

Investing in Community

Using American Rescue Plan Act Funds to Promote Healing in Chicago Communities

Impact Report for Together We Heal Creative Place Program

December 2024



"The strongest Black woman I've ever known on this Earth is my mom...I honored my mother & my father."



Patrice Black



In 2021, Chicago's communities were in need of healing.

The COVID-19 pandemic laid bare the systemic inequities in access and opportunity that had existed in Chicago for decades. Black Chicagoans accounted for 41% of all deaths from COVID-19, despite being less than 30% of the population,⁰¹ and Chicago Latinx residents saw the steepest decline in life expectancy of any group.⁰²

In retrospect, these racial disparities should have been unsurprising. Chicago's legacies of redlining, restrictive covenants, and other regressive and discriminatory policies have led to it being one of the most segregated cities in the US. With decades of neglect and disinvestment by government and business, predominantly Black and Latinx residents of the South and West sides of the city were already experiencing vast differentials in wages, wealth, health, incarceration and education.

Then came the pandemic, and the murders of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and too many others. The racial reckoning of 2020 brought new urgency to the need for healing.. In response, Chicago's Office of Equity and Racial Justice (OERJ) declared 2022 a Year of Healing, and committed to creating tools and programs for both policy change and cultural transformation through a healing lens.

Leveraging a once-in-a-generation, \$6 million federal investment, distributed through the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA), and in strategic alignment with the Mayor's Road to Recovery Plan, Chicago's Department of Cultural Affairs and Special Events (DCASE) worked with OERJ to create a program that would revitalize Chicago communities to create a more equitable, vibrant, and united city.

59% of Black Chicagoans and **50%** of Latinx Chicagoans held jobs requiring them to work in person during the height of the pandemic, at a time when vaccines were still unavailable⁰²

“When we launched Year of Healing in 2022, Chicago was in a year of recovery and rebuilding, as Black and Brown communities were grappling with trauma and disparate impacts of COVID-19. There was a need to collectively reckon with the past and present harms inflicted on these communities, while also acknowledging the deep need for healing and restoration in the face of ongoing inequalities.”



Nneka Onwuzurike

Business, Economic, and Neighborhood Development First Deputy, Office of Equity and Racial Justice

01. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC9643901/#CR4>

02. https://www.chicago.gov/city/en/depts/cdph/supp_info/infectious/respiratory-illness/covid-19-home/covid-19-impacts-on-life-expectancy.html



Creative Placemaking is a strategy to strengthen and sustain communities.

Creative placemaking is a collaborative change process where partners from across sectors shape the physical and social character of a place around local arts and culture. While the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) coined the term in 2010, communities have been creating publicly accessible spaces which honor their cultures and leverage their creative potential for much, much longer.

Creative placemaking has many benefits for residents and stakeholders. It clarifies community needs, increases vibrancy, promotes economic growth, builds capacity among residents, and fosters collaboration among local stakeholders.

CREATIVE PLACEMAKING



Arts and Culture:
Creative activities that preserve culture, including craft, and performing, visual, literary, and fine arts.

Placemaking:
The process of collectively reimagining and reinventing public spaces.

“Creative placemaking helps foster connection, comprehension, and healing, steering Chicago closer to our shared vision of a fairer and more cohesive city.”



Dr. Meida McNeal

Deputy Commissioner, Cultural Grants and Resources, DCASE

Together We Heal Creative Place added **healing** to creative placemaking.

Co-designed by Chicago’s Office of Equity & Racial Justice (OERJ) and the Department of Cultural Affairs and Special Events (DCASE), the Together We Heal Creative Place Program was an unprecedented investment into community-led artistic projects, designed to promote healing and transformation in Chicago’s neighborhoods. Award funding for projects ranged between \$25,000 - \$500,000.

The program was intentionally designed to not only acknowledge racial injustices and inequalities across generations, but also create public spaces for dialogue, understanding, and reconciliation.

Healing actions and practices were guided by OERJ’s Together We Heal Framework,⁰¹ which includes three core pillars: Reflect on our Past, Reclaim our Present, and Reimagine our Future. These three are essential and connected components of any healing effort. The TWH framework guides us to grapple with what has happened in the past, create space to shift power, and envision a more equitable future.

01. <https://chicagoyearofhealing.org/#framework>

TOGETHER WE HEAL CREATIVE PLACE



Healing:
The process of restoring to health or repairing to wholeness.

“Chicago has developed a bad rap for violence, right? Like they say, ‘Hurt people, hurt people.’ And so long as we’re hurt, nobody’s safe. So it’s important to shine a light on the healing. I was actually surprised that we got funding for healing. I looked at that thing three times, like, ‘Does this say healing on here?’”



Pablo Mendoza

TWHCP Grantee, Prison + Neighborhood Arts/Education Project

THEORY OF CHANGE

Together We Heal Creative Place had a simple, yet compelling, thesis behind it:

If we empower community-based artists and leaders with funding and resources for creative placemaking, then they will support their communities to heal, recover, and thrive.



This theory was based on the following critical assumptions:

- 1. Chicago needed to both heal emotionally and recover economically from the pandemic; rather than choosing one over the other, creative placemaking could do both.
- 2. Every community has experienced harm differently; rather than dictating what healing should look like, community-based artists and organizations could be entrusted to prioritize what was needed.

First, we'll walk through the components of this theory of change: the projects and inputs that came together at the outset. Then, we will discuss the impacts in terms of healing and recovery at the individual, community, and place-based levels.

“If we really want to see the end of violence and the rehumanizing of our people, we need to trust that the people that have been chosen to do this work have the capacity to build up their own communities, and that we don’t need anyone from the outside coming in and telling us how to do these things.”



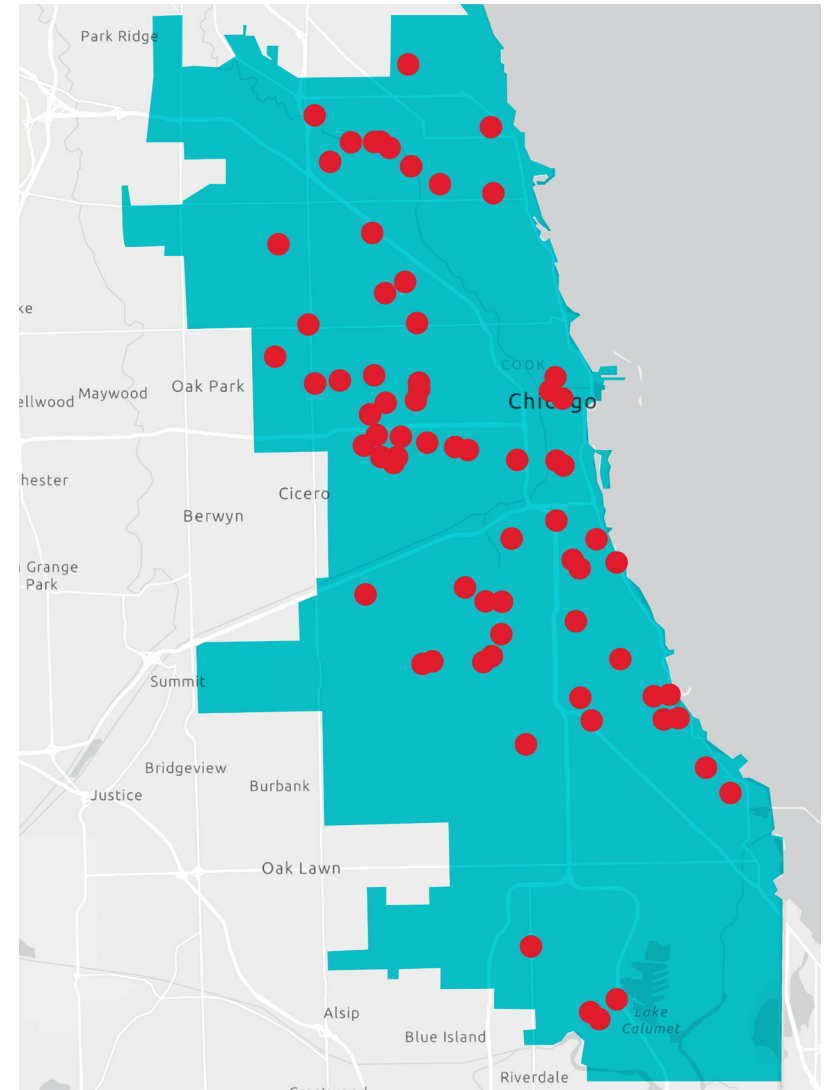
Laura Ramirez
TWHCP Grantee, Instituto Gaspar Yanga

