

2nd Story

REAL STORIES BY REAL PEOPLE FOR REAL CHANGE.

2nd
Story



WWW.2NDSTORY.COM

“Running through the stories is this endearing and enduring sense of humanity, unshaded by a commercial angle or necessity, just civil, thoughtful, and always memorable.”

AUDIENCE MEMBER



When someone asks our Managing Director, “What do you do?” she says:

"I work for an arts organization that believes that true, personal stories can change the world. For instance, a few years ago I was sitting at a 2nd Story show with folks that were new to the organization. We had just heard a story from one of our company members, Jenan Mohajir, a Muslim-woman who was wearing hijab. Her story ends with her bonding with her young son over their shared love of Metallica. As she was leaving the stage, the gentleman I was sitting with turned to me and said, 'The stories you tell at 2nd Story force me to realize the prejudices that I carry.' By sharing stories that center the human experience, we see ripples of change at the private, personal level as well as at the public, community level."

This is our best elevator pitch—it captures exactly who we are as artists and what we hope our art will achieve.

🔊 [Listen to Jenan's story here.](#)

At the heart of every healthy community is a thriving arts scene. At 2nd Story, we believe that stories are essential tools for creative expression, for healing, for economic mobility and professional development, for education, for public safety, for community building, and for the future of humanity.

We invite you to be a part of our community and join us in this work.



**WE USE TRUE, WELL-CRAFTED STORIES AS TOOLS
FOR OPENING HEARTS AND MINDS.**

STORIES ARE THE THING.

Founded in 1999, 2nd Story exists to fulfill its vision of living in a world driven by empathy. We believe that sharing our true stories with each other binds us to one another. Our mission is to create spaces where people can share and deeply listen to one another's stories.

Our work is anchored by our core values of Craft, Courage, and Inclusion. Our deeply held belief that personal stories can build a bolder and kinder world is seen in every show we produce, every class we teach, and every workshop we facilitate.

Here is a timeline of some of our proudest moments.

2016

Moved to a new home in Albany Park, a storefront located at the corner of Lawrence and Sacramento.

2021

Began our Pro Bono Partnerships Program with a collaboration with the Illinois Prison Project.

Worked with the entire teaching and administrative staff at Kennedy High School for the 21/22 school year.

Voted Best Virtual Storytelling Series in the *Chicago Reader*.

2023

Received two Creative School Fund grants to provide in-school residency programs to Roosevelt High School and Von Steuben Metro High School.

Began working with Maitri River Producers on a film featuring true stories from kidney donors.

1999

Organization founded as Serendipity Theatre Company.

2004

Produced the first annual 2nd Story Festival, which featured 13 tellers telling 17 stories over the course of 8 evenings.

2007

After a serious heart-to-heart, the organization stopped producing plays, focused entirely on storytelling, and started doing business as 2nd Story.

2008

Published the first 2nd Story Podcast.

2011

Began offering classes and workshops to the public.

2012

Published an anthology, Briefly Knocked Unconscious by a Low-Flying Duck, and did a book tour to Brooklyn, Minneapolis, Ann Arbor, St. Louis, and Los Angeles.

2020

Launched The Leap to 15, a multi-year campaign to increase all artist stipends to a minimum of \$15/hr.

In partnership with The Kedzie Center, started Claiming Our Space, an after-school program for DACA and undocumented students.

2022

Expanded advocacy and organizing work by partnering with Cannabis Equity Illinois Coalition and Illinois Action for Children.

2nd Story was proudly certified by the Pay Equity Standards.

Published our 200th podcast.





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I've been so touched and amazed by the sheer amount of care y'all put into everything from the audition process to the curation process. I don't think I've ever felt so seen, supported, and respected in an artistic space, and I come away from this with so much respect for the organization y'all have built and the people that are part of it.

2ND STORY STORYTELLER

We know that sharing and listening to true stories is a powerful tool for change. Annually, 2nd Story produces 30+ events (both public and private) and works with 100+ individual artists to craft and share true, first-person stories. In addition to our performances, we produce a bi-monthly podcast that reaches 25,000 listeners annually, create free study guides to accompany that podcast, and have published an anthology of stories.

