

The Fortune Society

CREATIVE ARTS

for Youth & Adults Involved in the Criminal Justice System

WE NEED YOUR SUPPORT!



The Fortune Society
BUILDING PEOPLE, NOT PRISONS

INTRODUCTION/BA

The Fortune Society

Fortune began in 1967 when David Rothenberg produced the play, "Fortune and Men's Eyes." The play captured the harsh realities of living in prison in a way that mesmerized audiences and generated important public discussion leading to the founding of The Fortune Society. Over the succeeding 48 years, Fortune has evolved into one of the nation's preeminent reentry service organizations, providing formerly incarcerated people with the services needed to break the cycle of crime and incarceration and to build productive lives in their communities. Our holistic service model is designed to address the varied social, economic, educational, familial, and/or health-related needs that our clients face.

To this day, we remain deeply rooted in the arts – recognizing the critical need for creative expression and artistic outlets for our clients.



The cast of "The Castle" – a play about the lives of Fortune clients and their experiences living in our nationally recognized reentry housing facility, The Fortune Academy, ("the Castle"), in West Harlem.

Need

Arts have been a crucial and valuable tool in criminal justice and reentry work, despite a decline in the support of such programs in recent years. Scholars from widely divergent academic backgrounds agree that artistic activities have significant benefits to individuals with criminal justice histories, playing a critical role in their rehabilitation and reintegration into society.

Our arts programs help to support the educational, emotional, and cultural development of individuals impacted by the criminal justice system.

Through various types of arts programming, we seek to offer a means of creative expression, healing, and renewal in a non-judgmental, supportive atmosphere. Our arts programs serve as a vehicle to facilitate healing, transformation, and personal growth for clients, and we know that enormous creative potential and talent exists amongst the criminal justice involved population. In fact, some of the world's most influential and profound works of art – whether visual, musical, theatrical or otherwise creative – were derived from the artist's raw life experiences and defined by their unique personal and emotional struggles. Many of our clients have lived through similar struggles – they know all too well the realities of poverty, abuse, addiction, and incarceration, and they long for and deserve opportunities to express their thoughts, feelings, and reflections that come out of these experiences through the creative arts.

Arts programs respond to each individual's basic human need for creative self-development, autonomy, and expression. The value of these programs are multi-dimensional and create simultaneous opportunities for therapy, education, and recreation – ultimately promoting transformational change and positive growth in the lives of our clients.

Sadly, however, we have found it very difficult to fund these all-important arts programs at Fortune.

BACKGROUND

Population Served

The majority of Fortune's clients come from high-poverty, low-literacy neighborhoods that allow little access to social services and very few opportunities to participate in arts programs. Our clients come from some of New York City's most impoverished and high-need communities, including the South Bronx, Upper Manhattan, four neighborhoods in Brooklyn (Brownsville, Bedford-Stuyvesant, East New York, and Crown Heights), and Jamaica, Queens. The overwhelming majority are Black and Latino. We have also seen an increasing proportion of young adults ages 16-24 in our programs in recent years. For these young people, many of whom are enrolled in our Education and Alternatives to Incarceration (ATI) programs, creative expression is extremely important for healthy youth development.

Arts programs tap into the hidden talents and potential of youth and can help them fully express themselves and experience positive growth for the first time in their lives. Many of Fortune's youth participants have had negative experiences in the public education system and attended under-resourced schools with high drop-out rates, low attendance rates, and heavy police presence. Given these experiences, many of these youth have quite understandably developed a negative attitude about school and other institutions in society. The absence of positive role models has also made it difficult for them to find an alternate pathway, and many have turned to drugs, gangs, and other criminal behavior as a means of survival or to find some sense of belonging and validation within their environment.

In this context, arts programming can offer a powerful therapeutic process that can humanize the prison experience – allowing participants to create unique works of art and to have the space to explore the full range of their emotions in a positive, supportive environment.

