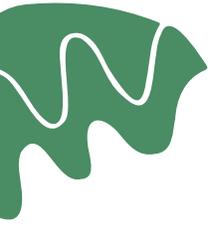


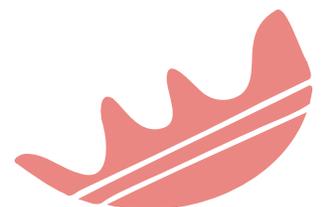


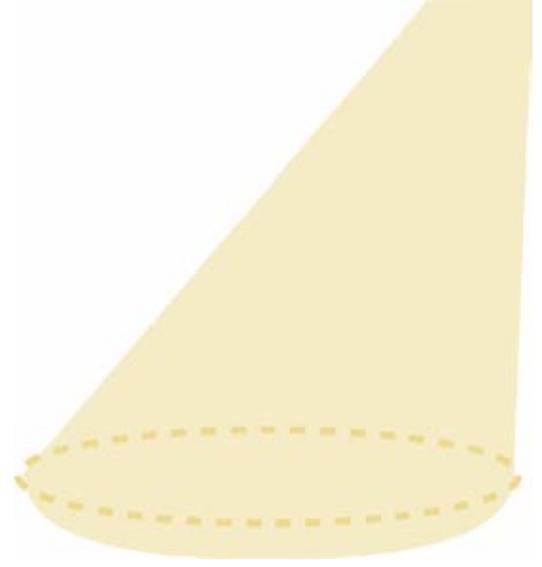
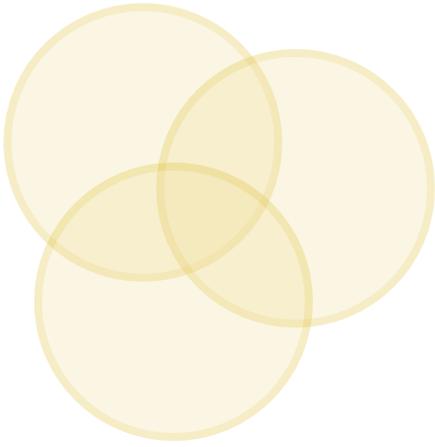
RE: CENTER

TABLE OF CONTENTS



Introduction	4
Indian Boundary Cultural Center	8
Austin Town Hall Cultural Center	14
Hamilton Park Cultural Center	20
Lincoln Park Cultural Center	26
Piotrowski Park Cultural Center	32
West Pullman Park Cultural Center	38
Douglas Park Cultural Center	44
Palmer Park Cultural Center	50
Calumet Park Cultural Center	56
Marquette Park Cultural Center	62
Ridge Park Cultural Center	68
Tuley Park Cultural Center	74
Berger Park Cultural Center	80
Humboldt Park Cultural Center	86
South Shore Cultural Center	92
Takeaways and Recommendations	97
Partners	101
Glossary	102





The Re:Center Project is a multi-phase cultural organizing and creative place-making initiative driven by local citizens and anchored in Chicago's neighborhoods.



INTRODUCTION

Work with the people who believe in the place: locals embedded by proximity, those connected by a desire to contribute or commitment to a mission. Provide multiple access points or ways to participate. Participation drives the transformation of a place and of those involved. Work as a resident and citizen to spur civic engagement, drawing a relationship between citizen participation and citizen power.

- from 9 Principles of Ethical Redevelopment, Rebuild Foundation

Re:Center is a multiphase creative placemaking initiative driven by local artists and residents and anchored in Chicago's neighborhoods. Through Re:Center, the Chicago Park District's fifteen Cultural Centers have collaborated with surrounding communities to re-imagine cultural priorities and programming at each site. Each year from 2015 to 2019, three Cultural Centers were initiated into a three-year process that would leverage these public parks as sites of civic engagement, learning, and creative communion.

In their first year, each Cultural Center worked with a cultural liaison to facilitate sustained convenings of community stakeholders. Working together, park staff, stakeholders and the Re:Center team hosted a "Listening Party" event where desires and needs for artistic and cultural programs were identified, alongside challenges specific to those communities and parks.

In the second year, a newly formed cultural committee and a contracted artist-in-residence envisioned and developed a culminating event, public art work, or community project. These formalized roles and structure helped to achieve some of those unique cultural priorities identified in the first year.

The third year marked the gradual close of the cultural liaison's tenure at that location, with the intention that the cultural committees and park staff would be empowered to function independently as programmers of their local Cultural Centers.

In this unique model, community members, artists, and park staff worked together to envision Chicagoans as cultural stewards of our public parks and Cultural Centers. Partially funded by [NEA Our Town](#) and in partnership with [Lookingglass Theater](#), Re:Center was developed and guided by the Arts & Culture Unit of the Chicago Park District as a means to support communities with

cultural programming resources and skill sets.

The deep work of Re:Center continues in other forms, with an asset mapping initiative funded in part by the City of Chicago's Department of Cultural Affairs and Special Events and the League of Chicago Theaters; cultural partnerships that continue to grow out of Re:Center; and ongoing support of Cultural Center staff and programs from the Arts & Culture Unit.

In addition, over the next several years a number of capital improvements are underway at many Cultural Centers bringing upgrades to stages, sound and lighting systems, curtains, and art gallery spaces. Reinforced through the community engagement work of Re:Center, we recognize the need to prioritize providing adequate cultural programming spaces to neighborhood artists, communities, and young emerging artists in training. We envision arts & culture as a strategy toward long term revitalization of many of our disinvested neighborhoods on the city's South and West sides and we recognize the importance of supporting artists in neighborhoods as advancing not only creative skills but also as providing economic opportunity.

Our work builds on the City of Chicago's Cultural Plan (2012), investing in cultural production at the local level through attention to the quality and density of programming space; support of neighborhood artist-producers as educators, facilitators, and makers; and a focus on what communities need and want. Understanding our parks as what sociologist Ray Oldenburg termed the "third space," where many people spend their time between home, work, or school, Re:Center echoes an understanding of parks as sites to encourage interaction with different kinds of people, exchange ideas, and actualize civic participation by stewarding and supporting these publicly shared spaces for the benefit of the wider community.

Re:Center has remained a flexible and adaptive process; it helps identify and articulate, creating a larger container for cultural



priorities to be visible and leveraged through a combination of resources. Cultural work at the community level is an incremental process. It is aspirational and ongoing. Over time, we chart the cultural priorities and cultural agents critical to a Cultural Center's vibrancy. Sometimes these changes happen quickly; more often they take years of slow development. In every case, it takes the right constellation of talents, resources, skills, passions, and capacity to realize momentum forward.

We listen to staff, community, artists, and the neighborhoods themselves for direction and inspiration on how to move toward activation. There is no one-size-fits-all approach. Simultaneously, cultural liaisons and the Arts & Culture Unit staff provide the institutional memory and follow-through to continue developing and realizing these priorities in the long term, while supporting the continuous work and labor of cultural park staff. Throughout all of this, we seed the growth of skills and confidence to engage in mutually beneficial cultural planning and coordination work. In the best scenarios, the community, artists, and staff begin to direct programming choices and priorities themselves and we, the Arts & Culture Unit, step aside to support only as needed.

In the pages ahead, you'll find the unique stories of each of the 15 cultural centers. Case studies are divided by site, and further divided into three broad categories of observations unique to each location: Where did we begin? (context, strengths, and initial cultural visions at the beginning of each site's process), What did we learn? (stories and discoveries through Re:Center), and What we are committed to? (cultural programming priorities and goals moving forward.) The wisdom of our in-depth qualitative conversations with stakeholders who have deep and long-standing relationships with their Cultural Centers - park users, Park Advisory Council (PAC) members, supervisors, artists-in-residence, leaders of other local organizations, and so on - are embedded in these case studies. These conversations were robustly supplemented by observations from cultural liaisons and Arts & Culture Unit (ACU) staff - individuals who did intensive Re:Center work across multiple sites and had unique insights into the similarities and salient differences in each Cultural Center's conditions and processes.

*Marian Hayes Artist Residency Cohort at Tuley Park
Jomo Cheatham, Chris St. Martin, Haman Cross III,
Stasa Wade*

Photo taken by Nikki Jolly

INTRODUCTION

Through this report, we hope to definitively demonstrate the immense transformative value of publicly-funded, hyper-local cultural work that is adaptive and responsive to the communities this creative work serves.

Through Re:Center, the Park District has cultivated meaningful partnerships of mutual commitment, not just with artists and organizations, but with community members who have deeply intuitive understandings of their communities' needs and are their neighborhoods' strongest advocates. In this sense, the Re:Center process at large (and this report more closely) functions to amplify work, needs, and dreams that have already been well-articulated at the Cultural Center level. We present this work with a renewed commitment to pushing the needle forward on imagining cooperative cultural work in the parks and beyond.

We end the report by drawing out a list of recommendations that connect our learnings across all fifteen Cultural Centers while honoring the needs and goals of those who are integral to cultural production work - park staff, community members, and local artists. We believe that keeping these recommendations in mind will strengthen the Park District's cultural work moving forward, bringing us closer to a place of sustainability, abundance, and true mutual accountability with our constituents.

**Thank you for taking
the time to read.**



*Meida McNeal
Arts & Culture Manager*



Making a new home for existing communities at

INDIAN BOUNDARY PARK CULTURAL CENTER

RE: CENTER STARTED IN 2015

RE: CENTER

“You have to keep doing the gardening work to make sure the soil is fertile and the community can keep growing.”

Thom Cox, Resident Artist

WHERE DID WE BEGIN?

Indian Boundary Cultural Center has a strong and collaborative cultural staff guided by a supervisor fluent in arts programming. This has produced a rich history of performance-oriented public programming.

The Cultural Center hosts multiple fully-realized productions by professional dance and theater companies each year, and boasts fruitful arts partnerships supported by the Cultural Center Initiative with organizations like Kalapriya, an Indian performing arts organization; Chicago Children's Choir; T. Daniel Productions, a mime company; and Khecari, a dance company.

This work is supported by a well-resourced facility with a grand piano, specialty studio space for lapidary, textiles, and dance, and a nature play space. The Center's 2015 Cultural Priorities Plan stated: This community is focused on early childhood and nature play/environmental education at various locations. The Cultural Center aims to be more welcoming to the South Asian community and encourage programming that brings multiple race/ethnic communities to the table, in reflection of the makeup of the neighborhood.

WHAT DID WE LEARN?

Phil Martini is the creative heart of Indian Boundary Cultural Center. As a veteran staff member of the Chicago Park District (CPKD), Phil expertly navigates his role managing the facilities and grounds of the park while also building his version of a creative production house. Phil welcomes artists for short and long term partnerships and residencies, understands the value of incubating new and experimental artistic work, and seeks opportunities to use culture as a draw for the dynamic communities that surround the park.

For Phil, the Listening Party's demographic diversity confirmed what he had been thinking for some time but had not had the time to research himself: there were more parents moving in with young children. The South Asian community, a prominent demographic of West Rogers Park, had less active representation at the park. A number of the surrounding community members used the green space but didn't know about much of the programming happening at the fieldhouse and adjoining nature center.

Working with cultural liaison Marcus Davis, Phil hatched a plan to begin to address these challenges. A roving performance series was launched in the green spaces of the park tied to ongoing programs in music, performance, and early childhood classes. Phil remembers: "It was like having an assistant for a while. Marcus did the work of pitching our programming to the Indo-Pak community and it actually helped diversify our audience a lot." That crucial on-the-ground outreach work required successfully navigating complex racial and socio-economic community dynamics in West Rogers Park.

Phil also notes that it was hard for community members to commit to a consistent schedule for the Meet Ups: "Many of the changes that came after the Listening Party were made by me; I relied heavily on my connections." This reaffirmed the significant advantages of having

*Rabid Bat Theatricals performs their play
"The Princess, the Minstrel and the Rabid Bat"
in 2015*

Photo taken by Marcus E. Davis



a supervisor and staff who are well-trained in both executing cultural programming, and cultural competency more widely. Davis' exit ultimately slowed down the momentum of work, which pointed to the importance of having a dedicated liaison on site to facilitate relationship-building and initial programming. Sound artist Peter Speer and theater artist Thom Cox tested out new cultural programming ideas as artists-in-residence over a 6-month period. This led to a partnership with the Indo American Center yielding a significant Re:Center project. Collaboratively workshoped by Thom and Rogers Park's immigrant communities, the play, *Sharing Space*, devised "a series of vignettes of memories about parks, and day-in-a-park's-life, and sharing space." This project proved the value in creating culturally-specific programming in order to serve new communities, emphasizing the relationship-building effects of the devising process, and the significance of the final showcase to participants and their community.

During one of the final rehearsals, a woman from Bosnia, Vjollca (whose name means Violet in Slavic) happened to be in the fieldhouse looking at some of the neighborhood announcements and program postings. Thom remembers: "She saw us rehearsing, and hung around and listened, and was hooked because she had her own immigration stories, full of difficulty. She walked into the room and asked, bravely, 'Can I do this?' And we invited her into the group. She came in and learned and was welcomed with open arms. She ended up performing with us!" Another woman, Zubeida, had a number of children, one of whom also participated in the process as an adult. Zubeida had other, more conservative children who objected to Zubeida being part of the performance. Despite this conflict, Zubeida committed to the process.

"Her kids came to the Cultural Center--they didn't enter the room for the show itself, but they came in after. Zubeida was super proud that they had come, and her kids were happy to see their mother happy."

While Thom was excited about the potential of continuing this project with immigrant communities in West Rogers Park, he also knew that he would not be able to make a long-term obligation. "To do that process over and over again, you have to have someone committed to doing that work for a while before you can step away. I wanted to get [the program] to a place where it could grow by itself. But it wasn't going to happen if someone didn't immediately step into my place after I stepped away." Though some goals were not achieved in the time allotted for the work, Thom had great ideas for future exploration including creating a collaboration between Indian Boundary and nearby Warren Park where a lot of the Indo-Pakistani community tends to congregate, as well as highlighting ambassadors--community leaders and individuals--from the various ethnic communities surrounding the park as the key to sustained investment. Thom also mentioned that work like this functions best with additional resources like translation services, and develops into longer-term engagements only with sustained investment from Center staff and leadership into the communities in question.

