

News from the Village

the children's
village

Winter 2015



Andre Charles took what he learned at The Children's Village to become a successful urban artist. Now he is sharing what he learned about art and life with a new generation of teens.

CV Alum Rises to Top of NYC Art Scene

Once you pass through the picket fence of CV alum Andre Charles' home studio in Brooklyn, you think you have entered a dreamland. Every surface that could possibly retain paint has been tagged with Andre's bright, beautiful signature art. Ladders and enormous pieces of wood are ready for his next inspiration, which currently is an enormous original design for The Children's Village. Check out the video at childrensvillage.org/AndreCharles

Andre, who is arguably one of New York City's most successful urban artists, has designed for Donna Karan's DKNY brands and Seinfeld, and worked alongside Keith Haring. But Andre's world was not always beautiful. He came to CV in the early 80's because dyslexia and ADHD caused him to act out in school. At 12 years old, he was unable to read or write. At CV, he learned to use his hands and his art to focus his energy. Staff gave him lanyard string to keep his hands busy so he could focus in class, a trick he still uses anytime he needs to concentrate. He fondly remembers his local Dobbs Ferry mentors, a couple who took him for birthdays and holidays and who "believed in me and gave me hope."

Andre's first designs were flyers for CV events such as the circus, which he also built and designed the sets for. On home visits to NYC, Andre would study the graffiti on the trains and come back to campus and practice. He made posters for the cottage walls and he would take magic markers to the CV-distributed jeans and sneakers. Before he knew it, kids were trading the Nike's they got from home for Andre's designs on off-brand CV shoes. That's where he learned his "hustle" which eventually became a successful career on the urban art scene.

CV taught me to choose my career and to be the absolute best I could be at whatever I chose.

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Just \$20 helps make a dream into a memory

For most of us, the holidays are a time for family, togetherness, and belonging. It's the season for hugging and laughter, sharing delicious meals and family traditions, and making new memories that will stay with us forever.

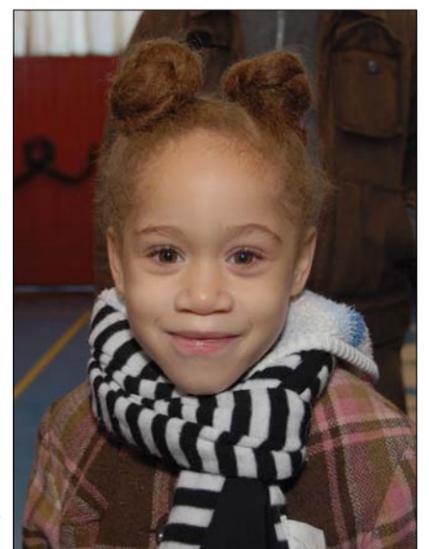
Unfortunately, for many children we care for, there is no family to hug and few traditions to share. But we can give kids special experiences that they will remember for years to come.

Just \$20 helps make a dream into a memory for a child who can't be home for the holidays. Dreams of flying down the mountain on a snowboard, cheering in the stands at a basketball game, or sipping hot chocolate on ice skates will be made possible with your support.

Will you help us make holiday memories this year?

You can use the enclosed envelope or make an online donation at:

childrensvillage.org/donate



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About The Village

Founded in 1851, The Children's Village works in partnership with families to help society's most vulnerable children so that they become educationally proficient, economically productive, and socially responsible members of their communities.

Finding Families for Lonely Kids

Maria was sixteen years old and she had no one. She and her two younger siblings had been adopted when Maria was nine years old, but when Maria became too troublesome, her adoptive mother gave up on her and sent her to CV, where her behavior worsened.

We had to do something to give Maria hope, so we called on our Family Finding Team, a group whose job it is to locate and connect kids with lost family members.

Interviewing Maria provided names and approximate ages of eight older siblings. Maria looked through hundreds of Facebook pictures. Nobody looked familiar. Everybody was disappointed.

We even hired a Private Investigator to track down an aunt out of state. No luck. Maria was losing hope.

