



Mikva  
Challenge

# *Because Democracy Matters*

Annual Report 2017



*Mikva Challenge envisions a stronger, inclusive democracy that values youth voice.*



*Mikva Challenge develops youth to be empowered, informed and active citizens who will promote a just and equitable society.*



Dear Friends,

Last year we made a commitment to you - a commitment to double down on our efforts to ensure substantially more young people become part of our democratic fabric. We promised that we would help youth amplify their voice and provide them with the tools to fight against hateful rhetoric and discriminatory policies. We promised you that we would work with youth to build a healthier, more humane and civil democracy.

We got a lot done. Over 15,000 youth participated in Mikva Challenge programs. That's nearly 1,000 more than last year and the highest total in our history. We have strong, creative programs in Chicago, Washington D.C. and California. And because our democracy matters, we are planting roots in Milwaukee, Wisconsin and Rochester, New York.

We are training hundreds of teachers across the country. Over 470 teachers in 188 school districts and cities use our curriculum to make learning relevant and fun for students. They instill a sense of civic duty within students who become catalysts for change in their communities.

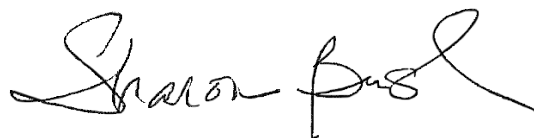
We continuously build partnerships with city officials to institutionalize youth voice in policy making. This year we launched a Youth Safety Advisory Council to provide youth input and recommendations to the Chicago Police Department.

Our alumni all over the country are involved in local elections, advocacy and neighborhood improvement initiatives. Last year 69% of Mikva Challenge alumni participated in community service versus just 36% of all youth nationally.

We are proud of these achievements and hope you are too. Please consider making a gift to Mikva Challenge. This is critical, urgent work that CANNOT be done without your help and support. We know you believe that our DEMOCRACY MATTERS.

Warmly,

**Sharon Bush**

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Sharon Bush". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Sharon" written in a larger, more prominent script than the last name "Bush".

*Board Chair*

CIVIC LEADERSHIP MATTERS

A portrait of a young man with dark hair and glasses, smiling. He is wearing a light grey long-sleeved shirt and a blue backpack with the word 'dreamfo' visible on the strap. He is standing outdoors in front of a stone wall and trees. In the foreground, there are yellow and orange flowers behind a black metal fence. The background shows a park-like setting with trees and a building.

*Emmanuel  
Batayola*

**W**hen Emmanuel arrived at Mikva Challenge in July 2015 to work as a Summer Fellow in Alderman John Arena's office, he brought with him a sharp sense of humor, an affinity for satire, and a healthy dose of cynicism – all characteristics that could have spelled trouble for him in an elected official's office. But instead of finding trouble, Emmanuel found a home in Alderman John Arena's 45th ward office among a staff that appreciated who he was and helped him learn to channel his quick wit and insights.

Today, he is a Junior at UIC studying Political Science and keeping his passion for politics alive by working for the Fritz Kaegi campaign for Cook County Assessor and serving as the Community Outreach Coordinator at the Evanston City Clerk's office.

**Tell us about your Mikva Challenge experience.**

I remember coming to the Mikva Challenge office for the interview thinking that this will be just like any other internship. A desk job to make some money over the summer break. I never thought it would fundamentally change how I thought about politics and politicians, or that I would discover myself through this experience.

The Summer Fellows program gave me a first-hand look into what government and politics were all about. Working for Alderman John Arena's campaign was the first time that I truly saw that a politician can make a difference in people's lives and that government itself is there

to help. He was really inspiring in the different ways he took the issues of his residents to City Council, and seeing that truly inspired me and gave me a new-found passion for politics and government.

