



IAMWENEWSLETTER

MARCH 2016

In 2015, the U.S. reached an historic 81% high school attainment rate. While other states are preparing emerging leaders for postsecondary education, Chicago's youth living in underserved communities are dropping out of high school at an alarming rate. According to a study conducted by the University of Chicago, students who have access to the arts and after school programming graduate at a much higher rate compared those who do not. Many underserved school districts in Chicago continue to lose state benefits each year, resulting in a lack of access to STEM programming and artistic outlets.

As a young, mission-driven, community minded organization, our programs have been 100% self-funded and run by volunteers. We are thankful for our volunteer "superheroes"

that have helped us provide this essential programming to at-risk youth in underserved communities around Chicago.

Our volunteers are a diverse group of skilled leaders who are passionate about using their expertise to empower youth and help Chicago communities to flourish. We understand that relying completely on the support of our volunteers for programming will not be sustainable going forward. We need help from the citizens of Chicago to build our financial capacity to meet one of Chicago's most urgent needs: increasing the high school graduation rate and preparing Chicago's youth for furthering their education. We believe this is achievable through arts programming, but we can't do it without the support of our communities.



Throughout the city, we meet like-minded citizens who share the same concerns about safety for our children and what the future may hold for adolescent youth who are not prepared academically or socially for the future.

Citizens need a space to voice their concerns and offer solutions; a space where they can come together and connect with like minds to build inspiration.

I Am We launched an initiative called: “**Imagine Chicago**,” where we plan to create a voice for community through community discussion opportunities and inspire citizens through artistic events.

Our first **Imagine Chicago Event** will take place on **Friday, April 15, from 6:00pm to 8:30pm** at Tommy Nevin’s Pub in Evanston, IL. The event will feature a jewelry making class with Associate Board member and local artist, [Meredith Kopelman](#). The cost is **\$30 online and \$35 at the door**. Join us for an evening of fun, community, and artistic expression and learn more about what **I Am We** has in store for 2016. [RSVP here](#).

Volunteer Spotlight

I Am We’s work and accomplishments would not be possible without our volunteers. All of our volunteers share a passion and humanitarian spirit for making Chicago stronger, more united and efficient. Most bring a wealth of experience and expertise to the work that they do. They are generous, smart, creative, and committed. To highlight these accomplishments, we present our volunteers with awards on a yearly and quarterly basis.

Quan Mai, M.S., Volunteer Superhero of the Quarter of 2016 (January 2016-March 2016).

Quan Mai is a Data Analysis and Statistician. She is a recent graduate from Northeastern University with a Master’s in Epidemiology and Biostatistics. Quan got involved with **I Am We** to find statistical reasoning for why adolescents of color are dropping out of high school at high rates in order to strategically develop effective solutions. Though she recently started new job, Quan continued to gather quality data from different websites to support the data analysis needed for our work. The data she gathered has helped to uncover a significant correlation: students who have access to resources and after-school programming including the arts graduated at a higher rate and are 3 times more likely to attend college compared to students that do not. Thank you, Quan for your commitment to **I Am We!**

Hilary Zankel, M.S.c, Volunteer Superhero of the Year (January 2015 - December 2015).

Hilary Zankel, an urban development analyst and a professional writer, joined **I Am We** in December 2015. Her role was to introduce us to potential funders who would be able to support our work. She spent countless hours searching databases and websites in order to gain referrals to identify which funders would be a good match for **I Am We**. Hilary’s work helped us to strategically develop a blended funding strategy to ensure we are able to move our mission forward. She has played a vital role in ensuring that **I Am We** programs are designed with measurable outcomes. Her work and contributions were invaluable to the mission and future of **I Am We**. Thank you, Hilary, for a year of exceptional service!





WORDS FROM OUR FOUNDER, LATISHA THOMAS

2015 was an exciting year for **I Am We**. We launched our Associate Board in January and it was the first year engaging with potential funders. We met exciting professionals throughout the city who chose to become our superheroes, a.k.a. volunteers. We provided programming to 30 youth in need. We developed several special partnerships and sponsors. In August 2015, we launched the 1 in 3 initiative highlighting that 1 in 3 youth of color will not complete high school. Upon reflection, 2015 was such an inspiring year because we achieved this as a self-funded organization.

We are excited about 2016 and what is to come. In our first quarter we welcomed two new leaders to our Associate Board, Aireale J. Rodgers and J.D. Van Slyke. We launched a new initiative called, Imagine Chicago, an exciting opportunity to share our mission throughout Chicago to help raise revenue for programming. Finally, we have the opportunity to provide arts programming to adolescent youth again this summer.

To learn more about **I Am We** and to find out how you can get involved, please [visit our website](#) or send us an email at info@iamwecommunity.org.

Sincerely,

Latisha Thomas, M.N.A.

