



**PRESIDENTIAL CITIZEN
SCHOLARS PROGRAM**

Paint 'N' Inspire: Encouraging Community Connection through Art

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Abstract

The aim of this project was to address the needs of families and children residing within the Newton Street neighborhood in Salisbury, MD. In 2019, the 2020 Presidential Citizen Scholars (PCS) cohort conducted an IRB-approved study to assess the needs of this community. According to the findings, parents from the Newton Street community vocalized the desperate need of mentoring programs for their children (Blake et al., 2020a). Additionally, Liberal Arts activities were the most popular after-school programs and seen as the most “in need of support” (Blake et al., 2020b). Moreover, the after-school activities that were highly requested by parents included academic tutoring, sports, theater clubs, social clubs, and mentoring programs. For our PCS Capstone Project, we hosted the “Paint ‘N’ Inspire” event in hopes to address some of the needs of the community while providing an opportunity for families and children to socialize and connect with the various resources the Newton Street Community Center (NSCC) has to offer. Lastly, we provided further suggestions for future PCS cohorts, Student Government Association (SGA) approved clubs, and sororities or fraternities to sustain this event for many years ahead.

Introduction

Our project, Paint ‘N’ Inspire, was designed to create an opportunity for the youth surrounding the Newton Street Community Center. Our first and foremost goal was for the children to be able to have the chance to learn art skills. The project provided art supplies to those who participated in the event. Based on past research, the drive for art is well desired within the community. For the future, the project will allow children of the community to better understand the resources available to them through the Newton Street Community Center. When the event becomes more widely known on an annual basis, it should be turned into an after-school event.

After School Activities

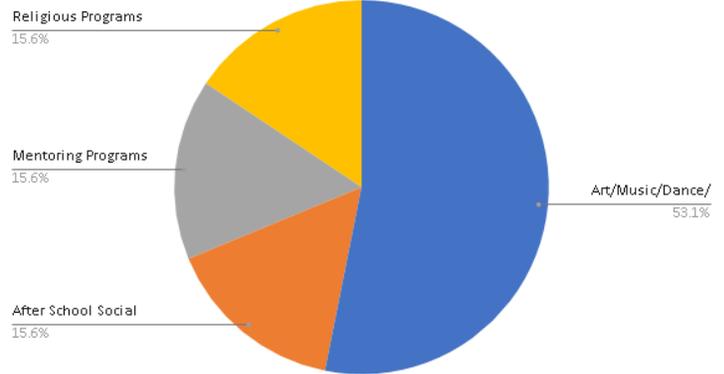


Figure 1: Community needs assessment findings from the 2020 PCS Cohort, indicating a large preference for arts-related after school activities in the community.

The Issue

The children of the surrounding areas near the Newton Street Community Center need resources to allow further growth in art and creativity skills, while also learning about the resources available at the center. As evidenced by the 2020 cohort’s research, there is a strong desire for art, music, and dance to be in effect at the Newton Street Community Center. This desire from the community was shown by 53.1% of the population stating it as a want.

Solution

We hosted this event in an effort to provide an enjoyable activity while promoting the community center and its resources. Given the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, we opted to hold an outdoor event in which we enforced mask-wearing and social distancing measures. Although we did not seek SGA involvement for this event, it is our hope that future PCS cohorts will partner with the SGA for future events and collaboration that will be hosted at the community center. In the future, we hope that the community center will be an approved center for Salisbury students to gain volunteering hours by providing tutoring services or hosting after-school activities. Sustaining this end-of-semester event will require extensive financial support and close partnerships with local non-profits such as the Fenix Youth project, Salisbury Art Space, Salisbury Wicomico Arts Council, Wicomico Library, and various businesses whose goals will be to enrich and empower residents of NS while recognizing their unique talents and skills.

