

# **Reflection On The Creation and Future of Art to Reduce Mental Health Stigma**

*Written By Mirabella Roberts*

*My special thanks are extended to Beth Pollard*

In 2018, I created a Nonprofit organization named Art to Reduce Mental Health Stigma (ARMS). The mission of ARMS is to eliminate the mental health stigma by using art as a tool to bridge understanding between those with lived experience with mental illness and neurotypical community members. Throughout my Brown experience, the ARMS team and I worked to constantly expand and improve ARMS. This paper is a reflection of my experience being the co-founder and CEO of ARMS. I recount the driving factors, both personally and statistically, that led me to create ARMS, and why the mission of ARMS is important to filling an unmet need in our society. I explore the different organizational changes that ARMS underwent throughout the years, with a deeper analysis of what aspects of the organization worked well and what problems we faced. Finally, I reflect on what the future for ARMS could look like.

I have read and understood Brown University's *Academic Code* and pledge that this capstone project fully respects the principles of academic integrity defined in the code, including that the research conducted for it was carried out in accordance with the rules defined by the University's Institutional Review Board for research involving human subjects.

I agree that my capstone project can be made available to the Brown Community for didactic purposes.

Mirabella Roberts



May 13, 2020

## **About ARMS**

Art to Reduce Mental Health Stigma (ARMS) is a Rhode Island based nonprofit whose mission is to challenge the stigma surrounding mental illness by connecting local artists with the resources to bridge understanding between those with lived mental illness and community members. We believe in a world where all individuals will actively seek treatment when they need mental health support, and a well-informed community will accept them. By welcoming allies, community members, and local organizations to engage with art and discussions of mental health, we hope to generate both individual and institutional progress in destigmatizing mental illness.

ARMS was a registered 501(c)(3) nonprofit based in the state of Rhode Island. We first began working on ARMS in February 2018. ARMS was founded through the desire to use art forms as a way to unify voices, working to create spaces that foster engagement and mental health support for the community at large. Through community conversations and endless relational meetings, our cofounders attracted a team of passionate volunteers that spearheaded the creation of ARMS. After months of research into what kinds of similar programming already exists in the US, the unmet need for stigma-reducing art programs in Rhode Island, and the impacts that art programming can have on mental health outside of the world of art therapy, the team began hosting test events around Rhode Island, such as an interactive art gallery and open mic.

ARMS was incorporated into the Rhode Island business bureau as a domestic nonprofit in May 2018 and established by the IRS as a 501(c)(3) tax exempt organization in September 2018.

### **Why Am I Writing This?**

I, Mirabella (Bella) Roberts-- author of this paper, am the CEO and co-founder of ARMS. I just graduated from Brown University with a double concentration in Public Policy and Literary Arts. My courses in Public Policy, especially “Building Powerful Organizations for Social Change” and “Nonprofits” combined with my literary arts classes, provided me a way to have a tangible understanding on how to run an arts nonprofit. This is what allowed me to have a basis of the right skills to create a nonprofit and work on ARMS. I also developed my entrepreneurial-- skill set by working closely with the Nelson Entrepreneurship Center at Brown. These resources provided a solid basis for me to form an organization. However, I ultimately had no experience with running a full-functioning nonprofit business at the young age of 19. I had a lot to learn to be an effective leader of a company and being a student at Brown, I did not have enough time to learn these skills at a rate that was accelerated enough for the sustained success of Brown as an organization. Ultimately, I wasn’t able to run an organization and graduate from Brown simultaneously, while maintaining my own mental health.