One of Re:Center's enduring challenges was maintaining staff to continue developing program capacity at sites further along in the process while engaging new sites within the hours allotted for the work. Indian Boundary was one of several examples where it was noted by park staff, artists, and community members that having a full time cultural liaison would be a real asset to supporting long term program growth and community participation. There is no substitute for being present and being patient with communities to engage and lead at their own pace.

“Your cultural space and my cultural space are so distant from each other...and yet here we are, and this is our home.”

- Thom Cox, Resident Artist

WHAT WE ARE COMMITTED TO

A forward-thinking supervisor and staff remain committed to creating further inroads with West Rogers Park's South Asian community.

A key next step includes developing a relationship with Silk Road Rising, a theatre company.

Continue to grow Indian Boundary's profile as a creative production house within the parks.

Ensuring the longevity and sustainability of cultural programming through future staff changes.

Taking time to build relationships at

AUSTIN TOWN HALL CULTURAL CENTER

RE:CENTER STARTED IN 2015

RE: CENTER

AUSTIN TOWN HALL CULTURAL CENTER

“These relationships take time in order to develop. We need to have the capacity through people staying on the ground and building community. There are relationships of trust there. Continuing the momentum does cost money.”

Vanessa Stokes, PAC Co-President

WHERE DID WE BEGIN?

The Austin Town Hall Cultural Center is a regal building with a former life as a town hall. It now houses an array of recreation and performing arts programs. The Center is close to a busy stop on the Chicago Transit Authority (CTA) Green Line, and facilities include an art studio, dance studios, a massive auditorium space, and a darkroom/photo lab in development. The Cultural Center has a strong Arts Partner in Move Me Soul Dance Company, along with in-house drama and visual arts instructors (shared with Douglas Park) and a part-time dance instructor. Through the Cultural Center Initiative the park has many visiting artists and performances and built on field trips to enhance the cultural programs at the park.

The largest age group in the Austin area is 19 and under at 30.5%, and the Listening Party clarified the need for more youth programming. To this end, the Chicago Park District's TRACE (Teens Reimagining Arts Community & Environment) program started their second hub at Austin Town Hall in 2019. Running year round, TRACE is a teen leadership and curatorial job training program promoting civic engagement that strives to cultivate creative, environmental and community-based youth activists. Local residents are spearheading an emerging Arts and Culture Committee, and are setting up a social media presence for the committee to attract more momentum. Vanessa Stokes, who heads the committee, notes that Austin residents have trust issues with organizational community interventions - with good reason.

The neighborhood has seen a history of well-intentioned non-profit organizations with limited capacity approaching residents for input on programming, with little sustained follow-through. This lack of sustainability is what Austin Town Hall Cultural Center hopes to address with its offerings. Austin Town Hall's neighborhood profile from the 77 Communities Initiative states

an intention to: Sharpen and hone our program offerings for teens to ensure the maximum number of youth between 13 and 19 are being served by the diverse range of facilities scaling up where appropriate, providing teens with a safe space to recreate.

WHAT DID WE LEARN?

At Austin Town Hall the Re:Center process brought opportunities for partnership to light, and built a collaborative planning process to grow programs and transform the space. Park supervisor Tebrena Howard-Fears said, “We started with an amazing Listening Party, and it drew all kinds of people in. It allowed the staff to see the things people wanted. It brought whole families together with other families and made us talk with each other about what we want for our community.”

As a gospel singer, Tebrena wanted to use her contacts to create an annual Gospel Festival and bring more programming into the auditorium. The Gospel Festival has been Re:Center process's most notable programming manifestation, evolving into an annual event, and shape-shifting to include different partners and funding sources. While the festival has become an anchor event for the park, it has also cultivated an environment for long term planning, collaboration, and exploration of strategies for promoting year-round cultural programs. Austin Town Hall's first Listening Party had significant teen turnout, and helped inform strategies on moving forward.

One of Chicago Park District's signature teen arts programs, TRACE, was identified as an organic tie-in to address the need for more youth programming. Teen engagement in the Re:Center Listening parties helped initiate the expansion of TRACE and leveraged opportunities

A gathering of the Austin Town Hall Arts and Culture Committee in 2019

Photo taken by Nikki Jolly



to bring more visual arts into the park. Tebrena said “Our big priority is this Teen Center. I want to see my teens smile, I want to make sure they have everything they need, I want them to have a space that they can call theirs. I’m excited that the TRACE program is at the Center - that program has already transformed the physical space.” The Center is now in its second year as a TRACE hub. This strategic move is a model for future collaborations with other programs, both internal and external to the Park District system.

The Cultural Center staff have had a fruitful, growing relationship with Tebrena as their supervisor, supporting her as she grows her capacity to lead cultural programming. Arts & Culture Unit staff have continued to show up for her vision: connecting her with funding for the Gospel Festival, advocating for it, working together to re-tool the annual budget to answer new priorities, and so on. Cultural Center supervisors generally have intensive workloads managing their facilities, their staff’s needs, and maintaining quality customer service with local park users. Incorporating new priorities into said work is not easy.

As has been the case across a few Centers, programming was shepherded primarily by staff and partners instead of a community-driven cultural committee. Without this neighborhood buy-in, building a successful promotional strategy for programming has been challenging. The relatively short timeline between ideation and execution of programs resulted in less time to build sustained investment from community members. Additionally, administrative work (especially work that requires specialized knowledge of park systems and timelines) is often not easily assumed by volunteers, and has been best stewarded by onsite cultural liaisons who currently split their time among multiple Centers, often in a part-time capacity. The most salient takeaway from community interviews was an

emphasis on the need for more time and resource investment in order to actually build long-term, well-rooted relationships of trust that would allow community members to support with confidence and competency.

“This is really delicate work, and it requires putting down roots,” says Vanessa Stokes, an Austin resident, artist, cultural organizer, and co-president of the Park Advisory Council. Her work with community projects and with the TRACE program led her to be involved at Austin Town Hall and to form the Austin Arts and Culture Committee within the PAC. Vanessa notes that “relationship building and follow-up are essential for creating community and ends up being the biggest challenge.” Collaborative planning and partnerships that meet community needs are vital: “These relationships take time to develop and we need to have capacity through people staying on the ground and building community to build trust there.”

**“We need investment,
plain and simple.”**

Vanessa Stokes, PAC Co-President

“It would be amazing to have a Listening Party once a year every year - where we bring together, eat food, listen to music and watch performances, and ask our people, “What do you want to see in the parks *this year?*”

Tebrena Howard-Fears, Park Supervisor

WHAT WE ARE COMMITTED TO

Staff and stakeholders envision the Center as a visual art gallery space, and generally desire increased visual arts programming.

TRACE has continued to beautify the interior of the Center space with a mural by artist Langston Allston in collaboration with TRACERs from Summer 2019, with a second mural planned for Summer 2020 in the lobby.

All stakeholders intend to see the auditorium realized at its full capacity, through capital improvements followed by community-supported and community-engaged programming.

The Center is working with the Arts and Culture Committee to secure sustainable funding for the Gospel Festival.

The community is also excited to be part of a burgeoning revival of local business, and anticipates fruitful future collaborations with new businesses.

Upholding a cultural legacy at

HAMILTON PARK CULTURAL CENTER

RE: CENTER STARTED IN 2015

RE: CENTER

“We need more investment - which I realize is hard with the city having other priorities.”

- Karen Ford, EC3

WHERE DID WE BEGIN?

Hamilton Park Cultural Center is anchored by a long history of cultural advocacy by its community - initially in the form of the EC3 (or Englewood Community Cultural Planning Council), which, along with the Re:Center cultural committee, laid the ground for the establishment of a robust Park Advisory Council. The Center supervisor is a strong cultural advocate as well, and supports strong partnerships including their Arts Partner, Live the Spirit. The Center recently lost a part-time dance instructor and that position is currently vacant. The Cultural Center Initiative offers contractual support in order to provide new art, dance, theater, and music opportunities for youth, teens, and families. This initiative has also supported many cultural community field trips throughout the years, and support for technical upgrades to the auditorium space.

The Center is heavily used, with a large well-outfitted auditorium space and dance studios. The building has immense potential to be a major center for arts and culture in the city, but needs significant infrastructure investment for this to be feasible. This notably would need to include updates for accessibility compliance throughout the space.

TRACE moved to Hamilton Park as the headquarters and sole programming site in 2016. Inferno, CPkD's mobile sound and media arts program, has engaged teens through media projects in collaboration with TRACE. Youth engagement and safety are a major priority for the Center. Hamilton's neighborhood profile from the 77 Communities initiative stated: Gangs and safety are issues that acutely affect everyone in this community; [we hope to] continue to provide successful programming such as After School Matters at Hamilton Park to provide secure and inviting spaces for residents.

WHAT DID WE LEARN?

In Spring 2015, Re:Center began at Hamilton Park with a Listening Party. Approximately 100 people attended the event featuring performances by the Chicago Children's Choir and students from the cultural instructor's dance class. After the Listening Party, the long-time Cultural Center supervisor transitioned out to another Center.

The new supervisor came on board with a strong background in sports and recreation, but little experience doing cultural work and a goal to revamp Center partnerships to adhere to CPkD protocol. For a period of time, this precipitated the end of the Center's relationship with EC3, whose more informal work with the Center had been grandfathered in. Eventually, staff from the Arts & Culture Unit and Hamilton Park worked with the new supervisor to figure out how to shift structures to re-welcome this group back in and build lost trust.

The Re:Center process at Hamilton Park had the advantage of building off the foundation of localized cultural advocacy. A cultural committee was formed including community members both old and new; youth and elders; families, artists and residents. Through EC3, there was a strong history of support for arts and culture. As Karen Ford, a longtime EC3 member explained, "[There was] lots of stuff already happening there." Dance, drama, and music were all represented through cultural instructors on park staff or through external partnerships. However, the group, along with the supervisor, identified a need to bolster visual arts as the one arts discipline that was not adequately represented.

The community rallied around this need by organizing "Creativity of the Senses," a month-long art fair and gallery show as part of Chicago Artists Month in October 2015. South Side, and Englewood artists in particular, were represented through painting, sculpture, upholstery, mosaics, textiles, and craftwork. The event series was imagined as a way to shine a spotlight on the rich creativity happening on the South

*Weaving Open Studio at Hamilton Park in 2016
Photo by Danielle Maude Littman*



Side. Artist and abstract painter Jimmy Williams was featured in several media features including Chicago Now, DNAinfo, and CBS News. In a televised interview, cultural liaison Danielle Littman noted, “Jimmy lives here and is an artist from here. He’s opening up something for the community and for his own artistic practice. This feels like the perfect way to bring Englewood even more on to the stage and create value in the community.”

In the following year, the newly formed Park Advisory Council built off the momentum of EC3’s foundational work and the catalysts set in motion through Re:Center to launch the Englewood Art Fair. Vendors signed up for tables. There were performances and live music. Several artists were featured including the unveiling of a community mosaic mural by JoVonna Jackson and a special photo exhibit by artist-activist Tonika Johnson.

In an interview with local magazine N’Digo, Jackson talked about ways she put the community in the lead in the creation of the large scale mosaic that is now installed outside of the fieldhouse. Jackson described her position as a guide and teacher to share techniques: “We took the ideas from community members about where they find their place of peace.

Six generations of community members from old to young helped create the mural. I’m proud of it because it shows the ideas of this community.”

Similarly, Tonika Johnson pointed out the impact of having her work featured as an emerging solo artist in her own community: “It brightens my heart to have people stop and look at my photographs and then to look back and tell me what it means to them. It’s a beautiful moment and I’m glad we decided to present it this way, because other than just featuring my work online

through Facebook or my website, this is really the first time I’ve seen my work printed on the quality paper I love and framed this way. And to do it in Englewood is just awesome for me. I really love witnessing people react to the exhibit.”

Since 2016, Johnson’s career has taken off with additional exhibition opportunities for *From the INside* to the launch and ubiquity of her critically acclaimed *Folded Map* project chronicling the effects of segregation in Chicago’s neighborhoods through the documenting of dwellings and “map twins” from opposite sides of the city.

As Tonika notes, “Hamilton Park’s staff, park advisory council, and community of visitors have been instrumental in my development and exposure as an artist! I consider Hamilton Park, my ‘park home,’ because my photography was appreciated, validated and supported by the community at Hamilton Park, first. Without that, I would not have had the confidence to pursue creating my *Folded Map* project. Plus, it has been a pleasure to continually work with TRACE as a guest teacher; the TRACE students motivate me to do work that inspires and expands people’s current way of thinking around Chicago’s race and segregation issues.”

Since these happenings, Hamilton Park has continued to look for ways to bring visual arts strategically into the Cultural Center. During Re:Center’s second year, the Center hosted two artists-in-residence, Monika Neuland Thomas and Jovonna Jackson, who provided weaving and ceramics classes. The Center brought in “On The Table,” Chicago Community Trust’s citywide forum initiative, to support the artists-in-residence. Karen Ford mentioned that Hamilton Park’s successful performance and visual art partnerships pushed against popular assumptions that the community wouldn’t be interested in “highbrow” fine arts programming.

HAMILTON PARK CULTURAL CENTER

The park supervisor, Michael Lindsey, continues to look for opportunities to bring a visual arts instructor on staff. He has welcomed TRACE, a teen arts and civic leadership program through the Chicago Park District that concentrates projects around photography, murals, and installation based work under a community curatorial lens.

In these ways, people are imagining new ideas and experiments to invest in more visual arts programming at the park. As Karen notes, "It's a beautiful building, but it has the potential to be so much more. You are only limited by the scope of your imagination."

WHAT WE ARE COMMITTED TO

The auditorium is in the process of being renovated with a new floor and technical upgrades including stage curtains, lights, and sound system.

As part of a strategy around increasing teen and family engagement, Hamilton Park is in the process of planning a recurring "teen skate jam" event.

Center staff and the PAC are working on adjusting marketing tactics to better serve a base of seniors who don't necessarily use social media.

The Center aims to bring a visual art instructor onto their permanent staff.

More than an outdoor space

LINCOLN PARK CULTURAL CENTER

RE: CENTER STARTED IN 2016

RE: CENTER

“You really need someone who’s going to spearhead the project who knows members of the community and who can make that ask.”

