

PRODUCING WELL-BEING:

**Music-Based
Creative Youth
Development's
Approaches to
Youth-Led
Workforce
Development**

**the lewis prize
for music**

community | collaboration | leadership

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This report is derived from the collective input and knowledge of numerous individuals with diverse backgrounds and expertise. We are grateful for the participation and contributions of everyone listed below. Each offered rich insights from their own experience as well as their circles of shared knowledge and relationships.

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Suggested Citation: Brown, A. and Ibarra, E. (2024) *Producing Wellbeing: Music-Based Creative Youth Development's Approaches to Youth-Led Workforce Development*. The Lewis Prize for Music

ABOUT THE LEWIS PRIZE FOR MUSIC

The Lewis Prize for Music (TLPM) believes that music plays a transformative role in the lives of young people, acting as a powerful catalyst for positive societal change. This conviction underlies a generous philanthropic endeavor: a five-year, \$20 million initiative both founded and financed by Daniel R. Lewis. The initiative is committed to fostering equitable systems change, ensuring that all young people have access to creative youth development through music.

Mission

The Lewis Prize partners with leaders in diverse and vibrant communities who create positive change by investing in young people through music. We believe young people with access to creative youth development music learning, performance and creation opportunities will mature into thriving individuals.

Vision

Communities have the leadership, commitment, and resources to provide diverse creative youth development music programs for all young people.

About Creative Youth Development

Creative Youth Development (CYD) is “a commitment to supporting young people’s stories, ideas, and dreams through creative expression and honoring their lived experience.” CYD merges positive youth development principles with artistic development. Also essential to creative youth development are the tenants of social and racial justice, youth voice and collective action.

The Lewis Prize for Music believes creative youth development is an important leader in equitable systems change for the benefit of all young people. Through its research, TLPM has identified a nexus of CYD systems change that includes:

- Partnership expansion in the pandemic
- Movement building support for young people
- Direct services offered before the pandemic
- Direct services offered during the pandemic
- Internal justice/equity orientations

TLPM’s 4-minute video “Creative Youth Development: Impact Beyond Measure” provides more insights into the CYD music field and its role in equitable systems change.

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INTRODUCTION

Dalouge Smith, CEO | The Lewis Prize for Music

One of the founding principles of The Lewis Prize for Music is our commitment to constant learning. Fulfillment of this principle is central to all we have undertaken and it is intrinsic to the Creative Youth Development (CYD) field we support. We also know that everything we learn about CYD belongs to the many amazing practitioners and young people that have shared with us. This is why we reciprocate by resharing what we learn.

Our first two major reports, *Midcasting Toward Just Futures* and *Soundings from the Heartland*, were focused on articulating nuances of the CYD field. The former examined the field's systems change characteristics during the pandemic and the latter explored characteristics of CYD in rural and small city settings.

This report goes in a new direction. Instead of solely examining CYD practices here, we consider them in relation to a much broader youth-oriented sector: Youth Workforce Development. We chose to undertake this examination because it has been evident since our first awards cycle that CYD organizations devote substantial programming, finances, and relationship effort to offering their youth artists internships, employment, and entrepreneurship opportunities. At the same time, we've seen that these offerings, like so much the CYD field does, often operate between systems in the gaps where young people experience the most hardship and exclusion.

CYD organizations undertake their work by responding to what young people communicate are their needs and ambitions. They do this with and for young people that have been consistently disregarded by others, including those in foster or carceral systems, navigating homeless or simply disengaged from school and work. Where the systems have failed these young people, CYD programs support their restoration to well-being with artistic opportunities that integrate wholistic supports. Among the most needed supports is a pathway to building a self fulfilling career.

Having seen CYD programs of all sizes devote themselves to providing this pathway support, we know it is essential work in need of greater support. The Lewis Prize can't provide all the support required or deserved but we can increase visibility and expand understanding of these CYD efforts to strengthen young people's work and career ambitions. We want this report to be a starting point for CYD-focused conversations among the many funders, policymakers and advocates who believe in the promise of young people and their futures as much as we do.

Just as conversations resulting from this report will be collaborative, the same is true for the creation of the report. Thank you to the five Lewis Prize Accelerator Awardee organizations who participated in our Lab to inform this report and whose work is represented in the case studies. Likewise, thank you to the many contributors to this report from our staff and across our network, with special thanks and congratulations to the co-authors and editors, Arielle Julia Brown and Eric V. Ibarra.

Finally, thank you to everyone who reads this report. We're confident you will be inspired by the youth-led success of Creative Youth Development!

ABSTRACT

This research paper offers an in-depth exploration of The Lewis Prize for Music's innovative Creative Youth Development (CYD) & Workforce Development Systems Change Lab. It articulates insights and key themes derived from sessions with these leading CYD programs: Beyond the Bars (Philadelphia, PA), The David's Harp Foundation (San Diego, CA), Hyde Square Task Force (Boston, MA), Memphis Music Initiative (Memphis, TN), and We Are Culture Creators (Detroit, MI). Our study reveals the dynamic interplay between CYD and workforce development, propelled by purposeful dialogues, peer knowledge exchange, and collaborative efforts. We underscore the transformative impact of CYD programs in enabling youth who are most marginalized, including Opportunity Youth, to discover their voice, refine their artistic skills, and emerge as leaders in the 21st-century workforce. Through reviewing case studies, examining creative works by youth leaders, and conducting comprehensive research on the sector, this paper champions collective action in support of CYD-based workforce development programs. It seeks to highlight how these CYD initiatives prioritize the wholistic well-being and interests of young people, assisting them in shaping optimal futures for themselves and their communities by developing agency in their own labor.

Beyond the Bars

Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

The David's Harp Foundation

San Diego, California

Hyde Square Task Force

Boston, Massachusetts

Memphis Music Initiative

Memphis, Tennessee

We Are Culture Creators

Detroit, Michigan

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Creative Youth Development (CYD) recognizes the interconnection of artistic development and positive youth development, focusing on principles such as racial equity, youth voice, and collective action. CYD programs go beyond simply providing opportunities for young people to showcase their talents. They actively listen to and become trusted places within each community, adapting to the unique circumstances of those communities and the young people within them. These programs serve as safe havens that not only strengthen the voices and artistry of young people but also empower them to become agents of change within the systems that affect them most.

Since 2020, The Lewis Prize for Music (TLPM) has been investing in and learning from CYD practitioners across the United States. The onset of COVID and the expansion of movements for racial justice only increased the urgency of addressing the wholistic needs of young people. CYD programs rose to the challenge, establishing virtual outlets for creative expression, offering technology and academic support, maintaining social connections to protect mental health, delivering meals, expanding youth employment, hosting COVID vaccination events, and guiding youth activism efforts. The long-standing connection between artistic programming, well-being support, and equitable systems change efforts has become even clearer in this work.

Our findings encourage us to issue an urgent call to action for policymakers, funders, and cross-sector collaborators to invest in the promise of CYD. We envision a future where all youth can access CYD opportunities to channel their creative assets, find community, and lead positive change.

The compelling case for the transformative power of CYD is clear in its approach to preparing young people for careers and entrepreneurship. By guiding youth to leverage their unique talents and navigate the complexities of the workforce, CYD lays the foundation for a brighter and more prosperous tomorrow.

The CYD field recognizes that to achieve this, it must focus on the wholistic well-being of young people. Our findings show how CYD supports young people's lifelong economic success in the workforce and fully self-determined lives rooted in the desires they have for themselves. Creative Youth Development achieves this by resourcing and entrusting youth to define the futures of their labor.

Our study concludes with A Call to Action to ensure all young people in every sized city and community across the United States have access and opportunities to benefit from Creative Youth Development.

A CALL TO ACTION

In addition to a resolute call for increased financial support of Creative Youth Development, our Advocacy Agenda includes:

- Creative Sector Champions the Creative Future
- Workforce Development Includes Creative Youth Development
- Funding for Sustainability
- Community Investment
- Creativity as National Service
- Sustainable Economic Models
- Leadership and Collaboration
- Advocacy and Awareness

NAVIGATING INNOVATION AND IMPACT THROUGH THE SYSTEMS CHANGE LAB

Background Statement

The Lewis Prize for Music (TLPM) Research and Knowledge Generation Team developed the Creative Youth Development (CYD) Systems Change Lab in 2022 to foster collaborative efforts and advance systems change in the field. In the spring of 2023, the Lab convened a diverse collective of youth leaders and nonprofit executives to explore the intersection between creative youth development and workforce readiness. Through purposeful dialogue and peer knowledge exchange, participants articulated the pathways and innovative strategies that unlock the full promise of CYD. The Lab surfaced connections across various approaches that empower CYD organizations to catalyze transformational change toward a society where young people steer the course of their future.

Systems Change Topic Area: Youth Employment and Workforce Development

Four systems change themes emerged from TLPM's examination of CYD work: education, youth employment, housing support, and carceral system interventions, with youth employment as a priority. Prioritizing youth employment aligns with the broader societal need for innovative approaches to workforce readiness, especially for younger generations facing unique challenges in an evolving job market. TLPM configured the Lab with this focus following affirming conversations with other CYD, arts, and workforce field experts.

The Lab Structure and Logistics

TLPM engaged a select group of programs unified in their focus on CYD and workforce development. We carefully curated a cohort of five TLPM Accelerator Awardees to examine diversity in approaches and strategic partnerships, thus ensuring a rich and comprehensive exploration. We also enlisted the support of a dedicated workforce development and CYD specialist Eric V. Ibarra as project manager and consultant researcher.

The Lab spanned five weeks. Participating programs shared their impactful partnership experiences and showcased the profound influence of their work in their communities. Facilitated by TLPM Knowledge Generation team members, the Lab hosted executive directors or program directors and a youth representative from each organization to foster robust discussions and creative problem-solving. All participants received an honoraria for their knowledge production and insights.

Moving Through the Sessions

Lab facilitators presented the following core questions to the cohort:

1. How do you prioritize self and community care while actively engaged in this work?
2. In the context of your organization, what do systems intervention and effective engagement with troubleshooting look like?
3. As we strive to advocate collectively at various levels, including state, regional, and national, what specific demands should we put forth to advance this important work?

Participating programs presented their overall activities and workforce development efforts during the second week. These presentations provided a comprehensive outline of each program's approach and impact. Each organization featured an adult and a youth leader co-presenter, expounding on their programming and showcasing the CYD methodology intertwined with their workforce development initiatives. Striking similarities emerged across organizations' approaches and desired impacts which we've further developed in this paper.

Participants engaged with a panel of esteemed experts who brought their knowledge in civic partnerships to the table in the third week of the Lab. Lynn Wharasky from Venice Arts shared how her organization ignites, expands, and transforms the lives of Los Angeles youth through photography and film education, along with jobs and apprenticeships in the creative industry. Similarly, Jamiel Alexander from the Aspen Institute's Opportunity Youth Forum expounded on the initiatives the Forum is undertaking to support this kind of work.

In the final weeks of the Lab, the focus shifted to collective articulations of a would-be policy agenda for CYD-based workforce efforts. Concurrently, participants shared drafts and ideas about their upcoming submissions for this collective research publication.

Post-Lab Synthesis and Compilation Activities

Following the Lab we took additional steps to synthesize and write up the Lab findings and developed multi-part case study materials with each of the participating CYD organizations. Two additional expert advisers, Penelope Douglas, and Michael O'Bryan, supported us in synthesizing the Lab findings and identifying connections to the wider workforce development fields. Separately, we enlisted CYD experts Carlos Cuestas and Aubree Weiley to facilitate and prepare abstracts of the Lab organizations' partnership conversations for the case studies. Eric Ibarra collaborated with youth leaders from the Lab organizations and an illustrator to visualize the well-being supports young people experience as program participants. Arielle Brown considered the policy agenda recommendations offered during the Lab in the context of creative economy workforce advocacy and youth workforce advocacy to prepare our Call To Action. The subsequent sections compile the results of these post-Lab activities.

IMPACT INDICATORS FOR CREATIVE YOUTH DEVELOPMENT WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS

Prior to the Lab, the Knowledge Generation team identified a set of impact indicators tailored to grasp the essence of Creative Youth Development organization's contributions to youth workforce development. These indicators were identified from The Lewis Prize for Music's Accelerator Awardee applications and year-end reports to serve as a wholistic tool to illuminate the impactful work of potential Lab participants. The five CYD organizations invited to participate in the Lab each undertake six or more of these eight indicators.

