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THE ROLE OF THE ARTS AND CREATIVE EXPRESSION IN EMPLOYABILITY AND ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY



PREPARED BY
NORC AT THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

NORC
at the UNIVERSITY of CHICAGO

RESEARCH TEAM

Jennifer L. Novak-Leonard,
Northwestern University

Gwendolyn Rugg,
NORC at the University of Chicago

Michael Reynolds,
NORC at the University of Chicago

Carol Hafford,
NORC at the University of Chicago

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1

INTRODUCTION

Today's global economy is marked by a widening gulf between wealth and poverty. While the U.S. economy has made a steady recovery since the Great Recession, millions of people still struggle to make ends meet: 12.7 percent of Americans lived in poverty in 2016. More strikingly, among those who live in poverty, the portion living in severe poverty is increasing, and reached a 20-year high in 2016 (Bialik, 2017; Semega, Fontenot, & Kollar, 2017).

This rising economic inequality is compounded by the rapidly changing landscape of job opportunities available to the American workforce. While the acceleration of the information economy is creating new kinds of jobs, it is also decreasing the demand for—or eliminating altogether—others, many of which have traditionally been held by people from the middle and working classes, leaving many to struggle to find their place in today's workforce (National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, 2017).

Even among those who are employed, the cost of living in the United States is outpacing wage growth: adjusting for inflation, American wages in 2017 were just 10 percent higher than they were in 1973, an increase that has not kept pace with the rising costs of housing, education, child care, and health care (Claxton, Rae, Levitt, & Cox, 2018; National Center for Education Statistics, 2018; Pew Charitable Trusts, 2018; Shambaugh, Nunn, Liu, & Nantz, 2017). This means that even those who are

working, especially those in low-wage jobs, may still struggle to make ends meet.

Simply put, we live in a time when many Americans face significant economic hardship. This hardship touches every aspect of a person's day-to-day life and wellbeing, from making it difficult to afford basic necessities such as housing, family care, education, and mental and physical health care, to prompting more existential distress related to one's sense of identity, purpose, and self-worth. These circumstances can lock people into a cycle of hardship: being faced with such substantial practical and personal challenges can make it ever more difficult to set oneself on a path toward financial stability.

A more holistic approach to creating economic opportunity

In the face of this persistent hardship and rapid economic and technological change, it is important to look at every possible pathway for addressing and mitigating the barriers to economic opportunity that confront so many people in the United States today. Finding and maintaining steady, living-wage employment is a vital pathway toward financial stability. As numerous factors feed into an individual's preparedness for employment, educational institutions, workforce development

organizations, and social service organizations have developed numerous approaches to preparing people for success in today's workforce. This report focuses on one relatively underutilized, but promising, approach: engaging people with artistic production and creative expression as a means to improve their employability and economic opportunities.

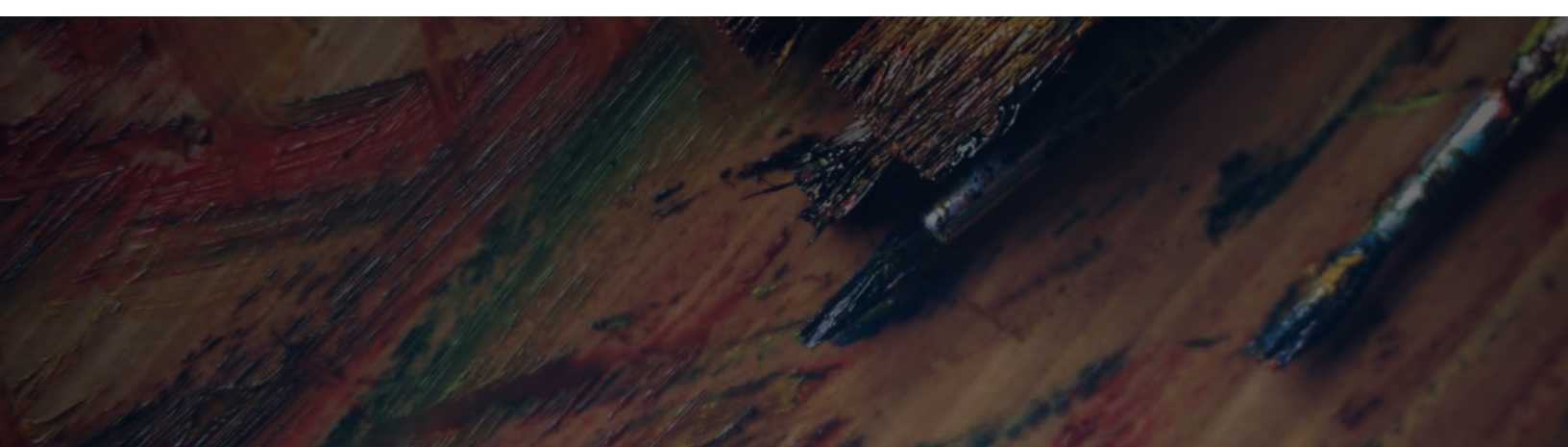
Because so many factors affect a person's ability to become and remain employed in living-wage work, organizations offer not only those services meant to train and help people find and retain employment, but also services that can help them mitigate the life challenges preventing them from finding work or securing promotion. Some organizations working with specific populations offer suites of wraparound services themselves. Others offer opportunities through a networked approach, developing relationships with others within the local workforce system to coordinate and leverage access to additional resources and opportunities for the people they serve.


Amid growing recognition of the need for people-focused, "integrated and holistic approaches" to workforce development and social service delivery (Kresge Foundation, 2014, p. 3), the central questions of this report are as follows:

What are the ways that artistic and creative expression are being used to improve people's job readiness, employability, and economic opportunity? How do such opportunities operate? How do they make a difference to the people who engage in the opportunities?

Given the foundational nature of these questions, this study is exploratory. To begin, we reviewed existing research and theoretical frameworks across multiple areas of research and practice, including workforce development, social services, education, and the arts.¹ We found that the intersection of artistic and creative expression with job readiness, employability, and economic opportunity has not been the focus of much research or publication. Existing research on the topic primarily pertains to youth and young adults, with seemingly broad recognition of the value and benefits of providing young people with programs and training opportunities in and through artistic forms in order to achieve educational and employment gains (Catterall, 2012). Research that we considered at the intersection of creative expression and economic opportunity for adults age 25 and older primarily discussed the use of arts practices as a formal means of therapy to address mental and other health and behavioral issues that may be a challenge to a person's ability to find or retain employment. By and large, however, this literature discussed the therapies in terms of health benefits, not necessarily in connection to helping a person enter the workforce. Through in-depth interviews with workforce development professionals, we also confirmed this relative dearth of existing information on the intersection of artistic and creative expression with job readiness, employability, and economic opportunity.

¹ The complete list of materials reviewed is available in the Appendix.





THERE IS GROWING RECOGNITION OF THE NEED FOR PEOPLE-FOCUSED, "INTEGRATED AND HOLISTIC APPROACHES" TO WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT.

Therefore, to best understand how artistic and creative expression are being used to improve people's job readiness, employability, and economic opportunity, we set out to learn directly from people engaging in this work.

Drawing from interviews, site visits, and a broader scan of programs and organizations across the United States, Section 2 of this report—*How artistic and creative expression is being used to bolster job readiness and employability*—provides an overview of observations about several key ways that artistic and creative expression are being used to improve people's job readiness and economic opportunity and how they make a difference to the people who participate in them; providing an organizing framework for the cases featured in the next section. The heart of this report is the illustrative cases² featured in Section 3, *Illustrative cases: Making artistic and creative expression work*. The cases arose from site visits and interviews with the passionate and generous professionals creating and implementing workforce programs that involve artistic and creative expression, as well as conversations with people who are struggling with economic hardship and are seeking, through engaging with the organizations in this report, to better their circumstances. Section 3 then offers rich detail and insights on specific ways the arts and creative expression are being used to improve people's job readiness and economic opportunity from those involved in the work, as well as individuals who are participants in the programs and services offered by the organizations. From our interviews with workforce development researchers and professionals, we garnered expert insights and reflections on opportunities and questions around the use of artistic and creative expression within the workforce development field. Section 4—*Takeaways and reflections*—provides a high-level synopsis of the key reflections we heard, as well as our own observations about the use of artistic and creative expression to aid employability and economic opportunity.

² Cases and interviewees were identified by conducting an online scan of organizations from across the country who are, in one way or another, working at the intersection of creative expression and economic opportunity and a broad request within related professional fields for referrals. Interviewees included workforce developers, job trainers, social service providers, nonprofit administrators, artists and arts administrators, and scholars—and, crucially, people who are struggling with economic hardship and are seeking, through engaging with the organizations in this report, to better their circumstances.

2

HOW ARTISTIC AND CREATIVE EXPRESSION IS BEING USED TO BOLSTER JOB READINESS AND EMPLOYABILITY

Within “local workforce systems,” there are a multitude of organizations, agencies, and stakeholders that play vital roles in offering support to those who are in, or would like to enter, the workforce (Eyster, Durham, Van Noy, & Damron, 2016). This section provides an overview of the ways some organizations are using the arts and creative expression as a means to offer this workforce support. These organizations run the gamut of sizes and structures, from small arts-focused nonprofit organizations to large community-based social service providers, as well as to those structured according to alternative operational models, such as social enterprises.³

As we sought to identify organizations and programs to understand how they work, we spoke with a range of people who collectively represent a broad swath of research and on-the-ground expertise across the workforce development and human services sectors. Some shared that discussions about helping people further their employment opportunities by providing chances for artistic production or creative outlet are not commonplace in their professional sphere or lexicon. However, many interviewees readily offered insights on how opportunities through engagement with the arts and creative expression aligned with the specific employment objectives of more typical workforce development initiatives, specifically with regard to employability skills they can help people develop. Many of the expert interviewees were also able to identify organizations that are doing work in this space. In this section, we describe what we learned from delving deeper into the alignments between these organizations’ programs and broader employability aims. We also summarize the different **approaches** that organizations have developed to carry out their work, as well as the intended **gains** and **goals** of this work.

³ For more details on the social enterprise model, see page 12.

Overview: Organizational approaches, intended gains, and end goals

Approaches	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Arts activities directly lead to work in the arts or creative industries ▪ Arts activities provide opportunities for on-the-job training and skills development ▪ Arts activities are among many resources offered for holistic support and wellbeing
Gains	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Hard skills ▪ Soft skills ▪ Access to resources and social capital
Goals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Improved employment and economic opportunities ▪ Personal development and growth

Alignments: Gaining employability skills and resources

Through a range of education and training opportunities, organizations offer chances for people to develop and exercise a spectrum of skills and competencies needed to attain living-wage work, collectively referred to as “employability.” Various frameworks that set out to define the universe of key employability competencies and skills have evolved over time, and have been debated within the education and workforce development fields since the 1980s (Bates & Phelan, 2002). Despite the volume of frameworks and accompanying variations in terminology, there is general consensus that being “employable” depends on having both hard skills and soft skills.

Each of the organizations we feature in this report help people develop both hard and soft skills, either directly through the process of engaging them in artistic and creative activities, or by providing other activities or opportunities for skills development. Importantly, when unable to provide direct support in developing certain skills, the organizations in this report also provide access or entry points to the additional resources, networks, and opportunities that one may need to be employable.

Below we consider some of the approaches the organizations we interviewed take to assist people in developing the skills, and accessing the resources and networks they need in order to obtain gainful employment. The organizations referenced here are profiled in more depth in the next section, *Illustrative cases: Making artistic and creative expression work*.

3 key components of employability

Employability



Developing hard skills

Hard skills have always been essential for employment. This set of skills encompasses fundamental academic competencies, such as literacy, numeracy, and language skills; workplace skills, such as the ability to conduct oneself responsibly and professionally in the workplace, arriving on time, and being adept at basic computer and technology skills; and technical skills, chiefly meaning the ability to acquire and apply specialized training required by employers. Today, in addition to specialized know-how, more generalized business and financial management skills are also highly valued.