Together We Heal Creative Place: Projects

Together We Heal Creative Place, or TWHCP, invested in projects that strengthened and sustained Chicago neighborhoods. DCASE sought out multi-year projects that would promote dialogue and connection, activate shared spaces, beautify communities, and celebrate local cultural richness. Rather than only funding new projects, they actively encouraged existing projects which highlighted local histories, cultures, and assets. Finally, they looked for projects that would activate the arts alongside other quality of life issues, such as housing, immigration, public safety, environment, health, youth development, and transit.

TWHCP projects were required to:

- Be place-based
- Be focused on a part of the city qualifying as disproportionately impacted, including low-income communities, qualified census tracts, and communities designated by the City of Chicago as high priority for health and safety
- Have a robust community engagement strategy
- Provide all programming free to the public
- Utilize an artistic discipline, such as architecture, culinary arts, curatorial arts, dance, design, film, literary arts, media arts, music, performance art, photography, public art, social or civic practice, theater, or visual arts
- Result in a tangible physical improvement to a publicly accessible and underutilized space, such as a plaza, park, or vacant lot and/or support a community-centered process to thoughtfully and creatively activate public space for residents' benefit.



Together We Heal Creative Place funded 47 projects all across the city of Chicago.

THE 47 TWHCP PROJECTS

Project Name	Grantees (* = fiscal sponsor)
Acting Up in South Deering, Once Upon a Pose	Lit Feelings, Jeweline Hale
Activando Nuestro Espacio Comunitario: Camino Cultural	Puerto Rican Arts Alliance
Agua	La Escuelita Bombera de Corazón, 18th Street Casa de Cultura*
Argyle Community Healing & Placekeeping Project	HAIBAYO, Chinese Mutual Aid Association*
Arts Access and Cultural Healing on Devon, Chicago's Little South Asia	Mandala South Asian Performing Arts
Austin Safety Action Plan 2.0	Territory Chicago, Root 2 Fruit Youth Foundation
Breaking Community Bubbles	People Matter
Calling in the Ancestors: Healing Our Hearts	Instituto Gaspar Yanga, Brown Wall Project, Civic Lab, Inc.
Changing the Englewood Landscape	Urban Male Network
Chicago Soul Arts: Some Sort of Saint	Bridge to Freedom
Citizenship for All: Storytelling for Immigrant Justice through NongGi Making	The HANA Center
Community Storytellers	Full Spectrum Features, Latinos Progresando
Creative Conversations	Taproots, INC
The Creativity Bus	Creative Chicago Reuse Exchange, E'a Williams
De Colores Art Café, Archer Ave Art Café	The Southwest Collective
Fertile Ground – A Community Theater, Dance + Garden Project for the Southside	Deeply Rooted Productions, Blacks in Green
Healing Through A Pandemic	Haitian American Museum of Chicago (HAMOC)
IMANifest Studios	IMAN
Interlocking Visions	Chicago Mobile Makers
Imagine South Shore: Legacy & Future	Artists Design the Future, Near NorthWest Arts Council*
Lawndale Love Stories	Foundation for Homan Square, IFF*
Liberation Landing	Let Us Breathe Collective, Su Casa*
Mending InterGenerational Historical Trauma (MIGHT)	American Indian Health Service of Chicago, Inc.
The Miracle Center's (TMC) Project Synergy	The Miracle Center

THE 47 TWHCP PROJECTS

Project Name	Grantees (* = fiscal sponsor)
MOJO Healing Garden and Performance Center	Muddy Waters Mojo Museum Inc, Chicago Blues Revival
Neighborhood Healing Project	Chicago Urban Art Retreat Center, Dianna C Long
Parkway Picture Show	Rome in a Day Productions Chicago, Alexandria Aikens
Reclaiming Sanctuary	Dr. Pedro Albizu Campos Puerto Rican High School
Rest. Rise. Move. Nourish. Heal	Red Clay Dance Company
Riverdale Creative Cultural Connections Project (RC3)	Architresures, People for Community Recovery
Roots and Blooms	We Sow We Grow Project, The Black Bloom Project
Sankofa Story Garden	ConTextos NFP, MAAFA Redemption Project
Signs of Change on 79th Street	Greater Auburn Gresham Community Development Corporation
Soil and Soul	6018North NFP, Wisdom Baty
South Shore Remembers	Sisters in Cinema, Yvonne Welbon
The Giving Tree Mural of Humboldt Park	Brianna Ramirez Smith, Marco Rios
Together We Remember Elise	Chicago Therapy Collective
Train of Thoughts	Urban Juncture Foundation, Asia Taylor
unBlocked Englewood	Folded Map Project, Chicago Bungalow Association
Urban Growers Collective's South Chicago Farm	Urban Growers Collective, Chicago Art Department
WACA Bell Park: Change the Narrative Past, Present and Future	Firehouse Community Arts Center, Haman Cross III
Walls Turned Sideways	Prison + Neighborhood Arts, Education Project
Wayfinding: West Side Lagoons	Wayfinding LLC, Calumet Collaborative
We Are Albany Park	North River Commission
Year of Transformation Through Solidarity	Pilar Audain
You Can't Kill the Revolution: A Cinematic Celebration of Arts & Activism on Chicago's West Side	Free Spirit Media, Westside Association for Community Action (WACA)
Youth Theater and Storytelling Workshops	Front Porch Arts Center, Free Street Theater

TOGETHER WE HEAL CREATIVE PLACE: INPUTS

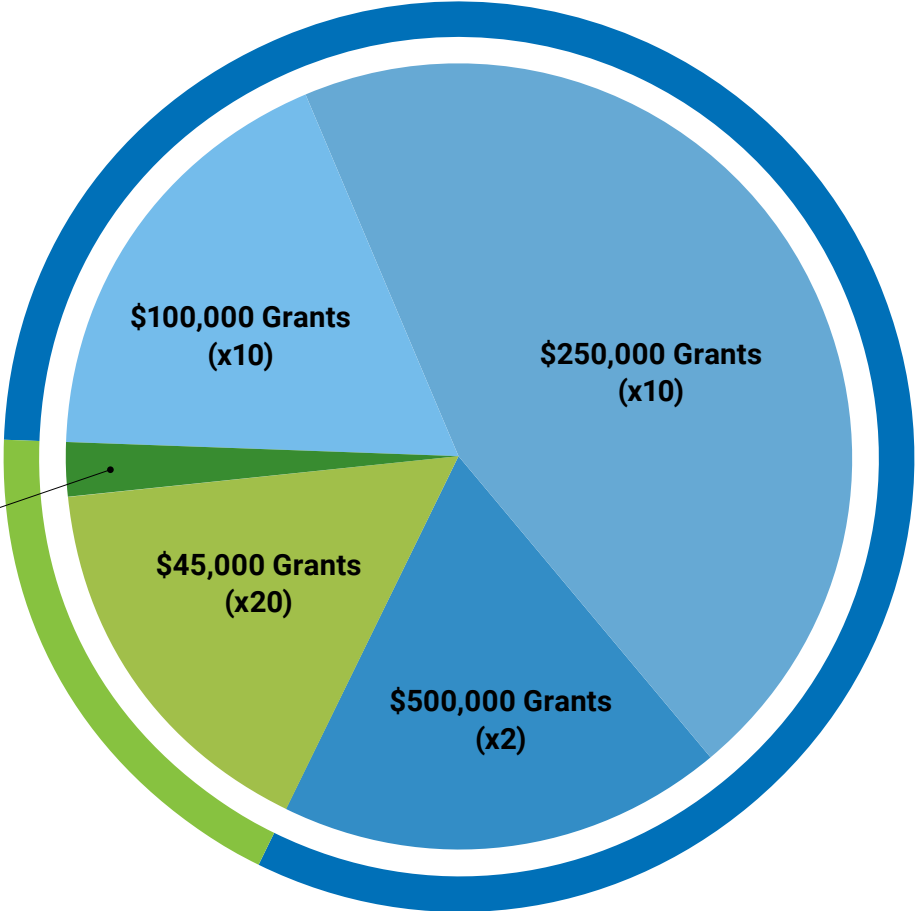
TWHCP provided a collection of resources to grantees. In terms of dollars, the program distributed a total of \$5,265,000 across grantees:

