We rocked the park! On the mornings of October 17th and 18th, if you were near the corner of 6th and Gladys, you heard the drums and maybe you saw the tables and chairs that we were setting up in Gladys Park and you thought, what’s that? Hopefully, you stopped in and checked it out. The “it” is the Festival for All Skid Row Artists, a yearly music and art festival that takes place right here in Skid Row!

This is the 6th year in a row that the Los Angeles Poverty Department (LAPD) has produced the event, and it just keeps getting better every year. If you don’t know about LAPD, we’re a theater group, but in addition to creating art, we are interested in creating community in Skid Row and the festival is one way we work to accomplish that goal. This year there were more bands, more visual artists and more people who wanted to be involved, whether it was volunteering, performing, running a workshop, doing a presentation or just simply being a part of the festivities. The community came out in numbers to show support for this two-day event that celebrates the many talented artists who call Skid Row home.

The festival started at 1pm on Saturday, October 17th with a drum performance by the Skidroplayaz, a group of about 10 Skid Row residents who perform with a variety of African percussion instruments. Walter Fears, a veteran and Skid Row activist, formed the group. Walter is a longtime performer with LAPD and has acted in a variety of LAPD shows, both here in the States and abroad. His band, Skidroplayaz, has been the festival house band for all 6 years and once again, they rocked the house. Walter and other artists have come back year after year to perform at the festival, proving that this is a community where people live and make art; LAPD knows this. As a matter of fact, LAPD keeps a registry of artists who live and work in Skid Row, and after this year’s festivities, the list numbers over 600, and those are just the artists that LAPD has been able to contact. There are hundreds, if not thousands, more artists living in Skid Row and every year new artists come through the gates of Gladys Park to perform or display their works.

One of those artists was Kaniah Chapman, a 15-year-old student enrolled in the theater academy at Ramón C. Cortines School of Visual and Performing Arts who heard about the festival through her mother. Kaniah loves art; it’s what she has always been passionate about. Her first love is theater, however Kaniah brought some of her many paintings and drawings to display at the festival. We asked her, what do you think about Skid Row? She said, “Skid Row is like a really huge family…a beautiful place. I grew up here…and I love it.” Kaniah sees the need for more cultural spaces in Skid Row and thinks that there should be more events like the festival, which she feels, “helps the artist to get their work out there.” The festival serves as a good medium for the artists to do just that: get exposure.

But the festival is really about Skid Row and the fact that this is a community rich with artistic talent. It was truly beautiful to see everyone in the park dancing, singing, making art and just being a part of the vibrancy of Skid Row. Saturday ended with a 30+ min. set by Passion, a band put together especially for the festival by Randy Bellfield (lead vocals/guitar) with the lyrical voices of Dante Chambers and Laquita Davis; they had the people up on their feet and dancing. Sunday concluded with Franc’s Melting Pot, a rock band created by formerly homeless musician and Skid Row resident, Franc Foster. Having first performed at the festival in 2011, Franc has returned every year, bringing with him his Melting Pot of talented Skid Row artists. Franc has now formed his own organization, Music and Arts Recovery, and is working to get instruments into the hands of disenfranchised musicians. With Dimitra D. D. Wilson and Lorina Hawkins powerful singing, it was a great way to end the festival and the community loved it.

