

Chicago Youth Speaks

A Pre-Apprenticeship - Teen Journalism Program made possible by **After School Matters**.



CONNECTING TEENS WITH COMMUNITY

This summer I Am We had the opportunity to partner with two special organizations, *After School Matters (ASM)* and *By The Hand Club For Kids*. Through these partnerships, we were able to introduce teens to their first job experience, teen journalist in training.

Through a pre-apprenticeship program made possible by *After School Matters*, teens received a modest stipend as a reward of being a key contributor in telling the stories of some of our amazing citizens that teens and Chicago need to know about.

Through *Chicago Youth Speaks*, teens worked beside *Lee Edwards*, Journalist and Instructor of *I Am We* and *Innocent Ndayishimiye*, Film-Maker and Instructor of *I Am We*. It was in this vein where students studied the art of journalism and within 6 weeks were transformed into emerging teen journalist and storytellers. Many of our teens never participated in any art enrichment programming before. Therefore, they had to learn the aesthetics of communication, body language, professional etiquette, story telling, etc.

However, thanks to our instructors and the amazing citizens of Chicago, *Chicago Youth Speaks* teens blossomed. They were so inspired to meet citizens of Chicago, who took the time to meet with Chicago Youth Speaks teens and share their experiences, information and encouragement.

With the help of our citizens of Chicago, teens covered stories on volunteerism, entrepreneurship, education, self-responsibility, community, faith, etc. As a result of these connections, students wrote about many of our amazing citizens, in which we will be sharing with you throughout the year.

In this photo are two students, they are reflecting on a Chicago citizen they just interviewed. They are sharing how inspired they were that someone with such a busy schedule would travel all the way to the West Side of Chicago just to meet them.

We are thankful that when our students look back throughout the year, they can reflect upon their first job experience and all of the amazing people who inspired and believed in them.



Meet Some of The Citizens That Chicago Youth Speaks Have Interviewed

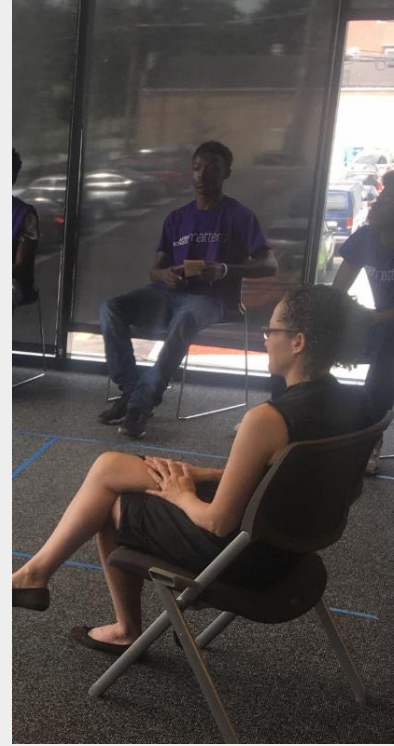
Andrea Watson, a Chicago reporter that is dedicated to developing meaningful stories that strengthens the Chicagoland community. She spoke with Chicago Youth Speaks regarding breaking barriers and the meaning of endurance. Students were very inspired to meet such a young and talented journalist who is passionate about teen causes. The students learned that Andrea birthday was the following week after they interviewed her. Therefore, they lead an activity where they all wrote birthday cards to her as a way of saying thanks and reminding her how her story and determination really inspired them.



Chicago Youth Speaks journalist met *Meredith Kopelman* and her dog, *Rocky*. Rocky is a therapy dog that visits hospitals and libraries bringing hope, joy and wellness to children and seniors. In this interview, students learned how meaningful volunteerism is. After meeting Meredith and Rocky, one teen reflected on this interview saying, "There are so many ways to spread love and joy."

Chicago Youth Speaks also met **Hilary Zankel**. Hilary served as a volunteer for I Am we in 2015, supporting the organization in the area of fund develop as a grant writer. Through Hilary's support and expertise, the grant that she wrote for After School Matters to fund Chicago Youth Speaks for the summer

of 2016 was funded. While some teens heard of grant writing, many did not. Therefore they developed interview questions to better understand who she was and how they can capture her story to inspire more people who share her giving spirit and values to volunteer and help Chicago neighborhoods. One student shared that Hilary inspired him to want to become a better writer, so he can one day write grants and proposals to better strengthen his community and create safe centers for kids and teens.



Regina Pinkston, HR Executive.