Activation grants:

Neighborhood-focused projects such as tours, performances, and other activations that may result in temporary or permanent changes to the built environment or physical character of a place.

\$25,000 Grants (x5)

\$45,000 Grants (x20)



Transformation grants:

Substantial community projects that are ready for full implementation with the necessary partners, community support, and funding to complete and result in a transformative physical improvement.

\$100,000 Grants (x10)

\$250,000 Grants (x10)

\$500,000 Grants (x2)

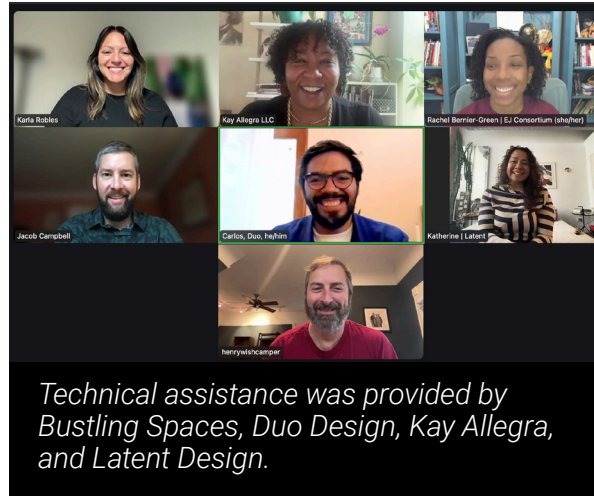
TOGETHER WE HEAL CREATIVE PLACE: INPUTS

In addition, grantees had access to the following supports:



Convenings

DCASE convened all grantees together twice throughout the two-year grant period, in order to facilitate connections and the sharing of ideas. They also hosted smaller, online convenings with grantees in similar regions to build deeper relationships and work out challenges in a supportive setting.



Technical Assistance

DCASE brought together a group of four Technical Assistance Program Providers, or TAPPs, to support the grantees in planning, launching, and executing their projects. Each TAPP was assigned approximately 12 grantees to support, and they provided over 25 hours of direct assistance to grantees, including meetings and site visits, as well as consulting on everything from budgeting to city permitting to additional funding opportunities. The TAPPs also hosted a series of five workshops on targeted topics, such as Placemaking Best Practices, provided guidance on working with public agencies such as the Park District and Public Library, and even set up four separate office hours with agency representatives from 11 city departments, to better support grantees in navigating city bureaucracy.



Communications and PR

Public Communications Inc. (PCI) provided communications support to DCASE, consultants, and grantees throughout the program. PCI developed a set of program key messages to ensure consistent alignment across all communications efforts and strategy for DCASE to amplify across their channels. They created a public microsite to disseminate information and track grantee events and provided a communications toolkit to help grantees effectively promote their projects and organizations. Additionally, PCI collaborated with DCASE and lead consultant Kay Allegra to increase program visibility through curated bus tours for city officials, community stakeholders, and journalists and by securing earned media coverage across the city.

EVALUATION PROCESS

To understand the impact of creative placemaking projects funded by TWHCP, DCASE worked with Greater Good Studio (GGS) as an evaluation partner. Greater Good Studio is a human-centered research and design firm based in Chicago. Over the course of 2024, DCASE and GGS collaborated to conduct an evaluation process that was both broad and deep.



Quarterly reports

DCASE administered quarterly surveys to all 47 TWHCP grantees, which collected qualitative and quantitative data on a variety of topics. GGS compiled and analyzed the results, developed findings and recommendations, and made adjustments to the survey each quarter. The data gathered, including both numbers and quotes, is reflected throughout this report.



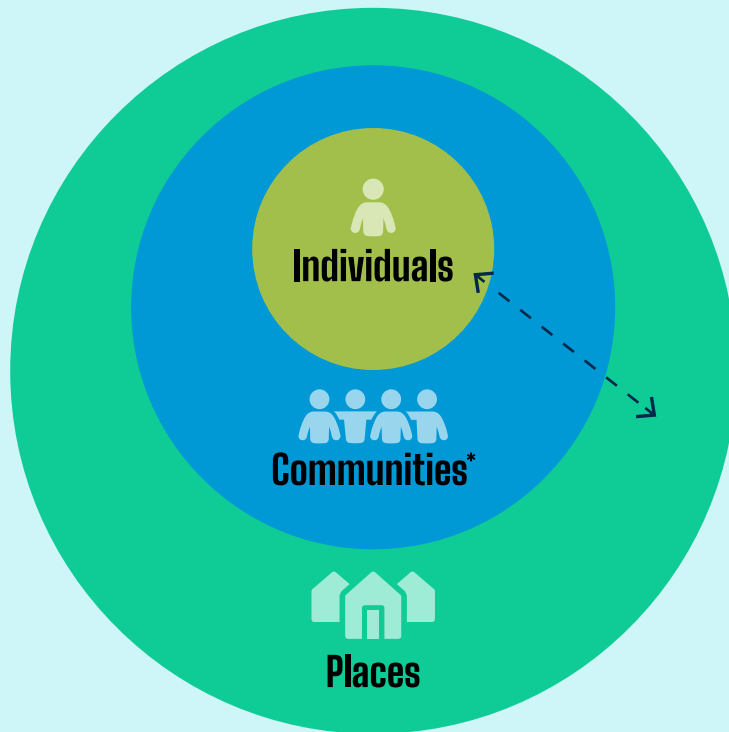
Site visits

GGS selected 8 grantees for site visits, based on a goal of ensuring diversity across geographic regions of the city, project types, and grant sizes. Each site visit included at least one in-depth interview with a project representative, such as grantee or lead artist, as well as program observation, artifact review, and conversations with participants.

GGS conducted learning conversations with a total of **26** grantees, partners, and participants across the eight site visit projects. Between the site visits and quarterly reports, they documented and synthesized over **675** discrete data points.

IMPACT FRAMEWORK

At its most fundamental, Together We Heal Creative Place was about healing. But what did that look like in practice? Through the evaluation process, GGS discovered evidence of healing at three levels:



* While individuals and places are perhaps self-explanatory, we use the term “communities” to mean groups of people with something in common. Communities may or may not be geographically co-located.

This program demonstrated that healing can ripple outward or inward. For example, in some projects, individuals experienced personal healing through art making or storytelling, which they then shared with others in their community. Perhaps those projects culminated in a physical change to the built environment, making it safer or more welcoming. On the other hand, some projects began with interventions that changed the visual landscape of a neighborhood. Then groups and individuals began to experience healing through viewing, interacting with, and improving upon those designs. Regardless of the entry point, TWHCP Grantees considered all three levels, and they understood their connections.

