

Our program works with youth and families who are involved in Youth Justice and are either already on Probation or awaiting trial and have often been criminally entrenched in their activities in the community. Part of the service mandate of our program is to expose our clients to community events, services and resources they typically do not access. The reason for doing so is to expand upon their current, limited cultural knowledge and build upon positive, prosocial experiences. The hope is that these cultural experiences and events will provide positive alternatives and interests which they will pursue instead of their previous criminally related activities. It is also hoped these cultural experiences will support more positive coping strategies as well as a better appreciation of the arts, music, athletics and education – which simultaneously support maturity development and a sense of needing to give back to their community in a positive manner.

Several months ago, Kids Up Front was able to provide our youth with tickets to see the musical show, Stomp. Several of our clients declined the opportunity, stating theatre was not “their thing”. However, two of our male clients were willing to attend the show, though neither had ever seen a play, let alone a musical production. Although willing to be open-minded, both youth had reservations about watching such a performance as it was clearly outside their comfort zone. Additionally, both of these youth did not have peer groups that frequented similar cultural performances, which are often stigmatized (for some reason). Feedback from the staff who attended with our two youth stated both individuals thoroughly enjoyed the entire experience of getting dressed up, going for dinner and attending the performance.

Both youth commented on the proficiency of the performers and marveled at the level of skill required to conduct the show. Our clients admitted the evening was a departure from their routines and was a very positive experience overall. Both young men noted they had been somewhat skeptical initially, however acknowledged that they were not only impressed afterwards, but had a great time and would take advantage of any future similar opportunities.

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