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Arts education nonprofit thrives in Buffalo library



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You might think it would be difficult for artists and performers to get along in a library, where the setting typically calls for quiet. But a local arts education provider has found a permanent place inside the Buffalo & Erie County Public Library's downtown central location.

It's been just over a year since Young Audiences of WNY moved to the library's second floor.

"We have a great space for meeting with our board and artists and we've really become stronger," said [Cynnie Gaasch](#), executive director.

Partnering with the library has given the agency meeting space and room for performances. The agency's last place was in the basement of an Elmwood Avenue church.

In the last year, YAWNY has grown by 12 percent and launched a strategic plan. Operating with revenue of about \$500,000, the agency has added two part-time staff, for a total of seven.

The agency is celebrating its 50th anniversary this year with monthly performances on First Fridays at the Albright-Knox Art Gallery and Saturday performances at library facilities by some of the nearly 100 artists affiliated with the agency.

But the core mission of the agency are school and community performances that bring art into the educational process, many aligned with common curriculum standards. Other programs are targeted to meet the needs of community groups such as a Boys & Girls Club or a neighborhood center.

A typical year will see YAWNY artists bring 300 programs to 195 institutional partners, from theater and dance to visual arts. But the agency wants to take its programs to more students and young people in and out of the city. And making those plans a reality will take additional resources.

“We want to give them more reasons to get involved in and after school,” Gaasch said.

YAWNY received a \$100,000 grant from the John R. Oishei Foundation for after-school and summer programs at the central library for at-risk teens. Students can also learn about arts organizations and local business through partnerships with the WNY Book Arts Center, Buffalo First and the Arts Partners for Learning initiative.

On April 20, the agency will hold an art auction at Tapestry Charter School featuring work from private collectors and artists from the area. All proceeds benefit YAWNY’s 50th Anniversary Innovation Fund.

For more information, go to yawny.org.

Tracey Drury covers health/medical, nonprofits and insurance