

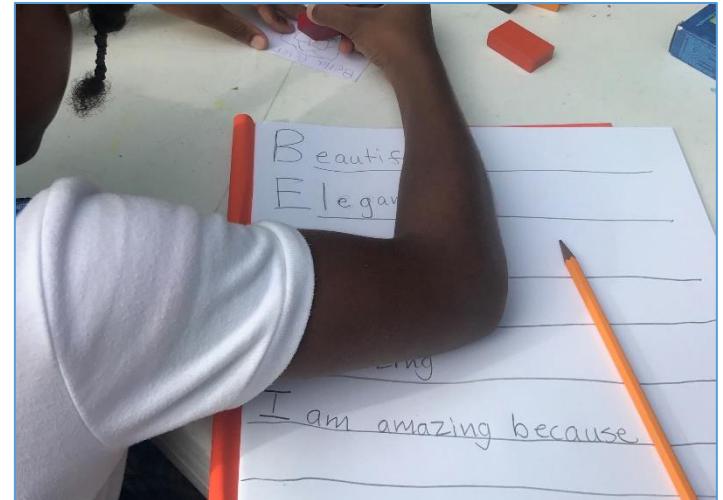


## IGNITING THE SPARK OF LITERACY

SPARK, held at the Caribbean Museum Center for the Arts and hosted by teen leaders from SCF Youth Advisory Council and graduates from Denver School of Science and Technology, was a success. We had 9 teen leaders from Denver and 6 teen leaders from YAC present for the duration of the two week reading enhancement program. We had 21 second graders from the Frederiksted area participate in the program and over 50 people attend the final performance on June 7<sup>th</sup>. People in attendance included supportive adults in the 2<sup>nd</sup> graders lives and other community members. All teen leaders were present for the duration and we had a range between 18-21 second graders attend each of the days. As a result, the ratio between 'teacher' and second grader was about 1:3.

The second graders completed in-take and exit surveys during the two week program and the findings indicated that at the start of the program 44% of them said that reading was difficult and on the exit survey, only 16% said reading was difficult. In regards to student empowerment, at the start of the program 94% said they knew what to do when they read something that didn't make sense and at the end of the program, only 55% said they knew what to do. This might be due to the fact that in a smaller learning environment the learner was able to be more vulnerable in recognizing their weaknesses and saying they did not know what to do.

Other successes of the program were that the Denver teen leaders were able to meet the second graders at their school and walk them down, since they were out of school. The walk down to CMCA provided a physical release for the second graders and concluded with a check in and active games on the waterfront prior to going inside the CMCA to begin the station work. Beginning the station work went well as the teen leaders got their groove in taking attendance and moving small groups across the street rather than the entire group of 2<sup>nd</sup> graders at one time, having snack provided at the first station ensured that 2<sup>nd</sup> graders were not hungry and got to



work right away. The topics explored at the five stations were: comprehension, flexible thinking, vocabulary expansion, creative writing and poetry.

The second graders were moved by the program and the relationships that they made with the teen hosts. One second grader had a hard time saying goodbye to a Denver student and was encouraged to get the Denver student's address so he could write him letters. Another grandmother approached a teen leader and reported that her grandchild had not been the same since his father passed away and this program seemed to light something in him again. The teen leaders witnessed and supported the individual growth of each second grade student, which was realized when all the 2<sup>nd</sup> graders were able to read their own poem to the audience at the closing event. When we began practicing for the performance, there were a number of second graders who were not interested in speaking on stage or needed a teen leader next to them.

The Youth Advisory Council is currently designing the blueprint, in partnership with the Caribbean Museum Center, for an annual, expanded program that provides more learning time and targeted support/training in positive youth development for the teen leaders. The ultimate goal is to build a sustainable, reading intervention program in order to close the widening gap between basic/below basic readers and proficient/beyond grade level readers. *For more information on how you can support this Initiative and the Council, please contact the Foundation directly.*



## High school students help spark learning in elementary counterparts

**MARKIDA SCOTLAND**

ST. CROIX — Eighteen high school students are winding down a two-week, after-school program dedicated to mentoring and educating their elementary school counterparts as part of the SPARK program.

SPARK is a partnership between the Denver School of Science and Technology, St. Croix Foundation, the Caribbean Museum Center for the Arts and Claude O. Markoe Elementary School, according to Tralice Bracy, CMCArts board chair.

As part of the program, 18 students — nine civic actors from the DDS and nine from the STX foundation's Youth Advisory

Council — were paired with 18 second-graders from Claude O. Markoe and second graders from the Frederiksted Boys and Girls Club, Bracy said.

The program is set to conclude at 6 tonight at the museum center.

"Under the tutelage of former St. Croix educator and YAC founder Leslie Hamdorff, and current YAC Advisor Emanuella Perez, the older students will pick up the second graders after school and walk with them to the Caribbean Museum Center for the Arts for SPARK," Bracy said.

She said the high school students have been engaging elementary school students in cross-cultural activities, providing them

with additional reading skills and tools to help improve their literacy levels, and guiding them in the writing of poems of their own creation with the themes of unity, healing, empowerment and community.

"CMCArts is delighted to be a part of this exciting program and hopes to SPARK an after-school program that will continue during the school year," Bracy said.

A high school student from the SPARK program, a collaboration between Denver School of Science and Technology, St. Croix Foundation, Caribbean Museum Center for the Arts and Claude O. Markoe Elementary School, help students with their studies.



*St. Croix Avis, July 2017*