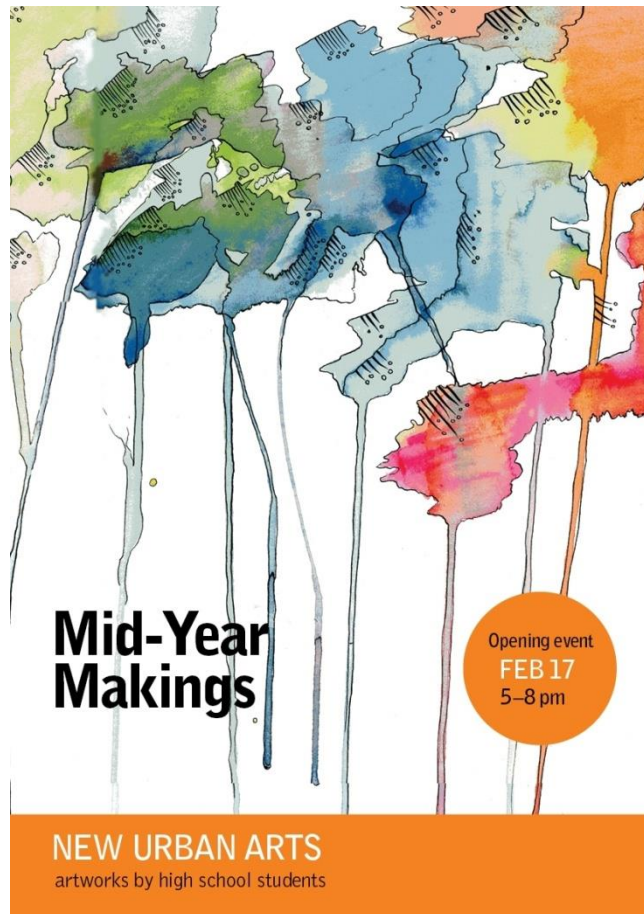


# NEW URBAN ARTS



*Invitation to midyear student exhibition. Artwork by Mandara Arnold, junior.*

## 2011 to 2012 Youth Mentorship in the Arts Program Report

\* \* \*

New Urban Arts  
705 Westminster Street  
Providence, RI 02903  
t. (401) 751-4556  
f. (401) 273-8499  
[www.newurbanarts.org](http://www.newurbanarts.org)

## **Mission and Vision**

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. Our free, year-round, out-of-school programs provide young people a supportive, stable community where they build sustained mentoring relationships with artist mentors.

## **Community Need**

The Youth Mentorship in the Arts program is an innovative response to two social problems: the need for more quality out-of-school programs for teens and the need of Providence youth for more creative learning opportunities. Teen years are a time of increased independence and potentially unsafe behavior, but also a critical time to tap young people's innate assets towards success. "It is in these hours that young people (ideally with caring adult supervision) form habits by which they will later allocate their free time, learn to conduct themselves socially, take their first jobs and formulate ideas about what constitutes a satisfying, worthwhile life" (Edna McConnell Clark Foundation).

In Providence, young people, particularly low-income youth and those in communities of color, are systematically denied access to high-quality creative learning opportunities. The City of Providence conducted an assessment finding persistent "dissatisfaction with the current state of arts education in Providence." The assessment also found that "access to arts education in Providence is uneven." Indeed, Providence public schools offer little to no arts education. The RI State Education Commissioner criticized Providence "for not providing a comprehensive program of art instruction" and failing to meet state arts requirements. The poor quality of arts learning opportunities reflects a more general critical need for quality expanded learning opportunities for high school age youth. According to RI Kids Count, only 6% of Providence public schools in 2008 were considered "high performing." This climate, along with current and continuing economic trends, puts added pressure on organizations like New Urban Arts to meet student learning needs in the arts.

## **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;
- 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 2011-2012 school year recruited 21 artist mentors, two studio study buddies (tutors), and one seniors mentor to mentor 277 high school students from October 2011 to May 2012 in arts disciplines ranging from painting, drawing, graphic design, to filmmaking. All programs took place in our new 3,900 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, who documented 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 2011 TO 2012**

277 students registered for our after-school programs in the 2011-2012 school year.

