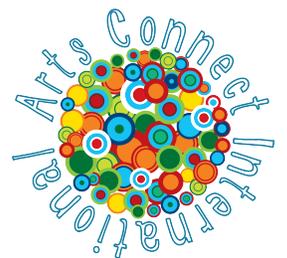




YOUTH UNITED ARTISTS

August 2018 - March 2019

ARTS CONNECT
INTERNATIONAL



SUMMARY

From the Summer of 2018 - Spring of 2019, ACI convened a collective of 6 youth arts leaders of color, self-named the Youth United Artists (YUA). The 6 youths represented four distinct BPS high schools. The program follows a Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR) process, positioning youth as social change agents and experts of their own lives. YUA members conducted research about social issues affecting their own communities in order to engage in advocacy. Drawing on ACI's network of arts leaders, the YUA members worked with ACI mentors to co-produce knowledge and artwork, using their research as inspiration. The YUA shared their exploratory research at the Arts Equity Summit in March 2019.

PARTICIPANTS

This YPAR program was conceptualized as a research project in partnership with the University of Massachusetts Boston. As such, the recruitment process followed an Institutional Review Board (IRB) vetted and approved protocol.

Youth: With partnership from Boston Arts Academy, ACI recruited youth participants for the YPAR program through a two-step application process. ACI staff members recruited on-site at the school, in addition to having support from Boston Arts Academy and ACI-affiliated educators who referred students to the application process. All potential participants were interviewed by ACI staff members.

Mentors: Three ACI staff members, Allegra Fletcher, Hanako Brais, and Marian Taylor Brown worked in collaboration with Stephen Hamilton, an arts educator and visual artist, and Jessica Fei, a YPAR Consultant; all members of ACI's existing community of artist leaders of color.

**Positioning
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FUNDING

YUA was made possible through contributions from the Living Closer Foundation, Foley Hoag Foundation, Shinnyo-en Foundation, the Dissertation Development Fund at UMass Boston, and the Boston Cultural Council. Each YUA member was paid a total of \$1,250 over the course of the program for their participation.

FORMAT

The Youth United Artists met after school once a week, in addition to participating in a week-long Training Institute in August and a week-long Research Intensive in February.

August Training Institute

The Training Institute brought the Youth United Artists and mentors together for the first time. Over five days, the YUA explored concepts of self and identity, group identity, YPAR research, democratic participation, social justice and activism, and art as a tool for social change. During



this time, each youth honed in on their artistic mediums and the social issues they are passionate about.

Weekly Sessions

Each session began with team building exercises to ground the team before starting work for the session. With self-directed inquiry as the guide, mentors collaborated with the youth in conducting exploratory research on a social issue of their choice. This process involved compiling literature reviews, choosing methodology, conducting interviews, coding and analyzing data, and presenting their information. Important to and continual in this undertaking was processing and meaning making through art. Arts leaders from ACI's network also visited sessions to act as additional mentors to the YUA.

February Research Intensive

As the Arts Equity Summit approached, the February Research Intensive provided structured time for youth to work with each other and YUA mentors to prepare, rehearse, and build skills for their presentations at the Summit. To help build their presentations, the YUA worked on an "Instagram Research Story" project, where they created a narrative of their research project through art and succinct captions. During this intensive, the YUA also visited the locations where the Arts Equity Summit took place: Hibernian Hall, the Institute of Contemporary Art, and District Hall.

RESEARCH TOPICS

Through the intensives and weekly sessions, the YUA refined their research topics, questions, and methodologies. Broadly, the topics that the YUA explored are as follows:

1. Toxic masculinity in Black and Brown communities
2. Housing Justice in Boston
3. Employment Discrimination
4. Immigration Narratives
5. Black Women's Experiences of Misogyny
6. Somali-American Identity

FEEDBACK & LESSONS LEARNED

To evaluate the efficacy of the program, one of the mentors conducted in-person exit interviews with the youth. Above all, the YUA were highly appreciative of the community that was built among the youth and mentors. They often described this community as a family of trust, openness, and care. Because of this environment, the participants felt that their voices were not only heard, but also appreciated and highly valued.

Meaningful Research

In self-directed research projects, with guidance and support from mentors, the YUA members chose social justice topics and crafted research questions that they are passionate about. Because of this, the YUA expressed that their research was meaningful, not only for themselves, but for their communities, with one youth commenting that "my research is

purposeful and important.” Additionally, one participant noted that he felt empowered, noting that he learned “how to use my voice as a youth.” Another youth noted that she felt empowered by the people she interviewed.

New Opportunities

For multiple YUA members, presenting at the Arts Equity Summit gave them a sense of accomplishment. Preparing to present their work at a large-scale summit pushed them to gain skill sets that are important to advocacy work. A YUA member noted that he is often told that youth voice matters and that he has “a voice” without knowing how to use it. But through participating in YUA, he was able to take steps forward in understanding and enacting what it means to use his voice as a young person. Additionally, exposure to ACI’s network allowed for YUA to meaningfully engage with arts sector professionals.

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A Supportive and Loving Environment

The atmosphere created by the program allowed for YUA members to bring their whole selves to the meetings. According to one youth: “We were able to really just be ourselves around each other.” Another YUA member commented: “One thing I can take away from this is the feeling of inclusion and now I know how it feels to have people around me. Now I know how it feels to have people who care about me around me, and so that just makes me feel like I’m going to continue including people into my circle, because, you know, everyone wants that feeling of inclusion.”

Suggestions for the next iterations of the YUA program:

- Create a wider YUA community by inviting this year’s YUA members to return as mentors for the upcoming cohorts
- Increase the number of hours YUA meets in a week to allow for more work time, including artmaking
- Explore other channels of advocacy for the YUA to engage in, in addition to the Arts Equity Summit

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