

vsa The State
Organization on
Arts and Disability
COLORADO



VSA Colorado

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The ARTWORKS Project

VSA Colorado is committed to serving teens, especially those that are the most disenfranchised in our communities—those with disabilities. It is estimated that over 22,000 teens ages 16 to 20 have one or more disabilities (Rehabilitation Research & Training Center) and VSA Colorado is overwhelmed with requests for services and programs for these youth. Teens with disabilities are also at high risk for poor transition into adulthood. Transition is a systemic problem complicated with the inherent challenges of having a disability. Transition is often complicated by a failure to involve young people in making decisions and to consider the issues of the most importance to them. Further education, training, and work experience placements are commonly considered to be care placements, rather than a way of gaining qualifications or paid employment. With an estimated 70 percent of people with disabilities unemployed or underemployed in the U.S., the ARTWORKS project explores a variety of work options in the arts, teaches workplace skills, and involves the teens in self advocacy and policy making on issues that are relevant to their lives. While we use the arts as the tool, the goal is independence and the development of young people with skills to succeed in the workplace.

Project Overview



ARTWORKS is an outside-of-school program that aids teens with disabilities to explore a variety of work options in the arts, teaches workplace skills and involves teens in advocacy and policy making on issues that are relevant to their lives. This is a comprehensive, four-part program that will reach about 100 students in four different ways by providing varied career experiences to help students find a good fit as they explore career paths. Career Day provides students with an overview of the arts as a career, and two residency programs will allow students to gain new artistic skills. The Summer Boot Camp provides a more artistic high-tech experience. Through mentoring and comprehensive training in primarily visual arts, professional artists and other working professionals with and without disabilities help ARTWORKS participants gain comprehensive experience to better prepare them for the transition into employment or entry into college and further independence.

The Office of Disability Employment Policy Guideposts we focus on are 1) Career Preparation and Work-Based Learning Experiences and 2) Youth Development and Leadership. We have a long track record of success in both of these areas.



Activities & Timeline

November 2011

VSA Colorado hosted a **Creative Career Exploration Day** for fifty high school juniors and seniors. Held each fall these Career Exploration days provide teens with the opportunities to visit creative industries like galleries, bakeries, graphic design studios, and artist studios. The goal of this activity is to expose nontraditional students to a wide variety of potential careers. Every participant received information about opening a College in Colorado Account as well as information about education plans for creative careers.

**November/
December 2011**

Artist Residency Program #1 “We Make Great Pets.” This six-week residency was for 15 teens with disabilities and was led by a professional artist. Teens painted portraits of pets to sell through the gallery and online for the holidays. We believe this residency gives young people the opportunity to learn about a commission-based project in a gallery. During this residency the expectations were that participants attend all sessions, be on time, and complete their work. Students also learned sales and marketing techniques. This was primarily an individually focused project and teens were paid based on commissions. Each participant was guaranteed at least one commission during the project.



**March/
April 2012**

Artist Residency #2 “Outside In.” This six-week residency, involving 15 young people, focused on art in public places, architecture and outsider art. The goal of this residency was for each participant to learn about public art, public murals, and produce two to three commissioned pieces of art. Students created, studied, planned, and executed two pieces of public art working with professional artists. Students were paid a commission for the pieces created in the community and also paid a small stipend to participate in the project.

**January 2011 –
April 2012**

Recruitment for Summer Arts Boot Camp, a job readiness program for teens with disabilities. Primarily working with Denver Public Schools transition program, VSA Colorado will recruit, interview, and hire up to 15 students for our Summer Boot Camp.

**June 4 –
June 29, 2012**

Summer Arts Boot Camp. An intensive summer program that incorporated technology as a key component of gaining job skills and exploring creative career options. The focus of this intensive was for the young people to explore new mediums and opportunities through technology. We have found that computers have opened up a wide range of opportunities for people with disabilities, both personally and professionally. The final project for this intensive is a student digital portfolio/resume, a website for their work, and

the experience of working one-on-one with a professional graphic designer to design an educational poster about an issue facing people with disabilities. At the end of this intensive all students will produce:

- An educational poster about issues facing people with disabilities
- A digital portfolio featuring their artwork
- A digital resume highlighting unique job skills
- An individual web page linked to VSA Colorado site
- A College in Colorado Account
- A stipend for the time in the program
- A valuable, hands-on experience working with professional artists in the creation of a variety of projects

*Note: The four-week intensive is where VSA Colorado produced the how-to manual. We believe this aspect of our program is the most replicable. We have worked with the American Institute of Graphic Arts (AIGA) Colorado chapter for four years on the poster project. As a part of this project we developed and delivered a book outlining the steps of the project and how other communities can replicate this part of the project. As stated earlier AIGA has been our partner for four years and they are interested in rolling this project out nationally.



