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## The lowdown on Ypsi's B.Side

By *Mark* | August 19, 2009

Over the past week or so, I've been exchanging emails with Eastern Michigan University's Jessica "Decky" Alexander about a youth entrepreneurship program called [B.Side](#), that's run through the university's Office of Academic Service-Learning. Here, for those of you interested in entrepreneurship, local job creation and local opportunities for young people, is our mini-interview.

**MARK:** So, what's your role with B. Side, and how did you get involved? I know that you've been active with local youth dialogue/performance groups and the like, but entrepreneurship seems like a pretty big jump.

**DECKY:** Well, I've been involved with local youth programming for years, from Peace Neighborhood Center to YAG to Ozone Drop In, but mostly in spoken word, performance and social 'issue' theatre. I inherited the B.Side when I became the director of the Office of Academic Service-Learning at EMU. My predecessor, Kathy Stacey, initiated many local programs focused on youth voice (YYEA and Community Youth Mapping) out of this office. My experience with youth as well as my sense of place here - were helpful as I immersed myself in this office. My own personal background (the world I grew up in) was business driven so in an odd way the intersections of youth, business and community are not so far off my radar.

I also do have some strong relationships within the community given I live here and thus (I believe) have given some additional support to the program. As the director of AS-L, I oversee the B.Side, but it is run on a day-to-day basis by Jack Bidlack, Angelina Broderick and our outreach coordinator, Courtney Fitzpatrick. Jack and Angelina have been involved youth voice and programming and/or local business for years. Courtney has been involved with the Washtenaw Cultural Plan and sits on the board of Community Records, which is one our creative partners in the B.Side of A - they run the music/sound skills workshops.

The B.Side of A (The Business Side of Art) was launched to fill the gap between what some of the youth involved in the B.Side were dreaming of creating and the skills needed to do so. So, in the B.Side of A, which is supported through the Summer Youth Employment Program (Michigan Works!), youth receive training (12 hours a week for 8 weeks) in various disciplines within the arts, such as graphic design, textiles, and culinary arts. This 'training' will support them as they work to pilot their own youth-owned or youth-run businesses and enterprises, or create their own product or service. It's something that may provide them some economic independence or simply may orient them to new found capabilities. In this program, we were able to hire 12 local fine and applied artists who serve as workshop instructors. This is our first summer of the program and we hope to continue to offer 'skill-based' workshops throughout the

year and thus provide more teaching and artistic opportunities for locals. This program is loosely modeled after a couple programs - one is called Artists for Humanity in Boston and the other is YAAW, Youth Artists At Work out of Toledo. This summer program, because it is funded by Michigan Works, has restrictions as to who can participate (these are financial). These restrictions are different than the entire B.Side program, which is community-based program. Any youth between the ages of 13-20 can participate in B.Side. If they cannot get to the B.Side site (the EMU College of Business), we provide bus tokens, etc. to help get them there, or work to coordinate carpools, etc.

**MARK:** I'm new to this whole space of kids' entrepreneurship. Are there other programs around the country that seek to teach kids about such things? And, if so, how's B.Side different?

**DECKY:** There are some programs - most notably, the [Network for Teaching Entrepreneurship](#) (NIFTE). One can buy their curriculum or receive training in their philosophy. There's also the Generation E program in entrepreneurship education. B.Side staff was trained in Generation E but adapted the curriculum, as B.Side is not a school-based program, but a free community-based program. Most 'training' in this area is school centered. What distinguishes B.Side is that it's has four components. ENTERPRISES - youth run businesses - providing employment and job readiness. We currently have two enterprises: Digital Inclusion and the B Green Garden.

BSIDE BASICS – A curriculum program.

YOUNG MOGULS - where youth are provided workshops , mentors and internships—and where they can hone business plans and apply for micro-loans to launch their businesses if possible.

BSIDE of A- youth participate in internship with a local business, attend skills workshops with local artists, receive overview of entrepreneurship and are encouraged to create/vision a product or concept through their skill workshops.

**MARK:** I know it's only been in operation for a short while, but do you have any successes to speak of?

**DECKY:** Well, it's just been around for a little more than a year and a half... How do you define success? Are there tons of youth launched businesses? No. Is there an emerging youth 'entrepreneurial' culture? Perhaps. By summer's end we will have two (including a Bstore) enterprises, with one where youth can display and showcase their products. So, instead of launching a full-fledged business, we are focusing on youth also launching and developing their own projects, services and products: BBQ Sauce, Catering Business, Memoir, an Ezine, etc..