Steve Weaver, Executive Director, Chicago Public Art Group

WHERE DID WE BEGIN?

Lincoln Park Cultural Center sits within a large green space along Chicago’s busy lakefront with a campus of destinations that attract city-wide visitors such as the Lincoln Park Zoo, Lincoln Park Conservatory, and Peggy Notebaert Nature Museum. The Cultural Center offers strong family and early childhood programming in addition to specialty arts programming to seniors, adults and teens.

The Cultural Center Initiative primarily supports supplies and maintenance for the specialized studio spaces which include a lapidary studio with metal and glass capabilities, a woodshop, a dance studio, ceramics studio, and an intimate auditorium. The programs are supported by a strong cultural staff, including: a full-time woodshop instructor, part-time dance instructor, part-time visual arts & ceramics instructor, a full-time instructor based out of Indian Boundary who teaches lapidary and stained-glass classes two days per week, as well as part-time and seasonal recreation leaders that support family programs, an after-school program, and summer camp.

The Cultural Center Initiative also provides contractual support for intergenerational cultural trips for the active teen club and senior club. There are specialized workshops targeted for these groups as well as contractors who bring new arts experiences to summer camp like body percussion, hip hop dance, beatboxing, breakdancing, and other visiting performances. The Center attracts an intergenerational audience, with an active senior contingent and a strong interest for more youth programming. In its neighborhood profile from the 77 Communities Initiative, the Center stated that it intends to: Continue and expand partnerships with Chicago Public Schools to strengthen programming while attempting to increase programs for young adults which are the largest demographic.

WHAT DID WE LEARN?

Lincoln Park Cultural Center’s small fieldhouse is sometimes overlooked in comparison to the popular zoo, conservatory, and great expanse of green space the Cultural Center sits next to. While the fieldhouse is quite active, the supervisor and community set their sights on a neighborhood visibility project. A cultural committee was formed, and among multiple large-scale visions, a plan emerged to paint the nearby viaduct with a mural. They imagined this new public art piece would bring awareness to the activities inside the building and welcome diverse audiences.

The community Meetup process moved the project forward strategically. Each of the planning meetings showcased different models for the group to consider from mural-focused art groups they might reference for inspiration, to fundraising, to ideas for marketing efforts to the surrounding community. In this way, the group put together a feasible plan based on their collective capacity to do the work.

Teaching artists Mirtes Zwierzynski and Sonja Henderson were hired from Chicago Public Art Group (CPAG) to facilitate a daylong series of workshops with various age groups from early childhood to seniors. Each workshop had participants visualize symbols and messages representing the cultural resources and community spirit of the park’s ongoing programming in visual arts, boat-building, and dance among other creative forms. An initial design was created and the group began to build a development and implementation plan in phases, raising some initial dollars through several small community fundraisers.

Challenges began when the group, composed of park staff and community, learned the viaduct selected for the project was under a different set of rules for approval than had originally been communicated. Navigating the various city agencies became a



A sketch for the stalled project by Chicago Public Art Group, designed in 2017

time and labor intensive process which took its toll on the energies of the mostly volunteer group. Steve Weaver from CPAG remembers: "We started thinking about the pedestrian underpass as the first idea. But CDOT wouldn't allow mosaics." Getting educated on how to bring projects like to the alderman's office also proved to be a sharp learning curve.

The group pivoted to a design project closer to the fieldhouse, but momentum began to slow as some of the core members of the group had scheduling conflicts. Without that energy, the plan soon came to a stop. Steve notes: "The failure might have been in not being able to expand the group of community supporters. The woman moving things forward ended up getting a job and was no longer able to commit time. There wasn't anyone else willing to take the lead on raising funds for the project. [The project needed someone] who really knew members of the community."

Lincoln Park's engagement process was an exemplary model at the beginning with community buy-in and a unique dynamism of intergenerational participation. When the community was fully invested in the project, there was ample energy to move things forward. But, as the group worked to revise the plan, investment and participation waned. The cultural committee was most challenged by moving from engagement to implementation, an oftentimes long and arduous process.

Navigating relationships, meeting community desires and interests, and finding the time it takes to move through bureaucratic channels requires patience and planning. This felt like an important purpose of Re:Center's structure: bringing community members closer to the inner workings and protocols of working within public space. Still, the process planted seeds

that lay dormant rather than being fully erased. Every so often the idea of revisiting the community mural in the nearby viaduct comes up as cultural programming goes on at the Center. Perhaps this idea will find fertile ground in the future when community power, staff guidance, and city support all felicitously align.

WHAT WE ARE COMMITTED TO

The Cultural Center is strategizing about how to create space for more light-lift partnerships, especially ones that cater to the senior community and offer diverse cultural experiences.

A community mural celebrating the richness of the Cultural Center's programming and bringing visibility to the fieldhouse is still a desired goal.

Park staff remain committed to creating space for intergenerational connection.

Reactivating an existing base at

PIOTROWSKI PARK CULTURAL CENTER

RE: CENTER STARTED IN 2016

RE: CENTER

“We need to think about more strategic, more relevant ways to organize alongside stakeholders.”

Patsy Diaz, Program Facilitator

WHERE DID WE BEGIN?

Piotrowski Park Cultural Center, as of not long ago, was one of the only two parks in the South Lawndale community, best known as La Villita. The Center boasts a new skate park, dance room with professional sprung dance floor, screen printing equipment, and the Park District's only convertible-domed, year-round swimming pool within a large radius.

The park has grown to serve as a cultural hub for its residents, alongside hugely popular recreational programming. Piotrowski Park has a rooted history of well-attended cultural and holiday events that have brought community members together to celebrate the unique social fabric of the community.

For many years, the Center has hosted large annual Thanksgiving food drives, family Easter celebrations, back-to-school events, and more. These programs and events have been supported by influential senior staff, like Nintha Serrano, and made successful through deep relationships with a dedicated base of community stakeholders. The Re:Center project facilitated communication between old and new staff at the park in order to reach a unified cultural vision and resuscitate an existing base.

The Cultural Center Initiative supports popular offerings including a teen DJ program, a Battle of the Bands event, and a recently revived Día De Los Muertos celebration. The Center is also a site of Young Cultural Stewards, a Chicago Park District art and civic engagement program for middle school to pre-teens, and is focused on recruiting from the many schools in the South Lawndale area. Mexican Folkloric Dance Company and Ravinia Lawndale Family Music School are all Arts Partners in Residence, offering free dance and music classes to the community.

The Center, however, does not have its own cultural instructors or a Park Advisory Council, and the relationships that staff have with community members remain individual instead of institutional.

In its 2016 Cultural Plan, the Center stated: This community could benefit from additional open space for its residents; strong partnerships provide additional programming at parks and increase overall recreational opportunities.

WHAT DID WE LEARN?

Piotrowski Park has an incredibly strong sense of not only community, but family. It has always been and remains a cultural hub for Little Village. The park has seen children grow into recreational leaders and then move on to be full time employees at the Chicago Park District, only to have their own children come to the park and participate in the same programs.

In its past, the park often bursted at the seams with families gathering for annual holiday celebrations. These events offered the community not only a place to experience unity and joy, but access to resources—whether it was a turkey for their holiday meal or school supplies for children. This all subsided when park supervisor Debbie Alvarado retired after a long tenure. In her stead, Nintha Serrano, a long time Recreational Leader and now Physical instructor, has been a pillar to the Little Village community and a constant thread at the park. Nintha played an integral role in bringing the community together to reactivate and steward programming the community had long awaited during their challenging transition.



*Park staff facilitate art-making at the Back to School Fest in 2016
Photo taken by Gibran Villalobos*

The Re:Center structure offered an opportunity for already-engaged Center users to come together, and in 2016 Piotrowski Park hosted a successful Listening Party, just as a new park supervisor, Andrew del Rivero, was on-boarded. There was fresh energy in the air and the community was excited to gather and envision a revitalized park. Re:Center's major effect at Piotrowski Park was in its work building trust between the new Park supervisor and the long-standing staff. Programming ultimately got driven forward by staff and partners instead of a cultural committee, but the Re:Center process has helped in the work of sowing seeds for a future PAC.

While that process is still in motion, Nintha spearheaded the revival of the Día De Los Muertos celebration in November 2019 to much collaborative success. The festival was preceded by a series of ceramics workshops facilitated by artist Alfonso "Piloto" Nieves Ruiz. These free family workshops satisfied a community need for family programming while building momentum toward a larger public event. As program facilitator Patsy Diaz notes, this was intended to "...give them a reason to come together, create together, and use that as an opportunity to speak with one another and be inspired to organize towards common goals in order to benefit their park community." And to a certain extent, that is what happened.

Walking into the well-attended event you could see families entrenched in the process of making family altars, breaking bread with one another, art-making, and the sound of traditional mariachi music. Patsy notes that all of this came about through existing relationships and is evidence that we need to "think about more strategic and relevant ways to organize alongside stakeholders." Likewise, Nintha believes this event was a success because she was "...given the opportunity to have more choices

[in planning] and relied more on my teens and parent volunteers and staff for help." The autonomy she was given by supervising staff "...made things a lot easier when planning and following through."

Re:Center facilitated communication between old and new staff at the park in order to reach a unified cultural vision and resuscitate an existing base. Nintha explains: "Andrew finally [trusted] me and I felt someone finally had my back. Thanks to Patsy and Andrew, [I was] able to have a budget and knowing what it could be spent on was a lot of help. I believe [the Re:Center process] did [improve relationships and build rapport among staff] to some extent. I think the newer staff finally realized what the staff with experience can do and how they can learn from and trust them." Serrano happily reports: "I have already had inquiries about the event. I was invited to speak about this event and some new ideas at our local chamber of commerce."

WHAT WE ARE COMMITTED TO

In addition to sustaining the large community events and family-friendly program they revitalized, staff are also planning for a Beer Garden and Food Truck festival, with an emphasis on bringing large cultural events back to the Center, given how well-supported and well-attended events like these have historically been.

Piotrowski's organizing and programmatic priorities lie in bringing together people with different perspectives around common goals.

Piotrowski Park is building momentum for the creation of a PAC.

Working from within at

WEST PULLMAN PARK CULTURAL CENTER

RE: CENTER STARTED IN 2016

RE: CENTER

“The Park staff made clear how many different groups were stakeholders in the park, and that set us up really well to explore with those different communities... We feel world class with the Chicago Parks.”

Jabberwocky Marionettes Puppetry, Artist-in-Residence

WHERE DID WE BEGIN?

The lush greenery of West Pullman’s historic natural savanna area is accompanied by a park campus including a school, fieldhouse, and ample green space. The Center is home to one of the most popular swim meets in the district, a growing dance team, a teen club, and a robust and extremely active special recreation group. There is a dance room with a custom sprung dance floor, a large arts room with screen printing equipment, a dance instructor and a full-time arts and crafts instructor who supplement the Center’s large Special Recreation program.

There is also a notable quilting program that participates in a yearly expo for textiles. Other recurring events that the Cultural Center Initiative supports include the yearly End of School Jam, Back to School Jam, Halloween Happenings, and House Music with Santa events. West Pullman has also explored residencies and hosted a dance residency by Deeply Rooted Dance Theater.

In an effort to build sustained cultural programming at the Center, staff implemented free monthly family series, occurring regularly on “Third Thursdays.” However, building an audience has been challenging. Due to the Center’s distance from major thoroughfares and public transit, it does not read as easily accessible to its community. Additionally, perceptions of safety are a serious concern. This is worth positioning within the context of inequitable distribution of resources across the neighborhood, as the cultural and institutional landscape is relatively sparse, and the historic Pullman District enjoys resources that do not easily migrate across Michigan Ave to West Pullman.

With a disproportionate amount of youth homelessness in the community, the Center is prioritizing youth programming. In recent years, major staff transitions slowed the pace of cultural work stewarded by staff. In spite of these shifts, the creativity that has emerged out of West Pullman - the resilient ability to

collaborate and generate fresh ideas with very limited resources - is what sets this community apart. West Pullman’s neighborhood profile from the 77 Communities Initiative stated: This is an established community with well-balanced age demographics that benefits from partnerships with CPS [Chicago Public Schools] and other community organizations.

WHAT DID WE LEARN?

West Pullman is a good example of what is possible when park staff and stakeholders trust community-engaged processes, even with a sizable learning curve. Re:Center had a slow start. The Listening Party had low attendance due to unfavorable weather conditions. Cultivating a cultural committee there became a real challenge with the major staff transitions and a shift in cultural liaisons. Once a new park supervisor and cultural liaison were onboarded, efforts to develop partnerships were jumpstarted by artist-in-residence Jabberwocky Marionettes. Jabberwocky’s members hit the ground running and did extensive community outreach to promote their upcoming public activations of the natural savanna area.

Jabberwocky understood that to make this a successful partnership, they had to tap into current existing audiences and that this would come with its own set of challenges. Jabberwocky Marionettes member Amber Marsh explains, “All of the groundwork was very hard and not very glamorous and took time to manifest.”

Jabberwocky’s best recruiting emerged from existing connections: art instructor Derek Moore’s youth arts and quilting classes, the after school youth program, and the Special Recreation participants. Amber Marsh exclaims, “Derek made our residency so successful there. He hosted us and collaborated with us and was key to some of our most



*A young participant in the 2018 Savanna Art Parade
Photo taken by Dave Rader*

incredible moments there. The people in the community are so cool, especially the church groups and the quilters. The park staff made it really clear how many different groups were stakeholders in the park, and that set us up really well to explore with those different communities.”

The collaboration was supported with regularly scheduled planning and troubleshooting meetings with the Park District’s Arts & Culture Unit and the Natural Resources crew. These meetings became integral to the process of growth and continuation at West Pullman Park. Consistency was key and Amber adds, “We really loved the staff meetings during that year, especially learning about the savanna at West Pullman [and how it was] maintained by the Natural Resources crew.” Youth participants and staff embraced Jabberwocky’s teachings. Their marionette-making workshops paid dividends in May 2018 culminating with the Savanna Art Parade in the park’s natural area.