- 1. Scalable Impact:** Assessment of employment programs and structures that exhibit a design for scalability beyond the organization, focusing on sustainability. The capacity of the program to provide sustainable employment opportunities to a significant number of young people indicates its effectiveness and potential reach. Scalable employment programs allow CYD organizations to assist a greater number of young people in developing the necessary skills and experience to thrive in the workforce.
- 2. Systems-Level Partnerships:** Survey of a program's systems-level partnership strategies for youth employment, which should involve civic, nonprofit, and private partners. These partnerships should consider intersectional systems change and other factors affecting youth and their families, such as housing and court interactions. CYD organizations establish job training, job placement, and outcome-tracking structures to support successful employment transitions. Organizations create meaningful, long-term change and expand their reach in the community by collaborating with diverse partners and addressing various issues impacting youth employment.
- 3. Intersectional Systems Change:** Appraisal of a program's capacity for movement-building through intersecting systems change work with youth employment. It stands as a crucial marker of impact, acknowledging the role of youth employment in sparking broader systems-level change. By aiming for a broader movement, CYD organizations forge a more sustainable and enduring impact on the community. This approach underscores the value of collaborative efforts in addressing complex societal challenges, reinforcing the idea that collective action is essential for meaningful and widespread transformation.
- 4. Job Placement and Career Development:** Evaluation of a program's effectiveness in securing job placements for youth. It is a significant marker of impact, showcasing the program's competence in readying young people for the workforce and generating substantial employment opportunities. Emphasizing external job placement allows CYD organizations to guarantee that young individuals are engaging in roles that resonate with their career ambitions and objectives. Additionally, this focus helps bridge the gap between talent development and actual employment, ensuring that the transition into the workforce is not only successful but also fulfilling for the youth involved.

- 5. Empowering Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) Leadership:** Measurement of a program's focus on promoting BIPOC leadership. By prioritizing leadership opportunities for BIPOC youth, CYD organizations foster an environment where diverse perspectives and experiences are valued and integrated into decision-making processes. This approach leads to more effective programs that better serve underrepresented communities. BIPOC leadership is critical in promoting representation and equitable programming that meets the needs of young people. Recognizing the importance of BIPOC leadership enables CYD organizations to position themselves as catalysts for social progress, creating pathways to success for their youth leaders.
- 6. Centering Opportunity Youth:** Assessment of a program's Opportunity Youth focus, referring to the specific population of 16 to 24 year old young people who are neither in school nor employed. This indicator is a critical marker of impact as it demonstrates the program's ability to create opportunities for youth who may face significant barriers to employment and education. Providing resources and support to this population is essential in promoting access and equity in education and employment, and it can lead to significant social and economic benefits for both individuals and society as a whole.
- 7. Innovative Job Creation and Entrepreneurship:** Assessment of how programs harness innovative and creative methods for job creation, entrepreneurship, and building new fields in the arts. It underscores the arts' capacity to generate novel opportunities for youth, marking a significant impact. Programs that blend the arts with entrepreneurship and burgeoning fields equip young people with crucial skills, forging fresh avenues for achievement. The arts' inherent capacity to spark creativity, foster critical thinking, and unlock new prospects is pivotal. Incorporating these elements, CYD organizations develop impactful, enduring programs that not only engage but also inspire young individuals to become innovative thinkers.
- 8. College Readiness:** Survey of a program's focus on college readiness programming and strategy. This is a critical marker of impact, as it reflects the program's ability to prepare young people for long-term career success through higher education. By prioritizing college readiness, CYD organizations help young people overcome significant barriers to higher education, such as financial or academic challenges, and equip them with the skills necessary to succeed in their future careers. In this way, CYD organizations make a meaningful impact on the lives of young people and set them on a path toward lasting success.

INDICATORS

Additional Impact Indicators Identified Through Significant Discussion with Critical Feedback

We shared the Impact Indicators with the organizations during the first Lab meeting and requested their feedback. It was a highly insightful process, as each organization had valuable perspectives to share. We found that we were mostly aligned in our assessment approach, and the organizations agreed that these indicators were helpful in assessing the impact of CYD programs.

The topic of college readiness sparked a valuable discussion among the group. Many organizations questioned whether it was an antiquated notion to believe that young people must be college-ready or college-bound to define their success. They pointed out the importance of considering vocational training programs and other avenues that prepare young individuals for the workforce. Some asserted that their CYD programs' workforce orientation offers young people a robust alternative to college or vocational training that better enables young people to build skills and pursue careers based on their interests and talents. Participants also raised the importance of highlighting CYD's approach to building a broader set of transferable skills that prepare young people for the varied careers they desire to enter later in life.

Such organizational feedback challenged us to consider alternative indicators and broaden our perspective on workforce readiness beyond the traditional approach. Through this dialogue, we gained a deeper appreciation for the importance of adapting our evaluation frameworks to reflect the evolving landscape of workforce development and the diverse aspirations of young individuals. We collaborated with Lab participants to expand our impact indicators to ensure that they are inclusive, relevant, and responsive to the needs of the organizations and the young people they serve.

Critical Additions to our Indicators

We identified these additional impact indicators to describe the efforts and approaches of CYD programs. They shed light on the multifaceted dimensions of CYD programs and further reveal the potency of CYD's dedication to workforce and career preparation. In the subsequent case studies, these impact indicators appear repeatedly as essential differentiators that reveal CYD's unique strengths and outcomes.

- 1. Accessible Opportunities:** Evaluation of a program's dedication to ensuring inclusive and equitable access for underrepresented youth. It recognizes that true accessibility transcends mere physical presence, encompassing a broader spectrum of inclusivity. This means considering factors such as differing abilities, geographic location, language diversity, financial barriers, and social affiliations, including gangs. By prioritizing accessibility, programs ensure that growth and developmental opportunities are available to all, irrespective of their background or circumstances. Accessibility opportunities create a level playing field where every young person, regardless of their starting point, has a fair chance to engage, learn, and succeed.

- 2. Cultural Relevance and Representation:** Focuses on a program's commitment to embedding cultural relevance and representation in its programs. It centers and validates underrepresented youth's experiences, histories, and cultures, ensuring that the program content resonates with and is meaningful to those it serves. This approach acknowledges the diversity of cultural experiences and seeks to reflect this in program design and delivery. It creates spaces where diverse voices are heard and respected, forming a core part of the program's identity. In doing so, CYD practitioners build programs that not only meet the specific needs of their communities but also foster a sense of belonging and validation among participants.
- 3. Mentorship and Networking:** Assessment of a program's effectiveness in providing mentorship and networking opportunities. It recognizes the critical role of mentorship in offering guidance, sharing industry knowledge, and opening doors to new opportunities for young people. Facilitating these connections helps programs bridge the gap between theoretical learning and practical application, allowing young people to gain insights, develop professional relationships, and understand the landscape of their chosen fields. This not only prepares them for their future career paths but also provides trusted multi-generational relationships that instill confidence and a sense of preparedness as young people navigate their professional journey.
- 4. Empowering Entrepreneurship and Small Business:** Assessment of a program's support for entrepreneurship and small business development among youth. Though entrepreneurship was identified in our first set of impact indicators, the Lab participants took the inquiry deeper. They go well beyond traditional employment preparation, introducing young individuals to financial literacy, business acumen, and the realities of being an entrepreneur. Such programs play a pivotal role in guiding youth to establish their own businesses or launch creative endeavors, thereby fostering skills in business planning, marketing, and navigating the gig economy. This approach is crucial as it equips young people not just with theoretical knowledge but with practical tools paving the way for economic independence and self-reliance. It's about inspiring a new generation of entrepreneurs who are ready to innovate and contribute to their communities.
- 5. Skill-building and Professional Growth:** This indicator focuses on the program's commitment to enhancing both technical and soft skills, crucial for professional development. Programs that offer training in areas like digital media, graphic design, or video production help equip young people with marketable skills in high-demand sectors of the creative economy. Additionally, developing soft skills such as communication, collaboration, and time management is emphasized, as these are universally valued across various career paths. This wholistic approach to skill-building ensures that young individuals are not only technically proficient but also adaptable and versatile in the workplace, ready to meet the dynamic demands of the modern workforce.

- 6. Bridging the Gap to Industry:** Survey of how effectively a program connects young people with internships and opportunities in the creative industry. These internships serve as a critical bridge between educational experiences and the professional world, offering hands-on, real-world experiences. Through these opportunities, CYD nonprofits help integrate youth into the workforce and support their long-term career development. These experiences are invaluable, providing employability skills, industry connections, and practical job training. This proactive approach by CYD nonprofits in creating pathways into the industry is crucial for young people, especially in creative fields where practical experience and networking are often key to success.
- 7. Nurturing Alumni Connections:** Assessment of a program's efforts to maintain and nurture relationships with alumni. It recognizes the importance of continued engagement and support even after program completion. By providing career guidance, professional development opportunities, and networking platforms, these programs extend their impact beyond the immediate term. This sustained engagement not only benefits the alumni through continued access to resources and mentorship but also strengthens the sense of community and belonging. It reinforces the program's commitment to being a lifelong resource and partner for its participants, thereby enhancing its role and impact in the lives of those it serves.

Through the collective building of these two sets of indicators, TLPM hopes that CYD organizations can leverage these articulations to measure, showcase, and communicate their vital impact to key stakeholders, including partners, funders, and policy makers. The indicators also provide building blocks to reinforce the foundation of programming structures.

External Affirmation of Impact Indicators

Both before and after the Lab, we reviewed youth workforce research reports. These are not reports devoted to creative workers so they seldom acknowledge the contributions artistic learning makes to skill development, network creation, or career trajectory. However, we have found that a number of the impact indicators present in CYD workforce endeavors are identified as fundamental to ensuring equity in workforce programs and long-term individual economic success. To highlight this, we describe below the findings of two reports that align with the CYD impact indicators.

The importance of multiple CYD impact indicators is validated by findings in the Swigert & Miles (2022) report “Financial Wellbeing and Wealth Building for Opportunity Youth” published by the Aspen Institute’s Forum for Community Solutions. The report identifies “Support and Guidance” as one of the “four elements necessary for youth and young adults to experience financial well-being and to be set for success in later life.”

According to the report, “Support and Guidance” encompasses specific sources of support such as mental health services, parenting supports, and advising to navigate education, career, and benefits systems, alongside developmentally appropriate approaches to learning such as instructional scaffolding, coaching, and low-risk experiential learning. This list replicates nearly all of the unique CYD impact indicators articulated by the Lab participants. CYD’s wholistic approach to development, which integrates financial literacy, mental health services, and experiential learning, is consistent with the Aspen Institute report’s findings for empowering youth toward financial independence and career success.

In addition, the report identifies entrepreneurship as a fundamental wealth-building strategy that Opportunity Youth can be supported in pursuing. The fact that entrepreneurship appears on both lists of impact indicators demonstrates that CYD organizations are closely attuned to this fact. Not only do CYD organizations prioritize entrepreneurship for wealth-building purposes, they recognize the many transferable skills that accrue to young people through entrepreneurial experience.

The Jobs for the Future (JFF) report, “Improving Services and Outcomes for Diverse Populations in America’s Workforce Development System: Recommendations from the Workforce Transformation Policy Council” (2023) also affirms the CYD impact indicators. The report’s recommendations state that, “...what works is no longer a simple matter of whether an individual is able to get a job. Success today requires more expansive career navigation, skill-development pathways, supportive services, and strong partnerships with employers to create pathways to quality jobs—especially for individuals who experience barriers to advancement.” As will be demonstrated in our case studies, this is exactly the orientation CYD takes when working with young people to build their careers based on their own desires for their labor.

The CYD Accessible Opportunities impact indicator is consistent with the entire set of JFF report recommendations labeled, “Meet People Where They Are.” CYD organizations already implement many of the approaches proposed and have the experience to train other workforce programs in the skills and capacities necessary to be more responsive to the unique needs of individuals. Ideally, workforce advocates will recognize this CYD strength and resource the field as it pursues the adoption of the JFF report recommendations.