Goals & Outcomes



For each program component listed above ARTWORKS participants achieved the following:

- Exercise independence in a safe environment
- Worked with positive role models through professional mentors
- Set individual outcomes and goals, with guided support to achieve goals
- Concluded their program with an exhibition at Access Gallery



Impact

Developing self-confidence and high self-esteem is critical to the future independence of the young people in our ARTWORKS program. Beginning with their involvement in the program, teens become actively engaged in various levels of program design including identifying disability advocacy issues, adapting tools and art mediums for accessibility, and providing input for focus areas. They are taught to generate a weekly individual goal plan and evaluate their progress. Self-confidence grows as each teen realizes how they can gain further skills and increase their own level of success. Continued work with individual mentors and professional artists gives teens a purpose and helps self-esteem to flourish.

Through this project we impacted nearly one hundred young people with disabilities by exposing them to creative career paths, structured mentoring, and job shadow experiences, as well as community service opportunities and the ability to earn a stipend for work performed (often this is the first money many of our participants have ever earned). Leadership skills are also a natural outcome of this program.

Training begins by allowing participants to actively participate in programming decisions within a small group and in a safe environment, and is reinforced by close interactions with their mentor throughout the program. As they become more comfortable communicating with peers and adults within the program, teens can expand their leadership abilities by assisting with larger group workshops throughout the year.



Partnerships

In addition to our work with approximately forty different schools from across the state, VSA Colorado has strong partnerships with many non-profits in the Denver Metro area.

The following are the primary collaborative partners for this project.

- AIGA Colorado, collaborating on our summer teen program and culminating summer exhibition. AIGA Colorado is a professional association of graphic designers that volunteer to work with our teens on the development of the poster, website, digital resumes, and the how-to guide.
- Santa Fe Arts District collaborated with VSA Colorado to help identify professional artists to mentor teen artists. Three exhibitions next year have a mentoring component.
- The Denver Public Schools (DPS) and the Littleton Public Schools (LPS) Transition programs are important partners by identifying and referring students to us. Both districts bring teens to our Career Exploration Days.
- Denver Urban Gardens agreed to allow our participants to create public art for their community gardens. In the past we have created murals, funky birdhouses and park benches for the gardens.
- PHAMALY is a professional theater company in Denver made up exclusively of artists with disabilities. We will work with Phamaly utilizing performance skills for

teens to increase self-esteem and overcome fears of speaking in public.

- ArtReach Denver: VSA Colorado is one of the ArtReach program's biggest ticket distributors with our clientele attending over 100 events each year. ArtReach allows us to set up various field trips and attend events throughout the year.
- Denver Art Museum—VSA Colorado visited the design department of the museum for a behind the scenes look at the museum operations.
- Gensler and Associates: we visited this architecture and design firm as a job shadow experience for the teens to see a large firm.
- Denver Office of Cultural Affairs partnered with us for a tour and an overview of the public art in downtown Denver. We utilized public transit to help the teens learn to get around the city independently.
- Colorado Cross Disability Coalition (CCDC) is a partner that helped us start our ARTWORKS project. Each year CCDC provides speakers and mentors for our teens to become self-advocates as they transition to adulthood.





Four Projects

Below is a summary of each of the projects we carried out with this funding.

Project Overview

Project #1 Career Exploration Day *November 8, 2011*

VSA Colorado hosted a Creative Career Exploration Day for 68 high school juniors and seniors from seven Denver Public High Schools. This year we also had two schools from Littleton Public Schools send students. Each participant had an Individual Education Plan and had been recommended by teachers or other school administrators. Held each fall, these Career Exploration days provide teens with opportunities to visit creative work places like galleries, bakeries, graphic design studios, and artist studios. The goal of the career exploration days is to expose nontraditional students to a wide variety of potential careers in the creative industries. Every participant also received information about opening a College In Colorado Account and information about education paths for creative careers. The students preselected two workshops to attend during the day and local creative businesses agreed to host the workshops. After beginning the day at a local theater with an overview of the day VSA

Colorado provided each participant with a map and a lunch coupon. In all we held 16 workshops, two plenary sessions and four optional activities. We coordinated this event with the Denver Arts Week Celebration and were able to work closely with the Denver Public Schools transition coordinator to identify the students. VSA Colorado is located in one of Colorado's Creative Capital Zones and the entire project was done within walking distance of our location.



