

NEW URBAN ARTS



2009 to 2010 Youth Mentorship in the Arts



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Mission and Vision

Our vision is a world where all young people - no matter their place in society - are entitled to become creative, independent thinkers and that meaningful change can happen only if every American pauses throughout life to create. Our mission is to build a vital community that empowers young people as artists and leaders to develop a creative practice they can sustain throughout their lives.

Community Need

There is consensus among various experts that creativity and imagination are not optional niceties in a child's education but critical skills and competencies in the workforce. To permanently transcend poverty, young people from our most under-resourced communities need higher-order independent and creative thinking skills, skills that are developed in high quality arts learning environments. Nevertheless, there remains a persistent need for quality after-school programs and access to arts and culture in Providence's low-income communities. The City of Providence conducted an assessment, finding that "access to arts education in Providence is uneven." This climate, along with current and continuing economic trends, increases pressure on enriching after-school programs. Our student enrollment and participation, which are at historic highs, reflect this pressure, as well as students' need and desire for more learning opportunities.

Project Goals and Objectives

Our long-term goal is that our students make a permanent place for creativity and imagination in their lives. Our interim goals are that students 1) develop close, positive relationships with non-parental adult mentors and peers, 2) acquire standards-based skills and knowledge in the arts, 3) begin to develop their unique artistic voice and 4) graduate high school on a path towards postsecondary education.

Youth Mentorship in the Arts Program Activities

The Youth Mentorship in the Arts Program in the 2009-2010 school year recruited 20 artist mentors and two studio study buddies (tutors) to mentor 450 high school students from October 2009 to May 2010 in arts disciplines ranging from painting, drawing, graphic design, to filmmaking. All programs took place in our 2,000 square foot, well-equipped storefront studio and gallery space.

Mentoring relationships at New Urban Arts emphasize collaboration and youth agency; as a result, mentorships enrich the creative practices of both youth and mentors. Mentors assemble resources and initial ideas instead of lesson plans and curricula, and youth choose their mentors and may switch at any time. Princeton University Lecturer Bill Westerman, currently documenting New Urban Arts on behalf of ARTOGRAPHY, writes, "young people who never considered they would be artists are finding new possibilities for life through this free program that eschews regimentation, formal attendance requirements and other aspects of 'schooling.'" (*In November 2009, New Urban Arts was one of nine arts organizations selected from over 100 applicants to participate in ARTOGRAPHY, a national Ford Foundation-funded grant and documentation program mapping exemplary artistic practice.*)

Our artist mentors undergo a rigorous selection process, conducted by students and staff, including essays, artwork and interviews. Over the ensuing year, artist mentors receive over 30 hours of professional development and training in various elements of arts education. While our focus is the creative development of young people, we also recognize that we work with youth from under-resourced communities. To that end, we also provide after-school snacks, free bus passes, daily tutoring and homework help and a strong partnership with College Visions, a college access and success program for first-generation and low-income college students.

About the Students We Served in 2009 to 2010

- 455 students registered for our after-school programs in 2009-10 school year;
- 169 students actively participated (attended at least once monthly for eight or more months throughout the year);
- Our participation index was 248*

Of All Active Participants (169 students):

- Fifty seven students were returning for their second, third, or fourth year;
- One hundred and eleven were new students;
- Active participants represented more than 10 different Providence Public High Schools, while the majority attended Central, Classical, Feinstein, Mount Pleasant, the Met and Textron Chamber of Commerce Academy;
- 57% were female, 43% male;
- 9% African American, 7% Asian/Pacific Islander, 10% Caucasian, 37% Hispanic, 27% no response, 9% Mult-racial
- 78% qualified for free or reduced price lunch;

** Our participation index weighs enrollment by frequency of participation. Our programs are flexible-commitment and youth can choose their level of participation.*

PROGRESS TOWARD PROGRAM OBJECTIVES

Ninety two percent of our student survey respondents reported that they had built strong, trusting relationships with their peers and artist mentors. Ninety five percent agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, "I have improved as an artist" and ninety eight agreed or strongly agreed with the statement "I am more open to trying new things." Ninety four percent agreed or strongly agreed with the statement "I have developed a way of creating that expresses who I am."

We are continuing to gather data on high school graduation. We now know that all but one high school senior participating in our programs for a minimum of one year have successfully graduated high school. Further, all nine students in our partnership with College Visions have successfully enrolled in college. Virtually all of these students are first-generation college students or from low-income backgrounds.