Here is what healing looked like through Together We Heal Creative Place:

1. **Individuals built pride and confidence.**
2. **Individuals processed their trauma.**
3. **Individuals reconnected with their heritage.**

4. **Communities passed down generational wisdom.**
5. **Communities strengthened relationships.**
6. **Communities showed up for each other.**

7. **Places reclaimed their beauty and power.**
8. **Places became safer and healthier.**
9. **Places were reimagined.**

These patterns were evident across a wide variety of grantees and projects, in 26 wards across the city. There is every reason to believe that these short-term impacts will continue to have long-term ripple effects.

The pages ahead share more about these insights, highlight some examples of each of them, and spotlight grantees who exemplified them through their work.

Individuals

Many TWHCP Grantees focused on healing at the individual level. This meant working with residents to remember who they are, the shoulders upon which they stand, and the strengths and assets they hold. While individual healing risks being a slower or more localized approach, this deep and intense work laid the foundation for many bigger and broader changes to come.

“I’ve benefited greatly from this. My family has benefited greatly from this. Those in my immediate circle, alumni and returning citizens, have benefited greatly from this. And when we heal, our families heal.”



Pablo Mendoza
TWHCP Grantee, Walls Turned Sideways



INSIGHT 01

Individuals built pride and confidence.

Many members of marginalized communities live with internalized oppression, having incorporated the myths that society perpetuates about their group into their self-image. Program grantees shared how they worked to combat these harmful narratives by helping participants build durable pride and confidence. People felt seen and worthy when they shared their stories. They honed their talents and stretched their artistic risk-taking. They also built transferable skills to contribute to the creative economy.



Youth with Territory NFP took pride in planning, implementing, and leading a block party designed to bring people together for intergenerational understanding, overcoming stigma, and healing.

“

I think this program is building confidence in our youth, to be proud to be Native. We're showcasing our heritage, and it's becoming more normal. Like, we see some of the youth make ribbon skirts, and instead of buying a prom dress, or for graduation, they're wearing their ribbon skirts. So it's helping build that confidence in who they are and their identity.”

**Jody Roy**

TWHCP Grantee partner, Saint Kateri Center

When I started this, I got accused of being like the white people. I'm like, I need you to explain that for me, please. And at the root, a lot of people equated fancy stuff with things that white people did. I would challenge them: tell me why you don't deserve to see this in your community. So we changed that conversation into, this is kind of a birthright. Everybody deserves to eat good food. Everybody deserves to be surrounded by gorgeous stuff.”

**Natasha Nichols**

TWHCP Grantee, We Sow We Grow



Grantee: Prison + Neighborhood Arts/Education Project

Chicago Region: Westside

Total Participants to Date: 1,012

Walls Turned Sideways

Prison + Neighborhood Arts/Education Project is a visual arts and education project that connects teaching artists and scholars to incarcerated students. For TWHCP, PNAP envisioned, designed, and built out a new space called Walls Turned Sideways. It's an art gallery, studio, and community center dedicated to artists and communities impacted by incarceration, with a focus on collective liberation, healing, and abolition.

"I just don't know that many spaces that are saying, you've been incarcerated, this is the place for you."



Sarah Ross

TWHCP Grantee, Prison + Neighborhood Arts/Education Project

In addition to being a safe space for folks to gather and make art, Walls Turned Sideways has functioned as a launchpad for new work. Anthony Spaulding, a community member and former student of PNAP, was incarcerated when Covid began. He wrote a script for a one-man show and recently performed it at Walls Turned Sideways. His show's next venue was Second City. Now, says Sarah Ross, "He's getting offers left and right, and he attributes it to us allowing him to develop his craft in this space."

INSIGHT 02

Individuals processed their trauma.

From the legacies of slavery and colonization, to the modern-day horrors of immigration and incarceration, many Chicagoans are living with trauma. And the impacts of trauma are far-reaching, disrupting everything from physical and mental health, to work and education, to families and relationships. TWHCP grantees found countless creative ways to help community members metabolize their traumatic experiences. They created safe spaces for releasing strong emotions, and helped people find peace on the other side.



The Haitian American Museum of Chicago (HAMOC)'s Healing Through the Pandemic project has provided various art workshops to Chicago Public Schools students that empower them to use art as a healthy way to heal and cope with their feelings and emotions.

“

If you know what else to do with that pain, you will put that bottle down. I'm not saying it's easy, but at least you will be like, You know what? I was actually happy when I was over there finger painting for a moment. And it'll start your wheels of thinking, you know?"



E'a the Artist

TWHCP Grantee, T.H.U.G. Hippie

That psychological trauma for 22 years - that didn't end when they opened the doors. And it's four years now since I've been home, and it still hasn't ended. Mental health is something that we all struggle with. It's one of the biggest contributors to folks going back in prison or passing away. That's why I was so adamant [about healing work] - it's not just freedom, but the quality of life."



Pablo Mendoza

TWHCP Grantee, Walls Turned Sideways



Grantees: Deeply Rooted Productions, Blacks in Green

Chicago Region: South

Total Participants to Date: 558

Fertile Ground

A Community Theater, Dance + Garden Project for the Southside

For 25 years, Deeply Rooted has brought justice, healing, and opportunity to communities through inspirational choreography, programs, and dialogue. TWHCP enabled them to produce a community-based performance called Fertile Ground, which captured and shared stories of Chicago residents whose parents or grandparents arrived here through the Great Migration. The experience was transformative for participants and audience members alike.

“There was a story about a woman who needed to leave the South because they killed her father, her brother, her husband, and she knew that she was next. Every time I told this, I had to literally get myself together so that I could go on with it, because all of the pain, the anger, the rage, the how dare you. But it was a communal grief, it was a communal anger. Collectively, we all went through it.”



Racquel “KanDC” Jones

TWHCP Participant, Fertile Ground Project

Deeply Rooted is planning the Deeply Rooted Dance Center, a state-of-the-art home for Black dance in Washington Park. TWHCP funding allowed them to partner with Blacks in Green, a national network for environmental justice and economic development, to envision and design a rooftop garden which will activate the space and promote mental and physical well-being.

INSIGHT 03

Individuals reconnected with their heritage.

Social and cultural identity provides an unparalleled sense of belonging, and belonging is a fundamental human need. Yet many residents in our society feel disconnected from their ethnic, racial, familial, religious, or neighborhood cultures. According to the 2023 Chicago Citywide Plan, most Chicago youth do not feel a sense of belonging, which negatively impacts their mental health.⁰¹ TWHCP grantees helped residents rediscover and reclaim their cultural roots, through rituals, festivals, lessons, and other programming. In this way, they helped Chicagoans rediscover what was theirs all along.

01. <https://www.chicagobusiness.com/crains-forum-equitable-health/belonging-basic-human-need-can-be-counter-complex-problems>



HANA Center’s “Citizenship for All: Storytelling through NongGi Making” program created safe, judgment-free spaces for community members to learn the historical and cultural significance of Korean banners and share their own stories through art-making.

“

We were convening women of African descent on the southeast side of the city, coming together and talking about healing. Going back and getting our ancestral knowledge, in terms of how we institute self care and care within our families and our communities. Focusing on things that our grandmothers and great grandmothers used to keep us alive...basically that we really need to, you know, go back and get.”



Ama Johnson

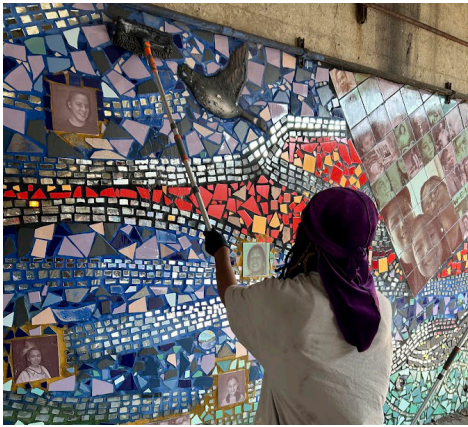
TWHCP Collaborator, UBUNTU Academy for Global Learning

We had a segment where people from the audience could get up and share their Bronzeville experience. It’s like, we want to hear from you. You have a Bronzeville connection, you have a Bronzeville story. And maybe it’s not up on the screen yet, but you can share it. People were able to share and make connections, and were genuinely just overwhelmed with emotion. It’s like, wow, there’s so much about Bronzeville that deserves to be celebrated, and it fills you with a lot of pride.”



