

The Dallas Express

Antoine Joyce of the All Stars Project

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By Jessica Wilmes



Antoine Joyce is a man of the stage. He has been performing in some form or another since he was 13-years-old, but one of his most important roles today is serving as Vice President and City Leader of All Stars Project of Dallas, the same organization that coaxed him on stage as a young teen.

Founded in 1981, the All Stars Project is a nonprofit based in New York City with additional locations in New Jersey, Chicago, Dallas, and San Francisco. The privately-funded organization annually reaches more than 53,000 young people and community members nationwide.

All Stars Project uses performance to build community and bridge racial, economic, and social divisions. When the organization came to the Dallas area in 2013, Antoine Joyce came along with it, and his leadership has proven integral to its success. A principal part of his work focuses on creating opportunities for youth, a facet of the All Stars Project he benefited from many years ago.

Antoine Joyce grew up in Bedford-Stuyvesant, Brooklyn, a neighborhood known for its deeply rooted African-American culture, hip-hop background, and original Victorian architecture. The area rose to recognition when legendary rapper Notorious B.I.G. referenced growing up on its crime-ridden streets.

Like many of the youth in the All Stars Project today, Joyce had to face a lot of tough choices growing up. He recalls deciding whether he should join a gang or stay in high school.

It was 1991 in New York City when he first connected with the All Stars Talent Show Network — a program of the All Stars Project. Tagging along with an older cousin who was already deeply enthralled with the program, Joyce joined a dance group and, with them, performed in talent shows around the area. This proved to be a crucial stepping stone in Joyce's life, exposing him to new opportunities with dance and video he had not realized existed.

"Dancing was my jam, and from time to time, I would be hired to dance in music videos (Foxy Brown, Whitney Houston, and others)," said Joyce to *The Dallas Express*. "It was an experience I would likely never have had otherwise."

Joyce later became a youth producer of the All Stars Talent Show, leading shows throughout New York City and New Jersey. He later took the official emcee title, which he held for eight years, and entertained audiences of thousands. Joyce then learned how to DJ and found himself in major cities throughout the United States, leading events and promotions. His work here ultimately led to the role of production tour manager for internationally renowned DJ Grandmaster Flash, where he managed technology and logistics for Flash's shows.

"I really enjoyed the scene and teamwork, and I collaborated on a few albums with him," Joyce notes of his time with Grandmaster Flash. "Through practicing and performing, I gained so many life lessons that translated in many other arenas of life."

Hooked on the power of performance, Joyce learned several life lessons by stepping on stage and outside of his comfort zone. Antoine understands the importance of the All Stars Project for youth development and opportunity, having discovered that himself as a young teen.

Antoine Joyce shared that in Dallas today, many young people live in poverty — which produces isolation and despair — and puts them at further risk of making poor choices.

To rewrite the narrative, the All Stars Project uses the developmental power of performance to transform the lives of youth from poor and underserved communities, he explains.

“All Stars is all about performance, and it offered fun, combined with an alternate pathway forward where I could take some of the pain and anger I sometimes felt and express it in a productive way,” Joyce says about his experience.

“Through the All Stars, I learned that in many avenues of life, we are performing, onstage and off. We make choices every day, in our personal and professional lives, to create our identities. [We] make and demonstrate conscious choices about who we want to be, [and] perform and share our best self with those around us.” Antoine Joyce shared.

Joyce’s commitment and involvement with the All Stars Project ultimately led him to meet Hunter Hunt, a major supporter, who helped lay plans for the organization to come to Dallas in 2012. A year later, the ball was rolling, and All Stars Project CEO Gabrielle Kurlander recruited Joyce to move from Brooklyn and see it through.

His ability to connect people and ideas is pivotal to his role with the All Stars Project, where he brings diverse communities together — ones that might not otherwise do so — to form new conversations and relationships.

Much of the success of the All Stars Project depends on the caring adults who partner with the organization; these leaders and volunteers go into housing developments and schools to work directly with young people to help them forge positive pathways.

The core programs of the All Stars Project in Dallas include the Development School for Youth, Development Coaching, and the All Stars Talent Show Network, explained Joyce.

Within the Development School for Youth, young people aged 16 to 21 learn how to perform as professionals, partnering with business leaders in workshops on various subjects, including resume-writing, networking, and public speaking.

In addition to his role with All Stars Project Dallas, Joyce serves as the national leader for the Development Coaching program. This virtual program gives young adults aged 18 to 24 an opportunity to partner one-on-one with caring industry leaders who help guide and enhance their personal and professional development.

Finally, the All Stars produce talent shows and performance workshops using improvisation, theater games, and skits to build environments where kids can feel accepted, build confidence, and can test who they are and who they aspire to become on stage, explains Joyce. Joyce is proud of these programs and their track record of success in pulling youth out of a bad place and assisting them in finding a better one.

“When a young person reaches back out to say thank you and shares their story of moving from a place of darkness and frustration to one filled with excitement and future goals — that’s the proudest moment,” said Joyce. “I’m so proud of building something that can include and uplift young people who need it most.”

Having lived in Dallas for almost a decade, Joyce has watched the All Stars Project take hold positively and, along the way, discovered a connectedness that makes Dallas a special place to be. He shares his opinion that while Dallas sees its share of problems historically and at present, Joyce is quick to point out the city carries a spirit of change, and he is excited to have played a part in that.

“I love that Dallas is a ‘big small city’; you can learn about someone today and then meet them by accident tomorrow. People are approachable, and everyone is connected to each other here,” said Antoine Joyce.

“I love the challenge of Dallas, as well. It has a deep history of inequality and inequity, but it’s also a very philanthropic and increasingly diverse city. People in Dallas on all sides genuinely want to fix the issues that plague large cities, and we have the tools to make it happen, so that’s thrilling.”

For those who wish to get involved, please visit <https://allstars.org/get-involved/>. To donate, visit <https://allstars.org/donate/>.
