

## **2017 Community Engagement Fellows Project Report**

### **Telling the Story –**

#### **Kelly Hart, Executive Director at Allied Arts of Whatcom County.**

We know that most of our different programs at Allied Arts help to provide opportunities, but have not adequately tracked or documented this in the past to really focus on the impact versus the more quantitative data that we compile for grant evaluations and financial reporting.

The goal for my 2017 Community Engagement Fellows Project was to work on developing better ways to tell the story about Allied Arts of Whatcom County's programs and how they impact the community. Through networking, collaborations and referrals, we learned of new ways to document the significant role the arts play in our community as well as creating some new community partnerships to better reach the underserved people in our community.

New this year, Allied Arts of Whatcom County has brought on an AmeriCorps Vista member. Important components of her duties are to track, document, and evaluate the programs and then devise ways to use this information for promotional and fundraising purposes.

It has been wonderful to have both our AmeriCorps member working with us and my fellowship projects taking place at the same time. We have had amazing opportunities arise due to the great networking with both the Community Fellowship program and the outreach through the AmeriCorps program.

Allied Arts has had a strong internship and Service Learning program with both WWU and WCC for years. This year as part of this project we worked with three students from Lori Daniel's Organizational Change Class and they made a video and flier documenting the importance of our Arts Education Program and the Children's Art Walk through a combination of quotes, images and statistics. These tools will be used to tell our story on our web page, social media and in fundraising efforts. We also had three interns assisting with creating social media posts to promote our programs in much more detailed ways (including photos and video) than we had done in the past.

I made a number of great connections at Community Engagement events that have led to conversations and projects that are still in progress, that will help to tell the Allied Arts Story. At a Community Engagement Forum, I made connections with Kate Foster at WWU Woodring College and Deb Currier - WWU Theater dept who are now helping to connect Arts Education and Theater students to further document our arts education program while learning invaluable teaching skills.

One ah-ha moments I had during a Community Engagement Forum about Skill Sharing was that Allied Arts needed to re-name their “Art as Business Classes” to “Art as Business Skill Sharing Session.” As soon as we did that, The number of applications for people wanting to lead the session tripled and the Facebook posts about the events skyrocketed!

I think more than anything, the Community Engagement Fellowship has helped me to realize the wealth of enthusiasm, knowledge and skills our local higher education staff and community leader have to make our community a better place. I loved hearing about everyone else’s projects and helping to brainstorm solutions or ways in which to collaborate. The variety of projects and scope in which they improve society is mind boggling!

I look forward to participating in more Community Fellowship events in the future. The combination of academic professionals and community leaders is a wonderful think tank for inspiration, motivation and creativity to help make our world a better place.