CENTERING WHOLISTIC WELL-BEING

The values of profound listening and prioritizing youth's voices echoed through every Lab gathering. Youth and adult leaders emphasized the centering of their wholistic well-being as the primary process and basis of their workforce development programs. Eventual discussions on advocacy calls to action beyond the Lab also centered around the core themes of complete well-being for young people. Following the Lab, we found our discussion on the central imperative of attending to youth well-being has surfaced in numerous contexts seeking to name all types of support young people need to thrive.

In collaboration with young people, the Aspen Institute Forum for Community Solution's Fresh Tracks program developed a "Youth and Young Adult Wellbeing" report aimed at defining and measuring well-being through the lenses of youth from various BIPOC backgrounds. This report identifies core themes of well-being, including a healthy environment, cultural connections, financial stability, inclusion and safety, community self-efficacy, healthy relationships, and mental health. Again, we see consistency in the findings of this youth-led report and our understanding of CYD programs' approaches to promoting wholistic well-being for young people.

8 Dimensions of Well-Being: Integrating into CYD Programs

To advance our work of articulating CYD's well-being orientation, we were inspired by the work of Peggy Swarbrick, an internationally recognized pioneer known for creating the 8 Dimensions of Wellness (2015). Her model encompasses physical, emotional, spiritual, financial, environmental, occupational, social, and intellectual wellness. Her delineations resonate deeply with CYD's commitment to nurturing comprehensive growth in young individuals. Our discussions revealed how seamlessly Swarbrick's 8 Dimensions of Wellness integrates into CYD practices, highlighting a natural alignment between her approach and the methodologies employed by CYD organizations.

- 1. Emotional Wellness** involves more than recognizing emotions toward managing and expressing them effectively. As outlined by the National Institutes of Health, it includes coping with stress and adapting to change. Developing healthy relationships and encouraging resilience, self-awareness, and open emotional expression are central to emotional wellness in CYD's dynamic setting. CYD programs emphasize building assertiveness and a positive self-image, enabling youth to confidently handle their emotional spectrum.
- 2. Physical Wellness** incorporates maintaining optimal bodily functions through balanced nutrition, regular exercise, and consistent healthcare. Emphasizing healthy habits, this dimension advocates for recurrent physical activity, healthy eating, and routine medical check-ups, vital elements for stress management and understanding one's body functionality. CYD's approach encourages young people to embrace these healthy practices, promoting responsible lifestyle choices like adequate sleep and a nutrient-rich diet.

- 3. Occupational Wellness** focuses on achieving personal satisfaction and contentment in one's career, a crucial aspect of overall well-being. It encompasses finding joy and fulfillment in work, maintaining a healthy balance between professional and personal life, and honing effective communication skills. CYD emphasizes developing strong work habits, exploring diverse career and volunteer opportunities in the arts, and setting meaningful career goals.
- 4. Social Wellness** is anchored in building and nurturing healthy social connections, relationships, and avenues for personal expression. This facet of well-being involves active engagement in social activities such as clubs, groups, or volunteer work, emphasizing the importance of maintaining these connections. It includes the skills to interact with a diverse range of people, awareness of one's impact on the community, and understanding of sex and gender roles. Social Wellness also underscores the significance of setting personal boundaries and cultivating a strong support network of family, friends, and peers. Central to this dimension is the development of positive relationships, effective communication skills, and the ability to seek and offer support when needed, all contributing to enhanced overall health and wellness.
- 5. Spiritual Wellness** focuses on seeking meaning and purpose in life beyond specific religious affiliations. It encompasses activities that enhance connections with oneself, nature, and others and nurture a harmonious relationship with the environment. Key elements include exploring personal values, beliefs, and principles, and participating in communities that share similar values, as well as helping those in need. This wellness aspect highlights the importance of accepting others, embracing a sense of greater purpose, and recognizing the diversity of values among people. While Spiritual Wellness can involve religious or spiritual practices, it primarily focuses on self-reflection, the appreciation of solitude, and the value of silence.
- 6. Intellectual Wellness** emphasizes brain health and development through mentally stimulating activities. This wellness aspect focuses on leveraging creative talents, fostering critical thinking, and embracing a commitment to lifelong learning. It involves engaging with intellectually enriching materials (literature, film, photography) and participating in public or community events to keep a focused mindset. Intellectual Wellness is about honing existing skills and acquiring new ones. Activities that challenge the mind, such as learning new languages, or mastering musical instruments, are integral to this dimension. Maintaining a positive self-image is crucial in Intellectual Wellness, as it greatly contributes to overall mental growth and health.
- 7. Environmental Wellness** focuses on the relationship between personal health and the environment. It encompasses understanding and actively participating in eco-friendly practices and how these practices impact human health. This dimension involves creating a decluttered, peaceful home environment and spending time outdoors. It also emphasizes community involvement, awareness of personal contributions to pollution, environmental awareness, and understanding the effects of climate change and human impact on the environment. Individuals prioritizing Environmental Wellness can contribute to the preservation of natural resources and enhance their overall health and wellness.

8. Financial Wellness revolves around the effective management and understanding of personal finances. It encompasses the knowledge and skills required for financial planning and managing expenses. Essential aspects of Financial Wellness include maintaining a budget, monitoring spending habits, and seeking professional financial advice when necessary. It also involves exploring ways to save money, being financially responsible, paying bills punctually, and regularly reviewing credit reports and bank statements. In CYD programs, teaching Financial Wellness is pivotal, as it provides young artists with essential skills to manage their financial resources.

TLPM's Workforce Systems Change Lab underscored the importance of centering wholistic well-being in all endeavors concerning youth development. The need for every setting where young people are engaged to be devoted to their well-being is echoed in the Youth Transition Funders Group Well-Being Framework (2021). The Framework addresses the imperative of valuing and validating young people's diverse life domains and contexts. It recognizes the residual and long-term impacts of systematic actions and inaction when well-being isn't centered. For the CYD field, attending to youth well-being is both proactive and protective as programs counter the negative impacts young people endure from the systems that encircle them.

The Framework also emphasizes the authentic engagement of individuals with lived experiences and the imperative to integrate them into all aspects of visioning, strategy development, and implementation efforts. This aligns with CYD's dedication to nurturing comprehensive growth across all dimensions of well-being, as encapsulated in Swarbrick's 8 Dimensions of Wellness. By embracing this wholistic experience-based approach represented in the principles of the Youth Transition Funders Group's Framework, CYD endeavors to create environments where youth can flourish and thrive, not just in their careers but in all aspects of their lives.

CREATIVE YOUTH DEVELOPMENT CASE STUDIES: CRAFTING SELF-DETERMINED LIVES

Local Realities and Creative Youth Development Pathways to Success

During the Lab, participating organizations highlighted a diverse array of workforce development strategies, all aimed at empowering young individuals through the arts. These strategies range from guiding youth into arts administration careers, engaging them in policy influence, training as teaching artists, becoming skilled technicians, and exploring gig-based roles in live performance venues. Additionally, they focus on helping youth find applicable roles outside the creative economy, where skills and aptitudes developed through their artistry, including creativity, problem-solving, collaboration, and communication, remain valuable. The variety of CYD approaches align with the overarching goal of fostering the holistic well-being of young people based on their culture, circumstances, and needs to provide support for them to craft self-determined and fulfilling lives.

We believe it is essential for these organizations to control the narrative of their work, just as it is for young people. To achieve this, we invited them to write a short Context Statement, participate in a local partnership conversation, and identify a young leader to guide the development of an illustration of the well-being program journey provided. The compilation of these articulations comprises this report's Case Study components.

Part One:

Organizational Context Statements

These statements written by the adult Lab participants provide valuable insights into how each Lab organization strategically intervenes, shifts, or contributes to workforce readiness and development for the young individuals they serve. Their firsthand accounts provide a comprehensive overview of the diverse strategies adopted to empower young people on their journey toward meaningful employment. They offer a nuanced understanding of the environments in which these organizations operate and the unique challenges and opportunities they face. These frank accounts offer enlightening glimpses into local contexts, community dynamics, and nuances that guide their diverse approaches toward igniting the full potential of young people.



Beyond the Bars

Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

We recognize that young people are integral and capable members of our community and world. Youth in Philadelphia face barriers to their well-being, growth, and positive inclusion within the broader community and society that are both specific to their cohort and to the families and neighborhoods that they come from and inhabit. These barriers include reduced access to adequate employment and job training, housing, educational resources, food, healthcare, and mental health services, as well as access to supported creative, fun, and community-building activities (Morgan et al., 2021).

We support young people in employment by training and employing youth to work within our programs and the larger community, as well as through offering youth programs that include technical training and strengthen participants' capacity for self-direction, confidence, communication, and self-efficacy. Through our student teacher program each year we hire and train 25 young people in the practice of teaching and sharing with other young people and their communities the musical skills and experiences that they have acquired in their time with BTB or the greater community. Beginning in the Spring, youth are immersed in BTB's Student-Driven Music Academy program, where they sharpen their skills playing instruments such as guitars, keys, bass, and drums as well as voice, learning to create music, communicate musical ideas, as well as working through best methods and practices on leading groups of young people through musical engagement. Through the Summer, we partner with the Urban Affairs Coalition's Summer Work Ready program to offer these same young people 20 hours a week of in-depth training and skill-building around teaching music, paid at a rate of \$15 per hour. By Fall this cohort of 25 students is ready to teach and lead within BTB programs and the larger community. Through a partnership with the Philadelphia Department of Parks and Recreation, these young people are employed throughout the school year - working at recreation centers all over Philadelphia sharing their knowledge, skill, and love of music with young people from their community. As student teachers move toward adulthood, growing in confidence, skill, and the ability to create a warm and inviting space for more young learners, they join our roster of amazing teachers, joining tried and true musicians from our community in leading Beyond The Bars programs.

Within Beyond The Bar's programming, within the student-teacher track, Student-Driven Music Academy, or Practical Producer's program, no matter which part of the city BTB students are building skills and capacity that help them to move forward in their lives, relationally, academically and professionally. Within the technical realm, students build capacity within the areas of music production, songwriting, music theory, communicating within musical contexts using musical ideas as well as gaining experience and competence working with music technology. In interviews with BTB students carried out through partnership with the Children's Hospital of Philadelphia young people shared that they felt that BTB programming was helping to prepare them for the future. Student after student shared that they felt more confident and better equipped to communicate their ideas and feelings with others and that they gained a deepened capacity for working together with collaborators. Students also identified that they felt a great sense of community within BTB spaces and that that sense of community helped to identify that in their time with

BTB and their future that they want to go back out and lead other young people in the experience, community, and growth of capacity, skill, and knowledge that they themselves have experienced within BTB programming. Beyond The Bars is excited to continue to build our capacity for connecting young people to the services, community, and capacity-building activities that they need to fulfill their goals, make their dreams a reality, and to achieve health and well-being within their lives and communities.

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The David's Harp Foundation

San Diego, California

The David's Harp Foundation, founded on relationship-centered creative youth development principles, seeks to inspire “opportunity youth” in San Diego County by providing an inclusive and nurturing environment for self-expression, growth, and skill development. Our programming starts inside the East Mesa Juvenile Detention Facility with the “Beats Behind the Wall” program, which works with youth experiencing incarceration, serving sentences of greater than a year. We use the power of music and multimedia production training to build mentoring relationships with youth. As youth learn production skills and industry-standard equipment, this innovative initiative aims to address the persistent inequitable barriers to entry in the San Diego creative economy and foster the potential of young individuals who might otherwise have limited access to resources and opportunities.

Recent data from the San Diego Workforce Partnership indicates that there are approximately 41,000 opportunity youth in San Diego County - young individuals aged 16-24 who are neither employed nor enrolled in school. Furthermore, according to SANDAG's Juvenile Justice Report, in 2019, there were 3,844 juvenile arrests in the region, and 80% of those involved were males. Many of the young people that we love are from under-resourced communities in Southeast and South San Diego County. Our communities have been disproportionately affected by economic and social inequalities. Consequently, youth are often unable to participate in the thriving, 2.4 billion dollar creative economy in the region.

Youth affected by the Juvenile Justice system often experience a lack of access to authentic relationships and support structures, which are crucial for personal growth and development. The David's Harp Foundation's relationship-centered approach recognizes the importance of building trust, empathy, and understanding as a foundation for skill development and workforce training. By forging genuine connections and offering guidance, we help youth build resilience and community, linking arms with them to overcome systemic, economic, and social-emotional challenges.

