



50 Years and Moving Forward

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For Local Seniors, SPARC Program is a Hit Once Again

(August 1, 2013—Bronx) With support from the Department of Cultural Affairs (DCA) and the Department for the Aging (DFTA), the Bronx Council on the Arts completed the 2012-13 season of *Seniors Partnering with Artists Citywide* (SPARC), having organized nine talented Bronx artists who were given the task of delivering arts programming to Bronx seniors in senior centers across our borough. These local artists provided a fun and interactive atmosphere for seniors to acquire creative skills, ranging from ceramics to acting to Bomba dancing and more.

A collaboration among DCA, DFTA and the city's local arts councils, SPARC matches artists with senior centers throughout the city. The program provides artists with a stipend and access to workspace in exchange for the creation and delivery of arts programming. This year, nine projects in the Bronx brought joy to seniors and unleashed their untapped talents.

This was evident in filmmaker **Ruben Dario Cruz's** project at **BronxWorks Morris Innovative Senior Center**. Seniors discovered their acting abilities by starring in an original production titled "Bronxerella." The story of Cinderella living in the Bronx was a playful spin on the familiar classic that turned into a true community effort. Cruz filmed the piece in various senior centers and enlisted Council Member Fernando Cabrera for a cameo role. With each project concluding in a public event, Cruz added to the cinematic thrill by showing "Bronxerella" on the big screen at Bow Tie Cinemas in Parkchester.



SPARC Program Bronx Artists bring their creative skills to local senior centers. (left to right; top to bottom) Milteri Tucker, Ruben Dario Cruz, Toni Renee Johnson, Laura Alvarez, Lisa Kahane, Gina Clark, (Oriolla) Mary Wedgeworth-Maakheru, "Dr. Drum" Jose Ortiz, and Josie Gonzalez.

Two returning SPARC artists incorporated the theme of cultural history into the genre of Bomba music. In "Generation to Generation" at **BronxWorks Heights**, "**Dr. Drum**" **Jose Ortiz** preserved Puerto Rican tradition with the aid of folkloric drum, song and dance. At **Neighborhood SHOPP Casa Boricua**, **Milteri Tucker** taught dances inspired by Puerto Rican poets and playwrights. These projects ended in lively public events, with seniors dressed in traditional Bomba skirts and taking turns dancing to the drum.

Music and dance were also front and center at **Co-Op City Senior Services**. **Toni Renee Johnson** took seniors on an exploration of American jazz from the 1930s through the 1970s. She taught moves to various dances through the decades as well as dance-partnering concepts. At the center's public event, seniors demonstrated how to choreograph by combining short dance sequences. They additionally performed a rendition of Jelly Roll Morton's "The Crave" from 1934. Many seniors praised the program as a fun way to exercise while making new friends at the center.

Other projects exercised the imagination through visual arts. **Laura Alvarez** showed seniors at **Neighborhood SHOPP Leon Senior Center** how to create "Inkblot Magic." The group drew folkloric masks and other colorful shapes that resembled faces and various forms of life. They also wrote fictional stories that explained their drawings. "My project was to help improve fine-motor coordination skills, but also demonstrate that there's no right or wrong in art," Alvarez said. "Once the seniors understood that, they were free to create."

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2 - For Local Seniors, SPARC Program is a Hit Once Again - 2

At **Kips Bay Castle Hill**, **Josie Gonzalez** revived the center's long-lost ceramics workshop in which seniors applied the basics of hand-building, glaze techniques and clay portraiture to create their own cups, jars, plaques and sculptures. "You didn't have to be an artist to be part of this project," one participant said. "Whatever work you made, Josie would show you how to make it beautiful."

Lisa Kahane's project at **PEP for Seniors** was a photography and autobiography workshop. Through field trips and hands-on instruction, seniors acquired technical skills and learned how photography could validate both past and future experiences. At a public event in the center's garden, seniors shared new photos of nature and local surroundings as well as old photos taken from their trips around the world. They discussed how the project opened their eyes and changed how they see the world.

Two more projects in the Bronx centered around storytelling. **Gina Clark** conducted "The Wealth of Elder Wisdom" at **Sister Annunciata Bethel Senior Center**. She used video and written documentation to preserve stories of old. Seniors proudly shared memories of childhood, their families and personal experiences such as war stories. "The most important thing I learned is that seniors appreciate when someone shows real interest in their lives and talents," Clark said. "Given the chance, they shine like diamonds."

Meanwhile, seniors at **RAIN Boston East** shared "Stories from Near and Far." Guided by expert storyteller **(Oriolla) Mary Wedgeworth-Maakheru**, they passed on personal and cultural histories in a public event forum. Poetry, song, dance, collage and fabric painting were some of the ways they expressed their stories. (Oriolla) Wedgeworth-Maakheru offered this variety in order to engage as many seniors as possible. "I had to come up with different projects to gain the interest of those who were hesitant to participate," she said.

Fresh off the success of these projects and others throughout the city, the 2013-14 application process will soon be underway. A call for applications is expected to be released on **September 3, 2013**. It will be available on www.bronxarts.org for all artists interested in working a SPARC project with a senior center in the Bronx.

For more information on SPARC, please contact John Sparaci at 718-931-9500 x20.

SPARC is a collaboration among the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs, the Department for the Aging and the City's five local arts councils situated in each borough – Brooklyn Arts Council, Bronx Council on the Arts, Council on the Arts and Humanities of Staten Island, Lower Manhattan Cultural Council and Queens Council on the Arts. It was developed as part of Age-Friendly NYC, a citywide effort to make the City more livable for seniors, and previously ran in 2011-2012 after a successful pilot called Space for Art in 2009. The 2012-2013 SPARC program is supported, in part, by public funds from the Department for the Aging.

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