**Describe yourself as a high school student.**

I was an extremely energetic person but was without a purpose. I was always trying to be everybody's friend and make everyone happy but in doing that I kind of forgot

“

**Being at Mikva Challenge gave me confidence in myself and pushed me to cross boundaries that I would have never dared to push.**

”

myself. Being part of Mikva challenged me in a lot of different ways. I was amongst a cohort of other young people who held different perspectives and they pushed me to challenge my views. That process of self-reflection helped me find my passion, which is helping people. My mom helps people in her own way. She's in the medical profession right now, and she was concerned when I was going to college because I wasn't studying medicine. But over time when she saw all that I was do-

ing to bring people's voices to the forefront, she was really proud of me.

**What programs were you involved with at Mikva Challenge?**

I was a Mikva Summer Fellow for two years. I also worked as a Student Election Judge through Mikva Challenge and came to every Campaign Thursday Mikva hosted to phone bank during the 2015 gubernatorial race. As a young alumnus, I got involved with Mikva's Youth Action Council that was responsible for giving out mini-grants to youth teams who wanted to do an Action Project in their school.

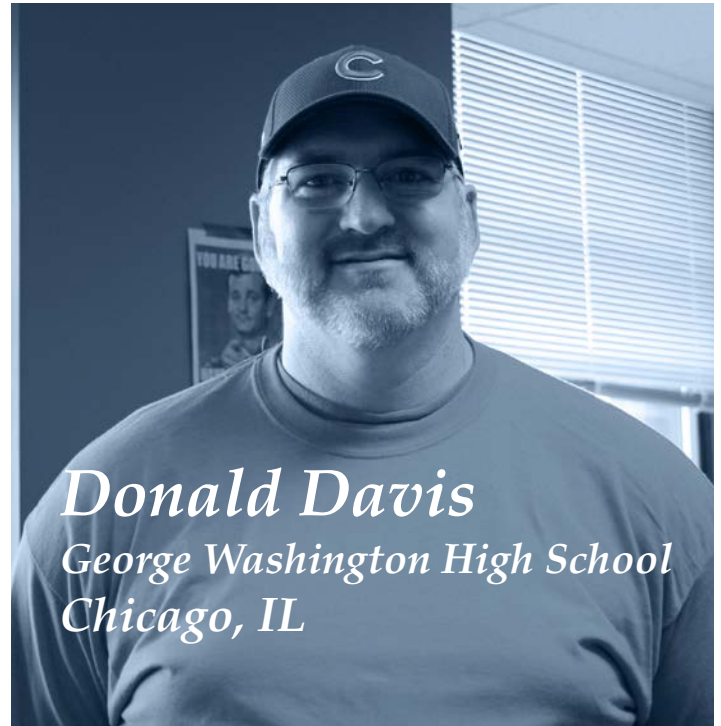
**What did you love most about being part of Mikva Challenge?**

I think it is the relationships I've created with people. As much as I say I was extroverted, I did not have a sense of purpose and I felt like I was missing something. But being at Mikva Challenge gave me confidence in myself and pushed me to cross boundaries that I would have never dared to push. I am extremely grateful to Mikva for that. This is a small thing, but everywhere I go, I incorporate youth voice in what I want to achieve. For instance, it was my push that led Evanston City Clerk Devon Reid to create a youth-led office. It showed me and the two younger interns we have there that it doesn't matter what age you are, you can still make a difference in politics, in government, and in the world. It is just a matter of having that foundation, and that foundation for me was Mikva Challenge.



*Sasha Guzman*

*Social Justice, Humanitas High School  
San Fernando, CA*



*Donald Davis*

*George Washington High School  
Chicago, IL*

Many of my students are immigrants and first generation Americans like me and in the past year they have felt marginalized, ignored, and fearful. Mikva Challenge has really helped me create a space where I can give them the tools to help them understand that a democracy includes them, that it includes their parents, and it includes them as citizens in a global sense.