EACH SEASON, WE SPEND NEARLY 2,000 HOURS CRAFTING STORIES.

Individuals who are selected to tell a story with 2nd Story are grouped with 2-3 other storytellers (the group they will perform with) and a curator (who shepherds the writing process, like a dramaturg shepherding the playwriting process). They spend 3- 4 months working with this small group. At story development meetings, each teller gets a chance to read through the draft of their story, talk through their ideas, and gather insights and questions from the other tellers and the curator, before working on their next draft.

2nd Story's process is artist-centered, with the group working together to support each other in writing (and then performing) their best work. This is one of the ways that we put our value of Craft into practice - as artists, we are continually engaged in the process, listening for new directions to explore or opportunities for detail, as well as different ways we might make a story come alive and connect with a listener. The "outside eye" is a critical component of our process.



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The Rising Tide Project provided Congo Square with purposeful space to review and assess how pay equity aligns with how we manage, grow, and preserve our fiscal assets while staying true to our creative goals and mission.

ERICKA RATCLIFF

Artistic Director, Congo Square Theatre

2nd Story is committed to centering arts worker care as a fundamental part of how we do business. A component of that work is making sure that every artist is paid equitably (both at 2nd Story and across our sector).

In January 2022, we launched The Rising Tide Project, an 18-month initiative to create a framework for achieving pay equity, investigate new models of care, and imagine what it means for arts workers to thrive (as opposed to just survive).

As part of this project, 2nd Story established a cohort model to support leaders as they imagine and implement the radical changes needed to take steps towards pay equity within their organization. In its first year, we worked with A Red Orchid Theatre, Congo Square Theatre Company, and Teatro Vista.

[Read more about The Rising Tide Project here.](#)



OUR CORE BELIEFS AROUND ARTS WORKER CARE:

- Our budget is a statement of our values, and our budget says, in explicit terms, that we value artists.
- Artists are workers, and workers deserve to be compensated fairly for their labor.
- The myth of the suffering artist is damaging. Suffering, despair, and poverty does not create better art, artists, or human beings.
- Equitable compensation is an essential component of any inclusion work.

[View our Pay Equity Policy here.](#)

EDUCATION PROGRAMMING

We believe that the best way to support a school is to support the school at all levels. From empathy training for staff and teachers, to storytelling programs for students of all ages, to story circles for parents and guardians, our education programming has expanded to meet the needs of our school community.



WE USE TRUE, WELL-CRAFTED STORIES TO BUILD COMMUNITY AND INSPIRE CONNECTION.



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One of my main goals as a classroom teacher is to foster empathy, and I want my students to think about each other's words and actions in relation to one another's contexts and life experiences. There is no better way to do this than through storytelling with 2nd Story.

ELIZABETH FERRELL

Roosevelt High School Freshman English Teacher

Each school year at Roosevelt High School, we facilitate a multi-week residency program for Freshman English classes as part of their Human Rights Unit, working with nearly the entire freshman class. Students work towards crafting and sharing their own personal stories and connecting them to one of the 30 rights designated by the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights.

THE STORY BEHIND THE STORY

During our first residency with Roosevelt High School, 2nd Story company member and teller Aimy Tien shared a story about centering joy and honoring her truest self. In the story, Aimy comes out to her mom. Following the class, a student approached Aimy and asked if she could hug her. The student then shared with Aimy that she was gay and that this was the first time she had said the words, "I'm gay," out loud. True stories make moments like these possible.

🔊 [Listen to Aimy's story here.](#)



WORKPLACE PROGRAMMING - CULTUREBUILDS

CultureBuilds is 2nd Story's story-centered approach to team building, skill building, and Justice, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion training for businesses of all sizes and types. We have worked with universities, nonprofits, national foundations, global corporations, and law firms to support their goals in business, marketing, leadership development, and company culture.



