



CREATIVE GALLERIES. CONFIDENT KIDS. CONNECTED COMMUNITIES.

“Every child begins the world again.”

— *Henry David Thoreau*

When a child makes something with their hands or spills words across a page, they’re really building something straight from their hearts. We, as adults, might provide them the mic, the paintbrush, or the pencil and paper to get them started, but it’s of the utmost importance that we listen as well.

The Children’s Gallery Chicago isn’t just an idea. It’s a promise.

A promise to the young creative minds of today that they are heard, seen, and that their experiences matter now, and not just for tomorrow’s sake. With each brushstroke and rhymed word, they become active agents of change, cultivating a world that is more tender, more thoughtful, and more accepting than ever before.

Our Mission

The Children's Gallery Chicago (TCGC) aims to become a space that cultivates creativity, confidence, and connection by providing vibrant art programs that support Chicago youth in telling their stories through visual art and writing.

Vision

Founded in 2025, TCGC emerged from a simple belief: every child deserves access to inspiring, high-quality arts experiences. In a time when many families are seeking safe, joyful, and meaningful ways for their kids to grow, we step in with programs that center creativity, mentorship, and public celebration. Our goal is to create a space where young people can thrive, not just as artists, but as the brilliant thinkers and storytellers they already are.

Why Now

In 2025, as arts and after-school programs vanish from public schools in underserved Chicago neighborhoods, kids are left searching for safe, creative shelter. We also have Chicago Public Schools **cutting out-of-school-time funding by roughly a third**, from pre-COVID levels, dropping from around **\$45 million to \$31 million**. This has impacted access to mentoring, sports, and the arts in communities most in need of such activities. **Meanwhile, Chicago Arts Partnerships in Education (CAPE) had to close *nine* after-school sites, affecting about 1,200 students, due to a \$1.38 million funding gap.** Arts organizations across the city have felt the squeeze as well. **Between 2019 and 2022, average budgets in Chicago’s arts sector dropped 8% in dollar terms but shrank a staggering 20% when adjusted for inflation.**

That means that *right now*, youth, especially in historically disinvested neighborhoods, are left voiceless and creativity-starved at a time when they need empowerment most. The Children’s Gallery Chicago steps in with joy, mentorship, and unapologetic creativity. We believe kids deserve more than survival—they deserve beauty, belonging, and bold expression.

Founder

Patty Aikonedo, founder and Executive Director of The Children’s Gallery Chicago, is a practicing artist, big dreamer, and arts educator with over a decade of experience. She holds an MA in Museums & Galleries Education, MBA in Management & Finance, and has conducted PhD research from University College London. She’s building the creative spaces she wishes she’d had more of as a kid:

one where young people are trusted with real tools, real platforms, and the power to shape the world around them. She aims to build spaces where children's stories aren't just heard...they're framed, spotlighted, and celebrated.

At-a-Glance

- **Founded:** 2025
- **Headquarters:** Chicago, IL
- **Founder & ED:** Patty Aikonedo
- **Mission:** To cultivate creativity, confidence, and connection through arts programs for Chicago youth.
- **Key Programs:** After-school art & writing workshops, youth-led exhibitions, mentorship & storytelling sessions
- **Website:** www.thechildrensgallerychicago.org

Quote from Founder/Executive Director

“When kids make art, they’re not just creating—they’re claiming space in the world. Our job is to make sure they know it belongs to them.” — Patty Aikonedo, Founder & Executive Director

Programs Overview

If you already have some of your pilot or first-phase programs outlined, include a 1–2 sentence description of each with title. For example:

- **Little Luminaries:** After-school art workshops for kids ages 6–11
- **Storytellers in Bloom:** Writing and zine-making for teens
- **The Children’s Gallery Live!** Pop-up exhibits curated by and for youth

Press Contact

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