I had a student, Sebastian, who was failing my AP Level History class but things completely turned around when he participated in Mikva Challenge's Project Soapbox speech competition. He is a high functioning autistic student and in his speech he talked about living in a gang infested community and how that exasperates his anxiety. He won the competition and Mikva Challenge gave him the opportunity to travel to Washington, DC with students from Chicago and DC over MLK Day in 2017. That experience transformed him! The experience of watching him standing outside the White House giving his speech was amazing. His legacy to me is to never underestimate what our students are capable of. We all need that reminding.

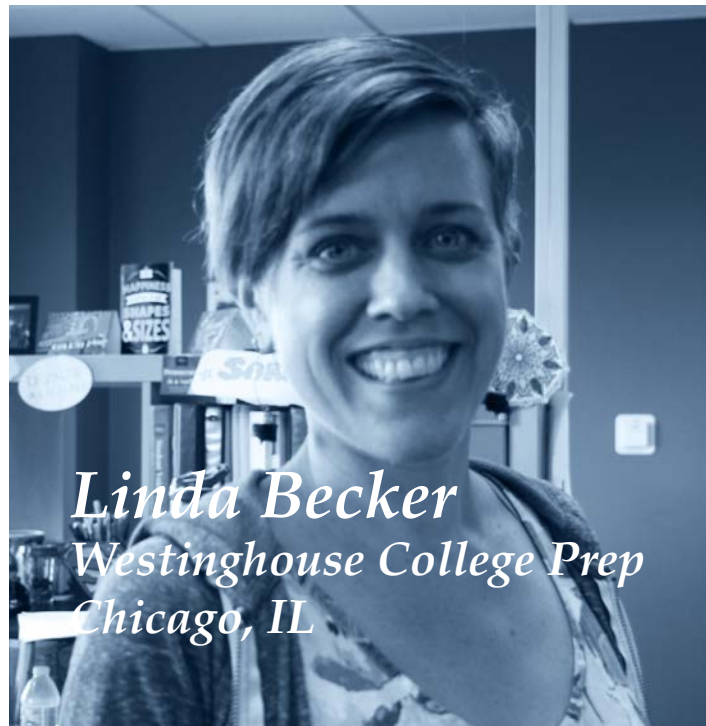
I teach in a neighborhood high school on the Southeast side of Chicago. My students don't often get opportunities to weigh in on an issue and be actively involved in politics. With Mikva's Elections in Action program, my students are now critical thinkers, they're able to weigh evidence and see both sides of an issue, especially with both political parties. They're also building their public speaking skills, gaining the confidence to talk to total strangers and in my view, those are essential life skills that we don't foster enough.

I've taught for 17 years but it was five years ago in 2012 that I started my journey with Mikva Challenge, and I've never regretted it! It changed my focus in the classroom. That was the first year I taught AP Government and that was also the year Chicago Teachers Union went on strike. Mikva Challenge provided opportunities for my students to come together and talk about elections and learn about the candidates while we were out on strike. It was awesome! They were learning the whole time.



*Karen Lee*

*Thurgood Marshall High School  
Washington, DC*



*Linda Becker*

*Westinghouse College Prep  
Chicago, IL*

**L**iving and working east of the river in Washington D.C, my experience is that young people are not invited to the table to share their perspective very often, and they have a very unique and powerful perspective! When you sit across from a young person (at least in my experience) and ask them a question, you get a very honest answer. And there's so much power in that place.

I think one thing that has been a super positive impact of working with Mikva Challenge DC is that there's now a few regular things that my students participate in every year. Through Project Soapbox, I've seen some young women find the voice and find the courage to talk about sexual violence. You can watch the transformation in these young women! They go from being ashamed of what has happened to them to feeling empowered by who they are. They feel pride in finding their voice in that public space and develop a call to action. They realize they are not alone, they are not the only one who has experienced it, and there are resources to help through the pain this trauma has caused them.

**P**eople that know me really well know that democracy is the thing that I maybe love the most. It means that everyone's voice matters, it means that we need a way to find common ground, it means that I'm responsible for myself and others, and that I have to solve problems. For young people it means their voice matters.

