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## National Endowment for the Arts selects Staten Island

# OutLOUD for national honor

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By **Rob Bailey**

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Courtesy of OutLOUD

Young friends of Staten Island OutLOUD gather at the proverbial picket fence, celebrating the NEA's award for OutLOUD to run The Big Read on Staten Island, featuring "The Adventures of Tom Sawyer." L to R: Deborah Grinnard (holding her son, Noah, age 2), Dakota Grinnard, age 10, Esme Ng, age 10, Samier Bawatneh age 7, Amier Bawatneh age 9, Frances Bruschi, age 5, Lila Bruschi, age 9, Isabel Bruschi, age 11, and Hannah Bruschi, age 13.

STATEN ISLAND, N.Y. — What a perfect 10th anniversary present.

Staten Island OutLOUD, a grass-roots dialogue and performance project, has been selected to by the National Endowment for the Arts to host The Big Read, a program designed to revitalize the role of literary reading in American popular culture. OutLOUD is one of only 76 organizations nationwide to receive this honor.

"It's quite an accomplishment that our volunteer-driven, shoestring operation has been selected for The Big Read," said Roger McClanahan of New Brighton, Staten Island OutLOUD's Board President. "The NEA recognizes the impact of OutLOUD's work over the last 10 years. It's very gratifying."

The Big Read mission: Bringing communities together to read, discuss, and celebrate selected books from world literature.

For the 2011-2012 program, Staten Island OutLOUD has chosen Mark Twain's "The Adventures of Tom Sawyer" because it's classic American humor appeals to all ages.

"His themes involve companionship and loneliness, civil rights, crime and punishment, the magic of childhood, the challenge of parenting, first love, friendship and family, says New Brightonite Beth Gorrie, founder and



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executive director of OutLOUD. “The book examines what makes a community work, how neighbors help one another, how they challenge one another, and how they treat outsiders. It’s the ideal community read!”

OutLOUD will revolve 20-plus activities around the novel’s themes in February-April 2012. Among them: Readings and discussions, a community fence painting session, concerts, spoken-word performances, an academic panel, film screenings, and a “Tom-Becky-Huck” look-a-like competition, presented in a variety of locations around S.I.

“We’re especially pleased that The Big Read coincides with our 10th anniversary year” noted St. George resident Kathleen Galvez, another OutLOUD board member. “OutLOUD was established in 2001, shortly after the 9/11 tragedy, as a means of bringing diverse neighbors together and strengthening community ties.”

Big Read outreach has already begun in schools, libraries, community organizations and artists, “who’ve responded enthusiastically” said Ms. Gorrie. “We’d love to hear from anyone who’d like to be involved in The Big Read, which will take place February through April of 2012.”

Thanks to a \$7,000 grant from the NEA, participating schools will receive high-quality teachers’ guides, including lesson plans, essay topics, and classroom handouts.

Staten Island OutLOUD has served more than 17,000 people at over 500 free events conducted in 20 different languages. Staten Island OutLOUD’s programs are aimed at building the Island’s communities by encouraging dialogue among neighbors. OutLOUD promotes cross-cultural understanding by inviting diverse neighbors to read world classics aloud together, and by exploring their differences, commonalities and shared history.

— For more information about the National Endowment for the Arts and The Big Read, visit [NEABigRead.com](http://NEABigRead.com).

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**sioutloud**

July 17, 2011 at 10:57AM

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We're grateful for this recognition from the National Endowment for the Arts - But it would never have been possible without such deep and longstanding support from our community. We thank the thousands of Staten Islanders who've participated in OutLOUD's events over the past 10 years. Since our establishment in September 2001, we've served over 17,000 participants with hundreds of free events - in 20 languages - throughout the Island. We look forward to welcoming many more Islanders to our community programs, and we would especially love to hear from educators & other community leaders who'd like to participate in our "Tom Sawyer" activities!

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**Robin\_Locke Monda\_511** July 17, 2011 at 11:08AM

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Staten Island OutLOUD and its Director Beth Gorrie are most deserving of this honor! OutLOUD has been a consistent and reliable part of Staten Island's cultural life since 2001. I went to one of the first Staten Island OutLOUD readings, in the dark days just after the 9/11 attacks. It was a profound experience that I will always remember. Since then, the world has seen major transitions and upheavals in the publication and delivery of physical and digital books. Yet SI OutLOUD reminds us that the act of reading continues, unchanged, as an avenue to expanding the mind. And that the act of reading, in a shared environment, strengthens community and our sense of belonging.

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**Roger\_McClanahan\_333** July 17, 2011 at 11:31AM

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recently i attended a reading of the declaration of independence, james joyce ulysses, aseop's fables in unique and charming locations. this recognition by the nea is a wonderful recognition of staten islands best kept secret.

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**daysafield** July 17, 2011 at 12:29PM

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This is such great news! I remember, also, SI Outloud's first few programs after 9/11 and what a comforting experience it was to sit with neighbors, many of whom had never met before, and read together. The fact that Outloud's events involve reading together, not professional readers but real community members who come together as strangers and leave as neighbors, is the most astounding and admirable thing about them. When they say they've served 17,000 people in ten years, that doesn't mean all those people were passive audience members, but active participants and readers. I've attended many events over the years and have been to many literary events in other boroughs, and for sure there is nothing like this anywhere else in NYC. Congratulations to all!

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**dickens** July 17, 2011 at 8:52PM

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The NEA grant allows Outloud to bring to the Staten Island community a variety of wonderful reading events and discussions that will enrich its participants' lives. Outloud has done so for my wife and I for a number of years and reading and discussing The Adventures of Tom Sawyer will add more. The event, including an academic conference with good speakers, promises to be educational for all.

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**Laura Hoffman** July 17, 2011 at 10:22PM

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It is wonderful to hear that SI OutLoud is a recipient of the NEA grant. Being involved with OutLoud has been such a great experience for me. The sense of community that this organization fosters is unparalleled. It is wonderful to see people of all ages coming together to enjoy great literary works. Congratulations, especially to OutLoud's wonderful, tireless director, Beth Gorrie.

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**Tamara Coombs** July 18, 2011 at 10:29AM

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Wonderful news! I've attended OutLOUD readings and dialogues all over Staten Island. A few favorites: readings from Sojourner Truth in a packed church, readings from Moby Dick on the overlook at Ft. Wadsworth with all of NY Harbor spread out below, and my own participation in Spoon River Anthology--a group of us barefoot in an old cemetery, reading touching poems about everyday lives. SI OutLOUD is that rare thing: a brilliant idea that has been beautifully executed. Congratulations to Beth Gorrie and the OutLOUD board and volunteers.

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**stgeorgelady** July 28, 2011 at 9:58AM

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Congratulations to Beth Gorrie, the driving force, and all others associated with SIOutloud.

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