135 students were active participants (meaning they attended, on average, once per month).\*

Our participation index was 166.\*

### **Demographics of Enrolled Students**

- Gender:
  - 39% male (rise in male students from past years)
  - 61% female
- Race/Ethnicity:
  - 46% Hispanic/Latino
  - 21% Multi-racial
  - 15% White/Caucasian
  - 15% African or African American
  - 3% Asian/Asian American
- Sexuality:
  - 15% LGBTQQ (about 5% lower than past years)
- 87% qualify for free/reduced lunch
- Nearly all of Providence's public high schools were represented in our student body with 45% from Classical High School and 23% from Central High School.
- Class year: Seniors: 28%; Juniors 28%; Sophomores 25%; Freshmen 19%
- 103 New; 100 Returning

### **Demographics of Active Participants 135**

- Gender:
  - 37% male
  - 63% female
- Race/Ethnicity:
  - 41% Hispanic/Latino
  - 24% Multi-racial
  - 13% African or African American
  - 17% White/Caucasian
  - 5% Asian/Asian American
- Sexuality:
  - 16% LGBTQQ
- 87% qualify for free/reduced lunch

- 54% from Classical High School and 20% from Central High School.
- Class year: Seniors: 25%; Juniors 33%; Sophomores 23%; Freshmen 19%
- 58 New; 77 Returning

\* A student must have attended on average once per month, starting from their enrollment in our programs, to be declared an active participant.

\*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

### Year-end survey responses (66 responses)

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. 94% (47% strongly agree)
- I have developed more confidence. 92% (35% strongly agree)
- I have developed a better idea of what I want to do in the future. 80% (31% strongly agree)
- I have developed a way of creating that expresses who I am. 94% (38% strongly agree)
- I have built strong, trusting relationships with my peers and artist mentor. 97% (53% strongly agree)
- I feel New Urban Arts is a supportive and safe environment. 97% (80% strongly agree)
- 75% of students rate New Urban Arts programs "outstanding" and 25% "satisfactory"

### Postsecondary transition College Enrollment

New Urban Arts invited 21 seniors to participate at its year-end Art Party and graduation Ceremony. Generally, New Urban Arts recognizes seniors at its year-end graduation ceremony who have participated actively over multiple years or enrolled in their senior year of high school and made great contributions to our community. All 21 successfully completed their high school diplomas (two completed alternative GED programs).

Seven of our seniors were eligible to participate in our College Visions partnership based on socioeconomic and educational criteria. College Visions (CV) is a Providence-based nonprofit organization focused on college access and success. CV was founded by an alumni artist mentor, Simon Moore. Every year, 7-15 seniors participate in intensive college advising and placement. Seniors who have participated at New Urban Arts for one year at New Urban Arts are eligible to apply to participate. Since this partnership began, 98% of participants have successfully enrolled in college, the vast majority are first generation college students from low-income homes. Last year, 7 students participated and all of them successfully enrolled in a college. These students were enrolled in schools including URI, Salem College, Mass Art, Community College of Rhode Island, University of Pennsylvania, and College of the Holy Cross.

## 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. (with four stating that they enjoy working with a mentor only occasionally and one student responding that they prefer “doing things on my own”). 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. Many students describe the role of the artist mentor as **both a friend and a guide**; one student writes, “I love working with my artist mentors because I feel that they're really warm and supportive. Also they're so talented and have offered me a lot of interesting feedback and lessons to better equip me as an artist.” Students also pointed out the **valuable knowledge, skills and experiences** that artist mentors provide, one writing that “I love working with an artist mentor because they can teach me new things” and that “they can guide me and help me expand my horizons.” Another students describes the importance of the **personal nature** of the instruction that mentors provide, saying, “They help to inspire you and they help you with anything you need, in and out of NUA [New Urban Arts].” These responses represent how students responded to the question in general:

*I love it. I find a huge flaw in our society is the distance between adults and youth but at NUA that distance is bridged and eventually nonexistent—which I think is a beautiful and important thing.*

*I like working with artist mentors because they give a lot of feedback, and my work went to a lot of places where it probably wouldn't have otherwise.*

*I do because they are all supportive and even if you mess up they are there to help you out. They are also there when you have problems out of the program.*

*Working with a mentor, I have gotten to learn more about the areas of my studies. I have gotten to develop more as an artist and as a human being.*