We also collect outgoing survey response data from youth participants. The percent agreeing/strongly agreeing with each statement:

- I am more open to trying new things. 98%
- I have improved as an artist. 95%
- I have developed more confidence. 91%
- I have developed a better idea of what I want to do in the future. 84%
- I have developed a way of creating that expresses who I am. 94%
- I have built strong, trusting relationships with my peers and artist mentor. 92%
- I feel New Urban Arts is a supportive and safe environment. 100%

Challenges

We have experienced significant increase in student enrollment and participation. The number of students enrolling reached 450 students this year, an increase of 50% from the year before. Our staff capacity can only comfortably manage 300 enrolling in our programs. From last year, our participation index increased from 181 to 248, a nearly 40% increase. Because our programs are flexible commitment and young people can choose their engagement level, we report both enrollment and a participation index, which weighs enrollment by frequency of participation (students who come only once monthly are weighed at less than 1 and students who come several times a week are weighed up to 4). There was no easy solution to managing this huge growth in demand from young people, which reflects profound need in our communities. While our evaluation data indicates that we continue to serve many young people very well, we are wrestling with the immediate strategic question of what our ideal capacity is.

OPEN-ENDED STUDENT RESPONSES

We collect qualitative data in the form of open-ended responses from youth participants as well as written artists statements.

Do you like working with an artist mentor?

New Urban Arts students overwhelmingly agreed that they enjoyed working with artist mentors. In their open-ended responses, the vast majority of students describe artist mentors successfully striking a balance between providing them valuable new skills, experiences and techniques while also providing artistic freedom. One student describes the role of the artist mentor as "one of the most important and unique things about New Urban Arts." Another student describes the style of teaching by saying, "[artist mentors] really let me go ahead and do whatever I want to try, and support me along the way." Another student says "[artist mentors] teach you so you can get better and eventually be on your own." Words like "independent," "guide," "friends," "friendly," "helpful," "positive," "relationships," "teach" and "experience" characterized what students found valuable about working with Artist Mentors at New Urban Arts. These responses represent how students responded to the question in general:

I enjoyed working with an artist mentor because I felt that I had a friend who would guide me in the right direction whenever I needed guidance.

Yes I do, because they know what they're doing and they also guide me to a better path. They have given me GREAT tips in how to improve my art.

Yes because the mentor helps you out but won't do your work and they help you become an independent person.

Yes, because they tend to have a friendly aura around them that says, "It's okay to approach me."

I do like working with my artist mentors. I have built strong relationships with my mentors. I trust their opinions and they are very helpful when it comes to my artwork or just if I need to talk. It is by far one of the most important and unique things about NUA.

Yes I do, I enjoyed working with Morgan [artist mentor] because then I would be the slacking man how I originally came in. With a mentor I have some motivation to work on a new project instead of just messing around for two hours and then going home. =]

What does New Urban Arts mean to you?

Consistent with past years, student respondents were overwhelmingly positive and focused on describing the kind of supportive and welcoming environment we do our best to provide young people. Words like “home,” “belong,” “magic,” “freedom” and “family” are characteristic of how students describe their experience in our after school program. The following selection of responses is representative of how students responded as a whole:

It means freedom to express yourself however you want to and to grow as an individual. New Urban Arts means a lot to me. I didn't think of myself as an artist before I started coming here and was introduced to different mediums of art that I didn't know about before. It gave me both the confidence to pursue those mediums and to be creative in other aspects of my life.

The feelings I have experienced are magical. New Urban Arts is in many ways a home, filled with family, & art, New Urban Arts is one of the most important things to me in the world

New Urban Arts has and will always be a place filled with love. No place on earth has ever made me feel more welcome, more loved, more accepted, and....I don't know. No words can describe how much this place has meant to me. I am eternally grateful to you, NUA. Thanks for the memories. <3 a LOT

It means a place where I feel like I belong. A place that understands my talents and doesn't constrict them like school. It's a second home to me and I would give up myself to make sure it stays to reach other kids like me.

I'm so glad that I've found New Urban Arts because I'm always itching to do different art projects—but lack the materials and people to do it with. I love that there is a completely free studio for me to expand my imagination without limitations. It's a fun thing to do afterschool.

It's a really cool place that helps a lot of people learn more about themselves and their environment. I hear a lot in school about students being excited for the bell to ring just so they can come here. I think that it's important for kids to have something to do after school where they are supervised and can still experiment with things.

