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ABOUT THE EVALUATOR
The nonprofit Urban Institute is dedicated to elevating the debate on social and economic policy. For nearly five decades, Urban’s scholars have conducted research and offered evidence-based solutions that improve lives and strengthen communities across a rapidly urbanizing world. Their objective research helps expand opportunities for all, reduce hardship among the most vulnerable, and strengthen the effectiveness of the public sector. The Urban Institute conducted this evaluation of the Arts Infusion Initiative. Authors of this brief are Jennifer Yahner, Jeanette Hussemann, Caroline Ross, Annie Gurvis, Ellen Paddock, Carla Vasquez-Noriega, and Lilly Yu.

ABOUT THE FUNDER
The Chicago Community Trust is a community foundation dedicated to improving its region through strategic grant making, civic engagement and inspiring philanthropy. As businesses, local governments, and organizations strive to solve pressing challenges, the Trust brings these key actors together to spur necessary collaboration. Through its Arts and Culture program the Trust supports the unparalleled opportunities arts offer to engage residents and bring the community together. It is committed to enhancing access for adults, students, artists and audiences who are underserved and underrepresented, while working with colleagues to identify and fill gaps. The Chicago Community Trust conceived of, spearheaded through an emergent model approach, and funded the Arts Infusion Initiative and its evaluation.

ABOUT THE EVALUATION MANAGER
The National Guild for Community Arts Education supports and advances access to lifelong learning opportunities in the arts. Working collaboratively with a broad range of practitioners and stakeholders within and beyond the arts and education sectors, the National Guild builds the capacity of community arts education providers to 1) deliver quality programs that are sustainable and equitable; 2) secure greater financial support; and 3) contribute to systemic change to ensure all people have access to arts education. They do this by providing professional development and information resources, ongoing networking opportunities, and leadership development for current and future arts education leaders. They also work to increase awareness and support for community arts education and investment in the field by developing strategic partnerships and leveraging the assets of current and emerging leaders in the field. The National Guild managed the evaluation contract and provided oversight and consultation throughout the process.

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INTRODUCTION

In 2010, an ambitious model for social change emerged in Chicago that aimed to connect detained youth and those at risk for incarceration (“at risk youth”) to rigorous and engaging arts instruction, infused with social and emotional learning goals. Dubbed the Arts Infusion Initiative, the Chicago Community Trust spearheaded and funded this five year, $2.5 million demonstration while earning cooperation from the local detention facility, public school system, community policing office, and community arts program leaders to integrate arts programming into youths’ school and after school environments.

This brief summarizes results from the first large-scale evaluation of the Arts Infusion Initiative, which was designed to: 1) assess the degree to which the project, as an emergent model for social change, was achieving its intended purposes and 2) generate actionable information for promoting effective Arts Infusion practices while redirecting those that have been less effective. To accomplish these objectives, from April to August 2015, the Urban Institute, in consultation with the National Guild for Community Arts Education, conducted a mixed-method evaluation resulting in seven key findings and recommendations for promising practices (for the full evaluation report, visit www.urban.org).

ARTS INFUSION INITIATIVE

Following a year of research and engagement by experts in the fields of arts instruction, juvenile justice, restorative justice, and positive youth development, the Chicago Community Trust launched the Arts Infusion Initiative in 2010 as a five-year emergent strategy for social change. The initiative comes at a critical juncture in our nation’s search for viable, alternative pathways for youth whose life circumstances severely limit their opportunities for educational and economic development and advancement, increasing their risk of incarceration. The Arts Infusion Initiative aimed to expose, inspire, and connect detained and at-risk youth to high performing arts learning programs infused with social and emotional skills instruction. As of the 2014-15 school year, the initiative’s core components included:

1. **Fourteen programs** from all genres of art—music, dance, literary arts, visual arts, and theatre—that serve

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**AT-RISK YOUTH**

The term “at-risk youth” in this brief refers to youths’ vulnerability to negative life outcomes (e.g., incarceration, school dropout) given current residence in a detention facility or socioeconomically disadvantaged community in which they may have been exposed to compounding risk factors, such as an unstable home life, gang activity, drugs, or violence.
detained teens in JTDC and at-risk youth primarily in the Chicago communities of Lawndale/Little Village, Back of the Yards, and South Shore (see figure 1 for a map of where Arts Infusion programming took place and figure 2 for program descriptions). Programs had to match the Chicago Community Trust’s criteria for high performance, which among others included rigorous teaching unit plans, engaging teaching artists and activities, and effective documentation of student progress in social and emotional learning.