Sandria Washington

TWHCP Grantee, Urban Juncture



Grantees: American Indian Health Service of Chicago, Inc.

Chicago Region: North-Northwest

Total Participants to Date: 933

Mending InterGenerational Historical Trauma (MIGHT)

American Indian Health Service of Chicago provides quality healthcare to the Chicagoland Native community through the incorporation of traditional ways of knowing, including powwows, round dances, arts and crafts, storytelling, music, and visual arts. The MIGHT project helped participants reclaim indigenous ways of knowing through a recurring gathering to design regalia, craft beadwork, and experience ancestral foods and dances. As so much of Native culture has been lost due to colonization and forced assimilation in boarding schools, this program was about the reclamation of that data.

The MIGHT program attracted a regular crowd of everyone from elders to young children, and built community while increasing participants' sense of identity and self-worth. Stories abounded of people making their first garments or jewelry, then teaching others to do the same. One participant, Jason Soto, reflected on his spiritual awakening of the past few years, including making a necklace and learning to sew. Now, he brings his daughter to MIGHT, and his mother is interested too!

"I don't know how they would have learned some of the Native ways without being here."



Rhonda Hood

TWHCP Participant, American Indian Health Service of Chicago

Communities

Communal harm requires communal healing. Many TWHCP grantees worked with groups of people who had been brought together by identity, geography, or circumstance. These communities found creative ways to bridge their differences, reflect on shared histories, and realize strength in numbers. And the bonds created by this type of healing will lead to greater resilience for years to come.



“We never heal on our own, because we didn’t get hurt on our own.”



Laura Ramirez

TWHCP Grantee, Instituto Gaspar Yanga



INSIGHT 04

Communities passed down generational wisdom.

Throughout the program evaluation, many grantees expressed that their communities live with the ongoing trauma of erasure, their truths neither documented nor celebrated. This program created channels for cultural preservation across generations in countless ways across the city. Participants practiced the customs of their ancestors, worked side-by-side with their elders, and chronicled stories of the past for the benefit of future generations. Through this work, intergenerational hurt became intergenerational healing.



The Riverdale Creative Cultural Connections (RC3) project included youth interviewing seniors for an intergenerational mural project in the Altgeld community.

“

We connect the older generation with the younger. Our seniors love coming and telling me how I'm doing stuff wrong...in a very loving way. They'll tell us about certain plants, and what they're good for. So it's nice, because I'm always learning.”



Natasha Nichols

TWHCP Grantee, We Sow We Grow

We often chastise young people for not knowing. But if we don't create a way for them to know, then what are we doing? So I love when the play happened, and there were young people in the audience, and we did a talk back, and they were saying, 'Now I'm gonna go ask my parent this or that.'”



Kevin Iega Jeff

TWHCP Grantee, Deeply Rooted Productions



Grantees: Urban Juncture Foundation, Asia Taylor

Chicago Region: Loop/Near South

Total Participants to Date: 215

Train of Thoughts

Urban Juncture Foundation advances the sustainable development of economically challenged neighborhoods. UJ is restoring The Forum, an iconic 1897 social and assembly hall in the Bronzeville neighborhood, into a hub for culture and community. As part of this restoration, Train of Thoughts is an initiative to document and share stories that catalyze the revitalization of Bronzeville.

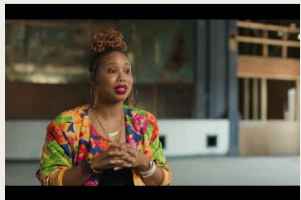
UJ worked with Asia Taylor, a filmmaker and owner of TaylorLane Creative, to produce visually compelling video episodes that showcase Bronzeville stories. The episodes are continuously broadcast on a large outdoor screen which engages commuters at the 43rd Street Green Line station. This innovative strategy is not only catalyzing public buy-in for the restoration of The Forum, but reminding Bronzeville residents and visitors that they are in, as Asia Taylor puts it, a “historical goldmine.”

“The people who were in this building, who graced this stage, are historical giants. From the music level, the political level. And it was on the demolition list... The elephant in the room is gentrification. There’s this common phrase, that Bronzeville is ‘up and coming.’ Well, it’s already here.”



Asia Taylor

TWHCP Collaborator, TaylorLane Creative



10/16/23

TRAIN OF THOUGHTS TRAILER

YOUR STORY LIVES HERE.

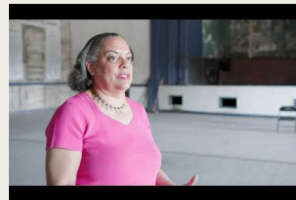
TRAIN OF THOUGHTS IS A UNIQUE STORYTELLING AND PLACEMAKING...



10/16/23

EP 01: THE FORUM: RECLAIMING BRONZEVILLE

THE FORUM, BUILT IN 1897, LIVES IN THE HEART OF CHICAGO'S BRONZEVILLE COMMUNITY AND SERVED AS THE EPICENTER OF BLACK CREATIVITY FOR 76 YEARS. THE LEGACY OF THE FORUM WAS THREATENED BY DEMOLITION, BUT...



10/16/23

EP 02: A BRONZEVILLE LOVE STORY

MOST ARE FAMILIAR WITH THE STORY OF JOURNALIST IDA B. WELLS. HOWEVER, NOT MUCH IS SHARED ABOUT HER HUSBAND, FERDINAND LEE, AND THE ROLE IDA'S FAMILY PLAYED IN HER SUCCESS. 'A BRONZEVILLE LOVE STORY'...



10/16/23

EP 04: BRONZEVILLE VOICES

IN OUR EFFORT TO FIND STORIES, THESE 'BRONZEVILLE VOICES' FOUND US. THIS EPISODE FEATURES NEIGHBORS WHO HAD DIRECT EXPERIENCES AND MEMORIES WITH THE FORUM DURING ITS TIME OF OPERATION...



10/16/23

EP 05: ART IS A MOVEMENT

THE AFROCOBIA STORY IS STRICTLY A CHICAGO STORY. FEMON RAMI AND ARLENE TURNER CRAWFORD SHARE THE 'WALL OF RESPECT' STORY AND THE MOVEMENT IT SPARKED IN CHICAGO...