Arts at Fortune

With very limited resources, drawing on key partners, volunteers and existing staff, we have launched a variety of arts programs over the past few years. In 2014, we held our first-ever [Arts & Theater Festival: Returning to our Roots!](#) The festival was a week-long celebration of the creative initiatives at Fortune. We featured 15 separate theater, music, dance, and spoken word events, plus a multi-site art exhibit at our main service center in Long Island City, Queens and our housing facilities in West Harlem. The festival was an impetus that allowed the entire Fortune community to experience and enjoy the wide range of talents among clients, staff, and volunteers.

To build on this momentum, we established a standing Arts Committee, which includes our founder, David Rothenberg, along with representatives from each of our service areas and volunteers involved in our arts programs. This Arts Committee meets monthly and has helped to ensure that arts programs continue to grow and flourish as much as possible, with the limited resources we have.

While the Arts Committee is doing as much as possible with almost no funding, we URGENTLY need an investment of resources to maximize arts programming at Fortune!



The Fortune Tellers perform at The Fortune Society's second-floor community space in Long Island City, Queens.

ARTS AT FORTUNE

We have infused our arts programs into a variety of service areas at Fortune, primarily ATI, Education, Treatment Services, and Housing to maximize positive outcomes, promote active engagement in learning, and to reduce criminal justice involvement.

However, our goal is to open opportunities for artistic exploration to ALL clients across the organization, with multiple points of entry open to them.

The following is a brief summary of the major areas of arts programming we have developed thus far:

Creative Writing/Poetry/ Spoken Word

Since 2012, Fortune has provided creative writing workshops to participants. These workshops are taught by Erika Munk, a volunteer in our Education program and former professor at the Yale University School of Drama. Erika holds writing workshops twice per week where participants spend time writing new short pieces of poetry and literature. She has also worked one-on-one with students to help edit their pieces. Fortune's writing workshop helps clients explore their feelings and create engaging stories. There is a supportiveness between members of the group and a willingness to share. The students' work is compiled into a book called the "Voices of Fortune" which features poetry, art, and stories from Fortune clients.

We have also developed a partnership with The Moth to bring workshops and performance opportunities to individuals at Fortune. The Moth helps our clients in developing storytelling pieces that empower them to share their life stories with the world. Workshops are conducted by experienced instructors from The Moth, assisted by teams of trained volunteer story coaches. Throughout the workshops, participants learn to shape selected life experiences into well-crafted stories, which are then presented to peers and members of the local community. Fortune's graduates present their stories at several performances, including our Arts & Theater Festival.

Video Production/Animation

Fortune offers a Multi-Media Production class at Castle Gardens, one of our housing facilities in West Harlem. The class allows students to gain computer and video production skills and to learn all aspects of the filmmaking process by capturing their own stories and sharing the stories of others living in the community. The class is taught by Teacher Rene Sing Brooks, an experienced digital filmmaker. Students have the opportunity to capture stories of local community members to produce "mini-documentaries" and even attempt to create a full-length film. In fact, the class is currently working on completing the film, "Off, Off Broadway" that features the lives of youth and their families and other significant people in their lives from the Harlem community. These films are presented at Castle Gardens and open to the public with a panel discussion afterwards and Q&A with the audience.

Some of the inspiring videos that have been produced, including the teaser for "Off, Off Broadway" can be viewed on our YouTube page here:
www.youtube.com/fortunesociety



Video Production Class.



Animation students at work.

We have also developed a partnership with The Animation Project (TAP), which offers a program that integrates arts and animation into a new form of digital art therapy designed to reach at-risk youth and provide them with an opportunity to broaden their personal and professional horizons. TAP uses digital art technology as a tool to change the lives of youth, capitalizing on their natural interest in new media to engage them in group therapy sessions, cultivating self-expression, improving self-esteem, enhancing social and emotional coping skills, while also fostering the development of practical computer competencies that transfer to many career and education paths. Student-produced videos have focused on subject matter highly relevant to their lives, such as police brutality, gun violence, drugs, gangs, and peer pressure. TAP currently conducts two groups for our Education and ATI participants.