This became a fruitful partnership as trust amongst park staff grew. The desire and ability to collaborate across disciplines followed soon after. This shift was embraced by Ron Wright, park supervisor, and a wave of new staff, all of whom brought a new charge of energy to the park. Coach Jelissa Bisbee started a successful dance camp bringing in new youth who had previously not been to West Pullman. Jabberwocky engaged the dance team and teen club, and they played a key role in activating the savanna.

Since then, collaboration continues inside of West Pullman with staff looking for ways to work together to engage their community in exciting arts programming. Developing these relationships with the supervisor has brought him into a

position of deep personal investment in, and leadership around, cultural projects at the Center. He spearheaded a visibility project to install light pole banners around the building. He continues to advocate for infrastructure upgrades along with exercising a general persistence and patience with other Center projects. Through the Cultural Center Initiative, West Pullman has mounted a new and popular Teen Recording Studio. Ever adaptive, West Pullman Park continues to resonate, engage and inspire, even if in slow incremental steps.

WEST PULLMAN PARK CULTURAL CENTER

WHAT WE ARE COMMITTED TO

Supporting and enhancing the Dance Program and attendant partnerships.

Growing and sustaining the Teen Recording Studio in the basement.

Developing community stewards and new Cultural Center users from the community.

Using the energy and momentum of short-term projects to slowly grow relationships with community collaborators.

Cultivating youth power at

DOUGLAS PARK CULTURAL CENTER

RE: CENTER STARTED IN 2017

RE: CENTER

“The process is democratic, with many partners. It’s been essential for me to play the role of representative to both the park and the partners, representing one’s interests to the other all along.”

Latham Zearfoss, Cultural Liaison

WHERE DID WE BEGIN?

Douglas Park Cultural Center sits nestled within a large green campus, and belongs to two neighborhoods that have recently been public focal points for institutional investment. The Center has a rich slate of arts and culture offerings and a well-established cultural staff who have worked in the community for a long time. Douglas Park has a dance instructor, visual arts instructor, and a drama instructor who provide collaborative programming and performances.

The dance program is well-loved on the west side (stewarded by the veteran cultural instructor, Elaine McLaurin) and the youth musical theater program is growing. Through a regional partnership, the Alvin Ailey Dance Camp is hosted on the Douglas Park campus at Collins High School. The Center has other strong and long-standing Arts Partners like Ravinia Lawndale Family Music School, and is host to events like the North Lawndale Arts Festival and Westside Music Festival. It also engages many repeat seasonal partners for programming.

The Cultural Center has an art studio in the basement as well as a small gym auditorium used for dance rehearsals. The Cultural Center Initiative supported the purchase of mobile drapes and lighting to help outfit the multipurpose ballroom for performances. The Center is situated between, and serves, two segregated communities: the predominantly Latinx community of Little Village and the overwhelmingly Black community of North Lawndale (the latter more predominantly uses the park).

A key takeaway from the Listening Parties was the need to make the Center a site where cross-cultural solidarity can be formed. People were eager to understand their neighbors better. One of the Center’s challenges is that Douglas Park can be confusing to navigate and the fieldhouse is hard to find,

which, paired with safety concerns, creates barriers to access, especially at night. Community members also want to create more opportunities for local youth - not just through art programming, but by providing economic opportunities as well. Its 2017 neighborhood profile from the 77 Communities Initiative stated: With sufficient open space, this community has a small population with a lot of youth; continue successful partnerships to increase program offerings at the parks.

WHAT DID WE LEARN?

One recurring question in this work is around the limits of resources and opportunities. Art is generally viewed favorably but also with suspicion.

As cultural liaison Latham Zearfoss puts it, “The communities we engage, North Lawndale for example, often voice concerns like, ‘art is great, but what does it actually do for me?’” Similarly, Re:Center falls into a trajectory of organizations, governmental entities and development groups - however well-intentioned - performing “community engagement” by seeking voluntary input from residents around an affected area, and then providing little or no follow-through on the ideas, recommendations, and other intellectual and creative labor performed there. As such, the work of Re:Center, which aims to do things differently, is largely around building trust and continuing to show up - a real challenge with limited resources.

Re:Center has been a uniquely designed avenue for many different kinds of people to galvanize around a central project, in spite of the physical site being buried deep in a green space in a siloed neighborhood. One of Re:Center’s most exciting developing projects has been Douglass 18, the Douglas Park Cultural Center’s in-

A miniature mockup of the CATs designs for Douglass 18, taken in 2018

Photo taken by Latham Zearfoss



progress mini-golf course inspired by the unique avian life of Douglas Park. A number of cultural organizations got connected to Douglas Park through Re:Center and Douglass 18.

Through an intensive and ongoing process of visioning, administrative organizing, and sustained resourcing across Park departments and community stakeholders, the golf course has marched towards completion, with a concurrent teen entrepreneurship program currently under development.

Zearfoss notes that this unique project which combines creative expression, ecological stewardship, and entrepreneurship is emblematic of how “interest in art and interest in economic opportunity go hand in hand at the Cultural Center [and] successful programming combines both.”

Local momentum and strong institutional buy-in on Douglass 18 developed important new relationships, and strengthened existing partnerships. Lincoln Park Zoo - the lead organization behind Douglass 18 - came to the Listening Party. The Center worked with Urban Gateways and Yollocalli (both youth arts organizations, the latter a project of the National Museum of Mexican Art) to facilitate visioning around the parks and create subsequent teen arts programming.

A community woodshop is coming soon to the Center in partnership with the School of the Art Institute of Chicago (SAIC) and Firehouse Community Arts Center. Re:Center also has collaborated with North Lawndale Community

Coordinating Council (NLCCC), specifically their arts and culture committee. It has been important to balance community dreams and expectations with the Center’s actual capacity to execute. This has involved consistent communication about park protocols and organizational and individual capacity.

The cultural liaison’s role was crucial on multiple levels: organizing community members, representing community interests, representing the Park District to community, bringing together institutional resources, demystifying bureaucracy, and convening meetings. It was especially important to ensure consistency in meetings to maintain momentum. The work is labor-intensive.

Zearfoss notes, “The [Re:Center] process is democratic, with many partners, and it’s been essential for me to play the role of representative to both the park and the partners, representing one’s interests to the other all along.” Haman Cross, a North Lawndale-based artist and all-around dynamo, acknowledged that, “Re:Center’s support has been really helpful.” Haman, Latham, and many other institutional and neighborhood partners worked together on projects like Douglass 18 that, as Haman put it, “make the parks a place of healing for the community.”

There is a shared sense of pride in this work, but also an uncertainty about the future as Re:Center winds down and Zearfoss’s attentions move elsewhere. As Haman clearly states, “It would be so great to always have access to a role like [the cultural liaison].”

“I’m more interested in making things that keep going and that I can pass off to the next person and hire people into. That’s part of my philosophy when I approach community projects. I don’t want anything to stop just because I’m not involved.”

Haman Cross, Artist-in-Residence

WHAT WE ARE COMMITTED TO

Teen entrepreneurship program and woodshop are in the works, along with resuscitating a ceramics program, and further updating the dance space and natural area.

Create better marketing and awareness strategies to draw community into the Center, including a pilot signage project to bring more visibility to programs and events.

Looking for additional opportunities to host entrepreneurship and grant-writing workshops for youth and community.

Ongoing support of the annual North Lawndale Arts Festival.

Back to basics at

PALMER PARK CULTURAL CENTER

RE: CENTER STARTED IN 2017

RE: CENTER

“There are so many amazing free and open spaces that connect communities that are right next door to each other. These places can be meeting points where we share our stories and really create new ones.”

Tracie D. Hall, Artist-in-Residence

WHERE DID WE BEGIN?

Palmer Park Cultural Center is located in the Roseland community. One of the industrial epicenters of the city, the park and its surrounding communities have a rich cultural history including nature trails, the Old Fashioned Donuts shop, and a longstanding arts community. The historic Town of Pullman model industrial community sits just east of Palmer, and tells the story of the company town created by George Pullman for his workers in the late nineteenth century. The town, and the neighboring Roseland community, fell into disrepair by the 1950s and suffered from urban neglect made worse by white flight.

Today's landscape shows the marks of this prolonged disinvestment but is also countered by the community's persistent resilience. Revitalizing efforts in historic Pullman have brought new businesses and artists to the area signalling a slow but steady shift.

Palmer Park is also ready for its next journey. The fieldhouse campus is unique with multiple currently-underused spaces that are conducive to programming and artmaking across three separate buildings. The park features a courtyard, fitness center, youth wellness center, gymnasium, and multi-purpose clubrooms. Outside, the park offers an aquatic center featuring the Chicago Park District's largest pool slides (a popular field trip destination for summer camps), soccer field, baseball/softball diamonds, basketball/tennis courts, and a playground.

The park also has one of the few ceramics buildings in the parks; staff hope to outfit the space with a small dark room to expand into photography. The Center also has strong sports, cheerleading, and growing arts programs. Its dance program is popular but does not have the capacity to serve all of the youth who are interested. With the desire to offer more diverse dance programming, Deeply Rooted Dance Theater held a residency

in 2018 offering free classes to youth while at the same time strengthening their skill set.

Building a strong rapport with community members and local area organizations has been challenging. The Center has seen several supervisors over the past five years. A part time visual arts instructor position has had much turnover, but the position was recently filled by an artist with a strong background in ceramics and visual arts. Attention is being placed on trying out a wide variety of cultural programming through a sampler event series and rotating artists-in-residence to try to build a base of park users.

WHAT DID WE LEARN?

One recurring question in this work is around the limits of resources. In many ways Palmer Park is the town square that connects multiple park users. On any given visit, you might see young people bouncing basketballs, elders laughing on the lawn, or youth dancing. Tracie Hall, Executive Director of American Library Association (ALA), voices,

“There are so many amazing free and open spaces that connect communities that are right next door to each other, particularly Pullman and Roseland. These places can be meeting points, where we share our stories and really create new ones.” Palmer Park connects to 5 other smaller playgrounds, all unified by one Park Advisory Council (PAC). Hall exclaims, “I [am] very excited about working with [the PAC] and being an artist-in-residence across those parks, as opposed to being in an enclosed space. It's so exciting to imagine a residency where your residence is the public!”



*Residents gathered for the Palmer Park Listening Party in 2017
Photo taken by Irina Zadov*

The Center is in the process of setting up consistent community programming. Facilitating this has been the main function of Re:Center at this site. The park has had a hard time successfully activating the adult community beyond brief engagements when parents drop their children off for programs.

While the Listening Party was very well attended with over 70 community members and families present, Meetups did not get off the ground partially due to their timing in the middle of winter and the Center's relative inaccessibility by transit. Additionally, recruiting community participation requires a consistent outreach plan that operates with buy-in from the supervisor and staff.

While initial connections were made with some nearby schools, churches, and the Roseland chamber of commerce, building durable relations were difficult due to multiple staff transitions over the course of the engagement period.

Deeply Rooted Dance Theatre proved to be a valuable partner at this site: They were looking for a new park home, and settled on Palmer Park because of its location across from a high school with a dance program. The program was well received during summer camp but met challenges recruiting students during the regular school year. Additionally, Cyaira Adams with Next Level Society, contracted artist, worked with a resident teen group on media production, but this program terminated when funding for that program ran out.

Palmer's newest partnership will be with librarian, artist, and cultural curator Tracie Hall as the artist-in-residence through the Re:Center Project. She will be hosted at Palmer Park's ceramics studio offering workshops, talks, and creative activations at nearby playgrounds Langley and Arcade Parks in the form of a curatorial/studio residency. Tracie is interested in collaborating with other artists in the neighborhood and is planning on doing pop-ups at other parks in the area that bring audiences back to Palmer. Plans for the residency are in their formative state, but a theme has been identified. Re-Collection focuses on gathering the stories of Roseland, Pullman, and the Far South Side. It is about re-collecting these neighborhoods as their own assets, and reimagining them beyond just the popular conception of their distance from downtown.

Tracie envisions, "I want to challenge these conceptualizations of geographies. I will be engaging with storytellers, musicians, dancers, designers, chefs--folks who can recollect these stories. Our parks are public. I invite anyone who has the time to come play, linger, celebrate, and build a public together that's perfect for what we need here."

With Re-Collection currently at a halt due to the recent outbreak of COVID-19, Tracie is especially interested in starting this particular program. "I want to invite people to tell their story of survival and sustenance in this period of pandemic. Every neighborhood has their own story of how they're moving through this and helping each other. I want to make sure that Pullman and Roseland tell their stories. If for no one else then at least to each other, so that we can remember."

WHAT WE ARE COMMITTED TO

Staff are interested in creating at least three or four events that attract different demographics from the surrounding communities.

Building stronger artist-in-residence opportunities to connect with communities like the upcoming engagement with artist, curator and administrator Tracie Hall.

Supporting the recently hired ceramics instructor to work on youth, senior, and family programs.

Center and ACU staff need to rethink structures of mutual accountability in order to build and maintain momentum for programming.

Honoring and uplifting South Eastside shared history at

CALUMET PARK CULTURAL CENTER

RE: CENTER STARTED IN 2017

RE: CENTER

“We need to figure out how to pass the torch in our neighborhood. How do we train up? How do we involve our young people? Working in city government, I see this need to celebrate and support our own. Who will carry the legacy forward? Who will learn it, inherit, and pass it forward?”

Ismael Cuevas, Chief of Staff, 10th Ward Alderwoman's Office

WHERE DID WE BEGIN?

Calumet Park Cultural Center is tucked away in the East Side community with 200 acres of parkland overseeing Lake Michigan. The surrounding landscape includes a beach, boat launch, an artificial soccer turf, picnic groves, playground, softball, football, and soccer fields, and a dog park. The Center has a vibrant array of specialty programs and studio spaces including vibrant gymnastics, upholstery, and sewing programs, a dog park, and many cultural instructors including a full-time woodcraft instructor. The Center also hosts the Lakeshore Model Railroad Museum and the South East Chicago Historical Society, along with their extensive archives.