I met Mikva Challenge pretty early in my career and it has had a profound effect on how I've set up my classroom. My students are decision makers, they contribute new ideas, and they are facilitating and making choices about their learning and how they're displaying their learning. The class is framed around the idea that our democracy is sick, and that the point of the class is that they will be given the tools needed to fix it. And so at the end they showcase what part of democracy they will continue to work on as they go off to college.

# WHY ACTION CIVICS?

Our democracy is in trouble. Faith in government is at an all-time low and cynicism about politics is at an all-time high.

As reported in  
The New York Times  
**88 million**  
eligible adults don't vote  
at all, even in general  
elections.

**"Only 25 percent** of U.S. students reach the "proficient" standard on the National Assessment of Educational Progress Civics Assessment. White, wealthy students are four to six times as likely as Black and Hispanic students from low-income households to exceed that level. Here's why: Students in wealthier public school districts are far more likely to receive high-quality civics education than students in low-income and majority-minority schools." (National Education Association)

"A Civic Empowerment Gap exists in our country, impacting urban schools with low-income, diverse students who are provided fewer and lower-quality civic opportunities." (Dr. Meira Levinson, No Citizen Left Behind, 2012)

## Our Solution:

Strengthen our democracy by bringing Action Civics — an authentic and transformative learning process built on youth voice and youth expertise — to young people in underserved neighborhoods and communities of color.

We're building a movement to provide more young people the opportunity to participate in hands-on civics education

**15,000**  
youth leaders

*Mikva Challenge surveys young people before and after their experience, and we found that upon completion of their Mikva program:*

**81%** **vs.**  
can make a strong argument for a candidate they support  
**28%** before the program

**95%** **vs.**  
report understanding the process of how a candidate gets elected president  
**52%** before the program

**90%** **vs.**  
are now confident working with a group of peers to solve community issues  
**52%** before the program

**87%** **vs.**  
are now confident in their research skills through interviewing experts, surveying peers, and examining secondary sources  
**53%** before the program

**94%** **vs.**  
report improved ability to critically analyze and take steps to solve a school or community issue  
**57%** before the program



### Improving Youth-Police Relations

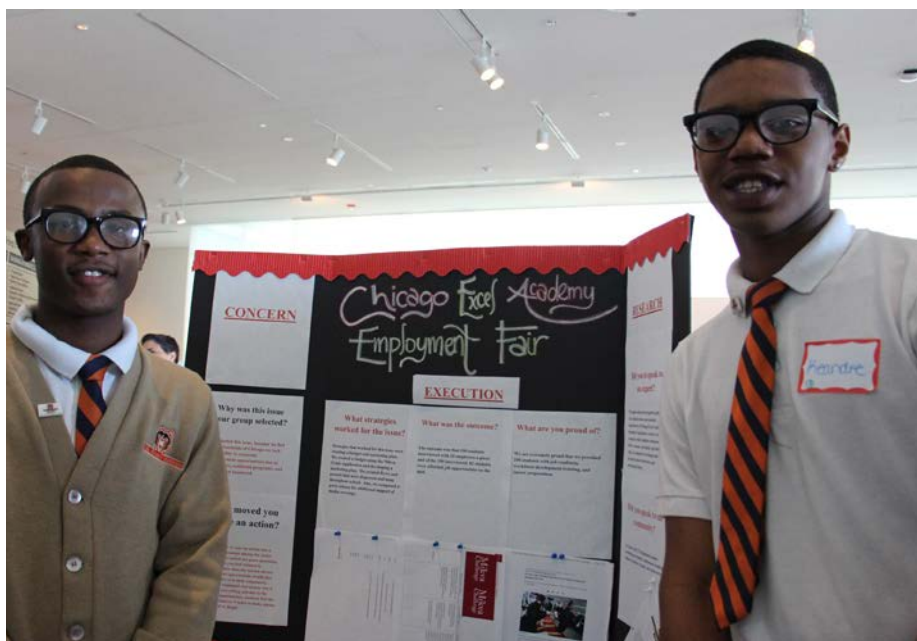
Over the course of this school year, students at Dunbar Senior High School conducted an action civics project to improve relations between students and the local police. They studied the root causes of mistrust between the police and local youth, and conducted surveys of their peers and teachers at the school about their experiences with the police.