- ▶ **Alignment: Technical skills for the creative industries.** Many organizations help people cultivate technical skills that are directly transferable to the workplace. Within the context of our inquiry into the intersections of artistic expression and economic opportunity, we identified organizations that cultivate both

people’s *general* technical skills, with the goal of helping them become more generally employable, and their *artistic* technical skills, with the goal of preparing them for more specialized employment within the creative industries. One example is **artworxLA**, a Los Angeles-based organization that engages at-risk high school students in a sequential arts program with the goal of setting them on a path to graduate and pursue employment in the creative industries or their field of choice. artworxLA uses an arts-based curriculum to help students re-engage with school, attain fundamental academic skills, and graduate high school with a plan for the future. For students who are interested, artworxLA also offers numerous opportunities for them to develop specialized technical artistic skills and gain direct exposure to, and experience with, the creative industries, which supply 1 in 6 jobs in Los Angeles.

▶ For more about artworxLA, see page 15

- ▶ **Alignments: Entrepreneurship, business, and financial skills.** Other types of hard skills that organizations in this report help people attain are the practical skills needed to run or work within a business and to manage personal finances. For some organizations we identified, artistic and creative activities tend to *comprise the organization's work*, but the objective of helping people develop business and financial skills *drives its mission*. An example is the Detroit-based social enterprise **Rebel Nell**. While its day-to-day activities revolve around jewelry design and production, it was founded with the intent of providing women struggling with homelessness with the tools they need to reach financial self-sufficiency. Thus, women develop numerous on-the-job business skills through working in the jewelry studio while also participating in workshops on topics such as financial planning and tax preparation, and they are given access to other key services and opportunities to help them achieve and maintain self-sufficiency.

▶ For more about Rebel Nell, see page 32

Other organizations help cultivate people's entrepreneurial ambitions in their field of choice; for this report, we identified organizations that

support budding entrepreneurs in creative pursuits. **With Love Restaurant**, based in Syracuse, NY, offers a range of opportunities for individuals interested in working in restaurants, including opportunities for a select few to design a concept for a restaurant built around the cultural cuisine of their choosing, and then puts those individuals at the helm of the restaurant's operations, providing an invaluable entrepreneurial testing grounds.

▶ For more about With Love, see page 20

Developing soft skills

Soft skills encompass matters of presenting and managing oneself and one's relations with others in a work environment. While soft skills such as critical thinking, creative problem-solving, and collaboration have always been hallmarks of large-scale innovation, the growing demand for all members of the workforce to develop and apply these skills in their own professional contexts distinctly characterizes employability in the 21st century. Moreover, the development of these skills undergirds the "21st century skills" movement within K-12 education, and is also the focus of an array of contemporary workforce development strategies.⁴

⁴ For more about the 21st century skills movement, refer to: <http://www.p21.org/about-us/p21-framework>

"[The process of making an artistic product] brings about new ways of learning, thinking, and connecting... this is a wonderful quality in the workplace."

– Harry Davis, Professor of Creative Management, University of Chicago Booth School of Business



Soft skills are not only important to attaining employment, but also to retaining and advancing in one's career path. Some research has suggested that, for lower-wage earners, the development and application of soft skills has greater positive influence on earnings than do hard skills (Lippman, Ryberg, Carney, & Moore, 2015). Conversely, some research has suggested that deficiencies in soft skills are more detrimental to retaining a job than are deficiencies in academic skills (Lippman et al., 2015). Unlike specialized technical skills, soft skills are highly transferable across employment opportunities and are beneficial to an individual's overall ability inside and outside of the workplace. While basic academic and technical workplace skills are fundamental to employability, there is also a significant emphasis on the need for certain soft skills. Of particular emphasis are (1) what some frameworks for employability refer to as "higher-order competencies," such as creativity and critical-thinking skills, and (2) personal and interpersonal skills related to self-presentation and communication. The organizations in this report place a special emphasis on developing these skills through artistic means, using the arts to help people think creatively, frame their self-narratives about who they are and what they can achieve, and effectively convey those narratives and ideas to others.

► **Alignment: Creativity and critical-thinking skills.**

Being able to demonstrate sound reasoning and apply creative problem-solving and decision-making skills are vital employability skills. The **Downtown Women's Center (DWC)** of Los Angeles is a large social service organization with a mission to help homeless or formerly homeless women secure permanent housing, address immediate health and wellness needs, and find gainful employment opportunities. DWC also operates **MADE by DWC**, which is a social enterprise that offers a line of boutique handmade products. One of the ways DWC helps women is by offering temporary employment positions with MADE, creating and selling artistic wares such as bags, candles, and cards under its in-house label, handMADE. The women work in teams within and across shifts, and an environment is cultivated wherein the women are expected to exercise creativity in the design

and creation of new products, as well as to identify, communicate about, and think critically to resolve any matters that may arise in their operations.

► For more about Downtown Women's Center, see page 28

► **Alignment: Personal and interpersonal skills.**

The abilities to present oneself favorably and communicate well are key skills to finding employment. **Code Tenderloin**, based in San Francisco, CA, assists people in developing skills related to self-presentation and interpersonal interaction while offering a free training program in coding for Bay Area individuals facing poverty. Along with technical training in coding, Code Tenderloin offers opportunities for participants to develop their soft skills in order to help prepare them to succeed in job interviews and the workplace. As part of this training, Code Tenderloin partners with local arts organizations that engage program participants in arts activities to cultivate self-presentation skills; for example, one theatre organization guides participants through a 10-week creative writing workshop that culminates in a theatre performance, giving participants a chance to hone their personal narratives through storytelling. Participants then have the chance to apply these self-presentation skills in the workplace: they are given the opportunity to visit local tech companies and practice their interviewing and networking skills with employees from these companies.

► For more about Code Tenderloin, see page 18

In their own words: Descriptions of specific "hard skills" and "soft skills" from a selection of employability frameworks⁵

Hard Skills



Soft Skills



Access to resources and social capital

Many circumstances factor into whether an individual is prepared for, and able to secure, gainful employment. As needs can vary widely from person to person, it is unlikely that any one organization will be able to directly provide each person with every opportunity they need to address their unique circumstances. Yet, finding a way to address the major barriers a person faces remains vital for their path to economic opportunity. Indeed, as learned from the proceedings of a symposium on strengthening the social and human services sector, the most promising organizations are those that can offer direct or indirect access to a wide variety of services; this “emphasis on supporting multiservice approaches emerges from a recognition that individuals and families experience multiple challenges simultaneously. Attending to their human needs with integrated and holistic approaches increases the likelihood of success” (Kresge Foundation, 2014).

⁵ For examples of employability frameworks, see:
 (a) U.S. Department of Education. (2018). Employability Skills Framework. <https://cte.ed.gov/initiatives/employability-skills-framework>
 (b) Secretary’s Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills, U.S. Department of Labor (DOL). (1991). What Work Requires of Schools: A SCANS Report for America 2000. America (Vol. 2008). Washington, DC: DOL. <https://wdr.doleta.gov/scans/whatwork/whatwork.pdf>
 (c) Lippman, L., Ryberg, R., Carney, R., & Moore, K. A. (2015). Workforce Connections: Key “Soft Skills” that Foster Youth Workforce Success: Towards a Consensus across Fields. Washington, DC: USAID. <https://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/documents/1865/KeySoftSkills.pdf>
 (d) Illinois Center for Specialized Professional Support. (2017). Illinois Essential Employability Skills: Framework and Self-Assessment. Normal, IL: Illinois State University. <https://icpsps.illinoisstate.edu/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/Essential-Employability-Skills-Framework-Final-Printed-Version.pdf>

Most every organization in this report implements a networked approach to offering multiple services by directly offering access to some resources and opportunities, while connecting people with external entities that offer access to others.

- ▶ **Alignments: Access to social capital.** Many of the organizations we identified offer to connect people with others who can help them on their path to economic opportunity. Types of connections these organizations' staff make include connecting people with *employers or employer networks* through which people might find work, or in the case of artists and artisans, connections to those who run *physical and digital markets* through which to sell their creations; *connecting people to a supportive community* of peers and mentors within and beyond the organization who can offer personal and professional camaraderie, support, and guidance; and *connecting people to complementary organizations or services* that can address

people's additional challenges or needs that are beyond the scope of services offered by the primary organization.

- ▶ **Alignments: Access to income and financial resources.** Many of the organizations in this report provide or facilitate opportunities for people to earn an income or better manage their finances. Means of doing so include offering people *direct employment* at the organization, giving people the chance to earn an income; facilitating *job placements* at other employers within the organizations' networks; giving people *opportunities to make supplemental income* through participation in events or sales arranged by the organization; offering people *micro-loans* to be used for addressing pressing financial needs that may be hindering them from finding or keeping work (e.g., loans for car repairs or transit passes to ensure that people have a reliable means of transportation to their job); and connecting people with *financial management support* (e.g., group or one-on-one financial management sessions on topics such as banking, taxes, and investments) to set them on a path toward greater financial security.
- ▶ **Alignments: Access to resources and opportunities for personal development and growth.** Many of the organizations in this report offer activities rooted in artmaking and storytelling that can serve a *therapeutic* function, providing people with outlets for self-reflection and emotional processing. While these creative activities differ from the formal practice of art therapy, participants we spoke with reported therapeutic effects, most often in the form of stress relief that helped them work through their personal difficulties. These activities can also serve an *empowerment* function, increasing people's sense of self-worth and dignity and enabling them to imagine and pursue a better life for themselves. Most of the organizations we identified are also connected to outside entities equipped to provide people with more intensive support for mental health and well-being.



Organizational approaches to using artistic and creative activities to bolster employability and economic opportunity

Staff at each organization tailor and implement their programs to best meet the needs of the people they are working with, within their local workforce system and social and geographic context. However, when considering the programs we reviewed collectively, we identified **three general approaches** for how organizations use artistic and creative activities to bolster people’s employment skills and economic opportunity.

Three approaches for using artistic and creative activities to bolster employability and economic opportunity

Approach	How it works	Example organizations
Artistic and creative activities directly leading to work in the arts or creative industries	Arts-focused organizations offer people the training and support they need to secure employment and make an income through engaging in artistic and creative activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ ArtworxLA (p. 15) ▪ Code Tenderloin (p. 18) ▪ First Peoples Fund (p. 22) ▪ Poverty and the Arts (p. 26) ▪ With Love (p. 20)
Artistic and creative activities providing on-the-job training and skills development	Social enterprise organizations hire and train people to produce artistic or creative wares, providing opportunities for on-the-job training and developing hard and soft employability skills to prepare them for jobs elsewhere	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ MADE by DWC (p. 28) ▪ Rebel Nell (p. 32)
Artistic and creative activities contributing to holistic support and wellbeing	Arts opportunities are one of many services offered by large nonprofit organizations and tend to be offered to provide holistic support to the people the organizations serve	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ People’s Resource Center (p. 36) ▪ Workforce Development Institute (p. 39)

Artistic and creative activities directly leading to work in the arts or creative industries

Under this approach, organizations’ missions and activities emphasize opportunities for artistic creation with the express purpose of bettering individuals’ economic opportunity. These organizations tend to be structured as modestly sized nonprofit arts and culture organizations, and tend to work with people who are interested in employment within the creative industries or in earning an income by selling their own artistic or creative wares. Some organizations help young people just starting out in the job market to develop initial artistic or creative proficiencies in order to find jobs in the creative industries, such as **artworxLA**. Others help adults develop new creative skills to enter an entirely new field, such as the culinary industry (in the case of **With Love**) or the tech industry (in the case of **Code Tenderloin**).

Other programs are tailored to help people who already possess considerable technical artistic skills and creative abilities to develop those skills and abilities further, and find means to make an income using them. An example of such an organization is the Nashville-based **Poverty and the Arts Artist Collective (POVA)**, which facilitates the creation and sale of artwork created by artists struggling with homelessness and poverty. POVA’s mission revolves around providing studio space, art supplies, professional development workshops, and both physical and online marketplaces for its participants to sell their wares and earn an income. Another example is **First Peoples Fund (FPF)**, which offers professional development trainings and financial support for early- to advanced-career Native artists and culture bearers. FPF trainings are designed to help these artists build their creative and cultural work into a reliable earnings base.