10/16/23

TRAIN OF THOUGHTS AUGUST 2023 PREMIERE SCREENING RECAP

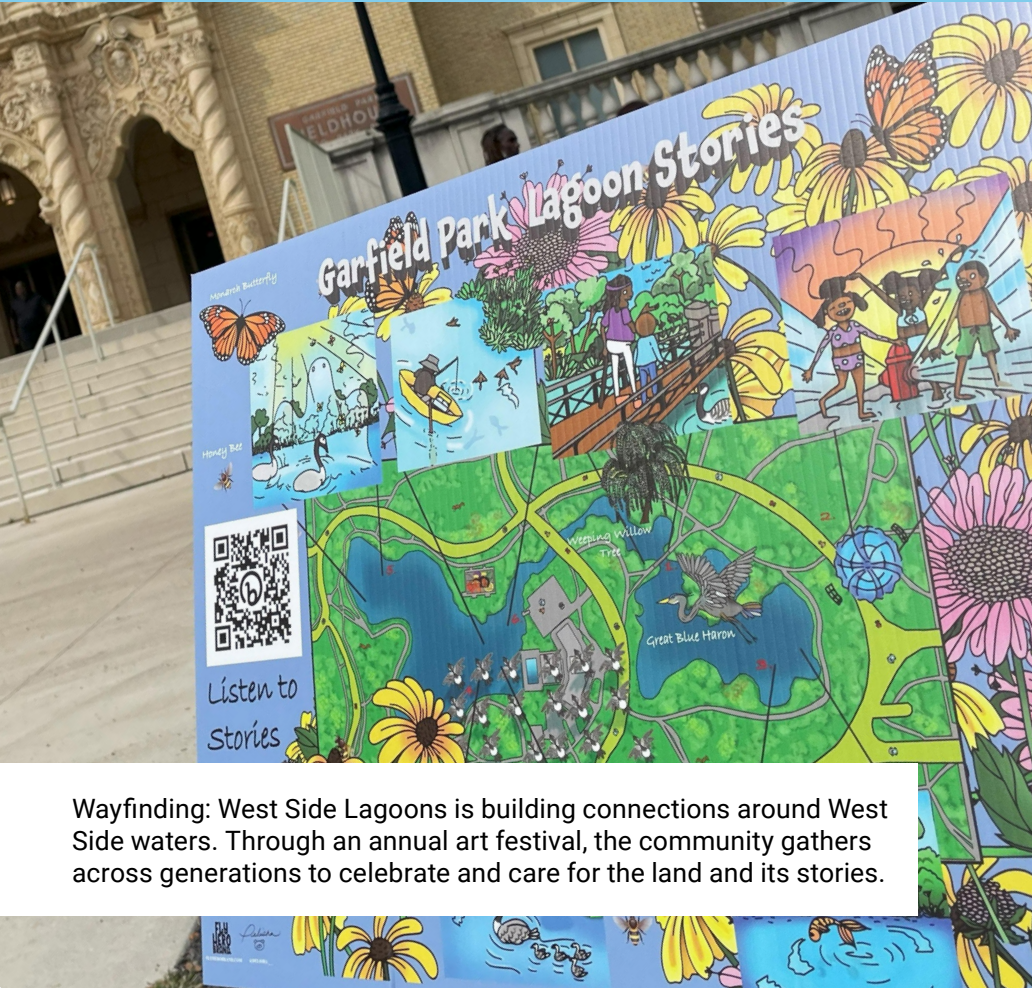
THIS SUMMER WE HOSTED THE FILM PREMIERE FOR 'TRAIN OF THOUGHTS' AT THE CREATIVE INCUBATOR ON 51ST STREET.

INSIGHT 05

Communities strengthened relationships.

Many Chicago residents live relatively segregated lives, which makes sense given the city’s 250-year history of segregation in housing, schools, jobs, and development.⁰¹ Furthermore, the scarcity mindset created by the system of white supremacy continues to divide people into smaller and smaller sub-groups. TWHCP grantees worked specifically to address fractures within communities, using art to connect people across lines of difference. They made compelling cases for solidarity across the city, and in response, participants made new connections, built their networks, and boosted their resilience.

01. <https://www.chicagoreporter.com/chicagos-250-year-history-of-segregation/>



Wayfinding: West Side Lagoons is building connections around West Side waters. Through an annual art festival, the community gathers across generations to celebrate and care for the land and its stories.

“

The pandemic, as well as the George Floyd protest, is actually what inspired us to come together and create a space for Black and brown people to do some racial justice work. How do we resolve this deep wound between Black and brown people? If I just knew these people and they knew me, maybe we wouldn't hate each other, right? So that was what this project was meant to do - bring folks that don't get the capacity to, you know, deal with each other in a more safe space, to actually create community and create relationships.”



Laura Ramirez

TWHCP Grantee, Instituto Gaspar Yanga

Many communal connections have been forged during our artistic offerings. We have witnessed an intergenerational group of community members become more vulnerable during group sessions. We have witnessed storytelling between strangers go from surface level to deep and reflective. New friendships have been made.”



Binta Diallo

TWHCP Grantee, IMAN



Grantees: Mandala South Asian Performing Arts

Chicago Region: Northwest-West

Total Participants to Date: 1,186

Arts Access and Cultural Healing on Devon

Chicago's Little South Asia

Mandala uses multidisciplinary performing arts to connect audiences to South Asian traditions, bringing Indian folk, classical, and contemporary arts to life. For Arts Access and Cultural Healing on Devon, they partnered with artist Indira Johnson to facilitate a Community Advisory Council. Through music, dance, and a permanent mural on the wall of a local business, the group co-created multiple expressions of what community means to them.

While Devon is home to the largest South Asian community in Chicago, it's also incredibly diverse, with over 200 languages spoken. To address deep divisions within the community, Mandala convened people of all ages, religions, and ethnicities. Participants explored the concept of "community" for the development of the mural, and built new relationships through the experience.

"There was a lot of conversation about wanting to create a space in which everyone feels welcomed and safe to exist. In some ways, that was probably the central idea that came out of it."



Ashmi Mridul

TWHCP Grantee, Mandala South Asian Performing Arts

INSIGHT 06

Communities showed up for each other.

In Chicago and across the country, many residents don't know their neighbors, let alone consider them part of their support systems. And social isolation has been identified as a public health crisis by the US Surgeon General.⁰¹ Programming through TWHCP invited residents to support and care for each other, and they wholeheartedly accepted the invitation. Community members helped each other to learn, to grow, and to feel safe and welcomed, building the self-sufficiency to support each other in times of need.

01. <https://www.hhs.gov/about/news/2023/05/03/new-surgeon-general-advisory-raises-alarm-about-devastating-impact-epidemic-loneliness-isolation-united-states.html>



Together We Remember Elise honors Elise Malary, who championed trans-inclusion, economic justice, and anti-racism in Andersonville, as well as the lives of transgender individuals who have been lost to violence.

“

I like to see the interaction between our participants. We've got people sewing on the machines that had never sewed in their lives before. So now they're talking, they're helping each other, instead of me running over there. [One person] has got long hair, and he was getting bullied in school over that. Some of the participants were able to talk to him about it, and try to make him feel proud.”



Christine Redcloud

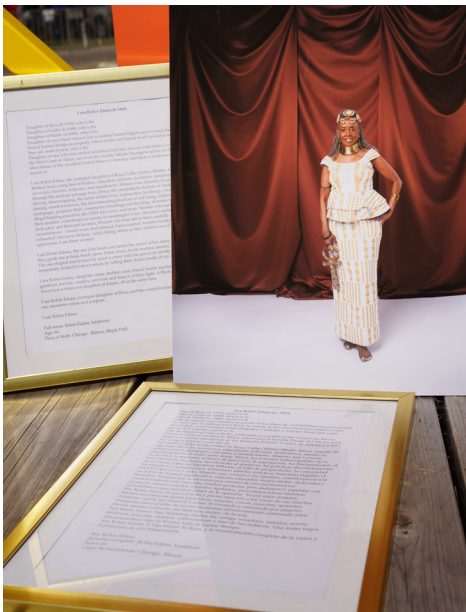
TWHCP Grantee, American Indian Health Service of Chicago

During work performed, many neighbors sat outside on their porches, looking out for one another and the work trucks. Neighbors began greeting one another and chatting with each other, whereas before they would keep to themselves when crossing paths. There is a renewed investment on the block, whether it's picking up trash on the sidewalk, or safety among fellow residents. Neighbors that are now like family.”



Gillian Wineman

TWHCP Grantee, Chicago Bungalow Association



Grantee: Instituto Gaspar Yanga

Chicago Region: Loop/Near South

Total Participants to Date: 1,000

Calling in the Ancestors

Healing Our Hearts

Instituto Gaspar Yanga supports the growth and development of community through education and knowledge sharing. They reconnect with ancestral knowledge through art, storytelling, and healing practices. Calling in the Ancestors: Healing Our Hearts was a journey intended to heal the strain caused by negative narratives about race relations in Chicago. Specifically, the intention was for Black and Brown folks to witness each other, see each other’s humanity, and build relationships across races and neighborhoods.