On a personal note, I am extremely grateful to have had the resources and teammates to be able to build something that made an impact on the community. From our constant problem solving and inter-departmental learning, I will now have the skills I need to ensure future companies are successful. I lead a team of what was at one point 40+ volunteers and some paid staff having never worked in business before. I was responsible for balancing the checkbook, determining ROIs, and managing fundraising campaigns for a business, while never having had any experience with finances in the past. I was paid to participate in two startup accelerator

programs. My marketing team and I strategized around creative and exciting marketing plans to attract such diverse audiences, including designing an online marketplace with an original clothing line. My tech team and I met consistently in the mornings to work on coding websites, and eventually, working on creating a unique app. Five Brown Students and I lead the event planning team, which organized minute logistics for large-scale events that attracted both the general public and the media. ARMS must pivot now to explore other options of achieving its mission. But I am proud of the work my team accomplished and I am thankful to have had the opportunity for life-altering experiences that allowed me to master an abundance of useful skills, in just a few years.

### **Who Was The Founding Team?**

I, Bella Roberts, am a poet, and mental health advocate. When I was 18, I lost numerous friends to suicide in just one year. I was devastated. Yet no one in my community spoke about mental health. Mental illness was still only spoken about in hushed tones behind closed doors. I encountered a resounding need for safe spaces and open discussions about mental health but did not know how to create those spaces. It was at a poetry open mic that I realized the power of art as an effective platform for uniting community members around mental health. One night, I discussed through poetry my mental health journey that I couldn't yet express to friends or family. Sharing my story through art not only empowered me, but also sparked conversations about mental health with community members. This is where the drive for ARMS came from on my end, and part of the reason the organizational mission will always be important to me.



Photo of Bella Roberts and Nicole Spring

Nicole Spring was the initial co-founder of ARMS.

Nicole and I met during the “Building Organizations for Powerful Change” course at Brown and created ARMS for an assignment to plan out a dream organization. We were inspired by the project and began to pursue it seriously as a fully functioning community organization. However, Nicole soon went to study abroad and working as a solo founder presented its own challenges.

After Nicole went abroad, Beth Pollard became the other co-founder of ARMS during the course of time that ARMS was in the Breakthrough Lab (B-lab) startup accelerator. She also served in the role of Events Coordinator. Her experience as a self-represented professional actress and dancer in Canada have trained her in how to run a business platform that's both effective and genuine. By the end of the B-lab program, Beth went to study-abroad in India. It was difficult for her to stay in touch with the team in the US and thus was unable to work on ARMS anymore.

Though by the time Beth left we had a substantial ARMS team, being a graduating senior, I could not manage to find time to find a new qualified acting co-founder.

### **The Need ARMS Was Created to Fill**

The incidence of mental illness and the negative impacts of not seeking treatment are on the rise. Mental health conditions are the leading cause of disability across the United States.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.nami.org/stigmafree>

About 1 in 4 adults suffers from a diagnosable mental disorder in a given year.<sup>2</sup> Suicide is the 10<sup>th</sup> leading cause of death in the U.S., and the 2<sup>nd</sup> leading cause of death for people aged 10–34.<sup>3</sup> Yet, only about 40 percent of adults with a diagnosed mental illness actually receive treatment.<sup>4</sup> This barrier to treatment is largely due to the overwhelming stigma people with mental illness face; stigma being defined as the “negative attitudes that motivate individuals to fear, reject, avoid, and discriminate against people with mental illness.”<sup>5</sup>

The stigma surrounding mental health negatively affects almost all aspects of people’s lives, in more ways than immediately meet the eye such as discrimination, reduced independence and self-efficacy, and segregation.<sup>6</sup> These negative attitudes work as obstacles, causing people to make assumptions, fear, avoid or discriminate against people with mental illness. Sometimes, this stigma affects those needing to seek treatment, fearful of what others may think, or the misconceptions they themselves hold. For instance, individuals with mental illness are more likely to experience homelessness and employment discrimination.<sup>7</sup> In all, public stigma toward mental illness matters as it “sets the context in which individuals in the community respond to the onset of mental health problems, clinicians respond to individuals who come for treatment, and public policy is crafted”.<sup>8</sup> The cycle of misinformation and stigma needs to be broken.

