

Unity's Needs Statement

Unity Charity uses hip hop to improve young peoples' lives, creating healthier communities. With a strong focus on improving mental health and well-being, Unity empowers youth with the confidence and skills for success. Promoting inclusivity and equal opportunity as a building block, Unity encourages youth to self-identify their state of mental health and well-being. This gives a voice to the community and allows Unity to better understand and meet the unique needs of the communities it serves. According to Canada's largest mental health teaching hospital, studies have shown that "the more protective factors in young peoples' lives, and the fewer risk factors, the greater the probability that these children or youth will be resilient"¹. By focusing its efforts in various underserved communities across Ontario, British Columbia, Nova Scotia, and Northern Alberta, Unity engages a diverse group of young individuals who gain more ways to express their stress, awareness of unity's programs, appreciation of the power of community, and awareness of mental health resources whilst contributing to the well-being of their communities.

Operating across Canada, Unity believes that hip hop can be used as a tool to educate and improve lives and that access to high quality artistic outlets provides youth with developmental tools. Hip Hop is a relatable and easily accessible network of art forms (dance, beat box, spoken word, and graffiti) that provides a healthy space for youth to grow into the leaders of tomorrow. Unity also operates in a context wherein a decade of funding cuts have proven devastating for arts programs in Ontario schools and, for many youth, access to the arts "depends on where they live and on their parents' ability to pay for private lessons or fundraise for arts in their schools".²

Unity defines "underserved youth" as youth who are disproportionately challenged in accessing inclusive programming well suited to their needs because of socioeconomic conditions, personal obstacles, and/or lack of opportunity. Underserved youth may come from priority neighbourhood or school communities that have challenges in areas such as unemployment, household income, crime, or academic achievement, or face personal physical, mental or family challenges.

¹ The Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (2012). *Understanding Resilience*. Retrieved August 11, 2017, from http://www.camh.ca/en/education/teachers_school_programs/resources_for_teachers_and_schools/growing_up_resilient_ways_to_build_resilience_in_children_and_youth/Pages/undertstanding_resilience.aspx

² Arts In Ontario Schools. (2004). *Arts Research Monitor*, 3(3), 1-1. Retrieved January 14, 2015, from <http://hillstrategies.com/content/arts-education-and-arts-young-people>