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OUR MISSION

At Casita Maria Center for Arts & Education we empower youth and their families by creating a culture of learning through high quality social, cultural, and education opportunities.

AND VISION

We envision being a vital contributor to the South Bronx renaissance, fostering culturally and artistically vibrant neighborhoods that effectively prepare the next generation for success.
From our humble beginnings in a five-room apartment in 1934 to our current state-of-the-art facility, Casita Maria has stayed true to its mission and values. Our hopes and dreams for the youth we serve have not changed nor diminished over the last 80 years.

Each day, we open doors of opportunity for our youth to walk through, via our educational and creative arts programming. We continually strive to do more, and do better for the thousands of young people and families we serve and support annually.

 Everything we do is driven by our commitment to provide outstanding arts, social, and educational programming. We instill a culture of learning in everyone who comes through our doors, sees a performance, or enjoys our community events.

On behalf of our dedicated staff and the youth and families we serve, I thank you for your support of Casita Maria. Your belief in our work makes it possible for us to continue to prepare a diverse population of youth to become successful adults.

I am proud of what Casita Maria accomplished in 2017, and I’m excited about the future of our organization. The success of our scholars is a result of your investment in our work. Their success is our collective success.

This annual report gives us a chance to look back and to thank our partners, including our individual donors, our many community collaborators, the philanthropic foundation and corporate community, and the government agencies we work with. The list gets longer and longer each year, and for that we say thank you! We hope you enjoy reading this report as much as we enjoy doing the work.

With gratitude,

HAYDEE MORALES
Executive Director
A MESSAGE FROM OUR CHAIR

I am honored to share the Casita Maria Annual Report with you and all our valued partners.

It was an inspiring year for everyone involved with Casita Maria, and I'm proud to say that in 2017, our programs served more than 1000 promising young members of the Bronx, East Harlem and Harlem communities. Our outstanding staff, volunteers, and partners continue to work tirelessly to inspire our scholars and enrich their lives with a love of the arts; we are so proud of all that we've accomplished together, and we cannot wait to see the creative works of this generation and generations to come.

We must always remember that to instill a long-term love of learning and the arts, we need to continue our work with children, day in and day out.

Looking ahead to what's in store in 2018 and beyond, Casita Maria will continue to advance our mission and work to build a brighter, more creative, and culturally rich future for our children and all future residents of the South Bronx and East Harlem.

I invite you to learn more about our programs, our impact, the youth, families and communities we serve. We also invite you to visit Casita Maria or to attend one of our public events throughout the year.

It is truly a privilege to chair this great organization. Thank you for your continued support.

JACQUELINE WELD DRAKE
Chair, Board of Directors
For more than 80 years, Casita Maria Center for Arts and Education has served as a cultural and community anchor for thousands of young people and their families in the Hunts Point section of the South Bronx. We have earned our reputation as the first and oldest Latino charity in New York City. We work with community leaders to highlight the vivid culture and contributions of frequently overlooked artists and performers living right in our own backyard.

Casita Maria’s art and education programs build on our neighborhood’s rich cultural legacy, showcasing contemporary artists while educating youth about the power and value of their artistic heritage. Casita produces exhibitions and performances that showcase the community’s unique artistic traditions. As educators, we weave cultural and artistic expression into our after-school and summer programs. Our programs inspire program participants to carry the torch forward -- to make their own contributions to our neighborhood's cultural tapestry.

Casita Maria continues to be driven by the core belief that in order to address poverty and ensure systemic, lasting change, we must build community and invest in our youth. Our programming helps create a sense of place and purpose for both our youth and the broader community. We strive to make learning interesting and meaningful, and we hope to help the entire community express its aspirations and construct a compelling vision for its future.
When participating in our programs, participants are encouraged to formulate fresh perspectives of themselves and their surroundings, moving past the deeply ingrained mindset that “nothing good comes out of the Bronx”. We encourage our scholars to see the South Bronx as the diverse artistic center that it is - the place that influenced the musical greatness of Tito Puente (a Casita Maria alumnus!). The place that was vital to the development of cultural movements such as Hip-Hop. The place that a multitude of world-renowned artists call home.

