Prioritizing Community-Building through the Arts: An Exploratory Study of Community-Based Arts Initiatives in Cape Town and Kigali

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Organizations Consulted

Africa Arts
Cape Town, South Africa
The Amy Foundation
Cape Town, South Africa
ekhaya ekasi
Klipsloha, Cape Town, South Africa
Ikhaya-Kulture “Home” Garden
Klipsloha, Cape Town, South Africa
Imanthi Educare Centre
Klipsloha, Cape Town, South Africa
Philipli Music Project
Philips, Cape Town, South Africa
Nyamarombo Women’s Center
Nyamo, Rwanda
Sano Boi & At
Kaproo, Kigali, Rwanda
Thokozani Together
Klipsloha, Cape Town, South Africa
Udondo South Africa
Cape Town, South Africa

The Project

By interacting with other arts nonprofits in addition to Imvula, I learned how the community works to provide meaningful opportunities for its members. During Apartheid rule, persons identified as black were forcibly removed from their homes near the City center and taken to the outskirts of Cape Town, now known as the Townships. Entire families were uprooted from neighborhoods they had known for generations and forced to rebuild a sense of safety and security within overcrowded and poorly made shacks. Nearly 50% of those living in the Townships are unemployed, and the majority of those who are lucky enough to have a job must take an expensive and long bus ride into the City every day without jobs, many young people resort to gang behavior to fill their days, often leading to increased violence and a culture of fear.

When talking with one of the Imvula teachers, Sibu, he told me that the biggest benefit of music education is how it teaches discipline. Many members of society question the value of teaching children music, as seen by a governmental tradition in the U.S. of underfunding the arts. From my research, I read studies connecting arts education to decreased violence, and Sibu's discussion of discipline takes this even further. By committing to an instrument, musicians learn self-discipline by practicing it and persevering to always play better. The environment of the music classroom also sets high expectations and requires students to work collaboratively towards a similar goal.

Connections

The most helpful course I took in preparation for my trip was SW 683, Evaluation in Social Work. Under the guidance of Professor Katie Doyle, I learned what aspects to consider when evaluating an organization, skills that directly transferred to my Global Independent Study. Cultivating relationships with organizations allows for further insight into their impact and future goals.

Takeaways

1. As a social worker, my duty is not to tell communities how to change; my duty is to amplify their voices. When I arrived in Cape Town, my question was: “Why does race determine access to the arts?” Now, my call to action is: “Celebrate musicians of color and support community initiatives.”

2. Allow yourself to be vulnerable. The organizations I worked with showed me incredible trust and openness and it is important to return the sentiment. The best conversations I had while traveling were not planned and were only possible through mutual respect and vulnerability.

3. Remember that poverty does not define a human or their community. As we are sure to work with communities that are diverse in more ways than one, it’s essential to not get caught up making certain assumptions based on one facet of someone’s experience.

Acknowledgements

Support for this project comes from the International Institute, the Alumni Board of Governors, and the Global Independent Study office.

Special thanks to Silvia Nyamirambo, my contact on the ground in Cape Town, Dr. Larry Garie as the advisor for this project, to Paula Marques for her support of this project, and to my friends and family who helped to make this possible.