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Rich/Collins Community Leadership and Impact Fellowship Final Report 2022

(1)The implementation of the project, including timing, milestones, partners, and participants

Once accepted as a Rich/Collins Fellow I created a logo on Canva and a title for the project called: Pushout and Peacebuilding. My project was inspired by Dr. Monique Morris's novel: *Pushout: The Criminilization of Black Girls In Schools*. The original idea for my project was to have two reading groups of about 5 participants each from Brandeis as well as then from the Department of Youth Services. Though my Department of Youth Services reading group went as planned the Brandeis approach due to participants not always having adequate time to fully engage due to time-conflicts had to be remodeled. The sessions I planned on distributing to each of the participants was: Where Is The Love?, The Tactical Exclusion of Black Girls In Schools, Punitive Discipline & Zero-Tolerance Policies, and the Final Memory Book Signing. The original dates for these sessions were: February 28th, March 14th, March 28th, and the Final Date being April 11th. However, due to having to be patient admist the CORI process these dates shifted too: March 28, April 4, April 11, April 13, April 27, and May 2. Additionally, I had to remodel my Brandeis group and chose to engage participants in my project by leading the Where is The Love? session in my Legal Studies class, hosted a Pushout film screening with the Brandeis Waltham Group Teaching Assistants In Public Schools (TAPS) in the Brandeis library, and completed The Tactical Exclusion of Black Girls in Schools with Brandeis's Educational Justice Intiative.

(2) The Needs that the Project Addressed

The goal of my project was to shed light on the silenced experiences of Black Girls in spaces of education and the criminal justice system. In order to demonstrate the way punitive polcies in

education and the criminal justice system target and specifically harm Black girls but also ways that I could help them find love through these spaces that have harmed them by incorporating activities that fostered empowerment. The Department of Youth Service's goal is to enhance community safety by improving the life outcomes for youth in custody. When entering my first day at the Massachusetts Department of Youth Services the 5 participants that I worked with mentioned the ways in which the book resonated with them the more they continued to read it. They mentioned wanting facilities to have more activities that explored elements of their Blackness and how that continues to impact their lives as well as workshops that were fun and engaging rather than mundane. I will never forget a participant coming to me to say that the empowering words on the notebook that I was able to purchase for them allowed her to see herself. Another vision of this project was to make sure that Black girls were given adequate visibility to thrive better in educational spaces through poetry and reflective activities by this participant and the others that engaged with my project we were able to enjoy this work collectively.

(3) The process used to assess the impact of the project and the results of the evaluation

As previously stated, the process that I took in order to implement my project was hosting the Where is The Love Session with the Massachusetts Department of Youth Services participants as well as with the Legal Studies class that I was taking and being given the opportunity to teach something I was passionate about. The “Where is The Love?” activity involved us each creating hearts and in it describing three places, people, and things that we loved then saving the last spaces to write what love and support looked like for us in educational and criminal spaces to share in a group discussion allowing us each to learn more about one another, our love languages, and support. When engaging with these sessions I would always start off by

explaining the vision and purpose of my project as well as asking each person what peace feels like to them and what drew them to the project and book. For example, peace to me looks like happiness and a breezy day on a nice Caribbean Island. For the next activity I completed this with the Department of Youth Services group where we each created poems inside of rainbows in order to reimagine spaces of love and support from the harm we faced in spaces that claimed to provide this to us but failed us. Additionally, in *Pushout The Criminalization of Black Girls In Schools* Chapter 2: *A Blues For Black Girls When The Attitude Is Enuf* is a spin-off of Ntozake Shange's piece: *For Colored Girls Who Have Considered Suicide When The Rainbow is Not Enuf*. Through this connection and the process of reimagining I thought a powerful symbol to represent this would be rainbows so created this activity. Furthermore, at Brandeis I completed a poetry session with the Brandeis Educational Justice Initiative with a lead faculty member that has supported this project from the very beginning Professor Rosalind Kabhrel, and then hosting a screen-filming with in the library with Brandeis's Waltham Group (TAPS) Teaching Assistance In Public Schools in which we also had a deep discussion after about the film and printed out mini-schoolhouses in which we wrote demands that we wanted to see in educational spaces for Black girls. Lastly, I concluded by creating a physical and digital Memory Book therefore we can continue to look back at the work that we have created collectively.

(4)Unexpected Successes and Obstacles

Obstacles of the project were maintaining commitment when it came to the Brandeis Participants reading group participants, and the CORI process for the Department of Youth Services taking a while to go completely through, limiting my ability to start on the date I had envisioned for the project. I believe the difficulty of the participants maintaining commitment was the time conflicts we were each having as well as the program duration being rather short. I

feel that maybe if it spanned across a year it could be better for participants to have one semester be about recruitment and then the other for actually implementing and carrying out the project. As for the CORI process and additionally needing each participant to not be a close-contact for Covid-19 were safety precautions so I really just had to sit these out and be patient and hoped that it all worked out which it did so I am grateful for. However, if I could give advice to my past self and others who will do their projects in the future and require CORI's I would tell them to try to do it as soon as possible.

(5) The Current status and Future Plans for the Program

The current status of the project is that the Department of Youth Services participants have tapped into their creative sides and have found a new book to look for support as well as a resource such as myself. I remember mentioning that I wanted to be a lawyer and one of them encouraged me that I would be great so I hope when this is the case that I can come back and somehow contact these young brilliant girls again. Additionally, 20 participants and coordinators came out to the Pushout film screening and reported learning something new after this experience. Lastly, I have also innovated a physical and digital Memory book with a signature sheet that we will all have access to in order to remember the work we collaboratively completed together. My future plans for the project involves Professor Kabhrel's class in the Fall of 2022: Juvenile Justice: Cradle Before Custody in which she is going to allow me to teach one day about Pushout and allow participants in the class to sign the Memory Book. I am looking forward to these sessions and fleshing out this teaching day with her to sustain my project at Brandeis.

(6) The Final Budget

Through the Rich/Collins grant I was fortunate enough to receive \$1,081.88 and I ended up

spending \$561.12 meaning the \$520.60 was left over. Initially, I was supposed to put this money towards Dr. Monique Morris got a chance to come to Brandeis during the closing session to speak, however my offer was rejected so I am hoping to save up more money in the future to save and try again to get her to speak at Brandeis. Additionally, since there was no speaker event or a sustained Brandeis reading group the money towards Snacks for both of these were not allocated. If doing this again in the future I hope to map out my budget in advance a bit more.

(7) Personal Growth, Reflections, and Final Thoughts

Overall, Pushout and Peacebuilding has emphasized the importance of Black girls always bringing more than a number and a statistic, but instead being humans worthy of love and support in the criminal justice and educational justice systems. Something that I loved about this project and experience was being able to engage with Black girls in person. I feel often in academia it is common for us to have social justice issues we are passionate about but it to only be a presentation or research essay however by interacting with these people as humans rather than data points it felt so much more real and impactful and further sparked as well as encouraged my interest in the law. Lastly, another takeaway that this project will forever highlight for me is the importance of being your true self, passionate, and spreading that love and good energy onto others. I didn't realize at the time but as I was doing each of these sessions and engaging with people they reciprocated the energy that I had because I was passionate about each of the activities I engaged with and topics encouraging others to tune in, help, and to learn something new by just being able to be my authentic self and to not shy away from that. Through trials and tribulations through multiple moments in the year continuing to be yourself and knowing you have value in each space that you enter is so important and something that this project magnified making it such an unforgettable experience in my Brandeis journey.

Pushout & Peacebuilding