See videos on the TAP YouTube page here: www.youtube.com/theanimationproject.

Visual Arts

For more than three years, Fortune has collaborated with the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) to conduct workshops that involve artistic expression. MoMA has developed this program with a wide variety of community-based organizations. In recent years, Fortune has been featured in the MoMA Community Partners Art Show. In 2014, we were part of the (RE)PRESENT Community Partner Art Show featuring art works from 24 different community-based organizations. Fortune participants created a piece called MASK CITY: (RE)FRAMING IDENTITIES. To create this piece, students were asked to think about “the face” they use when identifying themselves to the outside world – whether among peers, families, communities, or any other groups. Then, they were asked to think about they feel inside, identifying more private “inner faces.” They painted masks, symbolizing the outer facades or public identities and surrounded them with boxes, creating a communal structure to represent our “inner faces.” Participants put inspiring words and quotes in the boxes to represent ideas, feelings, and struggles that they reflected on during the project and chose to share with their public audience.



Mask City: (Re)framing Identities at MOMA Community Art Show 2014

ARTS AT FORTUNE

Art Therapy

For several years, Fortune was able to cover the costs of a part-time Art Therapist, who created structured group sessions with ATI clients that offered challenging themes and specific art materials to use for each project. The Art Therapist gave participants a chance to explore and become comfortable with a variety of media and to spark emotion-based discussions in order to foster introspection and boost morale. Through this deliberative artistic process, the Art Therapist would gradually help clients break down their walls and become more open to expressing their feelings conceptually – this was apparent in their artwork, which was truly rewarding for the clients to produce and for the entire Fortune community to enjoy as we would display their artwork throughout the facility. One client commented that Art Therapy felt like a family experience, because of the meaningful exchanges and the level of comfort he had in sharing his feelings with his peers. Over time, the participants build trust with the Art Therapist and with each other. Art Therapy offers a safe space to feel, to speak, and to create – it was often the place where even some of the more resistant clients would eventually open up once they had the chance to work with a particular artistic medium or theme that spoke to them.

Sadly, despite its profound and deeply positive impact on our clients, we no longer offer Art Therapy due to funding cuts. This has been tragic for the clients and the entire Fortune community. BUT - with your support, we could bring it back!



Our large-scale mural at the front entrance of Fortune's main service center in Queens.



Our experienced DJ sets up a beat for Fortune's weekly music group class.

Music Classes

Since 2012, Fortune has offered weekly music group classes with 2 overarching goals: 1. To connect with participants through music and 2. To offer pathways for creative expression in class and beyond. The groups are facilitated and taught by John Runowicz, a singer/songwriter with a PhD in Ethnomusicology, who has produced an original album, Adirondack, featuring songs about his own personal experiences of incarceration in the NYS prison system. The group is performance-focused, allowing students to try a variety of instruments, including guitar, flutes, and drums. Recently, we have brought in an experienced DJ as a volunteer to enhance the music classes and allow students to record their own original rap and hip hop songs. The music groups frequently lead to powerful discussions about clients' lives, especially as they relate to the lyrics in their improvised or "freestyle" rap songs. Fortune's staff engage participants with questions about their favorite artists or songs and their own performance experience, inviting them to share the music that most interests them. We recently purchased some basic recording equipment and created a small-scale "recording studio" out of a spare room in our main service center in Queens, including a laptop computer, a microphone, and a digital audio interface. This has made it possible to offer individual music instruction in guitar, keyboard, and voice to make recordings.

Client Story #1: Anthony Cruz



Anthony completed the ATI program in October 2014. Earlier that summer, he began taking guitar lessons with John Runowicz. According to Anthony, “I grew up in the Bronx, the birthplace of hip hop. I was surrounded by rapping, beat-boxing, and graffiti. So, my first instrument was my voice.” At Fortune, he was also able to develop his interest in guitar. He is now attending classes at Bronx Community College, focusing on liberal arts and music performance. He continues to regularly come to Fortune for his one-on-one music lessons with John, and is interested in pursuing a career in music.

