



Artivism: Fall 2018 Final Program Report (Critical Service-Learning: Reincarnation of Jim Crow, a youth-led art exhibit)

NEWARK, NJ





ARTIVISM (A CRITICAL SERVICE-LEARNING PROJECT)

FALL 2018

Report: Final Report - ArtStart 2018
Date: Friday, April 12, 2019
Submitted by: Amanda Ebokosia, CEO - The Gem Project, Inc.
Project Period: October 1, 2018 - December 14, 2018

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ABOUT THE GEM PROJECT, INC.

Since 2006, The Gem Project has serviced the greater Newark, New Jersey area and has provided high quality programming that has enforced leadership and community service amongst school-age youth, adolescent youth, and young adults. We have since evolved and consolidated our programming, offering service-based fellowships between high school and college matriculated students.

The Gem Project works to improve high school to college **student engagement**, while supporting **on-time graduation rates**, through peer-mentoring, life-skill workshops and service-learning initiatives that take on a social justice approach.

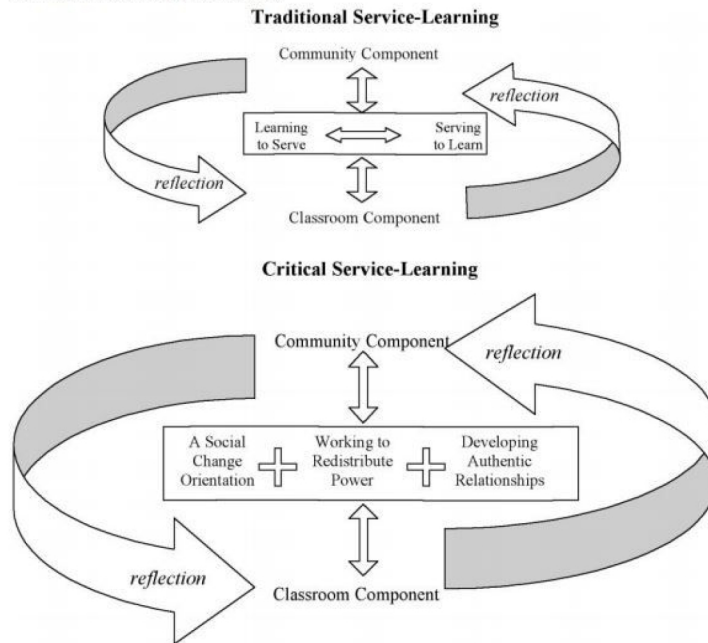
Since its inception, The Gem Project has impacted the lives of over **2000** youth and young adults. Our programs provide youth and young adults with financial awards/scholarships, employment and a supportive cohort community. Through our growing partnerships, we have also been able to provide student travel opportunities, stipends, free test preparation, and access to diverse employment. The Gem Project has been honored and/or recognized by **The White House (Barack Obama Administration), Forbes Magazine, Forbes.com, News12 New Jersey, National Journal, The Atlantic Media, Black Enterprise.com, GOOD magazine, NJ.com, Rutgers Magazine and others.**

OUR SERVICE-LEARNING APPROACH

Traditional practices of service-learning takes one through a 5-step process of investigation, preparation, action, reflection, and demonstration. Through this 5-step process, learning typically happens in a classroom setting and through the actual service work itself (we veer away from the traditional approach).



Figure 1.
Traditional vs. Critical Service-Learning



(Figure 1. Source: Mitchell, 2008)

Little is done to address key underlying issues, which often play a huge part in any number of identified social issues within a community.

By taking the time to also explore and dissect identity, race, privilege, policy, systemic barriers and power, we move toward a critical approach. Through the lens of social justice, our fellows are more equipped in addressing societal issues in a more inclusive and meaningful way.

OUR PROGRAMS

Taking place at local youth centers and school-based afterschool programs, The Gem Project provides **36 weeks** of after school programming during the school year and in the summer, **6-7 weeks** of programming, through our fellowship programs between high school and college students.

Summer Programming

In partnership with select community-based centers, The Gem Project, employs and supports youth between ages 14-24 on a service-learning initiative, which explores a community issue through a social justice approach.

Fellows will:

- Develop a social change orientation: call-to-action
- Examine systemic issues and policies that directly impact said issues
- Create their own policy recommendations for effective change

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- Strengthen youth voice and responsibility, while working alongside and not for program staff, fellows, and other stakeholders.