**"The experience at the Action Civics Showcase made me feel appreciated and made me believe my work is powerful."**

- Youth participant from Curie High School

## Civics Showcase

Our Action Civics Showcase is the culminating event of our Issues to Action program that brings together hundreds of young people to showcase their year-long activism efforts. This year, over 3,000 young people from schools in Chicago, Southern California and Washington D.C. presented their advocacy and activism work to their peers and community leaders. These students may be too young to vote but they are not too young to become civic leaders and forces of change in their communities.



### Jobs for Youth, by Youth

Concerned about the issue of youth unemployment, students at the Chicago Excel Academy of Southwest surveyed their peers and found that an increase in employment opportunities led to lower crime rates. They then networked with local businesses and community leaders to host a job fair at the school and connect students with employment opportunities.



## Immigration Rights & Protection

Students at Hawkins High School formed a group called S.E.R.Á (Students Educate to Resist and Advocate) to address the fear of immigration raids many of the students were faced with. This group organized "Know Your Rights" assemblies and community block parties to advocate for immigrant rights. They rallied to ensure their city and school retain their sanctuary status, and conducted multiple workshops on what to do if one should encounter I.C.E. Immigration lawyers.



## Youth Voice in Participatory Budgeting Chicago

After surveying their peers to learn what issues they care about most, students at Sullivan High School worked with the 49th Ward office and the Participatory Budgeting Project to draft a budget and propose a mural that would reflect the ward's and school's diversity. They've presented their work to community members in hopes they will vote for it to be funded with the ward's discretionary dollars.

**"Today I felt very inspired. Inspired by the fact that there are teens who are concerned about issues that are going on in the community. I feel empowered that our youth will be our change and the future."**

- Youth leader at Mikva Challenge's Action Civics Showcase

# SPECIAL THANKS TO ALL OUR SUPPORTERS

*gifts received between July 1, 2016 & June 30, 2017*

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\*Indicates a multi-year  
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Mark Rosenberg  
Jacqueline Shiff  
Amy Singh  
Brian Whalen  
Dr. Lauren S. Young  
Zoe Mikva,  
*Life member,*  
*non-voting*

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Leelai Demoz  
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Laura Krafft  
Steve Krone  
Adele Lander Burke  
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Christian Lindke  
Eduardo Lopez  
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Clint Schaff  
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Beth Mitchell  
Candace Moore  
Burrell Poe  
Kianna Robinson  
Danielle Rudas  
Goodman  
Eric Smith  
Aaron Tucker  
Vanessa Wasserman  
Donna Yuen



(L-R) Supporter Phil Rhys with ACLA Board Members Ethan Falk and Laura Krafft and members of JPMorgan Chase The Fellowship Initiative in Los Angeles, CA



Mikva DC Board Member Richard Wolff and youth leaders at the 2017 Mikva DC Action Civics Showcase

