



Kadijat Alaka LCPC, CDPH

Kadijat Alaka is a Licensed Clinical Professional Counselor and the Director of Mental Health for two City of Chicago clinics (North Lawndale MHC & North River MHC). She oversees mental health and administrative professionals, committed to helping individuals with mental health conditions cultivate meaningful lives. Kadijat earned her master's in Community Counseling from Argosy University (now the Illinois School of Psychology). She started her career at Trilogy Behavioral Healthcare, then worked with NAMI Chicago and Compass Health before becoming a Clinical Therapist III for the City of Chicago in 2019.



Chris Appleton, Art Pharmacy

Chris Appleton is the Founder and CEO of Art Pharmacy, a healthcare tech company addressing America's mental health crisis through arts-based social prescribing. His work has been highlighted by major media outlets like the New York Times and CNN. Appleton has received numerous awards, including the Americans for the Arts National Emerging Leader Award and Atlanta Business Chronicle's 40 Under 40. Based in Atlanta with his wife and two children, he holds an MBA from Northwestern University's Kellogg School of Management.



Zahra Baker

Zahra has been a drama and vocal music Teaching Artist in Chicago Public Schools for 25 years, specializing in arts integration. She developed a music residency highlighting African American acapella vocal traditions for Chicago Public Schools. Zahra has worked with organizations like Chicago Lights, Ravinia Music Festival, and Steppenwolf Theatre. An accomplished folk and jazz vocalist and storyteller, she has performed at the Chicago Jazz Festival, the National Association of Black Storytellers Conference, and more.



Teresa Berumen, ILCHWA

Teresa Berumen is the Community Health Worker Supervisor at Rush University System for Health, a Trainer with the Center for Health and Social Care Integration, and a member of the Illinois Kidney Care Alliance CHW Task Force. She co-leads Rush's 30-member Community Health Worker Hub, overseeing social determinants of health screenings and guiding patients to community resources. Teresa began her CHW career in 2014 at Enlace Chicago and Saint Anthony Hospital. She has co-authored three publications and presented at various conferences.



Chih-Jou Cheng, HAC Cohort Artist

Chih-Jou Cheng is a Chicago-based movement artist and puppeteer originally from Taiwan where she studied Community Theatre & Theatre in education. She is dedicated to creating artworks that illuminate the challenges and joys of the human experience through collaborative physical theatre. She is the co-founder of Dawn Theatre Project and has performed with Drury Lane, Teatro Vista, and other Chicago theatre companies.



Natalia Cuevas, HAC Cohort Artist

Natalia Cuevas is a Mexican American artist, educator, and mentor, based in the city of Chicago and actively working towards building community, bridging cultures, and supporting youth through art based learning. Natalia’s creative practice is deeply rooted in experiences growing up in Chicago with undocumented parents and draws from traditional Mexican iconography, folklore, and family stories of migration. Through interactive, immersive, and collaborative projects, Natalia cultivates spaces for community building as forms of celebration and healing.



Holiday Gerry, HAC Cohort Artist

Holiday Gerry is a 1st Gen Chicano and a Chicago native. As a CPS student, he discovered his passion for the Arts in afterschool programs such as After School Matters. Today he is a professional artist, activist, and photographer with a passion for teaching. He believes in the power of art for personal transformation and building community.



Elizabeth Gmitter PhD, City Colleges of Chicago

Dr. Elizabeth Gmitter is the Dean of Health Science and Career Programs at Malcolm X College, overseeing 20+ programs for 2,500 students annually. Since 2018, she has secured over \$7M in grants, including the HRSA Opioid Impacted Family Support Program and IL Department of Human Services Certified Recovery Support Specialist grant. Her expertise includes program expansion, curriculum development, and compliance.



JAQUANDA

Jaquanda, a Fly Girl Chicagoan from South Carolina, is a Co-Creative Lead and one of the three founders of Kuumba Lynx, an organization engaging youth in Hip Hop Arts Activism for 27 years. As an Arts Educator, Mentor, Yoga Instructor, Shamanic Reiki Healer, Poetress, Performance Artist, and Hip Hop Theater Director, Jaquanda is committed to community healing and sustainability through indigenous and African practices. She is also a Words Beats & Life 2040 Inaugural Fellow and International Peace Movement Honorary Ambassador.



