

Mariposa County Arts Council
Gazette Article, December 12, 2018

JUMP StARTS

Last month I introduced a little series of pieces that explore some of the Arts Council's programs that serve specific communities and have low visibility. JUMP StArts is one such program. Centered around visual artist residencies, this program provides at-risk foster and system-engaged youth living at Sierra Quest Human Services Foundation's Sierra Quest Academy opportunities to learn about and create art pieces that explore the concepts of identity, culture, community and home. Over the course of the past four years participants have worked with teaching artists working in the fields of photography, painting/drawing, printmaking, wearable art and mural work. Each residency explores how the elements of art, principles of design, composition and lighting apply to each respective medium/field and how these artistic techniques can be used to send a specific message to viewers. Through facilitated discussions and museum visits participants learn about and experience the work of well known artists who work in whatever medium they are currently learning about prior to starting their own project.

Beyond exposing youth to art, this program aims to do three specific things:

1. Engage participants in the creative process, which requires them to imagine, examine, and perceive; explore, experiment, and develop craft; create; reflect, assess, and revise, and; share their product with others. The process requires innovation, flexibility and determination and working through it is very challenging but also very rewarding.
2. Develop positive relationships with pro-social adults who can support participants' creativity and skills in a comfortable, safe and nurturing environment. The teaching artists identified for this program have been selected because of their exemplary track record working with at-risk youth and vulnerable populations and the program has been structured so that teaching artists are able to build trust and a rapport with the participants over the course of an extended amount of time.

3. Support emotional and intellectual intelligence. A growing body of academic research indicates that exposing youth to art promotes emotional intelligence, a greater sense of self-worth and critical thinking skills. Moreover, children's emotional and intellectual development is positively affected by carefully looking at works of art, talking about what they observe backing up their ideas with evidence, listening to and contemplating the views of others.

The accompanying photograph is an example of the work created in this program last spring. This particular residency was led by mural artist Dave Kim. This unit began with a series of facilitated talks at the academy that focused on murals (their purpose within a community, how they are created, and the various artistic styles associated with murals). Participants were then taken to San Francisco's Mission District to spend the day exploring the neighborhood's famous murals and witness artists at work. After that background and context was established, Mr. Kim began working with participants to develop a mural concept. The group decided to create a background that represented the forested landscape of Mariposa County and, in the foreground, they created outlines of themselves filled with images of places that are dear to them or places they aspire to go, therefore capturing their past, present, and future in a single communal piece. This mural is installed at the group home and while most of the young men who created the mural have moved on, it serves as a welcome and source of inspiration for new youth entering the academy.

Here I want to shift the focus of the article a bit and gush about the importance of partnerships in such programs and share my deep appreciation of everyone working at Sierra Quest Human Services Foundation/Sierra Quest Academy. This program is only successful because of the willingness of the Quest staff to help us develop, refine, deliver and assess the art experiences we are providing to their youth. Their understanding of the needs of at-risk/system-engaged youth and their willingness to explore and support how art can be utilized to help these young men along their path is what makes this program effective.

Our JUMP StArts program is funded in part by a grant from the California Arts Council, but we are always looking for local support to sustain this work. If you feel this program is of value, please consider sponsoring it. You can do so by calling our office at (209) 966-3155 or donating online at www.mariposaarts council.org.