Our continuum of programming starts with the “Beats Behind the Wall” initiative, which equips youth experiencing incarceration with creative tools and channels their energy into artistic expression. This program lays the groundwork for the participant's personal and professional growth, culminating in the Biz Pod workforce program. The Biz Pod program employs the “Family Business” model, emphasizing relationship-centeredness and equitable access to opportunities in the local creative economy.

Through our unique approach, we actively seek to interrupt the systems and transform our communities. By providing relationship-centered workforce training for opportunity youth, including those involved in the juvenile justice system, we are providing real opportunities for economic advancement and entrepreneurship.

The broader implications for young people participating in programs such as those offered by The David's Harp Foundation extend beyond the organization itself. These programs offer not just skills training and mentorship, but a gateway into the thriving San Diego creative economy. According to the San Diego Workforce Partnership, this economy represents a

sector worth \$2.4 billion. In this burgeoning market, there are ample economic opportunities, ranging from gainful employment to entrepreneurship, especially for individuals skilled in multimedia production and other creative disciplines.

One of the most inspiring examples of this is Warehouse Media, a student-owned video production company established by graduates of the Biz Pod program. Providing high-quality content for non-profit and corporate organizations, Warehouse Media demonstrates the entrepreneurial potential of the youth involved in our programs. Similarly, the advent of Red Dot Streaming, a student-led online content platform, has shown how youthful innovation can intersect with market demand, creating opportunities for both business and social impact.

By placing a strong emphasis on skills that align with industry demand, the Biz Pod program also increases the employability of its participants. This not only addresses the immediate needs of employers in San Diego's creative economy, but it also forms a critical part of the wider strategy to reduce the number of opportunity youth in the region. The ripple effect is substantial – the success of these young entrepreneurs can inspire others, generating a virtuous cycle of aspiration, achievement, and economic progress.

The key to this success lies in the relationship-centered approach, which nurtures each youth's unique talents, strengths, and potential. By focusing on the needs of employers and aligning them with the skills development of our participants, we create a win-win situation. Employers gain access to a pool of trained, passionate youth, eager to prove their abilities, while our participants receive opportunities to embark on meaningful careers or launch their own enterprises.

In summary, The David's Harp Foundation is a pioneering organization that addresses the complex needs of opportunity youth in San Diego County through its relationship-centered creative youth development approach. By offering a comprehensive range of programming, from the "Beats Behind the Wall" initiative to the Biz Pod workforce program, the foundation is actively working to dismantle the barriers that prevent marginalized youth, including those affected by the juvenile justice system, from accessing the creative economy and achieving their dreams. In doing so, David's Harp is transforming individual lives and shaping a more equitable and prosperous future for the entire community.



Hyde Square Task Force

Boston, Massachusetts

For more than 30 years, Hyde Square Task Force (HSTF) has put Black, Indigenous, or People of Color (BIPOC) young people at the center of our work. What started as crisis intervention in a community that was overrun with drugs and violence, where young people were being lost to gangs, incarceration, and death, is now a place where youth can successfully flourish as they develop their artistic, academic, and workforce skills all while receiving socio-emotional support.

HSTF's Jóvenes en Acción (JEA) and College and Careers Pathways programs primarily serve Latinx and Black youth from low-income Boston households. Most of our youth and/or their parents were not born in the U.S. with many youth being first-generation college-going students.

BIPOC youth face many barriers to their success, including a vast income gap. The median annual income for Latinx households in Massachusetts—\$39,742 a year—is less than half of that earned by White families—\$82,029 a year, which represents the largest income disparity between these two groups of any state in the country (24/7 Wall St, 2018). This disparity limits access to resources and opportunities, which places low-income BIPOC youth at a disadvantage.

Through HSTF's JEA and College and Careers Pathways programs, we aim to address this disparity by creating more access to those resources and opportunities they might otherwise miss. Through our programs, youth are supported as they navigate high school and their communities, develop post-secondary goals, and then set themselves on a path to achieving those goals. Youth interact with a number of caring adults including artists, community organizers, post-secondary coaches, volunteer mentors, and a trained social worker on staff.

Through JEA's Afro-Latin arts training, youth also develop transferable skills through challenging creative projects that prepare them for today's workforce. Youth learn how to work collaboratively in their music ensembles or while creating original songs that they then perform throughout Boston's Latin Quarter. They learn how to communicate effectively, taking on leadership and providing each other with feedback with the goal of enhancing their own skills and their work. JEA's 6-week summer session serves as an employment opportunity for youth that includes intensive artistic training with the expectation that youth will engage in activities and performances throughout the community, attend weekly academic and professional skill-building workshops with topics like study skills, time management, and networking, among others, and participate in leadership development and civic engagement projects. Youth who participate in HSTF programming during the school year also have the opportunity to obtain one of 20 stipended fellowships that are offered in music, dance, theater, and youth organizing. This group of youth fellows takes on additional responsibilities within JEA.

HSTF also offers a select number of youth the opportunity to participate in paid summer internships through partnerships with local law firms, arts organizations, and hospitals. These youth complete applications, submit resumes and cover letters and participate in an interview

process before being placed at an internship. For young people who have graduated high school, HSTF offers part-time and full-time job opportunities such as Programs Associate, Music Associate, and Education Success Associate positions in order to continue to develop their workforce development skills while also meeting critical organizational needs.

As a result of all the various strategies and relationship-building that are core to HSTF's work, we have program alumni who are lawyers, educators, organizers, elected officials, teaching artists, finance professionals, and much more. We also currently have 5 alumni on Hyde Square Task Force's Board of Directors helping to steward the organization as we continue to move into the future.



Memphis Music Initiative

Memphis, Tennessee

Future Imperatives and Economic Context

At the Memphis Music Initiative, as we attempt to prepare our participants for career success in or outside of the creative economy, it is important that we recognize the current economic conditions that exist locally.

For Memphis, the data shows:

- Key measurements for 53 largest regions show a languishing economy (2008-2018):
 - #47 – increase in jobs
 - #48 – change in median earnings
 - #53 – Change in top/bottom neighborhoods employment rate gap
- 51% of African American workers earn less than \$15 an hour (down from 61% in 2000) and it compares to \$23 for white workers.
- The conclusion: Memphis is #96 out of the 100 largest U.S. cities in per-person access to loans, grants, and other capital¹.

While these conditions paint a dismal picture of local economic opportunity, there is an important fundamental/systemic truth behind those numbers: “Memphis faces an overreliance on low-wage industries, misalignment between workforce skills and opportunities, and sprawl outpacing economic and population growth.²” If we know this to be true (and potentially worsening with the automatization of many traditional warehousing and distribution jobs which are the base of our local economy), we have a responsibility to approach workforce development with an eye toward preparing our participants for a more sustainable perspective.

For us, this means focusing on creativity and associated skill sets to prepare our participants for “creative class” jobs, as defined by Richard Florida in “The Rise of the Creative Class”. “The creative class does nonroutine cognitive work and applies 21st-century abstract skills on a regular basis. There has been a sharp increase in the demand for creative class workers since 1980. Once again, this is primarily because of the appearance of the personal computer—creative class jobs are facilitated by technology, not replaced by it.³” By focusing on 21st century skills development, we aim to both prepare young people for the evolving world of work, but encourage them to lead Memphis in building a more equitable and robust 21st century economy.

As a youth-centric organization, we must also acknowledge the shifts occurring in Millennial and Gen Z populations, with regard to their perspectives on work. Where previous generations may have aspired to work in environments that provided the most prestige, stability, or income, we’ve observed that younger workers have come to prioritize diversity, autonomy, common values, and flexibility. Further, “Young 20-somethings are delegating to their boss, asking for mental health days, working less once they’ve accomplished their tasks for the day, and setting their own hours, Goldberg wrote. It’s a sharp contrast from the overworked, structured days that work-obsessed millennials are accustomed to.⁴”

MMI Curriculum Strategy

Our curriculum is aligned to support creatives, whether they pursue careers in the arts or not, in deepening their skill set and exploring their passions. Two evidence-based frameworks support this approach. The first is articulated by educators here³:

We have asked teachers, principals, superintendents, community leaders, parents, and students across the world to name the skills that students must have to be successful in the 21st century. They all come up with the same list of skills:

- Problem-solving
- Creativity
- Think analytically
- Collaborate
- Communicate
- Ethics, Action, Accountability

This list aligns with our six measured goals/intended outcomes for the MMI Works Program:

1. Youth are Effective Communicators
2. Youth are Critical Thinkers
3. Youth are Collaborators
4. Youth are Creatives
5. Youth are Goal-Setters and Goal-Achievers
6. Youth are Responding to Systemic Issues

Additionally, we see music and art as the ideal vehicle for this workforce development intervention, as many young people, particularly given the incredibly rich music tradition of the Memphis region, are passionate and engaged by music. But beyond their general interest, there is evidence that their engagement in these passion projects leads to better economic outcomes and economic mobility. To summarize findings by researchers Stefanie DeLuca, Susan Clampet-Lundquist, and Kathryn Edin, in the book *Coming of Age in the Other America*, “kids who found what researchers call an “identity project,” essentially a passion or hobby that helped motivate them, went even further, onto college or decent jobs.”⁵

Differentiators in the Creative Youth Development (CYD) Approach to Workforce Development

In summary, we see four general approaches by CYD organizations like MMI that make our workforce development interventions particularly effective and relevant to youth.

1. ***We connect with existing passions of young people to get them enthusiastically engaged in their planning for the future.*** As opposed to many workforce programs that try to identify what pathways will simply lead to sustainable employment, we start with areas where young people have passion, or “identity projects”, and build their engagement and confidence from there. One MMI participant captured this connection; *“At first, I thought it would be just like other programs around the city. I assumed that MMI would have the same curriculum, the same lectures, the same “GOAL” outline sheets, and all the other things that I had learned in previous internships. Fortunately to my pleasant surprise, I was definitely mistaken. Unlike the other programs, Memphis Music Initiative focused on the students within the program and asked us what did WE want to explore and learn within the city of Memphis.”*

- 2. We appeal to the Millennial/Generation Z value set.** The data tells us that young people are increasingly seeing the world of work through their own values, not necessarily through the values the world has pre-defined by older generations. CYD organizations generally encourage young people to be world builders, to define and live into important values, and to take creative approaches to exploring what that means personally and professionally. We regularly hear, “We don’t want to work like our parents work; we want to do our own thing.”
- 3. We build on our existing expertise in creating supportive community around young people.** CYD organizations know how to use artistic practice to build beloved community, so that young people feel supported, bolstered, and loved through the tough transition from child to young adult. As one participant articulated, *“I always believed that I wasn’t “creative” enough to be able to apply creativity as a facet of my career and as I got older, creative careers just seemed way more risky to me so I decided to play it safe. This summer, MMI has made me want to take the risk, and I can’t be any more grateful. Being creative, writing screenplays, making and editing short films makes me *happy* which is so important in the long run and I think that I’m pretty good at doing it.”*
- 4. The skill sets we build have extremely high transferability to most 21st century careers.** Creative class careers, including careers in the arts, not only build on the skill sets noted above, but they demand an entrepreneurial mindset and approach. CYD organizations that integrate workforce development encourage young people to think through how they will bring their creative projects to market, and how they will monetize their creative outputs in a clear, hands-on way. Certainly, these skills are transferable to a wide range of professions. A participant explained, *“My dream was becoming more tangible, more a reality with each new activity that they had in place for us to participate. Slowly, but surely, I began to notice how I was becoming more engaged with asking questions that would lead me to answers as to how to get started as videographer.”*

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¹<https://www.smartcitymemphis.com/2021/07/memphis-risks-a-knock-out-punch-from-another-wake-up-call/>

²<https://www.urban.org/sites/default/files/publication/104511/community-development-finance-in-memphis.pdf>

³Getting It Right: Aligning Technology Initiative for Measurable Student Results, Jukes, MacLean, McLure, Page 3

⁴<https://www.nytimes.com/2021/10/28/business/gen-z-workplace-culture.html>

⁵<https://www.theatlantic.com/business/archive/2016/04/kids-poverty-baltimore/476808/>



We Are Culture Creators

Detroit, Michigan

We Are Culture Creators is founded on the ethos of self-determination and self-actualization. Part of that work is job readiness and mentorship specifically in music art and culture. Young creatives of color aged 18 to 24 in Detroit face several challenges, including limited access to resources and opportunities, as well as unique needs that are not always adequately addressed. Some of the challenges our youth encounter include:

- 1. Lack of Representation:** Limited representation in the creative industry may make it difficult for young creatives of color to find role models or mentors who share similar backgrounds and experiences. In Detroit, this rings true the higher the position of power and decision-making, the whiter it becomes. This is true even in a city that is 80 percent black.
- 2. Access to Education and Training:** Access to quality education and training in creative fields can be limited, hindering their ability to develop their skills and pursue their passions. Thus the Culture House is essential to help provide a space to learn and experiment in a safe but professional space.
- 3. Economic Barriers:** Financial constraints prevent many of our youth from investing in the necessary equipment, software, or studio space to fully explore their creative potential. Our equipment is key to youth learning and having opportunities.
- 4. Discrimination and Bias:** They often face discrimination and bias, which impacts their confidence and hinders their progress in the industry. As well as closed doors before they are even open.
- 5. Networking and Industry Connections:** Building professional networks and connections can be challenging, especially when the industry lacks diversity and inclusion. So it is to let We Are Culture Creators provide real-life diverse mentors for our youth.

