

The reflections below are from leaders in the five organizations that participated in BYAEP and implemented all five evaluation tools over the course of the three-year project.

Medicine Wheel Productions (MWP)



S.P.U.N. (Medicine Wheel Productions' youth initiative) was launched in 1998 as a response to the high rate of suicide and heroin overdose deaths among teens in South Boston. In our first summer we had eighteen young people work for us. Most of them were in a program funded by the Federal Department of Labor; many were survivors of suicide attempts and many were on prison release. Now, twelve years later, we serve over 300 young adults each year, many in the 19-25 year old range. The Medicine Wheel tradition has long held that every spoke of the wheel is significant and that if one spoke is broken, the wheel is broken. All of our work is a response to the human condition; all of it involves inviting young people to take their rightful places as citizens and contributing members of society.

Through the BYAEP surveys, particularly the alumni survey, we have tangible evidence of how young lives have been changed through our programming. Out of the 68 responses that we received through our recent alumni survey, the vast majority were extremely positive:

- An impressive 87% of our young people were proud to report that in the past five years they had “worked to improve their choices in life” after being at Medicine Wheel.
- Social and Cross-Cultural Skills and Creativity and Innovation were the two strongest 21st century skills that alumni stated they developed at MWP.
- 80% of our alumni believe that MWP contributed to their working to solve problems in their community.
- 89% of our alumni are working hard to make their dreams a reality.

We have found that 85% of alumni feel that their experience at Medicine Wheel contributed to them taking their education seriously and working hard, with many of our young people pursuing an education working in the trades. It has been encouraging to hear that 75% of alumni feel that their experience at MWP contributed to them finding and keeping a job. These are just a very few ways that we have been able to use the BYAEP survey to deepen our work. Additionally, the BYAEP surveys have enabled us to bear witness and give testimony to the change in young lives, using art as the threshold.

All of us have anecdotal evidence of how and why our programs are wonderful—we witness these miracles every day. The problem, of course, is trying to measure these anecdotes. The BYAEP survey has provided MWP with an outlet and opportunity to strengthen our capacity to measure and communicate the impact we've had on our young people. Funders really do value seeing the concrete results that the self-evaluations (especially the risk assessment) and alumni surveys have produced. In a grant received from the MBAs for the Arts Foundation, the organization articulated that our participation in BYAEP was a key reason why they opted to fund us.

We are excited to continue utilizing the BYAEP surveys and to rely more heavily on the positive results that we've produced when reporting out to funders and the community at-large. While we have utilized many of the statistics mentioned above to some degree, there is still a plethora of data that we have at our disposal to share out in a compelling way.

BYAEP has been a tool that helps us explain who we are as an organization—what we do well and where we need to work. It's helped us to better understand the young people that we serve. Most importantly, BYAEP has helped us to focus and ensure that the services we provide are in line with our mission.

For example, we have a deep-rooted interest and focus on inclusion. We spend significant amounts of time on this concept in our programming. Through our alumni survey, we found that 92% of our alumni think that their experience at MWP contributed to their working well with people of other racial/ethnic groups. This impressive statistic indicates that our focus on inclusion has produced fruitful results, and that our young people are really thinking about this and embracing it in their lives.

As we mentioned above, BYAEP has also played a key role in helping us to better understand our young people and the challenges they face in everyday life. Specifically, we were able to identify that:

- 43% of teens at MWP feel that they have only a 50/50 chance or less of living to age 35. This number is alarmingly almost three times the national average. (Borowsky, Ireland, & Resnick, 2009, p. 81).
- 63% of teens in Medicine Wheel have had two or more friends or family members die due to violence, drug overdose or other unnatural causes.

These statistics really encouraged us as an organization to step up the level of case management that we were providing to our young people. Over the past few years, our case manager has created a solid program for the organization and has built key collaborations with other community resources that can support the needs of our young people. BYAEP played a critical role in helping us to create this shift/change in our programming.

