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SJ Engage, a San José Public Library (SJPL) initiative sponsored by the Silicon Valley Community Foundation, seeks to inspire social action and local civic engagement in young people within their communities. SJ Engage empowers local youth, ages 13-24, to connect with their local government leaders and community partners as well as provides them with the digital and information literacy skills to speak out about issues they most care about.

SJ ENGAGE 1.0: DIGITAL CIVIC ENGAGEMENT (2018-2019)

Throughout history, youth have played a critical role in change. Youth, locally and nationally, are advocating for the issues they care about through campaigns like March for Our Lives and Black Lives Matter. Recognizing the need to support the development of our local youth as fully participating citizens, SJ Engage provides space, resources and opportunity to use tools to connect and collaborate. Last year, SJPL partnered with the company LRNG to create a resource rich environment that combines digital and local learning experiences that affect youth and their communities and results in unlocking real-world opportunities, such as internships and a chance to connect with government leaders.

The SJ Engage team worked with LRNG to create 3 online playlists that unlock real world experiences. The first of these playlists allowed youth become familiar with people, ideas, organizations working in the fields of immigrant rights, gun violence, housing, and mental health. By completing this first playlist, youth will unlock opportunities to shadow local organizations and professionals in these issue areas. The second playlist encouraged youth to become informed digital citizens and understand how fake news, fact checking, confirmation biases, and data literacy play a critical role in consuming media. And the final playlist youth learned about discourse and public speaking essentials in order to present their issues of interest and call to action at a San José City Council/City Department meeting.

Goals

SJ Engage launched on August 13, 2018, just in time for school, with the goals:

- 250 youth participation
- 100 youth completing a playlist
- 75 youth connecting with government or community leaders

Since then 310 youth in San José are have participated online or in person with 75% of the participants being from south San José (95111) which includes East Side Union High School District's Andrew Hill High School.

Outreach & Partnerships

Outreach has been a core component for the SJ Engage program. SJ Engage staff have completed 63 outreach events: class visits to local schools, tabling at community events, and connecting with non-profit organizations and connected with 2,858 people. Staff have partnered with over 20 local non-profit organizations, community and government leaders, including SIREN, HomeFirst, LGBTQ Youth Space, and Donor Network West to provide real-world opportunities for SJ Engage participants.

- SJ Engage was able to secure local and state internships for teens at the Office of District 3 City Councilmember Raul Peralez, Office of Mayor Sam Liccardo, and Office of State Assemblymember Evan Low.
- SJ Engage staff was embedded with a class at Andrew Hill High School for a week during March 2019 As part of Andrew Hill's Social Justice Academy, SJ Engage staff worked with students though the SJ Engage curriculum. Future plans include connecting students with guest speakers from non-profits and leading a more in depth classroom-based discussion on local civic issues and planning social action projects.
- As part of completing Playlist 2, the SJ Engage team worked with a Facebook hiring recruitment team member to provide SJ Engage teen participants a tour of the Facebook Campus and opportunity to discuss career opportunities in social media and civic engagement.
- On April 19, 2019 District 10 City Councilmember Johnny Khamis was hosted at a Teens Reach, branch library teen advisory, leadership, and volunteer groups, for a community circle discussion on local civic issues inspired by SJ Engage curriculum and participation.

SJ ENGAGE 2.0: LEARNING TO ACTION (2019-2020)

SJ Engage was granted continual funding from the Silicon Valley Community Foundation for the 2019-2020 fiscal year. Throughout the 2018-2019 year, teens expressed a desire for deeper learning on civic issues, a need to connect with others, and a way to put their ideas into action. The next iteration of SJ Engage responds to these demands in a way that creates a foundation for lifelong civic participation.

Learning Circles

This next phase of SJ Engage focuses on discussion and reflection in Learning Circle format. The learning circle facilitation was developed using Harwood Institute community conversations, Bonner Network and Highlander Folk school group learning models, and restorative justice practices to deepen learning about the issues and strengthen soft skills and emphasize social and emotional learning through reflective discussion.

The learning circles will still continue to use the SJ Engage curriculum. It will just be updated with additional resources and move from the LRNG platform to the Articulate360 training platform that SJPL uses for online trainings. The curriculum will support learning circles and will have an online toolkit/discussion guide for educators and other librarians to use for their programs.

Social Action Projects

Teens are the largest group of volunteers at the library, making up 62% of total volunteers, but only make up 37% of total service hours. Most of those hours are earned through participating in Teens Reach, SJPL's teen advisory and volunteer group. In SJ Engage 2.0, those Teens Reach groups will have a chance to take a deeper dive into issues, discuss them in learning circles and then take action. SJ Engage seeks to empower teens by allowing them to gain a deeper understanding of the issues and then make changes in their own community.

Inspired by the Teens Leading Change initiative at LAPL, the second phase of SJ Engage seeks to motivate and support Teens Reach groups who want to create and implement a social action project in their community, inspired by the issues and reflections through participating in SJ Engage. We will do this by providing mini-grants to complete a project and connect the teens reach groups to our partners and other non-profits that might align with their social action project goals.

Outcomes:

- 20 Library Teens Reach Coordinators will be trained on the SJ Engage toolkit and SJ Engage Learning Circles model at bimonthly coordinators' meetings
- 20 branches will host civic education and Learning Circle discussions for approximately 2 hours once a month during Q2 (July - September) and Q3 (October - December) with a total of 100 unduplicated youth participating.
    - 75% of SJ Engage participants who respond to the self-completion survey will agree that their knowledge of social issues and confidence in their abilities has increased as a result of the program.
- Teens Reach groups will propose, develop and fund community-based social action projects. Selected projects will fit at least one of the SJ Engage focus areas (mental health, gun violence, housing, immigration, or information literacy).
    - 7 Teens Reach groups will develop a social action project and implementation plan
    - 70% of the projects will be awarded funding (up to $3,000) to put the plan into practice
    - 85% of SJ Engage participants who respond to the self-completion survey will agree that they are now more likely to become personally involved in civic action as a result of the program

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