Their needs include:

- 1. Affordable Education and Workshops:** Access to affordable or free workshops and educational programs that focus on creative skills development.
- 2. Mentorship and Guidance:** Guidance from experienced professionals who understand their challenges and can offer valuable insights and support.
- 3. Financial Support:** Funding opportunities and grants to help with equipment purchases, project funding, or exhibition costs.
- 4. Inclusive Creative Spaces:** Access to inclusive and safe creative spaces where they can freely express themselves and collaborate with others.
- 5. Cultural Representation:** Increased representation in media and arts to promote diversity and foster a sense of belonging.

To address their challenges and cater to their needs, it is essential for the city of Detroit to invest in programs that promote diversity, inclusion, and equitable access to resources within the creative industry. This might involve supporting community-based organizations, offering grants and scholarships, and encouraging businesses and institutions to prioritize diversity and representation in their initiatives. We are one space in a city of creatives and we know that there is room for hundreds of Culture Creators houses reaching the thousands of young creatives looking for guidance and support.

Part Two:

Partnership Conversations Illuminating the Local Context and Interventions

These abstracts from the Lab participants' Partnership Conversations shed light on the significance of CYD collaborative efforts. They add an external perspective to the ways in which CYD effectively equips young individuals for the workforce and their enduring success based on the specifics of their community. These partnerships showcase CYD's networked approach to actively engaging youth in shaping their desired futures and providing a diverse range of relationships to forge their own paths.

Guided by the expertise of consultants Aubree Weiley and Carlos Cuestas, these conversations delved deep into the core essence of each awardee organization and its esteemed partners. Through interviews exploring the rich tapestry of local history, labor efforts, and interventions, a collective understanding of their work emerged, providing invaluable insights. Partners uplifted the thoughtful methodologies of the CYD organizations while confronting future challenges and exploring future opportunities to foster greater impact within the field. They also offered insights into local challenges impeding young people's self-determination.

Engaging with individuals and organizations deeply entrenched in CYD and workforce development programming allowed for a nuanced exchange of wisdom and perspectives that add nuance to understanding the field.

Beyond the Bars

Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

Beyond the Bars and Philadelphia's Park and Recreation Department have been in partnership since 2022, bringing music education to youth in many recreation centers around the city. Bill Powell, the Department's Performing Arts Coordinator, emphasizes how the approach of Beyond the Bars to music pedagogy immerses Philadelphia youth in learning music theory, performance, and production. By closely working with Beyond the Bars, Bill's belief that "music changes lives" deepens and brings a hopeful outlook into the future.

Bill speaks of the partnership's future in terms of scale. During our conversation, he recognized how programs like Beyond the Bars attract the attention of elected officials and communities, increasing their willingness to keep and expand funding for music education. This is crucial work. As the perpetual threat of defunding arts education continues, the partnership between Beyond the Bars and Philadelphia's Department of Parks and Recreation shows the importance of making artistic pursuits available as a public good. In Bill's estimation, this partnership should not be limited to his department but has the potential to reach the wide network of libraries in the city.

Expanding the reach of Beyond the Bars will result in bonding communities around performing arts education outside of school settings. This is tied to the funding landscape and constituents' interest in the different Philadelphia districts. As public funding for arts education in urban settings is increasingly scant, Beyond the Bars operates at no cost to the recreation centers by independently fundraising. Recreation centers offer Beyond the Bars program space and support staff at no cost so the programs are free to all the youth interested in participating. This reciprocity speaks to the success of this partnership and allows the partners to focus on youth and the potential of music education to change their lives.

This model of reciprocity, however, reveals a level of precarity pervasive in performing arts education in relation to public funding. Christopher Thornton, Beyond the Bar's Co-Director, spoke plainly about this issue as something that must be addressed at a state and federal level. The scant or nonexistent public funding for performing arts programs in Philadelphia is symptomatic of the divestment of arts education writ large. This inescapable reality makes Christopher wonder why programs "that give people life" find themselves perpetually as an afterthought and on the verge of defunding. Partnerships such as Beyond the Bars and the Philadelphia Parks and Recreation Department reveal the solidarity necessary to achieve the beneficial impact of arts education on the material and emotional well-being of a community.

Aquil Shakur, a former student and now a Beyond the Bars educator, recognizes that emotional well-being and support constitute a cornerstone of after-school programs in recreation centers. As these spaces struggle for survival, the partnership between Beyond the Bars and the Philadelphia Parks and Recreation Department ensures access for Philadelphia youth to arts education: they come to learn music and stay for the support systems they encounter. However, these systems depend on funding, infrastructure, and improving the conditions for partnerships that center youth and their well-being at the core of their mission.

The David's Harp Foundation

San Diego, California

Curiosity forges unsuspecting and fruitful partnerships. In the case of The David's Harp Foundation (David's Harp) and Sony, curiosity took the shape of Ashley Ayala, Senior Business Analyst for PMO at Play Station, bringing diversity and representation into practice. The impact of initiatives promoting Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) in the corporate and academic worlds has been questionable, as reported in print and digital media. Lack of standards, consistency, and accountability among DEI promoters count as some of its failures. Yet, the basis and history of the partnership between David's Harp and Sony tell a different story; they work reciprocally to foster workforce development at the corporate and entrepreneurial level, offering youth the necessary tools to compete professionally in the music, sound, and video industries.

The relationship that started as financial and in-kind support from Sony to David's Harp developed into a laboratory for youth workforce development, as seen in the employment of a David's Harp participant in a staff position at Sony. It has grown from there reciprocally through BizPod, a program that falls into the Family Business model informing the culture of David's Harp. BizPod is a creative content business incubator that grew out of David's Harp and produces video content for clients including Sony, San Diego Symphony, the City of San Diego, and The Jacobs Center for Neighborhood Innovation among others. Through the family business model, BizPod participants learn specialized skills in a safe environment that set them on a path of success while being compensated for their work, just like a traditional family business.

Brandon Steppe, the founder and Executive Director of The David's Harp Foundation, emphasizes that the future of workforce youth development relies on relationships at all levels and the soft skills needed to nurture those relationships. This is pivotal in Brandon's view and a difference-maker in the partnership with Sony. For Brandon, developing soft skills in youth is a "wholistic approach, with workforce as a small piece of a bigger pie, that bigger pie being relationship[s]." That wholistic approach, however, requires the corporate responsibility Ashley brings. By valuing lived experience and trusting the work at The David's Harp Foundation, Sony has looked beyond potential employees' traditional higher education pathways (undergraduate degrees and internships accessible to more privileged populations) towards the artistic experience of the local community where its Southern California headquarters are located. Within the contours of this partnership, David's Harp participants are building competitive resumes while the organization is providing "youth equitable access to San Diego's 2.4 billion dollar creative economy."

Hyde Square Task Force

Boston, Massachusetts

Hyde Square Task Force (HSTF) in Boston takes an innovative approach to guide young individuals toward their desired career path by partnering with potential employers across various sectors. These partnerships extend to local health centers, hospitals, law firms, and more. HSTF's dedicated staff work closely with young individuals to navigate post-secondary education and the job market, aiming to secure sustainable wages and enable fulfilling lives. Employers recognize the developmental outcomes associated with creative youth development (CYD) as valuable, as it equips individuals with durable and transferable skills that prepare them well for the workforce. By connecting youth with different industries and sectors, such as arts, healthcare, and finance, HSTF plays a vital role in helping students discover employment opportunities that align with their skills and interests. This is achieved through a range of activities, including hosting site visits and panels featuring cross-sector partners and introducing and educating youth about potential careers. Additionally, HSTF works one-on-one with students to explore their interests and match them with existing partners in these industries, fostering a personalized approach to career exploration and development.

When it comes to preparing young individuals for the workforce, HSTF Deputy Director Brenda Rodriguez-Andujar places great emphasis on the significance of multiple mentors. By providing access to a range of caring adults, including arts coordinators, teaching artists, civic organizers, social workers, and program managers, HSTF ensures that youth benefit from a diverse set of perspectives and experiences. This approach not only helps them develop artistic and leadership skills but also establishes valuable connections to a variety of potential employment opportunities.

Ruth Mercado-Zizzo, partner of HSTF and Vice President of Programs and Equity at EdVestors in Boston, is an example of one such caring adult who advocates for building cultural wealth through a workforce development system that supports all young adults. She acknowledges the rapidly growing interest of young adults in the creative sector and believes that providing paid work-based experience in arts and culture, such as the Boston Bloomberg Arts Internship (BAI), is a valuable means to offer opportunities for exploration. The Boston BAI program combines arts education and career pathways, offering work-based learning opportunities, career panels, and other exploration activities. Through immersion in the arts and cultural community, students not only gain significant work experience and exposure but also cultivate a sense of belonging and confidence in these settings.

Young adults can fully explore their interests and develop their potential by accessing a diverse range of employment opportunities available in their communities, learning from various role models across different sectors, and engaging in paid creative work-based learning. Uniquely crafted by CYD organizations, youth-focused collaborations and partnerships for workforce development play a vital role in helping to prepare young adults for success in their chosen fields.

Memphis Music Initiative

Memphis, Tennessee

In a lively conversation between Amber Hamilton, Executive Director of Memphis Music Initiative (MMI), and Elizabeth Cawein, Founder, and Executive Director of Music Export Memphis (MME), the two visionary leaders explored fundamental Creative Youth Development strategies in preparing youth for the workforce and supporting their journey towards successful careers in the creative sector.

Entrepreneurship was featured at the forefront of their discussion. Recognizing the challenges associated with entering an industry that often offers limited opportunities, both leaders emphasized the importance of inspiring curiosity. They highlighted how developing creativity, confidence, and vulnerability, nurtured through artistic experiences, becomes essential for thriving in the 21st-century economy. These skills cultivate fluency in communication, allow for innovative ideation, and encourage flexible framing of opportunities in a rapidly automating workforce landscape.

In response, MMI offers a comprehensive professional and personal development series for youth that encompasses activities aimed at teaching these 21st-century skills. This series empowers youth to set ambitious goals and chart their paths toward their desired destinations. Employing tailored curricula, including interactive sessions on topics ranging from creative liberation to utilization of resources and community to effect change in the lives of themselves and others, students bridge their school and work experiences with whole-life skills, including design thinking, problem-solving, and goal setting.

Another important aspect introduced by Amber is the impact of social media on the perception of power structures among youth. Instead of relying on traditional hierarchies, young people now view power within the context of networks. They excel at creating and maintaining these networks but still seek guidance on effectively navigating them. In this context, mentorship has become an essential component. A trusted mentor can provide industry connections, guide pre-employment experience, offer personalized coaching, and facilitate nuanced in-person networking opportunities.

To address this need, the MMI Works summer internship program was established. It provides youth in grades 10-12+ with a pathway to explore and strengthen their creativity, earn money by working at local arts and music organizations, and gain the thoughtfully stewarded experience of being a professional in the arts. This example of mentorship in creative sector work experience goes beyond simply providing contacts and guidance; it offers a rare opportunity for transparency and realistic evaluation of job prospects in a highly competitive market.

In the contemporary music industry, success is no longer contingent on performance or perfection alone. Rather, it hinges on entrepreneurial aptitude and genuine passion, as Elizabeth astutely highlighted. By emphasizing the development of 21st-century, whole-life skills and establishing a strong support system of mentorship, youth become empowered to navigate the intricacies of a dynamic field confidently, setting them up for extraordinary achievements.