2. **Special events and performances** for youth in JTDC and the surrounding communities organized by Arts Infusion stakeholders. The most notable events were Creative Career Day held annually for JTDC youth and Passport to the Arts held at Loyola University annually for community youth. Additionally, all programs included a culminating performance, gallery show, anthology, or audio/video recording by Arts Infusion youth.

3. **Knowledge sharing sessions** coordinated by Loyola University to foster a network of collaboration and professional development among the Arts Infusion teaching artists and program directors by providing space and an opportunity for them to share and learn from each other. Sessions involved interactive lectures, open forum discussions, and small group breakout sessions covering various topics.

4. **Assessment consultations** with an experienced arts assessment consultant to help programs assess youths’ social and emotional learning. Individualized assessment consultations became part of the initiative when the Arts Infusion Steering Committee recognized the consultant’s value in helping one grantee develop their rubrics. By 2014-15, almost all grantees were using the consultant’s online system for data collection and his analyses to inform their annual reports; see his assessments at [www.artsassessment.org/case-studies](http://www.artsassessment.org/case-studies).

Overseeing these activities was the Arts Infusion Steering Committee, created to help guide the initiative’s evolution and chaired by Suzanne Connor, senior program officer at the Chicago Community Trust.

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**FIGURE 1. Map of Arts Infusion Initiative Program Locations**

Source: Program addresses were provided by Arts Infusion grantees to the Chicago Community Trust. Notes: Large icons represent the primary school and community locations of Arts Infusion programming, including the Nancy B. Jefferson Alternative School at JTDC where multiple programs were in operation. Smaller icons represent additional locations at which at least some Arts Infusion youth were served.
ABJ-Ray of Hope Center of the Arts  
*Est. 2002. Teens, Young adults*

Provides digital music and media instruction to South Shore youth; created Hip Hop Hello Arts'preneur program through which youth digitally create, develop business plans for, and sell musical greeting cards.

BBF Family Services (Better Boys Foundation)  
*Est. 1961. Elementary age, Teens*

Offers apprenticeships labs to North Lawndale youth: ArtLAB, BeatLAB, FilmLAB, KnitLAB, LitLAB, and TapLAB. Each involves workshop instruction, field trips, visits from industry professionals, and a final project.

Free Spirit Media  
*Est. 2001. Teens, Young adults*

Serves youth at North Lawndale College Prep, teaching an after school program that introduces participants to writing, filming, and editing news stories around a topic of their choosing.

Latinos Progresando-Teatro Americano  
*Est. 1998. Teens, Young adults*

Helps North/South Lawndale youth write and share their own original plays during after school and summer arts sessions.

Old Town School of Folk Music  
*Est. 1957. Elementary age, Teens, Young adults*

Provides pro bono weekly introductory blues guitar lessons and music listening to detained JTDC youth, as well as periodic performances.

Precious Blood Ministry of Reconciliation  
*Est. 1997. Teens, Young adults*

Exposes Back of the Yards youth to a diverse arts program that ranges from mural creation, silk screening, theatre production, digital music and film production, and t-shirt silk screening. Partnered with Peace and Education Coalition.

Street-Level Youth Media  
*Est. 1993. Teens, Young adults*

Offers Back of the Yards and North Lawndale youth media production workshops, including music, video production, photography, journalism, and multimedia arts. Workshops may also focus on social justice and career skills building.

Young Chicago Authors  
*Est. 1991. Teens, Young adults*

Serves detained JTDC youth and youth in Rudy Lozano Leadership Academy by providing poetry, spoken word, and rap workshops. Includes final student showcases and the renowned Louder Than A Bomb Festival, a version of which is held at JTDC.

Cerqua Rivera Dance Theatre  
*Est. 1996. Teens*

Instructs youth in dance and use of dance, drumming, and theatre in the furthering of social justice. Serves youth in North/South Lawndale at Rudy Lozano Leadership Academy.

Kuumba Lynx  
*Est. 1996. Elementary age, Teens, Young adults*

Engages youth in and out of JTDC in footwork dance program. Also exposes youth to HipHop poetry with a social justice theme.

Northwestern Bienen School of Music  
*Est. 1895. Teens*

Offers digital music composition program including musical content analysis to detained JTDC youth. Some youth also participate in Saturday AMPED music sessions facilitated by Northwestern’s Center for Civic Engagement.