When a new park supervisor, Demitrice Seaton, arrived, she came in with much needed energy and a clear vision responsive to the needs of the community. Through the Cultural Center Initiative, contractual support was provided to create new art and dance opportunities for youth including: popular adult salsa classes, youth hip-hop classes, an annual step dancing workshop, and a youth theater program. This initiative has also supported many cultural community field trips throughout the years such as a yearly quilt expo trip for the upholstery and sewing program participants. Staff are committed to catering to the community's seniors, and began hosting an Annual Senior Appreciation Luncheon.

There is a large community of artists who want to stop the outflow of artists from the neighborhood. During the Listening Party at Calumet Park, it became clear that this diverse community cared for the history and heritage of the Southeast neighborhood. The cultural committee was composed of dedicated community artists, organizers, and local educators that supported the cultural vision at the Center.

WHAT DID WE LEARN?

Calumet Park was envisioned in 1903 as part of the South Park Commission's transformative neighborhood park system, built to provide social services and breathing spaces for the over-crowded immigrant neighborhood. The story of white and Mexican immigrants who established and developed the infamous steel mill and rail yards is one upheld with great pride. South Chicago is historically industrial and was once considered the “dumping ground of the city.”

However, a concern that was brought to the forefront during Re:Center's Listening Party at Calumet Park was the need to elevate the voices of the artists that contributed to the making of the South East Side community. For decades, artists have been woven into the fabric of this community's making, creating art that speaks to steel mill history, the economic and mental health issues prominent once that industry went away, and the environmental activism trying to counteract it all. All that was left was residue--the stacks, the coke plant, the largest incinerator in the country, and pollution issues.

Many artists who did not feel supported took their talents to other Chicago communities, such as Pilsen. There is a strong urgency to put a stop to the outflow of artists from the community, and a deep desire to nurture, celebrate, and honor these artists whose work speaks to the history and heritage of Calumet Park. Through the Re:Center Project, a cultural committee was formed and composed by dedicated community artists, organizers, and local educators. Park supervisor Demitrice Seaton states, “[The Re:Center Project gathered] the community together to see their needs. It was interesting because it seemed like the community had a chance to really voice their concerns for the first time for a place they cared about a lot.”

Members of the cultural committee were always very interested in lifting up South East Side community history. Community Meetup discussions often revolved around a desire to remind the present

*Mexican Folklore Dancers at the Calumet Cultural Heritage Day in 2018
Photo taken by Patsy Diaz*



day community and younger generations of the unique history of this neighborhood. Two cultural heritage events were hosted in Fall 2017 and one in Fall 2018 (funded by Night Out In The Parks, a CPKD initiative). They were pivotal points in the process as they brought together many lifelong residents of diverse backgrounds and paid meaningful tribute with an art exhibition commemorating the late Mendoza Brothers, who were artists from the community.

Nonetheless, the civic engagement process at Calumet has been a challenging one to navigate. The cultural committee has struggled to reconcile different needs and expectations, from preserving history to developing funding resources for future projects at the park. Through this, the committee has demonstrated the need to grow capacity and diversity in membership keeping artists and seniors in mind. Youth represented one key demographic missing from the cultural committee over the several years it ran under Re:Center.

The park supervisor and ACU staff acknowledged the importance of incorporating youth representation into any future community work as the next generation of contributors to the community and future keepers of the South East Side's history and heritage. Demitrice Seaton recognizes, "The [cultural] committee is getting tired now. If we're continuing with more funding, I'll try to recruit more people, because this has been lovely, but I don't know if the current committee will continue. Nothing wrong with a fresh set of eyes to make work happen!"

Work continues through other Cultural Center initiatives. In 2016, Floating Museum worked with Calumet Park and community partners incubating the idea for the mobile curatorial program. They built an outdoor freestanding installation in the lawn at Calumet Park and featured art from neighborhood artists and cultural instructors at the park. Support from CPKD's Night Out in the Parks program has helped build long-term collaborations with SkyART (a non-profit providing free visual arts programming for youth) creating pop-up visual art workshops and exhibition support at Calumet and other parks in the region.

Emily Johnson's *And Then A Cunning Voice/A Night We Spent Gazing at the Stars* created an opportunity to pilot a unique event that combined food, performance, dance, music, storytelling, and audience participation. For over two years, ACU staff, Chicago Department of Cultural Affairs & Special Events (DCASE), and the park supervisor worked to bring New York-based artist Emily Johnson's all night performance and community event to the park. With co-presenter support from the Dance Center of Columbia College, the project was finally realized in Fall 2019.

Over 80 audience members attended and participated in this all night spectacle and participatory performance. These kinds of cultural programs build relationships that enhance creative options at the Center while also expanding the forms that creative expression can take by encouraging experimentation and innovation.

CALUMET PARK CULTURAL CENTER

WHAT WE ARE COMMITTED TO

Reviving the social dance program,
and furthering the theatre program.

Developing the Center's
relationship with neighborhood
youth arts programs like SkyArt.

Working with park supervisor and
staff to strategically use events to
cultivate a version of the cultural
committee that might eventually
work with the existing PAC to help
support programming.

Keep showing up, keep trying at

MARQUETTE PARK CULTURAL CENTER

RE: CENTER STARTED IN 2017

RE: CENTER

“The moms and grandmas on this committee have shown so much interest in bringing about positive change at that park. Even if they don’t feel equipped enough, it’s really promising that they keep coming. Their kids are grown and not even participating in park programming anymore. But they’re still invested.”

Jasmin Cardenas, Civic Practice Artist, Lookingglass Theatre

WHERE DID WE BEGIN?

Marquette Park Cultural Center is surrounded by a lagoon and golf course and sits at the edge of an expansive green space with two playgrounds, natural areas, sports fields, and monuments.

The park hosts a number of large community events, including an annual Halloween/Día de los Muertos event, winter holiday concert, and indoor and outdoor soccer tournaments. The building has an ADA-compliant stage, a music room, two gyms, and a multi-purpose room that is used for community meetings, workshops, and art programs.

The Center is home to one of the last music programs run by the Chicago Park District. After a long period of being without a music program, a new part-time musical instructor was hired in Fall 2018. The Center also has a woodshop that is currently inactive following the retirement of the long time instructor in 2017.

Hyde Park School of Dance (HPSD) has been a longtime partner, hosting a popular youth dance program that has expanded over the past several years. HPSD is contracted to provide three year-round early childhood dance programs.

There is also a part-time art instructor who teaches craft-making and textile arts. Marquette’s 2018 Cultural Plan stated: Given the large and increasing youth population in this community, look for opportunities to repurpose existing assets to provide appropriate recreational opportunities.

WHAT DID WE LEARN?

In 1966 Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., along with 700 civil rights activists and community members, marched in Marquette Park as part of the Chicago Freedom Movement to protest racist and unjust housing practices. Met with violent protesters, Dr. King said that the march was “the first step on a thousand mile journey.” Today, Marquette is primarily patronized by Black and Latinx park-goers, but the community remains divided in many ways. The Re:Center Listening Party brought Black and Latinx neighbors together, sowing excitement about continued cross-cultural exchange. However, the cultural liaison coordinating these efforts departed shortly thereafter and momentum slowed.

Jasmin Cardenas, a cultural organizer, activist, and artist with Lookingglass Theatre’s Civic Practice Lab, reinitiated outreach efforts through a series of small Meetups with logistical support provided by ACU. The community members who consistently s group lef these Meetups were primarily Spanish-speaking parents. As a result, meetings were held in Spanish with English translation primarily for the Park District Staff. Coloring pages were brought to accommodate parents who had their children with them.

This group shared an overlapping memory of the park: a lush and beautiful rose garden - with over fifty varieties of roses - where everyone took their quinceañera photos. But when a groundskeeper retired and budgets were cut, the rose garden disappeared. The group was particularly focused on outdoor beautification, which though not technically in the Re:Center project’s purview, did feel relevant to the cultural vitality of the park.

As Jasmin discovered over several months of consistent conversations, there were decisive conclusions: the working group wanted more diversity-focused programming that would bring Black and Latinx families together inside the park, expressing frustration



*Participants in the inaugural Day of the Child / Día del Niño in 2019
Photo taken by Nikki Jolly*

that they had to leave their own community in order to enjoy or participate in cultural celebrations.

In response, the group created their own Dia del Niño Family Festival, which successfully brought together people from across neighboring communities. The playground concessionaire, Maria Carrera, provided an expanded menu and asked her daughters to create handmade paper flowers.

The park provided games while neighborhood volunteers and local teens supported arts and crafts and face painting. The Festival included performances that represented the diverse communities they sought to gather: Mama Edie, African American storyteller; Rosalinda Zamora, Latina aerobics instructor; and Las BomPleneras, all-female Puerto Rican rhythm group. Youth performers were featured through a shared bill with student musicians from Marquette Park's music program and the Mexican-American youth-led band Mariachi Tradicional Juvenil.

Rebirth Poetry Ensemble led a stirring, hopeful youth poetry performance, intended to give hope for the future. Overall, it was an inspiring day that created a blueprint for how communities can work to organize together. Jasmin noted, "The moms and grandmas on this committee have shown so much interest in bringing positive change... their kids are grown and they're still invested."

After the event, park leadership and ACU shifted the focus of October's annual Halloween event into a Día de los Muertos Celebration. Leading up to the big day, artists Mercedes Inez and Son Monarcas provided weekly visual

arts workshops for families, including calavera puppet-making, ojos de dios weaving, and printmaking. These workshops provided collaborative art-making experiences which culminated with the Park's inaugural Día de los Muertos event.

In addition, a family workshop series and guest speaker series was arranged to support the cultural committee in navigating park processes, and Park District staff came to share about Park Advisory Councils, Community Gardens and Nature Play spaces. These had never been offered in Spanish and thanks to Jasmin's translation, this vital information was made available for the park's Spanish-speaking community.

Although Jasmin's contract ended for the project, she continued working with the group as they worked to establish a new park advisory council. There are few resources, and while the group is trying to navigate fundraising, they are developing a positive relationship with park staff to support programming and are working towards building a new outdoor nature playspace. By taking on projects one at a time, there is hope that a committed group of community collaborators will strengthen support for more robust cultural programming.

Though Marquette's unique journey instills hope, it also yields big systemic questions. Most pressing are: how do we bridge cultural and language gaps sustainably? Furthermore, committee members were showing up, but without the capacity to be organizers in spite of their deep personal investment. The group lacked technical and fundraising skill sets, resounding a central Re:Center concern: how do we sustainably equip community leaders with the skills and resources to facilitate democratic, decision-making conversations?

WHAT WE ARE COMMITTED TO

Working towards building a nature play space.

Imagining new funding formulas (that garner public and private dollars) to increase the depth of cultural partnerships.

Assisting PAC to navigate fundraising by connecting with the alderman's office to gain support for their large project goals (nature play space, pool) as they continue to nurture a positive relationship with park leadership.

All staff are cultural staff at

RIDGE PARK CULTURAL CENTER

RE: CENTER STARTED IN 2018

RE: CENTER

RIDGE PARK CULTURAL CENTER

“Having a music festival has always been something we’ve wanted in Beverly. I grew up here and am a musician myself....For years there hasn’t been a space in Beverly that people could come to and share their music. All the other places we know of are so far up north. I love that [ACU] is available to even collaborate on events like this. I thought something like this wouldn’t happen for years.”

Courtney Mitchell, Recreation Leader at Ridge Park

WHERE DID WE BEGIN?

Ridge Park Cultural Center is constantly bustling with activity and programming: it has a woodshop, a ceramics building, and a theater, all stewarded by a strong cultural staff, including a full-time ceramics instructor, a woodcraft instructor, and an arts and crafts instructor who also includes sewing & quilting.

The Center has a gymnastics program, and adult theater classes are offered by the park supervisor at Monroe Park, who was a former park staff member at Ridge Park. The Center is host to the Vanderpoel Arts Association and Gallery and the Ridge Park Art Fair & Festival. The Center is anchored by a strong and ambitious Park Advisory Council (PAC), though Re:Center noted the need for the PAC to diversify to represent more perspectives and increase capacity.

In its 2018 Cultural Plan, the Center stated: Parks in this area are well used, programs are growing, and partnerships with parochial schools and other groups increase numbers of Cultural Center users.

WHAT DID WE LEARN?

At Ridge, Re:Center’s baked-in flexibility was instrumental in implementing a slightly different iteration of our collaborative, community-led programming initiative.

Under Mary Jo Viero’s leadership, the Ridge Park Advisory Council [RPAC] was robust in size while remaining very focused on renovating the building and fundraising to that end. As Mary Jo put it, “All of the programming here is on the 2nd floor which means it’s not handicap accessible. The roof was leaking and I wanted to get that fixed. They [Chicago Park District] said in order to have requests listened to, you needed to have a PAC [Park Advisory Council]. So I started a PAC! It’s been taking so much of my focus that I haven’t been able to focus as much as I’d like to on cultural programming.”

Even so, in 2017, the RPAC successfully introduced the Ridge Park Art Fair and Festival. Re:Center supported this effort with funding and labor support, sidestepping our normal community engagement process in favor of supporting a fledgling cultural program spearheaded by community members, including a longstanding Arts Partner in Residence, the John H. Vanderpoel Association, which features a unique, world-class collection of late 20th century paintings.

As Re:Center attempted to continue to build new projects with community stakeholders, momentum slowed due to stakeholders maintaining commitments to other efforts, including the Art Fair. At this point, Re:Center was pivoted toward supporting a visionary effort by two on-the-ground staff at Ridge.

Ridge Park supervisor, Dan Ryan, brought two of his park staff, Mia Kittaneh and Courtney Mitchell, to the table. They had been dreaming of a mini-music festival at Ridge that would showcase talented young musicians who live or grew up in the Beverly area. Courtney Mitchell

Aaron Evans performing with his band in the inaugural Ridge Parkapalooza in 2019
Photo taken by Latham Zearfoss



identifies the purpose and impact of this project: “Having a music festival has always been something we’ve wanted in Beverly--I grew up here and am a musician myself. I’ve been part of the open mic community here. There was a space on 103rd called World Folk Music where all the amateurs would go. It was such a great environment, but it got shut down and bought out so we lost our space. For years there hasn’t been a space in Beverly that people could come to and share their music. All the other places we know of are so far up north.