We Are Culture Creators

Detroit, Michigan

We Are Culture Creators (WACC) works with youth between 18 and 24 years of age, a demographic overlooked by government and philanthropic funders. For Elizabeth Stone and Michael Reyes, WACC's Co-Directors, the irony of ignoring a demographic that, given their independence and capabilities, would most benefit from creative youth development and workforce development programs is not lost. In their partnership with the Detroit Pistons, however, WACC has found a valuable avenue to highlight the work of participants who gain experience, a competitive resume, and recognition for having worked with a brand like the Detroit Pistons and, by extension, the NBA.

Aaron Michael Johnson, Brand Strategist at the Pistons, wanted to reconnect the famed basketball team with the Detroit community. This goal took Aaron to a block party searching for Curtis Roach, a young creative who went viral during the pandemic for his song “Bored in the House”—and a WACC participant. From there, the partnership took off. In Michael Reyes's words, its success hinges on organizations like the Detroit Pistons “having the right people in place.” This translates into having people in corporate spaces who achieve their goals with the community and not despite it; who see the work of youth organizations like WACC as vital to the city. Aaron captured it best when describing his experience at the WACC block party: “It was the youth; it was music. Like a work of art.”

The Pistons' work with youth yielded the team's first Youth Council. It involves high school-age children up to 18 years of age to discuss, plan, and execute events targeting the same age demographic and make the experience of following the Pistons more youth-centered. The success of the Youth Council put in motion plans for an Influencer Council, targeting youth between 18 and 24 years of age. Both The Pistons and WACC are working in tandem to bring workforce development opportunities to this demographic. While these ideas developed, the Pistons relied on WACC for some of its youth-centered initiatives, benefiting WACC's participants. For example, the Pistons offered Curtis Roach an entire halftime performance once the arena reopened as COVID-19 restrictions eased. At another time, the Pistons and WACC collaborated to launch new merchandise, with WACC participants working as the main photographers for the products' advertising. These are just two examples of workforce development strategies benefiting WACC's participants whose work is recognized by one of the biggest brands in basketball.

Considerations arise between the professional artistic production that characterizes WACC, the pigeonholing subjecting BIPOC arts organizations to produce entry-level deliverables, and the professional quality of artwork required to represent a brand like the Detroit Pistons. WACC struggles with exceeding expectations of what non-profit youth organizations are supposed to produce in terms of quality. Their ability to deliver world-class products for major national brands contradicts what the philanthropic community expects from so-called disadvantaged youth. In other words, the technical skills of WACC participants are on par with the needs of major brands like the Detroit Pistons but defy the expectations of granting institutions who question whether organizations like WACC need their support. After all, their participants and production values exceed what grantors expect from non-profit organizations centered on youth.

Perhaps this is a lesson for the philanthropic community and government entities that fund (or defund) arts organizations: dignified and dedicated support of youth arts programs goes beyond after-school programs and unleashes the potential of young artists armed to compete equitably in the nation's creative economy.

Part Three:

Youth-Led Visual Narratives Illustrating Workforce Development and Well-being Impacts

The following visualizations showcase how each organization prepares young individuals for their self-determined career paths as told by the youth leaders themselves. These visualizations crucially articulate the weave of the eight elements of wellness into program experiences: Emotional, Financial, Occupational, Social, Environmental, Intellectual, Physical, and Spiritual.

The final products enhance understanding of each organization's methodology to promote and prioritize wellness as well as self-direction in their workforce development programs.

Youth leaders from each of the Lab organizations spearheaded a collaborative process to create these visualizations. Their lived experiences and insights played a crucial role in capturing the essence of the organization's programming and showcasing it authentically. We paired them with a professional illustrator and undertook a process that involved several key activities in which the youth leaders actively participated. Their involvement guaranteed that the visualizations reflect the organizations' values through the eyes of a primary stakeholder.

The final products are a communication tool that enhances understanding of each organization's methodology and illuminates how they promote and prioritize wellness in their workforce development programs. They highlight the structure and methodology of the programs while also showcasing the transformative mentorship and relationship-building that takes place within their walls. They reveal the crucial aspects of emotional and social wellness that shape the organizations' approaches and collectively provide a picture of consistent practices across communities and organizations. Through these captivating visualizations, the unique and impactful nature of creative youth development programs in terms of youth-led workforce readiness becomes evident.

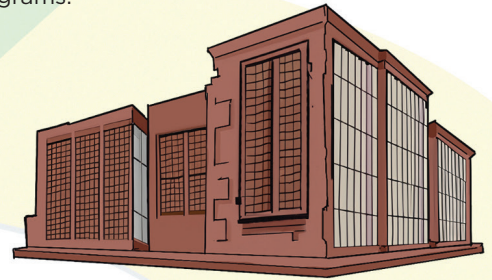
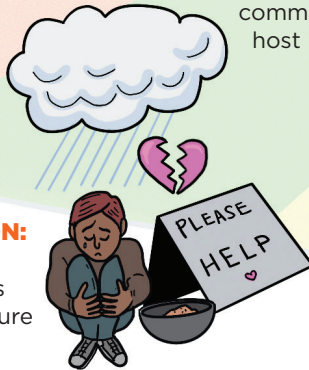
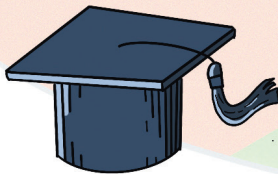
Beyond the Bars

The Beyond the Bars' Ecosystem of Support Model: Beyond the Bars works to create accessible musical spaces throughout the city for youth



INVITATIONAL PROGRAMS: Students in invitational programs can try out BTB programming throughout the city in locations such as youth shelters, diversion, trauma clinics, foster care, and rec centers. Music Labs are built by BTB in the partner programs spaces and then run by our community-based teachers. Students can continue in the partner programs for as long as they would like (students often stay in locations such as shelters for transitory periods).

When students identify that music is something that they enjoy they can then join one of our receiver programs. In addition to 'stationary' programs BTB also utilizes a Mobile Studio — a van and mobile recording and music creation set up that meets young people where they are at community events as well as with partners who do not host BTB programs.



TRANSITION TEAM/RESOURCE CONNECTION:

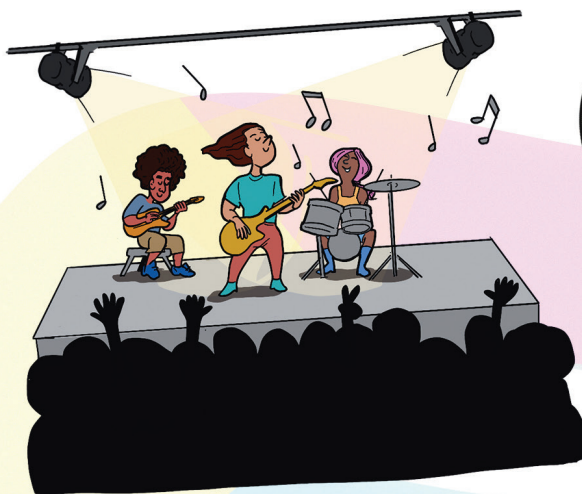
Once students identify that they enjoy music we use our transition team to not only help students join BTB receiver programs but also work to ensure that they are connected to additional resources through our wide network of community-based partners. Students in invitational programs fill out daily reports asking if they want to do additional classes with Beyond the Bars and if they have additional needs such as shelter, food, counseling, clothing, or education. We then work to connect our youth to additional Beyond the Bars programming in their neighborhood and connect resources and partners to our youth to help ensure that their basic needs are being met.

RECEIVER PROGRAMS: Students can then join our larger receiver programs that receive students coming from partner exposure programs throughout the city.

These self-run programs last throughout students' adolescence and can help them with performing shows, recording their own music, and engaging in career counseling

toward their personal goals. Our Receiver programs are ongoing programs that are located in our students' neighborhoods so that they do not have to travel far to express themselves with music and be supported by a compassionate community.

CEC



STUDENT TEACHER PROGRAM: The student-teacher program works with tenured students to develop as leaders and learn how to be music educators and peer mentors and mediators where they are then hired by community partners such as Parks and Recreation to be employed to be co-teachers at music labs that we helped build.



The David's Harp Foundation

STARTING MY PROGRAMMING ADVENTURE, I had a strong desire to become proficient in music production. This led me to the studio, where good grades granted me studio time. DHF's impact was profound, channeling digital music for positive change. The studio experience fueled my motivation, pushing me to excel academically and personally, reaching new heights. Prioritizing wellness, I nurtured social bonds, sought intellectual growth, and tended to emotional well-being, fostering a balanced and fulfilling life.



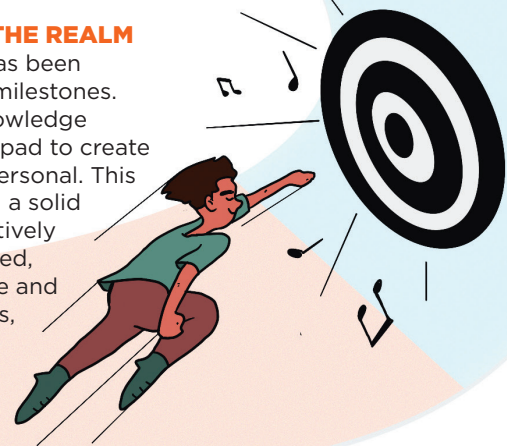
REACHING GRADUATION was a pinnacle for me. The incentives provided the drive, igniting my dedication to excel. The pivotal role of DHF in guiding and supporting me cannot be overstated. Without their unwavering mentorship, this achievement wouldn't have materialized.



BIZPOD EMPOWERS YOUNG ADULTS with the creative economy by unveiling innovative paths to financial gains. Wellness is prioritized, spanning social connections, intellectual growth, occupational fulfillment, and financial stability. The Business Pod program caters to 18-24-year-olds in transitional phases, fostering entrepreneurial skills and thriving in the creative economy. Since 2017, Biz Pod has launched four student-owned businesses, molding future entrepreneurs.



MY PATH TO SUCCESS IN THE REALM OF MUSIC PRODUCTION has been characterized by significant milestones. I harnessed the tools and knowledge gained from DHF as a launchpad to create something meaningful and personal. This foundation provided me with a solid footing to build upon. I effectively employed the skills I developed, built by a well-crafted resume and valuable industry connections, which collectively propelled me to flourish within the competitive landscape of the music industry.



RETURNING TO DHF AND GIVING BACK has been a deeply rewarding experience. I've learned the power of relationships and now, as an instructor, I'm able to extend opportunities to others. A standout program, "Beats Behind the Wall," brings DHF's recording studio program to incarcerated youth in San Diego County. This initiative provides artistic expression, workforce training, and mentoring, helping youth navigate the challenges of the Juvenile Justice system. Wellness, spanning social, intellectual, occupational, and financial aspects, remains central to DHF's mission, driving positive change and growth.



AT 25, DIVING INTO COMMUNITY AND MENTORSHIP as an "Emerging Leader" has been enlightening. Finding job satisfaction and paving paths for new leaders have been fulfilling. Equipping and guiding fellow leaders taught me about empowerment and growth. My aspirations are bold: establishing my venture or infusing a Bizpod-style framework into my clothing brand. Students gain hands-on experience and compensation, merging learning and earning. Prioritizing wellness is also crucial. Continuing to thrive and find contentment across all life facets is the plan.

Hyde Square Task Force

Once HSTF, Always HSTF

RECRUITMENT involves reaching youth through schools, Artes Culturales, and community events. Artes Culturales offers music and dance lessons for ages 8-14, providing a taste of Jóvenes en Acción/Youth in Action (JEA) learning. This primes youth aged 13-14 and in 8th-12th grades for recruitment into the JEA program.



JEA revolves around AfroLatin arts & culture, encompassing dance, music, and theater. We offer career exploration, education assistance, and civic engagement workshops. The program provides social and emotional support, fostering relationships among youths and staff. Our focus extends beyond graduation, ensuring each youth leaves with a solid plan. We aim for program involvement and later giving back through HSTF fellowships. This includes community contributions through teaching and performing, alongside external internships tailored to youths' interests like law or medical fields.



