



**Neutral Zone**  
**Annual Report**  
2015-2016

# What a Year it Was: Highlights from NZ's Executive Director

Dear Donors,

It just keeps getting better. Life at Neutral Zone is never dull.

Every time I walk through our space, teens are finding a safe place, building skills and making new discoveries about themselves, their talents and how to connect deeply to the world around them.

For nearly two decades now, we have been successful at running a great youth center and we've connected with thousands of teens. And I think we are better than ever at living out our mission as we provide teens opportunities for personal growth, artistic expression and community leadership.

But we also recognize that **not every teen who needs our programs makes it to our front door**. So we've worked hard to extend our reach, from partnerships with school-based programs to consulting work with youth-serving organizations across the state of Michigan.

I want to share a few things that stood out to me from this year.

We hosted **our first NEA artist-in residence**, Lavinia Hanachiuc who did sculpture and animation work with the teens. Our teens were able to build a relationship with a visiting artist to help them build their talents and work on a continuous project that was meaningful to them.

Our **youth-owned enterprises** continue to produce work. Neutral Zone's record label, Youth Owned Records, released King Ogundipe's album *Problem Child*, and Red Beard Press released two youth publications; a book of poems by Kyle Abraham, and *Pufferfish* which contains poems, short stories and artwork from teens. In addition, we have streams on Youtube of youth-created videos from our video production program.

NZ partnered with CTN, Ann Arbor District Library and Game Start to host "Your Game From the Ground Up" – a workshop on how to **build a video game in one day**, supported by Toyota and Calt Design Research.

We continued to build our partnership with Washtenaw Intermediate School District to support area high schools in hosting diversity councils to work on **inclusion efforts in their schools**. We also partnered with the Ann Arbor Public Schools' Rising Scholars program to host two high school forums providing full day workshops on college and career access.

**YDS continues to grow** – supporting work through United Way in Detroit schools and through the Michigan Council for Arts and Cultural Affairs to build visual arts councils at arts organizations in Ludington, Grand Rapids, Flint and Ypsilanti.

**Thank you** for helping the Neutral Zone make all of these opportunities possibilities. You are part of our community who cares deeply for all of our young people and together we are making a difference in the lives of many youth.

With appreciation,



Lori



## Pufferfish Anthology Sold Out

“I am beyond excited to unleash this new, tiny and powerful gem of teen art into the world.” That’s a Red Beard Press (RBP) teen, introducing *Pufferfish*, RBP’s first edition of its literary magazine, an arts anthology from Ann Arbor area teens.

Teen editors packed *Pufferfish* with funny, witty, moving and inspiring works of poetry, short stories, photos and original art, again, all from local teens. In April, RBP released the magazine at an all-ages event featuring button making and t-shirt screen printing.

Wanna get one? You can’t (yet). *Pufferfish*’s first run sold out, as did its second printing. RBP published four books this year, including *Pufferfish*.



## Three Noisy Days Last June

Neutral Zone joins forces twice a year with other youth-serving organizations funded by longtime NZ supporter the ELMA Foundation. Jointly, this collaborative force of nature is known as the Music and Youth Development Alliance (MYDA). Last June, NZ hosted our fellow adults and teens from New York, Richmond, CA and Los Angeles for three, loud, workshop-filled days.



Our topics:

- MYDA strategic planning
- Youth Driven Spaces
- music performance & management

Somehow, we also carved out time to show off southeastern Michigan to our guests, visiting the Heidelberg Project and the Motown Museum. To cap the meeting, each group’s teens treated the community to a performance at LIVE on Washington, Neutral Zone’s annual outdoor teen music and arts festival.





## What's the Most Important Part of Youth Programs?

The youth themselves.

That idea is at the heart of Youth Driven Spaces (YDS), an NZ-supported initiative. Keeping that radically important message at its core has pushed YDS to grow.



YDS works with adults and teens at other youth-serving organizations to develop new practices that increase youth voice, decision making and leadership in their organizations.

This year, YDS worked intensively with 10 organizations and directly involved 25 adult advisors and over 120 young people. Groups included high schools, arts organizations, after-school programs, a library, a municipal-based youth group and a workforce development program. Next year, YDS plans to double this service, working with more than 20 programs.

## Get Your Game On #3

At Neutral Zone, young people get the space and the help they need to translate their ideas and imagination into software.

