

Creating Sparks
BCGA Arts Impact Story

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Jeff M. Poulin: BCGA Arts Impact is an audio series telling the stories from members of the Boys and Girls Club of America community about the power of arts, cultural, and creative programs around the world.

Hey there, Jeff here. Rachel has recently been appointed as the Chief Operating Officer at the Boys & Girls Clubs of Wayne County, where they offer a variety of arts programs, specifically Visual Arts. Her demonstrated **leadership commitment** is evident through her interview as she describes the importance of centering **youth voice** in programming to create artwork that can then be highlighted in **culminating experiences**.

Her Club currently participates in the Boys & Girls Clubs of America's National Arts Contests to provide opportunities for youth to be recognized for their talents. Rachel loves engaging new members in the arts and watching them discover their own unique spark as they develop pride in who they are and what they can do in and through the arts. Check it out.

Creative Generation: Can you introduce yourself where you are from and what you do and your club?

Rachel W: Yeah. So, to introduce myself where I'm from in my club, my name is Rachel. I'm the Chief Operating Officer for Boys and Girls Clubs of Wayne County, and we're located in Richmond, Indiana. And we have a couple of clubs that are in smaller towns right outside of that, most of them are hubs in Richmond.

CG: What kinds of arts programs do you lead or work in within your club?

RW: What kinds of art programs that we lead and work with? We have participated in the National Arts Competition. So we put on an art show every winter, really in January. And we have three art instructors, two of which are in our standalone buildings, and one is a traveling art instructor. And she travels between all of the clubs throughout her time, which is really nice.

And they do follow all the categories of the arts competition, so monochromatic drawing, painting, oil, pastels, all of those things. We're looking into getting more into digital arts and dance and things like that. That's what we're trying to move forward on the different levels.

CG: That is strong visual arts, so it's always good to expand. Please tell me a story about your favorite memory in this work.

RW: My favorite memory in this work in general is related to arts. Um, well, my favorite story is we are art instructors at one of our buildings. He does a really good job of making sure there's like a theme for the week, or if there's, you know, a certain awareness month or whatever it may be. He's really adamant and intentional with the themes he chooses. And for Black History Month, he was going over famous historical artists. And there was a Club member we had who normally is kind of all over the place. Not really in the art room that much. He popped his chair down, and he was like, I'm black. I'm proud, I am doing art today. And so that's a favorite story just because it shows that the little things we do get our kids invested and get our kids involved and things they wouldn't normally do because they have that tie in to who they are. So it was nice.

CG: Representation always matters. And then our last one, what impact do you think your program has had on the youth involved?

RW: What impact I think our program has had on the youth involved. I think our program is an outlet for a lot of our members who aren't necessarily able to express themselves freely or who don't really fit in in the other areas, they kind of flocked to our arts program. And that's really where they thrive and where they flourish. And we've had a couple of people get their arts and international competitions, which they weren't expecting. And so it really boosts their confidence. So it's just really nice for them to have a space and for them to be themselves and be confident themselves.

CG: I am an introvert so I'm a musician and that's how my voice is so clearly understood. Well, thank you for your time. Love to hear your story.

Jeff M. Poulin: Thanks for listening to BCGA Arts Impact. This episode was produced by the team at Creative Generation: Katie Rainey, Valerie Killebrew, and Emma Lamberti. The series executive producer is me, Jeff M. Poulin. The cover art is by Bridget Woodbury. Music from Scott Waltz. A special thanks to the series contributors and the staff at Boys and Girls Club of America for their support.