High Expectations for High Quality

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. Tabitha oversees the curriculum and program implementation across the Boys & Girls Clubs of Bloomington. In this interview she speaks about the importance of **youth voices** within accessible **learning environments**. Tabitha's Club has various Visual, Performing and Digital arts, many of which are youth led. They also include a thematic arts program that rotates projects and ends in meaningful **culminating experiences**.

Tabitha believes staff should provide spaces where youth feel a sense of belonging and can build confidence. She sees how the arts can and should provide equity amongst youth. **Artistic instruction** at her Club focuses on **high expectations** that support practice and dedication, which ultimately results in high quality work youth can take pride in. Check it out.

Creative Generation: Can you introduce yourself where you're from and what you do in your club?

Tabitha C: My name is Tabitha Sahni. I'm from the Boys and Girls Club of Bloomington, Indiana. And my role is the Director of Programs.

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

TC: Yep. Our club has several different types of arts programming. And I oversee the curriculum and the implementation across all three of our sites. So we have performing arts that we have a very strong circus program that we have run in the past. We also have a podcasting program that we just started. So I consider that an art. They produce their own video editing skills, things like that. We also have, like your visual arts, a sort of really strong ceramics program that's supported by our local university, some of their professors. We have had an orchestra this week, since COVID. We haven't run some of the programs, but in our

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orchestra, we had a symphony orchestra group from the university that would come in and showcase it with our kids. We also partner with a lot of dance groups. So we have our IU movement exchange. We just did a family event where our kids performed and then their parents had to perform so it was really great. But yeah, it really varies per club. We do themes every week for our programming. So last week was Space Week, and my job is a Club member. So he came home and he had this CD that had an alien on it with a cup thing on it. And he was so proud. He's like, Mom, this is the best art I've ever made. And he was so proud of it. So we do a lot of little stuff like the crafts, arts and crafts, but then we also have a lot of opportunities for kids to perform. And to present we do an art showcase every year. Where can we have the really popular ukulele club? It's just an easy way for our kids to learn an instrument and kind of get them into that. So yeah, it's various

CG: No, no, it sounds like a very very expensive and I haven't heard circus yet

TC: So Circus is a big hit. We do globe globe running where they have these like a big kind of exercise ball, but it's harder. Yeah. And they're like running across the top of it. Jug devil sticks where you like to flip a whole for and then we are also part of the circus program where they learn how to do things like, and the show like they're showmen. It's a great thing. So we have some really great things coming out of that program.

CG: Oh, yeah. The greatest show, man. Yeah. Oh, yeah.

TC: Oh, when that movie came out, yeah, the circus program became cool. I mean, it was always cool. But like, That guy got some street cred for the circus troupe that we have for sure.

CG: So please tell me a story about your favorite memory of this work?

TC: Oh, gosh, um, you know, anytime that we have a performance where kids are performing in front of an audience, like you've seen it at the conference, like it's just like and we were just talking about this of like, when kids get to see themselves in the perspective of the audience almost they're like, they are you know, I don't think most kids are like, I'm this go to singer I'm this go to performer but sometimes the stage is where people find their like homeplace. So that's where they can gain confidence and realize that, like, I'm no different than a lot of the people that I admire, and I see and I'm able to do this work. So specifically, you know, I, a couple years ago, we had a violin program, we had a partnership with a musical arts youth organization and in Bloomington. And so we had a violent instructor who would come twice a week and teach kids the violin. And just the difference that, you know, the kids had that tangible skill that they left with, and that they could showcase to their parents, you know, that was very memorable, just to watch them kind of struggle through learning how to play an instrument. It was free, you know, it was something that we could build into their after school care program wasn't something you know, that's the big thing with Boys and Girls Club for me is that access to accessibility? Yeah, you know, you know, some parents have the ability to, like, I have the ability to pay for my child to participate in music lessons, I can drive him, I have

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flexibility with my schedule, I have the transportation. But you know, at the club, a lot of our families don't have that. And so we're providing equity in these programs that we have. So, you know, the violin program specifically, you know, seeing those kids really become artists become performers through that program, and then to see them with their parents and their parents coming up to me afterwards. It's like, wow, I didn't know you guys actually did like, I thought it was just them playing around, you know, but they actually performed and gained the skill. So that was just a really valuable and memorable thing that keeps happening even though I'm not a musician, I'm not a rare artist and any kind of sense of the word. But I still know the value because I see how it lights some kids up and where they really find their place. Yeah, interesting in the world? No,

CG: no I can, I can hear it in your voice that you do really care.

