Program Evaluation

An evaluation of our “Philosophy in the Community” program is provided below. For each section, we have included a basic overview of our application contents (i.e., a snapshot), followed by our respective assessment of how our program faired relative to the guidelines, plans and goals set out in our application.

Project Description

Application Snapshot: Our Philosophy in the Community program consists of a variety of public philosophy activities ranging from philosophy walks and symposiums to philosophy workshops, forums, and more. Activities are free to the public and designed for people of all ages and backgrounds, from children to elders and are geared to: (a) spark and encourage the exchange of ideas; (b) promote critical thought and reflection; (c) cultivate the faculty and virtue of “philosophical sensitivity”; (d) nurture and contribute to a sense of imagination and wonder; (e) reconnect people with nature by way of doing philosophy in inspiring places; (f) facilitate the application of philosophy to matters of everyday living; (g) inspire leadership and action, and; (h) build, foster and strengthen the community and environment. In line with our mission, this project honors and aims to show the practical value of philosophy and why and how applying philosophy to our everyday lives matters.

Assessment: Our application pledged to use grant funds for 3 areas of focus within our philosophy in the community program – namely, our philosophy walks, our philosophy workshops, and our “Big Ideas by Little Philosophers” (BiLP) program. Each of these activities were geared to meet the aims set forth in (a) – (h) above. We are beyond thrilled with what we were able to offer and that each activity met our respective goals.
In order to provide a more robust and immersive experience of the programs that the Berry Fund helped to support, please find below links for each that will lead you to archive pages outlining the endeavor, what was explored, photos, and related resources (e.g., audio recordings, texts/references). URL’s for each of these are also provided at the close of this document.

- 4 philosophy walks (open to all ages) – each with guest speakers
  - June Philosophy Walk – “Environment, Ethics & Stewardship”
  - July Philosophy Walk – “Virtue & Hope”
  - August Philosophy Walk – “Reconnecting with Nature”
  - September Philosophy Walk – “From Ecology to Ethics”
- 1 philosophy workshop – “The Life of Virtue in Greek Philosophy”
- Curriculum development for our “Big Ideas by Little Philosophers” (BiLP) program – specifically, our Spring “Know Thyself” project

Of additional note relative to the success of these activities, we were extremely pleased with the quality of our guest speakers, the diversity of subject matters philosophically explored, the engagement and improved critical thinking skills of youth within our BiLP program, and the level of community participation and support.

**Demographics/Community Members Served**

**Application Snapshot:** Our philosophy in the community activities are free to the public and designed for people of all ages and backgrounds, from children to elders.

**Assessment:** Our program stayed true to its targeted demographics and community goals. Participants displayed a broad range of perspectives and an equally extensive spectrum of backgrounds, experience and ages. Shared characteristics of most (if not all) individuals who participated in our various activities were “an open, inquiring mind” and “a genuine desire to engage in meaningful dialogue and philosophical exploration.”

Generally speaking, and for obvious reasons our philosophy walks tended attract individuals who liked to be outdoors. Subject matter also contributed and
brought some folk out who did not describe themselves as particularly “outdoorsy” but who, nevertheless, found the subject matter intriguing. Our philosophy workshop consisted of a diverse group of individuals, from young AmeriCorps members and college students to social workers, playwrights, retired urban planners and artists.

Our “Big Ideas by Little Philosophers” program consisted of youth ranging from 7 years old to 17. Over the course of Spring, the kids from Cottonwood Agile Learning Center participated in our “Know Thyself” project. The project culminated in a community showcase at our 2019 Reeder’s Alley Block Party, where youth exhibited their philosophical wares and participated in a fun question and answer session with members of the community in the garden. The Reeder’s Alley Block Party attracted over 2,000 people from the Helena community and beyond.

Grant Fund Allocation

Funds from the Berry Fund for Public Philosophy were used to help cover honorariums for our philosophy walk and workshop guides, as well as curriculum development and implementation for our “Big Ideas by Little Philosophers” (BiLP) program. An overview of fund allocation by activity categories is provided below.

Berry Fund Allocation (by Activity Categories)

- $400 – Funded 4 Philosophy Walks (Honorariums)
- $200 – Funded 1 Philosophy Workshop (Honorariums)
- $400 – Funded our BiLP “Know Thyself” project (Curriculum Development & Implementation)

Of additional note, funds above and beyond the $1,000 awarded by the APA Berry Fund for Public Philosophy were also applied to our “Philosophy in the Community” project – which consisted of the abovementioned activities, as well as a host of other activities throughout the year. The numbers below reflect the allocation of the Berry Fund for Public Philosophy funds only.
HOW THE BERRY FUND FOR PUBLIC PHILOSOPHY GRANT HELPED ENRICH LIVES THROUGH PHILOSOPHY IN 2019

WHAT SORTS OF THINGS DID YOUR GRANT HELP FUND?

4 PHILOSOPHY WALKS
1 PHILOSOPHY WORKSHOP

OUR "BIG IDEAS BY LITTLE PHILOSOPHERS" PROGRAM

$1,000 CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM IMPLEMENTATION HONORARIUMS

IN SUPPORT OF OUR 2019 PHILOSOPHY IN THE COMMUNITY PROGRAM
Some Community Testimonials

“Merlin is so important to our community because it promotes critical thinking and thoughtful interaction between anyone and everyone who wants to participate in an ongoing conversation about what it means to live our best lives. Without Merlin we would be leaving some of our most beautiful opportunities to interact intellectually with one another to chance, and what a misguided strategy that is. Thank you, Merlin, for getting us together and sharing our passions, fears and blessings.” – Shane Doyle, Educational Consultant, Native Nexus Consulting

“It’s not often that a lively public discussion tumbles out into a bar after the main event closes for further hashing, but it’s happened more than once with Merlin events I’ve gone to. Gone are the days of round-table cafe’ philosophical confabs sprouting spontaneously on street corners. Merlin fills a wonderful social role of providing forums for discussion of critical issues to our community. It provides a kind of fountain of ideas percolating among us in this time of rapid transformation and creative foment.” – Tim Holmes, Artist

“Over the past couple years, my wife and I have participated in several of Merlin’s activities, including Philosophy Walks, Drive-in evenings, Think and Drink evenings, the Reeder’s Alley Block Party, and philosophy symposiums. I find three things about these activities to be particularly impactful to me and keep drawing me back to Merlin. First, I often hear things that make me question my own thinking. Through the presentation of ideas that are new to me and the discourse with others who aren’t necessarily like-minded, I get the opportunity to examine why I believe what I believe. In some cases, this solidifies my opinions and attitudes. In other cases, it truly has caused me to shift my perspective. As the consummate introvert, I find the desire to really understand the what and why of my own thinking to be a driving force. Second, Merlin provides a safe forum for discussion and serves as the conduit for bringing together groups of people with distinctly unique backgrounds. Discussions within the various forums are clearly not driven by group think. Rather, diversity of thought would be a better way of describing the audiences. The one commonality I’ve found with the programs I’ve attended is that even though the participants come from a wide variety of fields
from across the region, most participants are sincerely interested in hearing and understanding the perspectives of others. Merlin creates an encouraging and safe environment for social discourse, free of animosity and attack. That is something that is increasingly disappearing from our society. Third, Merlin activities are fun. Being fairly new to the Helena area, Merlin activities have opened the door to meeting new people and making friends with folks that I would not otherwise have met. These relationships have helped my wife and I build a sense of community that transcends our jobs and immediate family, helping us feel part of the Helena region.” – Jon Kesler, Principal Consultant, Center for Veterans Enterprise Transformation

**Supplemental Report Information**