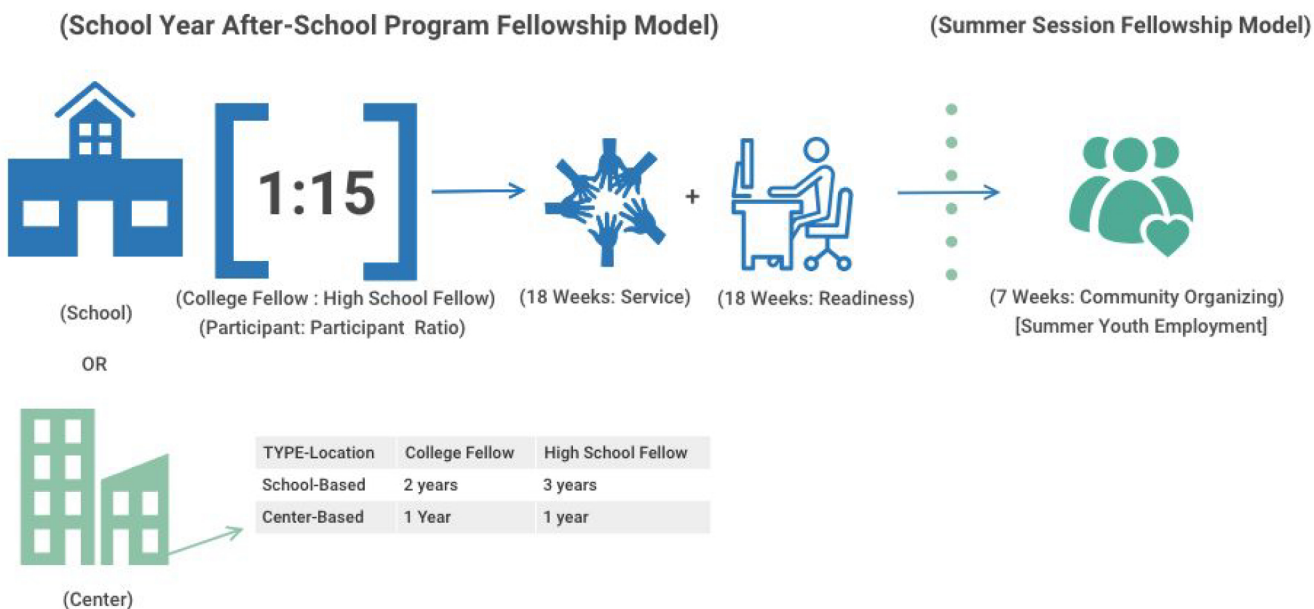
School Year Programming

Our school year programming strives to have fellows meet and/or understand the needs of the community that they are planning to serve. Participants will develop a service-learning initiative within 18 consecutive weeks of the school year. The next 18 weeks afterward for a total of 36 weeks, will be dedicated to cultivating life skills that are focused on financial literacy, time-management, early college awareness, post-secondary higher education or trade preparatory programs, and career exploration readiness programs.

QUICK FACTS

- **220 Hours** | All fellows benefit from dedicated **service-based** work and/or hours in a single year, attached to a stipend or employment.
 - 96-112 hours - Summer program session
 - 66-108 hours - Fall/Winter program sessions
- **40 Hours** | Dedicated hours of professional development for fellows during the summer session of programming and weekly, during spring sessions. Professional development includes 1:1 coaching and supervision to assess personal and professional goals. During the spring session, fellows participate in mock interviews with recruiters from actual employers and develop digital portfolios.
- **100%** of our senior high school fellows have been admitted and have plans to attend an accredited University or College.
- **All** of our fellows have shown demonstrated financial need, when reporting to our program partners.
- **Our fellows** involved in our summer youth employment programs in partnership with the City of Newark have been matched with employment, beyond their summer assignment with us as Gem Project Fellows, Community Organizers, and/or Facilitators with **program partners** or external employers.

OUR MODEL



ABOUT ARTIVISM, THE GEM PROJECT'S ARTSTART FUNDED PROJECT

Period: October 1, 2018- December 14, 2018

Over the course of 11 weeks, Newark High School students from all across the city convened at the Rutgers University Paul Robeson Galleries to take part in The Gem Project critical service-learning initiatives, which allowed fellows to explore the complexities of race, privilege, class, gender and zero tolerance policies and its influence within their community.