The Theater Offensive (TTO)



The three major things we have learned from our work in BYAEP, specifically with the BYAEP Self-Evaluation and Program Evaluation are:

1. Golden nuggets about program improvement: Anyone who works with youth knows that they will tell you when you are doing something wrong or when changes need to be made. In True Colors, youth are an integral part of shaping the program content and design. The BYAEP evaluations, however, have provided a written, formal method to receive feedback from participants on more subtle details. For example, in year one, information gathered from the BYAEP Self-Evaluation indicated that only 63% of youth felt that participation in True Colors helped them become a better listener. This was our lowest score measured by the Program Evaluation. Staff put great effort into calling attention to moments in rehearsals and performances when listening is crucial to the creative process and moments when folks in the room successfully listened. Results from the second year show that 100% of youth felt True Colors helped them become a better listener.

2. Organizational impact: A second impact has been an organization-wide cultural shift at The Theater Offensive. After True Colors started meeting higher standards of proof for the efficacy of its work, our other programs embarked on efforts to demonstrate their impact. This has changed our process from beginning to end. We're still artists; we come up with crazy ideas every day and sometimes we do them just because our gut tells us to. However, we now we have a common practice of identifying when that risk seems worthwhile and some common language to discuss the impact of these artistic choices!

3. Potent data to present: Our work with BYAEP has enabled us to gather information that complements the art, which gives stakeholders a fuller picture of the impact True Colors has in the lives of youth and in the community. We now understand that we need to present stories, images, and data when talking to our stakeholders, and BYAEP has helped us develop systems to capture this data. Some examples of this are the fact that 88% of youth agreed or strongly agreed, "This program has helped me build my confidence," and youth participants reported an eleven percentage point increase after participation in the program in their feeling "connected to my community."

4. Proper prioritization: The previous three lessons learned are in order of importance. Our evaluation needs to be specific enough to improve the programs and the organization in order to better serve the youth. Reporting data out is a lower priority. Each funder has needs that may or may not be met by our evaluation, so we cannot structure all of our tools to accommodate the needs of every funder. There are still many challenges and barriers to using the BYAEP tools and getting the data necessary to "wow" funders. However, after participating in BYAEP we feel we are able to better help participants, funders, and the community at-large understand the impact and benefits of True Colors.

ZUMIX

"I wanted to become someone who meant something. I have." – Jen, age 17

From the onset of the BYAEP collaboration, ZUMIX has felt the importance of implementing a comprehensive evaluation system into our programmatic culture. In our early stages, we faced two very distinct challenges in implementing the evaluations tools: scheduling and capacity. ZUMIX's programs operate in three semesters (spring, summer, and fall) and serve approximately 400 youth each year, of which roughly 300 are teenagers. Therefore, we had to administer evaluations more frequently and to a greater number of students (as compared to the other organizations). Additionally, many of our young people are served through private one-on-one instruction, which the BYAEP materials are not intended to track. It took us about a year to be able to navigate these challenges, but in the end the strengths of the BYAEP tools came to the forefront and began to have a positive impact on our teaching artists' work.

The primary strength that has emerged is the power of the Self-Evaluations. These tools allow us to do several things that are incredibly useful from an administrative level.



1. Self-Evaluations allow us to gauge the pulse of our general student population. In a given year, ZUMIX has fifteen group programs in four different areas (Songwriting & Performance, Instrumental Music, Music Technology, and Radio). These programs are intended to attract young participants from many backgrounds and with diverse interests. Our teaching artists have always had a good sense of their respective classes, but administratively it was sometimes challenging to get a sense of how the overall student population felt in the context of their work. BYAEP has allowed us to measure that rhythm. In the first year that we implemented the tools, we saw that a majority of our youth were looking for more leadership opportunities. In response, we thoughtfully created various opportunities for them to exercise these skills, including a leadership council and several paid youth staff positions. In the second year of implementation, the percentages showed that many of our youth were uncomfortable giving feedback to others on their work, stating that they “didn’t want to make someone feel bad.” As a result, our teaching staff subtly incorporated more opportunities for feedback in classes, and we have noticed that fewer students now feel uncomfortable in these conversations.

