



Interview with Co-Founder of YouthSpeak! Collective- David Kietzman

Los Angeles Incite Director Matt Scelza spent some time talking to David Kietzman, Executive Director and Co-Founder of Youth Speak! Collective- a non profit organization that empowers the youth in lower income communities in the Northeast San Fernando Valley. Below you can learn more about the organization and their non-traditional way of funding the organization.

How did you create an offshoot that matches your mission without being a traditional nonprofit program which depends on grant funding?

I was thinking about it for probably at least two years along with our digital arts instructor. We were giving jobs to students [with] other people working alongside and we just thought it would make sense but we just never acted on it. A couple of my staff told me to either do it this year or stop talking about it. It was nice because I think ideas can usually stay in the idea stage and lack action. So, we called a meeting at my house just to brainstorm on potential social enterprise ideas. In about three hours of brainstorming, we came up with a lot of good ideas, along with the typical silk screening shop or a coffee shop.

Our criteria involved having something close to our mission that we could actually profit off of that could go back into one of our programs. By focusing on the criteria, we were able to create Youth Speak Media Solutions. Mike, the digital arts instructor, became our Creative Director and I became the Director of Development, both volunteering our time to get the venture off the ground. We put together a group of 6 mentors and an initial group of ten students that were graduates of our Digital Arts after school program, [and] had already gone through at least a year or two of programs.

How does one get involved?

We have a pretty simple student application but the group of youth right now for the most part came through our after school program. Since Mike, our after school instructor, [also] leads Youth Speak Media Solutions, it definitely makes it easier. He sees the kids that want to take it to the next level. Such as the students that want a creative career path either in digital photography, or editing and film. We also have roles for mentors, if you have a background in film, photography, editing or marketing we are always looking for mentors who can work with the students and clients.

Was this earned income idea pursued because it was an easier way to get money compared to grant writing and fundraising?

We wanted an additional source of income and not constantly only rely on grant funding, so this seemed like a really reasonable approach. We had created a product that could generate jobs and revenue for our programs, which was a great fit for our organization. In general I think arts programs are harder to fund and we really had plans to expand our arts programming. Roughly about 20% of every job is profit that goes back into our digital arts program.

To see some of the work Youth Speak Media Solutions has done, click this link: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q2r-3qO0uLQ>

And here is an award-winning YSMS Pitch: <http://vimeo.com/47151957#at=0>

