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New Urban Arts Endowment Fund

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“For a lot of students, wherever their creative practice is nurtured and encouraged is where they want to spend their time and energy. New Urban Arts becomes that central positive experience for many Providence young people who otherwise wouldn’t have these opportunities,” explains Daniel Schleifer, executive director of New Urban Arts.

Founded in 1997, the nonprofit community arts studio on Providence’s west side offers free after-school and summer arts and youth development programs for low-income high school students—students who attend schools that have had to make severe cuts to the arts. Its core program, Youth Mentorship in the Arts, connects

artists-mentors with students. “For many young people, this is one of the very few places where they’re asked, ‘What do you want to do? What do you want to learn?’ We strive to have everything we do originate from the interests of our youth,” Dan states.

The New Urban Arts facility accommodates a myriad of interests, featuring a screen print studio, black and white photo darkroom, recording studio, digital media lab, library of art books, and areas for painting, drawing, and sculpture, as well as areas for sewing and textiles.

The organization recruits students from nearby high schools, but finds most enrollees learn of the program through word of mouth. Strong relationships with local colleges attract artist-mentors; program alumni also fill this role.

New Urban Arts is about more than the arts. “All young people, no matter their place in society, should have the opportunity to become more creative and independent thinkers. The hours spent on creative tasks build up our young people, giving them a sense of identity, voice, and the ability to make meaning of their worlds,” Dan shares.

Just as the programs are fostering the growth of those they serve, New Urban Arts is maturing as an organization. “This endowment signals that we see ourselves as a permanent institution. And we feel strongly that working with the Foundation makes us part of a community of nonprofit organizations that have established themselves as essential to the health and vitality of Rhode Island,” Dan concludes.

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