Fast forward to last summer, Latham sat down with us and we talked about Ridge Parkapalooza and I shared that I wanted a space like this for musicians, whether they were established or not. The process was a little difficult - I was struggling to figure out my role in the planning. We struggled to figure out how to get a stage for the event - there were a lot of middlemen we had to deal with. We had a lot of problems with people not responding to our request, which was especially frustrating as we were getting down to the wire. I wish there were a clear flowchart that we had to understand how to do event planning in the parks.”

It was an ambitious project with a steep learning curve but with the impact was positive. As Courtney recalls, “The day of the festival was a dream come true. Looking from the standpoint of an employee, I think it was an incredibly well-oiled machine - everything went off perfectly and everyone did their jobs.

I love that the cultural department is available to even collaborate on events like this.” This unique iteration

of Re:Center highlights the need for greater agency and support for on-the-ground staff investing in hyperlocal cultural programming.

With Re:Center funding now gone, there are no other real mechanisms to support park staff with projects like this. Even so, Courtney and Mia, along with cultural liaison Latham Zearfoss, continue to search for partnerships and grant opportunities to bring back Ridge Parkapalooza with some key improvements. Courtney notes that, “We couldn’t get the word out about the event fast enough - we had a delay with our graphic designer. Because of the late advertisement we had a proportionate community response. But the folks who did come had an amazing time. I would truly love for this event to happen again.”

RIDGE PARK CULTURAL CENTER

WHAT WE ARE COMMITTED TO

At the Listening Party, there was strong interest in developing a maker space, which led to the possibility of a future partnership with St. Xavier University's fine arts department.

Ridge continues to be a site where its Park Advisory Council is a natural home for cultural stewardship. That said, while being quite strong, the RPAC has not been able to develop volunteer capacity to take on the necessary work, even as it holds big ambitions.

Support for signature programs that are relevant to the surrounding community. Park staff are hoping to secure funds for a future iteration of Ridge Parkapalooza, and the Ridge Park Art Fair is on hold this year due to COVID-19 and scheduling issues.

New staff, new hopes at

TULEY PARK CULTURAL CENTER

RE: CENTER STARTED IN 2018

RE: CENTER

TULEY PARK CULTURAL CENTER

“As an artist, I was first trained at Tuley Park - Back in the late 90s I was working my first job, and I took a \$20 photography class at the Park. I learned more in that photography class in the 90s than I did at my Master’s program.”

Chris St. Martin, Artist-in-Residence

WHERE DID WE BEGIN?

Tuley Park Cultural Center is a large park centered in the residential area of Chesterfield in the Chatham community. The park has a tennis court, a pool, an auditorium which is used for many community events, a ceramics studio, and the Gallery Sous Terrain (an artist-in-residence space), along with a photo studio that is in need of repairs. This busy park hosts active recreation programs for all ages. The park has an art instructor that teaches two days per week and specializes in ceramics and mixed media. Over the years, the Cultural Center Initiative has supported new arts experiences for the teen club and cultural concerts for well-loved community events.

Through a transition in staff, the new Park supervisor has been able to leverage resources and make improvements to create a cultural corridor in the park, building a more intentional connection between all of the park programming. The park is a site for the Young Cultural Stewards Fellowship, which engages youth aged 12 to 15 as caretakers of culture and agents of change within their parks and neighborhoods. Youth explore what culture and community mean to them while developing skills in cultural preservation, organizing and building creative platforms for social change. Tuley’s 2018 Cultural Plan made a commitment to: strengthen partnership with community organizations and CPS while responding to community recreation needs with our programs.

WHAT DID WE LEARN?

In the late 1990s, Chatham artists William Heard, Floyd Payne, and Marian Hayes were looking for an exhibition space for Chicago Artists Month. After they approached Tuley Park, the collaboration grew over a 10 year period, leading to the 2009 creation of Gallery Sous Terrain, a community gallery and artist workspace in the basement of Tuley Park. Marian Hayes, in addition to being an artist and DJ, was a true community connector who participated in every community event at the park. In 2016, the community mourned her loss after she was struck by a motorist, and Gallery Sous Terrain became inactive. Eventually, park staff sensed an opportunity to leverage community input in order to re-energize this space through the Re:Center initiative.

The Re:Center cultural liaison and key members of the park staff left their posts in 2018, which caused delays in the progress; it also caused a decline in participation of teens that had been the most active participants in the Listening Party. However, there was still support from the Arts & Culture Unit staff and civic engagement artists from the Lookingglass Theater, and focus groups were initiated with neighborhood artists and supporters to explore and reimagine the artist residency. The teen club was re-engaged by Lookingglass Artist Mari DeOleo, and they supported a community work day to clean out the gallery space and begin planning a teen mural project. When funding ran out, the project was continued by Diedre Arnold, the art instructor on staff at the park.

A new park supervisor was hired, bringing new energy to the projects and strengthening the existing partnership with the Young Cultural Stewards program. With support from all parties, a shift was initiated to create a “cultural corridor” in the park field house. Work orders and collaborative budget-planning brought air conditioning to these spaces, which helped to foster a more welcoming workspace for all users.

*Marian Hayes Artist Residency Open Studio in 2019
Photo taken by Nikki Jolly*



In 2019, the Marian Hayes Artist Residency was launched and 4 artists were selected to work in the space and engage with park programming over a 9-month residency. One of the artists-in-residence, Chris Saint Martin, took his first photography class at Tuley Park in the 1990s for \$20 and was mentored by Marian Hayes and other artists there.

He said, “I learned more in that photography class than I did at my Masters program” because “these are the kinds of services and people that exist in the community.” During the residency, open studio events brought families into the space and showcased the unique gifts of each artist. However, without dedicated coordination to shape the projects, support marketing, and coordinate with park staff, it was difficult for the artists to find their groove.

Chris notes there are “decades of disenfranchisement we’re working against” on the South Side and “people don’t think of our neighborhood as a destination for art, we need to change that mindset.” There is more work to do connecting the residency as a resource to institutions and artists deeply rooted in the South Side. As Chris says, “there is something new on the horizon” for Tuley Park.

“I wish also that we could cross-pollinate more with artists and institutions across the South Side.”

Chris St. Martin, Artist-in-Residence

TULEY PARK CULTURAL CENTER

WHAT WE ARE COMMITTED TO

A new staff and supervisor have a lot of energy, and are very open to cultural programming and collaborations.

Tuley Park is looking to re-establish the Marian Hayes Artist Residency as well as its Theatre and Dance programs and partnerships.

The supervisor wants the basement to be demarcated as the cultural corridor of the park. Strategically, a teen mural project will be installed there as the visual marker announcing this space.

The Center is interested in developing community stewards, and a group of stakeholders who represent the diverse user base of the Center. The photo studio is also due an upgrade, and the Center plans to develop an attendant program with it.

Realizing collective potential at

BERGER PARK CULTURAL CENTER

RE: CENTER STARTED IN 2018

RE: CENTER

“I’m now collaborating with other organizations I’ve met through this process. Just this week I’ve been doing a mini-residency at Roman Susan, who I met through this!”

Rachel Damon, Synapse Arts, Arts Partner in Residence

WHERE DID WE BEGIN?

Berger Park Cultural Center comprises two mansions overlooking Lake Michigan in the North Side neighborhood of Edgewater. The neighborhood has a high concentration of people in the 20-34 age range, and a number of local arts and culture organizations in the vicinity. Between that and a former supervisor with a strong theatre background, the Center has deep ties to the local theatre community. Berger Park also has a robust Park Advisory Council (PAC) that is well-versed in the local arts scene. The campus includes the North Mansion, whose renovation is the main focus of the PAC. The Center is also home to unique studio spaces and a variety of other spaces that are conducive to intimate art experiences.

Berger Park has strong theatre, ceramics, and lapidary art programs. The park has a full-time jewelry instructor (split between Green Briar Park), a full-time ceramics instructor (split between Loyola Park), and a full time theater instructor. In 2016 the dance and drama instructor retired, disrupting consistent enrollment. The new instructor focuses solely on drama, and the Cultural Center is supplementing dance programming with partnerships. Synapse Arts is an Arts Partner in Residence at Berger and Loyola Parks, and teaches the parks’ youth dance programs. Artist Janai Cutcher teaches the senior tap program in exchange for rehearsal space. The park is a welcoming space for several other regular partners and renters who perform and program the space regularly.

The Cultural Center Initiative offers contractual support in order to provide new art, music, and theater opportunities for youth, seniors, family, and all ages. Up until 2016, Arts XIII (currently known as Young Cultural Stewards) was hosted at the park offering youth (ages 12-14) the space to critically and creatively engage in art, technology, and media to become advocates and

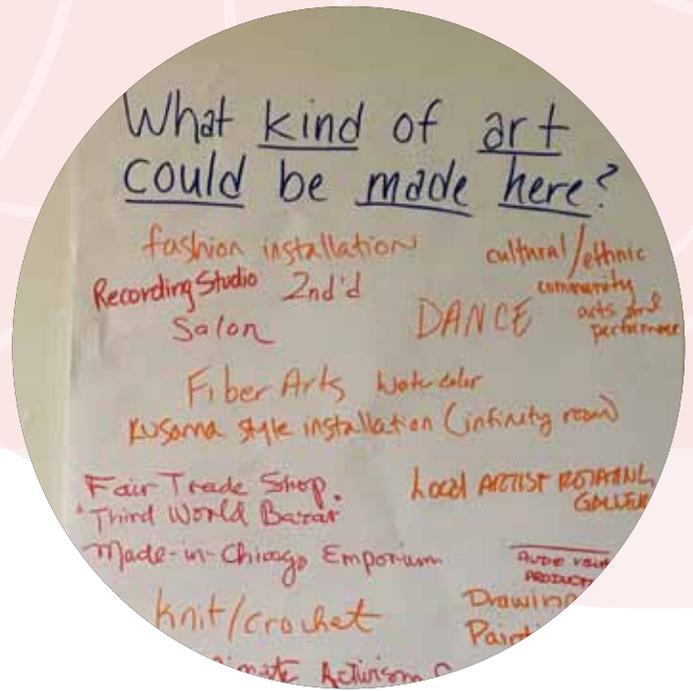
caretakers of their parks, neighborhoods, and communities. Berger’s 2019 Cultural Plan stated: This community has a multi-cultural, multi-generational and socio-economically diverse population which should be taken into account when developing recreational and cultural programs.

WHAT DID WE LEARN?

With good reason, Berger Park feels like a communal home on the lake. The idiosyncrasies of the space are a big part of why it is so cherished by the community. Berger is uniquely structured, like a campus, with the main building being an intimate old mansion. Just North of the main building is an almost identical mansion that is largely unoccupied and in a state of mild neglect, with some pressing concerns.

These buildings are registered historical landmarks, and as such, their upkeep often comes with a hefty price tag that the Chicago Park District is unable to carry. The Berger Park Advisory Council [BPAC], at the time when Re:Center first began there in 2019, was researching grants for some needed improvements to the North mansion, known as Gunder House.

Through Re:Center, BPAC and other community stakeholders embraced additional arts programming as a potential focus for Gunder House. As Rachel Damon, Director for Synapse Arts, an Arts Partner in Residence at Berger and Loyola Parks put it, Re:Center kicked off with “a Listening Party for gathering a bunch of information. We got to hear directly from the community about what they want.”



Wall surveys at the Berger Park Listening Party in 2019
 Photo taken by Irina Zadov

Nathan Smith, who co-directs Roman Susan Art Foundation, was brought into the fold. Nathan recalls that cultural liaison "Latham Zearfoss was reaching out to folks who were potential stakeholders." Rachel, Nathan and others came to the table for regular meetings about the future of Gunder House. "What we arrived at is the idea of making the North Mansion a multi-use space - where the first floor is public," Rachel states. Nathan adds, "It's a historical building.

Programming needs to be in relation with the structure of the building and respecting it. How do we incorporate creative mediums that don't have to hang things on the wall?" Roman Susan, along with the LGBTQIA+ language justice collective FRUTAS, landed on the idea of a screening room. Re:Center purchased a projector and screen and inherited some working sound equipment from the Theater on the Lake. All three core groups - Synapse, Roman Susan, FRUTAS - developed proposals for programs and coordinated with theater instructor Eileen Tull to support an expanded version of her Senior Movie Club using the new and improved equipment.

In spite of this momentum, there are still hurdles. Nathan continues, "There's a door on the north side that needs to be replaced. The door is by a staircase that used to have a wheelchair lift that no longer works. The building currently isn't accessible because of this. [It's a] huge shortcoming." Rachel adds, "We can't really do anything but wait." In the meantime,

the process of these convenings has forged new partnerships and greater dialogue between arts organizations working in the neighborhood.

Rachel had this promising note, "I'm now collaborating with other organizations I've met through this process. Just this week I've been doing a mini-residency at Roman Susan, who I met through this!"

WHAT WE ARE COMMITTED TO

Identifying new partnerships in that space, along with developing more diverse programming that attracts new audiences.

Berger Park is focused on planning and gathering support for the North Mansion renovation.

The current PAC, composed mostly of white elders, aims to diversify in order to accomplish their goal of better representing Edgewater's racially diverse communities.

Investing and protecting what's already here at

HUMBOLDT PARK CULTURAL CENTER

RE: CENTER STARTED IN 2019

RE: CENTER

HUMBOLDT PARK CULTURAL CENTER

“I feel like the folks who came to the Listening Party laid out a very clear framework to ensure work was authentic to the community. A lot was said about how to get people talking across different communities, especially between old and new residents.”

Nell Taylor, Executive Director, Read/Write Library

WHERE DID WE BEGIN?

Humboldt Park Cultural Center sits inside a sprawling campus in a neighborhood undergoing rapid gentrification. The campus includes a lagoon, Chicago's only inland beach, a boathouse, active baseball fields including Little Cubs Field (a replica of the Chicago Cubs Stadium) and the National Museum of Puerto Rican Arts & Culture. The Center has a full-time arts and crafts instructor, Nellie Roman, who leads a majority of the Center's early childhood and youth programs. Nellie also leads Day Camp planning, and the Cultural Center Initiative supports her efforts with a summer contractor who can bring new arts experiences each summer. Adult ceramics was added after a critical wiring issue was resolved with the kiln, adding a much desired programming option.

