Project HELP Nevada

The Creative Impact

The Creative Impact project is geared toward at-risk youth. The Creative Impact is an arts-infused approach to support youth to be critical, creative thinkers, collaborative learners, and active citizens that breathes creative energy into our community. It creates synergy between the learner and artists, motivates support groups, attracts volunteers and connects project participants to the community. The Creative Impact is a foundation program from which at-risk young adults can learn traditional and non-traditional art forms and choose their own unique artistic direction.

Research suggests that the arts can have a positive impact on youth development, from birth through adolescence. For example, Menzer (2015) found that engaging in various arts activities (such as singing, dancing, play acting, and doing crafts) at a young age is associated with positive social and emotional behaviors, including empathy, sharing, and mood control.

For at-risk, criminal justice-involved, and traumatized youths, the arts can provide an outlet for addressing emotional and/or problem behaviors through opportunities to learn new skills, develop new talents, and express thoughts and ideas in creative and therapeutic ways (Ezell and Levy 2003). Similarly, for youths dealing with trauma or victimization (including exposure to violence), the arts can help them cope with painful experiences by fostering resiliency (Heise 2014). Creating art can strengthen a youth's problem-solving skills, autonomy, sense of purpose, and social competence. Moreover, art can help encourage positive emotions and strength, allowing youths to view themselves as survivors and not as victims (van Westrhenen and Fritz 2014).

The Creative Impact project studies a myriad of arts including drawing, painting, ceramics, soap and candle making, short story and poetry writing, dance, clothing design, creative cooking and games. Basic mathematics, reading and writing are an integral part of the program. Along with math, reading and vocabulary development, journaling is an essential part of the program. Through their journaling, participants express their problems, goals and wishes and the PHN Life Coach along with the volunteer artists guide them toward a positive expression of feelings through artistic expression.

The Creative Impact project allows at-risk youth to develop their self-confidence, to take their core issues and give them a tangible and manageable form, to develop skills in critical thinking, communication, and peer mediation. Coupled with select lessons from the LIFE Skills component, the project stresses rights and responsibilities, assertiveness training, community relations, and helps youth explore how negative behavior affects their lives.

Volunteer artists use content, which is relevant to experiences, needs, and interests of the participants and the lessons are geared to individual levels of ability. The team of volunteer artists of The Creative Impact work with the youth to create an artistic exhibition (on canvas, poetry, dance, etc.). The walls of PHN administrative offices, located at 239 S. Sierra Street are transformed into an artist gallery and a quarterly showing is open to the public. In addition, youth art is offered for sale to help support the program and the artist.

The Creative Impact strives to use art and its profound effect as a way of helping at-risk youth heal and gain a sense of well-being when adults – and words – have failed them. Art in every medium is a way for these kids to reframe their negative experience and imagine something different. The creator of The Creative Impact tells us art, in any form, can teach a host of social skills, from making eye contact to working in a team as well as giving them empowering ways to express themselves. Often, for the first time, people are not looking at them as kids in trouble; they are looking at them as artists.

The Creative Impact makes an *IMPACT* on these kids, their lives and their hopes and dreams.

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