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<sup>2</sup> "Mental Health Disorder Statistics | Johns Hopkins Medicine Health ...."  
[https://www.hopkinsmedicine.org/healthlibrary/conditions/mental\\_health\\_disorders/mental\\_health\\_disorder\\_statistics\\_85,p00753](https://www.hopkinsmedicine.org/healthlibrary/conditions/mental_health_disorders/mental_health_disorder_statistics_85,p00753). Accessed 3 Feb. 2019.

<sup>3</sup> "NIMH » Suicide - National Institute of Mental Health - NIH." 10 May. 2018,  
<https://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/statistics/suicide.shtml>. Accessed 3 Feb. 2019.

<sup>4</sup> [http://www2.nami.org/factsheets/mentalillness\\_factsheet.pdf](http://www2.nami.org/factsheets/mentalillness_factsheet.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> ([Corrigan and Penn 1999](#))

<sup>6</sup> ([Corrigan and Shapiro 2010](#);

<sup>7</sup> ([Corbiere et al. 2011](#); [Corrigan et al. 2006](#); [Corrigan and Shapiro 2010](#)).

<sup>8</sup> ([Pescosolido et al. 2010](#), p. 1324).

Our society has identified stigma, proven its role in our psycho-sociological society, made it a household concept seen in a new U.S. survey conducted online by The Harris Poll in which: “92 percent of respondents believe there is stigma in our society against those with mental illnesses. [Furthermore] nearly half of survey respondents who know someone with a mental illness (48 percent) say they do not know how to speak to them about seeking treatment, and a third (34 percent) do not feel comfortable discussing mental health issues with family and friends.”<sup>9</sup>

However, even if the evidence for its social presence is mainstream knowledge, the American population does not believe that we are combatting this force with the resources it deserves. In a recent study at NAMI it was found that despite nearly two-thirds of respondents saying they think mental health services are insufficient, only 30 out of 51 states (including Washington D.C.) increased spending on mental health services for the 2015 fiscal year.<sup>10</sup> And America is not the only country that believes this. A survey published in 2015 found that only 7% of respondents from developed countries believed that mental illness could be overcome.<sup>11</sup> With these kinds of misconceptions, it's easy to see why stigma surrounding mental health is rampant on not just a national, but global sphere.

Our idea for developing ARMS was built off of other researchers' work, who state that “Positive personal contact with a person with mental illness was significantly associated with lower levels of endorsing stigmatizing beliefs and actions. Given these consistent findings, anti-stigma interventions should “focus on increasing positive personal contact with people living

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<sup>9</sup> Harris Poll/ Janssen Survey - 2018

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.pewtrusts.org/en/research-and-analysis/blogs/stateline/2014/12/15/some-states-retreat-on-mental-health-funding>

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/26496017>

with mental illness, target key groups in positions of power (e.g., landlords, employers), and should incorporate messages about the ways in which stigma and discrimination impede life goals and opportunities” (Corrigan 2011).<sup>12</sup>

Art to Reduce Mental Health Stigma (ARMS), a Rhode Island based 501(c)3 nonprofit, was created in response to the need for a shift in the dialogue surrounding mental health.

## Proposed Solution

**How can art help our mental health and fight the stigma?**

- Personal expression**  
Making art helps us reflect on our place in the world, articulate our visions for the future, and overcome inhibitions about sharing our personal experiences.
- Processing trauma**  
Creating and sharing art can help people process complex psychological trauma by accessing memory, emotional insight, and physical sensation.
- Building community**  
From concerts and poetry slams to gallery shows and group workshops, art gives us new opportunities to find support and connect with the people around us.
- Promotes dialogue**  
By encouraging people to share and listen without judgment, art lets us have honest conversations about sensitive topics like mental health.
- Spreads the message**  
Art provides an powerful and approachable platform for important statements about mental health, from individual experiences to systemic issues.
- Helps others understand**  
Viewing art made by people who've experienced mental illness increases mental health awareness, empathy, and knowledge in the general public.  
(International Journal of Social Psychiatry)

**Share your voice. Join the fight.**

We'd love to hear from you! Email us at [info@armsnostigma.org](mailto:info@armsnostigma.org) or check us out on social media:  
[armsnostigma.org](http://armsnostigma.org) | armsnostigma

Graphic created by Lucy Duda and Mirabella Roberts

Art to Reduce Mental Health Stigma (ARMS) is dedicated to fighting the stigma around mental illness by providing a platform for art that sparks open and honest conversations on mental health.