Storycatchers Theatre  
*Est. 1984. Teens, Young adults*

Allows detained JTDC youth to participate in a program called “Temporary Lockdown” to create their own autobiographical performances through musical theatre and perform for family, supporters, and staff.
Steering committee members included representatives from JTDC, the Nancy B. Jefferson Alternative School based in JTDC, the Chicago Public School Office of Education Options, the Chicago Police Department’s Alternative Policing Strategy program, Loyola University’s College of Fine and Performing Arts, an independent arts assessment consultant, and varying program directors and teaching artists from the 14 Arts Infusion programs.

**Emergent Strategy of Creative Youth Development**

The Arts Infusion Initiative embraced the strengths based approach of creative youth development while following an emergent strategy for social change. Creative youth development merges hands-on arts education with skill building to support positive youth development in adolescence and adulthood (Montgomery in press; Montgomery 2014; Hirzy 2011). Effective programs focus holistically on youth assets and youth voice and provide safe and healthy spaces that encourage positive relationships (Holmgren, Daily and Heinen 2015). An emergent strategy recognizes that as the many partners of an initiative carry out their work, a demonstration’s practices may need to change in response to changing realities and circumstances (Kania, Kramer, and Russell 2014). Emergent strategies involve: 1) co-creating and collaborating by partners because effective change depends on strong and trustful relationships; 2) funders’ emphasis of effective practices and discontinuation of ineffective practices; and 3) holistic focus on improving system fitness to ensure sustainable social change (Kania, Kramer, and Russell 2014).

**Social and Emotional Goals**

In accordance with an emergent strategy of creative youth development, the Arts Infusion Initiative evolved to include four social and emotional learning goals: conflict resolution, future orientation, critical response, and career readiness.

CONFLICT RESOLUTION, the first goal identified by the initiative during its first year (2010-11), seeks to teach youth how to resolve issues peacefully using verbal skills and to embrace conflict as a learning opportunity. A growing body of research finds that conflict resolution instruction is successful in reducing rates of
recidivism and school disciplinary sanctions (Bradshaw, Roseborough and Umbreit 2006) and in improving academic outcomes (Stevahn et al. 2002). Several Arts Infusion providers taught conflict resolution as a stand-alone activity, using restorative justice peace circles or event-specific curriculum, while others encouraged youth to work through conflicts and engage others’ perspectives in art making or performance.

FUTURE ORIENTATION, developed as a goal during the second year (2011-12) of the Arts Infusion Initiative, seeks to instill greater mindfulness of the future and the ability to develop longer-term goals, emphasizing responsible decision making and contemplation of the consequences of youths’ actions. It also encourages participants to complete artistic products in an intentional and collaborative way. Development of future-oriented decision making in youth can encourage school completion (Brown and Jones 2004), prevent recidivism (Clinkinbeard and Zohra 2012), and increase occupational development (Schoon and Parsons 2002). Arts Infusion providers integrated future orientation through mentoring, exposing youth to a broader world perspective through books and theater, and allowing youth to lead and execute final performances and exhibitions.

CRITICAL RESPONSE, based on Liz Lerman techniques, was added as a goal in the initiative’s third year (2012-13). In critical response focused efforts, youth learn to offer and accept constructive critique through interaction with and analysis of artistic works. By encouraging such exchange, the program seeks to strengthen participants’ social awareness and relationship skills. Programs teaching similar skills have have been associated with reduced recidivism (Joy Tong and Farrington 2006) and physically aggressive behavior (Frey, Hirschstein and Guzzo 2000), while improving in-class behavior (Frey, Hirschstein and Guzzo 2000). Critical response goals were an integral part of the process through which Arts Infusion participants exchanged feedback on artwork and discussed the work of professional artists.

CAREER READINESS, was incorporated into the Arts Infusion Initiative during its most recent year (2014-15) and is the only goal developed wholly out of the expressed needs of youth participants. Career readiness instruction focuses on
helping youth build skills and attitudes transferrable to the workplace and provides exposure to careers in the arts and art-related roles. Studies examining the effects of career academies for high school youth found such programs reduced dropout rates while increasing on-time graduation (Kemple and Snipes 2000) and youths’ job skills (Loughead, Liu, and Middleton 1995). In addition to the annual Creative Career Day and Passport to the Arts events, Arts Infusion programs began to instill career readiness by: 1) emphasizing the business side of art; 2) developing career and skill building curriculum; and 3) providing opportunities for public performance and media engagement.

**KEY FINDINGS**

Seven key findings can be drawn from the Urban Institute’s evaluation of the Arts Infusion Initiative. (See Evaluation Methods box at the end of this brief.)

