The Art of Learning Through Play

BGCA Arts Impact Stories

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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. In this episode, you’ll meet Aaron W. aka “The Problem” from the Boys and Girls Club of America in New Rochelle. In this story, Aaron shares their thoughts on the power of learning environments through play. Aaron loves to see Club members use the arts as an outlet for joy and as a place to hold space for creativity. Check it out.

Creative Generation: Okay, first, can you state your name and spell it first and last?

Aaron: All right. My name is Aaron Williams. I am also known as “the problem”.

CG: Oh, okay. Hi, the problem. Can you tell me a bit about what you deal with at your club? And where are you located?

Aaron: I'm the director of the Boys and Girls Club right now. I oversee, obviously, the club, one site. Obviously, all the programs that go on, I'm actually a club kid that grew up in the club that I'm actually working in right now, which is kind of crazy. And pretty much right now. I'm excited. We're getting a brand new building. So the one I grew up with got torn down last year. And they're in the process of building a new one right now. So it's like the first brand new building in our city for a youth center in over 50 years. So super excited to kind of be leading that charge of this brand new building coming into the town for our communities. That's amazing. And what city uses New Rochelle, New York.

CG: Amazing. That's so cool. It's so cool. Can you tell me a bit about the arts programs that are in your club?

Aaron: Yes, let's start. Basically, I started with arts and crafts, that's more than we do daily. So arts and crafts program, obviously, we're doing a lot of art projects, a lot of Canvas, a lot of painting a lot of drawings, and do some vision boards as well kind of swing that into the arts,

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but we use the swing that over into programming as well. What a lot of kids would do vision boards to kind of kind of map out their path of life. And then also, we have our Java Matters program and lyricism. 101 We didn't do it that much this year, or lyricism, but we definitely do a Java Matters program, where we actually are hosting our third play this year, sort of two years prior to COVID. Obviously, we did the Wiz, which is a spinoff of The Wizard of Oz. And then we did the Lion King, not the like, it was called the different name, but, ya know, an anti anti with a twist meta facts are. Wow, we did anybody twist.

CG: I love that. That sounds amazing. Um, what do you have, like a specific memory that you think of that was like your favorite memory from these arts programs.

Aaron: Um, to be honest, just seeing the kids in a different realm, different aspects of that you don't see him in all the time. So now on stage, mind you, they're rehearsing, they're tired and cranky when they rehearse. And then you see them play and they put on a great performance is like, you know, I play basketball. So sometimes it's like, oh, basketball is cool, you know, you're excited for it. These other kids don't have sports as an outlet. All of them don't. So to see these kids perform, I mean, just to see them as happy when they formally finish and they're so happy. It makes me happy. Pretty much you can see him in a different aspect of life for them. Like seeing them heavies. You know,

CG: That's amazing. It's awesome when you can see them in their element and like in their flow, like it's such a good feeling to know that you're supporting that and cultivating that condition. Yeah, that's definitely amazing. What impact do you think art has on the youth in your clubs,

Aaron: um, big impact this, like I said, they get that they get the act out. These kids have a lot of energy coming from school, where we actually got a program that we're working in the schools right now. They're like the lunchtimes in middle schools. And I'm going to high school as well. And you can see some of the times they can't go or read, it's like during the lunch period, they're in a recess. They're, like, still trapped, they got all this energy that's balled up. So when we get to after school, we want to make sure we, you know, let them release that energy, and obviously, in a positive way. But definitely, like the arts definitely lets them or at least a lot of energy release a talent, a hidden talent that sometimes they don't even know they have. Like I said, we do like a Tik Tok Tuesdays, or Wednesdays kids love obviously, Tik Toks gotta be doing some, but you know, they get to act out, they get to act and get in front of a camera and just, you'll see them dance, you'll see them do scenes or movies and skits. So like I said, the arts are a big, you know, big key in their lives. And it just helps us out in the club daily.

CG: That's amazing. And lastly, because you're an alumni, do you have any memories of arts related programming in your club and how do you think that affected you?

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Aaron: But I got to see my art. I want to say it is more so of a history than art, but like the chess checkers, the learning of it. I was the youngest of five boys. That was raised so he's always in the club. I was a baby. So a lot of times my brother David practices that I can't go on how to stay outside. I started learning, the building manager. He's actually living in the building. He literally taught me how to play all these games. And at first I was like, I want to learn how to play chess is boring. But he taught me the art of chess on how to move and strategy. And I started to enjoy it. And he taught me how to play a bunch of different games. So I'm a gamer. So anybody that comes to the club, I'm going to challenge them in every game. I try not to let the kids win because they took too much trash that they do. So I made sure I beat everybody. But yeah, just the art of just learning. Learning all the games, and really with chess, just the art of just learning it , it was amazing. Then it's like, oh, now like I, you know, I got to try to beat the master. I never beat him in chess.

CG: That's amazing. I mean, learning the strategy and like learning how to move creative, like, yeah, that's such a gift. Yeah. And look where you are right now. That's amazing. Yeah, so yeah, those are all the questions I have. Thank you so much for sharing. I'm going to ask you a question. I do have a clothing brand, right. It's called everything brand. So I'm going to ask you one question. Sure. I gotta answer it. What means everything to you and one word describes what means everything to you.

Aaron: That's hard. Right means everything to me. Joy, Joy. So the funny thing is you're very close to mine. There's no wrong answer here. But mine is happiness is everything. That's my life, quote. Happiness is everything. So he just said joy. I'm like, that's probably the closest to be honest. I've heard of mine. Because a lot of people don't know a family. That's that. So mine is happiness is everything. Yes. So and that's what I quote that I live by. So you say joy, smile and laugh.

CG: Yeah, I mean, do the things that excite you exactly. Happy things that nourish you.

Aaron: Yeah, no, that's positive. Everybody round. Amen.

CG: Thank you so much. You're welcome. Thank you. Yeah.

Jeff M. Poulin: Thanks for listening to BCGA Arts Impact. This episode was produced by the team at Creative Generation: Katie Rainey, Valerie HD 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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