As a cohort, fellows decided on an social issue that they would like to address, through their youth-led art exhibit, displaying 2-D and 3-D installations. The chosen issues were:

Mass Incarceration as it leads to homelessness and a smaller cohort worked on **gentrification**. The exhibit was titled: **The Reincarnation of Jim Crow**.

High School Fellows /Exhibiting Artists: Danae Brooks (Newark Collegiate Academy); Tatiana Florexil (Saint Vincent Academy); Inayah Folch (North Star Academy); Victoria Hoegah (West Side High School); Ayoko Kessouagni (American History High School); Erica Mends (Malcolm X).



Shabazz High School); Kiara Page (Barringer High School); Angelica Pimentel (American History High School); Andrea Samaniego (Technology High School); and Kendra Sanchez (Arts High School).

Educators/Collaborators: The project brought the participation and support of the Founder and CEO of The Gem Project, **Amanda Ebokosia**, art educators/co-curators **Nadine LaFond** and **BaJa Ukweli**, including **Rutgers University Paul Robeson Galleries** and **Express Newark**. It is made possible in part by Newark Arts Council's ArtStart 2018 grant, which is funded by **Prudential Foundation, M&T Bank, Bank of America, Turrell Fund, New Jersey State Council on the Arts**, and the **Geraldine R. Dodge Foundation**.

The ArtStart Grant: \$2,600 | ***Overall Project Cost:** \$10,640.00 | **Value:** \$17,000-\$20,000.00
*** In-kind support** - director value: (\$6,000)

PARTNERS AND/OR SUPPORTERS

Newark Arts - The Gem Project's fall 2018 programming was funded as an ArtStart 2018 grant recipient.

Lakeland Bank - We received a generous donation from Lakeland Bank to continue our fellowship programs for youth and young adults. The funding will go toward our "Change Agent Today," campaign which is in support of sustaining our youth and young adult programs.

Jersey Cares - Jersey Cares provided our Gem Project fellows with an opportunity to also become Jersey Cares fellows, while in our program. Fellows were given professional development opportunities to support their growth, through various workshops upon conclusion of our fall fellowship program. All fellows earned stipends at the conclusion of their service by doing additional service hours, outside of the 60-70 hours, contributed hours across the 11 weeks.

Rutgers University's Paul Robeson Galleries - Through the support of the former Associate Director of Paul Robeson Galleries at Express Newark, Caren Choi, we were provided space to facilitate our program across the 11 weeks.

Kite+Key, The Rutgers Tech Store - Under the leadership of Randall Isaac and his team, each fellow received welcome care packages to start their 11 week journey with us in program.

KelCHer Hub and KelCHer Visuals - The KelCHer Hub located at 220 Washington Street, Suite 201, Newark, New Jersey hosted our fellows' youth-led art exhibit at their venue and provided event photography and video.

GOALS

PWBAT (Participants will be able to),

1. PWBAT identify social issues and themes through an array of visual artwork both contemporary and historical. Activist artists can include any artist from local from Newark and widely known artists (ie. Shepard Fairey, Jean-Michel Basquiat, Banksy, etc.).
2. PWBAT think critically about social issues and how it informs self-expression through visual art on a local to global scale.
3. PWBAT create their own visual artwork influenced by an activist artist of their choice or original piece.
4. PWBAT understand the basic structure of a policy and discover how it relates to chosen social issues, displayed through art.
5. PWBAT create their own recommendations on their chosen policies to interpret at their art showcase.
6. PWBAT have a deeper sense of identity, social emotional competencies, and understanding of art activism.

OUTCOMES

Within this 11-week program, our Gem Project fellows did accomplish the following goals:

1. Engage with activist artists and work on visual art projects that addressed a social issue by leading art educators from Newark, NJ.
2. Learn how policies impact their chosen social issue, while using art to inform and educate a community at-large.
3. Offer their own policy recommendations, through their artist statements at a local youth-led art exhibit.

4. Organize as a cohort their own call to action, through the arts and discuss their own recommendations for social change.
5. Be published: New Jersey Stage Magazine published an article about their student-led exhibit December 10, 2018, over 50 registered.
6. Participate in leadership programs at Harvard University - All Expenses Paid, which garnered **300 participants** from across the country. 2 Fellows earned scholarships and attended: Ayoko, age 16 and Andrea, age 18.
7. Engage with local guest facilitators, which included: Dr. Shana Russell, senior program manager of States of Incarceration and a local musician (BLKBRD), who specializes in socially conscious music.
8. Community Engagement: High School fellows were able to speak with individuals who are currently incarcerated, while receiving feedback on their artwork from them to authentically complete their project.