Why art? Included to the left is our infographic on how we know art both helps us cope with mental illness and fight the stigma surrounding mental health. Often at the center of public action for generational movements, performing and public art in particular has been used as a tool centered in cultural identity and storytelling. Artists have acted as contributors to communities' ecosystem building bridges to social cohesion and understanding.

The study and fight against mental health is based heavily in sciences that can demean individuals to

<sup>12</sup> Parcesepe, Angela M and Leopoldo J Cabassa. “Public stigma of mental illness in the United States: a systematic literature review” *Administration and policy in mental health* vol. 40,5 (2013): 384-99.

objective numbers, while often ignoring the power of personal expression, trust, and faith in one another. We created ARMS to build on that half of the equation. With respect for diversity, a willingness to listen, and a passion for creating, we built a non-profit that aimed to serve the needs of the community on an extremely personal level.

In thinking of mental health, our events in the past have sought to spurn introspection and individuality. As such, our past events included diverse platform opportunities. It's not just about the platform, it's about the community that we engage with, and our events reflect this value.

### **Blythe Baird Event: Sample of What Worked and What Did Not**

One event in particular really highlighted the tangible impacts our successful events had by creating an expressive local community discussion of mental health but also allows me to now comment on what would be a problem moving forward. In November 2018,



Photo taken by Nicole Spring at SEG

ARMS hosted a spoken word poetry workshop and performance at the Social Enterprise Greenhouse in downtown Providence. They hosted us in their space, and our agreement was that we would in return help advertise for SEG. Our assumption in forming this agreement and future contracts of this sort was that it was mutually beneficial: we would receive a venue for an event, and the company, we believed, would in turn benefit off of our marketing efforts. This was true for this event, which was one of the factors that it was a really successful event. As this was our most popular event by far, we believed that such agreements would be as effective in the future.

However, the venues (small local restaurants, bars, etc.–the kind that could benefit off of good PR) would not have the capacity or pull to bring in such large crowds, and vice-versa the number of people that would come to these events would not constitute good enough PR to keep the venues happy.

On this night, we contacted and flew in Spoken word Poet Blythe Baird, one of the most famous slam poets of our time, who then went on to agree to join our advisory board (and shortly after that never responded to an email again). Students came from Brown, RISD, JWU, and high schools. Adults in the community came in larger numbers than we expected. Amazingly, a young woman drove all the way up from New York to attend this event. Blythe brought her own voice to our vision by performing her own mental health experiences, teaching us a method and framework for how to do it ourselves, and gave us a platform for people to speak their poetry to supportive strangers. Teenage students read their poetry aloud for the first time. Community members struggling with gender dysmorphia opened up to us. Community members who were strangers to each other cried and embraced each other at the end of the night, exchanging contact information and promising to continue their conversations. We received new members, donations, and a tangible impact.

When we asked for community feedback at this event, we saw how our mission was beginning to take effect. We learned that 100% of attendees; both people with mental illness and those who previously experienced stigma, said that they would return to future events. About 82% of people said that their understanding of mental health improved at our events, with the remainder of people citing that they themselves suffer from mental health and therefore reported they had a sufficient understanding of mental health. We have received countless positive

feedback from attendees including the following anonymously submitted sentiments from post-event surveys:

- “It is important to eliminate the stigma so I can be open and honest with my friends, family and peers. Events such as this are taking a step towards normalizing conversation around mental health illness and create an environment in which I can be comfortable sharing my own narrative.”
- “The vulnerability really resonated with me. Honest conversations like these really personally help me with my personal stigma”



## ARMS Presents: Blythe Baird

A night of performance  
and workshopping with  
an award-winning poet

11/30/18  
7-9pm

Graphic created by Alexa D'Ambrosio

It was an amazing night. As a result of it

being such a great success, we believed that future events could run the same way. However, we ultimately did not have the money to continue to fly in high-profile artists like Blythe Baird who would

bring in such large crowds of community members. This was important as it was not just vital that we would have enough people to satisfy the venue and meet our monetary goals, but also, it was and still is important to have a balanced number of both neurotypical community members and people with lived experience with mental illness that needed an outlet. The reason for this is that it is an important part of reaching our mission; creating a space where individuals with lived experience could share their story artistically and guarantee a crowd of people to listen.