Project #2 **Artist Residency #1** *November/December 2011*

“We Make Great Pets.” Twelve young people with disabilities participated in this six-week residency. Led by a professional teaching artist, Niza Knoll, the students learned to paint portraits of pets to sell through the gallery and online for the holidays. This residency gave the participants the opportunity to learn about a commission-based project in a gallery. The gallery incorporated a session about how to manage your time and how to talk about your artistic style. During this residency the expectations were that participants attend all sessions, be on time, and complete their work. There was a quality control system set up that the instructor or a VSA Colorado staff would need to approve the piece before it was sealed and delivered. Students also learned sales and marketing techniques. This was primarily an individually focused project and teens were paid based on commissions. Each participant was guaranteed at least one commission during the project. The interesting or unexpected part of this project was that it was so successful that people were still calling and asking about commissioning portraits after the holiday season. We have made this an ongoing part of our program offering and to date have completed nearly one hundred commissions. We are partnering with two doggie day care centers and one animal hospital to further market the project. As mentioned each student was guaranteed one commission but the average was three. We have expanded this project and now people can order commissions online through our website.

Project #3 **Artist Residency #2** *March/April 2012*

This six-week residency, involved 14 young people with disabilities, and focused on art in public places, architecture, and outsider art. The goal of this residency was for each participant to learn about public art, public murals, outsider artists, and to produce two to three commissioned pieces of art for a gallery show. Students studied master artists then planned and executed two to three pieces of art working with professional artist mentors. Students were paid a commission for the pieces created and were also paid a small stipend to participate in the project. This project actually led to a shift in direction for the Artworks program at VSA Colorado. One of the teams of young artists studied with Los Angeles based artist Mark Bradford. Mr. Bradford uses street signs and found paper in his work. After the team studied Mr. Bradford's work and began work on their pieces, they used many of the VSA Colorado collateral pieces (calendars, brochures, old gallery postcards) as the source material for these pieces. The pieces were very intriguing; in fact, we sold both pieces at the gallery opening. The "aha" moment was when someone asked us if we could do a piece for them using their collateral materials. We now use material from others and have begun commissioning corporate art. We have also received a commission to do a photo mosaic of a building here in Denver. We realized through this experience that if teens have difficulty being hired for traditional jobs and pay, then through the commissions we can create some work that will give young people an experience closer to traditional jobs and help them earn money. We did a series of mini workshops during the residency, reiterating the importance of presentation and sales skills, but the most exciting part was this option that opened up a revenue stream for our participants and for the organization. We created a brochure to market our corporate commissions. To date we have three corporate commissions, one mural, and have decided to dedicate our August show in the gallery around the idea of commissioned corporate art. We will invite all



the art consultants and public art officials in the area to attend an industry night and see if we can expand this program on a larger scale.

Project #4 **Summer Arts Boot Camp** *June 2012*

In this past summer intensive we incorporated technology as a key component of gaining job skills and exploring creative career options for 17 youth. The focus of this month-long intensive was to explore new mediums and opportunities through technology. We have found that computers have opened up a wide range of opportunities for people with disabilities, both personally and professionally. The final project for this intensive was a student digital portfolio/ resume, a webpage for their work (that they would be able to maintain after the summer ended), and the experience of working one-on-one with a professional graphic designer to design an educational poster about a personal issue they face. The poster project is what we focused on for the how-to manual for this project. We have worked with AIGA Colorado on the poster project for five years and they have also indicated they would like to explore expanding this project to other locations. This part of the project would be very easy for many VSA affiliates or any other group to incorporate.

Impact

Developing self-confidence and high self-esteem is critical to the future independence of the young people in our ARTWORKS program. Beginning with their involvement in the program, teens become actively involved in various levels of program design including identifying disability advocacy issues, adapting tools and art mediums for accessibility, and providing input for focus areas. They are taught to generate a weekly individual goal plan and evaluate their progress. Self-confidence grows as each teen realizes how they can gain further skills and increase their own level of success.



Through this project we impacted 111 young people with disabilities by exposing them to creative career paths, structured mentoring, and job shadow experiences, as well as community service opportunities and the ability to earn a stipend for work performed (often this is the first money many of our participants have ever earned). Leadership skills are also a natural outcome of this program. Training begins by allowing participants to actively participate in programming decisions within a small group and in a safe environment, and is reinforced by close interactions with their mentor throughout the program. As they became more comfortable communicating with peers and adults within the program, teens can expand their leadership abilities by assisting with larger group workshops throughout the year. Perhaps the biggest unexpected outcome was just how valuable the sales and marketing workshops were for our teens. We have seen them sell pieces from the Outside In Show and actively communicate ideas for murals and other art pieces.