Regina met with Chicago Youth Speaks students during the third week of the program, they loved her. Regina was very open and approachable. She openly discussed how doors opened up for her when she made the decision to take her life and future seriously. Teens really connected with this message. Regina shared how she began her career as an associate at Home Depot. In this vein, she quickly identified her strength was connecting with people and building trust. From this, she began to build meaningful relationships and was introduced to the career of human resources. Today, Regina is the Director of G.S. Floor Designs, Inc. where she leads the strategic direction of HR and organizational development. Students were amazed

with Regina as she shared that she comes from their communities. She know what it is like to live in poverty and have little access to opportunities. However, she stressed that even in the midst of obstacles, if you believe in yourself the road to success is attainable. At the end of the interview, students were so inspired with Regina that they wanted to walk her to her car. One student said, "I can't wait to tell my mother about her, they can make an inspirational movie from her story."

Thomas Voit, Financial Representative.

Thomas also met with teen journalist of Chicago Youth Speaks during the fourth week of the program. Students lead a session about personal



responsibility. Thomas is an advocate for veterans, families, small businesses and those looking to retire.

With his time in this field he has seen first hand what financial choices we all make today impact what tomorrow brings. With his time in the military there was always a saying which stuck with him, "Fail to Plan, Plan to Fail."

After talking about his professional experiences, students inquired and wanted to know more about Thomas life as a teen. Thomas was so transparent, that students continued to have more of a free conversation with Thomas. After the interview, Chicago Youth Speaks reflected and shared that they were so surprised how trusting Thomas was to share so much of his personal life with them. Additionally, Chicago Youth Teens adopted Thomas saying, "'Fail to Plan, Plan to Fail.'" They referenced this saying throughout the remainder of the program to hold each other accountable.



Flikk Thorton,

Artist, After School Matters Program Specialist and iHeart Radio Sound Engineer took the time out of his busy schedule like our other amazing Chicago citizens to meet the teen journalist of Chicago Youth Speaks.

Flikk had a realness about him that was very appealing to the teens. He shared his experiences as a young father, artist and professional, and encouraged teens to really take this time to learn who they are so they can

began early cultivating their skills and talents.

Flikk is a multi-talented artist, that is also fluent in Spanish. Additionally, he has a big heart in creating opportunities for teens to THINK AND DREAM BIG. One of our goals as an organization is to give teens access to their local and greater community, including access to corporations and careers that they may not normally have access to. Flikk understood this passion of ours. Therefore, he created an opportunity through the amazing organization, iHeart radio, where Chicago Youth Students had an opportunity to visit, meet their favorite radio personalities on 107.5 WGCI, like Frankie and Kendra, and so many other professionals at iHeart.

Students were so inspired by this experience, as they saw first hand how effective communication skills can open many doors for them. When one student was asked to write about Flikk that will be published in September, he described Flikk as a warm heart changing the lives of so many teens.



ENDING WITH GRATITUDE

During the last week of Chicago Youth Speaks for this summer, the program ended with reflections and gratitude. As a result, Rev. Pastor LaDonna and Letitia Douglas volunteered with us in the memory of Nelson Mandela to serve youth and community. It was a very inspirational day, as students had an opportunity to interview Rev. LaDonna and learn of her mission work in South Africa and many other parts of the world. Students were amazed with her experiences and wanted to know what inspired her to travel and serve. Rev. LaDonna was so kind and transparent, she freely shared. Please stay tuned as our students have written about her and her amazing work which we will be sharing in the near future. Additionally, they were also inspired by Letitia Douglas who participated in an exercise with Chicago Youth Speaks called, "Going back in time to thank someone who helped us."

Each student selected someone to thank from their interviews this summer, in addition to thanking someone in their past, and someone in their hearts. What an inspirational way to conclude an experience.

OUR TEAM

"Alone we can do so little; together we can do so much."

~Helen Keller

Chicago Youth Speaks was facilitated with so much love and care. I want to take this opportunity to thank:

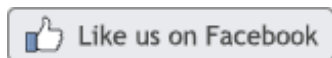


- **Lee Edwards**, Program Instructor (Back right in photo).
- **Innocent Ndayishimiye**, Program Instructor (he is not in the picture as he is our superhero who is always working behind the scenes).
- **Mary Bradley**, Executive Board (another superhero not in the picture as she is also working behind the scenes).
- **Pamela Murray**, Executive Board (Far left).
- **Selene Castaneda**, Program Evaluator, Volunteer (Far right).
- **Meredith Kopelman**, Associate Board, Co-Chair, (Middle).
- **By the Hand Club For Kids** and its amazing staff
- **After School Matters** for providing great enrichment experiences for teens living in Chicago
- **Chicago Youth Speaks Teens**
- And of course the **parents**...thank you
- **Curate** for providing a healthy snack for the teens of Chicago Youth Speaks.

*We also want to thank our entire *Executive Board, Associate Board, Team, Volunteers, Partners, Supporters and Friends*. Our work is **not possible** without you.



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