Client Story #2: Lance Brown



Lance completed the Treatment Services program in December 2014. Earlier that year, he began attending the music groups and asked the instructors about individual recording sessions. He has produced some rap music that is poignant – telling stories of the dark world he has left behind. Lance explains that his songs are “about my life, about what I’ve been through in the past.” He has a daughter who is only 6 months old who is the new focus of his life. He says, “Most nights I’m home with my daughter, staying away from the drama on the street.” Lance is now working at a part-time construction job and has signed up for training through our Employment Services program. But, music-making is his newfound

love! He regularly returns to Fortune for recording sessions and to learn more about the process of recording. Lance expresses his future music-making dreams, saying “I want to make my own beats one day. I want have my own recording at home and record myself!”

ARTS AT FORTUNE

Fortune Music Café

Each month, music students and others with musical talents have a chance to perform at our Music Café where staff and participants can choose, prepare, rehearse, and perform music for the entire Fortune community at lunchtime. The show is a wonderfully eclectic mix of styles reflecting the diverse age range and background of our community – with a wide range of songs including classical, country, pop, and hip-hop music. Extraordinary talent has emerged already! For some clients still struggling with serious reentry issues and life challenges, the opportunity to perform and be celebrated gives them a chance to experience the positive future that is possible for them and feel the encouragement of an entire community surrounding them.

See a sample of the Fortune Music Café on YouTube here:

www.youtube.com/fortunesociety

Photography

In recent years, Fortune has worked with a photography instructor using participant cell phones and low-cost digital cameras to give them the opportunity to experiment and explore the art of photography. The participants learn how to alter and enhance photo images using Picassa software, allowing them to strengthen their computer skills and digital literacy, while also enriching their natural creative talents. The instructor suggests different themes, and participants can also come up with their own ideas. For example, some have decided to focus on sports, police/community relations, graffiti art and the artists who create it, and even flowers and gardens of NYC. They use their cell phones or digital cameras to take photos in different parts of the city, and then work in the classroom to edit them with the instructor's guidance and support.



The Public Theater

THE PUBLIC.

Since 2010, Fortune has partnered with The Public Theater to allow our clients the opportunity to become involved in theater. This partnership has evolved over the years and has become the most robust and important partnership that we have in the area of arts and theater. There are a variety of ways that The Public Theater has brought the experience of performing arts to Fortune.

- **Mobile Shakespeare Unit:** The Public's Mobile Unit is a reinvention of Joseph Papp's Mobile Shakespeare, which he began in 1957, evolving into the New York Shakespeare Festival and ultimately becoming The Public Theater. Joseph Papp had a simple idea—that Shakespeare belongs to everyone—and this idea remains at the heart of the Public Theater's work to this day. The Mobile Shakespeare Unit has brought four performances to Fortune in recent years, including *Measure for Measure* in 2011, *Richard III* in 2012, *Much Ado About Nothing* in 2013, and *Pericles* in 2014. In addition to performing these works, the Public Theater staff came in advance to help our participants understand the major characters, themes, and language of Shakespeare; and when performing the plays, the actors used techniques to make the scenes more engaging and relatable to the lives of our participants, while still speaking words from the original script.
- **Public Works:** The Public Works is a major new initiative of The Public Theater that seeks to engage the people of New York by making them creators and not just spectators. Working deeply with 5 partner organizations (including The Fortune Society), Public Works invites members of diverse communities to participate in workshops, take classes, attend performances at The Public, and, most importantly, to join in the creation of ambitious works of participatory theater. Under the leadership of Public Works Director, Lear deBessonet, Public Works deliberately blurs the line between professional artists and community members, creating theater that is not only for the people, but by and of the people as well. The inaugural year of Public Works

culminated with a three-night production of *The Tempest* at the Delacorte Theater in Central Park. 200 New Yorkers from all five boroughs came together to create an unforgettable civic experience that set the standard for Public Works productions to come. Following that acclaimed production, Public Works returned to the Delacorte in September 2014 with a three-night musical production of Shakespeare's *The Winter's Tale*, featuring Public Works' signature blend of professional actors, community members, and special guests. Fortune not only participated in both of these performances, we actually had a full scene in *The Winter's Tale* developed and performed entirely by Fortune staff and clients. Public Works:

www.publictheater.org/Programs--Events/Public-Works/



Fortune staff and clients in *The Winter's Tale*.

