

To: Donors

From: Andrea Johnson, Executive Director, C.I.P.T.T., Inc.

August 24, 2021

Re: Final Report on C.O.P.E.'s Hands Across Central & Becoming Unmasked

This is a final report on disposition of the grant funds provided for the Hands Across Central and Becoming Unmasked art projects created as part of Central Opportunities for Purposeful Engagement (C.O.P.E.) and Central Promise Neighborhood Initiative. The goal was to use art therapy to address mental health post-COVID, with special attention on high schoolers from East Tech High School. We united the community by showcasing the art from donors, residents and health care professionals, around a common vision in two public art installations called HANDS ACROSS CENTRAL and BECOMING UNMASKED.

The plan was to hire Promise Ambassadors to provide art, leadership and self-help training for student interns at the garden; CIPTT, Inc. would provide technical and resource support, as well as mentoring, coaching, and instruction, as needed. We received \$2000 from Sisters of Charity Foundation for the Hands Across Central project and privately raised over \$5,700 through IOBY crowdfunding. These funds were used to sponsor a summer leadership program with 5 participating student interns; and 4 parents of students. We had 6 volunteers who assisted in gardening and art activities. Originally, all students were to be paid as interns through Y.O.U. to embellish the work of participants in the art project. However, only one student ended up being paid through Y.O.U. and the balance of the participants were paid out of raised funds. All funds were used for the program activities. The following summarizes the activities, outcomes achieved, challenges overcome and lessons learned.

Summary of Accomplishments

Overall, C.O.P.E. was a success with engagement of over 150 persons, including 56 Central stakeholders who created 32 hand word art canvases and 24 masks; and 18 Promise Ambassadors, residents and entrepreneurs hired as contractors/interns. The stakeholders represented a diverse group of SVCMC staff, SoCF staff, teens, adults, and seniors from or affiliated with the Central neighborhood. The interns were Central residents, who created art pieces for the exhibition and embellished art from other stakeholders. The display opened on schedule on August 7, 2021 at the first Health Walk and Art Exhibition in Central.

The C.O.P.E. Summer Leadership Program ran between June 1 and August 7, with 10 interns, including 4 teens from East Tech between the ages of 15-19 years of age, 1 youth age 10, 3 adults and 2 seniors ages 65 and 82. In addition, the garden hosted 5 in-person events and 3 Zoom events, where 10 or more persons from Central organizations visited the garden and participated in gardening, art therapy, and/or entrepreneurship training. We also hired 8 local businesses and Promise Ambassadors to teach art therapy classes, provide suicide prevention training, lawn maintenance services, and transportation to and from a field trip to the Cleveland Zoo to research job and volunteer opportunities. (Two other planned activities with ambassadors were canceled due to scheduling conflicts.) The culminating Art Opening and Health Walk event on August 7 hosted over 50 people in attendance. During the event, 12 persons received health and wellness screenings from SVMC residents, and summer interns led a Health Walk from the garden down to Tri-C and back. Also in attendance was Councilmember Gray and Cleveland Metro Police Recruiters; SVCMC staff gave food away, and

SVCMC medical staff provided for health screenings. Participants were encouraged to pick fresh produce of a variety of greens, peppers, tomatoes, and squash, and received health information on the medicinal value of each of these vegetables. Two of the interns have graduated from high school but still need transition training, so they will continue with Y.O.U through the fall harvest.

The following outcomes were achieved: 1) Interns received leadership training by identifying personal goals and taking concrete next steps toward them; and demonstrated leadership ability by hosting and leading the Health Walk; 2) Interns produced 3 individual art pieces and assisted in embellishing art work of others; 3) Ambassadors received training and feedback on entrepreneurial pursuits, along with recommendations on next steps; 4) Plants grown were and continue to be harvested and distributed to the community free of charge; and most importantly 5) a diverse, intergenerational, multicultural, interdisciplinary group of stakeholders, i.e., residents, teens, professionals, ambassadors and community leaders, came together to express and process the effects of the pandemic on mental health, and display creatively their hopes, dreams, wishes and reflections for themselves and Central post-COVID.

Due to vandalism of one of the panels, the size of the exhibit at the garden site was reduced and a photographic exhibit of the project will be on display at 3 sites on SVMC campus.

Challenges

Dawn Glasco told me when we started that nothing will happen in the manner planned and these words rang true throughout. First, the student interns had special needs, e.g., Independent Education Plans, autism, seizures, which we had not contemplated but required us to revise both our expectations and the outcomes to ensure their success. This also meant that caregivers and family support members also came with the interns, so we adopted a holistic approach in looking at family needs, rather than simply individual needs. We also made the adults interns. Turns out that 44 % of East Tech students have I.E.Ps. We decided to refocus on activities of independent daily living as outcomes, i.e., completing online forms, using public transportation, interviewing techniques, handling transportation, shopping, preparing meals, using the telephone and other communication devices, and taking medication. We also discovered that 80% of all students with disabilities are unemployed. This created a new focus for our outreach as this group of students have the highest risks of failure in life without intervention.

Second, we assumed that by advertising the program activities through fliers, social media and email well in advance, residents and interested persons would register. Unfortunately, the prevalence of crime, violence and distrust by residents and ineffective communication outlets required that we do outreach to organizations, inviting them to participate in an activity at the garden so that members were familiar with each other during the experience. It also necessitated that we put in place preventative measures to minimize theft and vandalism, as well as to keep people safe through social distancing.

Third, communication and transportation were recurring issues for some of the students as the majority of students did not know how to take public transportation, lacked the technology to have and receive reliable information, instructions, etc. Dawn was able to secure computers for two of the interns and we got permission from East Tech to allow the students to keep their computers through the summer.

Finally, with the rain storms during this summer, we held some sessions online, or met at Sterling Library. We found that there was something special about the atmosphere at the garden that changed when we went inside. Internet access was a challenge for some, so we used Sterling Library for internet related activities where there was resource support available.

It reinforced for us that being outside and together without distractions was definitely preferred.

Lessons Learned

The biggest lesson is that if you are going to effect change in the lives of young people, you have to be holistic to include the caregivers and support system to ensure that what is learned is reinforced, and not undermined through “crabs in the barrel” mentality. The best chance for success in helping young people in Central lies in dealing with students who are already involved with an organization, mentors or groups and have some existing support structure. Moreover, flexibility and adaptability are indispensable in implementing any program in Central. Assumptions must be tested and reevaluated constantly throughout the implementation as the layers of complexity in the lives of Central residents cannot be underestimated.

Focus for 2020

CIPTT has received a grant from the Huron Foundation to study the social determinants that undermine graduating East Tech students with Independent Learning Plans (IEPs) and some form of disability, from mastering Activities of Independent Living to prepare for job training in horticulture, animal care, and art.

Thanks again for your support of C.O.P.E. and the E. 39th Garden Mission, to Empower Wellness in Central Together.