2. Self-Evaluations also allow us to track an individual youth's progress over multiple semesters/years.

Since many of ZUMIX's young folks participate in numerous programs over many years, it is important for us to be able to look at a young person's progression over time while involved in our programs. BYAEP Self-Evaluations give us insight into our participants' thoughts and feelings about themselves. Although several particular stories come to mind, we can't help but think of a young man who has been struggling with a difficult personal situation for several years. Carter began coming to ZUMIX this past fall. He is incredibly outgoing and LOVES to sing. He joined our Vocal Group program and immediately "vibed" with ZUMIX. Looking over his Beginning Self-Evaluation, we learned that his mother has AIDS and that this is becoming an increasing difficult situation for him to deal with. He was excited to come to ZUMIX so that he could escape this reality for at least a few hours each week. Upon completing the program and his Final Self-Evaluation, Carter revealed that being at ZUMIX has significantly helped him deal with his mother's illness and that he no longer feels ashamed of her situation. He is able to deal with this reality much better—in large part due to the non-judgmental attitudes of ZUMIX's staff and participants.



3. Program Evaluations allow teaching artists to think about the programs from the youth's point of view.

At the end of each semester, program staff and teaching artists were given reports on their respective programs along with quotes from students commenting on the programs, the instructors, and their learning/artistic experience. Each report included statistics that highlighted the positive aspects of the program as well as possible areas to improve on. One very simple, but extremely powerful, example of how these evaluations positively affected programming is in the case of ZUMIX's Vocal Group (Voices). In the spring of 2010, at the end of our first year of implementing the evaluations, several of our youth participants suggested in their Program Evaluations that the instructor should allow the chorus members to select the music repertoire that they work on over the semester. As a result, the instructor devised (along with youth) a democratic system for song selection. Over the next two semesters, enrollment in the chorus grew steadily, participants became more excited about rehearsals, and the group sounded really good.

BYAEP tools have shifted the way that we are able to communicate with our donors and the foundations that support us. We are able to report on measurable data in a more comprehensive way than we were able to before. This has allowed for a deeper dialogue between us and our supporters. We have had various responses to our presentations and from funders. When presenting the BYAEP Framework to audiences and other organizations there is noticeable interest about using this as a model for evaluating youth arts programming. In terms of funders, our only response has been more of a critique. This particular funder was not so interested in seeing the results of the areas of development that BYAEP measures; instead, the funder wanted to know about the hard skills youth are learning in our programs (technical skills, musicianship, etc.) as opposed to "feelings." We have been considering how we can incorporate this into our evaluations moving forward.

Hyde Square Task Force (HSTF)

“People see what I’m doing—being a part of the community, teaching dance to the kids, doing good stuff for the community.”

– Jamil, age 17

Our evaluation results revealed two important strengths of the program: **confidence in leadership** and **community engagement** among our participants.

- In their Final Self-Evaluations, 93% of youth agreed or strongly agreed, “I am a confident person.” This showed a 43 percentage point increase from the Beginning Self-Evaluations.
- The percent of teens who agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, “This year, I have done something valuable for or in my community” increased from 57% in their Beginning Self-Evaluations to 100% in their Final Evaluations.

We are a part of a larger organization that places great value on these two areas, to which we continue to dedicate much energy and program time. One of the major ways youth develop leadership and community engagement is through teaching dance to other young people in their community. We are continuing to strengthen this piece of Ritmo en Acción by intensifying the training process for all youth as they are preparing to become instructors. The youth will get more training and practice before they actually go out into the community and teach, which will continue to significantly strengthen their leadership skills.

One area we focused on during this past year was peer relationships. We found, through the BYAEP evaluations of year one, that only 54% of youth said they had gained trusting relationships with their peers. This was our weakest score, and although it is easy to see how this mistrust can be a product of an environment that has a great deal of violence and negativity, it also challenged us to be much more intentional about planning and implementing more team-building activities throughout the year to help create the trust teens were missing. This year we made a concerted effort to enhance dialogue and build accountability and trust by developing our system of “feedback and expectations.” Every two weeks, the group came together and staff gave input about areas where each dancer excelled and places where there was room for improvement. This helped create a sense of transparency and group accountability, which has helped improve relationships within the group. These efforts have helped to improve the trust and strengthen the relationships among the dancers on the team. In the Final Evaluations, 90% of youth felt that they had gained trusting relationships with their peers at HSTF, an increase of 36 percentage points from the previous year.