The program brought together a cohort of Black and Brown women for a series of outdoor workshops, which included sound healing, herbalism, yoga, a water ceremony, and other modalities. Passers-by would often ask to join. The women told stories of their ancestors, wrote poems, and took beautiful portraits.

“We don’t need material things to heal. We need to create spaces where people feel safe, where people feel at peace, where people can get in touch with themselves, and where people can reconnect with the Earth and the elements that allow them to heal...So that’s the work that we do.”



Laura Ramirez

TWHP Grantee, Instituto Gaspar Yanga

Places

Healing a place is more than just healing the people who live and work there. Every neighborhood has its own collection of physical elements - from homes and businesses to parks and gardens - as well as its own unique character, spirit, and history. TWHCP Grantees healed their neighborhoods through murals and public art, activation of vacant lots, and the design and development of entirely new spaces.

“When you talk about healing in communities, these are places where everything left, all the businesses left, there’s basically nothing there. They go outside, they look at empty lots and they feel abandoned. And so we can see the potential that [our project] will have to attract people, to come outside of their houses and get to know each other.”



Makeda Crayton

TWHCP Grantee, Deeply Rooted Productions



INSIGHT 07

Places reclaimed their beauty and power.

Many of Chicago's most disinvested neighborhoods are the same places that have rich histories of flourishing. Sadly, those histories are often invisible to the residents of today. TWHCP grantees uncovered, documented, and augmented the hidden beauty in North, South, East and West side neighborhoods. Participants left their mark on places through everything from murals to gardens to buildings. Through that process, they helped those places to reclaim their latent power.



WACA Bell Park transformed an old basketball court into a cultural hub for youth through community imagining and creative placemaking.

“

One of our episodes is with Bronzeville Winery. They talk about how they went to get funding, and a lot of banks said no. ‘Who’s going to go to a winery in Bronzeville? There’s an empty lot across the street.’ Finally, a bank did say yes, and it’s now an extremely successful establishment, and all it needed was a flashlight. We had that episode play on our screen, so that anyone who walks by knows, oh, we have wineries here! So people recognize, they live in a historical goldmine.”



Asia Taylor

TWHCP Grantee, TaylorLane Creative

To the point about [Devon] being a hub for South Asians, in the community meetings the facilitators have Indian backgrounds, but not one participant was Indian. We just had people from lots of different ethnicities. And that was reflective of what Devon is really.” “I see other murals on Devon, you look at them, and [they say] ‘This is India.’ You look at our mural, it is very global. It belongs to everyone.”



Ashmi Mridul and Pranita Nayar

TWHCP Grantees, Mandala South Asian Performing Arts



Grantees: Creative Chicago Reuse Exchange (CCRx), E'a Williams

Chicago Region: South-Southwest

Total Participants to Date: 300

The Creativity Bus

CCRx sparks creativity and redistributes surplus for teachers, nonprofits and arts/community groups. E'a Williams is a teaching artist and program developer who owns and operates T.H.U.G. Hippie (Trauma Healing Urban Guru, Helping Inspire People Past Insurmountable Experiences). Together, they launched The Creativity Bus to provide social-emotional-based arts and wellness experiences to better empower the underestimated.

The Creativity Bus visits organizations and community groups on Chicago's southwest side with a variety of physical and creative experiences - everything from drum circles and Double Dutch to hands-on making of instruments, masks, and peace bracelets. The programming is the entry point for larger goals of healing, stress reduction, and community building.

"I think that creating a project, for someone who doesn't necessarily feel like they're creative, there's a lot of good that comes from just making something and feeling proud of it."



Rebecca Memoli

TWHCP Grantee, Creative Chicago Reuse Exchange

"How good did you feel, just picking up a drum? You ain't thinking about nothing bothering you. I bet it ain't bothering you now, whatever it was."



E'a the Artist

TWHCP Grantee, T.H.U.G. Hippie



INSIGHT 08

Places became safer and healthier.

Health and safety are intertwined. A community with opportunities for physical and mental wellness is also a safe community. Unfortunately, too many Chicago residents experience their neighborhoods as both unhealthy and unsafe. TWHCP grantees demonstrated a keen awareness for the types of interventions that would help participants to feel and be safer and healthier. From physical activity to fresh food, from mindfulness to restorative justice, they used their creative practice to design more thriving.



UnBLOCKED provided critical repairs to Englewood homes, both as reparations to the history of racist housing practices, and to beautify the block.

“

Covid had us inside. What called us to stay in was our need to be safe. And so now, I can't think of a better motivation to come out and help. As we reprogram ourselves to adjust to what it looks like in the post of the height of the pandemic, and as people become more aware of what goes into your body, having that through fresh and locally grown produce [at the farm], the interactions with chickens, and just nature itself.”



Ronnie Mosley

TWHCP Partner, Alderman, 21st Ward

We believe that our work of getting kids and families out to make art and heal together IS public safety!



Sarah Ross

TWHCP Grantee, Walls Turned Sideways



Grantees: We Sow We Grow, The Black Bloom Project

Chicago Region: Far South

Total Participants to Date: 136

Roots and Blooms

The We Sow We Grow Urban Farm is an award-winning agricultural nonprofit headquartered in the West Pullman neighborhood. They are dedicated to the growth of gardening and farming in urban landscapes through education and service. In partnership with the Black Bloom Project, they launched Roots and Blooms, an invitation to their community to create and enjoy the natural and built beauty in the neighborhood through monthly activations and workshops.

The project beautified the farm through colorful mosaics which depict the growth of a seed. Even more powerfully, the series of events, from art-making and wellness workshops to family movie nights, provided the setting for neighbors to connect, feel safe, and find joy.

“You look around here now and you just see so much life... And it encourages others: ‘Let me trim those trees by my garage.’ When people see energy, we tend to match it. So the transformation of this lot alone encourages and inspires others to transform their immediate surroundings.”



Ronnie Mosley

TWHCP Partner, Alderman, 21st Ward



INSIGHT 09

Places were reimagined.

Activists often lament that we are “living inside someone else’s imagination” - a world where systemic oppression is not only acceptable, but necessary. TWHCP grantees offered an alternative. Fueled by the flexible resources of the grants, these artists and community-based organizations worked tirelessly to imagine and build alternative visions for their communities. They saw vacant lots, and dreamed of gardens and community centers. They saw crumbling buildings, and dreamed of murals and pop-ups.



ConTextos and the MAAFA Redemption Project’s Sankofa Story Garden connected literary and visual arts and personal storytelling to activate a community green space in West Garfield Park by and for the residents of the neighborhood.

“

There’s not a lot of spaces that are like, ‘Come hang out, make art,’ for formerly incarcerated people. A lot of spaces are the institutional ones, they’re like, let’s do a job. They’re really important. But we all need a little bit more than that, you know? We wanted to have a space that you could come in and be like, dang, I want to be here.”



Sarah Ross

TWHCP Grantee, Walls Turned Sideways

Chicago has left these communities destitute. So you create the conditions where people start to do desperate things, in order to keep themselves what they think of as whole. You can create a space for them to learn dance, or music, or gardening, that’s in their own community. They’ll see a performance, or visual art, and I can see it unlocking something in their minds, in their hearts. Sparking seeds that they didn’t know they had within them. That’s what we’re trying to do.”



Makeda Crayton

TWHCP Grantee, Deeply Rooted Productions

Together We Heal Creative Place saw profound impacts at three levels:

Individuals...

- » built pride and confidence
- » processed their trauma
- » reconnected with their heritage

Communities...

- » passed down generational wisdom
- » strengthened relationships
- » showed up for each other

Places...