However, that crowd of neurotypical community members would only come in such large numbers when the artist was appealing enough to the general public. The artists that would

appeal to the general public were too expensive. This was the root of the ultimate unsuccess of the organizational structure.

Aside from our Poetry Workshop with Blythe Baird Past programing included but certainly wasn't limited to:

- Express Your Psych Open Mic
- Flip the Script: a national film festival at the Avon Cinema
- Crafting Workshop with Therapy Dogs
- Dancing Through Madness: a dance show, lecture, and workshop on schizophrenia

### **Educational Programming**

In our first years, before participating in the B-lab program, we also tried to provide educational programming to high-schools and middle schools in Providence as after-school programming, as well as other educational opportunities. We had a specific "Community Outreach" team dedicated to this.

Our pilot program, named "Change of Art" was at Hope High School. The aim of our program was to expose youths to how diverse artists use art to speak about mental health and share their experiences. Our plan was to showcase these narratives through brief presentations that highlight artists' mental health journeys and coping mechanisms. After the presentations, our plan was to lead conversations on stigmatization, mental health, and wellness. Our goal was to have a space that enabled youth to use their featured artistic medium to reflect on their own stories and mental health journeys. We planned to showcase a different artistic medium focus for

every week: poetry, painting, dance, film, photography, sculpture, etc. Our belief was that by leading this, we would empower youth to find the medium that enables them to talk about their mental health freely. We aimed for this programming to address tolerance and acceptance by celebrating neurodiversity, showcasing inspirational individuals of various demographic backgrounds, and reflecting on the mental illness stigma.

However, our pilot program was not successful. This was simply because the school we worked with was not able to advertise our program at all, so no students were aware of our program. After no students showed up the first 3 programs, the team was frustrated. On one hand, we knew that if we put time into our promotion of the programming it could be successful. However, we also knew that this would have to be done with the time of our own team since the school did not have the resources to do so, and being a mainly student-led unpaid team, putting the extra time into the work was difficult. The team came to a decision that they did simply not have the resource of time as students to do so, and we did not have enough money as an organization to pay a full-time staff.

Past Change of Art, the community outreach team planned to develop partnerships with a myriad of pre-existing organizations in Rhode Island like schools, clinical programs, art organizations, and disability justice programs. However, because “Change of Art” was not successful, the team no longer felt motivated to continue to explore those other educational avenues. As a result, we soon after changed our business model to no longer include purely educational programming and instead only focus on an events-based model.

### **Sustainability Model & Funding**

Once we had raised an approximate \$4,000 in the past few months of ARMS being a 501(c)(3) organization from grants, fundraisers and donor appeals, we believed that we could use the financial momentum to move forward. We thought that for a nonprofit, ARMS would have a solid means of sustaining itself: through the art itself. However, this presented a series of problems. Most of our workshops were ticketed at about 10\$ (with the exception of those in the community who cannot afford the tickets) and initially would attract around 200 people. In the initial phases for ARMS, we tried to accurately price our tickets to break even with the cost of planning the events themselves. We quickly realized a few major flaws with this. For starters, breaking even for the price of just the events was not enough as the primary revenue model for a business. We realized we needed money for the staff, artists, promotional materials, etc. Another flaw was that the price would fluctuate based on the needs of the event and often the price could not be kept at a high enough cost and still attract enough community members, especially community members that were in marginalized communities and perhaps needed our programs the most.

