



THE PENGUIN PROJECT RECOGNIZED BY FEDERAL ARTS AND CULTURE AGENCIES WITH NATION'S TOP HONOR

Cited as one of the best creative youth development programs in the country

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(Peoria, IL | Nov. 9, 2017) – The Penguin Project has been honored with the 2017 [National Arts and Humanities Youth Program Award](#), the nation's highest honor for these programs. [The Penguin Project](#) was recognized for its effectiveness in promoting learning and life skills in young people by engaging them through creative programs.

The awardees — chosen from a pool of 350 nominations and 50 finalists — were recognized for improving academic achievement, literacy and language abilities, communication and performance skills, and cultural awareness.

The Penguin Project gives children, teens, and young adults with special needs an opportunity to star in a community theatre production. The young artists have a wide spectrum of special needs including Down syndrome, Autism Spectrum Disorders, intellectual disabilities, cerebral palsy and ADHD. Participation in the program enhances social skills, communication skills, and self-esteem.

Using "Junior" versions of Broadway musicals that are professionally modified for young performers, The Penguin Project artists are matched with Peer Mentors who guide and assist them through rehearsals and join them on stage for the production.

Started in Peoria, Illinois in 2004, The Penguin Project has become a national program with 26 replication sites in 15 states throughout the country. Since its founding, hundreds of children have participated in and benefitted from a wide range of productions.

"The Penguin Project was founded on the principle that children with special needs can participate in and excel at community activities when given the opportunity and support. We have seen young people who had no friends, would hide when they met people, and feared interaction with others blossom into engaged and confident individuals who proudly show their talents," said Andrew Morgan, M.D., founder of The Penguin Project. "To see this program grow as it has and benefit young artists with special needs and their families across the country is immensely gratifying. We're incredibly proud of this award and of the young people, volunteers, supporters, board and staff across the country who made it possible."

First presented in 1998, the 2017 National Arts and Humanities Youth Program Awards were presented through a partnership between the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA), the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH), and the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS), in cooperation with the National Assembly of State Arts Agencies (NASAA).

"These 12 creative youth development programs represent the best of the best," said Pam Breaux, president and chief executive officer of the National Assembly of State Arts Agencies. "They are living proof of the power of the arts and the humanities to build the skills young people need to succeed in school and in life."

In addition to the national recognition, The Penguin Project will receive \$10,000 to support its programming and engage more young people from the community.

For more information about The Penguin Project, including downloadable videos and soundbites for this story visit <http://penguinproject.org/>.

LIVE STREAM: The awards ceremony will be streamed on NAHYP's YouTube Channel beginning at Noon CST November 9: <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCUp7ViZEhp786dPOmJn0rsQ>

PHOTOS:

Photos and captions from the ceremony will be available for download via Flickr by 8 p.m. ET on November 9, 2017 at https://www.flickr.com/photos/pcah_nahyp/albums