LETTER FROM THE ARTISTIC DIRECTOR

In YCA’s building near the intersection of Milwaukee and Division, you can find on any given Tuesday night a room filled with young people. They come to work on their writing. They come to share their stories. They come to be a part of a vibrant youth community. And they come because they know it is a place where they can be themselves.

Ask a young poet about the first time they read a poem out loud at YCA. They will likely tell you it was electric. They were terrified. They were astonished at the sound of their voice in a hushed room. They will tell you all about what they wish they had done differently, and yet, by standing up and owning their stories, they were transformed. The stories they tell are essential and fundamentally human. YCA grows courage in young people through pen and mic.

YCA’s reach extends far beyond our West Town headquarters. We have served schools, libraries, youth centers, and other community spaces in nearly every zip code in the city over the past year. Our suburban connections are strong as well and we are proud to have hosted more than 100 schools from across the Chicago region at the Louder Than A Bomb Chicago Youth Poetry Festival.

We know that few places like YCA exist. The reason some students travel long and far to reach us is that they don’t have outlets in their neighborhoods. While it is important to YCA to bring students from across the city together, there needs to be more neighborhood-level opportunities to be involved in poetry. YCA remains committed to creating these spaces—in libraries, cafes, and community centers—where young writers can develop their skills and, through their words, generate change in the world around them.

KEVIN COVAL
Artistic Director
Through creative writing, Young Chicago Authors helps young people from all backgrounds to understand the importance of their own stories and those of others, so that they can pursue the path they choose and work to make their communities more just and equitable.

In October 2017, YCA’s board of directors approved the organization’s new mission statement, which more clearly articulates the purpose of YCA’s work. This re-crafting of YCA’s mission presents the impact YCA seeks to have on both the individual and the world around the individual.

GOALS
Young Chicago Authors carries out its mission by focusing on six primary objectives that guide YCA’s work with young people. YCA’s programming is designed to serve these targeted, measurable goals.

Foster Youth Creativity and Expression
All of YCA’s workshops ask students to approach writing as experts of their own experiences. Asking a simple question — “Where are you from?” — elicits profound stories that, in their telling, empower the writer and enlighten their audience.

Engage Young People in a Cross-City Dialogue
YCA brings young people from diverse backgrounds together, surmounting geographic and cultural boundaries that serve to segregate Chicago. Every week, students from all over the city gather at YCA to listen to one another’s narratives. Each year at the Louder Than A Bomb Chicago Youth Poetry Festival, young people from more than 120 zip codes bring their stories to the stage to share with a wider audience. Together, young people are starting a new conversation about art, unity, and social justice.

Provide Spaces for a Youth Community Rooted in Poetry
Relationships begin at YCA based on a shared love of creative expression through the written and spoken word. Young people from different neighborhoods, who would otherwise have no way to connect, form enduring bonds.

Involves Young People in an Examination of the Conditions of the City and the World
YCA’s pedagogy is grounded in the belief that all people have important stories to tell. YCA is particularly interested in presenting students with the voices of artists who represent marginalized communities, engaging students in conversations about inequity and injustice.

Build Critical Thinking, Reading, Writing and Public Speaking Skills
YCA reframes education for young people by using a fresh new approach to the literary arts in classroom settings, sparking achievement in language arts and social and emotional learning areas. YCA connects students to school-based poetry clubs, which strengthens the student-school relationship and provides direction for out-of-school hours.

Support Early-Career Teaching Artists As They Become Cultural Educators
YCA is an incubator for talented writers who have chosen to pursue a living in arts education. As members of YCA’s Teaching Artist Corps, these artists develop their identities as educators and mentors while simultaneously developing their craft.
2016-2017 IMPACT OVERVIEW

YCA served more than 10,000 students between the ages of 12 and 25 from many different backgrounds.

STUDENTS BY GENDER

- 56% Female
- 41% Male
- 3% Nonbinary

STUDENTS BY RACE/ETHNICITY

- 52% Black/African American
- 16% Latino/Latina
- 17% White/White Ethnic
- 9% Multi-racial/Multi-ethnic
- 4% Asian American
- 2% Other

MEDIAN HOUSEHOLD INCOME

In neighborhoods where YCA students live

- 50% Below $40K
- 40% $40K to $80K
- 30% $80K to $120K
- 10% $120K and up

580 NEW POEMS

580 new poems were written for presentation at the 2017 Louder Than A Bomb Chicago Youth Poetry Festival preliminary bouts.
STRAIGHT A’S FROM STUDENTS

YCA’s artist educators received high praise from students who attended YCA programs. YCA’s Teaching Artist Corps members in aggregate received 97% of all possible points on student surveys.

CHICAGO-AREA REACH

YCA served Chicago-area students from more than 200 zip codes in 2017.