Kevin Iega Jeff, Deeply Rooted

Kevin Iega Jeff is a celebrated dancer, choreographer, and artistic director, recognized as one of Juilliard’s 100 Outstanding Alumni. Honored alongside legends and listed as a top performer by Newcity magazine, he was appointed to Chicago’s Cultural Advisory Council by Mayor Lori Lightfoot. Iega’s work includes Broadway’s *The Wiz*, Spike Lee’s *She’s Gotta Have It*, and over fifty choreographed pieces. A community-focused artist, he founded JUBILATION! Dance Company and co-founded Deeply Rooted Dance Theater.



Khiry Johnson

Khiry “Kyrie Da Comic” Johnson is an international motivational comedian with a background at The Second City. Based in Chicago, his standup blends street-smart humor with witty social commentary. Kyrie has performed at The Comedy Store, Kill Tony, Laugh Factory, and Zanies, and was a 2024 finalist in Chicago’s Funniest Comic competition. His engaging style combines “Edutainment” and “Artivism,” creating a memorable experience for audiences.



Stephanie Jones-Horne, CDPH

Stephanie Jones-Horne, a Chicago native from the Southside, is the Director of two mental health clinics in the Bronzeville and Englewood communities. Passionate about mental health and dedicated to leadership, Stephanie advocates for mental health awareness, treatment, and support. She channels her passion by teaching a Trauma-Informed Mentoring course to inner-city youth as part of a violence prevention program.



Gail Joy

Gail Joy is a seasoned yoga instructor with 18 years of experience, specializing in overcoming race-based stress and trauma at The Joy Yoga. She promotes emotional resilience and inner peace, aligning her work with her mission to help individuals realize their full potential. With a master's in management from Roosevelt University, Gail blends academic knowledge with her passion for mindfulness and wellness. She believes that individual growth benefits everyone, making her a powerful force for positive change in her community.



Kiam Marcelo Junio

Kiam Marcelo Junio (b. Philippines) is a non-binary artist, certified holistic wellness coach, and US Navy veteran. They hold a BFA from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago and an MS in Health and Human Performance from Pacific College of Health and Science. Kiam's art explores spirituality, identity, and time, using diverse mediums like sculpture, performance, and photography. As a creative wellness coach, they help artists and leaders cultivate self-knowledge and authentic expression.



Jewel Hale, HAC Cohort Artist

Jewel Hale is an interdisciplinary artist from Chicago, Illinois. She obtained her BA in theater studies from Northern Illinois University, received her MA in interdisciplinary arts from Columbia College Chicago, and her MS in curriculum and instruction from Western Governors University. She is a certified wellness, SEL, and yoga instructor. She has been writing and performing professionally since 2012.



Arlieta Hall

Arlieta Hall is a host, actress, improviser, stand-up comedian, writer, Certified Dementia Communication specialist, and first-time filmmaker from Chicago. A recipient of The Second City NBC Bob Curry Fellowship, Arlieta co-starred as Sadie on Showtime's *The CHI* and co-produces the comedy show *My Best Friend is Black*. After caring for her father with Alzheimer's, she used their story in her debut documentary, *Finding Your Laughter*. The film was one of ten selected for The New York Gotham Documentary Feature Lab.



Shannon Harris, HAC Cohort Artist

Shannon is an international DJ, musician, composer, anthropologist, ethnomusicologist, and Audio Pharmacologist. He explores diverse genres and traditions in the Healing Arts through roles as a Qi Gong instructor, humanitarian, and pro-activist. With a BS in Computer Science and Music as Wellness certificate from Berklee College of Music, Shannon bridges unconventional futurism and indigenous traditions using sound energy. His career spans six continents integrating art, music, science, and research across cultural and spiritual traditions.



DeShawna Hill-Burns, Malcolm X College

DeShawna Hill-Burns, a proud Chicagoan and advocate for community upliftment, earned her BS in Health Information Administration from Chicago State University, becoming the first in her family to receive a degree. Awarded Part-Time Lecturer of the Year in 2006, she has served in leadership roles across multiple hospitals and is now the Senior Program Director for Health Information Technology at Malcolm X College. An alumna of the Leadership Initiative, DeShawna aims to inspire success and resilience in African Americans.