FOSTERING A SUPPORTIVE ATMOSPHERE, our program offers social and emotional assistance. Youths engage with our social workers and mentors through one-on-one meetings. Monthly "Real Talk" sessions, led by the social worker, address mental health concerns like anxiety, depression, and more. These discussions ensure that youths feel acknowledged and supported. This nurturing environment is crucial to us. As graduation approaches, the question arises: What's next?



CAMINOS focuses on transitioning recent post-grads and 11th graders into college and career pathways. We extend support and guidance during this critical phase. Through one-on-one coaching, we assist them until they complete their chosen careers. Moreover, we create employment possibilities at HSTF and facilitate connections with career options matching their interests.



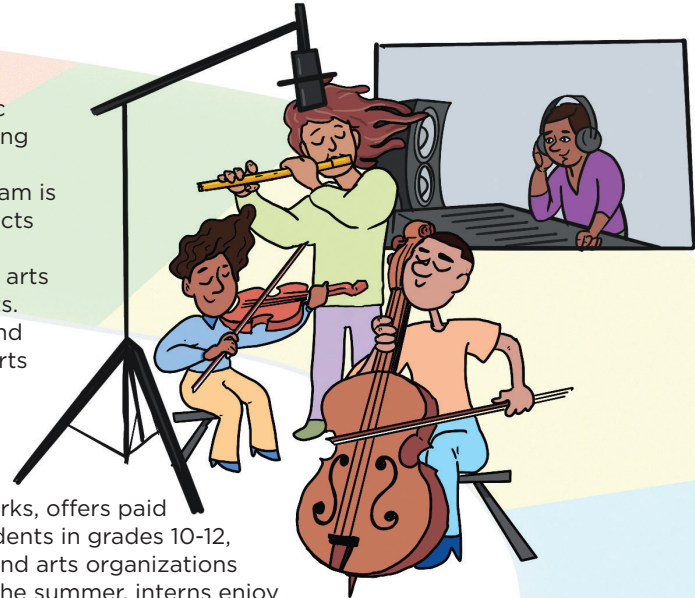
OUR GOAL is to offer the youth valuable experiences for their development and well-being. We provide them with opportunities that foster personal growth, enabling them to explore their potential fully. By delving into their culture and embracing its strengths, we encourage a deeper understanding of identity. Our support system ensures that they feel empowered and guided, particularly as they navigate post-high school planning and engage in networking opportunities. Ultimately, our endeavor is to contribute to their happiness and equip them with the skills to provide for themselves and their families.

Memphis Music Initiative

IN-SCHOOLS: Through our in-schools music engagement program, we collaborate with Memphis schools, placing skilled musicians in classrooms. This initiative transforms learning spaces into dynamic labs for emotional, social, and intellectual growth. Memphis Music Initiative Fellows engage around 1,200 students across 31 Memphis schools annually, offering music instruction and immersive experiences in the local music scene. This cultivates disciplined creativity, fostering students' personal and communal development, and empowering them to shape vibrant futures.



GRANTMAKING & CAPACITY BUILDING: Memphis Music Initiative (MMI) employs a trust-based approach in funding and capacity building, backing local entities offering enriching arts experiences to Memphis youth. Our program is designed to secure financial stability and growth prospects for grassroots organizations within our network. These organizations, deeply rooted in our city's dynamic Black arts community, play a vital role in nurturing emerging talents. MMI's dedicated team provides both financial support and operational guidance, ensuring enduring access to the arts for Memphis youth.



MMI WORKS: Our summer internship program, MMI Works, offers paid positions to high school students in grades 10-12, engaging them with music and arts organizations throughout Memphis. Over the summer, interns enjoy inclusive access to personal and professional growth, delving into themes like community building, emotional intelligence, personal values, and creative liberation. At their internship sites, interns actively learn essential professional skills and hone problem-solving abilities. They are empowered to set ambitious goals, strategize, and define their path, experiencing the creative economy firsthand. Through partnered experiences, they enhance their problem-solving prowess, fostering confidence and professional acumen.



ALUMNI PROGRAM: The MMI Works Alumni Program serves as a hub for former interns to maintain connections, expand their networks, nurture their artistic concepts, expand their network of supporters, follow their interests, and propel their envisioned initiatives. We have both one-on-one and cohort experiences to encourage alumni to build out their goals for creative entrepreneurship or professional endeavors, and we surround them with a curated group of professionals to support their vision.



We Are Culture Creators

CURATE EVENTS: We curate events to develop confidence in the artists' entrepreneurship. Through meticulously curated events, we cultivate artist entrepreneurship, empowering creatives to embrace their unique talents and confidently navigate their path toward success.



FOCUS ON ARTISTIC EXPRESSION BEGINS

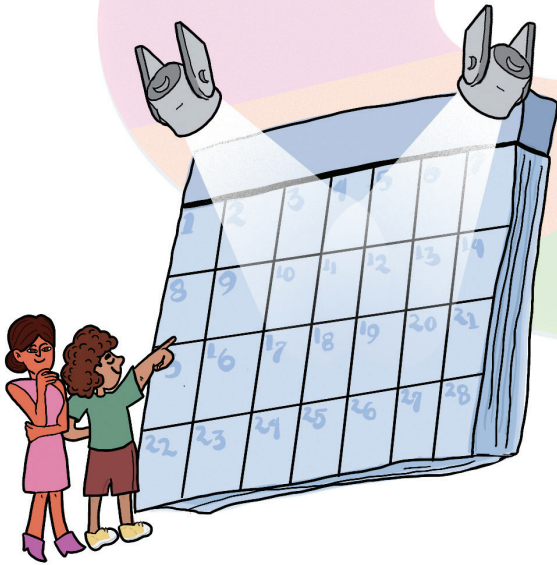
by first engaging youth and being there for emotional and moral support for when these young artists are first starting their creative endeavors.

Nurturing young talent with unwavering emotional and moral support, we are the creative haven for emerging artists, fostering their dreams as they embark on their artistic journeys.



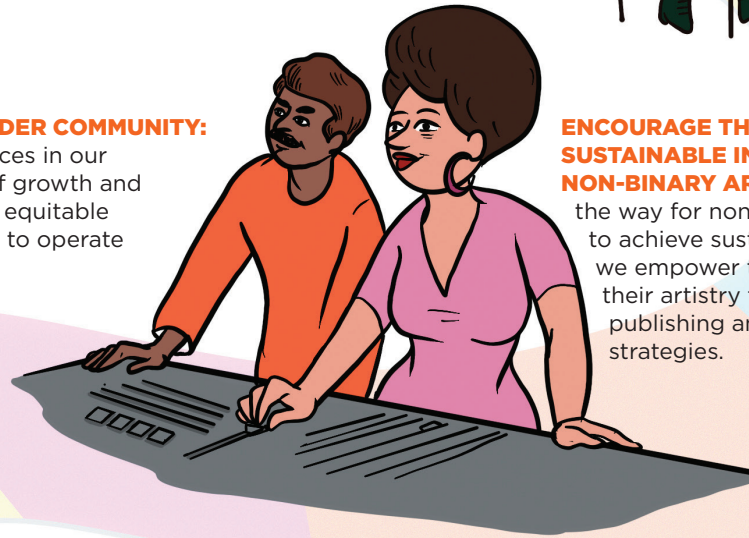
BUILD SOCIAL RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN SIMILAR ARTISTS:

We build social bridges among like-minded artists, fostering meaningful connections that enable collaboration, inspiration, and growth in the creative world.



BRING RESOURCES BACK TO THE WIDER COMMUNITY:

We're committed to reinvesting resources in our community, creating a positive cycle of growth and support for all, ensuring a thriving and equitable environment, gain financial confidence to operate solely as an artist and entrepreneur.



ENCOURAGE THE CREATION OF SUSTAINABLE INCOME FOR NON-BINARY ARTISTS:

Paving the way for non-binary artists to achieve sustainable income, we empower them to monetize their artistry through innovative publishing and distribution strategies.

ENGAGE YOUNGER ADULTS:

We develop upcoming youth with experience gained through our artistic journey. We actively engage with young adults, sparking their curiosity and involvement, and nurturing a generation of empowered and informed individuals ready to shape their future.



SUPPORTING YOUTH DESIRE TO PURSUE PASSIONS AND ASPIRATIONS

CYD-based workforce development programs' unique emphasis on artistic expression plays a pivotal role in promoting wholistic well-being. Young creatives' talents soar to their highest potential in a supportive environment. Guided by mentors and provided with essential resources, these young individuals can fully explore and develop their artistic capabilities.

Centering the desires of young people in their artistic practice as a career-building activity is fundamental in CYD programs. It's not just about guiding young individuals toward a job; it's about nurturing their unique artistic voices and enabling them to manifest their desires in life through art. This approach supports young people with achieving self-determined lives, a core mission of CYD programs and ingredient for a healthy life.

David Erickson of the New York Federal Reserve highlights the potency of self-determination in "The Fifth Freedom: Guaranteeing an Opportunity Rich Childhood for All" (2023). Erickson references S. Leonard Syme's theory that "the most important driver of improved health is control of one's destiny," and the landmark 1978 "Whitehall" study of British civil servants by Michael Marmot as corroborating evidence. The study found that though all civil servants had access to free healthcare, stable positions and consistent income, those with the most authority and control over their circumstances had longer life expectancy.

The accumulated findings of our research and this report demonstrate that investing in the convergence of artistic development and workforce development is not just valuable during the transition from learning to career, it is essential for nurturing vibrant long lasting lives that contribute to an innovative future.

ENTRUSTING YOUTH TO RESHAPE THE LABOR MARKETS

Recognizing that control of one's destiny is an imperative for a thriving life leads us to conclude that youth-driven transformation of labor markets is the necessary path forward. As workforce dynamics and economic landscapes continue to shift, the role of youth in reshaping labor markets is crucial, just as they are constant innovators in culture.

We urge all who are committed to young people to envision a future of labor through the lens of creative youth development (CYD) and the profound benefits that arise when young people have self-determined lives. Young minds become the architects of their destinies, forging innovative career trajectories that fulfill personal passions and contribute to the greater good of society.

In the following exploration, we delve into the implications and opportunities of entrusting young people to reshape labor markets while understanding how this paradigm shift empowers individuals, fosters innovation, and addresses broader societal needs, setting a new precedent for the workforce of tomorrow.

IMPLICATIONS

The implications of entrusting young people to reshape labor markets are profound. First, empowering youth in the shaping of their futures leads to more diverse and innovative career paths, as well as fosters a sense of ownership and responsibility for their vocational journeys. Young people in CYD programs are affirmed in pursuing careers that inspire and motivate them. According to youth leaders who participated in the creation of this report, through their artistic pursuits they discover the significance of aligning their career aspirations with their passions and creativity. Youth-led transformation of labor markets informed by CYD practices will infuse current workforce development efforts with this same rich outcome.

Additionally, youth-centered workforce development aligns career growth with societal impact, encouraging young individuals to consider how their work can contribute to the greater good. This can lead to a more engaged and conscientious workforce, creating a ripple effect of social responsibility and awareness.

The flexibility and adaptability inherent in youth-centered approaches ensure that the workforce remains responsive to the changing interests and needs of young people. It keeps pace with emerging industries and technologies, providing the development of relevant skills. The creation of supportive communities and ecosystems within organizations and communities is vital. These environments encourage experimentation, learning from failures, and iterative growth, ultimately helping young individuals define and achieve career success on their own terms.

OPPORTUNITIES

The opportunities stemming from entrusting young people to reshape labor markets are extensive. Educational, entrepreneurial, and mentorship spaces offer ample room for change. First, educational institutions have the mandate to redesign curricula toward an emphasis on critical thinking, innovation, and problem-solving skills. Institutions can then prepare young individuals not only academically but also to take charge of their career paths. Similarly, employers can create mentorship programs that align with the principles of youth-centered workforce development. Creative youth development programs offer insights, practical strategies, and the necessary tools to navigate the modern workforce, providing a roadmap for others to follow in supporting the growth of young minds and talents.

Second, as the CYD field has demonstrated, encouraging entrepreneurship within youth-centered workforce development programs fosters innovation, autonomy, and adaptability, all of which are essential in a rapidly changing economic landscape. Young people benefit from learning about risk-taking and resilience, as well as networking and collaboration skills, which are pivotal in modern work environments. Furthermore, emphasizing lifelong learning and curiosity can equip young individuals with the agility and openness to integrate new knowledge throughout their careers as they simultaneously build long term household wealth.