STUDENTS DESCRIBING LOUDER THAN A BOMB

Asked to describe the opening day all-participant event, students were not at a loss for words.
The Louder Than A Bomb Chicago Youth Poetry Festival (LTAB) is an annual event that hosts more than 900 youth poets throughout five weeks of bouts, workshops, and special events. Students representing schools and community groups in the Chicago area perform original solo and group poems in a tournament-style competition. Prior to the city-wide festival, many poetry teams compete in regional slams organized by YCA in different corners of Chicago. YCA also helps organizers of sister LTAB festivals outside of Chicago bring YCA’s successful model for youth engagement in the arts to communities throughout North America.

This year, YCA built LTAB around the theme “Our Gwendolyn Brooks” in honor of the centennial anniversary of Gwendolyn Brooks’ birth. Ms. Brooks’ poems powerfully documented the social, cultural, and political events of her day as reflected in the daily lives of her community. YCA teaches young poets to be the owners and experts of their own stories, and as such, the young people of LTAB are direct descendants of Ms. Brooks’ revelatory poetic tradition. YCA was honored to have Ms. Brooks’ daughter, Nora Blakely, in attendance at LTAB Team Finals.

Beyond the competition, there were numerous special events throughout the festival that celebrated youth voice and showcased the talents of artists working at the nexus of poetry and social justice, including Queeriosity (poetry and performance from the LBGTQ perspective), the Jordan Slam (duo and trio poetry slam), Half-Pint Poetics (open-mic for 5th-8th graders), Louder Than A Bomba (Latínx poetry and performance), MC Olympics (showcase for young MCs), Purim Party (interfaith celebration), Halal If You Hear Me (Muslim poetry and performance), and the LTAB University Slam (college-aged Indy poet competition).

NATIONAL SYMPOSIUM

Organizations from across the country currently producing or interested in starting LTAB festivals in their own communities, came together at YCA’s four-day National Symposium. During the Symposium, which took place during LTAB Chicago, partners observed up close and in real time how YCA organizes its festival. Participants also engaged in workshops and breakouts featuring YCA staff and personnel from partner sites. There were 14 LTAB festivals in cities from Boston to Tulsa during 2017.
Free of charge to the partnering schools, the Education Partnerships program teamed YCA teaching artists with 16 Chicago public high schools over the course of 15-weeks — from October 2016 to April 2017. YCA’s teaching artists worked closely with school faculty to create an engaging educational experience for the 480 students who took part in the program. Responding to the particular needs of each school, YCA’s teaching artists delivered programming in-class, after school, and through a combination of both.

### 2016-2017 EDUCATION PARTNERSHIPS SCHOOLS

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<tr>
<th>Gwendolyn Brooks College Preparatory Academy</th>
<th>Noble Street Charter - Muchin College Prep</th>
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<tr>
<td>Michelle Clark Academic Prep Magnet High School</td>
<td>Noble College Prep</td>
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<tr>
<td>Frederick A. Douglass Academy High School</td>
<td>Northside College Preparatory High School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sarah Goode STEM Academy</td>
<td>Walter Payton College Preparatory High School</td>
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<td>Instituo Justice - Rudy Lozano Leadership Academy High School</td>
<td>Neal F. Simeon Career Academy High School</td>
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<td>Nancy B. Jefferson Alternative High School</td>
<td>TEAM Englewood Community Academy High School</td>
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<td>William Jones College Preparatory High School</td>
<td>YCCS - Innovations High School of Arts Integration</td>
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<td>Robert Lindblom Math &amp; Science Academy High School</td>
<td>YCCS - Olive Harvey Middle College High School</td>
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PUBLIC WORKSHOPS

YCA offered at least seven hours of free Public Workshops in its offices each week of the academic-year, catering to the interests of 2,000 students from the age of 12 to 25. Workshops included WordPlay, a year-round, Tuesday-evening staple for youth poets, emcees, and musicians, who share their stories in a vibrant open mic, preceded by an hour-long writing workshop. On Saturdays from October 2016 to June 2017, Check the Method served serious young writers who gathered to discuss and write poetry with senior artistic staff. Later in the day, YCA’s emerging rappers came to YCA to hone their skills in a program called Emcee Wreckshop. YCA completed its second year of a monthly salon, Queeriosity, YCA’s safe space for queer and questioning youth and young adults.

INTENSIVES

In addition to its regularly-scheduled house programs, YCA hosted several Intensives that gave students the opportunity to rapidly develop as writers. During the summer, YCA selected 12 of its most driven students to participate in a six-week apprenticeship program called Bomb Squad. Bomb Squad members engaged in a rigorous writing practice guided by YCA’s senior artistic staff. During the week of July 10, the Bomb Squad cohort came together with more than 70 other young writers from around the country at YCA’s summer camp Write To The City. Participants explored poetry’s intersections with other art forms while building community with other young creatives. Write To The City’s participants included representatives from Louder Than A Bomb partner sites in Oklahoma, Florida, Virginia, Ontario, and Trinidad and Tobago. A third intensive program, Chicago Beat, was offered both over the summer and throughout the academic year. Chicago Beat is a journalism inquiry grounded in non-fiction creative writing and verse journalism. Students engaged in research, fieldwork, and writing that shed light on issues relevant to young people in the city.
TEACHING ARTIST CORPS

YCA’s Teaching Artist Corps is at the center of all YCA’s programming channels. The six members of the 2016-2017 Teaching Artists Corps led YCA’s public workshops, delivered its curriculum in YCA’s school residencies, and had significant roles at Louder Than A Bomb as hosts, bout managers, and performers.