Evaluation

In addition to the Student Learning Stories and Curriculum Maps we collect on a regular basis, we used several components developed by leading practitioners and advocates from the Kellogg Foundation. Using the Logic Model (www.uwex.edu/ces/pdande/evaluation/evallogicmodel.html) we included the following: an overview of how the Artworks transition program works, the theory and assumptions that underlie the program, and how it links to short and long term outcomes through the program activities, its processes, and theoretical assumptions. We used evaluation not only as a means of accountability and measuring stick for the program, but also as a management and learning tool. The ODEP Guideposts we focused on were 1) Career Preparation and Work-Based Learning Experiences and 2) Youth Development and Leadership.



Partnerships

Of course we would not be able to do what we do without our wonderful community partnerships. Listed below are the primary groups we worked with on this project and the role they played in our success.

AIGA Colorado—provided graphic designers for the poster project.

Denver Public Schools Transition Team—provided students and resources for the creative career exploration day.

Art District on Santa Fe—members of the Arts District provided space and resources for the Creative Career Day.

Gensler Architecture and Design—provided guided tours for participants and printing for the Poster Project.

Niza Knoll and Andy Bryzceck—lead artists for Portrait Residency and Outside In residency.



Conclusion

Perhaps the greatest lessons learned through this project are that transition from high school to young adulthood is challenging under the best of circumstances. We firmly believe the arts and creative industries have many viable options for young people with disabilities.

The core group of young people we work with are primarily on the autism spectrum or have learning or cognitive delays that make finding traditional jobs challenging. In working with disabled/disenfranchised teens, we have found one of the best ways to empower them is to help them successfully transition from student to whole person with a productive, quality, and meaningful career. An estimated 70 percent of people with disabilities in this country are unemployed or

underemployed. Most disabled students will graduate high school and have no job options. Typically the students in our programs have not had a job of any sort and therefore will most likely not qualify for even the most menial of jobs. Yet, these young people are talented in other ways.



We have been increasing our focus on job development over the past few years by working on developing skills for individual artists. However, we have realized that we need to go beyond teaching basic skills such as being creative, thoughtful, on time, etc. Teens need real work experience. In the past year we have started creating work with them, such as our Art-o-mat machine (a retired cigarette vending machine) that now vends art produced by our teens, creating a system where they get paid to create and produce. While often the checks from these projects are small, they are the first pay of any kind some of these young people have ever received. We are particularly excited about the idea of the corporate commissioned work as we believe this can open many doors for our young people. To date we have seen five of our young people receive commissions as a result of an employer they met while in our program. By expanding our market to larger companies we hope to commission more artwork.





Giving Voice



Project Overview

Giving Voice is the annual poster design collaboration between VSA Colorado and AIGA Colorado. Now in its milestone fifth year, the program matches graphic designers and teen artists with disabilities for a multi-session poster design and mentoring workshop, which culminates in a gallery exhibition.

VSA Colorado serves nearly five thousand people with disabilities, their families and those that work with them. The organization is creating a world where people with disabilities have the opportunity to learn through, participate in, and enjoy the arts. VSA is an international nonprofit organization founded in 1974 by Ambassador Jean Kennedy Smith.

AIGA Colorado is the statewide chapter of the professional association for design. Made up of more than four hundred Colorado-based designers, AIGA Colorado supports the interests of professionals, educators and students who are engaged in the process of communication design.

During the course of the summer, the Giving Voice Program works to empower teens with disabilities communicate about what is important to them. We pair each teen with a professional graphic designer who creates an educational



poster based on a personal experience, frustration or global issue the teen strongly about. The title Giving Voice comes from the simple idea that rarely does anyone ask a teenager what is important *to them*. This project gives them this chance to have their voices heard. Some of the posters are very personal examples of the frustration they may feel or the poster might depict a global, universal concern.

Examples of Posters developed for this past summer address the following issues.

1. Handicapped parking
2. Hunger in America
3. Native American traditions
4. Art as a form of self-expression
5. Water conservation in the west

The teens come to VSA Colorado primarily through referrals from Denver Public Schools Transition Program. Each year through their summer job training program, VSA Colorado works with nearly one hundred teens with disabilities.

