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YOUTH ENGAGE WITH THE ARTS TO BETTER THEIR COMMUNITY

*Local organizations team up to teach students how the arts can revitalize a community;
final product enjoyed by all*

SILVER SPRING, MD— July 30, 2013

Children and adults of all ages meandered through a community center, across a parking lot, and around several buildings to experience several arts installations, and reflect on what it means to be more than a number.

A pop-up event produced by Common Ground, on the evening of July 30, showcased the work that 26 middle school students created, with the help of six teen mentors and three teaching artists. Youth in the Carroll Avenue/Quebec Terrace and Nob Hill apartment communities have been working since January to find “Common Ground” in their community.

“This particular area of the county has always demonstrated a need for social service, especially through prevention and early intervention. This partnership stressed positive diversionary activities,” Carson Henry, Executive Director of YMCA Youth & Family Services, said about the culmination of Common Ground. “The kids learn to build pride in the relationships they make and the place they live. Everything the kids did was for the betterment of their parents, and their community.”

Community members and guests toured six unique stations and culminated with a celebration including music, refreshments, and a dance performance entitled “Numbers in Motion.” Each station offered a narration in both English and Spanish.

Participants spent the first two weeks of the program separating into visual, performing, and media arts to sort out all of their ideas and inspirations. Then, with just four weeks until the pop-up event, participants created two short plays, a poem, a video presentation, small mosaic plaques and a mosaic mural that will serve as a permanent fixture in the YMCA community center.

This year’s theme, “More Than Just a Number,” appeared in many mediums. A video presentation of two documentaries included interviews with community members about the different ways numbers are used in their everyday lives. Mirrors on mosaic plaques along the path encouraged each guest to reflect

if they are truly more than a number. A poem performed by several students explored the perceptions and possibilities of numbers.

Prototypes of a lighting project to illuminate address plaques were also displayed in the YMCA community center that will later be created using mosaic tiles with the help and input of the community.

“[The event] showed what’s possible when people care enough to invest in the youth and their community,” Henry said, “It was a night that the kids and community members will remember for the rest of their lives.”

About Common Ground:

The Common Ground project, now in its second year, came together through a Jim and Carol Trawick Foundation Team Up Grant which funds innovative partnerships working with under-served middle school youth. The partners, Youth & Family Services of the YMCA, Arts on the Block, Gandhi Brigade and Imagination Stage, each drew on its own unique expertise to deliver an eight-month, arts-focused skills development experience for youth in the two neighborhoods. Common Ground builds on the existing after-school programs of the partner organizations and engages participants in intensive training in the arts and leadership-skills development with the overarching goals of nurturing Media, performing and visual arts youth prepare for event. Photos by Common Ground media arts participants.

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