

# Kid City Evaluation:

## *Findings Related to Grant Goals*

### Kid City evaluation overview

Kid City is a partnership between the City of Maplewood Parks and Recreation (Maplewood) and Z Puppets Rosenschnoz (Z Puppets). Z Puppets is a Minneapolis-based theater and puppet company. With funding from the Minnesota State Arts Board (MSAB), Kid City brings the people of Maplewood together through theater, puppetry, and interactive art installations. Kid City's primary goals of the grant are:

- Facilitate cross-cultural collaboration and arts participation through multidisciplinary arts programming
- Teach socially relevant application of art skills using the power of playfulness

This evaluation summary highlights the ways in which Kid City accomplished these goals during its grant period (September 2015 – August 2016). To conduct this evaluation, we observed Kid City's weeklong brainstorm theater program called Kid Council (using the Youth Quality Program Assessment (YPQA) tool<sup>1</sup>), administered paper surveys at Kid City events, and conducted two focus groups – one with the Kid City staff and artist team, and another with the Kid City youth videographers. Each of these evaluation activities has its own write-up of findings; this document, on the other hand, synthesizes findings from multiple evaluation activities to provide an overall picture of how Kid City achieved its goals.

### Goal 1: Facilitate cross-cultural collaboration and arts participation through multidisciplinary arts programming

#### Racially diverse participation

Kid City engaged racially diverse participants in its events and programs. Event participants who took the survey identified as: White (58%), African or African American (25%), East Asian or Southeast Asian (17%), and Latino (13%) (compared to Maplewood's overall racial make-up of: 76% White, 9% African American, 16% Asian, and 6% Latino<sup>2</sup>). In our YPQA observations of Kid Council and in our focus group with the youth videographers, we identified 2-4 perceived racial groups, and this was confirmed by Kid City's estimates of the number of racial groups present for these programs.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The Youth Program Quality Assessment (YPQA) is a validated instrument designed to measure the quality of youth programs

<sup>2</sup> From the 2014 American Community Survey

<sup>3</sup> This evaluation intended to use the Maplewood Parks & Recreation program data to track racial make-up of Kid City programs, but these data were unavailable for this grant period.

## Cross-cultural engagement, awareness, and collaboration

Survey respondents (who took the survey at Kid City events) offered the following insights about Kid City's cross-cultural focus:

- About 9 in 10 survey respondents (88%) said they saw themselves or their culture at the Kid City event they attended
- More than 8 in 10 survey respondents (85%) said they have a better understanding of cultures in Maplewood because they attended the Kid City event
- Almost 7 in 10 survey respondents (67%) said that they interacted with someone of a different race at the Kid City event

We measured the level of collaboration during each Kid Council session through our YPQA observations. Because Kid Council youth were of various racial groups, these observations allowed us to measure cross-cultural collaboration (with race as a proxy for "culture") within Kid Council. Each session received the maximum rating (ratings are on a 1-5 scale, with 5 being the highest). These ratings indicate that Kid City was effective at providing collaborative opportunities (as identified by the YPQA) for youth of different racial backgrounds to:

- Work cooperatively on a team
- Participate in activities with interdependent roles
- Work toward a shared goal

## Goal 2: Teach socially relevant application of art skills using the power of playfulness

There were various art skills taught to youth through Kid City. Kid Council youth learned to facilitate brainstorm theater, youth videographers learned to make documentaries, and comedy skills were taught to elementary-aged children in Kid City's Laugh Labs programming. We learned about Kid City's effectiveness at achieving this second goal through observations of Kid Council and a focus group with youth videographers. We did not perform evaluation activities of the Laugh Labs program due to scheduling restrictions.

### Effective at teaching brainstorm theater

In our YPQA observations of Kid Council sessions, we assessed the effectiveness with which art skills were taught by focusing on the following measures: active engagement of youth participants, effective teaching methods for skill-building, and encouragement given to youth. Each session received the maximum rating for active engagement and skill building (with an overall rating of 5), and received almost the maximum rating for encouragement (with an overall rating of 4.6). This indicates that Kid City was largely effective at teaching brainstorm theater during Kid Council.

**Brainstorm theater** is a theater form that uses audience interaction and feedback to pose solutions to community problems. Brainstorm theater involves writing short scenes with an injustice, and performing these scenes for audiences. Audience members are asked for their ideas of how characters in the scene can correct the injustice, and are then asked to play that character and act out their idea to achieve justice. Brainstorm theater results in audience members feeling empowered to take part in correcting injustice in their communities while also brainstorming multiple potential solutions to a community problem.

## Film skills with a community focus

The Kid City youth videographers were tasked with making a series of short documentaries (1-3 minutes) throughout their time with Kid City, as well as a longer documentary at the end of the program. When asked about the most important skills they learned, youth videographers primarily mentioned technical film skills:

- Editing (3 participants)
- Cinematography (2 participants)
- Interviewing and speaking skills (2 participants)
- Maplewood events and resources, such as parks and trails (1 participant)

When asked about their favorite assignment, most youth videographers mentioned aspects of learning about how to bring people in their communities, including: interviewing city leadership about municipal problems, interviewing friends about barriers to city residents building relationships with each other, and creating a short documentary about the positive aspects of their community. Youth videographers saw much importance in learning technical film-making skills, and identified the community aspects of their work as meaningful for them personally. These findings indicate that Kid City was successful at teaching socially relevant applications of film skills.

## Summary and moving forward

The findings from these evaluation activities indicate that Kid City accomplished its two primary goals (as identified in their grant application). Some limitations should be noted, including the small number of survey respondents and the lack of evaluation activities with Laugh Labs participants, and these limitations should be addressed in subsequent evaluation efforts. Despite these limitations, however, Wilder Research is confident in the validity of this evaluation and its findings; Kid City achieved its goals during its first year of implementation.

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