The graphic designers come from the membership of AIGA Denver and meet with the teens at least three times prior to the posters being unveiled. At the end of the summer the posters are presented in the gallery. The AIGA designers are thrilled to work with the teens as it is such a nice departure for them from their day-to-day work, and the teens are exposed to an adult in their life that is not paid to be with them.



Purpose

The purpose of the Giving Voice project is two-fold. First, with an estimated 70 percent of people with disabilities in this country unemployed or underemployed, we believe the arts provide the flexibility in jobs and opportunities to decrease that percentage. By exposing young people to the gallery/

studio we also empower them to consider graphic design as a very viable career option.

Furthermore, we believe teens with disabilities are at high risk for poor transition into adulthood. This is a systemic problem combined with the inherent challenges of their disabilities. This transition is often complicated by a failure to involve young people in making decisions and to involve them in the issues of most importance to them. Further education, training, and work experience placements are commonly considered to be care placements, rather than a way of gaining qualifications or paid employment. The availability of supported employment (support to do a paid job alongside typical workers) varies geographically.

While this is a short-term project we have seen the empowerment of these teens through this project and evaluations and feedback from family members and teachers have supported this observation.



Basic Structure of Program

The basic structure of the program is fairly simple and flexible allowing for variations and adaptations. For example, one year we focused the entire project on celebrating the Americans with Disabilities Act. The following year was basically a visual resume of the teen. This year we focused on global issues. Once the theme is decided upon it is up to each teen to determine what particular aspect they want to emphasize.

The steps below are meant to be suggestive only; these steps have worked in our project but can be adapted to fit many models.



Step 1 Development of Partnership

Contact your local AIGA Chapter. Most AIGA chapters have a mentoring component and a membership base open to this type of project. Often a simple phone call is enough to start this relationship.

Step 2 Recruitment of Teens for Project

Ten to twelve young people are a manageable number of teens to work with. We have run the program as part of a larger summer program, but it could also be run as an in-school or outside-of-school residency. VSA Colorado has operated the program utilizing six sessions as outlined below. We have had success running this program with all types of teens including those with developmental or learning disabilities, students with vision or hearing loss or those with other physical disabilities. It is also powerful for typical teens.

Step 3 Recruitment of Graphic Designers

AIGA can put out a call for designers through their membership networks. Designers are asked to volunteer for one orientation session and three mentoring sessions. See example at end of this document. VSA Colorado has done this as three working lunches over three to four weeks.

Sessions

Session 1 Teen Session

Overview of art and social change, participants are given overview of graphic design, poster design, messaging, and design. Teens are asked to fill out a questionnaire about interests and issues. These questionnaires are used to match the students with designers who also fill out the same questionnaires.

Designer Session

This orientation session is held with the designers who have volunteered to participate. It can be held at your site or at a



graphic design office. The purpose is to give an overview of the project, answer questions about the posters, timeline, and the deliverable. We also use this time to give an overview of VSA and to answer questions about working with teens with disabilities.



Session 2 Initial Meeting with Designer (45–60 minutes)

This meeting works well as a working lunch, but can be done in a variety of settings. The designers and teens are first paired up based on the responses to questionnaire. Once the pairing is made, designers and teens are given forty-five minutes to an hour to meet and start the design process. They chat about style preferences and concepts using source materials like design magazines, books, and the internet. Designers often bring laptops, sketch pads, or iPads for this session.

Session 3 Second Meeting with Designer (45–60 minutes)

After one to two weeks the pairs meet again to review the designers ideas based on first meeting. This meeting is critical to reinforce to the teens that they are the client and the designer is working with them to bring their idea to life with a powerful poster designed to educate people. Designers often bring laptops, sketch pads, or iPads for this session.

Session 4 Final Unveiling to Group (1 hour)

This session is the unveiling of the final poster. Each team shows the final poster to the entire group and discusses the intent of their project. After the unveiling and the final tweaks are made to the posters by the designer, they are sent to be printed. Designers are also given technical specifications. We have been able to find local printers to print the final posters but they can also be printed on standard office color printers. We print the posters at 11x17 inches.

During this session we photograph each team and also ask them to compose a one to two paragraph description of

their process. We rely on the designers to provide the final description using the writing skills that our teens often do not have. We hang the descriptions and the photographs next to the posters.



Session 5 Design Studio Visit

The teens visit a working graphic design firm to see the day-to-day operations of a design studio. This helps teens to realize that graphic design can be a career choice for them. This visit is done as a group.