*Yes. I have built strong relationships with my mentors and I can say that there are other people that know me well besides my family. They bring out my true essence, in addition to bringing out the best in me.*

## What does New Urban Arts Mean to You?



Consistent with past years, student respondents were positive and focused on describing the kind of supportive and welcoming environment we do our best to provide young people. Words and phrases like “love,” “home,” “family,” and “be myself” 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:

*A second home. It isn't original but that's what it is. I can be completely myself here and receive the same from everyone around. There is always something to do and someone new to meet and a generally good time to be had.*

*It means a place where I can be myself, and express myself.*

*It means friendship, a strong and closeknit community, and a safe place to express myself.*

*NUA means a lot to me because I've learned how to do a lot of things, like draw and write better and more creatively. I wouldn't have been able to do this without NUA.*

*To me, NUA means a safe place that can strengthen people emotionally and artistically.*

*New Urban Arts is a fun place where no one judges others. It's open to the community and allows students to have a place to relax or hang out with their friends.*

*A place where you can be yourself and no one will tell you otherwise, a place to have fun and a place to be productive.*

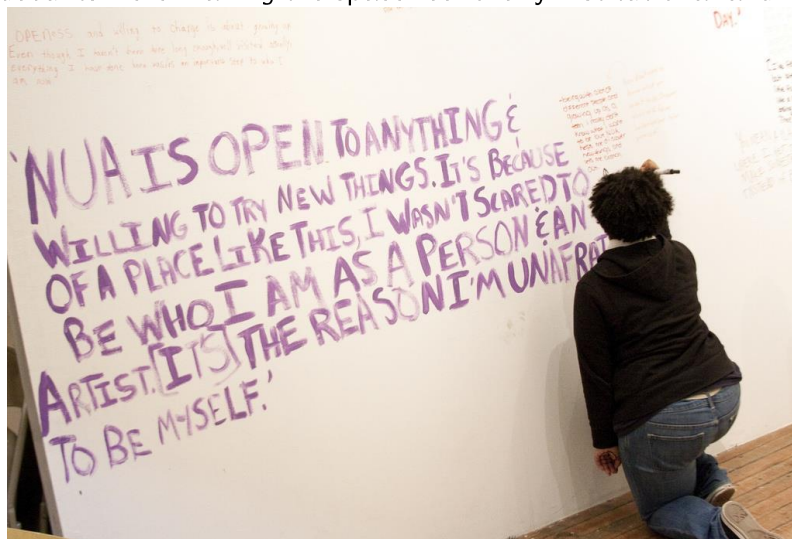
## Challenges

In 2010-11, we faced challenges in managing growth and participation in our core-after school program, which has historically been open enrollment and allows ongoing youth registration throughout the year. These open policies allow us to be as inclusive and accessible as possible, especially to our city's most underserved youth. In the first few months of the 2010-11 school year, we experienced a surge in enrollment compared to similar periods in past years.

High attendance and participation is generally a positive indicator for teen after-school programs. However, ongoing formal and informal feedback from our youth participants and staff and artist mentors in focus groups and youth advisory council and staff/artist mentor meetings was that the space at New Urban Arts felt increasingly unsafe, was missing its normal positive "vibe", and that too many newer youth participants had not been appropriately oriented to the culture at our studio. Too many youth were participating in New Urban Arts solely as a hang-out space (we offer free snacks, free riptiks and have several computers with internet access so New Urban Arts is an attractive social space) and not as part of a continuum of their participation in our programs. We encourage participants to use New Urban Arts to hang-out, but not to the exclusion of building relationships and participating artistically. "They don't know what New Urban Arts is" was a common refrain we heard from our returning and older youth, who gradually drifted to other programs, came less frequently or stopped coming all together.

The surge in attendance was accompanied by an increase in incident reports of missing items and thefts and anecdotal feedback that confirmed that many young people were failing to make a deep connection with the community of New Urban Arts. One student remarked, "We're not just the mall." We determined that we had work to confront these challenges to prevent mission creep.

In January 2011, after several staff, youth and artist planning conversations we instituted new short-term measures to address safety issues, including a daily attendance cap of 50 students and an enforced 10:1 youth-to-adult ratio at any given time. In addition, our staff and youth leaders organized several community building events (spirit week, studio challenge day, karaoke parties) throughout the winter and spring to clarify the values and norms of our space without resorting to ham-handedly posting "the rules" on the walls (which tend to be ignored). Our attendance figures normalized in the spring and the feedback we received from youth and artist mentors was that New Urban Arts was gradually achieving a healthier sense of normalcy, but that these new strict restrictions and headcounts were making the space feel overly institutional and less creative.



