Before March of 2020, “unprecedented” likely wasn’t a term many of us used. However, now it seems like something we say as much as hello. There’s no doubt that COVID-19 has changed our lives forever and has certainly changed live theatre, whether that’s a temporary change or not. All-of-us Express was and is determined to find a way to exist and thrive throughout this time, just like we have throughout so many other unprecedented times.

When the pandemic first struck Michigan, we were just beginning work on our highly anticipated production of Fantastic Mr. Fox but were ultimately forced to cancel it. That devastating loss only led to another when we went on to cancel our summer 2020 production of Frozen JR. However, in what felt like a sea of cancellations and postponements all over the world, we held on to one glimmer of hope: our studio class production of The Little Prince. The very nature of our studio class gave us the flexibility to carry on rehearsals virtually (and eventually safely in person) and postpone the show to a later date. What was supposed to be a six-month process turned into nine months, but eventually ended with two live performances with extensive safety precautions and a limited audience.

Throughout this time, we experimented with other virtual offerings as well. We had a handful of what we called “Zoom Parties”, which were nights we let some of the kids come into Zoom meetings and just hang out with their friends. We also developed a virtual version of our Summer Camps, including “Harry Potter,” “Stranger Things,” and two running games of Dungeons & Dragons. Additionally, we attempted more advanced camps that were more like full classes including Production Design and Playwriting. All of these things were incredibly successful and gave us the confidence to tackle even bigger challenges.

While many theatres across the world are going dark for the foreseeable future, AECT has made the decision to carry on virtually. We will offer (almost) everything we have offered in the past including full productions with backstage crews. We also hope to expand into virtual classes as the school year progresses. The staff, youth participants, and families involved in All-of-us Express are committed to persevering and weathering every storm. As the world changes around us, we will adapt, and we will still be here.
WHAT IS THE GUILD PROGRAM?
Each crew within the Guild Program (Costumes, Directing, Lights, Makeup, Props, Set Design/Construction, Sound, and Stage Management) has three levels: Apprentice, Journeyman, and Master. Each level of each crew has a determined list of requirements to complete before moving on to the next level. Each level takes at least one production to complete but can take multiple productions.

The Guild Crews are broken up into three groups, which is only important for those interested in Assistant Stage Managing and Assistant Directing. The groups are as follows: Costumes and Makeup; Lights and Sound; and Sets and Props.

The goal of the Guild Program is to thoroughly train each youth participant in every aspect of working behind the scenes on a production and prepare them to eventually teach those skills to others. Once a participant has a Master badge in a crew, they are qualified to be a Crew Head in that crew if they choose. People who have completed Master badges through our program have gone on to work professionally as Lighting Designers, Stage Managers, Directors, and more.

WHAT MAKES US UNIQUE?
Beyond being a community theatre, All-of-us Express strives to fully prepare our participants for their future: whether that future is in theatre or any other area. The youth in our program have the opportunity to learn every aspect of theatre, both on stage and backstage. Through our Guild Program, each person on each crew learns a set of skills necessary to eventually master the crew and teach those skills to their peers. Additionally, participants learn life skills important to any area of work or study.

We strive to offer variety in our show selections so that there is something that appeals to everyone. We offer musicals as well as straight plays, dramas, comedies, and fairy tales. We want the youth in the program to get experience acting in different kinds of shows, as well as the different kinds of design demands needed for each show.

Additionally, each person in the program is required to work on crews in order to continue being on stage. We want to maintain an environment where everyone is just as important as everyone else, and no one is constantly in the spotlight. This is also part of our effort to give everyone a well-rounded theatre experience and education.

It is the mission of All-of-us Express Children’s Theatre to offer young people of all backgrounds, cultures, and lifestyles the opportunity to produce professional quality plays, study many aspects of the dramatic arts, and develop valuable life skills while providing outstanding entertainment to the community.
All-of-us Express Children's Theatre has enriched our whole family. Until he participated in a summer camp when he was 9, my son searched for an activity that kept his interest, trying out various sports and dance groups. His drama camp counselors encouraged the participants to audition for the next show, so he tried out and earned a role. He has participated in every show since, either as a cast member or working to earn badges for various crews. The theatre has become his family, main group of friends, and a safe haven from life stresses. Our whole family has enjoyed attending performances and getting involved in the Board. I truly can't imagine what our lives would look like without the Children's Theatre.

-Jen VanDerHeide,
Vice President of AECT
Board of Directors

I've never really been a fan of sports. My family always tried to get me to do things like soccer, or football, but they never stuck. I was kind of lost until I found AECT. I auditioned for my first show, The Neverending Story, when I was eleven, and I've been in love with theatre ever since! I truly found my family here at All-of-us Express, and I would not be the person I am today without it. The theatrical elements are at a higher quality than most theaters, allowing children to learn and improve their acting skills in a fun and high quality environment. Even if you don't like acting, there's a place for you! The guild based crew system allows you to work behind the scenes, and make lifelong friends while doing it! It truly is an amazing, one-of-a-kind place.