Aside from the tickets for the events, we also were beginning to sell the produced art from the events on our website, shown by our one-of-a-kind clothing line on [armsnostigma.org/shop](http://armsnostigma.org/shop). However, again, for this to have been successful enough in producing revenue we would've had to invest money into marketing the site which we did not have.

We received outside funding from donations and grants. We have received numerous generous donations from both individuals and companies such as Goldman Sachs. Bella also participated in the WE@Brown incubator and won the pitch night on behalf of ARMS. The Nelson center has been extremely supportive of ARMS in its development stages both in providing funding through the explore grant and through mentorship and guidance. However, we

did not have the knowledge as a team to effectively apply for grants, nor enough time as a team to devote to learning how to do so. To hire someone as a full-time grant writer was too expensive and would not allow us to continue our programming. We had great momentum for our programming at the time and taking a break to fully- pursue funding options was something we voted against. When I decided to pause our programming in the fall of 2019 to pursue funding full time through a series of fundraising campaigns and grant writing, the team was not as motivated to continue working on ARMS and some staff members left the team. Without the proper support of the team or training in grant writing, reaching our funding goals became overwhelming.

Though dropping our 501C3 status would allow us to accept money from investors, Beth and I decided to remain a nonprofit, as fulfilling our mission has always been most important to us throughout this endeavor. During B-lab, Beth and I decided to institute a new sustainability model for our organization. We planned to make our programming fully based on the ARMS Weekly Series model below. Together with the B-lab staff, we developed a new sustainability model. This model would rely on the contracts with the local businesses we were using as venue spaces providing us with a portion of the income, they made off of the customers we brought them from our events. This model could have worked, but we did not have the time to fully-pursue it because we were in the process of building out an online platform of a mobile app and corresponding website to automate the processes of bringing artists and businesses on board. Our plan was that the platform would allow artists who wanted to get involved with ARMS to simply login and select a venue and plan their weekly-series event without ARMS staff support. The platform would also certify that our model was working both through surveys on the impact of the events, and in collecting funds from the venues and attendees. We as a team invested a lot of

money (1000+) and time in building the platform. We did not have many of the technical skills and hired a company to work with.

However, the app-building company ended up scamming us. When I reached out to the CEO of the company, who I had trusted because we met in person numerous times, he threatened me. I found out from his social media that he moved out of the country, and never heard from him again. We began to work with another app-building company, but monetarily it was difficult to recover. I don't think I could have foreseen the company scamming us, but reflecting on this series of unfortunate events, I realize that if I had involved a larger team in this process, we may have been able to come out of the events in a more- successful manner. Unfortunately, I was working on this over the summer of 2019 and many of the staff members were away and not reachable. This taught me a lesson: to always involve a team in all processes, even if that means waiting on business expansion.

### **New Business Model: ARMS Weekly Series**

Hosted through partnerships with local businesses, ARMS Weekly Series pop-up spaces centered around workshops where artists, with defining mental health stories, illustrated their art form and open public conversations. Each weekly event lasted for about 2 hours and had three components:

#### **Arts Presentation**

ARMS' artists are typically local individuals who have powerful stories about mental health. Their mediums vary, sometimes they are spoken word artists, singer-songwriters, or visual artists. Their experiences range from being diagnosed with conditions, being an

ally to a loved one navigating a mental health condition or struggling with the stigma and misinformation in the media and their community. However, all of the artists have one powerful thing in common, they have all used art as a form of healing.

During this portion of the event, artists would plan to spend about 30 minutes sharing their craft, either performing pieces, showing their work or painting live.

To ensure consistent quality and supportive spaces are created, ARMS planned to distribute a training manual (which Beth finished developing) to each artist, so that they better understand the scope and goals of the event. The training manual includes a roadmap to the purpose and layout of each event, reviewing the needs of community mental health and how they can utilize their artistic medium to facilitate growth and motivate the community. We will use this training manual as we transition to a club to remain faithful to our mission.

