2-25-2001

Inner-city creativity - Kids from the streets learn new avenues of expression

Channing Gray

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Bringing the arts to the inner city

Continued from the cover

Programs such as Community MusicWorks in New Urban Arts are unusual in that they are not outreach components of some larger non-profit looking for a conscience or a way to make their grant applications seem sexier.

The idea behind these grass-roots efforts is to be accessible, which is to say free and based in the community as support for kids when they hit rough patches in their lives.

Ruth had been toying with the model for his project ever since his student days at Brown, when he studied under education reformer Ted Sizer.

"Could music, could the discipline and pride that comes from mastering an art form, be used to change lives?"

"Where do we get that information?"

"If there's someone pushing me and encouraging me, what else can I do? If I can learn a whole song in one lesson, what else is out there for me?"

She was not alone in her feelings, and started to practice again.

"But it's also an art form, mechanical but imaginative. And that transfers to life. It helps children conceive of bigger opportunities for themselves..."

Ruth said she was one of the first to sign up for lessons this year.

"Just to have a project that lasts from third grade through high school," said Ruth, "something you don't get in school, is one of the compelling reasons for a program. This can provide structure and a supportive community for a child, and that's pretty powerful.

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To reach Community MusicWorks, call 831-2190 or write: Sean Brown at 30 Messer St., Providence, 02909.

Project New Urban Arts is at 743 Westminster St., 02903. Call 751-4556.

For information on programs offered by CityArts, 891 Broad St., call 941-0705.

Joelle Jensen is head of youth services for AS200, 115 Empire St., 02902. She's at 454-3551 or Joelle/cas200.org and can fill you in on the arts group's Broad Street Studio.