For the third year, NZ, Toyota and Caltly Design Research offered teens a unique workshop in creative design technology. More than 80 of them took us up on it, learning how to bring their cast of characters to life inside a video game of their own design.



Shout outs to:

- comic book artist **Jerzy Drozd** for sharing his illustration expertise
- **Game Stop** for coding instruction on how to develop teens' video games
- **The Ann Arbor District Library** for music equipment to create sound effects in NZ's studios
- **Toyota & Caltly Design Research** for continued support and real-world, professional expertise



## Ann Arbor's First-Ever Youth Poet Laureate

In Ann Arbor, we believe in developing and recognizing local talent. We are one of twenty vibrant literary arts communities nationwide to name a Youth Poet Laureate.

Local teen poets, rappers, leaders and activists applied, each submitting five original poems as well as a short essay describing the importance of poetry in their lives. Local adult poets formed a panel to review the submissions from five finalists and select a winner.

And the winner is... Carson Borbely, a Community High student. The mayor honored her with a proclamation at a City Council meeting. She also won a cash prize, and will have a debut poetry collection published by Penmanship Books in New York City.



## Giant Light-Up Sculptures? Bring It On!

Neutral Zone's Visual Arts Council (VAC) hired our first artist-in-residence this spring, funded by a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts.

VAC teens helped to draft the job description and expectations, reviewed resumes, interviewed the candidates, and selected artist Lavinia Hanachiuc to host open studio workshops at NZ.



In the workshops, teens created a stop-motion animated video and a giant luminary sculpture that they paraded at the annual FoolMoon event in early April.



# Dear Donors,

The Neutral Zone counts on you and your support. Your generous donations help us run special programs, pay for new initiatives, keep the lights and heat on in our building.

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Because of you, we never have to turn a teen away because of financial issues. Your donations help build the kind of citizens you'll be proud of when they're running the world of the future. Thank you very much!

## YDS Partners

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Washtenaw Intermediate School District  
Washtenaw Community College

## Alumni

*Neutral Zone is grateful for **all** donations. But we're particularly proud to receive the support of our alumni. When former NZ teens give back to us, we take it as a particularly vivid sign of success, theirs and ours.*

Illyana Balde	Zilka Joseph
Elizabeth Brooks	Alex Perlman
Fiona Chamness	Kelsey Rasmussen
Drew Clark	Charlie Reischl
Allison Correll	Anna Rosenfeld
Erez Dessel	Bennett Stein
Milo Inglehart	Charlotte A. Wolfe



**Above: Alumni at a recent NZ gathering**

**Below: Comments from alumni who donated to NZ**

*"Use it wherever you need it. All you've done for me, this is hardly enough. From our family, to my second family."*

*"I'm donating as a teen who has become a person all thanks to the Neutral Zone. I can't imagine myself [...] as I am without the space, and all the great people who work there. I want to say thanks [...]"*

## Individuals

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 Ronald & Janice Weston  
 Christopher White  
 Terence White  
 Laura White  
 Linda Lewis-White &  
 Francis White  
 Robert & Marina Whitman  
 Cheryl Wiese  
 Sandy Wilcock  
 Tianasha Williams  
 Gene & Rose Wilson  
 Peter Winkler  
 James Winquist  
 Michele Wong & Scott Goci  
 Lisa Wozniak & Orlando Simon  
 Trudy Wyss  
 Hanshi Sun & Andy Xia  
 Fernando Yarza  
 Lynn Fiorentino & David Yates  
 Deborah & Barton Yeary  
 Sei Yoshida  
 Frank & Linda Young  
 Evans Young & Catherine Shaw  
 Jack Zadigan  
 Maria Zampierollo & Brian Partin  
 Leif Zeng  
 Eugene Zenzen  
 David Zwerdling & Martha Teite



Riot Youth's  
Queer Prom  
attracted over  
**150** joyful  
celebrants.

## 2015-16 at Neutral Zone, by the numbers



Neutral Zone's Red  
Beard Press published  
**4** books featuring  
nationally recognized  
poets, as well as  
youth poets,  
storytellers and  
artists.



**457** local  
teens  
registered  
for NZ  
programs.

**95** teens from  
**3** area high  
schools  
attended **2**  
Rising Scholar  
summits.

**1** endorsement by  
US Poet Laureate  
Juan Felipe  
Herrera for Red  
Beard Press' book  
*The Plural, The  
Blurring* by H. Melt.