The Festival for All Skid Row Artists was produced by the Los Angeles Poverty Department with the help of Lamp Arts Program & United Coalition East Prevention Project and was sponsored by Alex Market, Fabric Planet, Love Nail Tree and the L.A. department of Recreation and Parks.
Nick Paul and I just enacted a award-winning poem I wrote for the Final Poetry festival at the Skid Row Library, History Museum & Archive. I won last April. Here, reciting the poem—with the drummers playing along with me—it was very famous. The poem is called “Skid Row comes to Broadway.” I was in a writing workshop at the museum and we were talking about how they were going to research what was going in the neighborhood developmentwise by bringing the museum to Broadway, and I thought that sounds like a musical. I kinda ran with it and said: "I would like to see a Skid Row studio for media. For adults and children—I love children—but it needs to include adults who want to fulfill their aspirations—even though they maybe aren’t as educated. It should be for those trying behind the camera as well as in front of the camera. A place where people can tell their stories, gain skills, maybe make some money and contribute to the community.” I was in a writing workshop at the museum and they were talking about how they were going to research what was going in the neighborhood developmentwise by bringing the museum to Broadway, and I thought that sounds like a musical. I kinda ran with it and said: "I would like to see a Skid Row studio for media. For adults and children—I love children—but it needs to include adults who want to fulfill their aspirations—even though they maybe aren’t as educated. It should be for those trying behind the camera as well as in front of the camera. A place where people can tell their stories, gain skills, maybe make some money and contribute to the community.” I was in a writing workshop at the museum and they were talking about how they were going to research what was going in the neighborhood developmentwise by bringing the museum to Broadway, and I thought that sounds like a musical. I kinda ran with it and said: "I would like to see a Skid Row studio for media. For adults and children—I love children—but it needs to include adults who want to fulfill their aspirations—even though they maybe aren’t as educated. It should be for those trying behind the camera as well as in front of the camera. A place where people can tell their stories, gain skills, maybe make some money and contribute to the community.” I was in a writing workshop at the museum and they were talking about how they were going to research what was going in the neighborhood developmentwise by bringing the museum to Broadway, and I thought that sounds like a musical. I kinda ran with it and said: "I would like to see a Skid Row studio for media. For adults and children—I love children—but it needs to include adults who want to fulfill their aspirations—even though they maybe aren’t as educated. It should be for those trying behind the camera as well as in front of the camera. A place where people can tell their stories, gain skills, maybe make some money and contribute to the community.” I was in a writing workshop at the museum and they were talking about how they were going to research what was going in the neighborhood developmentwise by bringing the museum to Broadway, and I thought that sounds like a musical. I kinda ran with it and said: "I would like to see a Skid Row studio for media. For adults and children—I love children—but it needs to include adults who want to fulfill their aspirations—even though they maybe aren’t as educated. It should be for those trying behind the camera as well as in front of the camera. A place where people can tell their stories, gain skills, maybe make some money and contribute to the community."
Enormous THANKS TO...

... our community partners: Lamp Arts Project and UCEPP. Alex Market paid for our lunches. Council District 14 provided tables and chairs, Love Nail Tree printed our t-shirts, which were provided at cost by Jacob at the Fabric Planet and our neighbors who gave us books. Our ‘park band’ the Skidroplayaz. Michael Hubman alias Waterman celebrated his 9 year anniversary with us.


... and the artists who facilitated the creativity stations: Matt Miyahara and Valerie Hayden managing the paper mache stations, Jen Hofer and Jessica Ceballos writing personal letters and poems for anyone who needed one, Joyce Ligthbody chalkling messages around peoples feet, Gnanavaro Mexican making peoples portraits in clay, The Big Draw LA and the people who invited us to re-imagine our neighborhood: Tom Grode with Our Skid Row, Faith Purvey with Build Your Skid Row and Jeff Cain and Katherine McNenny with Creating Creative Space in Skid Row, Helki Frantzen and the filmcrew and the LAPD crew and staff.

Get Ready for Los Angeles Poverty Department's

7TH ANNUAL FESTIVAL FOR ALL SKID ROW ARTISTS

Coming up Saturday & Sunday October 22 & 23, 2016

The Festival is 2 afternoons of non-stop performances created and performed by Skid Row talents. We’re talking about performance of all kinds: music, dance, more music, spoken word, theater and yes even more music. Skid Row visual artists will display their work and we’ll have arts workshops going on, so anyone can make some work on the spot. If you want to perform or exhibit your work, contact us anytime between now and October and get a spot at the festival.

Call or write us!

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Festival for All Skid Row Artists is produced by Los Angeles Poverty Department with help from community partners Lamp Community Arts Program and United Coalition East Prevention Project. Love Nail Tree, Alex Market and Fabric Planet. This year’s festival is made possible with the support of California Arts Council’s Local Impact program – CAC’s Local Impact program is supported by the National Endowment for the Arts, Doris Duke Charitable Foundation, Department of Cultural Affairs of the city of Los Angeles, L.A. County Arts Commission, Department of Recreation and Parks.

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Los Angeles Poverty Department’s crew and staff: Austin Hines, Henriëtte Brouwers, Sean Gregory, KevenMichael Key, Walter Fears, John Malpede, Stephanie Bell, Suzanne Shaw, Sherri Walker, Celestine Williams, Chas Jackson, Anthony Taylor, Jen Wilson, Chella Coleman, Kahil Anderson. Stephane Bell: I’m a cook. I also belong to the theater group LAPD – for 18 years. I’ve been in the community over 20 years. I love to come down here every year to help out. I would love to see all communities get together and do something like this every year around the world because it’s a beautiful thing and we could visit other peoples country and do the same thing that we’re doing here and just get along and have a good time. I’ve been giving out T-shirts, helping with sandwiches and water and greeting the people, which I love to do anyway. Just meeting all different faces and seeing the faces from last year. And I’m going to do it again next year if the Lord says the same, I’ll be here next year. I love to sing. I’ve been singing since I was 7 all the way up till now, and I’m 52.

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