

# NeON Arts

A program of the NYC Department of Probation  
in partnership with Carnegie Hall's Weill Music Institute

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**AWARD-WINNING NeON ARTS PROGRAM  
BRINGS ARTS TO JUSTICE:  
*Increasing Equity, Diversity and Inclusion in the Arts  
By Engaging New York City Young People***

**Independent Evaluation Released, Highlighting the  
Positive Effects of the Initiative on Youth, Staff, and the Community**

**NEW YORK**— Today, **Deputy Mayor J. Phillip Thompson, Probation Commissioner Ana M. Bermúdez Esq., and Clive Gillinson, Executive and Artistic Director of Carnegie Hall** announce the completion of an [independent evaluation](#) of NeON Arts, an innovative model which provides free, high-quality arts programming and arts education to creative, talented, and motivated New Yorkers living in neighborhoods facing serious socioeconomic challenges. The study was conducted in partnership with the Mayor's Office for Economic Opportunity and the Young Men's Initiative, and supported by the Stavros Niarchos Foundation.

A public-private partnership launched in 2013 between the New York City Department of Probation and Carnegie Hall's Weill Music Institute, NeON Arts serves all youth in the community, including people on probation, with performances and other events open to the general public. Westat and Metis Associates, two independent research and evaluation firms, assessed the implementation of NeON Arts and revealed positive effects of the initiative on participants, staff, and the wider community. As a key component of the evaluation, the research team worked with a Youth Advisory Group (YAG), ensuring that young people were involved throughout the design and execution of the project. Youth ages 18–24 with experience in NeON Arts and an interest in learning about evaluation methods were invited to participate.

Researchers found that the arts programs offered through NeON Arts were highly engaging, providing opportunities for participants to express themselves while learning new skills and taking creative risks, and that participation had a destigmatizing effect on people involved in the

justice system. In addition, the initiative has helped to deepen relationships between youth and adults. Probation officers in particular were able to build more positive professional relationships with their clients by creating art together. Performances and showcases have allowed young people to engage with others from across the city and share their collaborative work with their communities.

“With the release of this independent evaluation of NeON Arts, we are reminded of just how important the arts are in virtually every aspect of a young person’s growth and development,” said **J. Phillip Thompson, Deputy Mayor for Strategic Policy Initiatives**. “It is not an overstatement to suggest that programming like NeON Arts help to transform communities in powerful and meaningful ways. I commend Commissioner Bermúdez, her talented staff, and our incredible partners at Carnegie Hall’s Weill Music Institute for leading such critical work across the five boroughs.”

“NeON Arts is transformative, at the individual, community and agency levels,” states **Commissioner Bermúdez**. “Fueled by a unique public-private partnership between the New York City Department of Probation and Carnegie Hall’s Weill Music Institute, NeON Arts allows diverse communities to engage in a participatory decision-making process to provide the type of community access to the arts that results in improved wellness and greater equity in our City. The evaluation confirms the importance of having the justice system be a vehicle for creative expression.”

“NeON Arts brings high-quality music and art projects to youth in all five boroughs of New York City, providing transformational experiences and engaging local communities,” said **Clive Gillinson**. “The successful partnership between the Department of Probation and Carnegie Hall demonstrates the impact and potential that the arts have in justice settings. This evaluation supports what we already know—that young people thrive when given the opportunity to be creative, explore their talents, and express their voice.”

This evaluation builds on a growing body of knowledge that a meaningful difference can be made in young people's lives when they are engaged through music and the arts. A report from the University of Pennsylvania’s Social Impact of the Arts Project revealed that the presence of cultural assets in low-income communities is correlated with improved well-being outcomes in education, health, and safety, including a 14% decrease in cases of child abuse and neglect, 5% decrease in obesity, 18% increase in kids scoring in the top stratum on English and math exams and an 18% decrease in the serious crime rate.

NeON Arts aims to support the social, emotional, and creative development of young people ages 16-24 in the seven NYC neighborhoods which large concentrations of people on probation call home: Bedford-Stuyvesant, Brownsville, East New York, Harlem, Jamaica, the South Bronx, and Staten Island. Each year, up to 25 twelve-week workshops are led by local dance, music, theater, visual arts, poetry, and digital media artists and arts organizations. Projects culminate in free public performances or exhibits in each neighborhood and citywide celebrations at Carnegie Hall for participants to showcase their accomplishments.

