

# 2025 Mentorship and Well-Being



Our mentorship program is an ongoing program where youth connect with positive adult role models through 1:1 meetings and creative activities. Some of the highlights this year have included going to see the movie *Wicked*, alternative Valentine's party, celebrating birthdays and graduations, and a supportive job club.

All the young adults that go through any of YEA's programming can participate in a variety of mental wellness workshops covering many topics. These mental wellness workshops allow students to build tools and coping strategies to increase mental wellness and build connections with mental health professionals. Led by YEA Youth Advisor Destini Montez, therapists Tamika Thomas and Diana Francis, these workshops allowed Arts Street participants to build tools to support their mental health.

Counseling, and workshop topics this year have included self-care, growing your strengths, identifying emotions and moods, and how society and identity can impact mental wellness. We have received positive feedback on the workshops with 85% of the participants saying they learned a new skill to cope with mental health challenges and responses such as, "These activities are essential for us and we should do more!"

# Identity Workshops 2025



Throughout the year, Arts Street places an emphasis with our participants on exploring identity and the integral part it plays in art. Post-programming surveys show that because of these workshops, 82% of our young adults showed an increase in understanding of their identity. Highlights from this year include working with Denver artists Lilian Lara and Devin Urioste who led our young artists in creating meaningful and beautiful artwork reflecting their identities.



Another project with identity as a focus included working with 18 young adults, ages 14-19 to create digital photographic portraits. Devin Urioste again led the group in a workshop of identity exploration where youth brainstormed symbols they could represent important aspects of their identity and wrote an artist statement about the meaning. They each had their portrait taken and incorporated those symbols onto the photo digitally using Procreate software.



Lilian Lara is a Denver artist who creates beautiful fashion and headdresses from upcycled materials reflecting her Latinx heritage. In summer 2025 she worked with 22 young adults, ages 14-19, to create one-of-a-kind headdresses that culminated in a photographic portrait. Devin Urioste first worked with the group exploring what identity means and symbols or expressions of those various identities. Lilian had them examine various styles of headdresses from different cultures and how each culture visually represents their concepts of identity through art. The young adults were given an assortment of upcycled materials to create designs that demonstrate their values and personhood. They also learned the basics of photography and photographing portraits with artist/instructor Adama Bamba and had a final photoshoot with their unique headdresses.



# Graduation 2025



Congratulations go out to all our 2025 YEA graduates! Our young adults continue to impress us by setting goals, overcoming obstacles and reaching their dreams. We saw graduates from 12 different Denver area high schools with many planning to attend post-secondary training or starting their career paths. Our mentorship program assists youth in navigating the challenges that this transitional time can bring. Witnessing the importance of education and seeing the confidence our participants gain from achieving goals is a cornerstone of our YEA mission.



# Graduates Spotlight 2025

Loni L., a YEA participant and her mother are examples of excelling through many circumstances to graduate this year. Loni has been a participant in our Arts Street and culinary programs over the past 4 years. She graduated as valedictorian of her class at Colorado High School Charter, while taking concurrent classes at Community College of Denver, even giving a speech at graduation! Loni's mother is a former participant of YEA, completing programs 17 years ago, and this May she graduated with an associate's degree from Community College of Denver while working as a human services provider. We love to see the continued successes over the years in one family.



We also witnessed the amazing journey of another YEA participant who started with us in 2009. Benjamin Itangishaka graduated from South High School and earned a Daniels Fund Scholarship for a full ride to University of Northern Colorado where he earned a degree in political science & sociology. He then went on to complete a Master of Science in Global Affairs from New York University in 2018 and this year completed his Doctorate in Education in Learning & Organizational Change from Baylor University. Benjamin came to Denver as a refugee from the Democratic Republic of Congo and completed his education in his third learned language. Benjamin has been a Student Success Advisor for Pepperdine University and is currently working for 2U Inc. supporting faculty at multiple universities in improved teaching methods and student success outcomes. He resides in Denver with his wife and two children.



# Career Exploration & Entrepreneurship 2025



A component of all of Arts Street programming includes working with our young creatives in exploring careers and supporting them in their own side hustles. One of the ways we do this is by having working creatives lead our programming and talking about their own career pathways. This year youth have been inspired by Denver artists Chelsea Romaniello, Devin Urioste, Jasmine Wynter, Jessica Early, Juan Fuentes and Lilian Lara. In addition, these artists worked with some of our youth in guiding them in entrepreneurship, learning about marketing and all the other components that go with owning your own business or working for yourself. Several youth were able to sell their work on First Friday on Santa Fe and one artist even created a large commission working with our client Rebel Bread. There are many ways to have a creative career within multiple industries, and our staff work with participants to help guide them in reaching their dreams.

