

Young people given a voice: Center stage

Written by Titilayo Bediako



An exciting partnership was formed this summer between WE WIN Institute, the Ordway Theater, Connections to Independence (C2i) and Sabathani Community Center.

The collaboration brought in noted artists including, Chad Heslup, Toki Wright, Chastity Brown and Lisa Brimmer. Heslup, better known as MC Longshot; a song writer, composer and producer who has just released his sixth CD titled, "Instant 4 Eternity," which has received rave reviews. Wright is a Twin Cities recording artist, community organizer and educator. Brown is a singer, songwriter and musician who was dubbed by the critics as Minneapolis' best folk artist in 2012. Brimmer, is a poet and a Givens Foundation for African American Literature Fellow in 2010 and 2013.



The program helped children develop a respect for the arts and gave them an opportunity to participate in all aspects of the arts. Students learned the roles of language in art production, artistic expression and various career paths that exist within performing arts.

The artists led youth through group warm-up and performance exercises during which they learned how to vocally warm up to sing, project their voices and use their whole vocal range.

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They also instructed students how to produce original artistic content. The professional artists mentored youth in the process of producing a show, from creating and ordering artistic content to stage management techniques, to how to run lighting and a soundboard.

Youth also learned a variety of performance skills during an intense two-day tech and dress rehearsal, including speaking to the audience, talking to a group, voice projection and how to negotiate stage space with other performers.



"One goal of the project is to encourage life-long engagement in the performing arts. We are delighted to partner with WE WIN Institute and Sabathani for this program and are committed to continuing a partnership of creative programming, education and entertainment that inspires us all," said Patricia Mitchell, president and CEO of the Ordway.

"This program fits completely within our mission," said Lissa Jones, executive director of Sabathani Community Center. "We welcome the opportunity to partner with WE WIN Institute and the Ordway to give our young people access to the arts."

Heslup, one of the artists who also works with WE WIN Institute, assisted with youth on a project. He helped youth in creating a spoken word composition on Trayvon Martin, the

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17-year-old African-American youth who was killed and received national attention.

"It has been really incredible working with our youth this summer. They worked hard and really demonstrated great talent and the ability to give their best," said Heselup.

The program was showcased on Aug. 23 inside the Sabathani Community Center auditorium with a variety show format. The acts included singing, hip-hop, poetry, music, and dance.