SUCCESS STORIES

Upon all the work that our high school fellows achieved and experienced, here are selected success stories from Fall 2018:

Hosting & Moderating Discussions: Throughout the 11 weeks, fellows worked to examine policy and interrogate issues on race, identity, privilege, class, marginalized populations and societal inequities. Upon conclusion of completing their art pieces they planned their own youth-led art exhibit, which incorporated an engaging conversation that fellows facilitated with

senior program manager Shana Russell of States of Incarceration. In addition, included a moderated artist talk by high school fellows, with the audience. Hosts were Erica Mends, junior at Malcolm X. Shabazz High School, and Andrea Samaniego, senior at Technology High School. The moderator of the artist talk was Ayoko Kessouagni, junior at American History High School.

Invitation: Harvard Leadership Conference: High School fellows Ayoko Kessouagni and Andrea Samaniego were accepted into a dual scholarship provided by Harvard Undergraduate Women in Business and The Gem Project to attend Harvard's Young Women in Business and Leadership conference. The dual scholarship covered the meals, classes, supplies, workshops and their admission ticket. The Gem Project also provided lodging, transportation, and all meals. Fellows earned valuable next steps from industry leaders about their career trajectory and learned from professionals within the art world, which included fashion editor Aya Kanai. Fellows engaged in an innovation challenge and pitch, while also speaking up about their interests before an audience. It has led to possible career and summer opportunities.

Access: Through pre/post surveys fellows have commented that they have earned money for college as a result of speaking about their experiences with activism, through our program. One anonymous fellow remarks unedited, "I have a Raise Me account at school where colleges give me micro scholarships according to anything required to graduate high school. So I placed the link to my artwork and a brief summary about the GEM project underneath a provided slot that said Art/ Media. Then I got money from a college I might apply to in future. Recently, I filled a form that asked for a significant community and volunteer activity which I participated in including my leadership role and the estimated number of hours I participated in each activity. All this wouldn't have happened if not for the G.E.M. project" Upon conclusion from our fellows' participation at the conference at Harvard University, Andrea followed up with current students who volunteered to connect as mentors, as she shared similar degree interests as them.

Connection: All youth were not recruited by artistic ability. They were presented with an opportunity to engage and create meaningful change. Through the support of our art educators, they worked alongside our fellows to go over techniques. One child writes anonymously through survey, "I feel more strongly about using art in my career. I also got linked to the opportunity at Jersey Cares which also gives me a stipend."

Acknowledging Marginalized Communities: The most memorable experience that all fellows vocalized was when they spoke with someone as a class through 2-way video conference, who was currently incarcerated. It was an opportunity to ask questions and listen to first-hand accounts to reflect on what they learned regarding policies, which have supported the rise of mass incarceration. It also allowed them to come to terms with any assumptions they may have had, before the completion of their art work. Through this experience, many fellows felt more

compelled to advocate, share stories, and provide policy recommendations through their artist statements (see transcripts section).

Selected Participant Post-Program Survey Responses:

- "... This program influenced my life by making me be aware of what is happening in my surroundings. Also, to notify me how to act in a situation that I feel I am stuck in." - Andrea S., 18, Technology High School Student
- "...This program (The Gem Project Artivism) will help you make connections with different types of people." -Kiara P., 18, Barringer High School

ON THE SERVICE PROJECT - 4.13/5.0



DEMOGRAPHICS

Youth identified themselves as the following, in their own words:

- 25.0% - Afro-Latina - Female
- 12.5% - Hispanic - Female
- 62.5% - African American/Black - Female
- 62.5% - Age 15-16
- 37.5% - Age 17-18

Selected: Advice on improvements from fellows:

- "I think the program is okay for me. How Ba'Ja, Nadine and Miss Amanda explain topics like social injustice and identity to us is great since they always leave us with a question to think about every time."
- "I liked the combined classes and hope we do that more and also would like to get to know both mentors in the workshops."
- "I believe that the program could be improved for me and other participants if more influential relatable people come in to speak to us."
- "Maybe offer Saturdays in case during the week doesn't work out due to school work."
- "I would encourage the continuation of checking how everyone's day went because it really helps a lot."