SHAMELESS but APPROPRIATE PLUG: Please join us for the B.Side of A Program Showcase where youth will share and showcase their products and visions on Thursday, August 27th, 2009, from 4:00-6:00 p.m. (light hors d'oeuvres), at Celebrations (formerly Cady's) in Depot Town.

There have been several youth launched businesses including-catering, tutoring business, t-shirt design, music production, and lawn care...

**MARK:** Tell me more about BStore. Also, I'm curious as to physical space in general. Is there a place out of which all of this is run?

**DECKY:** The B.Store and the physical space are in development—since this is a university program (at this juncture) it's caught up in liability issues. We hope to have both an online site (or create one through /facilitate places on Etsy) and have a downtown storefront.... so... no, there is no current physical storefront space, yet.

**MARK:** So, how many kids would you say that you're dealing with, and how do they break down demographically? Are they typically older students, kids from the surrounding townships, kids who do well in school? Kids that haven't traditionally done well in other programs?

**DECKY:** This summer we will have 60 youth in our summer program (some of the youth are B.Side Young Moguls); 30 active youth in the Young Moguls with several of them involved in internships. The youth are primarily ages 14-16 and come from all areas of Ypsilanti including houses like Miller House which are affiliated with Ozone. I can get you the actual demographic breakdown—but recruitment is quite broad (school cafeterias, classrooms, principals, other social programs, social workers, churches, Ozone and youth programs such as 21st Century, Upward Bound, and GEAR UP. The majority of the youth (80%) are from Ypsilanti and Ypsilanti Township (Willow Run area not necessarily Lincoln School ) The youth come from families of various economic means, but as we are in Ypsilanti a majority of the youth fall into the middle and lower economic rungs.

Certainly one of the goals of the program is to increase high school retention or rather focus on the relevancy of school work in real life, but it is not the overall focus of the program. By default a focus of the program has been access to higher education as much of the program is housed on EMU's campus. We have been able to assist youth in applying for college and seeking financial support, etc.

**MARK:** Now I've also seen B-Side doing things in Ann Arbor. Is that a different chapter? Or do you and the Ypsi folks have events at in Ann Arbor as well? If I'm not mistaken, the loading dock behind the new Neutral Zone building on East Washington has a B-Side logo on it.

**DECKY:** That is the bside records of the Neutral Zone—different....

**MARK:** So, what haven't I asked that I should have?

**DECKY:** I guess to me—this program really at its core is about both access—resources, people, possibilities and engagement. Youth know little about the community in which they live—all 60th youth this summer are 'interning' with local artisans, businesses and non=profits, many of them are working with local businesses in creating a product for them (website or business card). The B.Side is not without its flaws , but it does has the potential to transform the lives of many youth simply by providing place and

purpose. Will it spur some youth economic revolution in Ypsilanti? Perhaps. As more youth are given tools to both start a business and the artistic or applied skills necessary to launch such businesses there may be some kind of renaissance of youth art and work papering this area. It's too early to tell and at this point like many programs still trying to find its footing and funding.

This entry was posted in [Education](#), [entrepreneurism](#) and tagged [Angelina Broderick](#), [Artists for Humanity](#), [B Green Garden](#), [B.Side](#), [BBQ sauce](#), [Boston](#), [Bside Records](#), [Bstore](#), [catering](#), [Community Records](#), [Community Youth Mapping](#), [Courtney Fitzpatrick](#), [Decky Alexander](#), [Digital Inclusion](#), [Eastern Michigan University](#), [Etsy](#), [ezine](#), [Gear Up](#), [Generation E](#), [interviews](#), [Jack Bidlack](#), [Kathy Stacey](#), [Michigan Works](#), [Miller House](#), [Network for Teaching Entrepreneurship](#), [Neutral Zone](#), [Office of Academic Service-Learning](#), [Ozone](#), [skill-based workshops](#), [social issue theatre](#), [spoken word](#), [Summer Youth Employment Program](#), [Toledo](#), [Upward Bound](#), [Washtenaw Cultural Plan](#), [Young Moguls](#), [Youth Artists At Work](#), [youth programs](#), [YYEA](#). Bookmark the [permalink](#). [Post a comment](#) or leave a [trackback](#): [Trackback URL](#).