In general, using BYAEP has helped make evaluation a more important part of the culture of the program. It has become a habit to ask the teens how they are doing in the program, what they are learning, and what suggestions they have to improve the program.



Raw Art Works (RAW)

The strongest benefit of the BYAEP project for RAW has been the development of a common language across the organization, through which we can engage, dialogue, and challenge ourselves to improve in clear outcome areas. The language and spirit of the BYAEP Framework of “I Create, I Am, and We Connect” is deeply woven deep into RAW’s infrastructure and strategic vision. It informs our curriculum, quarterly reports, and staff meetings. It is inherent in our relationships with youth, funders, staff members and our community. The nine 21st century skills have been very useful in helping youth establish goals and also in building a vocabulary and skills development focus among both staff and youth that generates a consistency and vibrancy in our organization.

We have learned much about our strengths and development areas through our evaluations with youth and with our alumni. Two items to mention include where we have excelled and where we need to improve:

1. We have learned that our youth believe that RAW staff delivers excellent programming. Teens have consistently rated all of our programs a minimum of 9.1 out of 10. 89% of teens feel that their successes are celebrated at RAW, which represents an increase of 27 percentage points from the beginning of the year.
2. Over the past two years we have placed emphasis on improving specific low scores:
 - Although 90% of teens agree, “I have gained trusting relationships with my peers here,” only 54% of teens agree or strongly agree, “I am connected to my community.”
 - Only 61% of teens agree or strongly agree, “I put strong effort into my education.”

In 2010-2011 RAW worked hard to help youth define how they might more positively engage with their community. Every RAW program was given the challenge to have art displayed in the city and to creatively seek opportunities for community engagement. For example, our RAW Chief teen mentors nominated organizations and leaders in the community whom they felt were the “soul” of Lynn and then made each award recipient a unique handcrafted trophy. In small teams they personally delivered the trophies throughout the city, including one to the Mayor of the City of Lynn, Judy Flanagan Kennedy. A week later the Chiefs received a hand-written card from Mayor Kennedy. The entire experience was incredibly affirming for everyone involved. In our 2011 Final Evaluations, we increased the community engagement score nine percentage points to 63%.

In 2010-2011, the percentage of youth who placed strong effort into their education increased by only one percentage point. In 2011-2012, RAW will better assess the efforts of youth in school and how to improve their connection to their education and success in school. This is a TOP priority along with our continued commitment to helping youth connect positively with their community. Our curriculum is designed to deeply reflect these intentions.

Other benefits of BYAEP include our Artistic Responses (“Drawing it Out” evaluations), which have provided valuable evidence of the strength and diversity of the work we do and the outcomes we are able to achieve. In looking through the hundreds of our Drawing Evaluations completed over the past three years, it is clear that there are ten distinct areas of growth which youth speak to year after year (see Appendix).



BYAEP's inclusion of tools for alumni evaluation has increased our ability to connect to our alumni and assess long-term outcomes. In administering our Alumni Survey, we have been able to connect with over 200 alumni across the nation. For three years in a row we have held an Alumni Dinner, attended by 50-60 alumni each year. Our active Alumni Facebook page has over 150 members. Sixty-six alumni completed surveys, which have offered us incredible statistics and a wealth of quotations from alumni who are now as old as thirty-two (see Appendix). One alumna summed up our challenges and successes of many youth at RAW:

"The greatest influence RAW has had on the way I respond to challenges is the way in which I now reach out for help when I need it. Before participating in RAW, I struggled through adversity totally alone, which led to very destructive, at times self-mutilating, behavior. From the moment I set foot into the RAW building, I was overwhelmed with support, concern, and encouragement from peers and mentors that immediately changed the way I handle adversity. Now, not only am I willing to ask for support when I need it, but my coping skills are stronger and healthier than they have ever been, a direct result of my experience working through issues in RAW groups."