



UNITEDPERFORMINGARTSFUND

## Teaching Apprentices Share the Magic of Theater with a New Generation of Artists

**For the young adults working as Teaching Apprentices at First Stage's Theater Academy, acting and performing have given confidence, creativity and purpose to their lives. Now they work to share the gifts bestowed by theater with a new crop of young performers.**

Teaching life skills through stage skills, First Stage Theater Academy is the nation's largest high-impact theater training program for young people. It's a place where young people can trust others, see that it's OK to be themselves, and learn to overcome the fear of failure by taking risks in a completely supportive environment.

To celebrate Arts In Education Week (Sept. 11-16), we spoke with Joey Chelius, who worked as a Teaching Apprentice at the Theater Academy this summer. Joey has been hooked on theater since he first discovered it as a child, and is now pursuing a Bachelor of Fine Arts in Acting at UW-Stevens Point.



**Q: What brought you to First Stage?**

**A:** I attended First Stage as a kid and returned to First Stage this summer by chance. Last summer, I was hired to direct a children's production of *101 Dalmatians* for a local church. I told a friend, who happens to be the Assistant Headmaster at First Stage, about my amazing experience with the kids. When she saw how emotional I got talking about it, she said, "You have to apply for a First Stage Teaching Apprenticeship. You'll love it." That turned out to be the perfect advice.

**Q: What was it about teaching that made you want to do it again?**

**A:** Sometimes kids are afraid to be creative because they might be judged for going outside the box. If I can show kids that it's awesome to be passionate and creative and follow what you love regardless of what others think, why wouldn't I

do that?



Paul Ruffolo Photography. paulruffolo.com

**Q: What was this summer like for you?**

**A:** Every day at the Theater Academy was better than the previous one. I left every day feeling like I had learned more from the kids than they learned from me, so it was a really humbling summer. Every kid had an amazing breakthrough moment at one point or another.

**Q: What does arts education mean to you?**

**A:** It sounds overly dramatic to say that it saved my life, but it really did. I was picked on a lot as a kid and it was rough. I never would have gotten through it if I hadn't learned to manage my emotions through theater. I learned how to channel my emotions into something that I love instead of something negative. My music education and my theater education got me through the hardest parts of my life.



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**Q: What are your hopes for your students?**

**A:** We all have something to work towards in life, and that transcends the Theater Academy. The empathy that you learn from theater can take you a long way. If there's one thing I hope my students take away from me, it's that they use what they've learned to be a light for someone else.

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