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Nonprofit brings out artists in local youth



Courtesy of Lillian Alonzo Marin

RAISE YOUR HANDS | Lillian Alonzo Marin, founder and creative director of Artistic Dreams International, stands with participants in ADI.

By [SOPHIE NEIMAN](#) / Columbia Daily Spectator
October 24, 2013, 2:33am

This is one story in a series profiling the grant recipients of the West Harlem Local Development Corporation. Read all of the profiles [here](#).

“The most rewarding thing about working with children is that you start to view your own limitations, because they have none,” Lillian Alonzo Marin, founder and creative director of Artistic Dreams International, said. “They are like a mirror. They teach you that anything is possible.”

Possibility expanded for the two-year-old nonprofit on Oct. 10, when the West Harlem Development Corporation awarded the program a \$35,693 grant. It was one of seven local organizations to receive project grants from a total fund of \$194,197. ADI plans to use the new grant to continue its work in Harlem.

The organization provides visual arts programs for children living in West Harlem, running a Saturday morning workshop in the George Bruce Library at 125th Street and Amsterdam Avenue.

In class, children work with visiting artists, experiment with a variety of media, and are encouraged to use artwork to express issues and develop new skills.

“Each ADI teaching artist creates very engaging and comprehensive material, and it’s so satisfying to see our kids make new

discoveries about themselves and the world while they are in the process of creating art and learning about artists,” May Pamana Nazareno, New York director of ADI, said.

Alonzo Marin remembers one young girl, Shiwa, who fled Tibet and moved to Harlem with her family. “I saw that she started doing paintings that had some violence. Her mom said she was happy it was coming out in her art, because she didn’t know her daughter was struggling.” As she continued to create artwork with ADI, Shiwa became more expressive and vocal.

“We all know that children have gone through some type of trauma, but the arts allows them to get that out of their system, and gives them a space to build a brighter future for themselves,” Alonzo Marin said. “The ultimate goal and vision is to keep doing what we’re doing, which means having children spread their wings and be able to grow out of any pre-imposed circumstances.”

“We want to do good work, because ultimately we believe that the arts change lives in countless and profound ways,” Pamana Nazareno said. “Every child deserves that chance to experience art’s incredible gifts.”

With the grant, ADI will start a free arts program for third, fourth, or fifth graders in a West Harlem public school. Currently, there are 10 candidates for the program, and ADI is analyzing need and preparing a curriculum, which will imbed elements of math and science into arts education.

In the midst of expanding the non-profit into northern Mexico, Alonzo Marin sees Harlem students as “the foundation of Artistic Dreams. ... The Harlem kids are the example that all the other kids will follow.” She said that the grant will allow ADI to strengthen that foundation.

After receiving the grant, “we celebrated, but we only celebrated for one day,” she said. “Then we had to get back to work to be able to implement what we’d promised.”

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By Breanna Leslie-Skye

Mar 25, 10:12am

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By Samantha Sokol

Mar 24, 10:15pm

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