



# THE EQUITY INNOVATION FUND



## Equity Innovation Report 8



**UNITED WAY**  
Racine County

## ► Equity Innovation Report 8 Grantees

### Black Arts Council of Racine

Project: Black Women Stage Showcase

### Focus on Community

Project: Focus on the Future

### I O Youth

Project: Racine Alternative Learning Performing Arts Studio

### Racine Art Museum

Project: Hoop Earrings and Low Rider Bicycles – Photographers Nicole Acosta and René Amado Offer New Ways of Understanding Mexican American Culture

### Racine Video Production Workshop

Project: Awareness Through Art

### SAFE Haven of Racine, Inc.

Project: Feather-a-Nest



**6 projects** totaling over **\$385,600**.

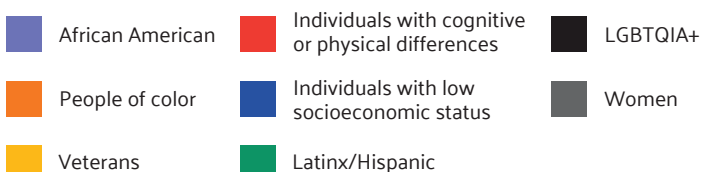
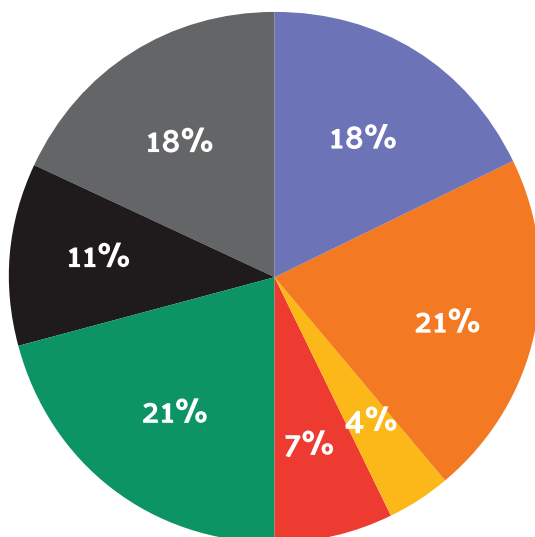


**36,091 individuals** served.



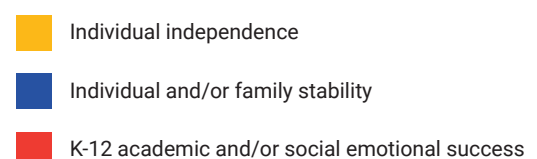
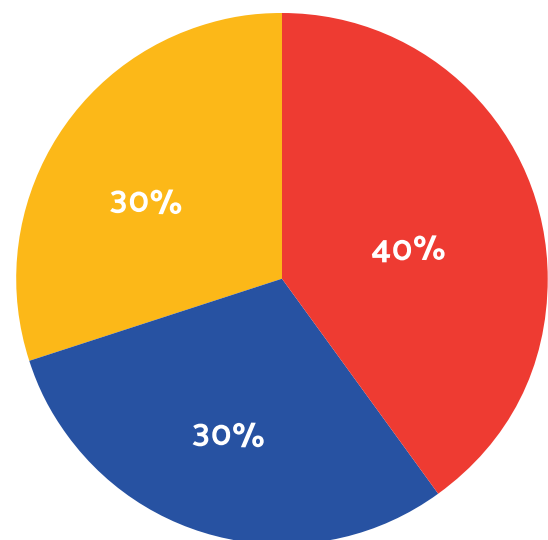
**3 projects** are directed by BIPOC, women, LGBTQIA+ community members or other marginalized individuals.

**Marginalized Populations Served by Projects**



Grantees indicated in their application which marginalized population their projects will serve. Projects may serve more than one population.

**Areas Addressed by Projects**



Grantees indicated in their application the focus area addressed by their project. Projects may address more than one focus area.