**KEY FINDING 1**

**Arts Infusion youth participants showed statistically significant and substantial improvements in social and emotional learning skills, as measured by conflict resolution, future orientation, critical response, and career readiness.**

As shown in **figure 3**, the pre-post assessments (n=320) of Arts Infusion youth participants in the 2014-15 school year showed statistically significant (p<.001) and substantial improvement across all social and emotional learning goals measured, including conflict resolution, future orientation, critical response, and career readiness. Most youth were initially assessed at a “developing” level when beginning Arts Infusion programming and were at near “accomplished” upon completion. Although the research design precludes causal attributions for these improvements, the differences are sizable. The percentages of improvement ranged from 27 percent for conflict resolution and career readiness to 29 percent for critical response and 36 percent for future orientation. Similar improvements were evident for male and female youth, for JTDC and community program
settings, and for music, literary arts, visual arts, dance, and theatre genres.

Most Arts Infusion stakeholders agreed or strongly agreed that the social and emotional learning goals specified by the initiative were appropriate and that the Arts Infusion Initiative had successfully helped at-risk youth improve accordingly. One JTDC teaching artist indicated it was easy to incorporate the initiative’s goals because they “are already a part of what we do.” Future orientation, in particular, resonated universally with JTDC staff, youth participants, teaching artists, and program directors given the culminating shows put on by many programs for youths’ families and other supporters in JTDC and the community. Some examples include Northwestern University’s music listening parties; Literature for All of Us’ poetry bashes; Storycatchers’ theatrical productions; and Young Chicago Authors’ renowned “Louder Than A Bomb” poetry competition (a version of which is held at JTDC annually). Youth at Precious Blood Ministry even opened their own community art gallery called “Art on 51st Street.”

**KEY FINDING 2**

**Arts Infusion teaching artists with strong artistic knowledge and classroom management skills were effective at engaging and inspiring youth.**

Arts education is not solely about the content being delivered but also about who delivers it and how. Many Arts Infusion teaching artists were highly skilled, credentialed, and accomplished in their artistic fields. The stakeholder survey showed that more than half
(52%) had been providing arts education for over 10 years, while another 12 percent had been teaching for six to ten years. Nearly half (46%) had a graduate degree such as a masters in fine arts, while another 36 percent had graduated from college. Further, nearly two thirds (64%) had been helping justice-involved or at-risk youth for more than five years; and 36 percent had been doing so more than 10 years.

Despite relatively small salaries, Arts Infusion artists showed strong commitment to their work exposing, inspiring and engaging youth in creative development. Three quarters responding to the stakeholder survey had been involved in the initiative for three (17%), four (25%), or five (33%) years. Retaining high quality teaching artists is critical: youth need consistency and familiarity in their relationships with adults to form bonds and develop mentorships (Jekielek et al. 2002). Further, retention increases the return on investment to funders who support teaching artists' professional development activities.

Many teaching artists expressed the importance of “art modeling,” or teaching art in such a way that youth see it as a living medium, rather than a historical artifact. Because many shared a similar racial/ethnic or cultural background with students, grew up in Chicago, or were embedded in Arts Infusion neighborhoods, they were able to engage in art modeling by demonstrating the existence and value of art creation by people from diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds, locations, and socioeconomic status. Interviewed youth said they wanted to learn from teachers who looked “like [themselves];” and, notably, several teaching artists were alumni of the Arts Infusion program or had prior experiences of justice involvement.

Stakeholders interviewed at JTDC and in the community countered that teaching artists’ ability to relate to youth transcended racial and ethnic appearances. Rather, they placed greater emphasis on qualities of respect and communication style.

EXAMPLE OF SUCCESS

“Antonio”

Antonio (pseudonym) received Arts Infusion education from Free Write Jail Arts and Literacy and Young Chicago Authors (YCA) while detained in JTDC. Upon his release, he sought out a teaching artist with whom he had bonded, so that he could continue pursuing poetry and participate in YCA’s annual Louder Than A Bomb poetry festival. The teaching artist went out of his way to support and fund Antonio’s participation in the event, including providing transportation to and from the performance so that he would not have to walk across gang lines. The same teaching artist continues to support Antonio’s engagement in high school poetry club and as a YCA youth leader today.
One JTDC staff member stated that Arts Infusion programs “have allowed the youth to work with others from various backgrounds [that] share similar interest [with them, which] is very encouraging, powerful, and life changing because... it helps to change their negative thinking about others from different cultures and backgrounds.” Similarly, an Arts Infusion youth shared that, “Growing up I always thought people of different descent from me was totally opposite [but] after working with Arts Infusion, I realized that we all have the same problems and we are closer than we may think.”