TC: Yeah, I'm a crier, too. So it's my passion, it's like, you're gonna cry, and people are gonna, it's just part of it. So, I mean, that's, it's the beauty that, again, it's beyond ourselves, and even the whole thing that you talked about with people not really thinking they're an artist or performer, like, we need so much more opportunities to break down that like, even if you do it once a year, you can still be an artist. And so much of what we don't think we are, is really just like other people's perceptions. So like, I, you know, I grew up thinking, I'm not very good at science, I'm not very good at math, and then I'm getting adult and like, I am good at math, like people, I can show people how to do math, but I think it's because you know, of our societies. You know, women are not usually encouraged to go into those. But it's the same thing with sports. Same thing with STEM. Same thing with art, you know, I don't think I'm an artist, mostly probably because I wasn't given the opportunities or didn't feel confident in those opportunities to take advantage of it. So we're trying to break that down so that we can have kids that see themselves in lots of different ways. Exactly.

CG: And thank you for doing that work. Yeah, I can hear it. So

TC: It's rewarding. So it's not like Don't Don't pity me to like all that good work. It's good work. It's good. It's fun.

CG: It is. And then the last question here is, what impact do you think your programs have had on the youth? You kind of talked about it?

TC: Yeah. Yeah, I think the youth that participate in our program, you know, they walk away, proud. And I think that competence, that pride that comes with the work, it brings value to all aspects of their life, I was an athlete, so I can speak like, you know, I always kind of hated that, like, I didn't have good experiences a lot of times with, with coaches and just teams that I was involved in. But that's consistent application of practice and perseverance and then seeing the outcome of your work. I think that is something that is also in the arts that I've seen, that, you know, knowing that you have something that you can be proud of. And it's something that you have worked to gain. I think that just gives the kids those tangible products that they're like,

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Oh, if I did this, then maybe I could do this. And so that opens up those doors for those kids. So I think arts programming specifically in the club, you know, we throw lots of things at the kids and kind of see what sticks. And arts programming is one of those things that is always consistently popular, because they think it's about self expression. It's about like, there's all types of art and you can be you don't have to be one kind of artist. And so I think that I think is the biggest impact for our kids kind of finding who they are in the art space. And then that consistent application of like, just hard work and consistent application of your skills so that you can reach that next level, you know, so

CG: Yeah, all about progress over perfection.

TC: Yeah. Just we don't get enough time to see the progression. Yeah, always thinking about the end product. Oh, yeah. And it's so good to like, I have a friend who is in her class. They started with their first drawing, and then they compared it to their last one. Oh, yeah. Even a few weeks, you can really tell you can totally see it. Yeah. When I was a teacher, the daily grind was hard, right? You don't see the progress. So you step back, and you're like, oh, this gets kids doing stuff, I'm actually teaching things. So that's been I think that's a beautiful concept, too, with the arts, because it's so like, you know, you can say, Oh, this is cute in the beginning. But then, you know, the more that you practice it the different levels it takes for that individual and, and also, like the communities that we are working in are not typically represented. So the fact that we're empowering them to speak their voice, and then we help kind of broadcast their message and their voice in our community. That's, you know, I don't want the only art showcase in the library to be from the art studio that you have to pay for, you know, so I think that's something we've been trying to do like partner with people to make sure that our kids have access to the same opportunities and can get in the same in the same showcase as some of the kids that have, you know, have a lot more privilege and access than then kids in our communities.

CG: Perfect way to end it and thank you for your time.

TC: Anytime you want me to talk about our committee.

CG: Thank you very much. Have a great rest of the conference.

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.

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