**BLACK
IS
BEAUTIFUL**

**WE USE TRUE, WELL-CRAFTED STORIES TO SHARE
EXPERIENCES AND UNDERSTANDING.**



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It was essential for me to bring this opportunity for strengthening communication among our team members to our Community Wellness and Workforce Development departments.

BREANNA HOLLIE


VP of Youth & Community Development at Lawrence Hall


From after-school programs for their residential students, to professional development for their vice presidents, to community-wide events on trauma and resiliency, we have been a trusted partner of Lawrence Hall since 2018. Our ongoing commitment to Lawrence Hall and its Albany Park and South Shore communities is rooted in skill building, story development, and community building.

THE STORY BEHIND THE STORY

We anchored one partnership with Lawrence Hall with a true story by teller Christine Thoren. Her story kicked off a day-long symposium called "Providing Hope & Healing: LGBTQ+ Youth and Initiating Change within Systems."

 [Listen to Christine's story here.](#)

 [See how we have used Christine's story in other CultureBuilds workshops.](#)

 [Download the free study guide that was inspired by Christine's story.](#)





**WE USE TRUE, WELL-CRAFTED STORIES TO
ADVOCATE AND ORGANIZE.**

100%

of participants felt affirmed, validated, heard, and supported by staff and peers.

100%

of participants felt they had opportunities to safely share their experiences and stories.

100%

of participants felt that they successfully crafted their own story/narrative.

100%

of participants would recommend this program to their peers.

80%

of participants felt they learned storytelling skills that they can apply to future opportunities.

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"I'm feeling more comfortable with my story. For a long time I felt like I lived something that always had to stay hidden."

PROGRAM PARTICIPANT

Through Claiming Our Space: Stories of Hope & Courage, The Kedzie Center and 2nd Story have confirmed our belief that our work is stronger together.

Designed to respond to the increased stress and isolation reported by immigrant students due to ongoing uncertainty and changes in immigration policy, Claiming Our Space, launched in 2022, offers a space for healing, community, and storytelling for DACA (Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals) and undocumented students in the Chicago area.

The art of storytelling plus the healing nature of therapy, done in community with each other, has an amplifying effect for both the individual and the group. Over the course of multiple weeks, students learn how to tell and shape their own personal stories in an empowering and healing way. They also build strategies for coping with their immigration status through social support, storytelling and writing, and other forms of expression.

Program Objectives:

- Enhance the participant's ability to express their feelings and create and tell their own story.
- Increase their confidence, sense of belonging/connectedness, and perceived social support.
- Increase their access to additional supports and resources.

CANNABIS EQUITY IL COALITION

This three-part workshop series provided coalition members with an opportunity to craft their stories for important advocacy around the burgeoning cannabis industry. Centered in community, the organization wished to lift the voices of those who use cannabis for physical and mental health reasons, dispel myths around the industry, and ensure that the community is fairly represented with local, state, and national legislatures.

"I really loved how invested our team was, which came from the dedication and inclusion from the coordinators. You all made this possible."

ILLINOIS ACTION FOR CHILDREN

CultureBuilds facilitators led a multi-week workshop series for parents and child-care givers to source and craft their stories for their participation in Illinois' Advocacy Day. Advocacy Day is presented for state legislatures to listen to the needs of constituents, and the issues that affect their roles as caretakers of children. Through this process, workshop members were able to hone message of their story, and practice how to present the stories with a live audience.

"I did not know how to approach writing or storytelling for advocacy purposes as an individual—a real, live human. I appreciated the examples of what helps make a story memorable."

ILLINOIS PRISON PROJECT

For the last two years, CultureBuilds by 2nd Story has worked with the Illinois Prison Project to prepare their ambassadors to use their stories for advocacy and change. The ambassadors are all formerly incarcerated and use their stories to address community leaders, legislators, media, and others to give a fuller picture of the challenges and needs experienced by those who are formerly incarcerated.

"It was wonderful! Exactly what our team needed to get over the final part of our program."

"Just so thankful for your time, expertise, patience, and commitment to making this work. It really means the world to see another organization pour into us what we normally pour into the community."

PETER CONTOS

Deputy Director, Cannabis Equity IL Coalition



