

Youth initiate their own action for a better Portland! - April 12, 2011

Portland's youth are making it happen for themselves through an \$8,000 grant from the BPS Youth Action Grants Program. On March 18, 2011, eleven projects for youth 21 and under were awarded funding for proposals that encourage girls to study math and science, hold a bi-lingual reading competition and address issues of institutionalized racism, among others.

Supported by the BPS Youth Planning Program, PCC Students4Giving, the Multnomah Youth Commission, the Office of Mayor Sam Adams and Mercy Corps Global Citizen Corps, the Youth Action Grants encourage new and creative youth-designed and youth-led projects, particularly those which engage large numbers of youth, broaden youth skills, and involve new youth leadership. The 11 projects awarded prioritize any one of six articles in Our Bill of Rights: Children + Youth in order to help make it a reality for the youth of Portland.

In the 2011 grant cycle, Miranda Zook, 17, of East Portland, was awarded \$1,000 to accomplish her action proposal. With the help of local non-profit Free Arts NW, she will work with the Youth On A Mission Thrift Store to create a mural to attract attention and support to the local business. The Youth On A Mission Thrift Store, located at 11923 N.E. Halsey St. sells second-hand goods to fund programs that teach life skills and provide services to youth who have been through the juvenile justice system in Multnomah County. The store also employs youth who have experienced the justice system, giving them the opportunity to learn business and sales operations, while providing a space for them to express themselves. The mural project draws on art therapy as a tool towards building skills for success in youth who are often forgotten.

"I've been doing bad things all my life. And I wanted to flip that around and do some positive things for the community," shared a youth who works at the thrift store. The hope is that the store front mural will not only beautify the East Portland community they live in, it will also increase profits which allows the store to employ and serve more youth who struggle through the justice system.

This spring, Miranda's project brings together community groups like the East Portland Action Plan, Free Arts NW, the Multnomah County Department of Juvenile Justice, and local business in an innovative way that empowers youth to participate and be positive in their communities.

Sampling of Projects to be awarded in the 2011 grant cycle:

- A math tutoring program to motivate and inspire young girls towards math and science success;
- An education series for youth workers and youth about the importance of Queer and Transgender inclusiveness;
- An education and celebration event to promote awareness of the experiences of undocumented youth in Portland;
- An art and creative expression forum about the value and experiences of youth in alternative school programs citywide;
- A bilingual reading competition at James John Elementary School, where children learn literacy along with their Spanish-speaking parents, while stepping as leaders in their school; and
- A workshop series designed by youth to educate and speak honestly about dismantling institutionalized racism in Portland.

For more information about this and the 10 other awarded projects, e-mail Pam Phan, Youth Program Coordinator at pam.phan@portlandoregon.gov.

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