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FAME Center, a Nonprofit That Provides Music, Theater & Art Classes to Kids, Expands to New Location in South Loop Sept. 26

Organization provides full and partial scholarships to kids who want to take private lessons and classes

Sept. 19, 2022

CHICAGO — FAME Center, a nonprofit organization that offers a wide variety of music, theater, creative writing and art classes for kids in the South Loop, often at a free or reduced rate, is excited to announce that it is moving to a new, larger location Sept. 26.

FAME Center's new facility will be located at 1319 S. State St., inside Willow Creek Community Church's Chicago campus. However, although FAME is renting space inside the church, FAME is not a religious organization and is not affiliated with the church itself

FAME Center, which is an acronym for "Fortson Art and Music Education," was founded in 2018 by Sheila Fortson, a private music teacher who had been teaching students piano, violin and voice lessons in Chicago for more than 20 years.

From the beginning, FAME's mission has been to provide full and partial scholarships to allow everyone to be able to afford to study the arts, and over the past two years, it has provided more than \$100,000 in scholarships for free or reduced-cost lessons and classes. The organization also provides free instruments and instrument rental assistance to kids who need it.

"We believe that every student deserves to have access to the arts, no matter what their economic circumstances are," Fortson says. "We try hard to keep our classes affordable and accessible to as many people as possible."

Fortson said she got the idea to create FAME Center when she was attending graduate school at Columbia College Chicago and started thinking about what she wanted her life's mission to be. "My goal was to give kids access to the arts so they could dream about a future they never thought possible," Fortson said. "And FAME Center was born."

FAME opened its first location at Daystar Academy at 1550 S. State St., offering private music lessons in a variety of instruments. From there, the nonprofit added group music classes, art

classes, computer coding classes, creative writing classes, and theater classes to the mix. During the pandemic, FAME also began offering virtual classes, and in 2021, it began offering a full-day summer camp as well.

In addition to providing classes and lessons at their South Loop location, FAME Center has also worked with several schools to provide arts and music education and has partnered with other non-profit organizations to provide after-school arts classes.

“With so many schools under budget crunches these days, arts education is often one of the first things to get left by the wayside,” Fortson said. “But we believe giving kids a window into art and music is so important. Who knows who will become the next Wynton Marsalis, the next Amanda Gorman, or the next Alicia Keys? We want kids to be able to dream.”

For example, for the past few years, FAME has partnered with an organization called By the Hand to provide after-school classes for teens at their iCity location in Cabrini Green, teaching them drumming, guitar, painting and more.

This past year, FAME Center began offering drop-in community events as well that are either free or pay-what-you-can to try to fulfill its mission of providing arts education to everyone. Some of the community events being planned for this fall include a monthly story time for preschool-age children, an adult community choir, adult art classes, a parents' night out event and more.

FAME Center currently serves more than 400 students a year through its programming at its South Loop location and through its partnerships with schools and community organizations. And Fortson hopes that the move to the larger space will allow them to serve even more kids.

Its new, 2,500-square feet facility will include five programming spaces, several offices, a parent waiting room, and a community room where programs that are open to the public will be held.

For a detailed list of upcoming events, please visit <https://www.famecenter.org>.

About FAME Center

FAME Center provides equitable access to arts education so that the next generation has creative tools to uncover their potential and imagine their futures. FAME Center was established as a 501(c)(3) in 2018 to directly confront the lack of accessibility to music and fine arts education in under-resourced Chicago communities. We work tirelessly to fulfill our mission of fostering creativity by providing transformative education through creative engagement resulting in the growth of the human spirit through the arts.

For more information about FAME Center, visit www.famecenter.org.