▶ For more about Poverty and the Arts, see page 26 | ▶ For more about First Peoples Fund, see page 22

Artistic and creative activities providing on-the-job training and skills development

On-the-job training and employment opportunities in businesses featuring artistic and creative products are examples of newer ways the arts and creative expression are being used to aid economic opportunity. Organizations using this approach tend to be structured as low-profit limited liability companies (L3C)—also known as social enterprises. Social enterprises bridge the gap between nonprofit and for-profit operational models: their work revolves around the sale of products or services, but their mission is driven by a purpose other than profit-making (Young, 2001). Rather, this commercial activity and revenue is used as a means to generate income to support their socially motivated initiatives, which often revolve around bettering the lives of the specific populations with whom they work (Young, 2001). Though the field is still developing, research has shown that social enterprise efforts can have positive effects on the wellbeing of those they serve, including positive changes in mental health, self-confidence, self-esteem, motivation, and commitment to goals, serving as a “springboard” to a more successful and happier life for participants (Roy, Donaldson, Baker, & Kerr, 2014). Further, social enterprises offer participants the opportunity to engage in situated learning, which is predicated on the idea that learning is a fundamentally social process and occurs most naturally through everyday practice and contexts (Lave & Wenger, 1991).

We identified multiple social enterprises whose work revolves around hiring people who are disadvantaged in the labor market, training them in creative production and sales, and helping them acquire hard and soft skills, as well as offering access to specialized support to mitigate particular barriers to employment. As noted, one example is **Rebel Nell**, which is self-sustaining through hiring and training people in the creation and sale of jewelry, but whose ultimate objective is to set the homeless or formerly homeless women it employs on a path to financial self-sufficiency. Another example is **MADE by DWC**, a social enterprise nestled within a much larger social service organization, the Downtown Women’s Center. Hiring individuals to create and sell MADE’s line of

boutique handmade products provides them with on-the-job training in creative and retail environments, opportunities for soft skills development, and a means to earn a living wage until they can transition into other, more permanent work.

Artistic and creative activities contributing to holistic support and wellbeing

The defining characteristic of this approach is that opportunities for artistic production and creative expression are one small piece of the many services offered by the organization, and they are offered for the purpose of overall, holistic wellbeing. These organizations offer arts opportunities because they see broadly applicable value of such activities to the people they assist. One community-based example is the **People’s Resource Center (PRC)**, a large social service organization offering many social services to residents of suburban DuPage County, IL. Along with offering necessities such as food, clothing, and rent assistance, and resources such as job search assistance and access to technology, PRC also offers free arts classes to anyone who is interested; all of PRC’s services are geared toward enabling people to become self-sufficient and to help them in times of need. On a larger scale, another example is the **Workforce Development Institute (WDI)**, which provides grant funding to support workforce development initiatives throughout the state of New York. Along with support for more traditional efforts, WDI funds arts-based “workforce enrichment” initiatives to enhance workers’ sense of dignity, agency, and wellbeing. WDI staff are motivated to offer creative outlets in part because they consider such opportunities to be a notable gap in the services offered by other organizations in the workforce development sphere.

▶ For more about People’s Resource Center, see page 36

▶ For more about Workforce Development Institute, see page 39

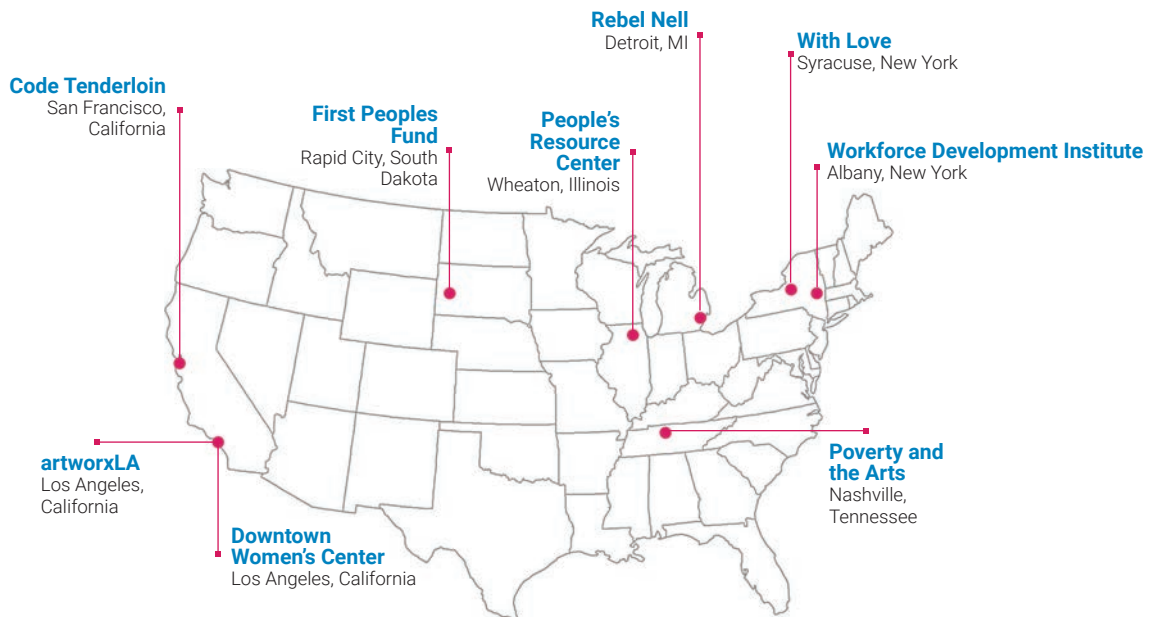
3

ILLUSTRATIVE CASES: MAKING ARTISTIC AND CREATIVE EXPRESSION WORK

The remainder of this report shares a series of case studies featuring social service, arts, social enterprise, and workforce-oriented organizations that are working at the intersections of creative expression and economic opportunity.

The organizations presented here work with many kinds of people, on a range of scales, and across varied geographies and artistic mediums, all over the United States. The common factor is that each organization exists to support individuals struggling with poverty, and sees creative expression as an important vehicle through which to offer that support.

Case studies at a glance



We sourced suggestions for case studies through conversations with researchers and practitioners in the workforce, economic development, and arts and culture sectors, as well as through internet searches. We also used a “snowball” approach during our conversations, asking each organization we contacted for additional recommendations. In all, we considered a pool of several dozen organizations, nine of which we selected for further exploration.

The case studies presented here include each organization’s:

- ▶ **Geographic location**
- ▶ **Year established**
- ▶ **Population served**
- ▶ **Mission statement**

and explores the following dimensions of the organization’s work:

- ▶ **How it works:** This section unpacks how the organization is structured and operates day-to-day, how and where the organization offers opportunities for creative expression within or alongside its job- and career-focused programming, and the web of partnerships and networks within which it operates. Some cases also feature a “program spotlight” that takes a deep-dive into a specific dimension of the organization’s programming.
- ▶ **Challenges and solutions / Lessons learned:** This section reports on challenges that have arisen as organizations have tried out different program models and approaches, and the adjustments they implemented as a result, providing an invaluable opportunity for these organizations to share lessons learned.
- ▶ **Impacts** the organization’s work has made on the people and communities it serves.

One thing we heard repeatedly in our conversations was a desire on the part of organization staff to connect with and learn from like-minded peers. To that end each organization has provided contact information and welcomes others to get in touch.

We are indebted to the many individuals who gave generously of their time and enthusiasm to make these case studies possible. It is our hope that these cases will illuminate—for the benefit of other organizations, their constituencies, funders, and policymakers—the many ways that the arts and creative expression can benefit those struggling to make ends meet.



artworxLA

501(c)3 nonprofit arts organization engaging at-risk high school students in a sequential arts program with the goal of setting them on a path to graduate and pursue employment in the creative industries or their field of choice

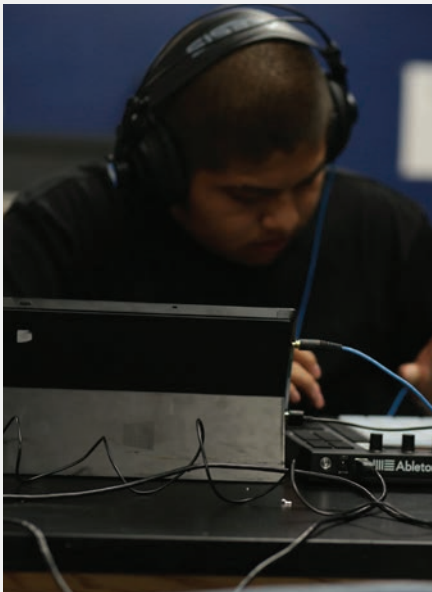
Location: Los Angeles, CA

Established: 1992

Population served: artworxLA works with students age 14-24 years old attending alternative education high schools across Los Angeles. These schools are geared toward students who are non-traditional learners, are at risk of not completing their degree, or have personal circumstances that require more flexible schedules or personalized support services. Since its founding, artworxLA has worked with over 12,000 students.

Mission: *"artworxLA combats the epidemic high school dropout crisis by engaging students in a long-term, sequential arts program offering a pursuable life path that inspires them to stay in school, evolve as unique individuals and flourish as creative adults.... By partnering with cultural institutions, arts colleges, and creative industry professionals, we encourage youth to stay in school, earn their high school diploma, and pursue a plan for their futures. artworxLA uses the arts to re-engage students and help them realize a path toward high school graduation and entry into Los Angeles County's creative economy."*⁶

⁶ <http://www.artworxLA.org/our-ideals/>



Former students speak of artworxLA as having elevated artmaking from something they viewed as a hobby to something that could be made into a viable career.



How it works

artworxLA's program has two tracks. First, it offers two-hour, once-a-week arts courses within 30 alternative education classrooms across Los Angeles County. Second, artworxLA runs a full-time arts-focused alternative education program, called its "alternative arts academy," at a local public school. The program emerged from an important insight artworxLA staff gleaned from observing the attendance habits of students participating in once-weekly artworxLA classes: some students made a habit of attending school on the "art day," but skipping school for much of the rest of the week. Pondering the question "What would happen if we made the 'art day' every day?" led artworxLA staff to launch the full-time academy, which offers students daily coursework in areas such as animation and music production.

Program spotlight: The ladder

Across all its classrooms, including its arts academy, artworxLA employs a single program model. Dubbed "the ladder," it is a "long-term, sequential arts program that creatively links overlooked alternative high school students with professional artists, cultural institutions, and communities to imagine, produce, and present new work."⁷

The ladder has four levels. Level 1, which has about 1000 participants each year, involves three 11-week workshops per school, per year. Guided by professional teaching artists, students work in the classroom on projects that align thematically with current exhibitions or programs happening at cultural institutions around Los Angeles (last year's projects were on themes such as "Monuments and Memory," which went along with an exhibition at the Japanese American National Museum, "Utopian and Dystopian Visions of the Future," which went along with programming at the Los Angeles Public Library). Some courses involve all students working together to create one artistic product, while others involve students working on individual projects, accommodating a range of student interests and learning styles. Each workshop culminates in students making a public presentation of their work at the cultural institution. The primary objective of Level 1 programming is to give students an outlet for creative expression, expand their engagement with their community, and help them learn that creativity is a tool and a life skill.

Each summer, artworxLA holds intensive training sessions for its Level 1 teaching artists to help them develop a thematic curriculum and prepare them for working with at-risk youth. The trainings include: (1) a session on working in alternative education settings and offering trauma-informed support to students, (2) a session spent at that year's collaborating cultural institutions, doing a deep-dive into the content of the theme that will be explored in the teaching artist's class, (3) a session on artworxLA's pedagogy, including how to balance teaching an art form with developing relationships with the students and supporting their social and emotional growth, and (4) a culminating session during which the teaching artists present their tentative lesson plans for the year and receive feedback from their fellow teaching artists, artworxLA staff, and former artworxLA students.

Levels 2-4 are designed to prepare students for careers in the creative industries, providing opportunities for increased specialization and training in creative pursuits such as fashion, film, or music production. Level 2 places approximately 60 students per year in afterschool residencies at institutions around the city, where students have the chance to work with industry professionals. Along with this work, students also participate in leadership development classes on subjects such as resume writing, job interviews, and financial management. artworxLA frames Level 2 as a bridge between the classroom and the workplace, exposing students to their industry of interest while also nurturing their development of critical job readiness skills. After completing a residency, students are eligible to apply for Level 3, which includes paid summer internships and scholarships for programs at local universities. Finally, once students graduate high school they become eligible for Level 4, to receive ongoing support and mentorship needed to navigate pathways to college and creative careers.