Susan Imus LCPC, Columbia College

Susan D. Imus, LCPC, BC-DMT, GL-CMA, is a Professor at Columbia College Chicago, co-coordinating the Arts in Health minor. She led the Creative Arts Therapy department for 19 years and co-founded six programs. A trained dancer and actress, Susan now facilitates Arts in Health initiatives at Rush University Medical College and Rush Generations Center. She co-leads a National Endowment for the Arts-funded study on Dance for Health for older adults and is an international consultant and educator across Asia and Europe.



Emily Hooper Lansana

Emily Hooper Lansana is a storyteller, arts administrator, and educator with over thirty years of experience. She has performed at the National Storytelling Festival and various museums and colleges, often with Performance Duo: In the Spirit. Emily mentors youth with the Rebirth Poetry Ensemble and has received a 3Arts award, an OX-Bow Inspirator award, and a Community Service award from the Gwendolyn Brooks Center. As Senior Director of Community Arts at the Logan Center for the Arts, she continues to honor untold stories, particularly from the African diaspora.



Nile Lansana, HAC Cohort Artist

Nile Lansana is an acclaimed interdisciplinary artist from the South Side of Chicago. His work is centered around revealing radical truths and amplifying marginalized voices and narratives through a lens of Black imagination and visionary intention. He's just trying to be even better than he was the last time!



Mekeba Malik

Mekeba Malik began dance training at 12. He has studied Ballet, Modern, Contemporary, Jazz, Tap, Hip Hop, African, and Flamenco with prominent instructors such as Kayla Harley, Debbie Allen, and Alonzo King's LINES Ballet. His training includes Kiara Dance Arts Studio, Debbie Allen Dance Academy, The Joffrey Ballet, Dance Theatre of Harlem, and Deeply Rooted Dance Theatre. Mekeba is a 300-hour Certified Yoga Teacher and Personal Fitness Trainer. He is currently a company member with Deeply Rooted Dance Theater.



Meida McNeal PhD, DCASE

Meida Teresa McNeal is the Deputy Commissioner of Cultural Grants and Resources with the Chicago Department of Cultural Affairs & Special Events. She received her PhD in Performance Studies (Northwestern) and her MFA in Choreography & Dance History (Ohio State). She is also Artistic and Managing Director of Honey Pot Performance. Media has received awards from Illinois Arts Council, Field Foundation, 3Arts, Chicago Dancemakers Forum Lab Artist, and Links' Hall.



Melissa Raman Molitor ATR-BC, SAIC

Melissa is an Associate Professor at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago and founding director of Evanston ASPA, a nonprofit supporting Asian American communities through the arts. She was awarded the 2021-2022 Curatorial Fellowship at the Evanston Art Center and serves as Chair of Evanston City Arts Council. Melissa is involved with the Evanston Public Library Racial Equity Task Force and Evanston's Participatory Budgeting Process. She holds degrees in Psychology, Art Therapy, and is a registered art therapist and licensed counselor. Her multidisciplinary art practice explores identity, community care, and social change.



Lisa Moore PhD, University of Chicago

Lisa L. Moore, LICSW, PhD, is a senior lecturer and Director of the A.M. Program in Social Work at the University of Chicago. With over 25 years in social work, she collaborates on the Intergenerational Dialogue Project with SAIC and UIC. Her research examines Black women's labor and intersections of race, psychoanalytic theory, and autoethnography. Moore's psychotherapy practice focuses on adult survivors of childhood abuse and domestic violence.



Dr. Sekile M. Nzinga

Sekile M. Nzinga (she/her) is an intersectional feminist leader with expertise in academia, government, and non-profits. She is the inaugural Vice President for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago and was the first Chief Equity Officer for Illinois, establishing the Office of Equity under Governor JB Pritzker. Dr. Nzinga is an interdisciplinary scholar, educator, and activist focused on mental health, wellbeing, and reproductive justice in Black and underserved communities. She founded the Feminist in Residence program, authored "Lean Semesters," and edited "Laboring Positions."



