



Making Positive Change Through Collaboration

Ella Weiss, Harlem Gallery of Science Communications Associate



The well-being of a community is largely shaped by the resources that are available to its residents. Quality education, arts, and housing are among the plethora of factors that go into the cultural and financial growth of an area. Science and Arts Engagement New York (SAENY), a not-for-profit 501©3 corporation, partnered with The City College of New York (CCNY), to create the Harlem Gallery of Science (HGS). HGS addresses income inequality by creating new and innovative approaches to prepare youth from marginalized communities for higher education, and ultimately careers in the science, technology, engineering, arts, and mathematics (STEAM) sectors of NYC. HGS would not have seen the success it has now without support from generous organizations, made up of members who passionately foster positive change. One organization in particular, the West Harlem Development Corporation (WHDC), has made a tremendous impact on not only HGS, but the communities it serves.

The West Harlem Development Corporation is an entity that collaborates with and funds not-for-profits to improve the overall wellbeing of individuals living in West Harlem and Manhattan Community District 9. WHDC's Executive Director Zead Ramadan and Director of Programs Joanna Castro had a conversation with HGS Communications Associate Ella Weiss, to discuss the collaboration between the two organizations and the beneficial outcome of this partnership. Ms. Castro began by explaining that WHDC has 82 unique grantees. When asked what WHDC looks for when assessing whether an organization is a viable grantee, Mr. Ramadan stated, "We focus on organizations based in West Harlem, and service predominantly constituencies in West Harlem and Northern Manhattan, especially if we believe they can have an impact on underserved sectors of our society." On HGS' efforts specifically, he noted, "Attractive programs to teens and younger folks are not readily available. There is an impact in attracting young people to technology in a language that they appreciate."

WHDC has funded the majority of HGS' efforts since its beginnings. One of the first programs HGS created using funding from WHDC was the *Dream and Inspire: Mentoring Future Leaders Program*. The Mentoring Program began in 2020, and is still very much active in 2022. Ms. Castro expressed her sentiments on its growth: "It is nice to see a returning grantee that evolves, with lessons learned from one grant year to the next." She went on to say that the pandemic hit the city hard, but HGS was able to navigate a "successful pivot," rising to the challenge by administering the Mentoring Program and other workshops online. "It is a pleasure to hear from Stan [Altman, Ph.D., President of SAENY] on how the project has evolved and what it is shaping to be," she added. WHDC's funding not only helped youth from Harlem, but a much bigger sphere, as the program has expanded to a range of marginalized communities in NYC. Mr. Ramadan said of this, "This is the goal. We want to help small nonprofits in West Harlem, and have them grow to serve the entire city. Hopefully they will still be based here [West Harlem], but we want to be a great resource for the rest of the city."

The newest undertaking of HGS, dubbed *Pathways to CCNY and Careers in the Digital Gaming Industry*, originally used WHDC's funding to conduct a study on why and how gaming makes young people tick, and how to leverage that interest to lead them towards STEM careers. The program subsequently solidified into what it is now: an opportunity for youth to explore pathways to higher education and beyond, building interest through public events centered around gaming. "STEM is something everyone needs in their lives, and any opportunity for youth to understand STEM is important. We can't catch every child, but we can excite them through [leveraging] their interests. If this is one avenue to attract young people to STEM, it's a success," Mr. Ramadan said of the Gaming Pathways Program, "We are happy with how Stan and his team built up the program to help educate young people through gaming and on a variety of different topics."

WHDC and HGS are similar in that they hold a shared value of collaboration to uplift the community and provide support. Mr. Ramadan stated, "[Collaboration] is so important to us that it is our motto - Solutions Through Collaborations. We met with several nonprofits today and they expressed the need for them to collaborate for their programs to be successful. That's the spirit that we must harness, and we must continue to build in Harlem and Northern Manhattan, in order to provide the best services possible to our constituents. The failure to collaborate will only stress individual budgets and will impede our ability to have a more extensive impact."

With the help of organizations like WHDC, not-for-profits such as HGS can continue to serve under-resourced areas and promote inclusive education. It is important to give youth the tools to grow into well-rounded individuals and professionals, so they may add to the culture and vibrance of their communities.