Challenges and solutions / Lessons learned

A persistent challenge is the various barriers to participation in artworxLA programs that students face. These barriers include a lack of access to transportation to artworxLA and its partner institutions; difficulties navigating

⁷ <http://www.artworxla.org/the-ladder/>

the city; difficulties balancing time at artworxLA with family responsibilities, including caring for elders, siblings, and children; and insufficient financial resources to produce artworks, among other personal and interpersonal challenges. artworxLA staff make a concerted effort to address each barrier its students face. Cynthia Campoy Brophy, former executive director of artworxLA, says “We try to be flexible with the help we give, responding to needs as they arise.”⁸ To reduce the burden of some common barriers, artworxLA has covered students’ transportation costs, relocated downtown to be more centrally located and easily accessible, begun offering paid internships that also cover costs for materials and supplies, and added a licensed social worker to its staff.

Impacts

artworxLA sees itself as a broker, forging connections between students, schools and school districts, artists, cultural organizations, colleges and universities, and professionals and companies in the creative industries, aiming to leverage the existing resources of each to benefit the students.

artworxLA students experience a range of educational and professional outcomes. During their time working with artworxLA, many students re-engage with school, commit to consistent attendance, and earn their high school diploma with a clear plan for the immediate future. Under the alternative arts academy model, student retention increased from 32 percent to 81 percent over five years, and the rates of graduation with a plan tripled over the same time span. Currently, its academy is situated within a charter school in South Los Angeles and serves around 50 students every school day. In September 2018 artworxLA opened a new academy in partnership with the Los Angeles Unified School District.

After their time with artworxLA, some students choose to pursue professional careers in the creative industries. According to artworxLA, 1 in 7 jobs in Los Angeles is in the creative industries, and artworxLA knows the landscape well, facilitating multiple opportunities for engagement with creative professionals. In addition to tapping creative professionals to teach its in-school programming and guide its afterschool residencies and internships, artworxLA also brings in guest speakers from different industries for “Creative Career Day” sessions that demonstrate to the students how their artistic interests might translate into real jobs. artworxLA has also established partnerships with companies in the creative industries. For example, the music company Ableton has donated its music production software to artworxLA and periodically trains students on it, helping them develop marketable technical skills. In recent years, artworxLA students have gone on to receive scholarships to college art programs, to work as professional artists and artist assistants, and to found creative businesses. Former students speak of artworxLA as having elevated artmaking from something they viewed as a hobby to something that could be made into a viable career. They also speak of artworxLA as having legitimized their artistic ambitions in the eyes of their families. For one former student now working in their creative field of choice, it was not until showing their mother around the art center where they worked that she came to understand and accept the student’s career ambitions: “from then on she took me seriously.”⁹

But artworxLA also sees student outcomes that extend beyond the external accomplishments of graduating and pursuing arts-related careers. Several former students describe more personal benefits to their time with artworxLA, including artworxLA having opened their eyes to their hometown, helped them to find their voice, and cultivated a positive self-image. Brophy explains, “the goal isn’t just to create artists, it’s to use art to get them engaged in their whole education. Art skills are great life skills no matter what profession they pursue. Our goal is to provide them with more options so that they have more choice in their life path.”¹⁰

Website: <http://artworxla.org>

Contact to learn more: Shelby Williams-Gonzalez (Executive Director), info@artworxla.org

⁸ Interview, 8/15/2017

⁹ Interview, 8/15/2017

¹⁰ Interview, 8/15/2017

Code Tenderloin

501(c)3 nonprofit providing a free coding bootcamp and soft skills training alongside opportunities for artistic engagement to help place people in living-wage jobs in tech or their industry of choice

Location: San Francisco, CA

Established: 2015

Population served: Code Tenderloin is open to all adults in the Bay Area, with a focus on residents of the disadvantaged Tenderloin neighborhood in which the organization is based. Many participants have faced challenges such as incarceration, addiction, refugee status, or homelessness. Code Tenderloin offers two program tracks: one for individuals age 18-26 years and another for individuals 27 years and older, and it recruits participants primarily through word-of-mouth and outreach at community events.

Mission: *“Code Tenderloin provides dignity and opportunity through an intense job readiness and workforce development program. We remove barriers that keep people from securing long-term employment, such as: finances, legal, soft skills, technical skills, child care, transportation, education.”¹¹*

¹¹ <http://www.codetenderloin.com/#about>



Recognizing that it often requires an initial “foot in the door” to land employment in such an in-demand sector, Code Tenderloin participants are given the opportunity to visit local tech companies such as Twitter, Dolby, and Uber and practice their interviewing and networking skills with employees from these companies.

How it works

A small nonprofit funded through a mix of public (San Francisco's Office of Economic and Workforce Development) and private (sponsorships from tech companies) sources, Code Tenderloin offers a six-week coding course that teaches cohorts of 10-20 participants the basics of CSS, HTML, and Javascript, free of charge to all. Tapping local talent from the tech industry, the course was developed by staff from a Bay Area coding bootcamp and is taught by volunteers from tech companies. Along with the coding curriculum, the course includes a four-week job readiness curriculum meant to foster the soft skills necessary to prepare participants for entering or reentering the workforce. This program helps participants create a vision for success for their careers through activities such as goal setting, strengths identification, progress tracking, resume creation and editing, and mock interviews.

Code Tenderloin participants have opportunities to further develop these job readiness skills by engaging with local arts organizations with which Code Tenderloin has established partnerships. The Magic Theatre, a local theatre company, engages some Code Tenderloin participants in a 10-week writing and storytelling workshop culminating in a theatre performance, giving participants a chance to hone their communication skills through personal storytelling. Holistic Underground, a community development organization focused on making social impacts through the arts, has led workshops for Code Tenderloin participants that combine opportunities for creative production through participatory activities such as open mics and drum circles with the development of effective communication techniques and leadership skills.

Impacts

Given Code Tenderloin's San Francisco location and its focus on coding, many participants are interested in pursuing work in the tech sector. Code Tenderloin has developed close relationships with Bay Area tech employers to help break down barriers to entry in this sector. Recognizing that it often requires an initial "foot in the door" to land employment in such an in-demand sector, Code Tenderloin participants are given the opportunity to visit local tech companies such as Twitter, Dolby, and Uber and practice their interviewing and networking skills with employees from these companies. For some participants, these visits have led to internships, apprenticeships, interviews, or full-time work at these companies. Since 2015, Code Tenderloin has had 315 individuals complete its program and has directly assisted over 100 of those participants secure living wage jobs. The organization believes in the "ripple effect"—getting a good, steady job for one person also helps their families, friends, and communities to live better lives. Beyond its job-specific services, Code Tenderloin is also part of a wider social service network, and regularly makes referrals to organizations that can help participants with specific needs such as counseling and family services.

Website: <http://www.codetenderloin.org/>

Contact to learn more: Donna Hilliard (Program Manager) and Victoria Westbrook (Director of Programs), hello@codetenderloin.org

With Love Restaurant

Community college-run offsite teaching restaurant which offers a rotating menu of cultural cuisines, providing participants hands-on workforce and entrepreneurial training

Location: Syracuse, NY

Established: 2017

Population served: Residents of the Syracuse area interested in learning and gaining hands-on professional kitchen experience, with a focus on those who face barriers to education and employment. Many participants are connected to With Love Restaurant through area social service providers.

Mission: *“Our mission is twofold. We are both a Teaching Restaurant and Entrepreneur Incubator. Everyone here is a student in [Onondaga Community College] Workforce Development. This is our classroom.... Every 6 months we’ll incubate a new entrepreneur, offering up a new national or regional cuisine. We’ll give them space to experiment. Local farmer friends will grow menu-specific crops. [OCC] will give them wraparound business and financial training. Together we’ll help launch some new, awesome places for you to fall in love with.”¹²*

¹² <http://withloverestaurant.com/about/>

With Love serves as an incubator for the student’s future entrepreneurial endeavors while also affording them the opportunity to both connect with their cultural heritage and share that heritage with their local Syracuse community.



How it works

With Love Restaurant, a self-described “global dining experience,” is one of several sector-specific workforce development programs housed at Onondaga Community College (OCC), part of the State University of New York system. A teaching restaurant with a rotating focus on Syracuse’s diverse – but largely untapped – culinary tradition, With Love is meant to prepare people for work in the culinary industry or other professional endeavors. It seeks to work with individuals who face barriers to work or formal education, identifying potential students through partnerships with local social service providers such as immigrant and refugee resettlement agencies, veterans’ organizations, and welfare offices. With Love specifically seeks to work with individuals who look at the community college and think “I can’t go there”—who feel they don’t have the money, time, or background to attend community college full time but who desire a career-focused education. To the extent possible, it accepts all who are interested.

With Love has been financially supported by a Department of Labor Trade Adjustment Assistance Community College and Career Training (TAACCCT) grant, which allows students to work at With Love and receive educational and vocational support through OCC at little or no cost; once the grant ends, With Love expects to be self-sustaining. Students enroll through OCC and, depending on their interests and ambitions, embark on one of two tracks—a line cook track or a food service management track—and begin working as the restaurant’s cooks, staff, and managers. The line cook track was created due to a perpetual demand for well-trained, dependable line cooks in the restaurant industry, and the management track was created to afford participants the chance to develop the skills they need to someday manage and run their own restaurants or other businesses.

Aiming to help its students not just find work, but gainful work, With Love also offers opportunities to cultivate students’ entrepreneurial ambitions. Every six months, one individual is selected to be the “Entrepreneur-in-Residence” (EiR), and is given both a stipend and significant creative agency to design the restaurant’s newest regionally or nationally specific menu, often serving as a celebration of their own cultural roots. Recent iterations of With Love’s menu have included Pakistani cuisine, Burmese cuisine, the Lowcountry cuisine of Savannah, GA, and the menu’s current focus, Palestinian cuisine. Along with designing the new concept and menu, the EiR gets experience and training in all other aspects of the restaurant’s operations, from running the kitchen to balancing the books, and works with counselors from the OCC-housed Small Business Development Center and the regional economic development organization CenterState Corporation for Economic Opportunity’s (CEO) Up Start entrepreneurship program, each of which provides ongoing support and guidance on how to start, manage, and grow a small business. In this way, With Love serves as an incubator for the student’s future entrepreneurial endeavors while also affording them the opportunity to both connect with their cultural heritage and share that heritage with their local Syracuse community. Every six months, as the EiR changes, the restaurant is reimaged.

Beyond hands-on restaurant training, OCC also offers its students additional job readiness support, assisting them with access to transportation, counseling and social services, and job placements. Outside of OCC, With Love is plugged into a network of other organizations that offer further support and assistance, including social service providers such as Catholic Charities, and regional economic development groups such as CenterState CEO.

Impacts

With Love aims for its training program and accompanying services to help its participants onto a sustainable career path of their choosing. In its first eight months, the organization had success with graduating six students into living-wage work. With Love aims to increase this to over 20 people annually, and plans to track graduated students over time to ensure they are able to remain successful in the workforce.

Website: <http://withloverestaurant.com/>

Contact to learn more: Adam Sudmann (Program Manager), a.sudmann@sunyocc.edu

First Peoples Fund

501(c)3 nonprofit organization supporting Native artists and culture bearers through grantmaking, technical assistance, and educational programs aimed at helping them to preserve and share their cultural heritage and further their business acumen to make a living from their craft

Location: Headquarters in Rapid City, SD, but offers programming in Native communities across the country

Established: 1995

Population served: First Peoples Fund works with Native artists and culture bearers (such as Native language speakers, makers of traditional regalia, dancers, weavers, musicians, potters, painters, and traditional storytellers) across Indian Country, including American Indians, Alaska Natives, and Native Hawaiians. It worked with 450 participants in 2017, and has worked with over 3,500 participants since its inception.

