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MARWEN ANNOUNCES CHICAGOAN AKILAH HALLEY AS EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Marwen alumna to lead organization that provides free visual arts, college and career programs for young people from Chicago's under-resourced schools and communities.



(Chicago, IL – October 24, 2018) The Board of Directors at Marwen has appointed Akilah Halley as Executive Director. Halley is a former Marwen student, trustee, and as of 2017, deputy director. As only the third executive director in Marwen's 31-year history and its first leader of color, Halley will take the reins of this organization committed to improving opportunities for youth in Chicago's under-resourced communities and schools. Through free visual arts courses taught by Chicago-based teaching artists, college counseling, career development programs, and its alumni network, Marwen pursues a mission of educating and inspiring young people through the visual arts.

Board Chair Marcy Carlin described the selection as an exciting step forward. "Following a national search for the new Executive Director, we unanimously decided that the best talent was homegrown here in Chicago and here at Marwen. Akilah's multiple perspectives of Marwen—student, trustee, and management—make her triply well-qualified. Her strategic vision and long-standing relationships with our partners and supporters will allow for a seamless leadership transition as we continue to support creative youth development." Halley is succeeding Antonia Contro, who recently stepped down after a remarkable 25-year directorship.

“Marwen is a vital part of Chicago’s cultural and community vibrancy,” remarked **Mayor Rahm Emanuel**. “Akilah’s appointment showcases the success of Marwen’s decades-long commitment to making real and lasting impact. I’m excited to see what’s in store for Chicago’s youth under her passionate leadership.”

Akilah Halley first came to Marwen as a high school freshman in 1994, taking courses and participating in many signature programs all the way through high school. She stayed connected to teachers and staff and, in 2010, Marwen invited her to become the first alumna to serve on the Board of Trustees. As a board member from 2010 to 2017 Halley co-chaired the program committee, co-chaired a Paintbrush Ball fundraiser, and participated on the development committee. In 2017 she joined Marwen’s staff as Deputy Director. In that role she has helped guide the education department, communications, alumni relations, and other strategic projects.

“As Marwen grows and asserts itself in a complex time, I’m thrilled that Akilah is at the helm,” said **Steven P. Berkowitz, Marwen’s Founder and Chairman Emeritus**. “She is fully committed to art, learning, equity, and empathy, all of which are core to Marwen’s values. Not only does she have the professional experience needed to set Marwen’s vision for the future, but she is uniquely able to understand and respond to our students’ needs and aspirations - as she was a student herself.”

“Akilah is a brilliant choice for Marwen’s next generation leader,” said **Marwen’s former President & CEO Antonia Contro**. “Having known Akilah since we first came to Marwen in 1994—she as a precocious young student and I as executive director—I say with utter confidence and great joy that I cannot imagine a more promising successor.”

“As a Chicago native and Marwen alumna inspired by the city’s vibrancy and our resilient young people, I am honored to lead Marwen’s next chapter. The world around us can be plagued with deeply rooted challenges, especially for those from under-resourced backgrounds, and it is imperative that Marwen shines even brighter. Through meaningful engagements in creative youth development programs, Marwen helps young people shape pathways to thrive as individuals and contributors to our collective community,” said **Akilah Halley**.

In addition to her Marwen experience, Halley has been a design and communications professional in Chicago for more than 14 years. Her experience spans community relations for school reform with Chicago Public Schools, promotional and development marketing with Urban Gateways, and, most recently, strategic communications and engagement programs with Crown Family Philanthropies.

Halley earned a Master of Design in Design Planning from the Institute of Design at Illinois Institute of Technology and a Bachelor of Fine Arts in Industrial Design from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. She currently serves as Co-Chair for the Chicago African Americans in Philanthropy and is a member of the Leadership Advisory Committee at the Art Institute of Chicago. She lives on the South Side of Chicago with her husband and their one-year-old son.

ABOUT MARWEN

Founded in 1987, Marwen educates and inspires young people through the visual arts. It has served more than 10,000 students in 6th through 12th grade from Chicago’s under-resourced communities and schools from nearly every zip code. Following a 2015 expansion, Marwen now provides programming to over 900 students annually, offering free access to visual art courses, college planning, and career development programs at its Near North Arts Campus. For more information visit marwen.org.