OutPastMidnight

Jay Post & Jimmi Gordon are southside Chicago natives who play off experimental themes within their music. They've cut their teeth rocking various venues such as Gman tavern and the Metro and performing for organizations like Social Works and John Walt Foundation. Amassing 3,500+ listeners on Spotify and featured on HBO Max's SouthSide, OPM is on a mission to reinvigorate concert culture & make it more accessible to black & brown youth in the hoods of America.



Shalom Parker LPC, HAC Cohort Artist

Shalom is first and foremost a person. One who loves people and loves making art, specifically ceramics. She is also an abolitionist and invested in her community. One of the ways that she has used those passions is through becoming an art therapist and LPC at Chicago Torture Justice Center and working with people who have been tortured by the police.



Mecca Perry, HAC Cohort Artist

Mecca Perry is a Certified Sound Meditation Facilitator, Founder of Elevated Mediation Studio, Wellness Podcaster, and Wellness Event Professional. She weaves her background in event production/culinary arts with modern and ancient wellness practices, all in the service of others. Mecca's mission is to create bespoke sacred experiences that transform her clients' experience of themselves and the world. Mecca has completed over 300 hours of Sound and Meditation Training in Washington, DC; Chicago, IL; Tempe, AZ and Auroville, India.



Francisco Rodriguez PsyD, CDPH

Dr. Rodriguez is the director of the Greater Lawn clinic located in the southwest side of the city of Chicago close to Midway airport. Dr. Rodriguez has been with CDPH for over two decades. First as a clinical therapist and now as part of the leadership team in the mental health bureau. Dr. Rodriguez obtained his master's in counseling psychology and his doctorate in clinical psychology from the Adler School of Professional Psychology. Dr. Rodriguez was born in Mexico and immigrated to the States at age 17.



Andre Royo

Andre Royo is renowned for his role as Bubbles in HBO's The Wire. Recently, he starred as Royal in To Leslie, which premiered at SXSW 2022. He appears as Laz Zayas in Amazon's With Love and has notable roles in Empire, Hand of God, and Happyish. His film credits include Hunter Gatherer (SXSW Best Actor 2016), Red Tails, Super, Beautiful Boy, and The Spectacular Now. From March to April 2023, he performed in Eric Bogosian's one-man play Drinking in America at Audible's Minetta Lane Theatre, exploring themes of toxic masculinity and male fragility.



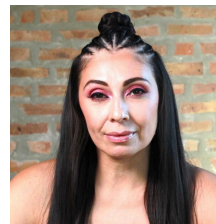
Farah Salem LCPC

Farah is a Kuwaiti-Iraqi interdisciplinary artist and art therapist based in Chicago. Her work bridges studio and therapeutic practices, exploring connections between geological time, somatic movement, gendered trauma, and healing rituals from the Arabian Peninsula. She examines access, agency, and the socio-cultural distortions of reality, focusing on grief, acceptance, and ancestral healing. Farah holds an MA in Art Therapy and Counseling from SAIC, is a Licensed Clinical Professional Counselor, and is pursuing ATR certification. Her art has been featured internationally at venues including the Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago and Expo Chicago Art Fair.



Veronica Sek, Sinai Chicago

Veronica Sek is a public health professional with extensive experience in leading multidisciplinary teams for workforce program development. She was the Senior Director of the Community Health Worker (CHW) program at Malcolm X College and now serves as the Business Services Manager at the Sinai Urban Health Institute. Veronica launched Illinois' first DOL-registered CHW apprenticeship program, developed a nationally recognized contact tracer training, and secured over \$4 million in grants. A bilingual Polish-American, she is committed to socio-economic stability and integrates her love of arts and health into her work.



Lady Sol, HAC Cohort Artist

Leyda "Lady Sol" Garcia is a proud XICANA and Chicago native who is globally recognized as a teaching artist, creative director, and street dance practitioner. She is a Co-Founder of Kuumba Lynx, Chicago's first all woman led Hip-Hip arts organization and a proud 3Arts Chicago Award winner. Lady Sol is a self-proclaimed "Professor of Practice" who has taught street dance workshops at Columbia College, Harvard U, Stanford U, and U of C.



