



Therapeutic Arts in Schools – Final Report

A partnership between Free Arts for Abused Children of Arizona and Children First Academy Phoenix

Executive Summary

Year 1

From September 2013 to May 2014, Free Arts for Abused Children of Arizona partnered with Children First Academy of Phoenix (CFA) to provide arts programming for 330 students. During this timeframe Free Arts provided CFA:

- Six professional artists and 12 volunteers to lead nine 12 week sessions for students in kindergarten through 8th grade
- Three in-service trainings for teachers
- Three school wide assemblies celebrating the accomplishments of the students in the program
- Two Free Arts Day events allowing the entire school population to participate in visual and performing arts activities
- A collaborative mural painted by a select group of 7th grade students

As a result of Free Arts programming, youth experienced an increase in self-confidence, positive behaviors, and engagement in school. Qualitative data and observations also show an increased sense of community and emotional support at the school.

Year 2

From October 2014 to May 2015, Free Arts for Abused Children of Arizona partnered with CFA to provide Professional Artist Series (PAS) programming to 250 students and additional arts opportunities to 80 more. During this timeframe Free Arts provided CFA:

- Six professional teaching artists to deliver 10 six week sessions to students in kindergarten through 6th grade
- Three school wide assemblies and two visual arts showcases
- Two professional development sessions for classroom teachers and administrators
- Two Free Arts Days for the entire school

Free Arts' data collection and observations indicate increased student engagement in classes, demonstration of leadership principles, increased collaboration between students, and reduced anxiety levels of students.

Introduction

The Therapeutic Arts in Schools Program is a component of the Free Arts Professional Artist Series. This program uses Professional Teaching to instruct children in under-resourced schools and child welfare agencies

in a wide variety of art forms. Professional teaching artists lead participants through sessions designed to impart transferable art, social, and coping skills that enable children to feel confident in their decision making, discover and develop their identity, and build their self-esteem. At the end of each series, participants have the opportunity to celebrate their accomplishments and demonstrate their skills through a culminating event. These presentations and exhibits allow participants a platform to share their skills, experiences, and stories with their community and help increase a sense of value and self-confidence in participating children.

For many years the Free Arts Professional Artist Series conducted partnerships with Free Arts' traditional partners of group homes, shelters and treatment centers. In 2009 a newly established partnership with Desiderata Alternative Program in the Phoenix Union High School District allowed the program to expand and serve a school-based population. Focused on art and life skill development, this program has increased in graduation rates, cooperation and positive behavior in participating students. In 2013 Free Arts piloted a more structured program in an elementary school setting at Children First Academy.

Free Arts uses a model called Art with Intention in all programs. This model utilizes a unique combination of art therapy and positive youth development principals. Artists, staff and volunteers are trained on population-specific communication skills and resiliency-building tools which increase their effectiveness with children.

Methodology

Year 1

Throughout the school year Free Arts supported six professional teaching artists to teach weekly sessions to students ages 5 – 14. Participating youth were selected by their teachers each term. Some teachers used the Free Arts program as an incentive for students. While others selected children who had “borderline” behavioral or academic records with the hope that participating in the program would help them be more successful and engaged.



At the start of each term each participating student completed a pre-survey that asked them to rate their agreement with the following statements:

- I like coming to school
- I feel special at school
- I feel important at school
- I feel relaxed at school
- I raise my hand in class
- I like to try new things
- I know a lot about other cultures
- I have done art, dance or music before
- Doing art makes me feel better
- I get along with other people in my class

Students completed the same survey at the end of each term, additionally answering questions about their experience and general satisfaction with the program. Additional qualitative data collected throughout the year included entries from student journals and interviews with six students who were chosen as case studies. The interviews were conducted at various intervals to collect information about students' thoughts and feelings toward the program, themselves and their fellow students.