Earlier this year NeON Arts was the recipient of the American Probation and Parole Association (APPA) Award for Excellence in Community Crime Prevention and has also been recognized as a recipient of American City and County’s Crown Communities Award.

**The results of the NeON Arts evaluation indicate that:**

- Engagement in NeON Arts workshops allowed youth to acquire new skills in an art form.
- Participants' focus and self-confidence significantly increased.
- Participation had a destigmatizing effect on people involved in the justice system.
- Youth participants reported that NeON Arts helped them build positive relationships, a supportive community of peers, and marketable skills such as time management, discipline, leadership, and teamwork.

**Elements that are critical to the success of the program include:**

- Prioritizing community leadership. Youth and stakeholder groups guide the selection and implementation of projects during each grant round, ensuring that the programming meets the needs and interests of the community.
- Offering a diverse range of artistic experiences for young people.
- Providing opportunities for participants to express themselves, learn new skills, and take creative risks in warm, collaborative, and safe spaces.
- Providing opportunities for young people and adults to work together on creative projects.

“Anyone who has worked around the NeON Arts program has felt the impact of the work, but it’s gratifying to now have evidence to support the powerful impact art can have on the lives of young people,” said **Darren Bloch, Senior Advisor to the Mayor and Director of the Office of Strategic Partnerships**. “Innovative public private partnerships like this strengthen communities and give young people powerful opportunities to express themselves. Thank you to Carnegie Hall’s Weill Music Institute, the Department of Probation, and our community partners for sustaining this successful program”

“This evaluation affirms NeON Arts as an innovative and powerful model in uplifting young New Yorkers, including probation clients, through creative expression and increased arts access,” says **Toya Williford, Executive Director of the Mayor’s Fund to Advance New York City**. “The success of this program perfectly demonstrates the power of partnership, and we are proud to have worked with the Department of Probation, Carnegie Hall, and funders since 2013 to support young artists in all five boroughs.”

“Evaluation is an important tool for the City to use to understand program implementation and participant experience,” said **Matt Klein, Executive Director of the Mayor’s Office for Economic Opportunity**. “We are pleased to support DOP’s evaluation of NeON Arts and welcome the insights it offers about offering high quality community-based arts programming.”

“NeON Arts is producing positive outcomes for youth living in New York City’s five boroughs by exposing them to arts education and programming,” said **Charissa Townsend, Executive Director of the NYC Young Men’s Initiative**. “Through the partnership with Carnegie Hall, youth have learned new skills, increased their overall self-confidence, and are ready to make positive and meaningful contributions in their communities. The release of the evaluation allows

others to see what we have been witnessing for some time now—that this program is making sustained changes in lives and communities.”

“Programs like NeON Arts that focus on self-expression and encourage collaboration are critically important to support those on probation,” said **Council Member Keith Powers, Chair NYC Council Committee on Criminal Justice**. “With a partnership from the historic Carnegie Hall, the program has been set up for success and it is demonstrating significant results. I commend the Department of Probation, and as Chair of the Criminal Justice Committee, I look forward to the program’s continuation.”

“I am proud to support NeON Arts, an extremely innovative and important program,” said **Council Member Jimmy Van Bramer, Chair NYC Council Committee on Cultural Affairs**. “This evaluation confirms that providing people on probation and all members of disenfranchised communities with access to art and cultural programming fosters community building, self-expression, and the development of new skills and talents. It is a fantastic, creative way to engage youth, combat stigma, and decrease recidivism on the long-term. Access to the arts is a right for all.”

“The results are in, and NeON Arts works! This public-private partnership to provide high quality arts programming and education to young people is truly transforming their self-esteem by destigmatizing what it is to be a young person involved in the juvenile and criminal justice systems,” said **Council Member Vanessa Gibson**. “By using one of the most powerful forms of self-expression, art serves as an educational tool that enables youth to develop deeper relationships to themselves and their communities. I am proud to support this award-winning program, which focuses on local community artists and art organizations to deliver project training to youth ages 16-24. The culmination of their hard work is featured in a community-wide showcase, open to all members of the community to witness first hand, the talent that exists in our young people. I am thankful for the work of the Department of Probation and Carnegie Hall, and look forward to continuing to partner with them on this important program.”

