

CASE-IN-POINT: TAKING THE PULSE

INNOVATIVE COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT: ART CITY AND YOUTH LEADERSHIP

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ABSTRACT

The following taking the pulse is a case study of a new youth leadership programme at Art City. Art as a means of community development is an innovative approach which is only beginning to receive due attention from planners, community practitioners and funders. The case-in-point explores ideas of youth participation in community development, why youth participation matters, the youth leadership program at Art City; including why the program was started, what the program entails, goals of the program and lessons learned after one year of operation as they prepare for year two.

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Source: Art City

Front elevation of Art City

INTRODUCTION

Art City is one of few community arts centres in Canada that offers free programming to participants of all ages. The importance of arts centres as a means of community development is growing within the arts and planning circles in Canada. Within Winnipeg aside from Art City, there is Graffiti Gallery,



Source: Art City

Model of city created by Art City participants

which is another community based art center and is located on Higgins Avenue. Like Art City, they offer older youth an opportunity to participate in various arts related projects.

ART CITY

Art City was started in 1998 by local artist Wanda Koop. "Wanda Koop is a long-standing resident of the West Broadway community and has worked hard to improve her neighbourhood for many years" (Art City web site).

Art city began with the intention of engaging young people in art and in the community processes that were beginning to take place in the neighbourhood at that time. Art City is located in the neighbourhood of West Broadway, in the heart of downtown Winnipeg and offers free drop-in programming and workshops to their culturally diverse community.

The West Broadway neighbourhood had experienced a period of decline but is now pursuing a rigorous, multi-faceted revitalization effort. West Broadway's revitalization includes a focus on housing, safety, physical and visual improvements and community development. Art City works closely with the West Broadway Development Corporation to ensure a coordinated community development effort (Art City web site).

Art City originally focused on children aged 6-17 but they have now expanded their programming to include all ages. "Art City's storefront studio offers an alternative to people of all ages who need or want a place to express themselves creatively. Free art classes are offered to anyone who would like to attend and guest artists appear regularly to share their experience" (Art City Website).

ART CITY'S MANDATE

- Fostering self-expression in participants, encouraging a sense of ownership, self-respect and pride in their work and community.
- Being a part of the neighbourhood, a place that is safe, comfortable, supportive.
- Being accessible by offering free-of-charge, quality programming with local, national and international professional artists.
- Being sustainable and available to the community day after day, year after year.
- Being a model for future community art centres. (Art City web site)

YOUTH AND ART

Art is an important element of community development as it provides people with a creative outlet or a vehicle for self-expression. Youth participation in art programs results in: healthier youth in communities, improved academic performance, creation of jobs, cost savings in other sectors, reduction in juvenile crime, and improved skill and career development (Arts Network for Children and Youth).

Engagement in art activities allows youth to: find their strengths, experience a sense of ownership, and develop critical skills. All of these outcomes may lead to youth who are more involved in their community and give them an opportunity to interact in a healthy manner with adults in the neighbourhood. Arts programs are beneficial to youth who learn visually, spatially, musically, and kinaesthetically; all forms of learning which may not be incorporated extensively into traditional educational classrooms. One study reported: "...improvements in higher-order thinking, communication and socialization skills" (Arts Network for Children and Youth p8).

Art studios such as Art City create jobs in the local economy for creative adults and artists. Not only do art programs create jobs but they also result in a cost savings in the justice system, health and social programming for youth because

when youth are actively participating in their community they are less likely to be engaging in criminal activity and needing other social programming. In April 2003 when the Young Offenders Act came into effect; the act called for more youth involvement in community organizations as a means of prevention, intervention, and reintegration (Arts Network for Children and Youth).

Participation in art teaches youth skills in communication, team building, and problem solving; all of which are essential in the current economy. "Add to this the natural abilities of creative people: intuition, flexibility and the ability to improvise, and you have the combination of sought after skills for middle or upper management positions" (Arts Network for Children and Youth). The above stated results of youth participation in art programs are not only important for youth engagement and their development but they establish the groundwork for youth participation in other aspects of community development.

YOUTH AND PLANNING

Participation in planning means that planning is: local, transparent, inclusive, interactive, responsive, relevant, educational, reflective, transformative, sustainable, personal, and voluntary (Driskell 2002). Art City programs and drop-in sessions allow youth participants to experience all of the elements and exposure to such elements is essential to being able to participate in other community planning processes.

