

Spring 2023

# play it forward



A quarterly newsletter for the Afterschool Development movement across America.

## SPECIAL ISSUE

featuring  
Gloria Strickland

In this issue of *Play It Forward*, we spotlight **Gloria Strickland**, All Stars Project (ASP) Senior Vice President/Chief Youth and Community Development Officer. This spring, after a more than 40-year plus career as one of the most forward-looking grassroots educators, afterschool development practitioners and advocates in the country, Gloria will be retiring. She will continue to be active as a member of the ASP Board of Directors. We sat down with her to talk about afterschool development (the approach and the movement) and why both are critical to the future of young people growing up in poverty across the country.



Gloria Strickland, Senior Vice President, Chief Youth and Community Development Officer, All Stars Project, Inc. and youth of the ASP



left to right: ASP Co-Founder Lenora Fulani, Gloria Strickland, ASP CEO Gabrielle Kurlander

**Q:** You are known as a “master developmentalist” who has helped transform the lives of thousands of young people of color growing up in poor, urban neighborhoods. When you say you help young people focus on development, what do you mean?

**A:** I love to talk about “why development.” For me, development is the activity of coming together and creating an environment in which young people and adults can move outside their comfort zones and do something new with each other. For young people, “new things” include deciding to walk through the doors of the All Stars and programs like it and take the risk to say “yes” to being with people they don’t know and rarely have the opportunity to meet, much less play with.

My primary motivation is not to teach them something. What I’m looking to do is engage them in a performance and a process through which they can discover who they are in relationship to what’s

going on in their lives, in their communities and in the world. That can be challenging, especially since I was trained as a teacher whose job was to help kids learn things, so I work hard at being as thoughtful and intentional about how I welcome and work with young people.



In fact, I’m very aware that I have to create a new performance of who I am in order to direct them in creating environments in which they support each other to have the “Wow, I just did something I never imagined doing,” experience.

## Q: Why is development important?

**A:** When ASP began some four decades ago, we had an ambitious goal: to create solutions to poverty outside of traditional institutions and independent of government support. I am proud to be part of a group of visionaries, developmentalists and dreamers who believe it is both possible and necessary to transform poverty and the isolation and hopelessness it produces. From day one, our priority has been to reach our country's poorest young people – kids who are totally isolated from the mainstream - and help them learn how to navigate the world in more creative ways. And how we've gone about this is by using performance to grow and to create new possibilities in the lives of our youngest and poorest citizens.

What we've seen is that this approach gives them an experience of themselves as builders of their lives. When they come up against obstacles and challenges – and they will - they can continue to create, and to have more, in their lives.



## Q: What have you learned from young people about development?

**A:** The young people I've worked with over the years have helped make me a believer in development. I've seen the most unlikely young people - who were so shy they could barely speak to another individual, much less in front of a group—embrace play and performance and absolutely blossom. Of course, this doesn't happen immediately. At first, they don't know what to make of all these adults playing and improvising and just generally being weird. They feel nervous and awkward but it doesn't take long for them to jump in and start growing in remarkable ways, which inspires me and my colleagues to get better at what we're doing.

What I've also learned from young people - and would urge my colleagues in the afterschool field to pay more attention to - is the role boredom plays in keeping young people from learning and growing. While there are many reasons young people come to All Stars, one of the big motivators is being tired of the same old, same old. They are plenty smart enough to know when something is different.

**Q:** You've worked with thousands of adults, including affluent business leaders, philanthropists, police officers, non-profit professionals and volunteers who are very passionate about giving back to poor kids, but don't always understand development. How do you reach them?

**A:** I have incredible admiration for the adults I've worked with, and I say this with great affection, they, like most adults, try and fit what we're doing into what they already know, which can make it difficult to learn anything new. One of the things they know how to do is to be helpful, which they tend to confuse with development. Being helpful is not the same as creating environments in which young people and their adult partners can grow in new ways. It's also the case that adults, including non-profit and community-based colleagues, often have a very defined image of what a "developed" young person looks like. Our youth are living in a world where their lives and hopes are constantly being stifled, so if we aren't willing or able to step outside our presumptions and assumptions and work with every young person as who they are/are becoming, they're going to end up even more isolated and alienated than they already are. We have to, and I believe we can, do better.



**Q:** In 2013, you launched the first Afterschool Development Working Group in New Jersey. The working groups have since expanded to Chicago and Dallas and involve leaders and front-line practitioners from over 250 organizations across the U.S.

**What do you see as their value?**

**A:** Our working group colleagues have repeatedly told us how few opportunities they and other professionals working in the field have to come together in ways that support them to grow as individual practitioners and to advance the field of afterschool. The fact that working groups continue to grow across the country is affirmation that there is something called afterschool and that its practice and mission is not the same as the practice and mission of school-based education. What afterschool does - and does well - is to partner with young people to engage in activities and conversations that support them to develop the strengths and capabilities - by themselves or taken together - that help them be successful in both education and workplace situations and to fully participate in every aspect of society. I am honored to be part of this community and will continue to work with afterschool colleagues on building a movement that commands the respect, and the investment dollars, it deserves.

# Sign Up Today!

In [Afterschool Development Working Groups](#) (ADWG), leaders and frontline practitioners come together to create a rich and vibrant environment for exploring new ways of thinking, learn innovative practices, and create partnerships that both strengthen the field and help meet the day to day demands of their work.

Working group meetings are open to afterschool practitioners and leaders across the country.

to sign up for a working group or contact Kathy Fiess at [kfiess@allstars.org](mailto:kfiess@allstars.org) or 917-969-2627.

**NEW JERSEY**  
Wednesday, April 25

**CHICAGO**  
Thursday, May 4

**DALLAS**  
Wednesday, May 10



## let's talk

Please share your responses to anything in Play it Forward and thoughts you have on Afterschool Development and what it means for our communities and country.

[CLICK HERE TO TELL US WHAT YOU THINK](#)

Or email Kathy Fiess at [kfiess@allstars.org](mailto:kfiess@allstars.org)



## spread the word

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## coming up

### **In the Next Quarter Issue of *Play it Forward*:**

**In the Field** – Profiles of people on the frontlines in our communities who are changing lives and making a difference.

**Building the Future of Afterschool Development** – Updates on the issues that practitioners, academics, and business, civic and community leaders are coming together to discuss in Afterschool Development working groups and conferences.

**On the Cutting Edge** – The latest developments in thought leadership, research and policy helping to shape the conversation about Afterschool Development, education and poverty in America.

**Philanthropic Partnerships** – Featuring partners and funders who are stepping up and investing in Afterschool Development and its growth nationally.

**A New Conversation about Evaluation** – Highlights of the growing national conversation about evaluation and the need for new tools.



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