## Black Arts Council of Racine

### Project: Black Women Showcase

The Black Women Stage Showcase was created by the Black Arts Council of Racine after recognizing a pressing need in Racine County. They saw a lack of opportunities for Black women artists across all platforms. In response, the Showcase was developed to uplift and empower these artists through a series of live performances, forum discussions, professional development opportunities and community engagement. The project addressed the historic invisibility and marginalization of Black women in the performing arts by creating space for their voices, stories and talents.

In addition to performance opportunities, participants engaged in career advancing activities such as educational workshops, mentorship and panel discussions. These sessions included business and professional development tools, community building activities and a financial literacy workshop. This unique approach not only supported artistic growth but also empowered participants to sustain and expand their careers and increase their access to resources.

The showcase successfully produced three performances of the play *Steal Away*, through which participants reported feeling more empowered to pursue their artistic passions. The program also sought to deepen public awareness and understanding. Audience members described the experience as transformative, noting a better understanding of Black women's contributions to the arts as well as to other professions. The Black Women Stage Showcase simultaneously spotlighted the talented participants while shining light on the importance of representation in the theater scene in Racine County.



## By the Numbers

- 407 individuals engaged across all performances including:
  - 3 productions of *Steal Away*
  - Spoken word event
  - Creative workshops
  - Post show discussions and callbacks
  - Black Women Forum
- 94% of the Black Women's Forum audience members reported gaining significant insights into the Black female experience
- 85% of audience members reported greater empathy and cultural awareness
- 200% increase in black women actors in Racine County's performance community
- 100% of program participants reported an increase in access to resources, networks and professional development opportunities as a result of their participation



"The Black Women's Stage Showcase gave our community more than a performance—it gave us a mirror, a microphone, and a movement. We watched women step into their power, tell stories and inspire others to do the same." – April Harris, CEO, Black Arts Council of Racine





## Focus on Community

### Project: Focus on the Future

Focus on the Future was a youth development initiative created by Focus on Community that empowered Racine County teens from historically marginalized populations. The project focused on building participant's social-emotional and leadership skills through local, state and national learning experiences. Youth engaged in conferences and trainings that covered a wide range of topics, including healthy relationships, networking, advocacy, data collection, enhancing leadership skills, alcohol and other drug awareness (AODA) and identifying local conditions related to community issues. In addition, through training courses attended, youth learned about understanding their rights and money management.

To wrap up their conference experiences, participants gave presentations to their peers and community members on topics they found meaningful and relevant. These presentations addressed critical issues such as the abuse of vaping, knowing your rights, domestic violence, safe driving and strategies for making their community safer.

Through their experience, participants were able to grow as leaders by developing self-confidence, self-awareness and effective communication skills. They were encouraged to explore previously unconsidered career opportunities while increasing their confidence in their ability to obtain and maintain employment. The program successfully equipped participants with relevant skills and a network of support while strengthening their connection to the community.



When asked what the highlight of Focus on the Future was, this is how the participants responded:

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“Being able to address a situation that I feel passionate about [and] presenting and incorporating my own ideas into the program.” – Lauren, program participant

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“Being able to connect with other peers my age who are passionate about the same things as I am.” – Layla, program participant

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### By the Numbers

- 70 youth served
- 5 conferences attended
  - Teen Institute
  - Community Anti-Drug Coalitions of America
  - Youth Social Justice Forum
  - Youth as Partners in Civil Leadership
  - Teen Summit provided by End Domestic Violence Abuse
- 103 hours of community presentation creation by youth
- 88% of participants reported increased self-confidence and self-awareness in leadership situations
- 91% of participants reported feeling more confident in their ability to identify, obtain and maintain a job that is meaningful to them
- 91% of participants developed a sense of belonging and support through peer networks and mentoring relationships



## IO Youth

### Project: Racine Alternative Learning Performing Arts Studio

IO Youth provided Racine Alternative Learning (RAL) with a state-of-the-art digital arts music studio, designed to support students enrolled in special credit recovery courses at the RAL school facility. While the studio was open to several groups of youth throughout the district, a structured program was developed specifically for RAL students whose outcomes were actively tracked. The initiative targeted students who were considered at risk, chronically truant, behind their academic peer group, or facing social, emotional, behavioral and cognitive challenges.