### Collaborative Community Workshop

Transitioning into an open forum and direct engagement, artists then led the participants in an exercise, such as song-circles, guided drawing prompts, or simply a Question & Answer session. Participants had time to introspect and express their reactions. This component was planned to last for approximately one-hour. Within this, participants had the opportunity to explore their own experiences, using art to process and guide their reflection. This component will remain crucial to the future of ARMS programming, ensuring that the community members have the tools they need to create their own art.

### Open Public Expression

After the workshop, ARMS facilitated a 30-minute space of open expression. This often would entail an attendee share (such as an open mic) or simply intimate conversations about mental health. Our programming would be supported by qualified volunteers, who would be there to provide support as needed and refer our participants to other mental health resources. This also will remain important to the future of carrying out our mission of promoting healthy conversations about mental health.

Sustainable change is made through a collection of moments that guide social impact. Since we began piloting our programming in 2018, we reached over 1,000 community members through the 25+ events we held. The conversations that occurred in ARMS' Weekly Series were engaging, empathetic and disruptive, but more importantly, they built bridges of understanding and social activism through art.

Although our programs were open to all, we typically saw individuals ages 18-35 attend our workshops, with the majority of participants within their early 20s. We had a high-mix population of low-income individuals, and individuals in the special needs and LGBTQ communities. Our participants were primarily from the Rhode Island tri-state area.

As we realized the scalability of our program, we began to form partnerships with businesses throughout New York City, such as celebrity journalist Pavolina Osta. We had plans to launch our first New York City event in October 2019 and have identified scalability opportunities in LA for that Fall as well.

After B-lab our goals for the year were to:

- Reach 3,000 individuals
- Host at least 50 events in the Rhode Island area
- Pilot our NYC expansion, hosting 10 events in the five boroughs
- Ensure that at least 85% of participants identify that they have formed valuable connections, and reduced their stigma surrounding mental illness.

However, due to the other reasons discussed throughout this paper, we were unable to follow-through on those plans. This is the main reason why we decided to switch to a club format.

### **Breakthrough Lab (B-Lab):**

During the summer of 2019, Beth and I participated in the Breakthrough Lab Startup Accelerator program run by Brown University's Nelson Center for Entrepreneurship. It was crucial that we participated in the B-lab program, to be given the time, space, energy, and funds to continue the important work we were doing in Rhode Island to increase conversations around mental health.

However, this is not, of course, the only reason we participated in B-lab. Being able to be effective leaders of a company is something that we struggle with as young people. However, through the workshops in the B-lab program, we were formally trained in how to effectively run a large-scale business. We became better at forming relationships, and better at being leaders by making our own schedules, our own work ethic, our own work practices.

Through a diverse community of minds we were inspired to create new and innovative programming outside of our prior experiences and background. An important part of making ARMS effective was and will continue to be figuring out what excites people, what attracts people in the community to certain ideas or events. Through the community at B-lab we were able to experiment with what kinds of events and programs are attractive to the people around us. Being a part of the community created by the cohort allowed us to work our hardest in problem solving and developing systems that would allow us to work on expanding ARMS nationally.

### **Plans for Future Teams**

While the number of staff members will certainly change as the organization pauses its nonprofit status, some current volunteers have stated that they will carry out ARMS in other capacities moving forward. We have an already established series of teams and problem-solving systems to effectively broaden and sustain our impact. The basic form and need of these teams will remain similar next year. These included: event planning, marketing/communications, advertising, finance, technical experts, and educational content coordinators. While the team names changed, these have generally stayed the same core needs of the organization.

The following is a list of our Advisory Board, the people who signed up to back ARMS and help us grow organizationally. Moving forward, we will ask these people for their input into what ARMS should do to remain impactful in the future. We expect to send these people a full, detailed email letter by the end of August 2020.

