

# Soothing Our Savage Inequalities: Nonprofit Arts Education in Buffalo

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## Buffalo String Works

"Our mission is to provide high-quality music instruction on stringed instruments to children of low-income, refugee and immigrant parents. We serve a community that is comprised primarily of recently displaced families from around the globe, thus we recognize the significance of music as a universal language. We offer a creative outlet for children and their families, searching for a sense of belonging in a new community."



BSW currently serves 50 BPS 45 and West Buffalo Charter School students whose families are from Burma, Thailand, Nepal, Somalia and Liberia.



Here I am with the three 6<sup>th</sup> grade cellists and a generous instrument donor.

## Key Sources

- Arts Education Partnership. *The Arts and Education: New Opportunities for Research*. 2004
- Catterall, James S. et al *Involvement in the Arts and Human Development: General Involvement and Intensive Involvement In Music and Theater Arts*. UCLA Graduate School of Education. 1999
- Heathcote, D.(1984) Drama and Learning, Chapter in O'Neill and Johnson, op.cit. pp. 90-102.
- Kozol, Jonathan. *Savage inequalities: children in America's schools*. New York: Broadway Paperbacks, 1991. Print
- Valentine, Kathryn, and Mónica F. Torres. "Diversity as Topography: The Benefits and Challenges of Cross-Racial Interaction in the Writing Center." *Writing Centers and the New Racism: A Call for Sustainable Dialogue and Change*. N.p.: Utah State U Press, 2011. 192-209. Print



## Just Buffalo Writing Center

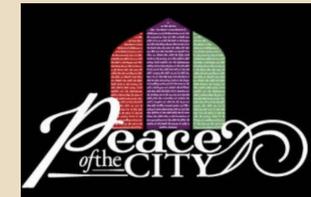
"The Just Buffalo Writing Center (JBWC) is a gathering place designed to aid young and emerging writers in the cultivation of their writing skills. Dedicated to the empowerment of young voices, the JBWC provides access to writing workshops, literary events, and one-on-one assistance with all kinds of writing. Our center hopes to help young people attain the tools they need to flourish as writers and leaders in our community."



Here I am at JBWC last summer, during a four-part chapbook making workshop (small handmade books of original poetry and fiction.) It was taught by a local teaching artist and in collaboration with the Western New York Book Arts Center (WNYBAC) just downstairs.

## Key Findings

- All three organizations began after witnessing the profound impact of the arts on students, and wanting to nurture it.
- Issues of accessibility to art: transportation and money
- Working within limitations: from not having a stage to practice on before the week of the show, to not having enough instruments to fill demand.
- A shared focus on the personal development of the students rather than on the art itself.
- There is a need for greater representation within the community and support/recognition of young and minority artists.



## Shakespeare Comes to (716)

"Shakespeare Comes to (716) brings together all of the passions of Peace of the City. We close the gap for our Buffalo public school students as they study, learn and memorize Shakespeare during critical summer months. They are taught powerful life lessons through the material – how to work collaboratively, how to take direction and what it means to embody another's story, which is the foundation of empathy. They learn basic job skills such as punctuality, hard work, discipline and team work."



A group photo from Peace of the City/Shakespeare Comes to (716)'s 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration dinner last month. The program featured four current students delivering emotional monologues that told the stories of four original students from 1992.

## Abstract

Even as cutbacks in arts programming disproportionately impact low-income and minority students, research is just scratching the surface of the cognitive and social benefits of participating in the arts. Rather than focusing on the failings of the education system, however, this project tells the stories of three successful Buffalo arts nonprofits with whom I have worked. *Just Buffalo Writing Center* provides free writing workshops taught by local artists, *Buffalo String Works* teaches violin and cello to West Side refugees, and *Shakespeare Comes to 716* trains underprivileged teenagers to perform theater. My project examines how creative writing, music and theater uniquely affect the brain and learning, as well as the benefits arts education has had on underserved populations in Buffalo: from LGBTQ to refugee to African-American students. Finally, based on interviews with program organizers, the project suggests how to fill in gaps of accessibility and representation in the Buffalo arts community.