More than **300**  
teens explored  
issues of diversity  
and inclusion  
through S.E.E.D.  
student-led  
workshops.

**60** teens from **6**  
area schools' Gay  
Straight Alliances  
created a digital  
storytelling  
project to be  
released in 2017.

**97** works of art created  
by **63** teens from  
**13** different high schools,  
were displayed at the  
**34th** annual Potential  
art exhibit hosted by the  
Visual Arts Council.

We counted more  
than **14,000**  
teen visits during  
the summer and in  
afterschool  
programs and  
special events.





# Financial Health as of 6/30/2016

## Assets

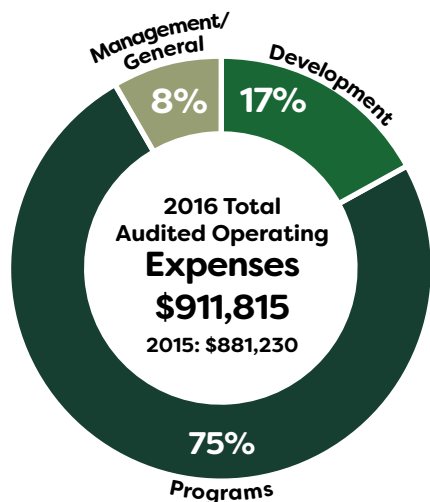
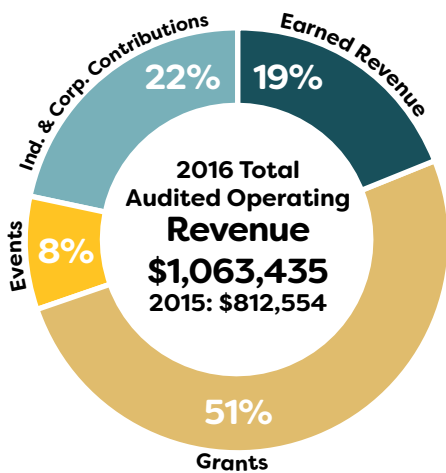
Cash & cash equivalents	\$115,078
Other current assets	\$350,513
Property & equipment	\$2,912,544