KEY FINDING 3

The Arts Infusion Initiative helped foster co-creations and collaborations between program directors, public schools, community policing, and the detention facility.

As an emergent strategy for social change, the Arts Infusion Initiative brought together a diverse group of community members, organizations, and institutions to support the efforts of creative youth development. From the beginning, the initiative developed mechanisms for knowledge sharing and decision making that encouraged co-creation and collaboration, including formation of the Arts Infusion Steering Committee and the funding of regular knowledge sharing sessions. Many collaborative relationships emerged as an outgrowth of these efforts; for example, Young Chicago Authors worked collaboratively with Free Write Jail Arts and English teachers at JTDC’s Nancy B. Jefferson school to facilitate a JTDC based poetry slam (vocal reading competition) mimicking Louder Than A Bomb. Perhaps most significantly the initiative helped forge a relationship between Arts Infusion stakeholders and JTDC, a historically insular institution. The first substantive example of Arts Infusion co-creation occurred when the initiative’s co-founders at the Chicago Community Trust and the Chicago Alternative Policing Strategy program worked together to open a high tech digital music lab at JTDC. Other examples of co-creation include the annual Creative Career Day at JTDC, Passport to the Arts at Loyola, and On the Table at JTDC, which

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This initiative is unique for Chicago, because even though many organizations do youth-based programming, there is no other effort [at developing] a collaborative network for helping kids and also for [helping] providers. ~Arts Infusion community policing administrator (2015)
are planned collaboratively by staff from the Chicago Community Trust, community arts programs, and the detention facility.

The Arts Infusion Initiative helped key stakeholders realize their common desire to improve outcomes for youth living in at-risk environments. Resource sharing and co-creation were natural results of this shared vision. Several Arts Infusion teaching artists started to work for multiple programs in the network, such as Northwestern University and Kuumba Lynx; Storycatchers and Peace and Education Coalition; and ABJ-Ray of Hope Center of the Arts and Peace and Education. Arts Infusion programs also made youth referrals to the professional recording studio at Street-Level Youth Media through the initiative’s network. Overall, 70 percent of the Arts Infusion stakeholders reported that some, most, or all of the youth participants received programming from two or more Arts Infusion providers. Finally, one notable outcome of the initiative is the Chicago public schools’ decision to plan a new Digital Arts Career Academy as an alternative career path for at-risk and court-involved high school youth. This planned co-creation is a direct result of the positive outcomes Arts Infusion youth exhibited in response to the initiative and the trustful relationship forged between Chicago public schools and the Chicago Community Trust.

**KEY FINDING 4**

**Arts Infusion knowledge sharing sessions and assessment consultations evolved to effectively provide professional development opportunities and increase assessment capabilities of program directors and teaching artists.**

Arts Infusion teaching artists, program directors, and other participants in the initiative’s knowledge sharing sessions indicated that sessions were helpful for their own professional growth as well as that of their organizations. In the early years of the initiative, the knowledge sharing sessions (held by a predecessor to Loyola University) occurred too frequently and left little time for Arts Infusion teaching artists to converse and share knowledge. Stakeholders consistently reported that the most successful knowledge sharing sessions occurred under direction of a Loyola University professor with longtime experience in helping small community arts organizations. She listened to the voices of participants and restructured sessions to occur
less frequently but for a more meaningful length of time, including breaks during which informal dialogue could develop.

During 2013-14 and 2014-15, an average of 31 individuals across the 14 programs participated in each knowledge sharing session. Other attendees included representatives from supporting agencies and organizations. Teaching artists comprised over half of the total number of participants at each session; however, teaching artist attendance varied substantially. Of the 38 teaching artists who participated in at least one of four knowledge sharing sessions held in 2014-15, 28 (74%) attended two or more sessions, and at least one teaching artist from each organization attended three-quarters of the sessions. Interviewed Arts Infusion program directors indicated that teaching artists who attended the knowledge sharing sessions regularly transferred that knowledge to colleagues.

Participant feedback collected by Loyola following each session indicated that knowledge sharing sessions were helpful because they provided a space to “learn about the work others are doing in the field,” “to hear stories about the act of teaching,” and more generally to “chat and learn from other colleagues.” Participants found sessions with “concrete trouble-shooting strategies,” workshops on program models, and the best practices of fellow Arts Infusion providers to be most helpful. Many teaching artists reported that sessions on trauma-informed care for youth and mental health were very helpful. Because trauma-informed care is so relevant to Arts Infusion participants, sessions incorporated training on trauma-informed service provision at least once per year. While still ranked highly, the Art Infusion blog and webpage were rated as least useful to grantees on the stakeholder survey, although teaching artists appreciated the variation this added to available spaces for collaboration.

