

Arts Education Student Profile: Beck Lawrence, First Stage

You are making a difference in the lives of nearly 83,000 children who benefit from UPAF-funded arts education programming. Here is just one story of how your gift has made an impact.

Incredible things happen at the First Stage Academy, which is funded in part by the generosity of UPAF Notable Women. Guided by the motto, "teaching life skills through stage skills," the Academy is the nation's largest high-impact theater training program for young people.

One of the most remarkable programs within the First Stage Academy is Next Steps, a groundbreaking, award-winning offering of classes designed to help students with autism take their next steps as an artist and person. The program gives them the opportunity to learn social skills among their peers while participating in theatrical and musical activities. Under the guidance of meticulously-trained faculty members, program participants often make unprecedented developmental leaps.



Eleven-year-old Beck Lawrence, a 5th grader at Fairview Elementary, has blossomed in Next Steps. "First Stage is where you can be yourself and have fun. You can act, make movies, and do improv. All the classes are fun. They even have a class for kids with autism. That is where I started," says Beck.

Beck's mother, Kelly, shares, "We had been attending plays at First Stage since he was three. We knew there was an academy, but we also knew it wouldn't work for him. The timing of our learning about Next Steps was perfect because Beck was in 3rd grade, which is the starting age."

Kelly continues, "First Stage is one of the most positive influences for Beck. He is completely accepted and encouraged there. When he starts a new class, we joke about who the teacher will be to ease his anxiety. It is a joke because we have learned it doesn't matter. They are all awesome. They also have older kids intern and help with both Next Steps and other academy classes. This is great for Beck because it shows him the 'next steps' he can take with First Stage as he gets older."

The First Stage Beginning of Day Cheer has become part of Beck's building blocks for life, and Kelly has printed out the words to put on his desk at school. The cheer goes:

I can't is NOT in my vocabulary! I take risks! I conquer my fears! I am not afraid to lead!

"It helps him to remember not only the cheer, but also the people at First Stage who believe in and encourage him."

For more information, please [click here](#).

Watch this inspiring video of First Stage's Next Steps classes.



First Stage Next Steps