## Liabilities

Accounts payable	\$8,014
Accrued expenses & Deferred revenue	\$44,947

**Net Assets**  
**\$3,325,174**

## Operating Results



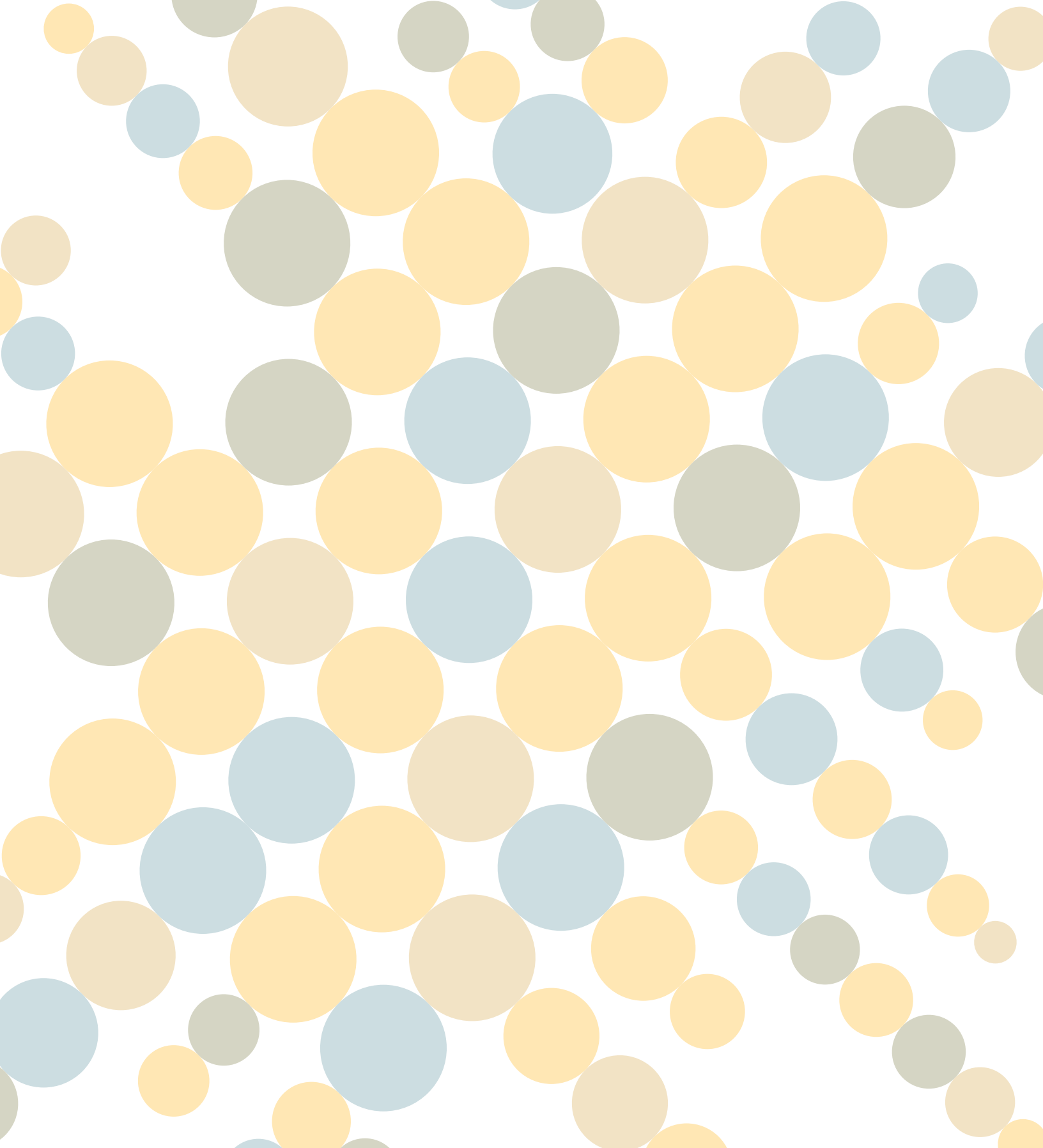
- **Individual & Corporate Contributions: \$229,833** | 2015: \$62,722  
 Few things signal the health of the Neutral Zone more clearly than individual and corporate donors selecting us as one of their philanthropic beneficiaries. We ask you for money, tell you what it's for, and you respond with generosity that astounds us. Thank you.
- **Special Events: \$89,437** | 2015: \$110,688  
 Neutral Zone puts on several fundraising events per year. We infuse every event we undertake with teen spirit and talent. NZ events are another opportunity to put teens front and center, where they belong, and allow the larger community to appreciate them.
- **Grants: \$540,688** | 2015: \$492,263  
 Multi-year grants keep our cash flow consistent. Donors can be confident that the NZ deserves their resources, as we have already earned the support of professional funders.
- **Earned Revenue: \$203,426** | 2015: \$146,881  
 We earn revenue from several sources:
  - Youth Driven Spaces coaching and consulting (sharing information about NZ's successes with other youth-serving organizations who want to implement our model)
  - Program fees
  - Sales of merchandise produced through our programs
  - Concert admissions
  - Renting our space when we're not using it
- **Management/General: \$77,719** | 2015: \$77,471  
 Someone's gotta run the place and make sure that we comply with the regulations that come with our non-profit status. These costs include audits and other outside professional services.
- **Development: \$153,169** | 2015: \$142,873  
 Building and sustaining treasured relationships with supporters takes time and money (as it does for every non-profit). Common expenses include mailings, thank yous, events and hospitality.
- **Programs: \$680,927** | 2015: \$660,886  
 Our pride and joy — helping teens improve their lives is why we're all involved with NZ. Program expenses range from hiring the right staff, to putting on concerts and poetry slams, to simply keeping the lights on at 310 E. Washington St.

Thanks to you, Neutral Zone will be around for the long haul. Here's more information about this good news:

Neutral Zone received \$25,999 toward our **Endless Zone Campaign**. This includes an operating reserve with \$49,602 received and \$118,750 in giving and pledges, plus the endowment funds, which total \$33,935 received.

Neutral Zone **increased our contract revenue by 54%** generating \$123,989 through work to coach and train schools and organizations to increase youth driven leadership and artistic opportunities.

Neutral Zone ended our year with \$109,595 in **temporary restricted grants**.



**NZ** *The Neutral Zone*  
Where teens lead, create and innovate

310 E. Washington St. • Ann Arbor, MI 48104

[www.neutral-zone.org](http://www.neutral-zone.org)