

## Summary of Progress for Action Project

### **Idea Inception:**

My initial action project idea was to answer the following questions to build a case for supporting foster youth access to arts programming: *(1.) Does DCFS have a feedback protocol/ system for former foster youth/ adult adoptees that is official, accessible, and non-deficit? (2.) Can LA County's DCFS pilot a hip hop dance/ youth/ recreation program, while also paying an adult adoptee or former foster low income youth like myself, to begin an arts education pipeline that will concretely address low college attainment and high mental disparity statistics on a national level? (3.) If these programs exist are they accessible to foster youth/ adult adoptees on all levels of the income spectrum? (4.) If successfully how will DCFS ensure a pilot arts education pipeline is sustainable, accessible, and stays consistent to the initial vision?* Answers were intended to be collected through surveys, in person interviews, focus groups, and attending relevant/accessible meetings for DCFS. In my personal outreach efforts between 2015 and 2016, child welfare agencies spoke about the need for arts programming but a lack of data or supporting models that bridge a connection between access and improved outcomes for foster youth. This was why my action project was designed with the aforementioned questions.

### **Project Execution:**

During the months of October & November 2018 I launched my project with the intention of getting the feedback of individuals impacted by the child welfare system. After meeting Leticia Buckley, Acting Chief Deputy of the LA County Arts Commission, at the second ACTIVATE session I was prompted to re-evaluate my approach to not focus on DCFS entirely. Leticia then introduced me to Denise Grande, Director of Arts Education, who expanded my understanding of where LA County stands with increasing access to system impacted youth and families.

I spent the months of December 2018 & January 2019 finding data on current access for arts education overall in LA and understanding which programs in California support foster youth through the arts. The LA County Arts Education Profile showed dance is offered at 32.1% of elementary and 29.7% of secondary schools in Los Angeles. Through a direct ask to my Activate Fellow Cohort I was connected with Tige Charity, founder of Kids in The Spotlight, a non-profit program doing visual storytelling of foster youth as a pathway to healing, growth, and viable employment opportunities. After explaining my project it became clear that there was less need to defend the work through research and instead show the results and impact of what I've accomplished in my own program. The interviews with staff of child welfare agencies the next month helped redefine my action project from research to outreach for my "Memoirs of a Broke Chicano" program.

### **Revised Execution:**

The beginning of February consisted of distributing a one sheet summary of M.O. A.B.C.'s foster youth impact, agencies served, and attempting to answer the following questions to find funding: *How does LA County or DCFS systemically invest in art programs, especially dance, to support foster youth's mental health? If not, what*

*organizations/individuals in Los Angeles follow a model that invests in foster youth through art (as therapy or healing)?* Re-introducing my action project goals I began interviews at the agency I worked at. Will Max (Resource Family Approval Director) and Heather Carrigan (Chief Executive Officer) of Allies for Every Child supported my action project by forwarding my one sheet to their respective networks. Because my outreach efforts seemed to slow down I was also interested in seeing where nationally foster youth were being supported. I connected with Foster Club, a national support network for foster youth who shared their organization was not aware of ways foster youth are encouraged to heal from trauma using art.

The second half of February I heard from Marcelo Cabrera (Program/ Compliance Officer) of Ark Homes Foster Family Agency located in Rancho Cucamonga who felt there were organizations within his network ready to co-partner with my program. He intended to setup a conference call with San Bernardino & Riverside County organizations that contract with LA but forwarded my one sheet so organizations could reach out on their own instead. Continuing to build momentum of my outreach I connected with a UCLA graduate student, Jessica, who did her dissertation on social capital and how institutional agents increase academic achievement. Initially I was informed Jessica focused her research on access for performing arts programs for foster youth and through exchanges she eventually forwarded my one sheet to DCFS social workers.

In the months of March & April 2019 I continued to outreach to my spheres of influence and new contacts. In March I connected with the First Star program at UCLA to provide foster youth with direct access to hip hop dance workshops. Tige Charity forwarded my one sheet to her network with the hope of finding funders to expand the M.O.A.B.C.'s program. A colleague also reached out to begin conversations on how to bring M.O. A.B.C. to his students at the University of Denver. In April I met with the First Star Bruin Guardian Scholars Academy Director, Karina Garcia, to discuss a summer partnership. First Star is a partnership with UCLA and the DCFS intended to secure policy victories and unveil the issues facing current foster youth in school. During April Jessica's colleague suggested to connect with AB 12 by calling the DCFS headquarters.

### **Next Steps:**

My next steps include follow up conversations with potential co-programmers, contacting AB-12 stakeholders, and continuing to share my findings to find the bridges necessary to efficiently scale up my program. Understanding that the child welfare system is now focused on family first and extracurricular support I will continue to show the ways programs led by foster youth are key in the overall conversation. Finding one program that does similar work to M.O. A.B.C. shows there is a high demand and low fiscal support overall for access to dance programs for foster youth. This only drives the uniqueness of my action project to eventually find the necessary support.