



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Ventura County Arts Council Program Selected As JUMPStArts Success Model

Danny, a dark-haired 14-year-old boy of slight build, puts the finishing touches on his poem entitled "Clarity," then reads it aloud with feeling and rhythm. The poem resonates with deep emotion, expressing its author's angst about the hard struggles of serving time in the Ventura County Juvenile Justice Facility. Craig Rosen, [Ventura County Arts Council](#) poetry instructor, nods his approval. Rosen manages VCAC's JUMPStArts program, Arts & Juvenile Justice, a grant-funded arts-based education program provided to youths engaged in the juvenile justice system.

Camarillo, Calif.—From poetry to painting, the arts are proving to be a way for incarcerated youth to launch a new, positive chapter in their young lives, and a local arts education program is now recognized statewide as the model for success.

Recently, the Ventura County Arts Council's Arts & Juvenile Justice program was selected by the Centers for Research on Creativity and the California Arts Council to serve as a case study site for the California Arts Council JUMPStArts evaluation project. As one of the top four JUMPStArts programs in California, the VCAC program is recognized for its inspiration and its practical application, as well as its success in engaging and motivating students who may be incarcerated for a period of time. The VCAC's results-oriented approach, including published chapbooks, art exhibits and poetry contests, demonstrate the program's ability to empower a population that few programs have been able to reach.

"The Arts & Juvenile Justice program offers more than an opportunity to be expressive. Integrating the creative arts into learning experiences can help enhance academic, social and personal development," said Rosen. "In my time working with the youth in this program, I have often seen a profound positive impact on self-image and self-esteem."

The VCAC facilitators work in close collaboration with the Ventura County Probation Agency and the Ventura County Office of Education to provide educational services to minors incarcerated in the Detention and Commitment Housing Areas within the Ventura County Juvenile Justice Facility in Oxnard. Using various arts disciplines, artist-instructors work directly with the students to impart life skills such as tolerance, cooperation, cultural authenticity, self-esteem, self-expression and mutual respect through disciplined activities.

“The work VCAC teaching artists have done with our youth is positive, rewarding and meaningful. Time and time again, we see the benefits of these services with our youth and the value that this type of program provides by way of positive learning experiences that help encourage these kids to re-evaluate their past behavior, commit to making better choices and become good citizens,” said Mark Varela, Ventura County chief probation officer.

“There is a lot of research that supports the value of arts education and the critical-thinking skills learned through the creative process, including logic, organization, teamwork, patience and the value of failure as an essential component to discovery and learning,” said Margaret Travers, VCAC executive director. “We’ve seen first-hand, the positive benefits these underserved youth get from participation in our arts programs. It’s highly empowering and transforming for the participants.”

The VCAC has been expanding its Arts & Juvenile Justice program offerings to include classes in drawing, music, dance, poetry, theater, bead making, drumming and crochet. Funding for the Arts & Juvenile Justice program is provided through a grant from the California Arts Council, matching funds from the Ventura County Probation Agency, in-kind support from Ventura County Office of Education, and corporate support from City National Bank’s “Reading Is The Way Up” literacy program and Panoramic Images in Skokie, IL.

In 2015, VCAC received a JUMPStArts grant for a program it designed for the Recovery Classroom at Gateway school in Camarillo for juveniles with recurring addiction issues. Teens found guilty of minor drug offenses attended the Gateway school as an alternative to being sent to juvenile detention. The grant funded two artist educators who worked with students in drama and writing. Students read literature, went on a field trip to see Richard Cabral, an actor on ABC’s American Crime, perform his one-man play, published a chapbook of their poetry and worked with music producer/composer Kenny Dread, reciting their poems while Dread edited in beats underneath. Students also interviewed each other about their writing as part of a podcast lesson.

The Ventura County Arts Council is located at 646 County Square Drive #154, Ventura, 93003. For more information call 805-658-2213 or email vcarts@pacbell.net, or visit <http://vcartscouncil.org>.

For nearly 20 years, the Ventura County Arts Council, an independent 501(c)3 nonprofit arts organization, has served Ventura County residents as the local arts agency designated by the Ventura County Board of Supervisors to serve the county’s citizens in partnership with the California Arts Council. VCAC advocates for the arts and for increased arts instruction in schools, and fosters community development through the arts, serving county artists, arts organizations and the general public through partnerships with arts supporters, businesses, foundation, and community leaders. VCAC embraces diversity and strives to reach low income and minority communities with programs designed to engage these diverse population.