We applied for the NFO grant which fully sponsored this program. This proposal requested \$723.00 from the Institute for Public Affairs and Civic Engagement at Salisbury University. The requested funds were used to support supplies and materials for the “Arts Drive” outside of the Newton Street Community Center in Salisbury, MD. The materials include 80 canvases, 25 acrylic paint, 100 paint brushes, 100 hand sanitizer bottles, 100 face masks, 80 thermometers and 250 paper packages. Each of these resources was imperative to the successful execution of the proposed project. The budget for each item was carefully considered on account of the estimated engagement for the event. On event day, we had ~20-30 attendees. Although all the supplies were not used, we donated the leftover materials to the community center for future events. Overall, the event produced a great turnout, with children being fully engaged in their paintings. Some participants requested additional canvases to fully display their artistic abilities.



Figure 2: The event setup outside of the NSCC.



Figure 3: Participants of “Paint ‘N’ Inspire.”

Recommendations

While this event was executed by Presidential Citizen Scholars in the short term, the hope is that nonprofit organizations, students, and community members can become involved in such civic engagement activities in the future. Possessing civic engagement attitudes and behaviors can further feelings of responsibility towards the enhancement of one's community (Procentese et al., 2019). Given this, it is important to create continual opportunities to partake in civic engagement behaviors. Paint 'N' Inspire can be viewed as one of these opportunities because it seeks to advance existing community resources, which may stimulate the neighborhood's interest and involvement in civic spaces. Future leaders should consider holding similar events that promote community resources while distributing important items such as art materials, school supplies, bike helmets, and other resources that respond to the needs of the community. Implementing continual end-of-semester events can be a way to remind residents of what is available to them, provide enjoyable activities for youth, and create civic engagement opportunities for students and community members.

Partnerships for longer term programs in the community would be ideal to yield a lasting impact on youth. Arts education has been associated with higher academic achievement, particularly when long-term programs are in place (Jindal-Snape et al., 2018). Additionally, art that is "public, large-scale, and collaborative" may not only bring about social and emotional benefits, but can foster a greater sense of community (Blatt-Gross, 2017, p. 57). To support these longer-term and larger-scale endeavors, future leaders should work on fostering partnerships, organizing regular volunteering events, creating job vacancies, or potentially establishing the NSCC as a service site. It is

also worth considering combining this event with other larger occasions in the wider community, such as Downtown Salisbury's "Third Fridays" and other events put on by the area's non-profit organizations. This can maximize partnerships by providing leaders with a place to convene and share missions. Important contacts to consider are the Salisbury University SGA Directors of Student Organizations, Campus Enhancement, and Civic Engagement, the City of Salisbury Neighborhood Relations Manager, and related nonprofits. Creating a continual event equipped with volunteers could produce a significant impact on both the local and campus community. Such initiatives should provide incentives to workers and volunteers to sustain future programming.

Conclusion

Drawing from the IRB-approved research conducted by the PCS 2020 cohort, we identified a significant issue among the community of interest. Within the population, there was a notable desire for youth activities related to the arts, indicating a lack of such services and events within the neighborhood (Blake et al., 2020a). This prompted us to communicate with city leaders and determine what could be done to engage this particular interest. Considering the impact of COVID-19 pandemic and the delayed opening of the NSCC, we resolved to hold a socially distanced outdoor paint event that would provide creative activities for youth, distribute engaging materials, and advance public knowledge of community resources, namely the upcoming community center. The robust benefits of afterschool activities and the arts can serve youth and families while also creating civic engagement opportunities for local leaders. Future events should incorporate partnerships with nonprofits, local businesses, and university departments to sustain a continual end-of-semester event.

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Appendix

Event Photos 7



Canvas from "Paint 'N' Inspire."



Plate, paint brush, and colorful canvas.



Event participant painting artwork on canvas.



Plates and canvases on the sidewalk outside of the NSCC.



Orange and yellow artwork on the pavement.



Plates, paints, and canvases.



Table set-up outside of the NSCC.



Event participant working on artwork.



Two canvases on cement in front of the NSCC.

Special Thanks

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The Institute for Public Affairs and Civic Engagement (PACE) is a resource center where the SU community, local government, non-profit and public groups can access knowledge and information. PACE draws on the interdisciplinary expertise of SU faculty, students, staff, and community partners. As a nonpartisan contributor, the Institute organizes projects and programs that are customized to fit the particular needs of the Eastern Shore community. For more information about PACE or the PCS Program, please contact us at PACE@salisbury.edu

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