



## ENRICHING THE LIVES OF SOMALI-AMERICAN YOUTH

### **Rising Impact**

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### **Program Overview:**

Since 2015, Fanka programs have taken place in communities around Minnesota including **Willmar, Moorhead, St. Cloud, Rochester, Mankato, Austin** and in the **Twin Cities**. The main objectives of this programs are to bring the general community together with Somali communities to learn from each other and build trust, relationships, and cohesiveness by openly promoting a dialogue of understanding and tackling issues faced by these communities.

Key topics of focus have included Somali art traditions, mental health, generational gaps, Somali culture, Islamophobia, and immigrants. Through these programs/presentations, a platform for conversation was provided; we were able to practice, teach, present, and document Somali traditional oral art forms; increase intercultural understanding; and improve quality of life for Somali youth by engaging them with positive activities that simultaneously connect them with their culture.

The overall program has three components: 1) An arts/cultural heritage club that meets biweekly and provides arts/cultural heritage education and peer mentoring for youth; 2) Three 8-week immersive workshops for youth with a recognized artist. The workshops are designed to introduce youth to traditional Somali arts/cultural heritage and encourage them to extend the traditions through their own artistic practice. 3) Public arts presentation and intercultural community engagement events designed to provide opportunities for local audiences to enjoy traditional and contemporary Somali arts/cultural heritage and provide opportunities for intercultural dialogue.

### **Examples of projects:**

#### **Fanka - Invisible Art Workshops:**

This weekly arts club component is involves arts learning, peer mentoring, and presentation, which is led by local teaching artists. On a weekly basis, youth receive instruction from a qualified teaching artist with a focus on traditional Somali poetry and then participate in a presentation. Workshop participants explore and learn the oral traditions of Somali art and heritage. Program participants also analyze and explore the works and then create their own work based on the traditional form. Through this process, youth are able to begin to understand how the traditional art/cultural forms can be a contemporary resource. They are encouraged to build bridges of understanding and awareness linking them to their cultural heritage and utilize these artistic techniques for personal expression. Through this process, the traditional art forms are preserved and renewed.



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### *Bridging Communities with Somali Arts/Cultural Heritage:*

The purpose of this project is to achieve two goals. For participating youth, we wanted to build their knowledge of traditional Somali art forms and increase their capacity to use Somali arts as a tool for communicating about a range of topics. For a 3-month period, youth participate in monthly art clubs where they are exposed to a different artistic medium and given instruction about the artistic form delivered by a trained Somali American artist. During art clubs, youth can determine how they want to use the medium to communicate their ideas, selecting individual or group performance formats, and use their time together to develop and hone their presentation. Historically, many of the youth served by Ka Joog and AADA (Rising Impact) are marginalized for a variety of factors that include truancy, struggles at home, or circumstances related to poverty and housing instability. “Bridging Communities” gives disenfranchised Somali American youth a positive outlet that helps them connect with their cultural heritage and experience prosocial activities with their peers. This program was held in Moorhead and in the Twin Cities.

### *The Chronicles of the Diaspora:*

Chronicles of The Diaspora play highlighted the experiences of two Somali-American immigrant families and examines their version of the American dream. Many forces play into the story of these families – Somali politics, identity crisis, terrorism, the strains of preserving culture, mental health, suicide, domestic abuse (topics many consider taboo), and highlights the misunderstandings and tensions between long-time Americans and their new Somali neighbors. Promises of prosperity and happiness are felt that reach far beyond the limbo of living in two cultures.

A discussion follows the play with actors and audience members regarding how we should move forward as a community and as a state regarding the issues that we face within the community. The play has been performed in three locations in Minneapolis, St. Paul and St. Cloud. With 11 actors, Somalis and non-Somalis.

### *Somali Independence Day Festival:*

The Somali Independence Day Festival is an annual celebration that is held in various locations in Minnesota. The first event starts in the Twin Cities and travels to various cities in the State. This is a memorable day for Somali Americans living in the United States, as it gives them a chance to celebrate Somalia’s Independence Day. The event also serves as a platform for building cohesiveness between communities around the state and promoting peace through art/humanities and education. This event brings over 35,000 participants from all over the state.



Eden Prairie, MN



Minneapolis, MN

St. Paul, MN



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### **Impact:**

- Cities served – Minneapolis, St. Paul, Eden Prairie, St. Cloud, Willmar, Rochester, Moorhead;
- 2,000+ people engaged through Chronicles play, including public officials, artists, organizers, professors and other community members from the Somali community and the general public;
- Worked with over 50 local artists;
- 95 art workshops, engaging Somalis and non-Somalis;
- We have been able to practice, teach, present, and document Somali art;
- Over 35,000 people took part of the Somali Independence Day Festival.

Some of the goals obtained throughout these projects include, but not limited to empowering Somali community of Minnesota and the general community by providing resources, tools, and space:

- To practice, teach, present, and document Somali traditional oral art forms;
- To increase intercultural understanding by sharing these art forms with non-Somali communities;
- To improve the quality of life for Somali youth by engaging them with positive activities that simultaneously connect them with their culture.

Below are examples of the feedback that we have been receiving from people with regards to this program in Greater Minnesota:

- White, F, 51+: “The program sure challenged stereotypes towards immigrants/Somalis, and it also did broaden my knowledge that helps me remember the richness of all cultures. I will see my community different moving forward and start talking to my neighbors more often. Thank you so much for inviting me and my family to the program.”
- White, M, 31-40: “Not all Somali people came to the USA at the same time.”
- White, F, 21-30: “I had the impression that immigrants/refugees would not want to return [to home country/Somalia]. This is clearly not true for many. Somalia is home and the country of your people and a country you love. It’s the colonialism and war. Additionally, I was impressed to see the pride and involvement of the youth. It is something that is challenging for all groups of people - but the pride and just sheer numbers of youth present is impressive!”
- White, F, 21-30: “People are quick to think immigrants are just trying to take U.S. resources, but there is so much hard work, pride, determination. I hope one day, if someone gets a degree in another country, it is recognized in the U.S. Caucasians can learn from the importance of respecting elders that Somalis have.”



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- White, F, 21-30: "Caucasians can learn from the importance of respecting elders that the Somalis have."
- White, F, 21-30: "I attended for the educational component and especially appreciate the speaker."
- White, F, 21-30: "This was eye opening for me. I am thankful to be part of this community."
- Many people commented they didn't know how important poetry was to Somali culture
- Somali, F, 21-30: "I learned the wonderful work and art being created to keep our culture Alive."
- Somali, F, 21-30: "[I learned] that there are Somali youth trying to learn more about their roots."
- White, F, 41-50: "Thank you for sharing! Wonderful to learn about Somali language and poems in the culture."
- Somali, F, 21-30: "Thank you tremendously. Humbling, makes me emotional our story is being told by us."
- White, F, 21-30: "Please do more programs like."

Below are the results of the surveys were taken throughout the program:

- 93% of the participants said that the workshops increased their appreciation of the art;
- 96% of the participants felt that the artists did well conveying the information of the Workshops;
- 95% of the participants said that they would attend another Fanka workshop;
- 94% of the participants said that the workshop increased their knowledge of Somali art.