The digital arts music studio served as a powerful creative outlet. It allowed students to learn and practice skills through hands-on experiences with instructors in a supportive, engaging environment. As a result, many students began to come out of their shells and gain confidence. The program not only supported academic recovery, but also aimed to improve school attendance, reduce chronic truancy, and decrease students' exposure to the criminal justice system.

By combining technology, mentorship and creative expression, the RAL Performing Arts Studio offered an inclusive and therapeutic space that helped re-engage students.

“Watching some of our non-verbal students flourish in the music studio is nothing short of powerful and moving. It underscores the fact that communication and expression extend far beyond words. Music becomes a universal language – one that offers these students a voice, a creative outlet and a means of connecting with others.” – RAL staff member

“We know that the RAL program has some very unique students with widely varied strengths and opportunities. The music program has served a pivotal role in helping these students develop enthusiasm for school, manage their big emotions and give them an outlet in which they are highly interested and can have success.”  
– RAL staff member



### By the Numbers

- 60 youth from the district utilized the studio, and an additional 32 RAL students were enrolled in the Performing Arts Studio program
- 75 Performing Arts Studio sessions completed
- Over half of enrolled students maintained or improved both their school attendance and GPA during program enrollment

Based on staff surveys of student progress:

- 63.4% of students demonstrated improved behavior
- 78% of students showed increased self-esteem
- 63.4% of students demonstrated improved social skills





Racine Art Museum

## Racine Art Museum

Project: Hoop Earrings and Low Rider Bicycles – Photographers Nicole Acosta and René Amado Offer New Ways of Understanding Mexican American Culture

This project brought together a series of exhibitions and educational outreach initiatives across both campuses of the Racine Art Museum (RAM). The goal of this initiative was to highlight diverse voices and foster cultural understanding within the community. The exhibitions featured work by photographers Nicole Acosta and René Amado, artists of color whose work centers on themes of cultural identity, heritage and community. Acosta's work voiced the stories of Black and Brown women using multiple artistic mediums, while Amado's photography explored the cultural significance of cars, bicycles and their connection to the Mexican American community.

This project not only featured exhibitions but various other forms of community engagement such as artist talks, demonstrations, and Spanish-language tours. Outreach even extended into schools with bilingual educational materials, programming for 5th-grade students and events like a job shadow day, RAM on the Road and 2nd-grade museum visits. The project successfully engaged a wide audience, deepening understanding of Mexican American culture, promoting inclusion, and sparking important conversations around race, social justice and community life. It also encouraged ongoing participation in programs that celebrate Hispanic culture and the arts.

While this was a standalone project, the museum plans to continue efforts to focus on collaborations with artists of color and programming that continues to build an equitable community, is representative of our community and increases accessibility and inclusion.



## By the Numbers

- 80 educational and outreach programs delivered
- 34,952 total exhibition visitors
- 1,515 RUSD students participated in school-based programs
- 96% of participants reported gaining knowledge of Mexican American culture
- 100% of participants indicated they would attend future programs focused on Hispanic arts and culture



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“It’s been a great honor to showcase not only my work as a photographer, artist and documentarian but to also put a culture that I am extremely passionate about on display for all to enjoy in RAM’s windows. The feedback I have received from my community and others who have viewed the display has been a great testament to how important the art of lowriding and the work I do is to others.” - René Amado, LOW

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## Racine Video Production Workshop

Project: Awareness Through Art – A Crowd Sourced Mental Health Film Project

Awareness Through Art is a mental health education initiative that brings together high school students, professional filmmakers and community members to create a series of five short films centered on mental health. The program aims to increase understanding of mental illness, improve knowledge of available mental health resources and encourage open, informed conversations.

The project began with students and community members participating in an introduction to rotoscoping, a digital animation technique, and received an explanation of how the images they created would be integrated into the final films.

