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First Stage's Annual **ImpACT Event Highlights Community Impact and Commitment**

Milwaukee, WI – October 19, 2021 – First Stage, one of the nation's leading theaters for young people and families, held its 9th Annual ImpACT Event on **Thursday, September 30, 2021**, at the Milwaukee Youth Arts Center. The event is held annually to introduce new supporters to First Stage and showcase its impact in the community. This year's event also reflected the organization's deepened commitment to Equity, Diversity, Inclusion and Justice strategies.

The event included presentations from Artistic Director **Jeff Frank** and Programming Director **Julia Magnasco**, a riveting spoken word piece written and performed by **Samantha D. Montgomery**, First Stage's Director of Community Engagement and Artistic Inclusion, a preview of STEP KIDS, part of Amplify – First Stage's BIPOC Short Play Series, with young performers **Tateiona Watson** and **Gavin Miller** and Director of Artistic Operations **Jeff Schaezke**, and some final thoughts and reflections from **Laura Orr**, Vice President of Governance on First Stage's Board of Directors.

This year's keynote speaker was popular Milwaukee dancer/choreographer **Christopher Gilbert** who shared stories on how he found his own light and how First Stage was part of that journey. He is a First Stage Theater Academy teaching artist as well as the director and choreographer for STEP KIDS, the second offering in First Stage's fall Amplify – BIPOC Short Play Series. STEP KIDS is now streaming on the First Stage YouTube channel at:
youtube.com/watch?v=E9R_Es4t4Z0

Other event highlights included remarks from **Julia Magnasco**, First Stage Director of Programming. She shared: "This past year in schools was unlike any other, with administrators, teachers, parents and students all navigating uncharted waters. Our **Theater in Education Department** wanted to support our schools in the best way possible and stay connected to our classrooms, so we recorded more than 20 arts-integrated workshops for teachers to access on-

demand, when it worked best for them and their curriculum. We had over 30 schools and 15 after school providers partner with us virtually this past season and utilize our virtual library of workshops.”

She also added, “Since the summer of 2020, First Stage returned to in-person classes in our **Theater Academy** . . . and this past summer was no different. By adhering to strict health and safety guidelines – including wearing masks, limiting class sizes, following social distancing practices, ongoing sanitizing of our classroom spaces and asking our students and staff to perform daily wellness checks – we were able to facilitate nine successful weeks of in-person Summer Theater Academy classes, with over 780 enrollments, including 10 students in our Next Steps classes for young people on the autism spectrum.”

In reflecting on the past year filled with its many challenges and opportunities, **Jeff Frank** commented: “I trust that you can see and feel a deepened commitment [from First Stage] to reflect our community on stage – and that is not the only place that this commitment is deepening. We’ve long believed that young people and their families connect more deeply to the material when they see themselves on stage – that is why we have young people on stage alongside our adult professional actors – it is also why we must look even more deeply at representation throughout each facet of our programming and our staffing.” In First Stage’s commitment to Equity, Diversity, Justice and Inclusion (EDJI) work, he asked the question: “What kind of future do we want to co-author with our community and our young people?”

To view highlights from the 2021 ImpACT event, the link can be found here: [youtube.com/watch?v=hbR5xeuDwas](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hbR5xeuDwas)

To view the Annual Impact Report video, please go to: [youtube.com/watch?v=dshvIQII0aE](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dshvIQII0aE)

To view the Annual Impact Report pdf, please go to: <https://www.firststage.org/about-us/annual-impact-report/>

GET INVOLVED

For more information on donating to First Stage and ways to donate, please visit: [firststage.org/support-us/](https://www.firststage.org/support-us/) or contact First Stage Development Director **Nancy Clarkin** at nclarkin@firststage.org or **(414) 267-2938**.

To learn more about First Stage’s 2021/22 season, please visit www.firststage.org or call **(414) 267-2961**.

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About First Stage

First Stage is one of the nation's leading theaters for young people and families. First Stage touches hearts, engages minds and transforms lives by creating extraordinary theater experiences through professional theater productions that inspire, enlighten and entertain. Its Theater Academy, the nation's largest high-impact theater training program for young people, fosters life skills through stage skills and serves nearly 2,000 students each year. As Wisconsin's leader in arts-integrated education in schools, First Stage's dynamic Theater in Education programs promote literacy, character building and experiential learning throughout the curriculum, serving over 20,000 students each year. First Stage was selected to participate in the Partners in Education program of the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts (2012), and was the recipient of the *Milwaukee Business Journal's* Eureka Award, recognizing creativity and innovation in business, education and the arts for its Next Steps program for students on the autism spectrum (2013, 2015). First Stage is a member of TYA/USA, the American Alliance for Theatre and Education, the Wisconsin Alliance for Arts Education, Milwaukee Arts Partners and is a cornerstone member of the United Performing Arts Fund (UPAF). www.firststage.org.