**Mission and History**

*“Art doesn’t have to be perfect, meaning is more valuable.” An Open Studio Participant*

The mission of the Open Studio Project is to serve the community by teaching and disseminating a creative process that allows individuals of all ages, abilities and backgrounds to experience art as a vehicle for personal growth. The organization, located in Evanston, Illinois, serves the Chicago metropolitan area. OS is committed to the concept that art can transform lives through self-discovery and enrich communities by promoting positive social change.

OS was launched in 1991 from the vision of three artists/art therapists who sought to channel their passion into community service. Adults and children, who otherwise might not experience how painting or drawing can release untapped internal potential, were a target audience. The founders believed that creativity can provide the strength, stability, and solace to overcome significant social and emotional challenges. They developed a therapeutic program combining visual arts and writing to support their mission.

**Pursuit of Excellence**

From its start as an innovative newcomer, the organization has embraced a strong service orientation. The continuing goal is to eliminate social and economic barriers to making art and provide a safe space to express emotions. Classes, workshops, and exhibits include participants who reflect the diversity of the city of Evanston. OS has also expanded its outreach through collaborations with educational, healthcare, and social welfare agencies.

The OS process is a creative journey combining writing and reflection with painting, drawing, collage and other mediums. Self-expression takes precedence over technique, and the art that is produced is not evaluated. Although students experience creativity without the distraction of anticipated judgement, they are encouraged to analyze how their art impacts or expresses their own emotional landscape. Facilitators work as colleagues alongside the class, providing a model for creative exploration. Classes follow a format which is foundational to all workshops and activities:

* **Stating an Intention.** Students document how they feel in the moment. An intention can be one sentence or a description of an issue or a challenge. The goal is to set the stage for creativity.
* **Making Art.** Techniques in a variety of mediums, appropriate for the group, are introduced. Tempura paints, pastels, and even found objects, are among the materials available.
* **Witnessing.** Artists use their work as a springboard to reflection. Whether it’s writing a poem or a description of the workshop experience, participants are encouraged to be spontaneous.
* **Summarizing.** Artists show their work. They have the option to share their writing or keep it private. The absence of comments promotes a sense of safety, respect, and community.

Activities are designed to include the broadest spectrum of the community. Sixty percent of classes are offered at a reduced fee on a sliding scale. No one is turned away for lack of ability to pay.

**Programs for Adults and Children**

**Art and Renewal: A Workshop for Helping Professionals and Educators** supports individuals in emotionally demanding professions such as mental health workers, first-responders and social service professionals. The workshop demonstrates how an ongoing creative practice can relieve stress, create emotional balance and renew empathy. Participants discover the OS process as a resource for their patients, clients, and colleagues. Continuing education credits are provided by the CG Jung Center, which is a co-sponsor.

**Connecting with the Creative Process** explores creativity over 10 weeks of 2 hour classes. An **extended** class is available for participants who complete the initial series and want a deeper experience. **A one-time workshop** allows students to test the water before making a longer commitment.

**Art and Adventure** encourageschildren of all ages to create art in a playful environment. Experimentation, fun, and spontaneity are encouraged. A variety of 2-D and 3-D materials are provided. This class is offered to coincide with District 65 Early Release Days, as a family class, and as a parent-child class for 2-5 year-olds.

**Summer Art Camp** isa half-day of art for children ages 6-12. Each session is unique and may feature a theme such as *at the beach, under the ocean, in the grass or with the animals*.

**Facilitator Training** teaches professionals to use the OS process in their practice for personal growth and social change. This is an intensive week-long training with follow-up supervision. Facilitator certification will be available for those who complete the course in 2018.

**Gallery 901** presents exhibits that celebrate creativity and increase awareness of pressing social issues. The work of local artists, as well as students and facilitators, is displayed. Exhibits attract both art lovers and people who typically might not visit a gallery.

**Community Engagement Programs**

**Art and Action** is a partnership with several organizations serving at-risk youth. After school workshops introduce teens and children to the OS process and to a creative gateway toward healthier decision making and greater emotional balance. For 16 years OS has collaborated with Youth Opportunity United to advance that organization’s mission to position vulnerable young people for post-secondary success. Students at Chute Middle School, Nichols Middle School, King Arts Middle School, Dawes Elementary School and Y.O.U.’s summer program participate. In FY 2017, Art and Action served 132 children in Evanston and Skokie. Fifty-six percent of participants were from low-income families.

**Art and Wellness** provides adult clients of social service agencies an opportunity to discover the OS process. Workshops can be a much-needed refuge from the stress of economic or emotional challenges.

**Art and Envisioning** applies the benefits of the OS process to business. Workshops focus on leadership development, creative problem-solving and organizational planning.