Year 2

Students at CFA participated in sequential arts sessions, building their understanding and skills in a variety of art forms and demonstrating their learning through performances and displays. Students engaged in the weekly sessions were able to discover how art can be used as a coping tool and can express one's identity and increase their self-esteem. Free Arts' data collection and observations indicate increased student engagement in classes, demonstration of leadership principles, increased collaboration between students, and reduced anxiety levels of students.

In planning for PAS sessions at CFA, specific student goals based on leadership were identified. Evaluations that quantified student engagement and teaching artist performance were collected from classroom teachers. Teaching artists submitted weekly reflections on their sessions that enabled them to assess and modify their instruction to improve student learning over the six week series. Free Arts staff also met with a focus group of five students at the end of the year to gather information on the students' experiences engaging with professional teaching artists and their art forms.



Below is a comprehensive list of the professional artists who participated in the Free Arts program at CFA.

Artist	Art form
Frank Thompson	African Drumming
Christy Puetz	Mixed Media, Sculpture
Melanie Sainz	Native Arts
Annette Sexton-Ruiz	Ceramics
Eileen Morgan	Taiko Drumming
Ryan Ingram	Hip Hop Dance
Tomas Stanton	Spoken Word Poetry

Fidelity of Implementation

Changes in year two included new administration and staff at Children First Academy, new program leadership at Free Arts, and changes in logistical implementation of program including data collection methods based on lessons learned. Four of the 6 teaching artists were the same from year 1 to year 2 and those artists implemented their curriculum in similar ways while focusing on more age appropriate activities and instruction.

Evaluation Results

Year 1

Two common themes surfaced during the 2013/2014 programming: 1) Students felt good and enjoyed themselves when creating art. 2) Students felt nervous before and then proud following the final performances- which indicated an increase in positive self-perception.

Free Arts programs helped create a community within the school where students and teachers could be brave and support each other across grade levels. Participating students experienced an increase in self-confidence, school engagement and focus and overall, felt “good” when participating.

At the end of the year teachers completed surveys reflecting on the impact that the Free Arts PAS program had on their students, themselves and their school.

- 78% of surveyed teachers felt that students who participated in the series seemed more engaged in school after participating.
- 94% of surveyed teachers said that students who participated in the series seemed to feel better about themselves after participating.
- 78% of surveyed teachers said that students who participated in the series had increased positive behaviors since participating.
- 78% of surveyed teachers said that having Free Arts at their school helped them as teachers.
- 89% of surveyed teachers said that Free Arts helped create community within their school.

Although we were not able to obtain academic records, 35% of teachers said that students who had participated in the Professional Artist Series had increased academic scores; 65% of teachers said that the impact on academic scores was neutral.

Year 2

In our second year at CFA we were able to build on the foundation and outcomes that had been developed in the first year and deepen the PAS sessions and partnership with the school based on the previous year's successes. While the turnover in administration and teaching staff proved to be an obstacle the ongoing conversations with CFA staff, focus groups of students, and teaching artists reflections indicate that nine out of ten series sessions were successful.

The triangulated approach of our data collection allowed Free Arts to measure the impact and experiences of each program participant (teaching artists, students, and teachers) and identify if the intended outcomes were achieved. The evaluations not only measured how many students demonstrated an increase in self-confidence, coping skills, leadership skills, and positive behavior, but also measured instances where students were learning and demonstrating the outcomes.

The results of the CFA evaluations demonstrate that:

- 96% of students were excited about Free Arts PAS sessions
- 96% of students enjoyed Free Arts PAS sessions
- 86% of students were engaged in questioning, exploring, brainstorming or discussions of the learning topic with the artist or their peers
- 84% of students worked with their peers more productively during Free Arts sessions
- 91% of students demonstrated reduced anxiety levels during Free Arts sessions
- 83% of students gained positive coping skills
- 87% of students demonstrated leadership qualities during Free Arts sessions
- 96% of students took pride in their art works or performance

All CFA teachers agreed with the following statements:

- Professional artist demonstrated respect for all learners by encouraging individual expression, responsibility, and decision-making.
- Students received regular feedback from artist on how to improve their work.
- Students used feedback from artist to revise and improve their work.
- At key checkpoints artists and students engaged in thoughtful comprehensive reflections.
- At the end of the series, the artist engaged students in a comprehensive reflection on what they learned.
- The Professional Artist Series improved students' attitudes towards school.