- Fortune Tellers: The Fortune Tellers has allowed us to take our partnership with The Public Theater even further with our very own in-house acting troupe. Brought together by the wide variety of theater and acting workshop offerings, The Fortune Tellers are a multi-talented group of clients and staff brought together by a passion for performance. In 2014, The Fortune Tellers put on two 60-minute performances of skits written and performed by themselves. This year, the group is more engaged than ever. Approximately 10 participants are involved and extremely dedicated and excited about this opportunity. The group is progressing quickly and is working through some of their personal struggles through this bonding experience. As one participant explained, "I don't just love this, I need this!"



PUBLIC WORKS exemplifies The Public's long-standing commitment to community engagement that is at the core of the theater's mission. It is animated by the idea that theater is a place of possibility, where the boundaries that separate us from each other in the rest of life can fall away. It seeks to create a space where we can not only reflect on the world as is, but where we can actually propose new possibilities for what our society might be.

THE DREAM

Arts for EVERYONE at Fortune to Make This Happen...We Need Your Support!

Fortune is looking forward to taking the next step in fully embedding arts programs across the organization and making them available for **ALL** clients interested in participating.

But, to make this happen, we need your support!

We are seeking to raise a total of **\$300,000** for our Arts Initiatives at Fortune. This would support the costs of a full-time Arts Director to lead and coordinate all arts programs, part-time Music Coordinator, and a wide variety of arts-related program supplies, materials, instruments, technology, and other related costs. We would also hire a part-time Art Therapist and explore other possible consultants or partners to enhance our arts programs in any of these areas.

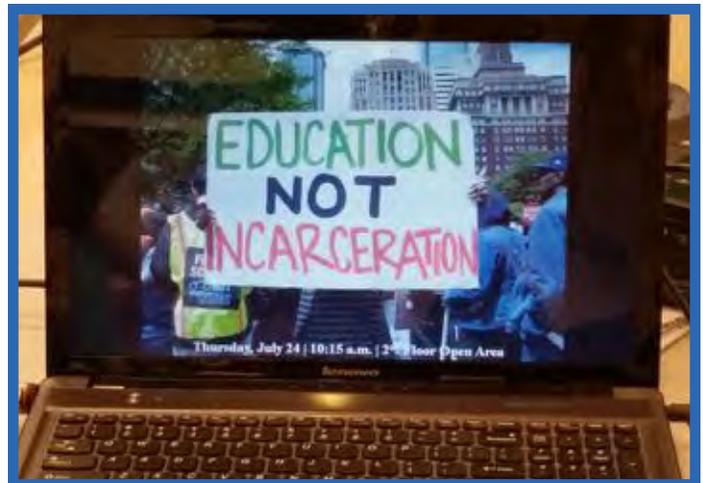
Please help us revive the arts at Fortune! Arts programming is critical to our clients' growth, development, and successful reentry, creating a valuable opportunity for creative experiences that our participants are often exposed to at Fortune for the first time in their lives.



WE ARE ASKING FOR MAJOR DONORS & PRIVATE FOUNDATIONS TO INVEST FUNDING IN OUR ARTS PROGRAMS!

If you are interested in learning more or providing funding, please contact: Jill Poklemba, Associate Vice President of Development & Communications, at jpoklemba@fortunesociety.org or (347) 510-3613.

If you have any further questions or if you have artistic talents you would like to share as a volunteer, please contact: John Runowicz, Manager of Creative Arts at jrunowicz@fortunesociety.org or (212) 691-7554.





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