Youth should be involved in planning, not only because it fosters personal and community development but because planning is concerned with creating places and communities. "Children are the dominant users of some spaces such as parks, playgrounds and schools" (Forsyth 2002:2). Teenagers are often perceived by adults to be problems in public spaces but their knowledge of the place positions them to

be good decision-makers in terms of what will be good for a public space, thus teenagers and other youth have knowledge and skills which allow them to participate positively in a community planning process (Forsyth 2002).

Participation includes the elements mentioned above but it is also essential to understand what benefits arise out of youth participation in community development. The following box highlights some of the benefits to other community members, and planners.

BENEFITS FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

- Participate in a new and exciting activity.
- Look at and understand their local community and environment in new ways.
- Learn about democracy and tolerance.
- Develop a network of new friends, including community role models and resource people.
- Develop new skills and knowledge.
- Help create positive change in the local environment and other aspects of the community.
- Develop a sense of environmental stewardship and civic responsibility.
- Develop confidence in their abilities to accomplish the goals they set.
- Strengthen their self-esteem, identity and sense of pride.

Source: Driskell 2002: 35



Mural from the Haunted Department Store Source: Art City



Source: Art City

The beauty parlor of the Haunted Department Store

BENEFITS FOR OTHER MEMBERS OF THE COMMUNITY

- Interact with young people in positive, constructive ways, helping to overcome the misperceptions and mistrust that often exist between generations.
- Understand how young people in their community view the world, their community and themselves.
- Identify ways in which the quality of life for local people can be improved.
- Build a stronger sense of community and pride of place.
- Appreciate the ideas and contributions of young people.
- Invest time and energy in the future of the community.

BENEFITS FOR PLANNERS AND POLICY-MAKERS

- More fully understand the needs and issues of the communities they serve.
- Make better, more informed planning and development decisions.
- Educate community members on the inherent complexities and trade-offs involved in policy and development decision-making.
- Create urban environments that are more child-friendly and humane.

Source: Driskell 2002: 35

YOUTH LEADERSHIP PROGRAM

The goal of Art City's Youth Leadership program is to address the lack of opportunities and choices available to youth in the West Broadway neighbourhood due to challenges such as; poverty, inadequate housing, food security, neglect, gangs and crime. Youth who participate in the program will participate in leadership training workshops, have greater responsibilities at Art City, begin to attain skills, which will prepare them for future employment, and the youth will receive a small amount of financial compensation.

A second reason for the Youth Leadership Program was the desire to retain Art City participants who were beginning to outgrow the programmes that were available to them at Art City. As youth mature their willingness to participate in certain activities wanes due to changing tastes. Thus, the program hopes to retain these youth by offering them opportunities which appeal to their changing interests.

The program was developed based on input from the monthly Youth Council meetings, anecdotal information, and observation of participants. Based upon these sources of information and input Art City staff realized this would be an important initiative.

The program involves a partnership with National Crime Prevention Strategy (Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness Canada), Urban Green Team Program (Manitoba Education, Citizenship and Youth), the Broadway Neighbourhood Centre, Teen Talk (Klinic), Winnipeg Boys and Girls Clubs, St. John's Ambulance, and Partners for Careers. Partnerships are an important element in insuring an integrated and successful program, which addresses community development needs.

The first group of participants were recruited through a sign-up sheet at Art City and ten youth were selected to participate in the program. The participants attended workshops on first aid, non-violent crisis intervention, self-esteem and positive

communication, post-secondary education, and career possibilities.

After the workshop stage participants are required to complete 40 shifts, each shift is 4-hours in length during drop-in time at Art City. The youth leadership participants have responsibilities, which include helping younger children with their art projects; preparing and serving snack; and supporting staff as needed.

Phase II of the program will begin in the Summer of 2005 and will involve recruitment of 10 youth participants who will participate in workshops and training before beginning shifts at Art City. The youth who participated in Phase I of the program will become mentors for the new participants to build a chain of mentorship and create relationships among youth participants. Additionally, Phase I participants will engage in more in-depth workshops on self-esteem and relationships.

LESSONS LEARNED

An evaluation of Phase I by the youth leaders and Art City staff has led to some changes in the workshops being offered for Phase II participants. This year's workshops will incorporate more sessions on acquiring practical skills such as: tools for working at Art City, childhood development and behaviour so that youth leaders will have a better understanding of why children behave the way they do and how to address conflicts that may arise between children.

For Phase II, staff will recruit participants, because during Phase I with the use of a sign-up method there was only a 40% retention rate. Youth will be selected based on their demonstrated commitment to Art City, and their level of respect for the program, staff, and other participants.

One important lesson, which came out of the first year of the Youth Leadership Program, is that there are many challenges in working with youth and being more cognizant of these challenges from the outset might result in better outcomes.