Clyde Valentin, Arts for Everybody

Clyde Valentin is a multidisciplinary artist, educator and cultural producer. With a passion for exploring the intersections of art, technology and social justice, Valentin has created numerous exhibitions and programs that challenge traditional boundaries. As the former Executive Director of the Hip-Hop Theater Festival, Valentin has been instrumental in fostering community engagement and promoting diverse voices in the art world. With a commitment to empowering marginalized communities, Valentin's work continues to inspire and provoke meaningful conversations.



Sarah Ward ATR, LPC

Sarah Ward, with over 30 years in art therapy, established the first art therapy program at Cook County Juvenile Court after earning her master's degree from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago in 1998. In 2001, she founded SkyART, which now serves over 3,000 youth annually through therapeutic art programs. A registered art therapist (ATR) and LPC, Sarah recently transitioned from CEO of SkyART to focus on her private practice and work with Greenlight Family Services. She also trains others in using art for healing and connection.



Alisha Warren LCSW, CDPH

Alisha Warren, LCSW, is the Assistant Commissioner of Mental Health with CDPH, overseeing Clinical Mental Health services and the CARE team. With over 15 years of experience as a practicing social worker, she creates sustainable, holistic programs that promote physical health, mental wellness, joy, and community, valuing collaboration for optimal wellness.



Kaoru Watanabe, National Cambodian Heritage Museum

Kaoru Watanabe is the Associate Director of the National Cambodian Heritage Museum and Killing Fields Memorial, and Cambodian Association of Illinois. She is a nurse by training, who brings holistic and ecological approaches to work with community. Throughout her professional career, she has worked with and facilitated dialogues among people and communities that bring different lived experiences and perspectives. She was born and raised in Tokyo and worked in Cairo before moving to Chicago. She has a BS in nursing from St. Luke's College (Japan) and an MS in nursing science from the University of Illinois at Chicago.



Dr. Gloria West PhD, Malcolm X College

Dr. Gloria West, born and raised in Chicago's Robert Taylor Homes, has over 30 years of experience working with marginalized groups in social services and education. Her expertise spans subsidized programs, nonprofit management, policy, and advocacy. Gloria is the Interim Director of the Community Health Worker program at Malcolm X College and has co-authored research published in the Global Journal of Community Psychology Practice. She holds a Ph.D. in Community Psychology, an MS in Nonprofit Management, and a BA from Chicago State University.



Pascale Ife Williams PhD, Healing Arts Chicago

Pascale Ife Williams, PhD is a cultural organizer, educator, disruptor, healing justice practitioner, and community scholar. Ife is a Chicago native with over 15 years of experience in justice-driven arts and community-engaged work that explores and engages racial, gender, and wellness equity. She invites communities to co-design their realities through radical imagination, strategic visioning, and creative healing practices.



Windy City Ramblers

The Chicago Windy City Ramblers INC. is a Non-Profit Brass Band Organization that is dedicated to the cultural development of the Youth of Chicago through the Brass Band and Second Line Culture. The Windy City Ramblers Brass Band builds from the musical legacy and festive spirit of the New Orleans brass band and second line culture while embracing the rich creative history of Chicago music culture and musicianship.



Ytasha Womack

Ytasha L. Womack is a renowned author, filmmaker, and scholar specializing in Afrofuturism. Her book *Afrofuturism: The World of Black Sci Fi & Fantasy Culture* (2013) is a leading work in the field, and her film *A Love Letter to the Ancestors From Chicago* (2017) has been featured globally and won Best Experimental Film at the Collected Voices Festival. Womack also develops Afrofuturist films and leads youth dance programs. She frequently lectures on Afrofuturism and innovation worldwide.



avery r. young

Chicago's Inaugural Poet Laureate, avery r. young, is an interdisciplinary artist and award-winning teaching artist. As co-director of The Floating Museum, his work includes programming for the Chicago Architecture Biennial - Cab5, *This is a Rehearsal* [2023]. Theaster Gates praised his book *neckbone: visual verses* as the work of "one of our greatest living street poets." His album *tubman.* is described as "brilliant" by Black Grooves. Young's poems and essays appear in various anthologies, and his performance, visual text, and sound design have been featured at major institutions including The Hip Hop Theatre Festival, The Art Institute of Chicago, The Museum of Contemporary Art, and American Jazz Museum.