A recreation instructor who ran band programs was relocated within the District, and the Puerto Rican Art Alliance's (PRAA) Cuatro program moved off site, effectively ending musical instruction at the park. Through a new partnership, the Chicago Cuatro Orchestra (CCO), has brought music programming back. It has been so successful, that CCO has expanded its offerings within their first year in residence. The Cultural Center Initiative has also partially funded a unique, long-term partnership for an adult social salsa dance program. The remaining funding needed to sustain the popular program is generated through a split-revenue model.

Humboldt Park Cultural Center also hosts a large number of region-wide and cultural events through Night Out in the Parks. Arts Partners in Residence Puerto Rican Arts Alliance have been producing teen-centered studio arts programs and exhibitions for over a decade. The Museum of Puerto Rican Arts & Culture began exhibiting and programming in the Boathouse Gallery several years ago. According to Humboldt Park's 2019 Cultural Plan: Good school partnerships will assist park programs offered for youth in this community.

WHAT DID WE LEARN?

When cultural liaison Yvette Mayorga started the outreach process she was “nervous about forces of gentrification” and was intentional about meeting with artists, organizers, park staff, and arts partners already doing work in the neighborhood. One of the stakeholders most vital to this process was Nellie Roman, a cultural instructor at the park. Yvette said, “Nellie's presence as a cultural instructor and her commitment to the park and its people is a big asset.”

Nell Taylor, a community resident, stakeholder, and Executive Director of Read/Write Library, said the Listening Party “laid out a very clear framework to ensure work was authentic to the community,” and that “a lot was said about how to get people talking across different communities, especially between old and new residents.” Yvette did a lot of groundwork to lead a successful Listening Party, but ultimately departed from her role as cultural liaison in early 2019, putting Re:Center momentum on hold. In the interim, The Re:Center team looked outside official staffing structures to support the vital cultural organizing that Yvette had kick-started.

Several contractors were brought in to run an abridged process, meeting with community members and stakeholders in Winter 2019 to determine a number of cultural priorities that could be catalyzed in the next several years. Vanessa Stokes, an artist and cultural organizer, brought her experience and knowledge as a participating community member at Austin Town Hall Cultural Center to her work with Humboldt Park. As a member of the Park Advisory Council and co-chair of the Arts & Culture Committee at Austin Town Hall, Vanessa emphasized the importance of patience and clear communication in working to raise community awareness about the cultural resources available to them. Carlos Salazar-Lermont brought his background organizing both politics and cultural resources in Venezuela to his work with the Humboldt Park community. Under the Arts & Culture Unit manager's supervision, Stokes and Salazar-Lermont co-facilitated



Art exhibition curated by Nellie Roman at the Humboldt Park Listening Party in 2019

Photo taken by Andy White

a short series of community engagements called “Take the Wheel,” a cheeky way to encourage ownership of park space and the cultural programming that happens within.

This approach to Re:Center worked to streamline the process into several sessions where assets and needs could be named and then collectively problem-solved.

Park staff and community identified what local resources were needed to meet the cultural visions imagined, and generated ideas about how to access those resources through in kind labor, fundraising, and working with neighborhood services such as the chamber of commerce or the alderman’s office.

Community member Nell Taylor continues to be involved in these meetings. One of the challenges noted is that everyone involved comes from small community organizations “that are working on a ton of community projects” so finding a way to “allow people to be passively informed...until they are ready to participate physically” will be an important way forward. As the project paused amid a global pandemic, it is clear to Nell that “the park itself remains a cultural hub, whether or not it’s formal, which is one of its big assets.”

One of the biggest challenges at Humboldt Park Cultural Center is the tension and mistrust in the neighborhood around issues of gentrification. As such, any real relationship-building must address those tensions through a commitment to responsive

and inclusive programming that is holistically conceived and driven forward, at least in part, by long standing community stakeholders. This is a prolonged moment of reckoning, in a way. How can a neighborhood institution like the Cultural Center remain publicly accessible and welcoming to its long-time Latinx residents while navigating gentrification politics? This includes critically examining and retooling Re:Center’s branding and its institutional ‘arts and culture’ language in order to be legible to residents; it also brings up the issue of capacity to make and sustain deeper change.

Establishing and maintaining relationships with a large slate of organizations and a diverse community of residents is tough work for a part-time cultural liaison when we know that long term relationship-building requires resources and time. In response to some of these issues, the “Take the Wheel” Meetups clarified stakeholders’ shared interests in building support structures to connect and showcase longtime artists living and working in the area. A number of ideas came up for future program planning work including having staff and community members collaborate on developing an annual community-led art fair showcasing a range of creative expressive forms.

HUMBOLDT PARK CULTURAL CENTER

WHAT WE ARE COMMITTED TO

Increased marketing that brings visibility to the Center through creative signage that will promote programming at the fieldhouse and boathouse spaces.

Developing a toolkit for stakeholders to successfully fundraise for more programming in the park.

Expanding partnerships, mentorship programs, and programming that will promote deeper civic engagement, such as an outdoor festival highlighting cultural vibrancy in the Humboldt Park area.

Growing meaningful relationships with the critical mass of artists living in the area.

Supporting the expanded visibility of existing cultural programs led by Nellie Roman through the construction of a basement exhibition space.

Meeting the desire by all age demographics for more dance programming through a series of dance residencies building on this energy for families, youth, adults, and seniors.

Build out a joint artist-in-residence program with another local arts organization, taking advantage of the myriad arts and cultural organizations in the area.

Reinvesting in community by recommitting to youth at

SOUTH SHORE CULTURAL CENTER

RE:CENTER STARTED IN 2019

RE: CENTER

SOUTH SHORE CULTURAL CENTER

“There’s a lot of clamor on all levels for theatre. We are really pushing for this to change, and a lot of that momentum is coming from the Re:Center program.”

Jeanette Foreman, Park Advisory Council and community member

WHERE DID WE BEGIN?

South Shore Cultural Center is known for its grand architecture as the “Crown Jewel of the Chicago Park District.” Its auditorium competes with Hamilton Park for biggest audiences, and its neighborhood landscape includes a community golf course that runs across South Shore and Jackson Park as well as the upcoming Obama Presidential Library.

This location is one of the Park District’s most heavily scheduled special event venues, and as such, brings much needed revenue to the District as a whole. At the same time, those returns are not particularly impactful or clear to South Shore residents.

The Center has a gallery space with visual arts programming, a commercial kitchen for culinary programming, and a well-designed natural space. The community has a rich legacy of Black Chicago prestige and is well-organized through community consortiums such as South Shore Works.

A large, active cultural committee is part of a larger well-connected Center base that has a fleshed-out communal cultural vision for the South Shore neighborhood. This community attends meetings for the Center in large numbers and is generally highly engaged.

The park programming at this location is centered on its cultural offerings, and programming staff include a full-time cultural coordinator, a part-time dance instructor, a part-time drama instructor and a part-time art instructor. The park is well known for offering cultural camps in theater, dance, art and photography which collaborate to create a summer show that is extremely popular.

The Cultural Center Initiative supports cultural programming by connecting additional partners and events and adding summer contractors to enhance the park’s cultural camps with master classes and music instruction. South Shore Cultural Center has hosted many partners over the years and continues to host the South Shore Opera Company who provide two free opera performances annually.

The Center is also home to the Park District’s Culture, Arts and Nature Department offices. South Shore’s 2019 Cultural Plan stated: Given the strength of South Shore Cultural Center, [we hope to] build upon cultural programming and special events while improving and increasing access to [the] lakefront trail and [connected] parks.



Teen spoken word artist performing at South Shore Teens Got Talent showcase in 2019

Photo taken by Andy White

WHAT DID WE LEARN?

Time is a funny thing at South Shore Cultural Center. For a neighborhood with a large population of senior citizens and youth, the regal building is a different experience depending on how long you've been alive and how long you've lived in the neighborhood. There is a sense of simultaneously looking back and looking forward, that a future cannot be imagined without fully dealing with the past, in the present. In many of the neighborhoods the Arts & Culture Unit works with, there is a robust nostalgia for a past era of abundance and activity.

But at South Shore this has a unique flavor. Seniors exhibit an animated commitment to making good on a social justice project they inherited - making what was once a private, segregated country club into a palace for the people, young people in particular. No one is more deeply invested in enlivening park spaces with youth vibrancy than community member Jeanette Foreman.

Jeanette is on virtually every Park Advisory Council in the Woodlawn and South Shore areas. In her mind, "The Park District has drifted very far from its mission [of] servicing the people, especially the low- and middle-income populations who would not otherwise have access to resources that help their physical and mental health."

At South Shore, this drift starts with teens. Jeanette flatly states, "There are no teen programs here, apart from basketball from time to time. Most teens I spoke to had never been to the Cultural Center in their lives." Her strategy for getting them in the building? "Ask teens what they want." And that is exactly what Jeanette did, through

a Teen Focus Group - with stipends supplied by Re:Center - that directly informed the ambitious South Shore Teens Got Talent event in December 2019, which was also funded in part by Re:Center. But in the new year, with funding expiring, new resources need to be identified. "Re:Center awakened youth interest [but] there was absolutely no follow-through.

This made the community feel like the process thus far was just a few one-off events with no capacity, budget, or staff for follow-through." While Jeanette feels adamantly this is "not what the community is asking for," she also concedes that the future is what we make of it. "There's still a lot of potential there. You've got to fund this. It will pay off in major ways."

SOUTH SHORE CULTURAL CENTER

WHAT WE ARE COMMITTED TO

The Listening Party and subsequent Meetups have revealed that the Center feels relatively inaccessible to the community due to being tied up in outside rentals. Re:Center negotiated with the revenue department to host 12 dates for community cultural programming which are being planned out with the cultural committee.

A new Black Box Theatre space is being developed in the basement, based on drama instructor Sidney Miller's visions of a robust children's theater program at South Shore. The room has been remodeled, painted and a modular stage has been designed and built specifically for that space. Cultural Initiative Staff are also exploring ways the space may be used through artist residency models.

The cultural committee is also committed to bringing back a jazz festival to its programming, and building a more connected ecosystem of partnerships with artists, other organizations, and the community.

Additional initiatives on the horizon include partnering with the Chicago Black Dance Legacy Project which "leverages the strategic resources of the Logan Center and University of Chicago to facilitate access to funding, support dance programming and training, and provide key administrative support to eight Chicago-based Black dance companies." The Center is looking for opportunities to engage the initiative in South Shore bringing a range of dynamic African diasporic forms to enhance Center programming.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

RECOMMENDATION: ACTIVATE PROCESS-CENTERED PROBLEM SOLVING ON A CONSISTENT BASIS TO CREATE SUSTAINED CHANGE AND POSITIVE TRANSFORMATION AT THE COMMUNITY LEVEL.

We encourage moving at the speed that communities need to build clear intention and mutual trust rather than forcing them into arbitrary timelines that do not allow for their valuable input.

Create opportunities for communities to participate on projects that can be realized on both small and large scales. By getting people involved in the work, CPD can build greater trust, more transparency, and accountability for how CPD runs park programming and events.

Programs need more time than is given in order to take root and develop relationships. Relationships of trust are what make programming like this sustainable beyond the initial structure of Re:Center. Those relationships take a lot of time and repeated follow-up in order to develop.

Develop volunteer capacity by being clear about what's possible. Establishing clear communication and setting clear parameters are the foundation for building strong relationships and are what will draw

community members back to stay involved over the long-term. It is how we are able to build momentum. Address community suspicion and mistrust by being transparent about what resources are available and how they are allotted. Stakeholders often feel like they are not given a full picture of how resources are distributed.

"I'd been explicit with the park staff that I wasn't going to be able to make that long-term commitment that this process deserved. To do that process over and over again, you have to have someone committed to doing that work for a while before y'all can step away."

*Thom Cox, Indian Boundary
Artist-in-Residence*



*Conservation Architect Teams (CATs)
testing out obstacles on the Douglas Park
miniature golf course in 2018*

Photo taken by Latham Zearfoss

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

RECOMMENDATION: INVEST CONSISTENT FINANCIAL, CAPITAL, AND HUMAN RESOURCES IN ORDER TO KEEP CULTURAL CENTERS ACTIVE AND RELEVANT AS HUBS OF COMMUNITY LIFE.

Additional funding is needed to execute the programming dreamed up in the Listening Parties. Stakeholders are often not coming in with much or any fundraising experience, and programming is hard to sustain after Re:Center funding runs out.

Address capacity issues with park staff. We must account for the need for increased staff time and work in order to meet the visioning needs that are laid out at Listening Parties, even more modest ones.

Build opportunities and training mechanisms to adequately equip the committee with knowledge and skill sets to pursue funding goals on their own.

“These relationships take time in order to develop. We need to have the capacity through people staying on the ground and building community. There’s relationships of trust there. Continuing the momentum does cost money.”

Vanessa Stokes, Austin Town Hall Park Advisory Council Cultural Committee

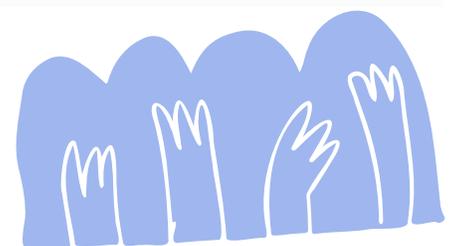
RECOMMENDATION: FULL TIME CULTURAL COORDINATORS/LIAISONS DISTRIBUTED STRATEGICALLY ACROSS THE CITY IS KEY TO ACHIEVE LONG TERM TRANSFORMATION.

In successful projects, the cultural liaison’s role was crucial on multiple levels: organizing community members, representing community interests, representing the Park District to community, bringing together institutional resources, demystifying bureaucracy, convening meetings, etc.

It was especially important to ensure consistency in meetings to maintain momentum. Their work is absolutely crucial in shaping the initial momentum of the work - especially in their administrative capacity. These positions merit being full time to be able to genuinely develop sustainable growth working with communities and park staff to represent their interests.

“Community members all work full-time, so they initially didn’t see the benefit of putting more work on their plate in convening people. So [the cultural liaison] doing the work of convening, setting agendas, etc., really catalyzed that process where there otherwise might not have been a process at all.”

