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Not-For-Profit Helps Public School Students Expand Interest In Arts

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Our latest New Yorker of the Week is a woman who is working to make sure students interested in the arts get the chance to consider making their talent their career. NY1's Dean Meminger filed the following report.

"I hope one day to become like maybe the CEO of an architecture firm," says Center for Arts Education program participant Richie Peterson.

Peterson's dreams are just the type of goals that the people behind the Center for Arts Education hope to help make a reality. A not-for-profit organization started in 1996, CAE works to restore and sustain arts education in the city's public schools after years of funding cutbacks. It encompasses several different programs, one of them the Career Development Program.

"We do the program in the fall and in the spring," says Dianna DiPalma. "Every semester we put a group of young people from New York City public high schools into internships in the very rich and vast arts industry in New York City."

The CAE program was created in 1999 after a study found that few who worked in the arts industry in New York were graduates of the city school system. It's already placed more than 400 students from nine city high schools into art-related internships. Each semester 40 juniors and seniors are selected based on the promise and desire they show.

"Maybe an arts teacher takes notice of them or a guidance counselor or even a math teacher says, 'I think this student is ready for an experience in the arts industry,'" says DiPalma. "They come to us we interview them and they have to talk about what they really care about, what they really believe in, and how they think this internship might benefit their future, then they get selected and they come to our boot camp."

Boot camp, which DiPalma leads, is a two-week training session where students learn workplace skills and get an overview into what working in the arts is all about.

"I came in as a member of Bayside High School's senior orchestra and I did have a little art background. Mainly it was music and then towards the end of the program I changed and I started focusing more on the business aspects of art," says former CAE program participant Cynthia Shivamber.

"Something we really want to open up the kids' eyes to is that there is so much out there beyond just the person on that stage and so many ways to make a really stable living and be very successful and really grow, especially in this city," says DiPalma.

So for working to make sure that city students with an interest in the arts can follow their dreams and make them a reality, Dianna DiPalma is our New Yorker of the Week.

– Dean Meminger