

## Donald A. Strauss Scholarship Foundation Project Proposal

### Art of the P.O.O.R (People Orchestrating Optimistic Renditions)

One of the main reasons I was able to succeed in school was because of my constant and active involvement with the arts. Throughout middle school and high school I attended an after school art-based program called City Team Ministries that served as my venue to de-stress from school as I exercised my artistic skills. City Team was where I took part in my first play, where I touched my first microphone, where I wrote my first rap song and where I met some of my most influential peers. As a result of my consistent involvement with the arts I became a more confident and active student. As a youth I consistently wrote songs and practiced performing them on a small stage provided at City Team. The song writing made me look forward to any class that had to do with learning words or poetry. Ironically, due to my artistic skills, I later became chosen to perform at my high schools' Honors Ceremony, despite not being a member of the Honors program. In community college I continued to optimize opportunities that allowed me to showcase my art. The influence of art helped me to improve my academics and thus facilitated my transition to the University of California Riverside.

This proposal seeks to start an art program to provide a space for at-risk youth to explore their artistic interests at least three times a week with hopes to encourage their academic participation as the arts have encouraged me. According to conversations I have had with local middle-school students and administration, those who underperform in core subjects like language arts or math are put into *block-classes* in attempts to raise their test scores. *Block-classes* means that the students take whichever core subject they are failing twice instead of once a day. In effect, this extra core class inevitably replaces their electives, so the students unfortunately lose the chance to participate in art or music until they raise their test scores. Furthermore, it is widely known that, due to budget cuts, art programs are continuously being cut in public schools because they are seen as less important than the core subjects. So, there is a possibility that by the time these students raise their test scores, public schools will have no more arts programs to offer them.

Through interaction with UCR college students, youth will be mentored and provided a space where they can build their self-esteem. Through artistic expression youth will become more confident learners. In his article, *Six Reasons For Advocating the Importance of Arts in Schools*, developmental psychologist, Dr. Jerome Kagan claims that youth who are "having difficulty learning to read at grade level whose art work or performance with a musical instrument is far better than many of the children in the top 30 percent on reading or arithmetic will experience a sudden boost of confidence that,

in some cases, is generalized to the formal academic domains.” In essence, art and music help underperforming youth come more self-assured by showing them that they are capable of competing with other students in the academic environment. Furthermore, as these students become more confident, they begin to approach school with more certainty and open-mindedness, which helps reduce their fear of other subjects.

### **Proposal Request:**

#### **Objectives:**

- Provide a positive space where local artistic middle school, high school and college students can:
  - Work together to produce three plays, three audio albums and one documentary.
  - Expand and use their artistic skills to alter their educational experiences and to improve their community.
  - Congregate at least three times a week to exercise and enhance their artistic skills.
  - Build self-esteem and develop imagination through involvement with arts.
  - Mentor and learn from one another.

**Methodology:** In order to accomplish my objectives and goals I will utilize the CRAFT method provided by the book, *Beginner's Guide to Community Based-Arts* by Mat Schwarzman. The CRAFT method is a strategy used to conceptualize the process of art projects that attempt to improve communities. CRAFT stands for *Contact, Research, Action, Feedback* and *Teach*:

- 1) *Contact*-establishing partnerships rich in integrity, trust, understanding and commitment.
- 2) *Research*-learning and gathering information of the people, places and community issues you're working to improve.
- 3) *Action*-the act of producing a new work of art that will benefit the community.
- 4) *Feedback*-igniting reflection, dialogue and organizing that will encourage the community to join or take further action in improving the community.
- 5) *Teach*-pass-on the new community-building skills to others to sustain the impact of the program.

**CONTACT:** I will collaborate and build relationships with local community centers, local middle and high schools and the University of California Riverside to utilize facility space to congregate, plan and host the plays. Communication about the program has already started with Youth Director, Gar Calhoun and the Youth Board Committee at the Cesar Chavez Youth Opportunity Center in Riverside. I will be presenting this proposal to them on March 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2012. In addition, I have started discussions with the administration of the local middle school where I currently tutor. They

agreed to let me present in late May. Furthermore, I will create a student club, which will have the same name as the program, *Art of the P.O.O.R.* at UC Riverside. This will facilitate the recruitment of interested artistic peers, which will become my core team. Student club status will also provide the benefits of renting rooms, equipment and fundraising on campus.

The core *contact* group will be comprised of at least nine UC Riverside students skilled in one of the following arts: spoken word, hip hop, singing, music-recording, film-recording, dance, drawing, stenciling and theatre. I will do extensive promotion through flyers, class presentations, word of mouth and on-line networks to recruit the core team. The core members will all be required to mentor a group of three to five middle and high school students who are interested in the art that the core member specializes in. They will also, be required to conduct at least two workshop presentation to recruit youth or conduct four interviews for the research phase.