- John Sebelius is an interdisciplinary artist and filmmaker who holds an MFA in drawing and painting from the University of Kansas and BFA with honors in illustration from the Rhode Island School of Design. The citizens of Lawrence, KS voted him the Best Artist of 2017. Sebelius founded Artistic Expressions Healing Arts Initiative in 2016 that teaches art to veterans suffering with PTSD.
- Melissa Withers is managing director of [RevUp Capital](#), a non-equity investment platform for companies moving fast up a revenue-fueled growth curve. Through her work as an investor and mentor, Melissa has overseen investments in 120+ companies across industries and at various stages of growth. She is a mentor and judge at TechStars and MassChallenge and a strong advocate for closing the diversity gap in early stage investing.
- Carole Maso is the author of ten books including the novels The Art Lover, AVA, and Mother & Child; poems in prose, Aureole and Beauty is Convulsive; essays, Break Every Rule, and a memoir The Room Lit By Roses. She is Professor at Literary Arts at Brown University and the recipient of many awards, most recently the 2018 Berlin Prize.
- Blythe Baird is one of the most recognizable names in spoken word and slam poetry. Originally from the northwest suburbs of Chicago, the award-winning writer has garnered international recognition for her poems that speak out on sexual assault, mental illness, eating disorder recovery, sexuality, and healing. She graduated from Hamline University with a dual degree in Creative Writing and Women's Studies. She teaches spoken word poetry at The Loft Literary Center in Minneapolis.
- Rick Owen is a psychiatrist by training and works at the Central Arkansas Veterans Healthcare System where he is the Associate Chief of Staff for Research. He also directs the VA Center for Mental Healthcare and Outcomes Research, is a professor of psychiatry

at the UAMS Psychiatric Research Institute and a professor of epidemiology in the UAMS College of Public Health. He conducts research to improve healthcare delivery and outcomes for individuals living with. Mental illness. He served on the NAMI Arkansas Board from 2007-2012. He has lived with bipolar disorder for over 30 years.

- Ronald Szabat currently serves as Director of Government Affairs & Clinical Practice for the American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry (AACAP) at its Washington, DC, headquarters. Until June 2012, he served as an Executive Vice President and the General Counsel for the American Society of Anesthesiologists (ASA), managing its Washington, DC Office.

### **ARMS In The Press**

The following links best represent press surrounding ARMS:

- TED talk presented by Bella Roberts: [13:23How to Use Art to Fight Mental Health Stigma | Mirabella ...](#)
- Moth Storytelling for JED Foundation:  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6f2iADmkEmM>
- The Power Thread: <https://thepowerthread.com/mirabella-on-fighting-the-mental-health-stigma-through-art/>
- The Providence Journal: <https://www.providencejournal.com/news/20190219/ri-nonprofit-uses-arts-to-tackle-stigma-of-mental-illness>
- Brown Alumni Magazine: [The Stigma Slayer | Brown Alumni Magazine](http://www.brownalumnimagazine.com › articles › the-stigma...)

- American Inno Magazine: [The Breakthrough Lab Venture Showcase: Meet the 7 Other ...www.americaninno.com > ... > Rhode Island Startup](http://The Breakthrough Lab Venture Showcase: Meet the 7 Other ...www.americaninno.com > ... > Rhode Island Startup)
- Next Gen: [Spotlight on Bella Roberts — Next Gen HQ – Next Gen Summitnextgenhq.com > spotlights > bellaroberts](http://Spotlight on Bella Roberts — Next Gen HQ – Next Gen Summitnextgenhq.com > spotlights > bellaroberts)

### **What Next?**

Due to the reasons discussed throughout this paper and the inability to host any events for the next year due to the Corona Virus pandemic, ARMS must shift its business model. I took an anonymous survey from the ARMS team about what they envision the future of ARMS to be. Most of the answers indicated the solution of transferring ARMS from a nonprofit to a school-based organization with the potential of starting at Brown University and spreading to other campuses. ARMS will remain an events-based model. As a result, until gatherings of 15+ people are allowed without fear in the US, ARMS will pause its work. Until then, we will work virtually on developing future systems that allow ARMS to continue to operate. No matter what happens to the future of ARMS, our team will continue to fight against the mental health stigma. I am forever grateful for everything I have learned from the experience of building and running ARMS.