# DCPA Tour and The Wiz

## Spring 2025

This year saw an expansion of our partnership with Denver Center for the Performing Arts and their community engagement program. A group of our Arts Street interns were able to tour DCPA's costuming department, learning about the creation of costumes from conception to performance. Our young artists were excited to see where the professional artists made the large monster costumes and hats. They also loved being able to see the overflowing storage rooms where costume designers can pull clothing for different performances. There was one room that was just shoes! This tour inspired some to think of being a creative in the performance arts arena. In addition, we were gifted tickets to see *The Wiz* performed. An excited group of young people sat in the front row thrilled by the sets, costumes, music and performances. For many, this was their first professional theater experience, and one said, "I will be thinking about this for the rest of my life." A huge thank you to Maria Corral at DCPA who coordinated these events!



# U.S. Congressional Art Competition

Spring 2025



This year thirteen Arts Street interns, ages 14-18, participated in the U.S. Congressional Art Competition. Led by local artist, Chelsea Romaniello, our interns created unique identity pieces based on a social justice issue that was personally significant to them. For this artwork, the interns first designed a symbol and created stencils from the design. Some of the issues represented were mental health, beauty standards, trans rights, homelessness, book banning, black rights and domestic violence. Using wood and paint they then made their bases and screen-printed their symbol. They added painted details and an artist statement. They submitted their pieces and were able to meet U.S. Congresswoman DeGette at the art show where they received certificates of participation. Arts Street intern Parker A., age 17, even won Best Multi-Media piece in show! In addition, one of Arts Street's previous interns from spring 2024, Tre-Zel B, age 17, won Best Drawing piece in show! We are so proud of all the hard work that our interns put into their projects. Participants included: Parker A., Brice B., Shadiamond B., Crishawn C., Erica D., Aubriana G., Lauryn F., Estrella M., Monika S., Mercedes S., Jessamyn J., Trav'ell C., and Aubrey M.

# Colorado Springs Mental Wellness Retreat

Spring 2025



During spring break 2025, a group of young adults were chosen for a trip to Colorado Springs for a weekend Mental Wellness retreat. Led by YEA Youth Advisor, Destini Montez, our youth experienced art and nature and took a closer look at mental health tools and resources. Their first stop on this whirlwind adventure was Cave of Winds. While there, the young adults explored the caves and experienced the amazing sound phenomenon. Back at their lodging and inspired by nature they participated in an identity exploration workshop creating masks and learned how issues with personal identity can affect mental wellness. The next day they took their masks for a photoshoot in the Garden of the Gods, exploring the flora and fauna and finding creative ways to express themselves. Another highlight was a trip to the top of Pikes Peak via the Pikes Peak Cog Railway, an exhilarating (and a little scary) new experience for all. All the young adults had a fabulous time and felt rejuvenated when they returned home!



# Steamboat Springs Art, Nature & Mental Wellness

This August, a group of exemplary YEA participants received the opportunity to travel to Steamboat Springs for 3 days to experience art, nature and the connection to mental wellness. Each of the participants has shown themselves to be leaders in our community and committed to YEA programming. During the trip the young adults experienced the Yampa River Botanic Park, where they photographed plants and wildlife representing different emotions. Coordinated by our outstanding volunteer, Marilyn Searls, these young adults worked with local artists in Steamboat. Led by Dona Steele, the first workshop was held at Steamboat Art Museum where they were able to view the current exhibit on printmaking and then create their own prints using everyday materials like foam, washable markers and water. The second workshop was based on how creating art can change the artist's mental wellbeing. Working with Marion Kahn at Wild Horse Theater, our young artists built and painted birdhouses with discussions on the therapeutic outcomes of art. Other highlights included meeting with Visual Merchandising Manager, Andrea Benavente for Alterra Mountains at Steamboat Resorts retail shops as well as at her home where they learned about her journey as an artist and learned about different creative careers. And we can't forget riding the gondola at Steamboat Resort to the top of Sunshine Peak with a beautiful hike led by Karen Pharris. Thank you to all our amazing partners and volunteers in Steamboat Springs for creating a unique and life-changing trip for our youth.

Summer 2025