YCA provides artist-educators with training, mentorship, and stability. Through year-round elements that include artistic meetings, professional development, workshop delivery, performance engagements, and evaluation, the members of the Teaching Artistic Corps grow in their dual roles as creators and teachers.

BRITTENEMY
“BLACK ROSE” KAPRI

KEITH “BLU” WARFIELD

E’MON LAUREN

KUSH THOMPSON

MATT MUSE

TIM “TOASTER” HENDERSON
The School and Community Resources arm of YCA fulfilled more than 107 requests for workshops, readings, and other types of engagements in the 2017 fiscal year. School and Community Resources work is fee-based and runs the gamut from a single workshop for 15 students to a multi-week school residency for 50 to a conference keynote for several hundred people. The following are examples of the types of engagements YCA did in the past year.

A PEOPLE’S HISTORY OF CHICAGO
On the city’s 180th birthday on March 4, 2017, Artistic Director Kevin Coval kicked off a year-long touring project associated with his new book of poetry, A People’s History of Chicago. In the year that followed, this project brought Kevin to every corner of Chicago to tell the stories of both well-known and little-known people who are part of the city’s fabric.

ILLINOIS HOLOCAUST MUSEUM
A partnership between the Illinois Holocaust Museum and the YWCA Evanston/North Shore brought YCA to the Museum to lead students through an interactive writing workshop following an exploration of the exhibition Women Hold Up Half the Sky.

NATIONAL GUILD ASSOCIATION
YCA artists presented a workshop on The Realest of Rap: Race, Class, and Gender Inequality in Community Arts and led participants through a radical re-imagining of youth culture in the public cultural sphere.

JOHN F. KENNEDY CENTER FOR THE PERFORMING ARTS
YCA guest artists performed in Chicago as part of the Kennedy Center’s Young Minds: Building Resilience and Well Being in the Next Generation.

PROUDER THAN A BOMB
In June, YCA artists conducted a pride-themed poetry reading at Chicago’s Navy Pier as part of the 2nd Annual Pier Pride event.

Kevin Coval appeared on The Daily Show with Trevor Noah in April 2017 to discuss his recently published collection of poems, A People’s History of Chicago.
At the end of 2017, Young Chicago Authors had grown to $1.7 million in unrestricted operating revenue, a level that leadership believes is sustainable. YCA’s 2017 unrestricted top-line increase of 2% follows an increase of 8% in the previous year. The revenue increase in 2017 was driven by healthy increases in foundation grants, government grants, and in-kind contributions.

Expenses in 2017 increased 7% to $1,611,615 as YCA continued to build an infrastructure that can adequately and sustainably support its programming opportunities. On an unrestricted basis, YCA netted $108,181, comfortably adding 6% of its revenue to operating reserves.

Total operating revenue of $1,678,300 produced net activity of $66,685. The total operating revenue comparison between 2017 and 2016 is skewed by a large, one-time grant YCA received in 2016 of $625,000. In that year, YCA was awarded the prestigious MacArthur Award for Creative and Effective Institutions.
FUNDERS

$50,000+
Allstate Insurance Company
Bloomberg Philanthropies
Chicago Teachers Union Foundation
City of Chicago Department of Family Support and Services
Columbia College Chicago*
The Joseph & Bessie Feinberg Foundation
Lannan Foundation
The Reva & David Logan Foundation
McCormick Foundation
Surdna Foundation
Youth Speaks

$20,000 - $49,999
The Albert & Anne Mansfield Foundation
Alphawood Foundation Chicago
The Chicago Community Trust
The Crown Family
Ford Harrison LLP*
Lloyd A. Fry Foundation
The MacArthur Fund for Arts and Culture at Prince
National Endowment for the Arts
Pattishall, McAuliffe, Newbury, Hilliard and Geraldson LLP*
Polk Bros. Foundation
Southwest Airlines*
Vocalo 91.1 and WBEZ 91.5 Chicago*

$5,000 - $19,999
The Boeing Company
Ferrara Candy Company
Hightower Holding, LLC
Illinois Arts Council Agency
The Lagunitas Brewing Company
Metro Chicago
Northern Trust Charitable Trust
Tribeca Flashpoint College*

Teaching Artist Circle
The Malkin Family
Robert Moore, Ph.D.
Joseph & Debbi Welch

*In-kind contribution of goods or services