Mission: *“First Peoples Fund’s mission is to honor and support the Collective Spirit® of First Peoples artists and culture bearers. Collective Spirit® is that which moves each of us to stand up and make a difference, to pass on ancestral knowledge and simply extend a hand of generosity. First Peoples Fund recognizes the power of art and culture to bring about positive change in Native communities, beginning with individual artists and their families.”¹³*

¹³ <http://www.firstpeoplesfund.org/what-we-do/>



“Our curriculum really focuses on asking ‘Where do cultural tradition and values come into play when developing a business?’ This is what’s unique about our curriculum. It’s not just business. It’s culture, history, heart.”

How it works

First Peoples Fund (FPF) strengthens the Indigenous arts ecology by offering a range of opportunities for both Native arts and cultural organizations and individual artists. For organizations, FPF offers grants and capacity-building assistance to a variety of community-based organizations, including Native Community Development Financial Institutions, Community Development Corporations, and arts-based nonprofits. For individuals, FPF's offerings include grants for artistic and cultural projects; honorary financial awards; year-long artist fellowships that offer financial support, technical support, and professional training; a youth-focused program that helps connect young people to traditional art forms and develop their roles as future culture bearers and community leaders; and professional development training for artists.

Program spotlight: Native Artist Professional Development trainings

At the center of FPF's efforts to expand economic opportunity for individual artists is a two-day professional development training program, formally referred to as Native Artist Professional Development (NAPD) trainings. These trainings are meant to "give Native artists the tools and support they need to manage entrepreneurial businesses in order to achieve economic success and grow as leaders in their tribal communities."¹⁴ The program's primary goal is to prepare artists to take the next step in their careers, whatever that may mean for each individual, enabling the trainings to accommodate a wide range of professional experience levels; any given training session tends to draw artists from nascent to advanced career stages.

Origins and evolution

In FPF's early years, its staff decided to establish a micro-loan fund for Native artists. Over time, FPF staff began to pair the micro-loan recipients with mentors working as professional artists to help the loan recipients make the best use of their funds. Seeing the benefits of mentorship guidance for both the loan recipients and the mentors themselves planted the seed for starting a more formal professional development opportunity, which grew into the NAPD training program.

Currently, anywhere from one to four NAPD trainings are held per month in Native communities across the United States. The two-day workshops are held in community spaces such as Native cultural centers and education facilities, and are fully subsidized by FPF or the host organization, making them free of cost to all in attendance. Up to 30 participants attend each session. Each NAPD workshop tends to have a regional draw. For example, a recent NAPD training in Albuquerque, NM, drew artists from various tribal communities across the Southwest and California.

FPF maintains an active network of approximately 30 individuals from across the country who lead NAPD trainings. The trainers, many of whom first got involved with FPF by signing up to attend an NAPD training, are themselves professional Native artists and entrepreneurs. By hiring trainers who share a cultural identity with NAPD participants, but who have also found commercial success beyond the Native community, trainers are able to bridge the gap that often exists between Native and Western values, practices, and terminologies. At its core, the trainers' main job is to put the principles of the global market economy within which the Native artists must work into terms that will resonate with them.

A values-driven approach

During the workshops, trainers guide participants through how-to sessions on creating a business plan, developing marketing strategies appropriate for different audiences, understanding the economics of supply and demand, navigating issues of copyright and legality in artistic production, setting product prices, and mastering the basics of contract negotiation, debt reduction and consolidation, and long-term financial planning. Many of these topics are common to other professional trainings for artists, and to career advancement trainings more generally. The linchpin of the NAPD program, and what makes it stand out among other professional development trainings, is that it advocates for building a career around one's cultural identity and values. As Lori Pourier, First Peoples

¹⁴ <http://www.firstpeoplesfund.org/community-workshops/>

Fund's president, put it: "Our curriculum really focuses on asking 'Where do cultural tradition and values come into play when developing a business?' This is what's unique about our curriculum. It's not just business. It's culture, history, heart."¹⁵ FPF succinctly frames this career philosophy as "finding a balance between the head and the heart."

Given this focus on values, an entire half-day is dedicated to helping each NAPD participant identify their core values as an individual and artist, and from there helping them articulate a mission and vision around which to anchor their artistic production. The trainers impress upon participants that this deeply personal exercise of self-exploration and self-reflection is crucial because, for Native artists, *personal and cultural values* can translate into *economic value*. The trainers state outright that art is a luxury—people don't need it to survive—so the impetus is on the artist to convey their art's unique worth. And for many Native artists, what gives their work value is the heritage, culture, and tradition expressed within it.

The values-centered approach is reinforced throughout the rest of the session, as trainers help participants infuse their values through each aspect of their business strategy, from developing an effective elevator pitch to pricing their work. (The latter is particularly important: the trainers explore how Native cultural values and norms often lead to Native artists' underpricing their work, and how artists can balance upholding their values with achieving a profitable bottom line.) One FPF staff member stated, "If you take [the values piece] away, our curriculum is similar to other business training tools. [But that extra piece] makes such a huge impact on the ways [Native artists] do business and how they think about themselves as a business owner... it was way different before [adding this element to the curriculum].... It was so Western. But once we introduced the value portion of the curriculum, the participants could see themselves in what we were teaching much better."¹⁶

Challenges and Solutions / Lessons Learned

Over the years, FPF has identified several challenges faced by Native artists and culture bearers and has worked to address those through its programming and support. One challenge is that many Native artists live in remote geographic areas and have limited resources to travel, making it difficult to have regular contact with both potential buyers and artist peers. This is a problem because, for Native artists living in relative isolation on reservations in rural areas, the only viable means of making a living from artistic production is to travel and participate in exhibits, trade shows, and markets, which requires being plugged into networks of both fellow artists and buyers. To address this barrier, FPF staff help the artists create peer directories and associations in order to increase artists' support of one another through shared exhibits and organized group transportation to regional art markets.

Another challenge Native artists face is securing access to capital to facilitate their entrepreneurial ambitions. FPF often works with individuals who are cash-poor and lack the collateral needed to receive loans to grow their businesses. Related to this, FPF staff have observed that many Native artists chronically sell their work at prices under market value in order to generate short-term cash infusions; however, this hurts them in the long-term as they are unable to wait for sales at the prices needed to support themselves and grow their artistic practice. For this reason, FPF offers participants detailed guidance on how to appropriately price items and build savings, and has also added a section to the NAPD training on ways for artists to diversify their income streams.

Impacts

Well over 1,000 Native artists have participated in the NAPD training program since its inception. The program's effectiveness is evaluated through pre/post surveys of participants and trainers, through which FPF can gauge changes in knowledge of topics covered. A frequent outcome that NAPD participants report is an increased ability to improve their economic situations by diversifying their income. Among NAPD participants who do not yet view themselves as "professional" artists, the training can provide the foundational skills needed to begin generating income from their practice. One FPF staff member offered an example of some NAPD participants

¹⁵ Interview, 2/8/2018

¹⁶ Interview, 2/8/2018

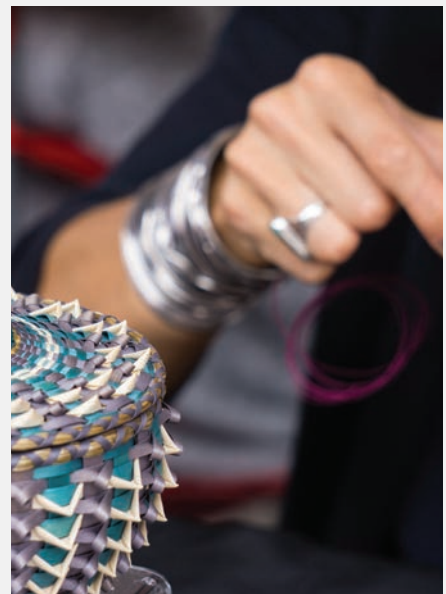
from Native communities in Alaska whose primary source of income is fishing, a seasonal trade. By attending the training, these individuals learned how to turn a craft they engaged in during the non-fishing months—in this case, creating wood-carved objects—into a source of supplemental income. Among NAPD participants who are already professional artists, the training can expose these individuals who only have one source of income—artistic production—to new skillsets and fluencies that can lead them on a path to additional revenue. They often become teaching artists or business coaches to others in their communities. Another FPF staff member noted, “Participants learn the skills needed to diversify, and they gain the confidence to cross sectors. There’s a lot of increased entrepreneurial potential.”¹⁷ Once individuals participate in an NAPD training, they also become eligible to apply for FPF grants and fellowships, opening up additional avenues of professional support.

Pourier summarizes the NAPD program’s impact as such: “When we first meet [Native artists and culture bearers] they might doubt what they have to offer the world, but over time we help them learn their wealth in terms of their cultural assets. And we help them put a number on those assets.”

Website: <http://firstpeoplesfund.org/>

Contact to learn more: Anna Huntington (Development Director) and Tosa Two Heart (Community Development Program Manager), info@firstpeoplesfund.org

¹⁷ Interview, 2/8/2018



Poverty and the Arts

501(c)3 nonprofit aiming to help artists struggling with homelessness to exercise their creativity for therapeutic, professional, and financial gain

Location: Nashville, TN

Established: 2014

Population served: Artists struggling with homelessness

Mission: "Poverty & the Arts is a nonprofit that provides supplies, studio space, training, and a marketplace for artists impacted by homelessness to create and sell artwork, as well as gain valuable entrepreneurial and social skills which helps them earn creative income, access higher-waged employment, increase their housing stability, and build the necessary security nets to remain out of homelessness."¹⁸

Some [artists] focus on creating and marketing works with an eye toward making sales; others...are free to simply make use of the provided space and materials and enjoy the social and therapeutic benefits of having a creative outlet and a supportive community.

¹⁸ <http://povertyandthearts.org/about-us/>



How it works

Poverty & the Arts (POVA) grew out of a perceived need for homeless or low-income artists to simply have access to the space and materials needed for creative production and income generation. In addition to providing its participating artists with space and supplies, it also offers professional development workshops and exhibition opportunities, facilitating the creation and sale of their artworks.

While income generation is the central driving force for POVA's activities, the organization is intentionally structured as a nonprofit (as opposed to a social enterprise or a for-profit gallery) so as not to limit the creativity of the artists: at POVA, artists have the freedom to create exactly what they would like, whether or not it sells. This organizational model allows for artists to set their own goals for their time at POVA. Some focus on creating and marketing works with an eye toward making sales; others unconcerned with sales are free to simply make use of the provided space and materials and enjoy the social and therapeutic benefits of having a creative outlet and a supportive community.

POVA partners with homeless centers and social service organizations to spread the word about its services. Interested artists fill out applications, pass background checks, and enter into sales contracts in order to begin working with POVA. So far, all who have expressed interest have been invited to participate, and they can be involved with POVA for any length of time they desire. Among those artists hoping to generate income, their works are displayed and sold in POVA's own gallery, which is adjacent to its studio space, as well as in businesses, art fairs and festivals, and exhibitions throughout Nashville. Works are also sold online, which opens POVA's artists to a national market; the vast majority of buyers discover POVA through Instagram. Artists keep 100 percent of proceeds from any works made on their own or 60 percent of proceeds on sales made on original works created using POVA's studio space or materials, or sold through its gallery space. There is an additional commission structure in place for the sale of prints and merchandise sold by POVA that feature the artists' designs.

POVA also partners with volunteer mentors from the local art community who lead professional development workshops on artistic techniques as well as business topics such as how to price artworks. Following a philosophy of not replicating services already offered elsewhere, POVA also sponsors artists' participation in specific professional development opportunities held at other organizations around Nashville. A recent example is a POVA artist attending a course on opening a member-owned cooperative business. Such opportunities help artists develop the skills and grow the networks needed to work toward their individual professional goals. POVA also assures its artists are connected to Nashville social service organizations that offer assistance with basic needs such as housing and transportation.

Impacts

POVA sees its unique value-add to be helping struggling artists profit from the social and emotional benefits of creative production, and to set them on a path toward greater financial stability through this production. POVA has partnered with over 30 artists to date. So far, each POVA artist who has wanted to sell their work has successfully done so. The organization strives to help each of these artists "get to the 1099 level"—to generate at least enough income through their sales to have to file a 1099 tax form. Some POVA artists have found it possible to supplement their sales with a part-time job in order to make a living wage. POVA has also helped its artists achieve other professional and educational goals, including attaining positions as teaching artists, enrolling in art school, and transitioning into full-time consulting work.