Session 6 Presentation

The posters are presented as an exhibit. VSA Colorado operates a gallery so we host the culminating event for this project at our gallery. If a gallery is not available, this exhibit and event could be held at a school or even at a design firm. Invite the designers and the teens to attend and encourage them to invite friends and family.

Both designers and the teens complete an evaluation at the culmination of the project. We use these evaluations to guide us for upcoming sessions.



Guidelines for Mentoring Programs for Young People with Disabilities



“Young people with disabilities have a great deal to gain from relationships with mentors who have the ability to guide them along paths towards independence and full-participation in their communities.” *(Disabled World)*

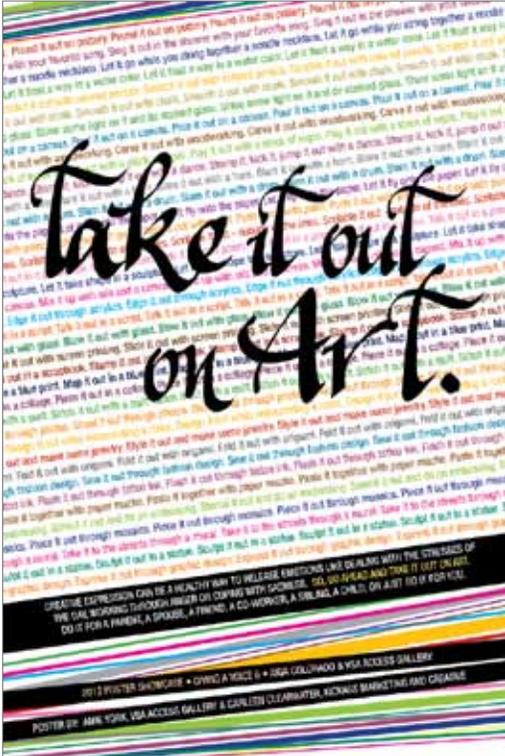
Regina Snowden believes that “there was no better role model for a young person with a disability than an adult who experiences a form of disability.” She went on to found, Partners for Youth with Disabilities. *(Disabled World)*

Benefits: (Disabled World)

- Disability pride
- Improved self-advocacy skills
- Knowledge of disability rights
- Increased independent living skills
- Improved motivation and self-esteem
- Involvement in community and extracurricular activities
- Healthier relationships with family, friends, teachers and others
- Interest in having a job/career and the knowledge of how to do so
- Interest in continuing education and the knowledge of how to do so



Technical Specifications for Poster



2012 Giving Voice Poster,
Amie York & Carleen Clearwater

The final poster size will be 16" x 24". It can be landscape or portrait and can be a full bleed.

Poster specs:

- 16 x 24 final size (16.25 x 24.25 with bleed)
- CMYK build
- 300 dpi
- High Res PDF with crops

Please post your files to the external ftp site, information at the bottom of this email.

Please include your build files just in case something happens with the PDF. If you use Illustrator, please outline your fonts to ensure no substitutions occur prior to making your pdf.

Also please write a short paragraph about how you worked together, your theme and the inspiration behind it. We will be posting it next to your poster along with a picture of you and your student. I have posted last year's write-ups on the ftp site for examples.



PAIRING Questionnaire

Name:

1. What are three unique or interesting things about you?
2. What do you feel is the biggest issue facing the country or the world right now?
3. Where do you see yourself in five years? What will you be doing?
4. If you could change one thing about the world what would it be?
5. If you had a billboard in Times Square what would you do with it?

Circle one word from each of the following pairings (for example, pick chocolate or vanilla and circle what you prefer, then do the next pairing).

- | | |
|--------------------|------------------|
| Chocolate | Vanilla |
| The Beatles | Beethoven |
| Pizza | Hamburger |
| Carrots | Peas |
| Spiderman | Ironman |



Resources

Disabled World—Young people with disabilities have a great deal to gain from relationships with mentors who have the ability to guide them, www.disabled-world.com/disability/motivational/mentorship.php#ixzz1xVkwSMld

Partners for Youth with Disabilities, www.pyd.org/

Rolex Mentorship and Arts Protégé Initiative,
www.rolexmentorprotege.com/en/about-the-initiative/index.jsp
www.artpartnersprogram.com/10YrAnniv/Unit5-SocActThruArt.htm

VSA Colorado Mission Statement

VSA Colorado/Access Gallery is an inclusive, nonprofit organization that engages the community by opening doors to creative and educational opportunities for people with disabilities to access and experience the arts.

www.accessgallery.org