Jeanette Foreman, South Shore Cultural Committee



CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

RECOMMENDATION: TRAINING IN CULTURAL PROGRAMMING IS CRUCIAL. STAFF AND COMMUNITY NEED TO BE ADEQUATELY TRAINED IN CULTURAL STEWARDSHIP SKILL SETS.

Not all community members are fluent in institutional 'arts and culture' language, nor do they have easy access to fundraising know-how.

Cultural Center supervisors should be supported with training around cultural programming.

Arts & Culture Unit staff should be more effectively positioned to support Cultural Centers and other parks by securing resources needed, building relationships, and providing logistical support rather than performing everyday administrative labor.

We also need to ensure that Cultural Center staff at large are co-conspirators with cultural committees in order for programming ideas to be a success. Region staff are often changing at Cultural Centers. Training has to be nimble enough to accommodate these recurring shifts.

"[Most] current supervisors aren't trained to look at cultural programming the way we do at Indian Boundary; it is its own skill set. It's not the same as athletic programs."

*Phil Martini, Park Supervisor,
Indian Boundary Park Cultural Center*

RECOMMENDATION: INVEST IN THE STAKEHOLDERS ALREADY COMMITTED TO THE CULTURAL CENTER AND THE COMMUNITY.

The most successful arts partners/ staff members at each site were people who were already long-time members of those neighborhoods/ communities. Artists from the neighborhood had more purchase at the Center. Leaders from the neighborhood had a more intuitive understanding of community dynamics.

Hyperlocalized leadership is crucial to effective organizing.

"You really need someone who's going to spearhead the project who KNOWS members of the community and who can make that ask. When we lost that person for our project, nobody else was willing to stick their neck out to make the ask."

*Steve Weaver, Executive
Director of Chicago Public
Art Group, Lincoln Park
Cultural Committee*



CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

RECOMMENDATION: CREATE MORE OPPORTUNITIES FOR PARK STAFF AND COMMUNITY TO DIALOGUE, HEAR EACH OTHER, AND COLLABORATE.

There is often a difference between community dreams and Cultural Centers' actual capacity to execute. One of Re:Center's main purposes has been to manage expectations with transparency while encouraging participants to envision what might be possible.

"We want to know our neighbors better" is a desire that's often voiced at Listening Parties. We need more strategies to bring community leaders into decision-making conversations and make programming welcoming to new communities.

It's worth defining what cultural programming is for each unique Cultural Center specifically.. Often, what stakeholders want to push forward isn't necessarily "cultural" but more apt for a park advisory council.

"One of the other key takeaways from the Listening Party was figuring out how the park can be a space where cross-cultural solidarity can be formed - something we saw in multiple Listening Parties. People want to understand their neighbors better."

Latham Zearfoss, cultural liaison, Douglas Park Cultural Committee



RECOMMENDATION: STREAMLINE CPD'S INSTITUTIONAL SYSTEMS AND POLICIES TO CREATE STRONGER PROGRAMMING THAT REACH A WIDER BREADTH OF COMMUNITIES CITYWIDE.

Community members often don't know what's happening in the parks. Outreach and communications need to work to create more visibility and awareness of cultural programming by using all the outlets available in a well-connected strategy including social media, physical announcements in park buildings and in the green spaces, media relations, and web presence.

We need to build specific marketing strategies to reach new users. Often, our marketing centers on people already active with parks. Re:Center worked to acquaint committee members with CPD's administrative policies, forms, and timelines - increasing transparency so that people knew why certain park processes move as incrementally as they do.

This felt like an important purpose of Re:Center's structure, bringing community members closer to the inner workings and protocols of the parks. Administrative processes should be reviewed for efficiency. Our existing contracting structures are often inaccessible to community members and artists. Being legible is part of being a good partner.

"Turns out a bunch of folks didn't know what [programs] the park already had. So the need for communication was clear - that's what we started talking about. We got to hear directly from the community about what they want."

Rachel Damon, Arts Partner in Residence, Berger Park

CULTURAL PARTNERS

INDIVIDUAL ARTISTS

- Haman Cross III
- Vanessa Stokes
- Jasmin Cardenas

ARTS PARTNERS IN RESIDENCE

- Chicago Cuatro Orchestra
- Khecar
- Live the Spirit
- Mexican Folkloric Dance Company of Chicago
- Move Me Soul Dance Company
- Puerto Rican Arts Alliance
- Ravinia Lawndale Family Music School
- Synapse Dance
- T. Daniel Productions
- Vanderpoel Art Association

SHORT TERM CULTURAL PARTNERSHIPS

- Austin Coming Together
- Residents Association of Greater Englewood (RAGE)
- Envision Unlimited

RE:CENTER ARTISTS-IN-RESIDENCE

- Jabberwocky Marionettes
- Deeply Rooted Dance Theater
- Floating Museum
- Mari de Oleo
- OPEN Center for the Arts
- Mama Edie Armstrong
- Laura Crotte
- Son Monarcas
- Mercedes Inez
- Chistopher Saint Martin
- Jomo Cheatham
- Stasa Wade
- Yollocalli Arts Reach
- Thom Cox
- JoVanna Jackson
- Monika Neuland Thomas
- Jennifer Harris
- Tracie Hall

LOCAL PARTNERS & CONTRACTORS

- South Shore Opera Company
- Hyde Park School of Dance
- Hot on 1 Salsa/Rico Mangram
- Jenai Cutcher
- Storycatchers Theater
- Juan Mojica (JAM1)
- Dominique Tolliver
- Amadeus Anzaldúa
- Milton Fields (DJ Monty)
- Virgil Pilate (DJ Virgil)
- Cyaira Adam (Next Level Society)
- Traveling World of Reptiles
- Playmakers Laboratory
- Yuri Lane
- The Happiness Club
- Edith C. Armstrong
- William Estrada
- Alfonso "Piloto" Nieves Ruiz
- Felicia Serrano
- Mary Castle-Enyard
- Sonia Russell
- Dereque Whiturs
- David Robinson (Made N Chicago)
- Reginald L. Davenport (DJ Purple)
- Gemini Jones
- Red Clay Dance Company
- Cirques Experience
- Chicago DanzTheater Ensemble
- Dr. Zylo and the Braniacs
- Animate Studios
- Pure Artistry (Boom Crack Dance Company)

GLOSSARY

CHICAGO PARK DISTRICT

CPKD

An abbreviation for Chicago Park District

CULTURAL CENTER

At the 15 Chicago Park District Cultural Centers you can find cultural programming including classes in art, music, dance and more; exciting events and unique cultural spaces. These facilities are located in neighborhoods throughout the city, making it easy to expand your cultural horizons. While each of the 15 CPKD Cultural Centers operates autonomously, the ACU works closely with the centers to fill gaps in cultural programming.

FIELDHOUSE

Chicago Park District fieldhouses serve as hubs for cultural and recreational programming and community events. Fieldhouses vary in size and amenities, facilities may include gymnasiums, auditoriums, multi-purpose meeting rooms, ballrooms, fitness centers, specialty arts studios and more.

CULTURAL CENTER INITIATIVE

work supported through cultural budget dollars and guiding priorities

CHICAGO PARK DISTRICT STAFF

ARTS & CULTURE MANAGER

A Chicago Park District employee within the Department of Culture, Arts & Nature who supports the arts and culture partnerships and programming initiatives across the city's parks and Cultural Centers.

ARTS AND CULTURE UNIT (ACU)

The Chicago Park District's Arts & Culture Unit (ACU) envisions parks and cultural centers as vital spaces that encourage all Chicagoans to explore the arts and their power to enhance quality of life, neighborhood development, and community dialogue. In a cultural resources portfolio including arts partnerships, community arts programming, and youth arts programs for all ages, ACU strives to increase and maintain quality cultural offerings and experiences for all Chicago's communities.

GLOSSARY

CULTURAL LIAISON

Chicago Park District employee within the Arts & Culture Unit who researches and identifies community resources, assets, and stakeholders and builds relationships and supports planning and implementation of community-driven projects at Cultural Centers

CULTURAL STAFF/INSTRUCTOR

Cultural Staff/Instructors are full time or part-time year-round staff who teach programming in the park. In addition to specialized stand-alone classes they may also support rotations in the after-school program and summer Day Camp as well as plan special events in the park such as performances, showcases or exhibitions.

PARK SUPERVISOR

A park supervisor manages the facility, green spaces and all staff at the park. They are responsible for general operations of the park, its programs, and scheduling in the space.

PARTNERS

INFERNO

Inferno is the Chicago Park District's mobile media program which engages over 1,000 young people (ages 6-18) across 80 parks to make collaborative music, produce documentaries and podcasts, and practice therapeutic sound recreation. Led by experimental musicians, media artists, and youth interns, Inferno facilitates opportunities for young people to tell their own stories and document their cultural landscapes.

PARK ADVISORY COUNCIL (PAC)

A park advisory council is a voluntary group of individuals who meet on a regular basis to support the effective functioning of their local park. PACs promote ways for the community to better utilize the Chicago Park District's programs and facilities; provide communication to the Chicago Park District on matters relating to their parks; increase community awareness of Chicago Park District projects; provide the community with a vehicle through which park information can be shared; and assist in locating alternate funding sources to enhance park facilities.

PARTNERSHIP (OR ARTS PARTNER)

An Arts Partner is a community artist or organization that collaborates regularly with the park staff on programs, events or projects.

GLOSSARY

ARTS PARTNER-IN-RESIDENCE PROGRAM (APR)

A program administered by the Arts & Culture Unit that develops long-term collaborations between neighborhood parks and non-profit arts organizations. Arts Partners-in-Residence offer free, year-round public programming in exchange for free use of park space.

STAKEHOLDER

Community member or organization with an interest or prior investment in the projects of focus during the Re:Center process

TEENS REIMAGING ARTS COMMUNITY AND ENVIRONMENT (TRACE)

a civic leadership and curatorial job training program of the Chicago Park District headquartered at Hamilton Park Cultural Center in the Englewood community and Austin Town Hall Park in the Austin community. TRACE annually employs over 80 young people (ages 14-22) tasked with collectively re-imagining their roles as cultural producers and community builders. Using creative activism, TRACE shows teens how to leverage the arts to engage, inspire and persist for positive change within ourselves and our communities.

YOUNG CULTURAL STEWARDS (YCS)

Young Cultural Stewards engages 75 youth (ages 12-14) as caretakers of culture and agents of change within their parks and neighborhoods. With regional hubs in Willy B. White, Piotrowski, and Tuley Park, youth explore what culture and community mean to them while developing skills in cultural preservation, organizing, and building creative platforms for social change.

RE:CENTER

ARTIST-IN-RESIDENCE

An artist-in-residence responds creatively to communities' interests and needs by imagining conversations, collaborative processes, workshops, classes, events, and other forms of programming through a short-term residency at a Cultural Center.

CREATIVE PLACEMAKING

Creative Placemaking is an evolving field of practice that intentionally leverages the power of the arts, culture and creativity to serve a community's interest while driving a broader agenda for change, growth and transformation in a way that also builds character and quality of place.

Source: Artscape

GLOSSARY

CULTURAL COMMITTEE

A Cultural Committee is a group of dedicated stakeholders formed through the Re:Center process. The committee contributes to and helps plan the cultural programming priorities for a neighborhood specific location, responding to the interests and needs of the community groups that use the space.

CULTURAL STEWARDSHIP

The act of preserving, growing and caring for creative, ceremonial and aesthetic practices held by a particular place or people. In the case of Re:Center, we also include a focus on shared public space - our parks.

LISTENING PARTY

A one night event at which invited guests participate in a large dialogue hosted by members of the community, event organizers, and invited guests. Guests are encouraged to discuss what makes up the past and current condition of their Cultural Center.

MEET UP

Participants from the Listening Party are invited to return to a more concentrated dialogue. Questions and comments from the initial Listening Party are discussed as a point of departure for future programming. Returning participants volunteer to meet as a group over a period of 3-4 months to develop strategies to improve the Cultural Center as well as broaden the programming.

FEATURE

The group's final event is produced with support from Chicago Park District, the Cultural Center supervisor, and any invited participants. The Feature event can be anything that is developed by MeetUP participants. This could be a performance, exhibition, publication, tour of the Cultural Center—the MeetUP participants decide.

CIRCULATIONS

Gatherings intended to facilitate storytelling, skill-sharing, and camaraderie amongst Re:Center participants working at different sites throughout the city. A series of inter-park circulations culminates the yearlong community engagement process between community agents and the Chicago Park District

RE:CENTER

Re:Center is a creative placemaking initiative anchored by a citizen-powered collective process. This cultural organizing work combines strategies in community arts engagement, artistic excellence, asset mapping, and program development to more fully activate key areas of need in throughout Chicago Park District's fifteen Cultural Centers. Together, community

GLOSSARY

members, artists, and park staff work to re-imagine Chicagoans as cultural stewards of our public parks.

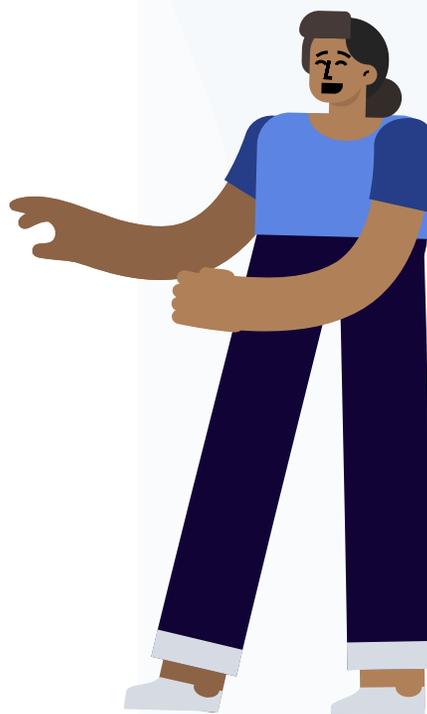
NATURE

NATURE PLAY SPACE

Outdoor play area using natural elements such as plants, logs, water or rocks.

NATURAL SAVANNA AREA

This natural setting is set can be found within West Pullman Park. The site's mature stand of oaks, hickories, and cherries covers an ancient river bank. This wooded slope is one of Chicago's few remaining native landscapes.



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