Because its artists have chances to exhibit and sell their work locally and online, POVA also sees part of its mission as providing art appreciators and buyers with a chance to gain direct, personal experiences with individuals impacted by homelessness.

Website: <http://povertyandthearts.org/>

Contact to learn more: Nicole Brandt Minyard (Founder and Executive Director),
creative@povertyandthearts.org

Downtown Women’s Center

Nonprofit social service organization focusing on housing; health and wellness; and educational, employment, and enrichment opportunities for women experiencing homelessness and formerly homeless women in Los Angeles. Job training and transitional employment opportunities in creative and retail environments are offered through MADE by DWC, a social enterprise operated by DWC.

Location: Los Angeles, CA

Established: 1978 (MADE by DWC established in 2010)

Population served: Downtown Women’s Center works with women currently or formerly facing homelessness across greater Los Angeles. In 2017, it served 4,150 women.

Mission: *“The Downtown Women’s Center is the only organization in Los Angeles focused exclusively on serving and empowering women experiencing homelessness and formerly homeless women. We envision a Los Angeles with every woman housed and on a path to personal stability. Our mission is to end homelessness for women in greater Los Angeles through housing, education, wellness, and advocacy.”¹⁹*

¹⁹ <https://www.downtownwomenscenter.org/about/>



How it works

Downtown Women's Center (DWC) is a well-established, multifaceted organization offering services for homeless women in Los Angeles that fall under three broad categories: housing, health and wellness, and opportunity. Housing and health and wellness services address the most pressing needs of many women who come to DWC: securing permanent housing and addressing immediate physical and mental health concerns. Once the women's critical needs are addressed, DWC turns to helping women reach longer-term stability through its opportunity services, each of which are aimed at breaking down barriers to unemployment and underemployment. DWC's opportunity services are three-pronged:

- ▶ Education classes in topics such as computer skills, literacy, and math, as well as academic counseling
- ▶ Enrichment workshops in artistic mediums, meant to build self-confidence and develop new skills
- ▶ Employment services including vocational counseling, resume and interview preparation, a job-readiness program, and job placement assistance. Of the 4,000+ women DWC served in 2017, approximately 1,000 used some aspect of DWC's employment services.²⁰ The centerpiece of DWC's employment services, and the vehicle through which the job-readiness program is implemented, is a social enterprise called MADE by DWC.

She views the creative process as a means to "achieve greatness on a small scale."

Program spotlight: MADE by DWC

MADE by DWC arose organically. DWC has long offered recreational arts courses in mediums such as painting and sewing, observing the therapeutic and confidence-boosting benefits of providing a creative outlet for the women who use its services. Over time, these recreational courses turned into drop-in workshops where women could create works to be sold and in return be paid on a per-piece basis, laying the groundwork for connecting artistic creation to economic opportunity. In 2005, DWC conducted a needs assessment for the women it serves and identified employment services to be a growing need. DWC staff then conducted a national scan of possible workforce program models and, after seeing the successes of other social enterprises at home (such as Homeboy Industries) and farther afield, and after observing the benefits of artistic creation for the women in DWC's workshops, decided to open their own social enterprise.

MADE offers DWC women three types of opportunities for on-the-job training and experience:

- ▶ Working in a resale boutique stocked with donated clothing and accessories
- ▶ Creating and merchandising a line of handcrafted products (appropriately named handMADE), including block-printed cards, soaps, candles, and Japanese bound notebooks and journals
- ▶ Working at a café that sells food and drink alongside handMADE products

12-week program

For some women, MADE can serve as an important transitional step on the path to workforce reentry. Women first enter a 12-week program in which cohorts of women spend about 10 hours per week working onsite at one of MADE's locations (serving as a sales clerk in the resale boutique, for example). This gets them into a structured work environment, allowing them to develop and practice workplace skills such as time management and accountability. The women also participate in round-table lunches with professional women in different sectors, including some who formerly worked with DWC and successfully transitioned into the workforce, and "Leadership 360" sessions on holistic workplace skills such as developing healthy relations with supervisors and colleagues. Upon completing the 12-week program, they participate in a formal commencement ceremony and receive a

²⁰ <https://www.downtownwomenscenter.org/2017/impact/>

certificate of completion. From there, most women work with a DWC employment specialist to find work, while some apply to stay on with MADE longer by entering into a 9-month paid program.

9-month program

The 9-month program, funded by LA RISE (Los Angeles Regional Initiative for Social Enterprise,²¹ an initiative of the City of Los Angeles), began in 2015 and offers approximately 10 women per year paid employment with MADE. DWC chooses to keep the number of participants small so that it can offer each participant a living wage. As one staff member explained, “Rather than paying a lot of women the cost of the bus fare it took to get here, we’re paying fewer women a wage that can actually help support them.”

DWC gives participants latitude in their work within the social enterprise, allowing them to select a job track that best suits their abilities and goals. Women can choose from three tracks: working in the resale boutique, working in the café, or creating handMADE products. Once they select a track, they also choose their own schedules, enabling them to select shifts that work with other responsibilities such as child care and educational coursework that might otherwise prevent them from retaining steady work.

Those women who select the handMADE track work with a DWC staff member to learn the processes for the design and production of handMADE products. DWC supervisors make a concerted effort to train participants on any aspect of the process they show interest in, providing each woman the opportunity to find her own niche within the production system. DWC women who take to the creative aspects of product design and production are given the freedom to devise new concepts for greeting cards; select colors, prints, and materials for bags; and experiment with new candle and soap scents.

Challenges and solutions / Lessons learned

Throughout the 9-month program, participants receive periodic evaluations from DWC supervisors and employment counselors. Similar to job performance reviews, these evaluations help make sure the women are on track to search for and secure permanent employment after completing the 9-month program. However, noticing that women tend to drop off from DWC’s longer-term employment tracking efforts, DWC staff are in the process of establishing an incentive system. This system will pay former participants incentives of increasing amounts to let DWC know their employment status farther into the future, and encourage them to return to the program offices and host “peer engagement round-tables” for women currently enrolled in the 9-month program. DWC staff hope that this system will benefit all involved: former participants will be compensated for continued engagement, current 9-month participants will gain wisdom and perspective, and DWC staff will be able to track longer-term employment outcomes.

Impacts

MADE by DWC benefits both DWC and the women it serves.

For DWC, MADE provides a means for financial sustainability. In recent years, it has generated annual profits of approximately \$350,000, roughly one-third of which comes directly from sales (in-store, online, and at partner retail locations around the country) of products in the handMADE line; 100 percent of these profits are then used to fund the organization’s programs and services. MADE also offers a chance for DWC to interact with the community at large. MADE’s public-facing retail locations provide a physical space for engaging Angelenos in an ongoing conversation about homelessness and spreading the word about DWC’s services to women in need, peer organizations, and networks of potential volunteers and supporters. Finally, MADE has grown DWC’s community of peer organizations. Since opening MADE, DWC staff have become active in multiple local and national social enterprise alliances, finding such networks to be supportive outlets for sharing operational models and processes for all to benefit from lessons other organizations have learned.

²¹ <http://ewddlacity.com/index.php/employment-services/la-rise>

For the women it serves, MADE offers steady work and on-the-job skill development and training, setting a path to workforce reentry and financial stability. For the first few cohorts of 9-month program participants, the rate of placement into permanent employment has been around 68 percent.

The women who choose the handMADE track also find the creative outlet to be enriching—one woman who had never made anything before coming to DWC is amazed at how the work “got my creative juices flowing” and helped her “find a zen.” Another finds satisfaction in learning a creative skill, employing it, and seeing the finished product— she views the creative process as a means to “achieve greatness on a small scale.”²² While women working with handMADE have a variety of career ambitions, some hope to build a career from the creative skills learned and honed during their time at handMADE. One woman who has long had an interest in fashion sees the chance to work with MADE as a gift of the time and resources needed to continue building her design skills, and is now making plans to launch her own line of handbags. She has found her work with handMADE to be confidence-building: “I’ve been a designer for decades and want to enter the fashion industry... this is helping me learn to rely on my own strengths and own what I’m good at.”

Website: <https://www.downtownwomenscenter.org/>

Contact to learn more: info@downtownwomenscenter.org

²² Interview, 8/17/2017



Rebel Nell

L3C social enterprise hiring women struggling with homelessness to put their creativity to work by repurposing graffiti from the streets of Detroit into necklaces, rings, earrings, bracelets, and cuff links. Through a 501(c)3 nonprofit also operated by Rebel Nell the women participate in empowerment services including financial advising, entrepreneurship trainings, and wellness support which are geared toward helping them transition back into independent living.

Location: Detroit, MI

Established: 2013

Population served: Rebel Nell works with disadvantaged women across Detroit who struggle with homelessness. To-date, Rebel Nell has worked with 20 women.

Mission: *“Our mission is to employ disadvantaged women in Detroit, to educate them on financial management, life wellness and business, and to empower them to successfully transition to an independent life. ... We partner with local organizations to seek out women who have struggled to find and retain employment. We hire these women as Creative Designers, teaching them to craft unique, wearable art from fallen layers of graffiti, while providing wrap-around supports to start them on the path towards upward mobility.”²³*

²³ <https://www.rebelnell.com/pages/about-1>



How it works

Rebel Nell hires women to put their creativity to work: as full-time creative designers, the women repurpose graffiti, an “abundant local resource,” from the streets of Detroit into necklaces, rings, earrings, bracelets, and cuff links, which are sold online and at shops and pop-up markets across the country.²⁴ Along with jewelry production, the women participate in “empowerment” services, which include financial advising and assistance, entrepreneurship trainings, legal aid, micro-loans, and wellness support.

Amy Peterson, Rebel Nell’s co-founder and CEO, began Rebel Nell with the goal of empowering disadvantaged women to become self-sufficient, but it was equally important to her to build an *organization* that would be self-sufficient. Structuring Rebel Nell as a social enterprise built around jewelry creation and sales was a means through which to achieve self-sufficiency. Peterson chose jewelry-making because she had some background in the craft and because she knew the jewelry-making process could make use of an abundant local resource: graffiti from demolished or condemned buildings around the city. But the intent was not to create a jewelry business, it was to empower women. As Diana Roginson, co-founder and creative director, shared, “It’s not really about training [the women] to become professional jewelry-makers. It’s about helping them pull themselves up and get them to the next phase.... In Detroit, starting a social enterprise often follows a desire to provide services to people in need, not the other way around.”

What started out as a social enterprise is now two separate entities. Rebel Nell’s jewelry-making operation, which began in 2013, is structured as a social enterprise. In 2017, Rebel Nell established T.E.A. (Teach. Empower. Achieve.), a 501(c)3 nonprofit that houses Rebel Nell’s empowerment services.

Program spotlight: Jewelry-making

Women referred to Rebel Nell by a local women’s shelter begin working with Rebel Nell for a preliminary two-week training period, at the end of which Rebel Nell and the woman make a mutual decision about whether to continue working together. For those brought on full time, it typically takes about two months for the new hire to become proficient in the jewelry-making process, and while a number of participants are self-described creative individuals, to date none have had formal training in jewelry-making before starting at Rebel Nell. Working in the jewelry studio alongside a professional metalsmith, the process is structured to allow women to take on additional responsibilities over time: a woman with seniority is designated as the production manager and is tasked with training and mentoring newer hires. While the production manager’s job includes training the women on safety procedures and the technical aspects of jewelry-making, the current production manager describes the most important aspect of her job to be helping new hires understand that “the most important thing is to care about the jewelry you’re producing, and take pride in it... pride is what assures a great product, and what boosts your confidence and self-esteem.”²⁵

Program spotlight: Empowerment services

When the women at Rebel Nell are not in the studio, they participate in a variety of “empowerment” programs and services that help them work toward self-sufficiency. Some are geared toward the practical matters needed to improve their financial stability, such as sessions during which financial advisors offer coaching and advice on topics including saving, investing, and building credit. Others help the women develop business skills: a formerly homeless woman who has since founded her own consulting firm offers an entrepreneurship series that focuses on creating business plans and building sustainable business operations. To address other barriers that are unique to each woman’s personal circumstances, Rebel Nell also offers non-interest-bearing micro-loans for the women to put toward specific financial needs, such as purchasing car insurance or paying tuition for continuing education.