The most highly rated knowledge sharing sessions pertained to the assessment and measurement of social and emotional learning goals. Participants indicated that sessions moderated by the arts assessment consultant (eventually hired for individualized consultations) were particularly helpful to implementing data driven goals and outcomes. Interviewed program providers stated that—through individualized consultations—the art assessment expert helped them develop meaningful rubrics and collect more uniform assessment data. Their only remaining desire was that they receive paid hourly planning time for the time spent with the arts assessment consultant.

This Place
In this place
We realize that we aren’t that different.
We aren’t that misunderstood.
We aren’t that bad.
We aren’t that mean.
We are human.
We lived.
We loved.
We know more in this place.

Poem by Arts Infusion youth participant in Literature for All of Us program.
KEY FINDING 5

The Arts Infusion programs succeeded in exposing at-risk youth to new skills and technologies, providing confidence building experiences that opened their minds to a positive future.

More than eight in ten Arts Infusion stakeholders said the initiative helped expose most or all participating youth to high performing arts education for the very first time. Further, stakeholders rated the high quality technological equipment provided by the Arts Infusion Initiative as a seven out of ten in importance to inspiring Arts Infusion youth. For the many Arts Infusion programs offering digital music and media arts instruction, the Arts Infusion grants enabled them to purchase—often for the first time—modern, professional-grade equipment to which many youth had never been exposed. The high-tech music lab in JTDC used by Northwestern’s Bienen School of Music staff, for example, was the first of its kind at the facility. Similarly, Better Boys Foundation was able to use Arts Infusion funding to purchase enough modern film lab equipment to serve a full 17-person class size, whereas prior labs had only one camera with which to serve all youth.

They show you that there’s more to life than the neighborhood.

~Arts Infusion community youth participant (2015)

Arts Infusion youth participants appreciated the opportunities to learn new skills that having such equipment allowed, including using GarageBand software to create their own music beats, filming personally narrated biographies within one’s own neighborhood, and using computers to develop and animate digital characters. Interviews with youth—particularly those in the detention facility—revealed an understandable preference for hands-on learning activities and arts programming that involved movement and choices as opposed to lecture-style discussions. Through such activities, youths’ exposure to Arts Infusion programming frequently inspired a passion for art of which youth had previously been unaware, increasing their focus on the future and on possible careers in the arts. One JTDC youth said the Arts Infusion program helped him realize “I can do more than I was
told. If I can do this, then I can do other things... You can be more than what society thinks you are.”

Stakeholders also noted several examples of Arts Infusion programming improving youths' academic achievements and outcomes. For example, three students at South Shore High School remained even as it faced demolition to be part of the poetry slam team; they then successfully graduated from high school. One participant at Free Spirit Media doubled his grade point average during his time with the program; and several youth at Better Boys Foundation said their English grades improved as a result of their writing experiences with the program. One participant at Precious Blood Ministry was so inspired by his exposure to theatre and media arts that he graduated from high school, enrolled in college, and minored in arts media because of the Arts Infusion exposure he had received.

**KEY FINDING 6**

**Arts Infusion programs experienced challenges connecting to and engaging youth after their release from detention.**

For several reasons, one of the greatest challenges Arts Infusion programs faced was connecting to and engaging with youth who left JTDC as they returned to their community. Many youth had little idea of how to locate or connect with arts education programs in their community, and many Arts Infusion grantees had no way of knowing when and where to reach youth who were recently released from JTDC, as this information was protected by privacy laws. In addition, several Arts Infusion programs that did not traditionally provide services to at-risk youth had difficulty retaining Arts Infusion youth long term.

To understand how to address these challenges, it is important to highlight the successful connections that were made through the Arts Infusion Initiative. With regard to youth-driven efforts after JTDC release,
those who successfully connected to Arts Infusion programs most often did so through a personal mentoring relationship they had developed while in detention. Mentors included Arts Infusion teaching artists who regularly provided programs or coordinated performances in the detention facility, highly involved youth caseworkers, and arts program directors who worked in JTDC but also directed a community based program. For example, the detention facility’s chaplain helped connect numerous JTDC youth to the community based Arts Infusion program he led (Precious Blood Ministry). Other JTDC students involved in Kuumba Lynx were told by the teaching artist about auditions held in the community; upon their release, they tracked down the program (far from their homes) and became part of it. Three Arts Infusion participants involved in JTDC’s Storycatchers Theatre sought out and joined its newly formed community-based ensemble upon release, because of the connections to staff and inspirational arts experiences they enjoyed before release.