**We continue to cultivate this rich, inspiring legacy that empowers young community members and encourages them to invest in their own potential.**

Since December 2015, Casita Maria has been led by Haydee Morales, a visionary leader with more than 30 years of experience in New York’s nonprofits and social services. Ms. Morales has extensive local, national and international experience leading programs and organizations focusing on health, youth education, and culture. Now, she is using her unique vision and understanding of the Bronx to build Casita Maria’s artistic programs into an engine for economic development. She is using her skills and leadership to foster the community pride and empowerment that makes progress possible.
IMPACT

IN 2017 WE SERVED 1000+ PROGRAM PARTICIPANTS

WE PROVIDED 2,205 hours ART EDUCATION

1,656 hours MUSIC EDUCATION
2,140 hours LITERACY AND ACADEMICS
1,206 hours THEATER & DANCE
12 performances BRONX LATIN JAZZ

SUMMER CAMP
280 hours for grades K-5
200 hours for grades 6-8

20,739 COMMUNITY PARTICIPANTS IN OUR CREATIVE ARTS PROGRAMMING
Casita Maria’s artistic programs bridge the rich cultural history of the South Bronx with the neighborhood’s dynamic presence. Exhibitions, performances, and educational initiatives promote a rich narrative of the neighborhood’s cultural life.

Casita Maria prides itself on advertising what we in the South Bronx already know: the people in our community are strong, resilient, creative, and ready for just about anything!

Casita Maria celebrates our neighborhood’s artistic legacy as a rallying point for community pride and cohesion. We provide a space for local artists to create shared cultural experiences that act as building blocks for a strong community – a community that can advocate for itself and work to build opportunity. Performances and exhibitions focus on issues that our community members, particularly our young people, face every day: immigrants’ rights, structural racism, and gender inequality.

We celebrate community traditions and culturally relevant art, and provide a forum for preserving cultural traditions that could easily be lost as neighborhoods changes.

Our programs improve the quality of life in the South Bronx—not only for the youth who attend our programs, but for their families and the neighborhood at large.

**WHY DO WE DO THIS?**

Because we care, and because we know the real difference it makes. Researchers at the University of Pennsylvania published a study linking cultural assets with wellness indicators, including health, personal security, and school performance. The study found that cultural assets have an ameliorating effect on wellness, which is even more pronounced in economically-disadvantaged communities.

“Casita Maria maintains the Spanish [Hispanic] culture but everybody is welcomed here and I like that very much. But most importantly, they also teach our kids values, about art, about music, about drawing...these activities keep kids away from trouble and teach them to know how much more they can do through art and music - they can speak out through painting, they can find a voice through writing poems, they can express themselves through art...when she is here I am at work and I know she’s in good hands”

—Parent of Casita Maria Program Participant
The educational opportunities we offer do not exist in a vacuum. Casita Maria’s programming targets the youngest members of our communities to ensure they reap the benefits from the arts and grow in personal strength.

This helps to offset the challenges they face every day. Our daily work with participants grows their leadership skills and socio-emotional development, and also integrates itself with their academic work and the challenges they face in school.

In the coming pages, you will get to see each of our programs through the eyes of the participants, parents, and staff who all work so hard to fulfill the dream of our Casita Maria founders: to enrich the lives of youth and adults with arts and education.
Casita Maria serves not just as a safe and nurturing after school program, but as opportunities to enrich children’s lives, improve overall wellness in disenfranchised communities, and provide the people in those communities with a sense of place and purpose. At Casita Maria, we deliver high-quality art instruction to more than 1,000 K-12 graders each year, providing them the opportunity to explore their own voices and refine their artistic talents. The self-confidence and self-knowledge developed in Casita Maria programs help program participants succeed personally and professionally.

From kindergartners through high schoolers, youth work with talented teaching artists to study music, visual art, dance, and theater. As part of Casita Maria’s Creative Youth Development framework, arts education is integrated with youth-development principles to spark young people’s creativity and build critical learning and life skills that carry into adulthood. Youth in the programs also receive support through tutoring, academic assistance, and counseling sessions.

Casita Maria operates after school enrichment programs five days per week, for three hours each day in addition to holiday break and summer camps. We work to instill a life-long love of all the arts, and help youth develop an appreciation for the role art plays in social justice and community development.
PROGRAMS

ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

In the early years of their attendance at Casita Maria, our scholars are offered music-appreciation classes. They are introduced to the basics of music, sight-reading, and theory, as well as the foundations of dance.

These lessons also focus heavily on literacy, helping students in the classroom and beyond. As the young musicians progress, they take percussion lessons, which teach them how to play an easily-accessible instrument. They study beats and drumming from around the world, which integrates geography and world history into the lessons.

In grades 3-5, the children can select from several focus areas—chorus, piano, violin or musical theater. After several months of practice in music, dance, theater, and choir, young artists put on a showcase for their families. In the elementary grades, we emphasize providing k-5th graders with the support they need to remain in school, such as daily homework help, STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts and Mathematics)-centered activities, and leadership. We strive to create an environment that reinforces the benefits of education while countering negative peer pressure.

