

About New Urban Arts

Founded in 1997, New Urban Arts is a nationally recognized interdisciplinary arts studio, gallery and performance space for high school students and emerging artists in Providence, Rhode Island. Our mission is to build a vital community that empowers young people as artists and leaders toward the development of a lifelong creative practice.

Theory of Change

Every young person is entitled to a strong and active imagination, and innovation in arts education will ensure that all young people can develop a commitment to lifelong learning and creativity. These two ideas drive New Urban Arts because we believe there is no greater possibility for social change than if every American pauses throughout life to create. Our goal is to encourage all young people to develop a sustainable creative practice and to participate in this courageous inquiry.

All young people – no matter their place in society – are entitled to become creative, independent thinkers. The sad truth, though, is that the majority of us do not develop a creative practice. The majority of us learn we are not creative. Systemic sorting selects a few as “creative,” while leaving the rest behind. Often, this occurs by not offering the arts consistently in education. At worst, arts education reinforces societal norms which uphold the idea that the majority are not technically gifted as artists, and, therefore, not creative. Bureaucratic school systems and large schools slow to change fail to create learning environments in which the practice of imagination and freedom is possible. Few have the resources needed to overcome these barriers.

For young people to develop their creative practice, New Urban Arts provides an arts learning community that focuses on more than just the technical elements of an arts education. It focuses on the development of one’s ethical, social, and imaginative capacities. It encourages the recognition that one’s self-interest cannot be achieved without a commitment to the self-interest of others. It believes in the inherent power and potential of all young people to be creative and become active leaders in shaping our future democracy.

Through imagining more promising alternatives for the world and ourselves, a sustainable creative practice allows young people to come forward and be possible in new ways. This generation of imaginers and leaders will carve bold, new paths for our democratic society that make more fulfilling and creative lives possible for all.

Vision and Strategic Priorities

The vision of New Urban Arts is to be an influential progressive educational model that demonstrates the importance and possibility of a lifetime creative practice for all young people. The strategic priorities of New Urban Arts are to:

- (a) Steadily grow New Urban Arts' student body and deepen student participation in its studio at 743 Westminster Street,
- (b) Enhance New Urban Arts' educational outcomes and share our values and practice in the greater world through more significant investments in artist mentors and alumni, and
- (c) Position New Urban Arts for future expansion by building a self-sustaining model through vibrant relationships with institutional partners, alumni, volunteers, and supporters.

Values

Connection: Authentic Experiences and Bonds Fuel Us

We believe that everyone needs a mentor – someone to trust, to share honesty with, and enable us to be accountable to ourselves. We need spaces where it is encouraged to be ourselves, to have our own ideas and vision. We approach the arts as a way to help us feel connected to others and reminded what is essential.

Voice: Young People Prevail

All are welcome at New Urban Arts. The diverse voices of young people drive the direction of our programs and organization.

Risk: A Push into New and Positive Directions

Find beauty in mistakes or failure. Through accident or mishap, there are opportunities to learn. It is hard to dare when fear of screwing up, letting down, or reprisal looms; and, you can't grow if you don't dare. We actively seek ways to push each other out of our comfort zones to stay engaged and challenged.

Inclusion: Everyone is on Equal Footing

You can never tell where the next meaningful artwork will come from. You have to encourage everyone. We believe everyone is ready to inspire or be inspired, with something to teach or learn.

Leadership: The Baton is yours for the Taking

Anyone can lead a project. If we provide committed, passionate people with direction and support, their project will achieve its goals. The same person can be a supportive follower and a visionary on different projects. The ink on our job descriptions is always wet. Roles and responsibilities thankfully evolve here.

A Few of New Urban Arts' Programs

At the heart of New Urban Arts' programming is our **Youth Mentorship Program**. Each year, 16 Artist Mentors are selected through a competitive student-led application process (from a pool of over 40 applicants) to work with the 150 student participants that regularly attend our daily workshops. Our mentors range in age from 18 to 40, and reflect the diversity of our student body. Every mentor is partnered with a small group of 4 to 8 high school students, and together they embark on a year-long journey of self-discovery and community building, through the lens of a specific artistic medium. This community fosters high expectations for young people, and provides them with

opportunities to succeed through structured studio practice, regular exhibitions of their work, chances to teach others, and college preparatory support. The program also creates leadership opportunities for students to design and lead arts workshops geared toward younger children in area recreation programs or adults with special needs.

Our Artist Mentors are held to high expectations, as well, and supported through our **Artist Mentor Development Program**, a rigorous professional development program in which mentors learn to engage young people in meaningful ways using innovative art education strategies. Mentors participate in a reflective process centered on weekly coaching circles, in which they discuss challenges and share resources with the assistance of a facilitator. They also take part in monthly half-day topical training sessions that examine the meaning and importance of community arts practice and offer practical training in effective communication skills, grant writing, crisis management, and community development.