STAYING CONNECTED

Longtime friend, donor, and past Board member, Rosanne Driscoll, sits down with RAW’s Development Manager, Alex Ashley

Rosanne has been a part of RAW’s history since the very beginning. When RAW first opened its doors in Central Square, back in 1994, Rosanne was out there spreading the word. A long-time teacher in the Lynn Public Schools, Rosanne has encouraged many of her students to get to RAW. “It has been incredible to see the changes in the kids who attended RAW. They came back to school so much more self-aware, grounded, owning their work and their choices. They came back leaders.”

Having grown up in Lynn with her Italian immigrant grandparents and her parents, she told me she understands what it’s like to not feel like you belong, or to feel different from those around you. “RAW is one of the safest, most accepting places I have ever stepped into. People like you just for being YOU! All kids need a place where they feel like they belong, and RAW is that place.”

Rosanne has seen RAW’s steady growth over the years. She sat on RAW’s Board when we broke down the adjacent brick wall to expand into our new “Gather” space, and thinks back to all the times she used to have to explain that RAW is “not just an art program.” She tears up thinking about Jason Cruz, and the rock he has been and continues to be for so many young people, but particularly the young men of Lynn. “He’s helping these young men talk about things. Things they don’t think they can talk about, like their feelings, and showing emotion. The guys that go through RAW and have worked with Jason are able to have honest conversations about tough topics. They can clearly articulate how they’re feeling, and know it’s OK to feel vulnerable. For many of them he is the main male role model in their lives.”

IN A TIME WHEN SO MANY KIDS ARE GLUED TO THEIR PHONES OR DEVICES, RAW IS MORE IMPORTANT THAN EVER. THE WORLD AROUND US MAY BE CHANGING, BUT KIDS’ NEEDS REMAIN THE SAME - THEY NEED TO FEEL SAFE, ACCEPTED AND CONNECTED. —ROSANNE

Rosanne sees so many kids losing touch with reality, getting sucked into what they see on their phones. They aren’t talking to each other anymore, face to face. “RAW is about the journey. The destination may be finally seeing their art on the walls of the gallery at the annual exhibit opening, but it’s really about the journey they take getting there. Engaging in dialogue, answering interesting and introspective questions about themselves and their art, learning to listen to each other -- these are the important skills they will take with them.”

Sitting there with Rosanne, I think about how many times I have heard people say, “I am so impressed by these kids! They look you in the eye, shake your hand, introduce themselves, and speak so thoughtfully and eloquently about their experiences here at RAW.” It’s clear this place is about so much more than art. Rosanne nods. “I was so fortunate to have the ability to give my kids a healthy, structured after-school life. I give to RAW because I know many kids don’t have that. In a lot of ways, RAW is family. It provides structure, healthy relationships with adults, and a safe place for kids to explore, identify, and develop new skills and interests. RAW provides direction and support. I’ve heard so many kids describe it as their second home. How could you not want to support a place like this?”

RAW is honored to have people like Rosanne take the "long walk with us." Whether you’ve known RAW for 25 years or you’ve just met us, we are grateful to all of you who support this work and our incredible kids. We SEE you, we HEAR you, and we THANK YOU.
This summer RAW’s Womxn Art Muralists group, WAMX, teamed up with a group of middle school students from KIPP Academy to conceptualize and create a mural at Williams Avenue Park in Lynn. The mural highlights the power of young peoples’ voices and their ability to bring about change in their communities.

In addition to the mural, the KIPP middle schoolers have been working with the city to get new playground equipment installed, and plant a community garden in the park.

The Williams Avenue Park project was initiated by Jenny, a middle schooler at KIPP who lives in the neighborhood. The WAMX team felt the importance of having her be an active partner in the mural’s conception. The muralists met Jenny and her mother at the park, prepared with questions to help drive the mural’s content both visually and thematically.

The mural is a portrait of Jenny, and it shows the new narrative Jenny and her peers are creating through their work in the community. The nest she is holding symbolizes the potential for new life, and the hope that the park renovations will help breathe this new life and opportunity into the surrounding neighborhood. The phoenix at the far end of the piece is rising, not from ashes, but from its nest. As it flies over the neighborhood it spreads a sense of possibility through the colorful wind it leaves in its wake. The muralists hope that the themes of rebirth, diversity and inclusion, and sanctuary and community inspire its viewers.

WAMX artist Heady reflected on the collaboration: “I learned how to step out of my comfort zone, how to talk to people, reach out and form new bonds that I didn’t know I was going to make. And to be bolder and more ambitious with what I do. I don’t have to be afraid to try something new and it’s okay to take some risks.”