“How they involve the kids in arts it’s so beautiful, it’s so meaningful for us and all the kids and the community. What we get in here is very special…I am a single mom and I would not be able to do this without the help of Casita and I know a lot of mothers here agree with me on that.”

—Parent of Casita Maria Participant

MIDDLE SCHOOL

Casita Maria’s middle school programs take place at our center and at Harlem Village Academy in East Harlem. We offer programs that best serve 6-8th graders in their academics and continuing art education. Program participants are encouraged to develop their story-telling skills through playwriting and have access to subjects such as Comic Book Art and Fashion Club. They are given the opportunity to move creatively through hip-hop dance lessons. Academics, playwriting, dance, music, fashion…we continually find ways for middle school students to express themselves in as many ways as possible.

We incorporate gender-based health programming into our offerings, along with Robotics, Capoeira, and Media Arts Production. And through all of this we aim to do what Casita Maria does best: help participants hone their leadership skills.

COLLEGE BOUND PROGRAM

For high school students, Casita Maria shifts its focus towards the college admissions process, providing scholars with opportunities such as university campus visits, mock college interviews, job shadowing, guest speakers, and workshops on writing essays and résumés.

The program leads college bound youth through an orientation of college financing, offering a complete picture of the financial resources necessary for college; it provides information about financial aid programs and helps youth and their parents/guardians complete the proper forms. Our annual college fair connects participants to college, exposing them to a host of colleges and universities.

College bound youth, many of whom will be the first in their families to attend college, receive step-by-step guidance through the process of college applications and admission, along with academic assistance and counseling. Casita College Bound helps high school students adjust to the academic and social demands of the higher grades, and prepares them for the transition to college. We are proud of all of the high school students in Casita College Bound, and look forward to making even more college dreams come true as the program continues to grow.
The value of art is transformational. I was not a good student...I was very average because I never applied myself to school in any way. And it wasn't until I got to high school, when I applied for an arts program that I started to care enough to apply myself. It was that program and those teachers and it was that art class and the acting and dancing that got me to begin thinking of even going to college. Thanks to art I started to associate school to something that I liked and could do. Thanks to art I got perspective. I felt like I woke up!"

—Casita Maria Staff Member

Every single day, we see leadership qualities in each of the children that walk through Casita Maria’s doors. That’s why we’ve created distinctive pathways to help them fulfill that potential.

The SmART Leaders Program uses artistic expression as a tool for social change and social justice. The self-selecting young women who participate are encouraged to re-examine the narratives that surround them – the narratives that depict their neighborhood as poverty-stricken and themselves as disenfranchised. Through artistic expression, our teaching artists and peer educators help young women develop their leadership skills and emerge as advocates for themselves and for their communities. As their self-image begins to change and they hone their leadership skills, they are encouraged to think about how they can build a more equitable world.

Committed participants will have the chance to apply their new leadership skills by organizing a community summit where they put what they have learned into practice by creating and facilitating their own workshops and activities.
SUMMER CAMP

Casita Maria’s programming doesn’t end when the school year does. For seven weeks during the summer, nearly 400 youth gather to continue their arts education, play sports, to go on field trips, participate in team building activities, and to foster a sense of community.

Each summer, the music education program picks a unique theme selected by staff and campers. In between field trips, campers learn dance, music, and percussion. They can practice their math skills or join a reading club. We also encourage campers to keep journals of their time with Casita Maria, allowing them to practice their writing skills, express their emotions, and grow in confidence. Campers stay engaged and active, keeping their minds and bodies strong during the summer months with uninterrupted learning and fun.

“While I was in summer camp, it was my first time with Casita this year. You know, my Mom is a single mother, so if they did not have Casita while the summer was going I do not know what would have happened. Because my mom is a hard worker...I do not know what I’d do or what my Mom would do if we did not have Casita Maria.”

—Casita Maria Camper, 4th Grade
CREATIVE ARTS PROGRAM

GALLERY

Casita Maria’s gallery provided an opportunity to bring more work by local artists to the youth and people in the community through public exhibitions. To increase ways to incorporate the gallery into the lives of the youth we serve, the gallery acts as the meeting place for program participants and their families to gather and appreciate the exhibits. It reminds them about the work that we do, it instills powerful messages and meaning, and it offers the possibility that one day, their own work could be featured in a gallery.

We work hard to foster a sense of inclusion for Casita Maria program participants — making them realize that they, too, are part of the artistic community. Our engagement activities bring professional artists and the Creative Arts Department staff into the gallery and community art studio to guide youth through the process of creating and curating exhibitions. They learn valuable skills such as working with artists, curation, writing, installation, marketing, and event planning.