Beyond the value of human connections, youth who engaged with arts programs after detention release had been inspired by the arts programming itself and the information available to them before their release. Several young men were so excited to continue their relationship with the arts programs, they returned after JTDC release to become interns or teaching artists. Given that successful connections involve the provision of information about arts programs, members of the Arts Infusion Steering Committee worked in collaboration with youth for more than a year to develop a visually stimulating digital DRIVE, now available on the Internet at www.getdrive.org, to help youth connect to arts programs in the community. Although each JTDC youth should now receive a copy of the DRIVE (as a flash drive) upon release, it appears more likely the effort’s success will depend upon its incorporation into a social media platform, such as Facebook and Twitter, or into a cell phone app.

Finally, Arts Infusion programs had a range of experience in working with formerly justice-involved or detained youth and used a variety of mechanisms for engaging and retaining such youth. In addition to the inspirational quality of teaching artist and activities, the most successful approach appears to have been stipends for arts apprenticeships or employment in arts-focused summer jobs.

Poem by Arts Infusion youth participant in Literature for All of Us program.
KEY FINDING 7

Arts Infusion programs served nearly 750 at-risk youth in 2014-15 at an average cost of $700 per teen; JTDC based programs cost $600 per teen, and community based programs cost $750 per teen.

To calculate the average cost of Arts Infusion programming per youth served in 2014-15, the Arts Infusion grant money distributed was divided by the number of youth served during that time, with results rounded for efficient presentation. Across all Arts Infusion programs, including both JTDC and community based organizations, the average cost per youth served was $700 ($506,795 in grants divided by 742 youth served). For this amount, Arts Infusion youth received an average of 20 weeks of programming. For JTDC based Arts Infusion programs, the average cost per youth served was $600 ($211,795 in grants divided by 351 youth served). For community based Arts Infusion programs, the average cost per youth served was $750 ($295,000 in grants divided by 391 youth served).

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PROMISING PRACTICES

Several recommendations for promising practices can be drawn from the Arts Infusion Initiative’s emergent model evaluation.

DEVELOPING PROGRAM CONTENT

Arts education programs designed to improve youths’ social and emotional development should be grounded in a rigorous set of criteria (e.g., well-conceived unit plans; engaging teaching artists; routine assessments of student progress) and—in keeping with the principles of creative youth development—incorporate hands-on learning activities that give youth a voice and a choice of modes for self-expression (Hirzy 2011; Montgomery in press). Youth responded most positively to arts programs of any genre that engaged them physically and mentally; movement-related activities include opportunities to act out stories, standing during poetry readings and music recordings, and dancing.

Arts Infusion youth also appreciated and looked forward to the programs’ culminating performances (e.g., poetry slams, music listening parties, theatrical performances) and opportunities to display their creative works (e.g., arts gallery presentation, literary anthology) for family, friends, and other supporters—though encouraging these may necessitate offering safe transportation to youth.

Digital music equipment provided through the Arts Infusion Initiative to Precious Blood Ministry.
It may also be constructive for programs to develop flexibility in the structure of their lesson plans so that a sequential progression of skills instruction and opportunities can be provided to youth whose attendance is more stable, while making more limited “single-lesson” or “individual mentoring” sessions available to youth who may attend only one or two sessions. Storycatchers Theatre, for example, recently developed a short version of their drama program to more broadly serve the juvenile detainees at JTDC. Arts Infusion programs may also benefit by offering youth more tangible symbols of affirmation and achievement, such as certificates of completion or academic credit, such as that offered by the expanded learning opportunities’ programs in Rhode Island (http://mypasa.org/hub-high-school) and the music programs described in Wolf and Holochwost (2015).

**IMPROVING SYSTEM FITNESS**

Several recommendations emerged for promising practices to improve the knowledge, effectiveness, and resilience of participants—the “system fitness”—in models similar to the Arts Infusion Initiative (Kania, Kramer, and Russell 2014). First, program directors should work to ensure that: 1) teaching artists demonstrate a cultural understanding of youths’ vulnerabilities, artistic knowledge and accomplishments, and approachability to youth; and 2) a respectful, safe space for youths’ creative exploration is created and focuses on activities youth enjoy most. To encourage teaching artist retention, greater attention must be paid to compensating them adequately, including paid hourly planning time to participate in professional development and assessment activities. It is also essential that teaching artists be given opportunities—as they routinely were in the Arts Infusion Initiative—to network and learn about other organizations.