*Studio Challenge Day, January 2011*

## Program Improvements for 2011-12

We realized that as our programs had grown, we had work to do to formalize those practices that make our art studio effective and allow us to serve youth well by cultivating youth empowerment, spontaneity and healthy risk-taking.

In March of 2011, we launched a new Program Committee comprised of key stakeholders in our organization as well as several outside advisors and experts from the arts, after-school, social services and education fields. This committee included a social worker at the Providence Children's Museum, a case manager from John Hope Settlement House who was also a New Urban Arts parent and the youth programs manager at the Institute for Nonviolence. We were fortunate to assemble this team of volunteer experts. Under the leadership of Program Director Sarah Meyer, this group helped us formalize policies and procedures to help ensure that New Urban Arts is a safe space without resorting to punitive, proscriptive adult-driven strategies that don't effectively manage behavior, disenfranchise youth, and would compromise New Urban Arts' values, mission and unique way of working.

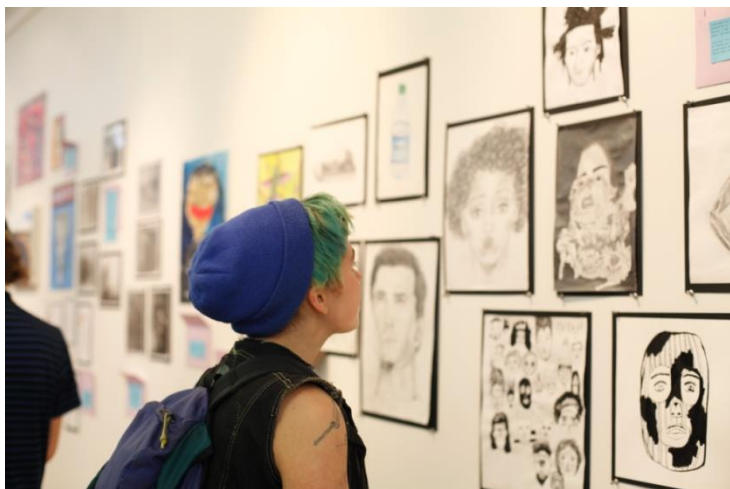
Thanks to their work we implemented the following recommendations in Fall 2011:

- We transformed our Studio Manager position into a Program Coordinator and added hours, so that we now have three full-time program staff positions: Director of Programs and Program Coordinator.
- We implemented a longer two-day pre-service orientation/retreat for all of our incoming artist mentors (increased from a one-day retreat) with added emphasis on the stages of adolescent development.
- We now have a dedicated New Urban Arts senior advising mentor to keep our seniors as visible role models for younger, newer students while providing these veteran students unique and special services appropriate to their needs.
- For all staff and volunteers that work directly with young people, we increased the professional development and training we provide through longer orientation and planning periods. We're also leveraging outside resources to access nationally recognized high-quality youth development and after-school training, particularly the BEST training which is provided in a joint collaboration of the Providence After School Alliance, the Rhode Island After-School Plus Alliance and RIDE's 21<sup>st</sup> Century program, emphasizing topics such as adolescent development, communication and conflict resolution.
- We now host an extended open house month before the official start of our school year programs, allowing returning students to come in and establish a culture and give our staff more time to prepare, plan, recruit new students, and train new artist mentors.
- We are also piloting set points of entry for youth, monthly orientations for new students throughout the year—we hope this will keep our programs accessible while giving our staff room to manage new student induction. It was clear from staff feedback that the crush of ongoing daily new student enrollment and registration was draining and distracting them from the work of managing programs for students who had already signed up.



## Gallery Attendance and Exhibitions

In addition to our core youth programs, New Urban Arts presented 19 events ranging from small art workshops (fourteen artists in our alumni artist mentor leadership institute) to major gallery openings of student work (such as the 554 people that attended our 2012 Art Party, our year-end celebration of student work). In total, 2,243 people attended events at New Urban Arts in 2011-12.



*2012 Art Party, May 18, 2012 at New Urban Arts*