-Brennan McKone,
Youth Participant

All-of-us Express sparked my love of theatre by introducing me to a welcoming community of actors and crew members. It's amazing to see how each show is put together, with each crew working to add to the final product. Having the opportunity to experience all the different aspects of a theatrical production from set building and props to costumes and makeup add to my appreciation of this theatre. Being surrounded by such an open-minded and accepting community allows everyone involved to grow as people and as performers. My fondest memory of my experience with AECT was working on set crew for Poe: Dreams of Madness, where I was able to design set pieces and build them with the help of the crew.

-Josh Silbergleid,
Youth Participant
Theater has been a prominent part of my life for the past twenty years. Some of my fondest memories were made in the theaters that I have performed and served in. Theater helped to nurture my creativity and grow my love of helping others; it gave me a community to feel like I belonged to and a support network. All-of-us Express is one of the companies that helps to spread these positive experiences. In the past several years, I have loved to see participants grow more confident in their acting, technical, and directing skills. This company provides these opportunities in bounds. But, more importantly, AECT allows a space for these kids to forge communities and feel safe to explore who they are as people. It makes me so happy to see how these young people grow to discover themselves as they work alongside like-minded and passionate peers. AECT becomes a safe haven – a home-away-from-home – for a lot of them.

I am incredibly grateful for the community and opportunities provided by AECT. The memories and friendships that I have made working alongside these young people will last for a lifetime, as I am sure it will with them, too.

-Steven Neal
AECT Instructor & Director

All-of-us Express offers a level of support, community, and joy I have rarely experienced in other organizations and teams. When I was seven years old, I saw AECT’s Peter Pan, and became enthralled with theater from that point forward. The first thing I wanted to partake in was sets crew. The backdrops, paintings, and set movers themselves fascinated me, and I longed to join the creation of a show.

The opportunity to learn all aspects of a stage play is one of the most wonderful parts about All-of-us Express, and something many kids do not get to experience. The theater becomes far more than a pastime, where participants learn all types of skills, from design, construction, technical composition, direction and, perhaps most important; interacting with people of all ages.

The confidence that this community inspires, truly is incredible. Coming from a competitive sports background the difference between the rigorous practices and rehearsals full of encouragement was thrown into sharp relief, and my interests became clearer by the play. Having people you can feel comfortable acting like a fool around, who laugh easily, and who really do want the best for you, is something extremely special. The bonds of friendship and trust create an easy atmosphere where learning is fun, and everyone can be themselves.

-Elena Forman
Youth Participant

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-Steven Neal
AECT Instructor & Director
All-of-us Express Children’s Theatre continues to grow in both numbers of participation and in the number of people who attend our shows. We welcome you to be a part of a growing organization!

As a result of their participation in the All-of-us Express 30th Season, parents/caregivers responded that:

- 97% felt the staff was knowledgeable and taught the necessary skills;
- 98% of youth participants had fun;
- 93% felt their children learned a new skill or improved an existing skill;
- 92% of youth participants increased their ability to express themselves through the arts;
- 96% felt they were better at solving problems; and
- 95% were able to see how their participation benefitted the production.
**Producer Sponsorship ($5,000)**
Sponsor one main-stage production and receive the following benefits*:
- Recognition in all advertising including (but not limited to): posters, interviews, and social media posts for the sponsored production
- Prominent feature on front page of our website for the entirety of the season
- Recognition on inside cover of show program for sponsored production
- Full-page ad in show program for sponsored production
- Additional ad space in show programs for other productions in the same season
- Verbal acknowledgement during curtain speech at shows of sponsored production
- 35 tickets donated to a youth serving non-profit organization in the Lansing area in the sponsoring company’s name (tickets to be used at any show at the Hannah Community Center during the season of sponsored production)
- 15 tickets to the sponsored production donated to an additional youth serving non-profit in the Lansing area in the sponsoring company’s name
- Framed & signed poster from sponsored production

**Partner Sponsorship ($2,500)**
Partially sponsor one of the main-stage productions and receive the following benefits*:
- Recognition in all advertising including (but not limited to): posters, interviews, and social media posts for the sponsored production
- Feature on front page of our website prior to and during the sponsored production
- Recognition on inside cover of show program for sponsored production
- Half-page ad in show program for sponsored production
- Additional ad space in one other show program during the same season
- Verbal acknowledgement during curtain speech at shows of sponsored production
- 30 tickets to sponsored production donated to a youth serving non-profit organization in the Lansing area in the sponsoring company’s name
- Framed & signed poster from the sponsored production

**Supporting Sponsorship ($1,000)**
Support one of the main-stage productions and receive the following benefits*:
- Recognition on show posters for the sponsored production
- Recognition on inside cover of show program for sponsored production
- Quarter-page ad in show program for sponsored production
- Website acknowledgement prior to and during the sponsored production
- 15 tickets to sponsored production donated to a youth serving non-profit organization in the Lansing area in the sponsoring company’s name

*For any productions where the above benefits are not practical (i.e. virtual productions), alternative equivalent benefits will be offered.
Contact us

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