Returning teachers and teaching artists noticed more student collaboration in series sessions during the second year and attribute this to students being more comfortable amongst their own classmates. Additionally artists reflected on increase leadership skills in their students. Drumming instructor Frank Thompson reflected, "... it was pretty amazing that the kids took total leadership in setting up the stage and drums for the performance. They did it on their own and did it productively as a group. As you know, for me, the performance is secondary or tertiary to my primary goals of giving the kids opportunities to lead and work together". Visual Arts Instructor Christy Puetz also noticed leadership in her students, "...many showed leadership with clean up and helping to keep order in the class when it was time for instruction or if the room was getting a little loud".

The choice to partner artists with individual classrooms and grade levels allowed students to feel more comfortable around their peers. Age appropriate instruction also allowed students to feel that the activities were more accessible.

Lessons Learned

Logistical:

Logistical challenges faced in year one included struggles moving children to and from Free Arts workshops in a timely and efficient way; and instructing students of varying ages and abilities. While marked improvement occurred in the area of community building due to the wide age range and natural mentoring occurring while children ages 5-14 participated in Free Arts workshops together, in year two we decided shift to a model that would allow us to have more control over the learning environment of the workshops. To this end we decided to partner teaching artists with individual classrooms to limit logistical challenges, allow artists to design more age-appropriate activities and promote artist/teacher partnerships.

Teachers and teaching artists both shared with Free Arts that they believe the structure utilized in year two of keeping opportunities classroom and grade based was more successful. One of the teaching artists shared with us that working with one grade level enabled her to develop age appropriate lessons where students were able to perform at a certain skill level and all learn new skills together. The teaching artist did not need to develop supplemental curriculum or manage students who were in higher grades, completing work sooner or were disruptive in class and could focus more on delivering instructional content.

Evaluation Methods:

In year one we focused on collecting significant data from the students. Through journaling, interviews and evaluations we gathered information that focused on their own self-perception and confidence. While this was valuable for us to understand our impact we collected a considerable amount of unusable data as the children were, in many cases, too young to accurately complete evaluation surveys or journal in a way that we were

able to evaluate with accuracy. We also received minimal feedback from our teaching artists. In an effort to track how lessons were delivered and understand the collaboration within the classroom we focused our evaluation on the artists. Extensive journal entries were collected from artists which proved to be helpful in understanding both the impact and the climate of the individual classrooms where workshops were held.

Objectives:

In a meeting with the new principal at CFA going into year two we identified the goal to promote leadership skills in her students. To support this goal we worked with teaching artists to include opportunities for students to lead during art workshops and added evaluation questions focused on leadership to the teacher surveys.

Plans for the Future:

As we move forward with planning Professional Artist Series sessions at CFA for the 2015/2016 school year, we plan to implement the program in the same capacity; and work with CFA to address how the Professional Artist Series can extend and contribute to the students' setting and achieving their own individual goals and CFA's "Leader in Me" guiding principles. Free Arts would also like to be able to connect classroom teachers to teaching artists sooner and more frequently throughout the series sessions so that lessons and skills are more transferable between series sessions and classroom lessons and vice versa. One thing Free Arts will consider is extending the length of the series which was recommended by all participants (students, teachers and professional artists).

Accomplishments



In year one The Therapeutic Arts in Schools Program helped create a community within the school where students and teachers could be brave and support each other across grade levels. Participating students experienced an increase in self-confidence, school engagement and focus and overall, felt "good" when participating. In a school where most students have faced challenges including homelessness, violence, abuse and neglect, these changes impact the students' ability to achieve and succeed in school and in life. As one student said, "If I was not in Free Arts, I would still be the way I used to be".