WAMX group leader, Laura Smith, invited Colombian public art muralist, Lina Diosa, a co-founder of the international movement, “Girl’s to the Front” to RAW. She taught the WAMXers how to use aerosol spray paints in the mural, a totally new technique for the group. Additionally, local artist Alex Gurney came in to teach the team how to cut the large panels, created in RAW’s studios, in preparation for the installation at the park. The mural, which is fixed to a fence in the park, stands at 8 feet tall and 36 feet long- one of the largest murals WAMX has done.

There are plans for a celebration at the park in October, where community members will be invited to paint and draw on pieces of wood that will be added to the mural’s sun rays. Keep an eye out on our social media for updates.

BACKGROUND: In 2018 the Lynch Van Otterloo YMCA in Marblehead introduced “Operation FunD!” a competition among local middle schools, aimed at educating students about how philanthropy addresses community needs. Jenny and her KIPP Academy peers were awarded a $2,500 grant for their The Williams Avenue Park proposal by the Fund. Jenny shared that when she was five years old, she fell off a broken seesaw at this park. In recent years she noticed the park was in need of repair, and not a safe place for young people in her neighborhood. She proposed that the group find a way to breathe new life into the park, making it a place for everyone in the community to enjoy.

The WAMX program is supported in part by grants from the BSA Foundation, New England Biolabs, and Essex County Community Foundation Women’s Fund, and individual donors. The Williams Avenue Park mural was made possible by a gift from John and Susie Kane.
BRINGING ART TO LIFE

RAW’s first animation group, piloted last school year, is back in full swing. The group is a beautiful bridge between our studio arts programming and film school, where youth learn the art of bringing their drawings to life. “Animation has a lot of humor in it. It’s fun and funny, and it opens up new avenues of expression for the group of middle schoolers. It challenges our kids to create an image that captures space and time,” says Bruce Orr, who co-leads the group with Arturo Gonzalez Barrios.

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IT’S LIKE A MAGIC SHOW – THEY LEAVE GROUP WITH JUST A HUGE STACK OF THEIR DRAWINGS, AND COME BACK TO SEE IT AS A MOTION PIECE. –ARTURO

Arturo, who has been primarily working in film school, teamed up with Bruce this past year to create a curriculum that focused on the foundational concepts of animation. It was important to them that the kids understood how animation worked, and how to create it in analogue – with paper and pens.

“This group is about learning to trust the process,” Arturo notes. “We’re encouraging the kids to let go of perfection, and to keep drawing, because you never know how all the images will come together in the end. They learn patience, how to appreciate their work, and how to break down a huge project into more manageable steps.” Both Bruce and Arturo say the most rewarding part of this work is seeing the kids’ faces each week when they witness their images coming to life.

With every new art form, RAW’s kids are learning to look at themselves and the world in a different way. In animation, before you can speed up your images, you must slow down the simplest of movements. It forces the artists to look at each moment, knowing it matters and makes a difference.

A NOTE FROM RAW’S EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Marina, nine years old, came to her first group at RAW in September. As she sat in our RAD printshop, checking in with 11 other kids from five different schools, she felt a part of something bigger than herself. Junior, always busy in his sketchbook, has been curious about filmmaking. He just joined our new animation group, and brought his cousin Francisco along with him this year.

Dario, Karen, and 14 other teens stood with the mayor as Anti-Violence week was announced at a city hall press conference. They were surrounded by murals and sculptures that their group created. They realized the importance of their collective voice, and bringing their concerns and aspirations to the people of Lynn. That conference was 25 years ago, and those teens were our first to ever create art at RAW Space.

We call these moments “widening the circle.”

Now firmly into our second quarter-century in Lynn, and our 32nd year in existence, I welcome you to consider how YOU can widen RAW’s circle of community and support. Join us at our winter career night and share your journey through your professional life. Bring a friend who has never been to RAW to view the 150+ pieces of art in our gallery. Join our circle of monthly sustaining givers.

How can you inspire others to get involved, as we prepare to make ever-greater impact in the lives of our kids and the city of Lynn?

We LOVE that you are part of RAW’s community, and are so grateful that you continue to share RAW’s story.

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SAVING THE DATE
BASH: Party With A Purpose | Saturday, May 2nd, 2020

BECOME A MENTOR
Contact Project Launch Manager, Hebert Labbate, hebert@rawartworks.org for more information.

SUPPORT RAW 12 MONTHS A YEAR
Join our Sustainable Givers Circle and help ensure RAW’s kids are seen and heard with a recurring monthly gift. Contact Development Associate, Valerie Rafferty, valerie@rawartworks.org for more information.

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