Source: Art City

A sculpture created by Art City participants

Although Art City is an organization which works with youth, there are new challenges that arise with a program aimed at empowering youth through their participation at a volunteer or staff level.

The first challenge to engaging youth is adultism, which is the belief that adults have more knowledge than youth due to a perceived lack of life experiences (Mullahey et al. 1999).

A second challenge is adults attempts to fit young people into adult structures, adults may use forms of communications which alienate youth or the organization may have highly organized protocols which youth may not fully understand and which are not fully explained (Mullahey et al. 1999).

Racism and discrimination is a third challenge to working with youth. Beauvais, McKay, and Seddon (2001) suggest that Aboriginal youth encounter significant struggle around identity. These identity

issues are compounded by conflicts that emerge between their values and those of the wider society.

A fourth challenge which may arise is that the current political climate may project false identities onto youth, especially Aboriginal youth. These identities are created based on a perceived sense of apathy on the part of youth because of their lack of participation in politics. However, the real cause of their inaction could be caused by the form of the political structures and their disinterest in addressing issues which are of concern to youth (Beauvais et al. 2001).

A fifth challenge is the scheduling of meetings or workshops in places inaccessible to youth (Wright). The final challenge is barriers to organizational preparedness; which includes assumptions by both youth and adults in relation to youth's capacities, adult's resistant to facilitating youth participation, failure to recognize diverse capacities of youth, and a lack of clearly defined objectives or expectations for youth participation.

Art City's youth leadership program is innovative in its approach to crime prevention and youth participation in community development. As youth progress through the program they acquire additional skills and responsibilities which will result in their investment in the programs of Art City and in their community.

Art City is demonstrating a commitment to evaluating progress and adapting the program to better meet the needs of participants. The youth leadership program is an essential first step in working towards Art City's goal of training youth in the community to take on more responsibilities in order to one day become staff.

Community development initiatives have much to gain from including arts programs in their revitalization efforts. Art City's Leadership Program is an innovative method of engaging youth in their community

COMMUNITY ARTS IN CANADA

By Jason Granger

When Art City first opened seven years ago, the concept of community art centres was still relatively new in Canada. At the time, there were only a small number of organizations struggling to access funding for their continually growing constituency of dedicated participants. Centres had to be creative, not only in their art programming, but also in how to attain funds. Arts funders did not have a direct route through which to grant monies to these agencies, corporations had never heard of such organizations, and all levels of government were just beginning to take an interest in these innovative community-based centres.

Today, there are dozens of community art centres across Canada providing a wide range of art programming that is offered free-of-charge to interested participants. This incredible growth can be attributed to two factors; mentoring agencies and specialized funding.

First, as community art centres emerged in the 1990s, they actively advocated and shared their experiences publicly. This provided the needed encouragement for other groups to establish. What followed was a flourish of community art centres opening across the country.

Second, as arts funders and government departments witnessed the successes of the community art concept, they realized that direct sources of funding were required for these agencies. With direct funding sources, community art centres no longer had to promote their project ideas on the heels of semi-related programs. The development of funding sources specifically for community arts programming provided the needed recognition to firmly establish community arts in Canada.

The support for community arts projects and programming is still growing. New organizations continue to emerge as older organizations gradually evolve from pilot projects to established organizations. With

increased knowledge and understanding of community art centres, it is now much easier to promote the benefits of community arts to government departments, foundations, corporations, and arts funders. However, funding is still a major challenge for community art centres. Community art organizations still suffer from a lack of sustainable, long-term funding. Because of this, it is common for community art centres to access up to 30 separate sources of funding each year.

A major advocate for youth-based community arts in Canada is the Arts Network for Children and Youth (ANCY). ANCY is a national umbrella agency that promotes the concept of community-based arts initiatives, provides assistance and resources to emerging organizations, and advocates to arts funders, foundations, and all levels of government. Art City has been a member of ANCY since its inception. ANCY is also interested in the additional benefits community art centres can provide for youth. Community art centres provide opportunities for youth to be mentored by positive role-models, develop decision-making strategies, explore their personal potential, and learn and practice leadership skills. The Art City Youth Leadership Program is an example of such an opportunity for teens in the West Broadway community.

Although there are still large funding hurdles to overcome, community art centres are here to stay. With the growing support for community art centres across Canada, the future of community art is promising. Obstacles to funding are gradually being eroded away, and new funding opportunities are continually being developed. Community arts agencies, together with their participants, will continue to promote and advocate for community art to ensure that this needed service is available to communities for years to come.

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