Finally, to support the model’s focus on improving youths’ social and emotional learning, continued professional development opportunities and assessment consultations should be provided, in the ways that emerged as

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**A lot of these kids are what I would call ‘forgotten kids,’ and they are getting a sense of humanity from these [Arts Infusion programs]—that there are human beings out there that care for them. This has lots of positive consequences for their present and future behavior.**

—Arts Infusion JTDC administrator (2015)
most promising for the Arts Infusion Initiative—
quarterly large-group knowledge sharing with informal
breakouts and customized small-group or one-on-one
coaching by a professional development provider (e.g.,
grant writing or fundraising) and assessment consultant
(e.g., rubrics development and refinement) experienced
in the needs of smaller community arts programs. These
opportunities are important because they offer teaching
artists the chance to vent concerns, ask questions,
and develop their program and services without direct
intervention from funders.

CONNECTING AND ENGAGING
YOUTH

Given the importance of relationships in all aspects
of the initiative’s success, it is critical that a human
element be involved in helping youth connect to and
engage with arts programming in their community.
One suggestion is the creation of a third party “arts
engagement specialist” who is unconnected from the
justice system but uniquely positioned to interact with
detention and arts program staff and youth—both
behind detention walls and in the community. Some
programs (e.g., ABJ-Ray of Hope Center of the Arts,
Precious Blood/Peace and Education) have this type of
connection in place, but a role with more system-wide
support is needed. Further, programs could attempt to
establish a memorandum of understanding with JTDC
to find out youths’ release and contact information
whenever available. Given the ubiquity of youths’ use
of digital technology and presence on social media
(Pew Research Center 2015), it also appears critical
to expand recruitment and retention efforts using the
most appropriate forms of social media; Facebook
and Twitter may reach the most diverse audiences
(Family and Youth Services Bureau 2014). Distributing
the DRIVE website material via social media and
incorporating it into a cell phone app should prove
promising for increasing arts programs’ connections to
and engagement of at-risk youth.

Finally, it might be useful to consider funding paid arts
apprenticeships for which youth can apply prior to their
release from detention. Such an opportunity would
create a guaranteed source of income for youth upon
release and a safe space for them as they reintegrate
into the community. Also, the establishment of “cultural
exchanges” of teaching artists and youth between
programs in different communities and between those
in JTDC and the community would help teaching
artists establish connections to youth (before and
after release) and expose and inspire youth in different
communities to new forms of art.

In conclusion, the fields of education, juvenile justice,
and family and youth services can benefit tremendously
from the emergent approaches embodied in the Arts
Infusion Initiative and from the efforts of the many
Arts Infusion stakeholders, teaching artists, and youth.
As one participating program director so aptly said,
“Art is a tool for healing and a means for youth to
tell their stories, connect with each other, and build
community trust,” indicating why such programs are
critical to communities’ strategies for intervening with
at-risk youth moving forward.
REFERENCES


EVALUATION METHODS

From April to August 2015, the Urban Institute, in consultation with the National Guild for Community Arts Education, conducted a mixed-method evaluation of the Arts Infusion Initiative that drew on multiple, quantitative and qualitative sources. (For a detailed description of the evaluation methods, see the full report available at www.urban.org). Research questions focused on determining the extent of social and emotional improvement in youth participants; facilitators of promising Arts Infusion practices; the value of knowledge sharing sessions and assessment consultations to stakeholders; the level of collaboration across stakeholders; and program costs. To address these questions, analyses drew on the following sources:

1. Five years of Arts Infusion teaching unit plans for infusing social and emotional skills instruction, proposals and final reports, assessments of youths’ social and emotional progress, and knowledge sharing activities, attendance, and participant feedback;
2. Quantitative analysis of the initiative’s 2014–15 social and emotional youth assessment data (n=320);
3. More than six dozen (n=73) interviews and focus groups with Arts Infusion instructors, program directors, youth participants, and community stakeholders;
4. An online survey assessing stakeholders’ (n=45) perceptions of the initiative, conducted by Urban during the evaluation period; and
5. Observations of more than a dozen Arts Infusion classes, events, and performances, as well as artwork (music, poetry, dance, theatre, and visual art) produced by teen and young participants.

Notes: Pre- and post-participation youth assessments were conducted by teaching artists in 2014-15 using a variety of rubrics which Urban’s researchers matched to the four core social and emotional learning goals of the initiative. Because youth were not randomly assigned to Arts Infusion participation and no comparison group data was available, causal attributions cannot be made; however, significant differences and associations are noted.

STATEMENT OF INDEPENDENCE

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