



# Empowering Youth Through New Ideas

Students and their adult partners, who submitted ideas to the Rose Community Foundation's Innovate for Good program, were honored at a reception at the University of Denver.

On September 14, 2016, nine student groups stood on stage at the University of Denver, presenting ideas they hoped would inspire others. One by one, the groups shared how they would help youth in the community. Some spoke in other languages; some revealed personal experiences; others explained what they'd already done. Their ideas were vastly different, yet they all shared a passion to create change among young people.

These nine groups were the Youth-Adult Partnership finalists in the 2016 **Rose Community Foundation's** (RCF) Innovate for Good program, which started as a way to find and fund new ideas. Last year, nearly 400 ideas were submitted in response to RCF's question, "What new and innovative idea would you bring to life to make the Greater Denver community a better place to live?" The winners were diverse in scope, ranging from an initiative to remove trash from the South Platte River to an organization where military veterans set up farm stands in at-risk neighborhoods.

For 2016, RCF decided to focus on youth projects. Starting last May, students, with adult helpers, had the opportunity to submit their ideas for youth empowerment programs. The 65 applications and videos were reviewed by more

than 200 community members and eventually narrowed down to nine finalists. At DU's ceremony, the finalists pitched their projects one last time, and ceremony attendees voted on their six favorites.

"When we chose to focus Innovate for Good 2016 on youth empowerment, we had imagined young people would bring an important, fresh, and needed perspective on what their communities need, and they certainly did!" says **Sarah Indyk**, director of special projects at RCF.

### 2016 Innovate for Good Winners

The six winners, announced that night, were awarded \$30,000 each to jump-start their ideas. Originally, applicants could request funding between \$10,000 and \$25,000, says Indyk.

"The additional \$5,000 beyond the original requests, will provide each awardee with some specific technical assistance, whether it's related to marketing and outreach or training or web development, that we believe will help each project succeed," she says. "The Foundation is excited and honored to have the opportunity to support the work of these inspiring young people, and their adult allies." The winning projects are:

- **Community Cypher by Creative Strategies for Change:** Using stories, music, and applied theater to address the school-to-prison pipeline
- **Community Interpreters Project by the Spring Institute for Intercultural Learning:** Training refugee and immigrant teens as interpreters
- **Empowering Native Youth in Metro Denver by Spirit of the Sun Inc.:** Engaging native youth from across the Greater Denver community in a leadership conference
- **Neighborhood Harvest Youth-Built Gardens by GreenLeaf:** Empowering youth to help residents of Northeast Denver create gardens at home
- **Thunderbolts Building Bridges by Lainie Hodges and student leaders from Manual High School:** Building relationships between students at Manual High School and law enforcement
- **Youth-Led Bicycle Repair Workshop by Westwood Unidos:** Creating a youth-led and youth-staffed bicycle library and repair workshop in the Westwood neighborhood

## Submissions

Do you have local parenting news, a story idea or shout out? Share it with us at [edit@coloradoparent.com](mailto:edit@coloradoparent.com).



Innovate For Good/Rose Community Foundation



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## Student-Led Project Winners

In addition to the six Innovate for Good Youth-Adult Partnership winners, the Rose Community Foundation awarded grants to four other winners—projects led completely by students. These teens received \$5,000 each to grow or start their projects. Here's what they'll be doing this year.

### Fostering Communication Through Theater

In the East High School theater group, artsC, boys and girls of all grade levels from a diverse range of backgrounds plan to perform theater exercises at local middle schools, with the goal of encouraging communication about difficult social issues. After performing short dramatic works they write and choreograph themselves, artsC will lead middle school students in discussion and activities.

"We are not seeking to solve their problems, but to bring up problems for conversation and change," says Jessica Nekritz, East High School senior and founder of artsC. "In today's society where young people struggle with issues pertaining to body image, mental health, and affording secondary education... we as young people can open the channels of communication for other young people."

### Mentoring High School Freshmen

When Jayr Cardenas started as a freshman at his Denver high school, Career Education Center (CEC) Early College, he didn't know anyone. A teacher paired Cardenas with a senior as a tutoring partner. The senior went above and beyond just tutoring Cardenas by mentoring him and befriending him, which made a huge impact.

"I believe that freshmen are outcasts in the school, just because they don't know anybody. If we unite the juniors and freshmen together, both will bring more community to our school," Cardenas says.

Through the CEC Early College Mentoring Program, Cardenas plans to pair upperclassmen with

freshmen, then bring in a variety of officers and health specialists to educate the upperclassmen. The older students can in turn mentor and talk to their freshman partners on many issues that teens face, including depression and drug abuse. Currently a senior, Cardenas hopes that the program, once started, will be sustainable. "I want it to be a legacy."

### Personal Relationships with Senior Citizens

Horizon High School students Emma Mantooth, Micaiah Miller, and Amanda Doe all have close relationships with their grandparents, and wanted to show other kids at their Thornton high school how rewarding those relationships can be. The girls started the after-school club, Juniors for Seniors, in which student volunteers develop one-on-one relationships with elderly citizens in nursing homes.

"Once we were at the nursing home doing room visits. We were knocking on doors, and all the rooms were empty except for the last door," Mantooth remembers. "There was this lady, all alone, and she started talking to us. She'd had three heart attacks, but she was still so sharp,"

Funding from Innovate for Good allows the girls to purchase tablets on which the students can play memory games with the nursing home residents, and offer the club at other high schools in the north metro area.

"It's done a lot of good and people have written their college essays about their time with our program," says Mantooth. "I think with funding we could expand the program and make it more accessible to other nursing homes across Thornton, and make it even better than it already is."

### Recording Life Stories of the Elderly

Since the second grade, Rebecca Chapman has volunteered with her grandmother to lead Jewish



**TOP:** Spirit of the Sun, Inc., one of the youth-adult partnership winners from p. 20, was awarded a grant to engage and connect Native youth across the greater Denver community. **BOTTOM:** The East High School theater group, artsC, one of the student-led project winners, was awarded a grant to use theater to foster communication about difficult social issues, which they plan to perform to middle school audiences.

services at nursing homes. "Each time I go, many residents wish to tell me their life stories," Chapman, a freshman at East High School in Denver, says. On one visit, she remembers meeting a 101-year-old man named Ben who had survived the Holocaust. Many of this family members were killed in concentration camps. "I don't even remember all the details of his story, though, because I couldn't record it at the time," Chapman says.

She plans to form the organization, Stories Worth Saving, in which teens will interview elderly residents on video about their

personal histories, so the details of their lives can be passed down accurately. In her group, she'll bring in professionals to teach teens interviewing skills, then the teens will go to nursing homes with video equipment and record their stories. Chapman plans to set up a website on which the community can then watch and listen to the stories.

"The program will empower teens...and bring comfort to the senior residents, through them knowing that their lives will not be forgotten," Chapman says.

—Lydia Rueger