

Follow us:
Site Search:

reaching and teaching at-risk youth

Share / Save    



REACHING AND TEACHING AT-RISK YOUTH

KATE TYKOCKI

THURSDAY APRIL 26th, 2012

A photojournalist by training Jeana-Dee Allen Rogers left Lansing after college to work at newspapers around the state. “It was an extremely dark time in my life. I photographed a lot of crime – homicide, suicide, fire – and in that whole period of that time, I would say 80 percent of the violent crimes I documented were committed by [young people] 15- to 25-years-old,” shared Allen Rogers. “I often asked myself what if these kids had been given greater access to resources. What if they felt more connected to their community by taking pictures or creating art or just having these resources where they could come together?”



Allen Rogers is back in Lansing, but now as Outreach Coordinator at REACH Studio Art Center. Before then she was volunteering at a local middle school and was saddened by the lack of arts education for students. “They would have art class be braiding little bits of string together. That just really is a shame because the arts can teach so much,” said Allen Rogers. “There’s history involved in creating art. So it’s not just that you’re creating something with your hands. You’re looking at what you can create above and beyond yourself that can connect you as a human being to the rest of the world through your creation.”

REACH is a studio art center located in REO Town, an area of Lansing just south of Michigan’s Capital Building, where the average per capital income is \$17,158 and more than 40 percent of the residents have an income at or below 2 percent of the poverty level. REACH offers art classes, workshops and day camps to local youth and creates special community art projects, such as the mural and sculpture installation directly across the street from the facility.



REACH also offers *Creative Connections* free art sessions where neighborhood children and teens can come together to paint, spin pottery, make music, write and perform plays and express themselves while also having a positive impact in their community. Another program helps high school drop-outs work to earn their GED through their involvement at REACH. In 2010, more than 900 youth participated in programs in REACH’s tiny 1,100 square foot studio. In 2013, the organization will move into a new space in REO Town that will give them up to 7,200 square feet to continue delivering quality arts education to local Lansing youth.



The Arts and Achievement in At-Risk Youth study released in March 2012 by the National Endowment for the Arts found teens and children of low ‘socioeconomic status’ who had a history of in-depth arts involvement showed better academic outcomes, earned better grades and demonstrated higher rates of college enrollment and attainment.

And yet, schools around the state are struggling to provide arts education to students and budgets for field trips are being slashed. REACH is one organization trying to fill this arts gap for youth by working to improve its community while improving the lives of the young people it serves.

“We’re struggling with kids that are homeless, kids that are in foster care, kids whose parents are incarcerated. Just life. There’s a lot of ‘life’ happening. If we can be this one space that encourages them to have a better day, to get away from something, to learn to express their feelings in a different manner and to feel like someone else is struggling too, it builds community and that’s the best thing we can do,” concluded Allen Rogers.