Select Anonymous Commentary for Feedback & Post Assessment:

- "...The Gem Project taught me how to wisely utilize any privileges we have, without pushing other people out which is a great lesson I learned..."
- "...I also learned how to be able to work peacefully with others in respect to our difference..."
- "...I learned about the social issues that were occurring in the community that I wasn't even aware of. What caught my attention the most is when we talked about incarceration. I was surprised with how much money was invested for a student to be in prison rather than having an education to pursue a career in the future..."
- "...they gave us the opportunity to learn more about important problems in the world..."
- "...Through the program, I was able to speak about a social justice issue (mass incarceration) at a group interview. If not for the program, I wouldn't know what to say at that moment..."
- "...I would encourage the continuation of checking how everyone's day went because it really helps a lot..."

Transcripts of select video clips, during program: Review fellows' responses below from when they spoke with someone who is currently incarcerated over video, while getting feedback from them to guide their completion of artwork.

([Video](https://bit.ly/2D43ID6) / link: <https://bit.ly/2D43ID6>) - Angelica, American History High School

Transcript:

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"My name is Angelica and I am from American History High School and I am a junior. I am a part of The Gem Project. Today I spoke with someone who is currently incarcerated and it was really different. My expectations were different. It was nice to see that not everyone who is incarcerated is intimidating. Speaking with this person, you can see he had a lot of potential to put out in the world, if he was not incarcerated.



The whole stereotype about people who get locked up is not true. Everybody is different."

(Video/ link: <https://bit.ly/2ZbsISu>) - Erica, Malcolm X. Shabazz High School

Transcript:



"Hi. My name is Erica Mends and I am a junior at Malcolm X. Shabazz High School. Today at The Gem Project we spoke with a guy who is actually incarcerated. What really made me sad was when he talked about getting paid 10 cents to an hour for work. Come to think of it, it is really sad because I can't imagine how someone can be paid that much for working. In his particular situation, he has done nothing wrong to be there. I know it hurts a little and is so sad but it really moved me. I feel like there just taking away his rights. No matter what he says, he will not get out. Once he is there, he has to wait for the 5 years to be over. It is really sad. I feel like no one is paying attention to it because their voices are not heard. I hope and pray that everything gets better. Thank you."

(Video/ link: <https://bit.ly/2Z4ZMvs>) - Ayoko K., 16, American History High School



Transcript:

"Hello, my name is Ayoko Kessouagni and I go to American History High School. I am a junior and I am part of The Gem Project. We are currently doing Art Activism and today I got to meet someone who is incarcerated. He got the chance to understand our artwork and see what we were doing and give us feedback on it. He was someone you would have never thought would be imprisoned. The fact that he was---was heartbreaking and at the same time, it made me see what it was like to be incarcerated."



(Video/ link: <https://bit.ly/2UqUyLE>) - Tatiana F., 16, Saint Vincent Academy

Transcript:



"Hi, my name is Tatiana and I go to Saint Vincent Academy. I am a part of the Gem Project Art Activism project and today we just met an incarcerated man. It was special because he seemed like a regular man. It kind of just felt like we were speaking with a regular guy. He was so calm

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about everything. You would not really know his situation until he actually told you. He is in jail for no reason and my piece kind of relates to him especially because it shows that slavery and mass incarceration are kind of like the same thing. He basically gets no contact with his family and all resources are limited for him. That type of environment should not be placed on someone who did not do anything wrong. I hope that my piece gets across to people. He kind of lit up when I showed him my piece and I felt special. Yeah, so that makes me want to work twice as hard.”

NEWS ABOUT THE PROJECT

(MAGAZINE): “New Jersey Stage Magazine: Youth-led Art Exhibit Tackles Mass Incarceration in New Jersey”

<https://www.newjerseystage.com/articles/2018/12/10/youth-led-art-exhibit-tackles-mass-incarceration-in-new-jersey/>

MEDIA

- (Video - <https://bit.ly/2lpHLSl>) Express Newark - Interviews Founder about ArtStart Funded Project
- (Video - <https://bit.ly/2UaQ5HU>) Recap of culminating event (Youth-Led Art Exhibit) - Youth-Led Art Exhibit.
- Photos of Culminating Event - <http://thegemproject.org> (Galleries - Section)

SELECTED PHOTOS (THEGEMPROJECT.ORG)

REFERENCE

FIG.1-

Mitchell, T. 2008. Tradition vs. critical service-learning Engaging the literature to differentiate two models. Michigan Journal of Community Learning, 14(2): 50–65.