In year two students experienced an increase in confidence, leadership skills, positive behaviors and interest in the arts. Mr. Yazzie, one of the 3rd grade teachers at CFA whose class participated in the Native Arts PAS with artist Melanie Sainz shared with us, "Several students who were timid and not engaged in the academic areas really showed confidence in the artwork and creativity." Teaching artist Melanie Sainz observed student growth

in areas of self-confidence and leadership, "[students] freely shared their design plans with others...there were a number of boys and girls that freely shared their helpful skills with others that were initially challenged with the materials." One of Mr. Yazzie's students, Albert shared his experience with Free Arts during the student focus group, "We got to share and be creative with our own classmates. We learned how to follow directions and help the teacher and express friendship."

Additionally our artists, especially those returning from year one to year two, recognized that the children were excited to see Free Arts and that our programming had become an important part of their school day. As reported by drumming instructor, Frank Thompson, “Students from the previous sessions would comment, ‘Hey, there goes Free Arts’ every time I walked through the halls. Questions of, ‘Hey, when do we get to drum?’ were routine during each visit. This is an important point and a subtle and powerful affirmation that the students are keenly aware of Free Arts being a special thing at the school”.

Obstacles

The main obstacle during both years of the program was maintaining consistency and forward motion during a time of great transition for both organizations. From 2013/14 to 2014/15 the entire administration and all but 2 teachers at CFA turned over. Additionally, Free Arts hired a new Program Manager to lead this partnership. Based on our finding in year one a new program delivery method and evaluation system were implemented. The vast amount of change made it difficult to measure the program consistently from year one to year two.

In later meetings the principal reported that many of the brand new teachers in year faced many challenges including adjusting to a new school environment and working with a special and often challenging population. Because of this Free Arts struggled to engage teachers in the arts programming. For example, out of the 10 series that Free Arts supported at CFA, only five teachers submitted completed surveys. Our results above reflect the data we collected from the five teachers. While we were not able to collect evaluations from each teacher, the data represents the changes that were identified by each teacher and strongly reflected positive changes in student learning and behavior. Some teaching artists noted that classroom teachers were not 100% engaged in the weekly sessions, and while still helping with classroom management, did not participate in the activities or make a strong effort to learn from the teaching artists’ ideas and practices during the series sessions. It is evident to us that moving forward we must develop specific expectations not only with the school and administrative staff but also with each individual classroom teacher. In future planning teaching artists and classroom teachers can collaborate together to determine optimal opportunities for classroom teachers to engage in learning alongside their students and assisting the teaching artist in facilitating activities and managing classroom behavior.

We faced one challenge that turned into an opportunity when a large majority of the 6th grade class was not interested in learning about Hip Hop dance. It was decided that the last two of six sessions would not be completed due to minimal engagement. Free Arts staff continued to engage students who had actively participated with the teaching artist and demonstrated leadership qualities in helping lead the Fall Free Arts Day activities with Free Arts Staff and volunteers. Four 6th grade students were assigned as group leads for the December Free Arts Day and were able to demonstrate leadership, teamwork, listening, and creative thinking skills to their peers. These 6th grade students served as role models to the school and were able to remain engaged with Free Arts teaching artists and volunteers.



Conclusion

Throughout the two year residency at Children Frist Academy, Free Arts has been one of the most consistent things that the children have experienced. Through the turnover of school administration and almost all of their teachers as well as students who fluidly come and go at this school, for those who remained the blue-shirt clad Free Arts Team was a welcome and safe program where they could express themselves. By allowing children to engage in the art in a variety of different ways (though in classroom series, one day events and performances) the program was able to infuse a sense of creativity throughout the entire school.

Moving forward this program will blend delivery elements from year one and year two to bring programming into the classroom and allow for opportunities for children to mentor each other throughout the artistic process. We are looking forward to partnering with the returning principal and our core group of teaching artists to deliver meaningful programming this coming school year.

"If I was not in Free Arts, I would still be the way I used to be."

- 9 year old CFA student