**New Fiscal 2017 Programming**

* In fiscal 2017, OS served 2,000 youth and adults from Evanston, the North Shore, and Chicago.
* Progress was made on developing a social and emotional learning (SEL) curriculum for special needs K-12 students. Special education includes children who have severe learning difficulties such as communication disorders or being on the autism spectrum, physical disabilities or behavioral problems. A pilot study, conducted at King Arts and Lincoln Schools, was completed in January 2018. The evidence-based curriculum will be offered to classrooms in Evanston School District 65 and beyond. OS is the first visual arts organization to provide the state-aligned art process to special needs children while fulfilling SEL and visual arts standards. The curriculum is designed to support emotional management, goal setting, relationship building and decision-making. Evanston has over 1,500 diagnosed special needs children in the school system per Katie Smith, Assistant Director of Evanston Citizens for Appropriate Special Education.
* A pilot project was established with Curt’s Café South, an Evanston non-profit that teaches life-work skills to young women and girls. The Cafe’s clients have experienced extreme disruption in their young lives. Many are sole providers for their families. Some live in shelters, others are teen mothers or have been victims of abuse and violence. They are focused on the daily struggle of surviving with limited family and economic support. An OS workshop is a rare opportunity for reflection and self-exploration. Kari Butler, Social Worker for Curt's Cafe South says, "Our young women long for time to just be quiet and be with themselves. Their lives are chaotic. They always ask, 'When is artmaking?'"
* For the first time, a full 7 weeks of Art and Adventure Summer Camp was offered.
* Six new facilitators graduated in May 2017. The training program’s format was revised as a one-week intensive. This new schedule promises to reduce costs and maintain program quality without impacting revenue.

**Organizational Capacity**

OS is staffed by an executive director who oversees operations, finances and fundraising. A business manager is responsible for administrative activities. The organization’s co-founder continues to offer her consultation and guidance. Seven facilitators lead the classes and workshops. Twenty-nine friends of OS give their time and effort as volunteers or interns. A 12-person board provides governance and oversight. The board meets five times per year to evaluate the organization’s performance, review plans for the coming months and develop long-term strategy. The board includes committees dedicated to finance, nominating, and special events. An advisory board contributes additional expertise and experience.

OS evaluates its youth workshops and activities using a system that was developed through the Envisioning Outcomes Program of the Evanston Community Foundation. Desired outcomes in content and process have been identified, and goals are set for each area. At the conclusion of a series, facilitators assess the group’s progress against benchmarks. One significant measure is the percentage of artwork that mirrors life experience.

In January 2017, the executive director retired and a new executive director was hired. This leadership change was an opportunity to assess the organization’s status and develop a strategic plan. Spectrum Non-Profit Services was hired to analyze operations and provide guidance for the future. The resulting study explored how OS could improve financial sustainability while increasing mission impact. Recommendations were made for staffing, board development, financial management, and program administration. Strategic priorities, which are being implemented, include:

* Building new community partnerships to leverage financial and program resources.
* Focusing the board on governance, strategy, and fundraising.
* Creating a program committee to reduce the amount of staff support needed for workshops and allow the executive director and staff to devote more time to fundraising and board development.
* Upgrading technology including the website and registration software.

OS is housed in a store front which includes a cheerful, paint splattered studio, a business office, and a gallery. This space is used resourcefully and meets the organization’s needs.

**Community Involvement**

The 74,500 residents of Evanston are both economically and racially diverse. Almost 18 percent of the population was born outside the United States. Per the US Census Bureau, in 2012-2016 approximately 14 percent of the population was designated as “in poverty.” Evanston is home to arts, philanthropic, social service and educational institutions. An internet search for social service organizations yields a list of over 100 agencies. Evanston Community Consolidated School District includes 7,655 students in grades PK-8. In 2017-18, 3,567 students were enrolled in Evanston Township Highschool. They represented 73 countries. There were 402 special needs students and 41 percent of students were designated as low income.

OS currently collaborates with 10 Evanston non-profits. Populations served are at-risk women, teens, and children. During FY 2017, 161 individuals participated in outreach programs. The demographics represented were: 50% African American, 20% Caucasian, 7% Asian, and 20% Latino. The fee-based workshops for children, adults, and social service professionals include:83% Caucasian, 6% African American, 7% Asian, and 3% Latino. Twenty-five percent of adults receive a full or partial need-based scholarship. The organization constantly seeks to expand its reach and anticipates realizing that goal, in part, through the social and emotional learning curriculum development initiative.

OS networks with constituents and promotes its programs via the major social media platforms and in person during gallery events and Artopia, its signature fundraising activity.

**Serving Illinois Artists**

Gallery 901 exists to promote local artists and highlight cultural events such as black history month. The gallery provides reasonable rental rates for artists to exhibit and sell their work. Seven Illinois artists are employed as OS facilitators on a contractual basis. They have the opportunity to show their work in the gallery.

**Evidence of Community Support**

OS enjoys support from local residents, businesses and philanthropic organizations. Volunteers donate their time to the organization’s programming and special events. In fiscal 2017, every board member was a donor. Contributions were received from 14 corporations, organizations or foundations; 313 individuals, and 40 in-kind donors. In-kind gifts off-set the cost of art materials and special events. Contributors include: The Art Works Fund for Organizational Development, City of Evanston Community Development Block Grant, New Trier Township, Evanston Arts Council, Foundation 65, First Bank and Trust, Youth Opportunity United, Blick Art Materials, James B. Moran Center for Youth Advocacy, Illinois Arts Council, and the Efroymson Family Fund.