Other empowerment services are more focused on personal wellbeing. One advisor helps the women work through mental health and self-esteem issues by coaching them in wellness techniques such as meditation

²⁴ <https://www.rebelnell.com/pages/faq>

²⁵ Interview, 2/13/2018

and daily affirmations. Another advisor who developed and runs a vision-boarding mobile app works with participants on vision-boarding as a means of goal-setting and achievement. Most of the empowerment services are offered by individuals who ask to volunteer with Rebel Nell by offering services in their particular area of expertise; this is how Rebel Nell formed relationships with its financial advisors, legal assistants, and wellness coach.

Rebel Nell staff recently restructured the way the empowerment services are offered. In the early years, they provided services based on what they imagined the women would most need, but over time they discovered that their offerings and the women's needs did not always align. In response, Rebel Nell staff now engage in "quarterly self-assessments" with each woman, during which they take stock of her specific needs and make a plan for how she and the organization will work together to address those needs. They have found this to be effective in tailoring the approach to address the most immediate barriers standing between each woman and her ability to achieve self-sufficiency.

Beyond the services Rebel Nell offers directly, it also partners with a range of other organizations offering complementary services, including a government organization called Community Ventures that provides basic necessities, including work uniforms, eyeglasses, and gas or public transit cards; and a nonprofit organization called Humble Design that provides furnishings and décor once the women secure permanent housing.

Challenges and solutions / Lessons learned

One challenge Rebel Nell staff experienced was identifying appropriate expectations for the women's time commitments and levels of autonomy. Initially, women were free to determine their own work schedules, but Rebel Nell staff found that having people in the studio at different times created inefficiencies in the flow of jewelry production. So, Rebel Nell staff implemented a consistent work schedule for all the women—10am-5pm Monday through Friday—and found that this routine schedule increased production efficiency. Consistent scheduling also has the added benefit of acclimating the women to the typical Monday-Friday workweek, facilitating their eventual transition into other employment.

Another challenge is related to organizational structure. Existing solely as an L3C (low-profit limited liability company), Rebel Nell ran up against limitations in eligibility to apply for grants and participate in certain trade shows and markets. To overcome that challenge, Rebel Nell established T.E.A., its nonprofit arm.

Impacts

Currently, Rebel Nell has the capacity to employ three to six women at a time. Once hired, the women can stay on with Rebel Nell for as long as needed to find stable housing and work. The majority of women are able to transition out of living in the shelter within one and a half months of beginning to work with Rebel Nell, and tend to fully "graduate" from Rebel Nell—that is, transition into permanent external employment—within three years. To date, Rebel Nell has worked with 20 women total, all of whom have successfully transitioned to secure housing. The majority of these women have gone on to secure gainful employment in various sectors: social services, a sewing-based social enterprise, the auto industry, the service industry, and even entrepreneurship: one woman has successfully launched a baked-goods and catering service. Rebel Nell has also achieved a 100 percent repayment rate for the micro-loans the organization has made to its participants.

Coming to Rebel Nell, she was intimidated by diving into a trade as unfamiliar as jewelry production. But, since proving to herself that she could succeed at it, she feels ready to tackle a new career: "I feel that if I can do this, I can do anything."

Women currently working with Rebel Nell report a range of benefits depending on their interests and ambitions. For one woman with a creative background, Rebel Nell has reshaped her self-perceptions and career aspirations. She has long had a passion for music and describes how playing in her high school's marching band provided comfort, stability, and meaning during a difficult period in her life. Despite her musical aptitude, she never thought of herself as an artist, and it never occurred to her that she could build a career around it. But reengaging in the creative process at Rebel Nell, as well as connecting with a mentor through the women's shelter who works as a professional musician, "made me realize that I'm an artist."²⁶ She now aspires to be a professional musician, composer, and music teacher. In her spare time in the jewelry studio, she created a necklace for herself in the shape of a treble clef to serve as a reminder of what she hopes to achieve.

Other women who do not have a background in the arts find affirmation through mastering a new skill. One woman with a penchant for technology and mathematics hopes to someday run her own computer repair service. She describes Rebel Nell as a "middle step" to getting there, saying her time with the organization has been a confidence-booster. Coming to Rebel Nell, she was intimidated by diving into a trade as unfamiliar as jewelry production. But, since proving to herself that she could succeed at it, she feels ready to tackle a new career: "I feel that if I can do this, I can do anything."²⁷

Women also report that Rebel Nell has helped to restore hope for finding satisfying, dignified employment. One woman said that, having experienced a string of negative experiences with past jobs and employers, Rebel Nell is shifting her feelings about work, because it is the first job she's ever had that she looks forward to going to each day. "I've never had an employer who's cared about me. I feel valued now."

Website: <https://rebelnell.org/>

Contact to learn more: Taylor Thorn (Sales and Marketing Coordinator), taylor@rebelnell.org

²⁶ Interview, 2/13/2018

²⁷ Interview, 2/13/2018



People's Resource Center

501(c)3 nonprofit social service organization offering basic necessities such as food, clothing, and rent assistance, as well as resources such as job search assistance, access to technology, and educational and arts classes, for residents of DuPage County, IL facing poverty

Location: Wheaton, IL

Established: 1975

Population served: Originally fashioned as a “neighbors helping neighbors” organization, People's Resource Center began with a few neighbors getting together to donate groceries to those in need in their community. Today its many services are available to each and every resident of DuPage County, IL, with a focus on those struggling with poverty. In 2017, over 27,000 individuals were served.²⁸

Mission: “People's Resource Center community exists to respond to basic human needs, promote dignity and justice, and create a future of hope and opportunity for the residents of DuPage County, Illinois through discovering and sharing personal and community resources.... We offer nutritious food and other basic necessities like clothes and rent assistance for people facing tough times. We also connect people with resources—education and tutoring, jobs, technology, art, a caring community—to create a future of hope and opportunity for all.”²⁹

²⁸ <http://www.peoplesrc.org/impact-our-work>

²⁹ <http://www.peoplesrc.org/about-prc>

The second day's curriculum is peppered with creative exercises meant to give people the chance to practice and strengthen their self-presentation skills. This includes an exploration of the power of creative storytelling to make oneself stand out in a crowded job market.



How it works

People's Resource Center (PRC) is a multisite, multi-service grassroots organization serving tens of thousands of DuPage County residents each year. It has two anchor sites and several dozen partner sites—including schools, libraries, churches, mosques, and retirement homes—to which they bring services.

While PRC began as a food pantry, it has since grown to offer a wide variety of services. PRC has a responsive, needs-based approach to determining what services to offer. It does not subscribe to any particular theory or model of what types of assistance “should” be offered, but rather adds services as the need arises among PRC participants and as PRC finds the staff and volunteer resources to offer a given service, taking an approach based on experimentation and flexibility. Today, PRC divides its services into two broad types:

- ▶ Basic services, which include the food pantry, a clothes closet, housing assistance, and financial assistance
- ▶ Empowerment services, which include adult literacy and computer classes, a job assistance program, and an art program

PRC weaves multiple opportunities for creative expression into its empowerment services, both directly through its art program, and more indirectly through its job assistance program.

Program Spotlight: Art program

PRC's art program offers art classes free of charge to residents of DuPage County. Originally begun for the purpose of encouraging creative self-expression for women facing tough times, today PRC's art classes are open to all, though PRC also offers classes geared toward specific groups, including families and children. The art program operates according to PRC's ethos of flexible programming, offering an ever-changing selection of classes based on the areas of expertise of the volunteer artists who lead the classes. Over time, PRC has offered classes in ceramics, jewelry-making, painting, photography, creative writing, mixed media, and sewing, among others. Classes are offered at PRC's anchor sites as well as at partner sites around the county, including schools, community centers, and housing complexes.

Program Spotlight: Job assistance program

PRC's job assistance program arose out of sheer demand: in the wake of Hurricane Katrina, a large number of displaced people moved to DuPage County and needed help finding work. Originally offered by a few volunteers as informal assistance to help people find jobs, the job program has since been formalized into a mandatory two-day workshop followed by ongoing one-on-one job coaching.

The entry point for PRC's job assistance services is a two-day group workshop led by trained volunteers, which covers a number of employability and workplace skills. The first day's focus is on conveying essential information about the job search process, including writing resumes and cover letters, networking, requesting references, and interview etiquette. Workshop leaders also review the range of benefits and assistance available to the unemployed and underemployed that are offered by PRC and its partner organizations, as well as through public assistance, from providing eyeglasses, work uniforms, and necessary work equipment to helping pay for insurance, rent, and other bills.

While Day 1 is information-driven, Day 2 is more interactive. Covering such topics as how to project confidence and how to craft an elevator pitch, the second day's curriculum is peppered with creative exercises meant to give people the chance to practice and strengthen their self-presentation skills. This includes an exploration of the power of creative storytelling to make oneself stand out in a crowded job market. Emphasizing that an applicant has a short window of time to catch a prospective employer's interest before it starts to fade, the workshop leader guides participants through how to tell compelling stories about their work experience as opposed to talking about accomplishments abstractly, the crux of which “is in making the creative link between what [the employer]

is asking for and what you've done."³⁰ The day's workshop also includes a mock interview role-playing exercise to give participants the chance to hone their storytelling abilities. Workshop leaders also address the importance of taking breaks and practicing self-care during the job search, and recommend doing something creative as a means of self-care, as creative activities can be a way to "shut off certain parts of your brain and activate others."³¹

Challenges and solutions / Lessons learned

As with many of PRC's other services, Day 2 of the job assistance workshop arose responsively, based on common skills gaps PRC workshop leaders noticed among job assistance participants. Originally, PRC only offered Day 1 of the workshop, offering bits and pieces of the Day 2 self-presentation programming during other, optional programs. But over time, PRC staff saw a consistent need for people to learn how to talk about themselves, so the organization added Day 2 as a mandatory part of the job assistance orientation. One PRC staff member said that, in general, more workshop participants need help with Day 2 skills, because those are the skills that are harder to develop: "Anyone can find and copy a template for a resume or cover letter, but there's no template for self-presentation."³²

Impacts

PRC measures impacts on participants differently for its job assistance program and its art program. For its job assistance program, PRC measures impact by employment placement. In recent years, PRC has worked with 15 volunteer job coaches to offer job assistance to roughly 100 people annually. Beyond the one-on-one coaching, PRC has a strong network of area employers and makes databases of area employers available to job assistance participants. PRC is able to confirm that about 50 percent of job assistance participants are placed in permanent work with which they are satisfied, though staff suspect the percentage is higher, as some participants drop off from job coaching services before officially notifying PRC that they have gotten a job and need no further job assistance.

For the art program, which in 2017 served nearly 800 participants across 15 sites, PRC staff observe social and therapeutic impacts on participants. For some participants whose time is filled by working multiple jobs and caring for children and family members, the art classes provide them with a rare opportunity to socialize and form connections. For others, the chance for a creative outlet helps them work through the difficulties and stressors they face in their daily lives. For many, both are true. And for PRC itself, the art program serves as an important vehicle for raising awareness about the organization and about the prevalence of suburban poverty—which is often overlooked or believed not to exist—in the surrounding community. Works produced by participants in the art program are exhibited at area galleries and hang on the walls of the offices of PRC's corporate partners. Bringing these artworks into the broader community expands awareness of PRC's mission among potential participants, volunteers, and supporters.

Website: <https://peoplesrc.org/>

Contact to learn more: *Debbie Lunger (Jobs Program Director and Community Relationship Manager)*, dlunger@peoplesrc.org

³⁰ Workshop leader, 11/1/2017

³¹ Workshop leader, 11/1/2017

³² Interview, 10/31/2017

Workforce Development Institute

501(c)3 nonprofit grant-making entity supporting workforce development initiatives which facilitate gainful employment and provide holistic support for workers throughout New York state. Among its core initiatives are grants made for “workforce enrichment” programs which enhance workers’ sense of dignity, agency, and wellbeing through opportunities for creative expression.

Location: New York (statewide)

Established: 2003

Population served: Through its grantmaking, the Workforce Development Institute aims to support individual workers and worker groups across New York state, many of whose voices are underrepresented in the public discourse or who face barriers to work.

