating Company in 2010 and American International Group in 2011 in New York. Wason went on to work full-time at MUFG Union Bank and RBC Capital Markets. “Now I have a career and a professional network, and a real sense of my own potential. These opportunities are in short supply, if they exist at all, in the neighborhood where I grew up.”

Future Growth

Not content to rest on its laurels, ASP is currently seeking to expand several new free initiatives.

Within the next year, ASP will launch the Connected Community app for download on mobile devices. Currently in testing mode, Connected Community will facilitate introductions between DSY alumni who are looking for full-time work and companies seeking to recruit new hires from this population. Companies will be able to post job opportunities and connect directly with registered alumni. Funding for the app has received initial underwriting support from EY, The Thierer Family Foundation, as well as author and filmmaker Antonio Elmaleh.

Operation Conversation: Cop & Kids, Youth Onstage!, and UX are programs being piloted in New York. Cops & Kids brings inner-city youth together with police officers, using performance and improvisation to build bridges and better communication between them. Youth Onstage! brings in volunteer theater professionals to train young people interested in pursuing stage arts. UX is a continuing education program for adults of all ages and backgrounds, with volunteer development coaches experienced in everything from social services to business.

In Chicago, the ASP has launched a campaign to establish a Center for Afterschool Development in the heart of the city’s downtown. Much like the Times Square headquarters in New York, this Center aims to bring together young people from the inner city with volunteers and corporate partners, in a prime location that appeals to them all.

The nonprofit also is partnering with the Center on Research and Evaluation (CORE) at Southern Methodist University (SMU) to provide quantitative and qualitative evidence of the impact of ASP’s programs and to drive the afterschool development field forward. ASP has created evaluation tools that capture the experience and impact of ASTSN and DSY on young people, as well as gather data that will help improve those programs. The evaluation and full report will be completed in 2020.

“The All Stars is my life’s work. I didn’t expect it to be. I grew up poor in Bed-Stuy, Brooklyn. Like many young people in poverty, I did not know about the world and the different performances needed to be successful in the world,” says Antoine Joyce, who started performing at All Stars Talent Shows at age 12 in the early 1990s. Joyce joined the ASP staff in 1997 and is now the city leader of ASP Dallas.

“In the All Stars, I was given leadership opportunities and exposure to different types of people. For the past 28 years, I have been giving back to thousands of young people across the country and the world. Being a City Leader here in Dallas is a dream come true and a privilege to help lead the next generation of young people.”