### **NeON Arts Participant Testimonies:**

“It’s like stepping into a place where you don’t have to feel out of order. You feel comfortable. Everybody treats you the same.” – **Youth Participant**

“There’s a lot of talent that we have we don’t know about because realistically nobody gave us a chance because we don’t have too many opportunities.” – **Youth Participant**

“Youth don’t want to be stuck. We love to grow. So what you gotta do is just give us an opportunity to step foot into growth.” – **Youth Participant**

“Art saved my life, so if I can show somebody else how to take a struggle and do something that they’re passionate about and make a living with it; it’s a win-win all around.” – **NeON Teaching Artist**

“I see my whole neighborhood talented and becoming successful... Instead of bringing down one another, I see them lifting each other up.” – **NeON Stakeholder/Community Member**

"We're just creating that platform for them to be able to perform the great skills and talents that they already possess, just allowing them to be able to bring it out. However, you do have to create that safe space for them, allow them to know that they're safe so that they can make themselves vulnerable and then begin to tap into that great talent, those gifts." – **NeON Stakeholder/Community Member**

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This winter, nine organizations will offer free workshops in spoken word, visual art, theater, culinary arts, film, and music production:

Bedford-Stuyvesant: **Urban Word NYC**  
Brownsville: **Thrive Collective**  
East New York: **Fame Airbrush**  
Harlem: **Changing Perceptions Theater, Pneuma Ministries**  
Jamaica: **Redz**  
South Bronx: **Drama Club, International Child Program, Urban Word NYC**  
Staten Island: **Projectivity Group**

For more information about how young people can participate in each project, including a full schedule, visit [carnegiehall.org/NeONArts](http://carnegiehall.org/NeONArts).

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### **About the New York City Department of Probation**

The New York City Department of Probation (DOP) helps build stronger and safer communities by working with and supervising people on probation, fostering positive change in their decision-making and behavior. DOP expands opportunities for them to move out of the criminal and juvenile justice systems through meaningful education, employment, health services, family engagement, and civic participation.

### **About Carnegie Hall's Weill Music Institute**

Carnegie Hall's Weill Music Institute (WMI) creates visionary education and social impact programs that embody Carnegie Hall's commitment to music education, playing a central role in fulfilling the Hall's mission of making great music accessible to as many people as possible. With unparalleled access to the world's greatest artists, WMI's programs are designed to inspire audiences of all ages, nurture tomorrow's musical talent, and harness the power of music to make a meaningful difference in people's lives.

### **About the Mayor's Office for Economic Opportunity**

The Mayor's Office for Economic Opportunity (NYC Opportunity) uses evidence and innovation to reduce poverty and increase equity. It advances research, data, and design in the City's program and policy development, service delivery, and budget decisions. NYC Opportunity's work includes analyzing existing anti-poverty approaches, developing new interventions, facilitating the sharing of data across City agencies, and rigorously assessing the impact of critical initiatives. NYC Opportunity manages a discrete fund and works collaboratively with City agencies to design, test and oversee new programs and digital products. It also produces research and analysis of poverty and social conditions, including its influential annual Poverty Measure, which provides a more accurate and comprehensive picture of poverty in New York City than the federal rate. Several of NYC Opportunity's programs is incorporated into the Young Men's Initiative, a comprehensive and expansive program designed to address disparities between young African-American and Latino men and their peers.

### **About The Mayor's Fund To Advance New York City**

The Mayor's Fund to Advance New York City is a 501(c) (3) not-for-profit organization working with over 30 City agencies and offices, 300 institutional funders, and 100 community-based partners.

The Mayor's Fund and its partners advance initiatives that improve the lives of New Yorkers from all walks of life and across all five boroughs. In particular, the Mayor's Fund has made strategic investments to promote mental health services for all New Yorkers, increase workforce development opportunities for young New Yorkers, and meet the needs of New York City's diverse immigrant community.

In building partnerships, the Mayor's Fund seeks to seed promising, evidence-based models; evaluate the efficacy of new programs and policies; bring innovative solutions to scale; and respond to the emerging needs of the city.

The Mayor's Fund is chaired by First Lady Chirlane McCray and governed by a Board of Directors appointed by the Mayor. In addition, the Mayor's Fund has an Advisory Board comprised of prominent civic and business leaders appointed by the Mayor to advise and assist the Board of Directors.

### **Metis Associates**

Metis Associates, a national research and consulting firm headquartered in New York City, brings over 40 years of experience in evaluation, information management, and grant development to its work in education, youth development, and the arts, among other areas. Metis works with a wide range of organizations committed to making a meaningful difference in the lives of children, families, and communities.

### **Westat**

Dedicated to improving lives through research, Westat offers innovative professional services to help clients improve outcomes in health, education, social policy, and transportation.

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