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## **Lindenwood Faculty and Students Collaborate on Community Art Project**

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**December 5, 2023**

Lindenwood University faculty and students, along with the Webster Groves Foundation, collaborated and funded a community project with Webster Groves School District this fall.

Through Lindenwood's President's Research, Innovation, and Development toward Excellence (PRIDE) Fund, this community project called BRIDGing (Building. Relationships. Inclusion. Diversity. Growth) Our Stories was born. The PRIDE Fund supports faculty projects promoting research, scholarship, and creative activity.

BRIDGing Our Stories was spearheaded by Lindenwood Associate Professor of Public Health Dr. Amy Estlund and Webster Groves Adjunct Education Instructor and Director of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Dr. Shane Williamson. It empowered students, faculty, and staff from Hixson Middle School and Webster Groves High School to advocate for their needs and embrace an appreciation for the community's diversity.

The storytelling art project framed personal identities and the lived experiences of marginalized populations to change attitudes, reprioritize educational equity, and create a change in social norms.

The project was completed this fall. Students, faculty, and staff expressed themselves through art, such as poetry, photography, music, dance, painting, and more. These creative expressions were placed in a community gallery for the public to view, learn, and appreciate. Additionally, the artwork is displayed in a professional development session for staff to learn about the power of storytelling, as well as relationship and community building.

Students expressed how their artwork highlights different aspects of their lives. Additionally, teachers noted how students can express themselves through multiple creative lenses.

This project involved two Lindenwood students – senior Aniah Moore and sophomore Samantha Sowerby. Both Moore and Sowerby gained invaluable real-world experience through this project. They immersed themselves in learning about their communities and the diverse cultures their community members come from. Those experiences will help them in their professional endeavors.

Moore, who is majoring in public health, decided to get involved with the project as a way to listen to and amplify the voices within her community, as well as understand their needs.

“One moment that left a lasting impression on me was when I was reviewing the artist's submission and creating the artist's statement cards,” Moore said. “It was incredible to see the vulnerability and creativity that each artist brought to the table. However, the artist's statements resonated with me the most. They showed me how each person saw themselves, their place in their community, and how their experiences have molded them. This experience reminded me of the importance of taking the time to truly listen to others because we never honestly know what someone else might be going through, and often, we have similar experiences as the next person.

“Through this project, I am discovering the importance of being present and lending an ear to make a difference in someone's life.”

Sowerby, who is majoring in cinema arts, enjoys mentoring younger kids. When she first heard of this opportunity to get involved and make an impact in the community, she didn't hesitate to accept.

“As I learned more about the project, I only got more attached and interested in the meaning and message behind it,” Sowerby said.