- » reclaimed their beauty and power
- » became safer and healthier
- » were reimagined

TWHCP included many Chicagoans. As of Q3 of 2024, the program had engaged a total of over 50,000 residents, as audience members and participants, across the city. Through over 1,000 sessions and events, the projects involved a total of about 1,200 creatives and artists. The program's microsite saw over 1,100 visits in 2024.

Furthermore, TWHCP projects boosted Chicago's local economy. Over 12,300 people gained new skills or knowledge through this program, including 5,600 youth. The projects created or supported over 80 full-time jobs and over 300 part-time jobs. About 750 artists were paid, and 650 youth workers were paid, by TWHCP grantees.

Finally, the program created lasting changes to communities. The TWHCP projects activated 51 vacant lots, and developed or preserved 54 enduring neighborhood amenities, or permanent, publicly available places and spaces such as community centers, skate parks, and gardens. These outcomes will continue to shape the character and heritage of neighborhoods for years to come.

Note: This data is reported as of September 30, 2024. It's likely that these numbers will increase in the last quarter of the year.

WHAT WORKED

Many elements of Together We Heal Creative Place were uniquely effective in helping grantees realize the Theory of Change. The program's framing, ongoing administration requirements, and grantee supports all helped them enable their communities to heal, recover, and thrive.

» **Acknowledging Harm, Encouraging Healing**

The grant guidelines explicitly named the systemic racism in Chicago's economic and public health systems as the cause of Covid's disproportionate impacts. This type of acknowledgement by government is rare, and it sends a powerful message to community leaders by reminding them that the outcomes of an inequitable society are not their fault. Alongside the city's Year of Healing 2022 initiative, the grant announcement called for projects that specifically focus on healing from past and present racial injustices. We believe that this recognition and focus led to DCASE receiving 187 applications, and garnered sustained enthusiasm from grantees. As Laura Ramirez, a TWHCP grantee, put it, "Living in [Chicago] for 30 years, this is the first time I've seen an actual initiative take a citywide look at what it takes to heal community."

» **Combining Multiple Levers for Change**

TWHCP was a uniquely intersectional program. It asked for both the creation of new artistic work and the preservation of local cultures. It required grantees to collaborate with partners across sectors and disciplines. And it fused creativity with the built environment. Makeda Crayton, a TWHCP grantee, told us, "A lot of times, with philanthropic organizations, capital is not something they want to do. But for people who do capital, creativity and art are a risky venture. This was like hitting two birds with one stone." This program demonstrated that the creative placemaking approach - combining tangible changes to the physical environment with creative expression and deep human connection - is indeed a recipe for strengthening and sustaining communities.

» **Just Enough Accountability**

Because funding was attached to a federal program, the reporting requirements for TWHCP were heightened. Grantees needed to fill out quarterly reports with both quantitative and qualitative

questions. Yet DCASE still found ways to lighten the administrative burden, primarily gathering data required by ARPA. "Somebody did a really good job of making the reporting accessible and simple. It was nice because it made me reflect. It didn't feel heavy handed," said Sarah Ross, a TWHCP grantee. This gave grantees a general sense that DCASE trusted them and their processes.

» **Support From All Sides**

Grantees felt supported and motivated by DCASE, both institutionally and personally. One example is when Meida McNeal, the lead program administrator, attended their events. Sandra Washington, a TWHCP grantee, said, "Having DCASE be invested says a lot. Everyone at DCASE is busy. So for someone to come out to [our screening] just really says like, 'Yes, we believe in this project.'" In addition, having a cadre of dedicated consultants extended the capacity of DCASE to support grantees. Many of these projects required specialized knowledge or city connections, and the Technical Assistance Program Providers, or TAPPs, were there as partners in the trenches. Grantees reported that the TAPPs answered their questions, checked in on their needs, taught them valuable lessons, and listened. "We accessed them as much as we could," said Nicholas Zepeda, a TWHCP grantee.

» **Connections with Peers**

The program offered opportunities for grantees to connect with each other, including both large in-person convenings with the full set of grantees and smaller, online gatherings with regional cohorts. Grantees consistently ranked these convenings as the most helpful type of support. "It was really cool to see what other people are doing," said Sarah Ross. Natasha Nicholes, another TWHCP grantee, said, "It was nice to connect with the other grantees [in the cohorts], because now you're aware of things that are going on, especially on the far South side of Chicago."

AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT

Like any new program, Together We Heal Creative Place had some challenges to learn from. These had to do with the types and timing of support provided, bureaucratic and communication barriers, and resource constraints.

» Mismatches in Support

Some grantees were disappointed by missed expectations regarding the TAPP consultants. They mentioned wanting more help “stretching their budgets,” for example, more customized communication tools, and more help with fundraising, report writing, and tracking data. Others felt that the TAPP support started too “late in the game,” in Year 2 of the program, when many grantees’ projects were already well underway. Finally, some grantees were unable to access consulting or workshops, as their capacity was simply stretched too thin by the demands on their time.

» Gaps in Consistency

While grantees did access and appreciate supports like the program-wide and cohort convenings, some were disappointed that these activities seemed to “peter out” over time. Others felt that they were given different directions by different members of the program team.

» Resource Limitations

Some grantees received less money than they requested, while others felt they should have requested more. Every grantee expressed concerns over wanting the work to continue - “there’s still more healing to be done” - but many felt uncertain as to how the projects might continue beyond this funding.



RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the overall evaluation and program impacts, here are recommendations for varied actors to build upon the success of this program.

» **DCASE should:**

- › Continue to deepen its leadership in creative placemaking.
- › Continue to make the case for creative placemaking as a strategy for both emotional healing and economic recovery.
- › Continue to partner with the Office of Equity and Racial Justice (OERJ) to embed healing in all grants and programs.
- › Partner more closely with the Department of Planning and Development and others to ease the bureaucratic barriers associated with placemaking.
- › Showcase grantees' work and impacts with local and national audiences, whether through tours, convenings, conferences, or other events.
- › If possible, launch a second round of TWHCP, with more guidance for grantees on funding amounts to request, more clarity on what consultants will and won't be able to support, and more help navigating city bureaucracy in order to launch projects which impact the built environment.

» **Other City of Chicago departments should:**

- › Consider how adding elements of placemaking, arts & culture, and healing might strengthen your current initiatives, engage new audiences, and make change efforts more relevant, responsive, and sustainable.
- › Partner with DCASE for support.

» **Other cities and philanthropic funders should:**

- › Consider how adding elements of placemaking, arts & culture, and healing might strengthen current initiatives, engage new audiences, and make change efforts more relevant, responsive, and sustainable.

- › Acknowledge the harms that their communities have experienced, whether through government, philanthropy, or other systems, and whether historically or recently.
- › Name healing as a goal. Understand that it's possible to invest in healing without fully defining it; healing is a clear and resonant need and it will look differently everywhere. Healing is nonpartisan; everyone is healing from something.
- › Visit Chicago to tour the TWHCP projects and learn more about creative placemaking!

» **Artists and community-based organizations should:**

- › Continue creating meaningful spaces for communities to gather, connect, and learn. Be proud of the work they are doing, and know that they impact individuals, communities, and places in a very deep way.
- › Continue to partner across sectors and work with bureaucracies in order to make changes to the built environment.
- › Recognize that their creative work impacts more than the people who directly interact with it. Talk about this work in terms of not only its individual impacts, but its ripple effects on everything from public health to community safety to economic development.

» **Residents should:**

- › Lean on their own heritage and assets, the people around them, and the places they love in order to find healing.
- › Continue to join and participate in local initiatives, even ones that ask them to express themselves creatively or push beyond their comfort zone.

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* All photos courtesy of TWHCP grantees and/or Greater Good Studio.



"I think that investing in artists is necessary if you want to heal the world. Because we are the visionaries. We are the ones who take the risks. And the fact that we need to heal our people - that's not negotiable."



Laura Ramirez

TWHP Grantee, Instituto Gaspar Yanga

