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NEWS | WEST HARLEM

## Local arts program for girls expands with West Harlem Development Corporation money



Courtesy of Dena adriance

DRAMA QUEENS | Girl Be Heard received \$44,552 from the WHDC to expand its program.

By [SAMANTHA PERLSTEIN](#) / Columbia Daily Spectator  
December 5, 2013, 3:25am

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

Through song, theater, poetry, spoken word, and dance, even more West Harlem girls will be able to raise their voices and speak up about the issues that are important to them.

Girl Be Heard, a nonprofit theater collective and educational program, was a second-cycle grant recipient of the West Harlem Development Corporation. The organization used the \$44,552 in grant money to open an after-school program for high school girls in Manhattan Community District 9 earlier this month.

For two years, Girl Be Heard ran a pilot program with Bread and Roses Integrated Arts High School in Harlem, creating a space where 15 to 25 female students could discuss issues that affect girls within their community. Now, Girl Be Heard will be expanding the program using the grant money from WHDC.

“We were doing a pilot program there, 45 minutes once a week during the lunch hour, and it was just really hard to do what we needed to do in that time period,” Dena Adriance, director for educational programs, said.

Girl Be Heard will move the pilot program to an after-school format and will serve girls from both public and private schools throughout

West Harlem. The group will meet for two and a half hours once a week.

The after-school program will tie in what Girl Be Heard is already doing with their citywide theater company but make it accessible to high school students within West Harlem.

“The performance is the end product of creating a safe space for girls to tell their story. We always like to share a fully produced show that is youth-led and youth-driven and share that with the community,” said executive director Jessica Greer Morris, who was listed in Newsweek as one of the “150 Fearless Women Who Shake Up the World.”

Girls accepted into the program are encouraged to share pieces that they have written in front of the other participants. The students will also participate in a dialogue, led by Teaching Artists, to discuss issues that are important to them.

“So often these girls are dealing with things in isolation,” Adriance said. “Girls will share that they have been cutting themselves and dealing with body issues, that they have been dealing with eating disorders, that they have been dealing with issues with their families at home, dealing with homelessness.”

The after-school program will give the students a space not only to share what they are feeling, but also to support one another in the process.

Bread and Roses’ Substance Abuse Prevention and Intervention counselor Emma Thomas was an important figure in establishing Girl Be Heard in West Harlem two years ago. She believed that the area would benefit significantly from the program.

“I’ve seen the results of their work with some of my former students who have since graduated and gone off, and I really think that they make a difference in young women’s lives,” said Thomas.

“We really took a chance on Harlem because we knew there was huge need,” Greer Morris said.

The WHDC grant money will also be used to fund Girl Be Heard’s theater company, allowing the participants to perform in schools throughout West Harlem.

By bringing shows into West Harlem schools, Girl Be Heard hopes that the strong voices of its girls will make an impact on the community. Its priority, however, is empowering the girls in the program.

“We really do believe in the philosophy that if a girl changes her own life, she changes the life of girls everywhere,” Greer Morris said.

[news@columbiaspectator.com](mailto:news@columbiaspectator.com) | [@ColumbiaSpec](https://twitter.com/ColumbiaSpec)

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# SPECTRUM

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By Breanna Leslie-Skye

Mar 25, 10:12am

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## Of Kardashian and cars

By Tova Kamioner

Mar 25, 1:11am

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By Samantha Sokol

Mar 24, 10:15pm

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### Bookstore Burglars Booked

This week in history in 1950, four juvenile delinquents who looted the Columbia University Bookstore were remanded to the Youth Home until their trial before the Children's Court.