Mission: *“The Workforce Development Institute is a statewide nonprofit that works to grow and keep good jobs in New York state. We use a range of tools—including ground level information, workforce expertise, and funding—to facilitate projects that build skills and strengthen employers’ ability to hire and promote workers. Our work often fills gaps not covered by other organizations and is accomplished through partnerships and collaborations with businesses, unions, other nonprofits, educational institutions, and government.”³³*

33 <https://wdiny.org/About>



WDI’s workforce enrichment grants are intended to promote the creative self-expression of New York workers whose voices are often not heard in the public discourse.

How it works

The Workforce Development Institute (WDI) makes grants to organizations and individuals throughout New York state who offer workforce development services and other support for workers. WDI receives grants through the New York State legislature, New York State Department of Labor, and the New York State Office of Children and Family Services, among other entities, and redistributes the funds across the state through 10 regional offices, helping to assure that grants address the unique needs of workers in each region.

Through its grantmaking, WDI supports businesses and working people in three ways: workforce development (connecting people with training, equipment, and technical assistance), workforce support (helping people retain and perform well at their jobs), and workforce enrichment (helping people with holistic wellbeing). Workforce enrichment—enhancing workers’ sense of dignity, agency, and wellbeing through opportunities for creative expression—is part of WDI’s mission because its leadership and staff believe in the importance of these opportunities but do not see support for them being offered by other workforce organizations in New York. WDI sees its niche in the workforce sector to be “filling gaps not covered by other workforce development or economic development entities with an end goal of facilitating the growth of good jobs;”³⁴ facilitating workers’ opportunities for creative expression is one of those gaps.

WDI’s workforce enrichment grants are made to help working people engage in creative expression and self-reflection through mediums such as photography, videography, music, and creative writing, with the ultimate goal of helping to increase their self-efficacy. In its earlier years, WDI ran its own artistic training programs that gave participants opportunities to create artworks that spoke to issues they faced in their jobs. WDI has since shifted its focus to distributing grants to artists and arts organizations that help people produce art that explores workforce and economic issues. Its grantmaking especially focuses on those who work with underrepresented groups, including people working low-wage jobs, women, people of color, veterans, and people with disabilities.

Impacts

As a statewide organization, WDI works on a large scale: in 2017 it made 338 grants statewide totaling \$2,886,560; cumulatively, WDI projected that its grantmaking reached over 15,000 workers across New York state.³⁵

WDI’s workforce enrichment grants are intended to promote the creative self-expression of New York workers whose voices are often not heard in the public discourse. A recent example is a grant made to a theatre artist to support working with a group of veterans, helping them process and tell their personal stories about their experiences in the military through the production of an original play. As the different regions of the state have different demographic makeups and employment opportunities, WDI also strategically funds organizations and programs that will resonate with specific regional needs. For example, the Utica area has a large refugee population, so WDI funded a local museum to develop English language classes, using the museum collection as a teaching tool, to help the refugees learn language skills to prepare them for entry into the local workforce. WDI’s grants also promote the growth of certain employment sectors. In response to one region’s rapidly growing creative economy, WDI made a grant to an artist and educator to create a comic book about pathways to creative careers. Distributed to middle school, high school, and college students throughout the region, the comic book was designed to educate them about viable career opportunities in their area.

Website: <https://wdiny.org/>

Contact to learn more: Ed Murphy (Executive Director), emurphy@wdiny.org

³⁴ [https://wdiny.org/portals/0/pdf/WDI%20Impact_Report_2017%20\(updated\).pdf](https://wdiny.org/portals/0/pdf/WDI%20Impact_Report_2017%20(updated).pdf)

³⁵ [https://wdiny.org/portals/0/pdf/WDI%20Impact_Report_2017%20\(updated\).pdf](https://wdiny.org/portals/0/pdf/WDI%20Impact_Report_2017%20(updated).pdf)

4

TAKEAWAYS AND REFLECTIONS

Over the course of our conversations with direct service providers, the individuals they serve, and workforce development researchers, administrators, and scholars, we heard numerous insights, reflections, excitements, tribulations, and outstanding questions concerning the practical details of using artistic and creative expression to aid employability and economic opportunity, as well as how this work fits within the broader field of workforce and economic development in the 21st century. We covered a great deal of ground, conceptual and literal. The following are distillations of some of the key reflections we heard, as well as our own observations about the use of artistic and creative expression to aid employability and economic opportunity:

- ▶ **Workforce development initiatives that incorporate opportunities for artistic and creative expression can help bolster a person's employability in a number of ways. Depending on the specific needs of an individual or group, arts activities may function as vehicles for the development and exercise of both hard and soft skills, and as points of entry for accessing other services and networks needed to find, retain, and advance in living-wage work.** Based on what we heard from organization staff, program administrators, and the people they serve, while the potential for arts activities to propel one into creative careers is important, of greater importance is the arts' power to offer and unlock other supports to holistically address people's needs. The holistic approach mirrors a growing interest, on the part of social service organizations and workforce development agencies, in using principles of human-centered design to inform the delivery of social services.³⁶ Human-centered design is a creative approach to problem-solving and service delivery that places its focus on people and innovative solutions that specifically fit those people's needs. The human-centered mindset aims to be holistic, taking direction and inspiration from people's experiences, being flexible in offering new services as the need arises, working within the world's constraints, solving problems creatively and intuitively, and ultimately allowing for more authentic stakeholder engagement by removing the traditional barriers between social service delivery systems and those the systems aim to help.

³⁶ For more on human-centered design and its application to social service delivery, see: 1) https://ion.workforcegps.org/announcements/2016/02/23/16/35/New_Customer-Centered_Design_Approach_Service_Delivery and 2) <http://www.designkit.org/methods>

- ▶ **Several types of organizations offer opportunities for artistic expression for employment gains, and organizations go about delivering arts-related services in many different ways.** We identified disparate organizations incorporating the arts and creative expression into their services, including small arts-focused organizations, large social service organizations, social enterprises, and funders of workforce initiatives. Moreover, the nature, structure, and intended purposes of the arts opportunities vary widely. Some general points of convergence include offering artistic training to prepare people for careers in the creative industries, offering creative opportunities as a vehicle to boost people’s soft skills development and general employability, and offering the arts as a complement to other services with the intent of serving people in a holistic manner.
- ▶ **Many arts-focused workforce organizations and programs grew out of distinct needs to be able to better assist people.** Staff at some organizations came to arts activities through seeking ways to pique interest, encourage engagement, fill service gaps, and give voice, ownership, and pride to the people they work to assist. Most organizations are embedded in, and work in collaboration with, a constellation of other support organizations for the people they assist, and therefore aim to fill specific niches to provide opportunities or services that are not offered elsewhere, but are distinctly needed.
- ▶ **Multiple workforce experts and practitioners, and many beneficiaries of the services they offer, reflected on how programs involving artistic and creative expression can provide a distinct benefit to people: a rare outlet for taking control of one’s narrative, expanding one’s imagination, and improving feelings about one’s personal potential.** Beyond expanding one’s skillset, several interviewees importantly noted that engaging in artistic and creative activities have the unique ability to help people reclaim their personal narrative, improve their feelings about their capabilities and the value they add to the world, and to reimagine their own future. The act of creating an artistic or creative work, be it for exercise, for sale, or for “art’s sake,” helps give meaning and ownership to individuals’ experiences. This has potential to help counter temporal discounting, the discounting of the future and placing minimal value on it, which is commonly used to explain and characterize choices made by people in poverty and facing economic hardship.
- ▶ **A number of interviewees expressed similar challenges and outstanding questions.** One issue that surfaced multiple times is that, while soft skills are highly in demand in the workplace and highly transferable across employers and other areas of one’s life, isolating outcomes of soft skills development is difficult. A question staff from many organizations we interviewed grapple with is how the direct and indirect benefits of soft skills development can be accounted for within workforce development outcome

“The arts are a great means through which to open [people] back up to their creative potential and reimagine themselves....”

– Erick Serrato,
Deputy Director and
Communications
Officer, Pacific
Gateway Workforce
Innovation Network



frameworks, which commonly focus on measures such as employment numbers, job retention rates, and wage increases. A related challenge that surfaced is the continued tension of balancing the length and intensity of services and support offered to any one individual, with the number of individuals an organization has the capacity to serve at one time. Especially given the gradual nature of soft skills development, and the number of barriers to employment that any one individual may need to overcome to reach employment, organizations may expend significant time and resources on each individual. This in part accounts for the relatively small cohorts of individuals many of these organizations serve.

► **Staff and administrators of the organizations we interviewed expressed a strong desire to connect with a community of practice and to raise the profile of artistic and creative work within more traditional workforce development networks.**

Organizations and practitioners providing workforce development opportunities through engagement with arts and creative expression shared a desire to connect to a community of practice that values and uses arts in their work, in order to share and learn about practices, successes, and challenges. The organizations and practitioners we connected with expressed excitement about how their programs have resonated with the people they aim to support and help. They also raised questions about better connecting their work within the traditional workforce development sphere, including funding and investment opportunities to support the need-driven services they provide. We hope this report will serve as a resource to those interested in strengthening the bridge between arts and workforce development domains.

5

APPENDICES

Interviewees

Joe Altepeter (Director of Social Enterprise), **Ana Velouise** (Director of Communications & Public Affairs), + **Dena Younkin** (Social Enterprise Senior Creative Manager), Downtown Women's Center

Kiley Arroyo (Panel Member, Rural Cultural Wealth Lab), Rural Poverty Research Institute

Cynthia Campoy Brophy (Founder & Executive Director, former), **Shelby Williams-Gonzalez** (Executive Director), + **Raul Flores** (Artistic Director), artworxLA

Harry Davis (Roger L. and Rachel M. Goetz Distinguished Service Professor of Creative Management), University of Chicago Booth School of Business

Matt Dunne (Founder & Executive Director), Center on Rural Innovation

David B. Easton (Head of Production), YouthFX

Lauren Eyster (Senior Fellow), Urban Institute

Chuck Fluharty (Founder, President, & CEO), Rural Poverty Research Institute

Izzy Gesell (Applied Improv Workshop Leader, Professional Facilitator, & Presentation Coach)

Virginia Hamilton (Regional Administrator, former), U.S. Department of Labor

Donna Hilliard (Program Manager) + **Victoria Westbrook** (Director of Programs & Operations), Code Tenderloin

Debbie Lunger (Jobs Program Director & Community Relationship Manager), **Lesley Gena** (Art Program Director), **Linda Cheatham** (Director of Operations), **Julie Wachowski** (Adult Learning & Literacy Program Director, Computer Literacy Director), **Jill Kimak** (Jobs Coordinator & Job Training workshop leader), + **Patrick** (Job Coach & Job Training workshop leader), Peoples Resource Center

Bronwyn Mauldin (Director of Research & Evaluation), Los Angeles County Arts Commission

Payton May (Creative Director), BitsourceKY

Nicole Brandt Minyard (Founder & Executive Director), Poverty and the Arts

Ed Murphy (Executive Director) + **Victoria Kereszi** (Arts & Culture Manager), Workforce Development Institute

Lori Pourier (President), **Jeremy Staab** (Program Manager for Community Development, former), **Ron Martinez-Looking Elk** (NAPD trainer), + **Kimberly Tilsen-Brave Heart** (NAPD trainer), First Peoples Fund

Julia Rhodes (Co-Owner & Director of Sales & Marketing), **Keri Gallagher** (Nonprofit Director), **Diana Roginson** (Co-Founder & Creative Director), **Amy Peterson** (Co-Founder & CEO), **Taylor Thorn** (Sales & Marketing Coordinator), + **Jayson Olson** (Metalsmith), Rebel Nell

Erick Serrato (Deputy Director & Communications Officer), Pacific Gateway Workforce Innovation Network

Nina Simon (Executive Director), Santa Cruz Museum of Art and History

Adam Sudmann (Program Manager), With Love Restaurant

Ellen Timberlake (Director), County of Santa Cruz Human Services Department

Carlton Turner (Director & Lead Artist), Mississippi Center for Cultural Production

Jose Wilson (Director of Workforce Programs & Clinical Services), North Lawndale Employment Network

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