ARTIST STATEMENTS AND ARTWORK



*Untitled, Emely Barroso, Class of 2010
Watercolors and ink on paper
(Photo, Jesse Banks III)*

UNTITLED

Whenever I talked about my years at New Urban Arts, I always seemed to focus on how much I loved the studio, the people, etc. and how big of an impact being there all of these years has had on me. I pretty much gush about how awesome N.U.A is. But have I ever stopped to think about how it's affected me as an artist? Well, I never really did until now (in case you were wondering). During my freshman year at Feinstein High school and first year in the studio, I was devoted to all things manga and anime-related. I was stubborn; refusing to try new styles that were outside of the box I had become so fond of. But, when I was here, something changed.

Because of [New Urban Arts], I felt inspired to try and experiment more. I began with comics, then watercolor, and self-publishing. I began to love sequential arts, painting, storytelling, book-making, zines, cartoons, comics, animation, screen-printing, and I yearned to find a way to blend those together. To this day, I continue to try to find a middle ground between my love of manga style and my infatuation with cartoon style. It's been like that for like... a year? With me, things were usually 'either...or': either manga or cartoons (and for a while between my sophomore and junior year, I was on an *uber* cartoon mix and manga began to disappear...or so I thought). I could never fully shake the manga off. But who says that's a bad thing? I don't.

I enjoy the challenge and the possibilities of experimenting to find a happy medium between the two. I feel like this exploration made me mature. I was willing to accept that, yes, I was changing but I was also willing to roll with those changes and continue to expand my creative horizons. It's weird writing this, looking back on what I used to be and what I am, (reliving that very, VERY awkward phase of my life would be a nightmare!). It's kind of eerie. But...it kind of warms my heart at the same time, thinking about how I've grown here, all the awesome people I've met here, all of the memories made here; it's amazing.

That feeling of amazement/love/encouragement/etc. is what fuels me and inspires me continually. The thought of making all of those people who had made me feel that and had done so much for me feel that way by looking at something I made really drives me. I know I still have a ways to go as an artist and reach that goal, but looking back, I feel like I'm on the right track to getting to see that. So thanks dudes, for the awesome four years. You have no idea how much I'll miss this place. How much I'll miss each and every single friend I've made here. I could write for the rest of my life and it wouldn't begin to describe how grateful I am to you. N.U.A.....thank you. I know this isn't a 'good bye' (I've been reassured time and time again this week that I'll be back (which is true because I can't imagine myself without this place)) but a 'see you again soon.' Things won't end here, they'll just be different. I'm stoked to be going to Hampshire this September, I'm excited to be graduating from high school soon (FINALLY!), and I'm glad to be writing this. This here, right now, this is my last artist statement as a high school student/N.U.A. student.

This is good/heartbreaking/bittersweet. What follows this is going to be very scary/exciting, but I'm pretty sure I can take it. Okay. Again, thank you (like, from the bottom of my heart). To all of you. Thanks... See you soon.:)

Emely Barroso



*Untitled, Carolina "CJ" Jimenez, Class of 2010
Installation in plaster, papier-mâché and furniture
(Photo, Jesse Banks III)*

UNTITLED

I said that the poet was god-awful; I couldn't relate to it. My teacher said that I didn't understand it because I didn't know enough, but I knew plenty. It was just that none of my knowledge gave me any reason to empathize with a full-grown man who couldn't figure out why he was unhappy.

Going into high school, you're still trying to figure out who you are. It became apparent to me why people had existential crises. It's hard to find out who you are when no one knows your name. When I started high school, I was no longer Carolina Jimenez or CJ. I became my student number (8259745)

Locker number (367)

My GPA (2.3)

My test scores (97 percentile in English

35 percentile in Math

85 percentile in Writing/Reading

I still have no clue what that means...)

I was constantly being told that I was getting the best education tax payer's money could buy, and if I didn't like it, I could leave.

I didn't like it, and I couldn't leave.

I became more obsessed with how I looked on paper than what I was learning. I felt myself being remodeled from a human being into a receptacle for lectures and test scores.

Learning should result from curiosity, not obligation.

Shout-outs: Everyone at School One for reestablishing my curiosity in learning and New Urban Arts for making sure I never lost it in the first place.

Carolina "CJ" Jimenez



*Untitled, Noel Puello, Class of 2012
Multimedia sculpture with LEDs
(Photos, Jesse Banks III)*



Mipahoe

The materials I used in making this work were hot glue, fabric, wood, wire, glitter cardboard and LIGHT! The process was tons of hot glue, burnt fingers, long nights at home and walks on the beach. Inspiration came from several different places: my mentors and Jesse who gave me the inspiration to put lights in it and an underground house.

I like the architecture and the lights the best in this piece. I worked with electrical wiring (aka the lights) for the first time.

Shout outs to all my female mentors and Jesse.

Noel Puello