Incorporating industry professionals' and advisors' insights and expertise is another valuable opportunity CYD convincingly demonstrates. By integrating industry perspectives devoted to supporting and mentoring, youth career readiness programs can better prepare young people for the realities of their chosen fields, thus providing a more well-rounded and realistic set of skills and expectations.

CHARTING A NEW COURSE IN WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT: YOUTH FOCUS VS. EMPLOYER FOCUS

The CYD approach transcends preparing young individuals for current job openings; it advances their overall potential and aligns their personal ambitions with professional realities. Unlike employer-centered models with a narrow focus on current job market skills, CYD offers a broader developmental scope. It stimulates creative thinking, strengthens problem-solving abilities, and inspires social responsibility. CYD prepares individuals not only for employment but also for becoming innovative, socially conscious society members.

This examination aims to highlight the varied prospects in youth-centered workforce development as exemplified by CYD, contrasting this with the traditional employer-focused models.

YOUTH-CENTERED WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT (AS CHAMPIONED BY CYD)

Fosters Individual Growth:

- Prioritizes young people's personal development, helping them discover and cultivate their unique talents and interests.
- Encourages self-exploration and self-expression, leading to more diverse and innovative career paths.

Empowers Decision-Making:

- Youth are active participants in shaping their vocational journeys, leading to greater investment in their chosen paths.
- Develops critical thinking and decision-making skills, essential for career and life success.

Addresses Broader Social Issues:

- Links career development with societal impact, encouraging youth to consider how their work can contribute to the greater good.
- Promotes social responsibility and awareness, leading to a more engaged and conscientious workforce.

Adapts to Evolving Needs:

- More flexible and responsive to the changing interests and needs of young people.
- Keeps pace with emerging industries and technologies, providing relevant and forward-thinking skills development.

Creates a Supportive Community:

- Builds networks of peers and mentors, fostering a sense of belonging and support.
- Encourages collaboration and shared learning, enhancing the overall learning experience.

EMPLOYER-CENTERED WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

Aligns with Market Needs:

- Directly addresses the current demands and skill gaps in the labor market.
- Ensures that training is relevant and directly applicable to existing job opportunities.

Streamlines Pathways to Employment:

- Provides clear and direct routes into specific industries and roles.
- Often includes partnerships with employers, leading to potential job placements post-training.

Focus on Practical Skills:

- Emphasizes the acquisition of specific skills and competencies required by employers.
- Often includes hands-on, practical training that is closely aligned with workplace expectations.

Predictable Outcomes:

- Clear metrics for success, such as employment rates and salary levels post-training.
- Provides a level of certainty and predictability for both participants and funders.

COMPARATIVE ADVANTAGES

- **Youth-Centered Approach:** Empowers individuals, fosters creativity and innovation, and addresses broader societal needs. It is based on a more wholistic approach, focusing on personal development and adaptability for life success, essential in a rapidly changing world.
- **Employer-Centered Approach:** Directly aligns with current labor market needs, offering clear pathways to employment and focused skill development but limited preparation for the dynamics of our restless world.

While employer-centered models provide direct practical skill acquisition for immediate industry needs, youth-centered approaches like CYD offer a more comprehensive set of benefits. These extend beyond job preparation, focusing on developing adaptable, innovative, and socially aware individuals. Such an approach ensures a workforce prepared not just for today's jobs but also for future shifts in the global economy. This empowerment extends beyond the workplace, nurturing individuals' long term well-being and commitment to contributing to society at large.

ENTREPRENEURIAL INFLUENCE ON CREATIVE DEVELOPMENT

The infusion of entrepreneurial insight into CYD and workforce development offers a transformative lens for examining the distinctions between youth-centered and employer-centered models. Entrepreneurship, with its core principles of innovation, self-direction, and adaptability, injects a dynamic element into the discourse on how we shape the vocational pathways of young individuals. This approach complements the objectives of CYD by introducing a mindset that cultivates a wholistic, forward-thinking approach to personal and professional growth. **As we delve into the implications of entrepreneurship on these paradigms, it becomes evident that its principles are not just additive but foundational, redefining the way we envision and implement workforce development strategies for the youth of today and tomorrow.**

Innovation and Creativity:

Entrepreneurship inherently values innovation and creative problem-solving, traits that are strongly nurtured in youth-centered CYD programs' artistic activities. It encourages young people to think outside traditional job roles and consider novel ways to apply their skills and passions.

Autonomy and Agency:

Entrepreneurial thinking emphasizes autonomy and self-direction, aligning closely with the ethos of youth-centered development. It empowers young individuals to take charge of their vocational paths, fostering a sense of ownership and responsibility for their careers which translates into healthful control of destiny. CYD's uplifting of youth leadership and voice cultivates these traits.

Risk-Taking and Resilience:

Entrepreneurship teaches the importance of risk-taking and learning from failure, which are crucial for personal and professional growth. These lessons are particularly relevant in CYD initiatives, where young people learn to navigate challenges creatively and resiliently through their art making.

Adaptability and Flexibility:

The entrepreneurial mindset is adaptable and flexible, essential in a rapidly changing economic landscape. Just as CYD programs cultivate young people's responsiveness to the complexities of their communities and the systems they navigate, youth-centered entrepreneurial development prepares individuals to pivot and evolve their careers in response to new opportunities and challenges.

Economic and Social Impact:

Entrepreneurship often aims to address societal needs and create positive social impact, a goal shared by youth-centered workforce development. It encourages young people to consider how their vocational choices can contribute to societal betterment. In CYD spaces, producing creative work that resonates with meaning and affirmation for the benefit of the community is an important measure of success.

Networking and Collaboration:

Successful entrepreneurship relies on networking and collaboration, skills that are also central to CYD programs where projects are jointly created. These skills help youth build valuable relationships and learn to collaborate effectively, which are essential in modern work environments.

Lifelong Learning and Curiosity:

Entrepreneurship is about continuous learning and staying curious, aligning with the CYD focus on lifelong learning and exploration. This approach ensures that young people remain agile and open to new knowledge throughout their careers.

Entrepreneurship, with its emphasis on innovation, autonomy, and social responsibility, is a cornerstone in the architecture of workforce development within the realm of Creative Youth Development. It does more than just add a dimension; it actively transforms the landscape, imbuing youth-centered development with the vision necessary for the emerging workforce. The integration of entrepreneurial principles within CYD programs doesn't merely prepare young individuals for the challenges ahead; it equips them with a mindset geared towards continuous adaptation, creative problem-solving, and impactful societal contributions.

This synthesis of entrepreneurship and CYD paves the way for a new generation of professionals. This new cohort will navigate with more ease the complexities of today's world in addition to their commitment to shaping a better future. This worldview makes them invaluable contributors to any path they choose to tread.

EMPOWERING YOUTH, ENRICHING COMMUNITIES: A CALL FOR ADEQUATE RESOURCING

We, the advocates and champions of Creative Youth Development (CYD), stand united in our commitment to the wholistic well-being of young people. We believe in young people's power and our duty remains to provide them with the tools, opportunities, and support they need to flourish.

CYD programs have consistently demonstrated their capacity to transform the lives of marginalized and system-impacted youth, empowering them to shape their futures with purpose and resilience. In light of the urgent need for comprehensive educational and career development opportunities for young people that promote their well-being, cultivate their ambition, and fulfill their dreams for themselves and their community, we urge policymakers, funders, and cross-sector collaborators to recognize the value of investing in Creative Youth Development.

Fundamental to our Advocacy Agenda is the recognition that the CYD field remains vastly under-resourced. Such reality limits our ability to reach and impact the full spectrum of young people, especially Opportunity Youth, who could benefit from CYD. To bridge this gap and unlock CYD's leadership, collaboration, and program potential, we call for a significant increase in resources and capital investment. As we advocate for adequate resourcing, we are not just investing in programs; we are investing in the future of our communities, fostering a generation of leaders, innovators, and change-makers. By uniting our forces to forge this future, we secure its attainment.

OUR ADVOCACY AGENDA

Creative Sector Champions the Creative Future: We urge arts advocates, policymakers, and champions for the creative sector and workforce to prioritize young people with the same commitment they devote to adult creatives. Efforts that champion national workforce initiatives for adult cultural workers and artists, like the *Creative Workforce Investment Act* proposed in 2024, will be even stronger by including policies to support young people in the creative workforce. Prioritizing youth creatives alongside adults in workforce policy must extend across national, state, and local spheres. It will require advocates to expand their networks to include youth workforce development advocates and policymakers at all levels of government. Our youth are the vanguard of cultural production. As such, we must champion their futures to champion the future of culture.

Workforce Development Includes Creative Youth Development: We are committed to cross-sector education and advocacy to recognize and support CYD-based workforce development in ways akin to non-arts-based workforce development. Funders of youth workforce champions can strengthen the advocacy and coalition work they already support by resourcing young people's creativity for the cause. This action will embolden all youth workforce stakeholders to add the needs of CYD-based workforce to their portfolio of policy requests, including updates to the *Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act* (WIOA). Including pathways in WIOA for professional training of Opportunity Youth as creative

workers will expand funding and authorization of creative workforce training through state, local, and tribal workforce programs. Although the needs of CYD-based workforce development programs may vary from non-arts programs, we recognize the shared alignment in this advocacy as all youth workforce development programs strive to center young people's well-being.

Funding for Sustainability: We urge policymakers, philanthropic organizations, and stakeholders to allocate dedicated funds for CYD-based Workforce Development programs. Sustainable funding, particularly from government workforce programs, will enable the CYD field to expand its reach, enhance programs, and serve more youth effectively so they can personally thrive and contribute to the economic vitality of their community.

Community Investment: Recognizing the vital role of CYD in communities as cross-sector hubs for youth development, we call upon local governments and philanthropists to prioritize the well-being and development of their young people through culture and creativity by allocating increased resources and support to CYD initiatives. Incorporation of CYD into youth-serving ecosystem collaboratives will broadly demonstrate the value of investing in the field's wholistic approach. Advocates can support the prioritization of CYD by recognizing it in frameworks and toolkits, such as the National Youth Employment Coalition's Youth Champion Communities: Mayor's Challenge.

Creativity as National Service: Young people aspire to give back to their communities, and CYD programs excel in nurturing and amplifying this profound sense of purpose. For example, Americorps could tap this committed community of young creatives by adding artists, culture workers, and community-based culture organizations as a "key" priority for new Americorps State, National Direct, and VISTA proposals. Additionally, enabling young people to serve in their communities will strengthen their growth amid their hometown anchors as they are more likely to remain and contribute following their service period.

Sustainable Economic Models: We are committed to exploring innovative economic models that ensure the longevity and growth of CYD programs. We can strengthen the field's financial sustainability by identifying and implementing models that align with CYD's well-being-focused mission. By updating existing federal and state workforce programs to include CYD-aligned criteria, these resources can serve as a sustainable anchor for CYD's career pathway initiatives and cross-sector collaboration.

Leadership and Collaboration: We encourage community leaders, youth-serving systems, and educational institutions to collaborate with CYD programs. By embracing CYD's youth-led cross-sector expertise, community resources and networks will be mobilized to better serve all young people, especially Opportunity Youth.

Advocacy and Awareness: We must commit to advancing an advocacy agenda that raises awareness about CYD's vital role in developing our youth and communities. By advocating for our field, we seek to secure the resources and recognition it deserves.

We believe in the power of young people. It is our duty to provide them with the tools, opportunities, and support they need to flourish. As we advocate for adequate resourcing, we are not just investing in CYD programs; we are investing in the future of our communities by fostering a generation of leaders, innovators, and change-makers.

We invite all stakeholders to join us in this crucial endeavor to ensure that CYD-based programs reach their full potential and leave no youth behind on their journey to a bright creative future.

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This report represents a significant investment of time and effort, characterized by thorough research, extensive discussions, and continuous ideation. In the process, we recognized the importance of sustaining collaborative conversations and inquiry into the cross-sector nature of Creative Youth Development. We believe the brightest possible future is only possible through the intersectional efforts of youth-focused practitioners, funders and policy makers learning and sharing together.

Join the Creative Abundance Collaborative to build momentum for Creative Youth Development's devotion to young people and providing all they need to thrive throughout their lives.

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