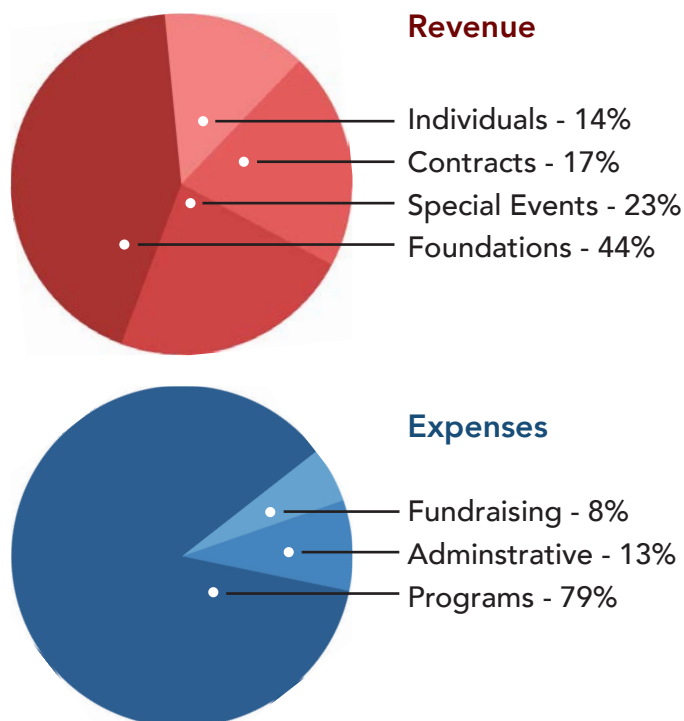


Chicago Board Members Jack Marco and Amy Singh attend the 2017 Youth Change Maker Awards & Benefit Dinner

# MIKVA CHALLENGE GRANT FOUNDATION

## FY17 Financial Narrative


Mikva Challenge is proud to report a strong financial position at the end of our FY17. We aligned our programming more strongly to mission with an eye to sustainability, while devoting 79% of our expenditures directly to Action Civics programs for youth, teachers, and schools. We ended FY17 with a significant budget surplus, driven by a multi-year capacity-building investment from the John D. & Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation that will enable us to build critical infrastructure in operations, resource development, program assessment, marketing, and curriculum offerings. This year we also met growing demand for our unique fee-for-service trainings across the country. We are excited about the Mikva model taking root in more communities and schools across the U.S. Thank you for your support of Mikva Challenge.



Years ended June 30,	2017			2016		
	Unrestricted	Temporarily Restricted	Total	Unrestricted	Temporarily Restricted	Total
<b>Revenue and support:</b>						
Foundation and corporate grants	\$ 470,800	\$ 1,484,441	\$ 1,955,241	\$ 276,000	\$ 940,295	\$ 1,216,295
Individual contributions	315,600	338,018	653,618	405,680	204,000	609,680
Special events:						
Gross proceeds	1,140,852		1,140,852	1,093,364		1,093,364
Expenses	(103,215)		(103,215)	(79,768)		(79,768)
Contract services revenue	782,242		782,242	438,961		438,961
Interest and dividends	28,648		28,648	28,394		28,394
Net realized and unrealized gain (loss) on investments	(37,730)		(37,730)	48,801		48,801
Other income	2,697		2,697	8,036		8,036
Net assets released from restrictions:						
Satisfaction of restrictions	1,191,442	(1,191,442)		906,256	(906,256)	
<b>Total revenue and support</b>	<b>3,791,336</b>	<b>631,017</b>	<b>4,422,353</b>	<b>3,125,724</b>	<b>238,039</b>	<b>3,363,763</b>
<b>Expenses:</b>						
Program services	2,713,803		2,713,803	2,619,243		2,619,243
Management and general	263,944		263,944	242,263		242,263
Fundraising	456,648		456,648	384,531		384,531
<b>Total expenses</b>	<b>3,434,395</b>		<b>3,434,395</b>	<b>3,246,037</b>		<b>3,246,037</b>
<b>Change in net assets</b>	<b>356,941</b>	<b>631,017</b>	<b>987,958</b>	<b>(120,313)</b>	<b>238,039</b>	<b>117,726</b>
<b>Net assets, beginning of year</b>	<b>1,698,582</b>	<b>569,278</b>	<b>2,267,860</b>	<b>1,818,895</b>	<b>331,239</b>	<b>2,150,134</b>
<b>Net assets, end of year</b>	<b>\$ 2,055,523</b>	<b>\$ 1,200,295</b>	<b>\$ 3,255,818</b>	<b>\$ 1,698,582</b>	<b>\$ 569,278</b>	<b>\$ 2,267,860</b>



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