We also incorporate education about the gallery exhibits into our studio art curricula. Young artists are taught proper art gallery etiquette, how to appreciate the art they see, and vocabulary so that they can describe the art they experience. They are also provided an opportunity to create their own artwork in response to the exhibitions.

In 2017, our exhibits included Edgardo Miranda Rodriguez’ “Arte de La Borinqueña,” which featured fine art prints designed by professional comic book artists starring La Borinqueña, the superheroine of a graphic novel. For “Las Tres Hermanas,” Somos Arte and Nancy Mercado collaborated on a coloring book so that our scholars could take it home, look at the pictures in depth, and learn about three community activists who made their home in the Bronx. The pages from the coloring book were enlarged and exhibited so that visitors could help color in the artwork collectively.

The other exhibits in our gallery each year include our proudest work: the amazing art that our scholars make in their after-school programming!
BLITZ

“There is no pretense about our community and it makes it enriching. And Casita Maria can be the epicenter of what the Bronx is famous for, a catalyst for making this happen and for putting the Bronx culture on the map.”

—Casita Staff Member

For many listeners, jazz music can be inaccessible and strange — hard to listen to, harder still to understand, and the idea of attending a jazz concert may seem foreign and daunting.

With that in mind, Casita Maria in partnership with Grammy-award winning musician Arturo O’Farrill founded BLITZ, a Bronx-based Latin Jazz ensemble. The goal of BLITZ is to have pop-up jazz concerts in unexpected places — bringing jazz to the people and making it more accessible. No tickets, no RSVPs, no advance notifications — just free concerts in public spaces for the members of the community.

In 2017, Casita Maria neighbors were treated to jazz concerts all over the South Bronx.

Performance locations included a tattoo parlor, an auto-repair shop, and a church courtyard. The size of the audiences ranged from five people to more than 1,000, all of them able to experience the joy of “guerilla jazz” performed by local artists in conjunction with BLITZ members. Jazz music combined with dance, circus arts, beat boxing, and even improvised tattooing to create truly unique performances for the community. Over the course of the concert series, more than 6,000 of Casita Maria’s neighbors had fun, positive experiences with jazz.
SOUTH BRONX CULTURE TRAIL

Casita Maria continues to enrich the cultural fabric of the Bronx by providing free public programming for the community, ranging from educational courses to marquee events like the South Bronx Culture Trail.

Through the South Bronx Culture Trail festival, community members are welcomed to visit Casita Maria and have the opportunity to experience the artwork on display there. But more than that, we have been bringing this festival to the people since 2011, through outreach efforts like murals, free public concerts, and public health and art integration.

In 2017, more than 8,000 people joined us for the South Bronx Culture Trail, which culminated in a mural unveiling and massive block party at Casita Maria.

Our 2017 theme, ‘Take the Green Train,’ was inspired by Duke Ellington’s ‘Take the ‘A’ Train.’ Our exhibits and events took place at various locations along the 4, 5, and 6 train lines that cross our community. Featuring everything from jazz musicians to community gardens, dance performances to “experimental Mariachi,” we thank the thousands who joined us to celebrate local artists and our community.

In 2017, our home got a fancy facelift courtesy of some of the artists who put on exhibitions in our gallery. Casita has three murals on the outside of our building painted by Tats Cru with imagery provided by Edgardo Miranda Rodriguez (the same artist behind Puerto Rican graphic novel, “La Boriqueña”). Beyond showcasing some of the incredible talent in our community, the murals also serve as a vivid reminder of our role as a beacon of creativity in the South Bronx.

“Casita connects to all the culture happening in the Bronx these days, you know the hip-hop, the paintings on their walls. Casita organizes shows here. We saw Ruben Diaz once.”

—Parent of Casita Maria Participant

When our scholars come through our doors every afternoon, they see the murals and remember that they, too, can create art. That they, too, can put forth beautiful pieces that will be appreciated and respected by their community. In the words of one nine-year-old Casita Maria participant,

“I feel proud of where I live because some places are just boring and boring looking. Here it’s big, with lots of people walking and you can explore and do stuff!”
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**FINANCIAL REPORT**

*Revenue and Expense Accounts*

**Revenue**
- 56% Government Grants
- 15% Contributions
- 15% Fundraising
- 1% Rental Income
- 8% Program Services Fees
- 4% In-Kind donations

**Expenses**
- 78% Program
- 11% Management and General
- 11% Fundraising
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Bronx, NY 10459

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(718) 589-2230

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