**RESEARCH:** In pairs, the core team members will conduct *research* in the form of interviews with local community members to create *contact* and to identify issues that need improvement in the community. Interviewees will include all the students we bring in from the high schools and middle schools, as well as their parents. Moreover, we will interview members of the city as well as non-government community leaders from the local area. The interviews will revolve around three questions:

- 1) What are some main issues in your community?
- 2) How can we improve those issues?
- 3) How can education play a role in this improvement?

One of the three plays will depict the most common issues brought up in the interviews and the most common solutions that the interviewees come up with. This approach will insure that the community plays a significant role in the program from the start.

In order to accommodate all my members and mentees I will allow a wide range of expression for the other two plays. For example, instead of depicting social problems, they can make plays that remind us about the good things in society. The plays will aim to promote a positive message about the community, while allowing all students the opportunity to create and express their own artistic skills and ideas.

**ACTION:** Recruitment of the youth will be conducted by the core team who will put together a presentation in relation to the program's objectives and goals. The team will then incorporate a short skit, a poem

and a song of why middle and high school students should join. In essence, a mini-play, so they can get a preview of the program. The presentation will be taken to at least two middle schools, two high schools and two community centers around the area to recruit youth.

Our goal is to recruit at least twenty youth. Each artistic mentor will take three to five students and guide them in whichever artistic skill the mentor specializes in. Besides being the coordinator of the program I will also be a mentor. I will use my previous experiences with music and poetry as well as the knowledge that I am currently gaining from my Theatre for Social Change and Hip Hop Theatre classes, to train my mentees. The plays will be fifty percent the mentor's work and fifty percent the youth's guided work.

In order to incorporate as many arts as possible, all the plays will have a similar structure. They will be about ten to twelve scenes long. Each scene will be around five minutes long. So the play will last about an hour. Furthermore, four scenes will be songs, four will be poems and four will be skits. Each scene will then serve as an audio track for the three albums that we will produce. The painters and drawers will create the backgrounds for the plays and covers for the CDs. Moreover, the filming will mainly be an artistic documentary of the three plays.

**FEEDBACK:** Throughout the *research* phase and the *action* phase we will gather and put together pamphlets, petitions, phone numbers and other tools that will ignite and inspire the community to communicate, reflect and organize to improve the community issues depicted in the play for social change. We will spread these when we showcase each play.

**TEACH:** The program will grow by recruiting new members at play performances, which will take place at the end of each quarter. We will perform the three plays at least once at UC Riverside, once at a community center and once at a local middle and high school. If requested we will perform it at other venues. One of the *feedback* pamphlets will be a detailed curriculum of a proposal similar to this one and of the process on how to join this program. Throughout the process of making the plays, the youth will gain confidence and improve their artistic skills through the mentoring so, that they will be teaching and mentoring the new incoming members. Moreover, throughout the making of the plays, the middle and high school students will also gain exposure to university life and university students as they will be working on the plays on campus once a week. Another day of the week we will meet and work on the plays at the Cesar Chavez Youth Opportunity Center so that the community could maybe join or at least notice the youth using their art skills in positive ways.

**IMPLEMENTATION TIMELINE:**

Activities to Meet Objectives	Responsible Party	Start Date	End Date
Contact	Core Members	February 20 <sup>th</sup> , 2012	April 20 <sup>th</sup> , 2012
Research/Feedback	Core Members	April 20 <sup>th</sup> , 2012	May 18 <sup>th</sup> , 2012
Action/Feedback	Core Members	May 18 <sup>th</sup> , 2012	June 15 <sup>th</sup> , 2012
Feedback	Core Members	April 20 <sup>th</sup> , 2012	Mid June, 2013
Teach	Middle/High School youth & Core Members	Mid Sept, 2012	Mid June, 2013

**SUPPLIES/ EXPENSES:**

Costs	Amount	Item
\$1,200	1	Apple MacBook Pro
\$100	1	Studio Mic
\$100	1	Recording Speakers
\$200	1	Audio Interface
\$300	300	CD/Cases
\$20.	1	Mic-stand
\$200	1	Picture Camera
\$600	2	Video Camera
\$220	1	Portable PA System
\$500	5	Guitar
\$250	5	Hand Drums
\$300	2	Piano Keyboards
\$60	3	Paint Brush Set

Costs	Amount	Item
\$60	3	Video/Camera Memory
\$60	3	Paints
\$60	3	Paint Paper
\$50	1	Coloring Pencils
\$30	3	Sketch Paper
\$170	1	Stencil Airbrush+paint
\$30	3	Stencil Paper
\$10	3	Reg Paper
\$1,000	90	Snacks for Mon/Wed
\$1000		Flyers/pamphlets/ advertisement
\$500		Props
\$7,560	428	Total

Arlene Cano, assistant director at the Chicano Student Programs at UCR has agreed to let me store the supplies in the facilities storage space, which has a safe lock.