

Open Jam Collective (OJC)

Cheech1Teach1

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Open Jam Collective

Toronto, ON

Overview

Hi, my name is Jose and I'm a seasoned professional street dancer and choreographer. I have been an active member of the street dance community for over a decade and with the help of the OCC grant, I am currently one of the founding members of "Open Jam Collective" a non-profit, street dance collective dedicated to creating free events and easier access to high level street dance for the community. We started off this project as a group chat on facebook messenger that we were initially using to communicate for a dance trip to Montreal. This chat eventually went from being a tool for small gatherings to a 200+ person hub for sessions, classes, events, and more. It single handedly kept the popping scene thriving throughout the toughest parts of the pandemic and now that things are open, we decided that if we could keep the spark alive through a global pandemic, then we can also use our influence to keep that spark alive throughout the winter months when dance relies heavily on indoor public space! Fast forward till now, we have organized 6 pop up events and 3 weekly programs, and thanks to our community and 8 80 cities, we are still going strong!

Achievements/progress

The journey began with a few visionary individuals who recognized the potential to bring together dancers from all walks of life through the art of street dance. Armed with the Ontario ChangeMakers Grant, this individual introduced "cheech1teach1" street dance events to Toronto. These events emerged as more than just dance showcases; they became platforms for self-expression, collaboration, and community building. collectives. Over the course of a year, the program hosted a remarkable array of events, including five street dance battles that pushed the boundaries of creativity, three mini battles that showcased the raw talent of emerging dancers, and two street dance parties that transcended physical borders by collaborating with five different street dance

Milestones

In the past 6 months, we have successfully facilitated 5 street dance events (Boogie on the Block, Cypher on the Block, Bickford Boogie, Party on the Block) with the final event of the series being a cross-collaborative launch party with four different street dance groups that brought together multiple street dance communities on the same night. We co-sponsored 2 mini popping battles and jams hosted by another street dance group called Toronto Popping, and we partnered with the Davenport-Perth Neighbourhood and Community Health Centre to host weekly street dance sessions for the community (The Sanctuary Sessions) and hosted dozens of outdoor sessions at the Bickford Centre on 777 Bloor st west.

The heart and soul of this movement, the "Open Jam Collective," epitomizes the grant's impact on fostering inclusive safe spaces for dancers. Dedicated to creating opportunities for local dancers, the collective crafted an environment where artistic growth flourished. Through hundreds of street dance sessions, participants found themselves part of a larger family, where mutual support and encouragement prevailed. By offering events that were entirely free for the community, the collective demonstrated that the love for dance transcended monetary barriers, placing artistic growth at the forefront.

The grant played an instrumental role in nurturing the growth of the "Open Jam Collective." From the very first event, the support of the grant allowed the collective to secure venues, bring in seasoned instructors, and facilitate dynamic workshops that empowered dancers to refine their skills. With each successful event, the sense of camaraderie deepened, and the dancers' dedication to the art form became palpable.

Impact

We have seen a clear impact on the community in the form of increased involvement and participation, consistent growth in both size and skill level, and support from the City of Toronto/other local dance organizations. Here are some clear markers of success and impact:

- Organized 2 free street dance community events that collectively brought together over 300 street dancers and the public;
- Financially supported 9 artists including DJs, graphic designers, and dancers; built long-term relationships with three venues (i.e. The Bentway Studio, Davenport-Perth Neighbourhood and Community Health Centre, and Coin 8 studios);
- Strengthened relationships with 7 street dance community groups in other street dance styles such as voguing, wh/aacking, krumping, and hustle (i.e. Haus of Poseida, ScrewFace Capital Toronto, 2U4U, TO Hustle Sessions, Funky Facilitators, and Toronto Popping) to promote cross-collaboration;
- Hosted 13 drop-in dance sessions at Davenport-Perth Neighbourhood and Community Health Centre that has brought together close to 200 participants to exchange, learn, and grow in the street dance style of popping;
- Sponsored 2 mini popping battles and jams hosted by Toronto Popping that allowed for nearly 300 beginner and advanced street dancers of all ages and abilities to get together, learn for each other, and level up;
- Currently building long-term relationships with 3 new funders and organizations (i.e. Toronto Arts Council, City of Toronto, Unity Charity) to ensure the sustainable funding of street dance events, specifically for the popping community. Acquired one new grant that we will use to plan our next month-long event in March.

Challenges

Some of the challenges that we have faced include:

- Making sure to spread out our budget to avoid spending all our money on one event, while simultaneously not lowering the standard of quality of the event and properly compensating our event staff (judges, DJs, videographers);
- Navigating a post COVID-19 landscape while still looking out for the health and well being of dancers (mask mandates).

We dealt with this by properly budgeting our events to be as conservative as possible without being stingy, and by fundraising through busking/street performing when anything extra was needed. Also by encouraging mask use at our events without enforcing it, and providing masks for those who didn't bring them.

Future plans

Beyond the tangible outcomes, the Ontario ChangeMakers Grant enabled us to pave the way for a cultural renaissance in Toronto's dance scene. Through "Cheech1Teach1" events and the "Open Jam Collective," diverse backgrounds, experiences, and dance styles converged, creating a rich tapestry of creativity that enriched the city's cultural landscape. The grant's impact extended far beyond the events themselves, resonating within the hearts of the dancers who found inspiration, belonging, and a newfound sense of purpose.

As the journey of "Cheech1Teach1" street dance events and the "Open Jam Collective" continues, one thing remains certain: the Ontario ChangeMakers Grant acted as a catalyst for positive change. Through free events that welcomed all, it fostered a sense of unity, empowered emerging dancers, and showcased the undeniable power of artistic expression. Toronto's dance community is forever transformed, thanks to the grant's unwavering support and the tireless efforts of those who passionately believed in the potential of street dance to change lives. With the help of 880 cities, we have expanded and preserved the culture of street dance in Toronto and have accumulated a strong community of over 100+ dedicated, and contributing members of the community. We did it!

All of our events and achievements can be found posted on IG:

@openjamcolective
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