After that, interviews were conducted featuring members of the Racine Friendship Clubhouse and other community members who shared their lived experiences with mental health diagnoses. These personal stories were used as inspiration for five original scripts, written by filmmaker Anthony Ramos of Night Watchman Productions and developed in consultation with mental health professionals. Lastly, a team of six filmmakers brought these scripts to life and created films using both live action and animation.

RUSD high school students engaged with the program through a presentation highlighting local mental health resources and excerpts from the interviews. This experience helped to begin discussions around mental health and reduce the stigma that comes along with it.

The completed films were screened for both students and the community, promoting empathy and awareness. By combining storytelling, education, artistic collaboration and youth engagement, Awareness Through Art has built a greater understanding of mental health and has empowered participants to support themselves and others.

## By the Numbers

- 511 participants, including RUSD students and community members
- 21 animation and learning sessions conducted
- 96% of participants reported learning something new about at least one mental health topic
- 96% of participants could identify two or more mental health resources to support themselves or a loved one



“I appreciate that we are working on and watching these films. Mental health feels like something we aren’t allowed to talk about.”  
- Case High School Student





## SAFE Haven

### Project: Feather-a-Nest

SAFE Haven's Feather-a-Nest program helps families transitioning from homelessness move into their own homes with dignity and stability. Through referrals from partner agencies in Racine County, families receive furniture, small appliances, toiletries, home décor and other essentials.

For families that have experienced homelessness, moving into housing can often come with additional financial strain and stress. After paying the deposit, rent and utilities, many families may not be able to afford basic items that make the home livable.

Feather-a-Nest goes beyond simply furnishing a space. It's about affirming that every person deserves a safe and welcoming home. This transformative support helps families feel seen and valued, contributing to emotional well-being, confidence and motivation to pursue education, employment and other life goals.

This is the only program of its kind in Racine County that offers this level of personalized support for families transitioning from homelessness.



"Feather-a-Nest furnishes homes for individuals and families emerging from homelessness to their own home, with dignity and hope. The program creates functional, clean and safe home spaces and helps people overcome the many disparities endured in becoming homeless. The assurance of on-going support and individual and family security is key to stabilization and healthy development. Clean, attractive and adequately furnished and equipped homes enhance an individual and/or families dignity and instill a sense of permanence. Individuals and families can move forward with other aspects of living when they have a home of which they can be proud." - Jeanette Brown, CEO, SAFE Haven



### By the Numbers

- 560 individuals served
- 249 homes furnished
- 100% of agencies reported satisfaction with the services provided to their clients
- 100% of individuals reported feeling valued because of the services provided







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“The Equity Innovation Fund provided United Way of Racine County the opportunity to invest in projects and programs that impacted broad cross-sections of our community and increased the number of nonprofit partners supported by United Way. From the inception of the fund, we were intentional in leaning into the expertise of our community in order to design a process that fostered innovation and brought lived experiences to the forefront of working to address needs and challenges. Our staff, volunteers and grantees worked together to celebrate successes and overcome challenges. Several projects have continued through support from United Way and other funders. While the dollars have been expended, the impact of the work made possible by the fund will continue to be evident in Racine County.” – Jessica Safransky Schacht, Chief Operating Officer, United Way of Racine County

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From its launch in January 2022 to the completion of the grants included in this report, United Way of Racine County’s Equity Innovation Fund has awarded 37 grants to 32 organizations, totaling more than \$1,821,000. Over 43,100 people have been served by the projects supported by the Equity Innovation Fund.

United Way of Racine County’s Equity Innovation Fund supports projects, programs and solutions that use innovative strategies to reduce disparities, improve outcomes and empower members of historically marginalized populations. The fund is made possible through the generosity of novelist and philanthropist MacKenzie Scott, and through support from Racine County.



## Stay Up to Date

If you have any questions about the Equity Innovation Fund, please contact Special Projects Director Katie Tuttle at [ktuttle@unitedwayracine.org](mailto:ktuttle@unitedwayracine.org)



To learn more, and to see other Equity Innovation Fund reports, scan the QR code or visit: [UnitedWayRacine.org/EIF](https://UnitedWayRacine.org/EIF)