Out of desperation, the team made a last ditch effort and took Maria for a car ride through Brooklyn, where she hadn't lived since she was nine. They spent the entire day driving around, relying on seven year old memories to turn down whichever street Maria suggested. Hours into the expedition, Maria spotted a bodega, the kind that is on every other corner of New York City.

"This is it! Turn left, two blocks, turn right. Stop! Seventh floor."

As they were examining the mailboxes for a matching name, an elderly woman stepped out of the elevator. She remembered Maria, she remembered the family, and she remembered just enough information that our Private Investigator was able to run with it.

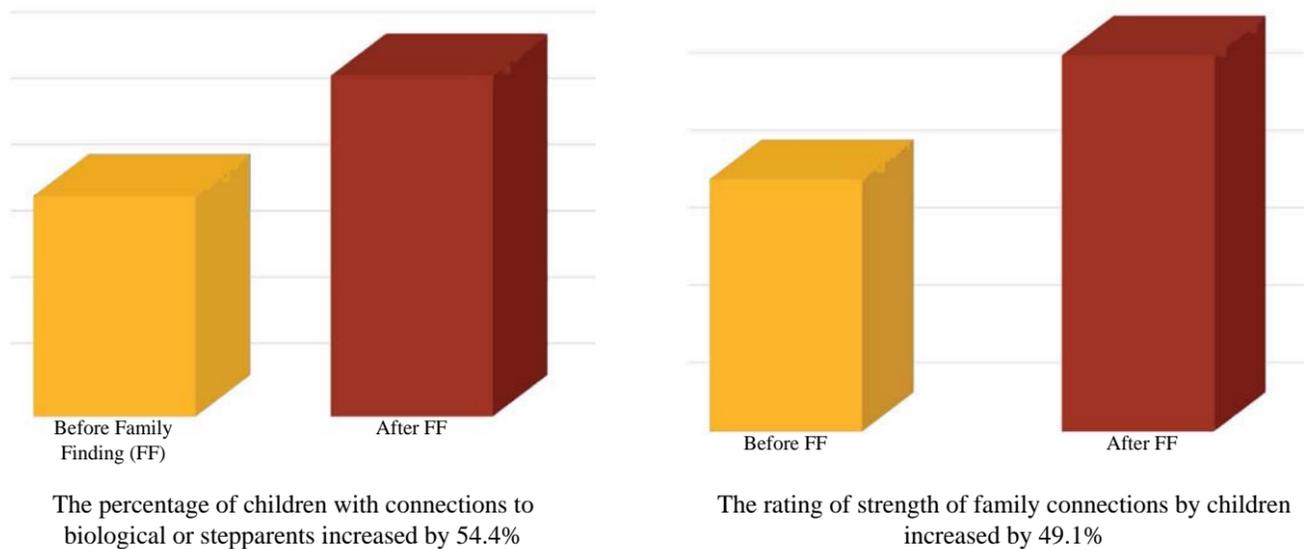
In September, Maria went to meet her aunt, who, it turns out, raised all of her older siblings. The aunt had been looking for her, but grew discouraged and lost hope. She wants to care for Maria, as do two other family members.

Maria went from being alone in the world with no identity to being a part of an enormous, loving, and supportive family. See below for how we are finding families for other CV kids.



Outcomes Corner: Family Finding

The Family Finding Department at The Children's Village identifies the loneliest children in our care and works to identify family connections for them. This program is evaluated by the Silberman School of Social Work at Hunter College. Here's what they found in their most recent assessment:



CV in Iraq: A Mission of Peace and Collaboration

CV staff ambassadors, David Collins (Assistant Vice President of Programs and Policy) and Lia Schwartz (Chief of Staff), spent five days in Baghdad at the invitation of the Iraqi government. The purpose was to identify how CV can expand its assistance with the orphan crisis facing Iraq – a project CV started with the Iraqi Children Foundation in 2009. While there, the team visited IDP (Internally Displaced Persons) camps, orphanages, and after-school centers with an eye toward learning what is working and what help CV can provide in the future.

While our focus will always be on keeping children safe and families together right here in New York, CV is increasingly being asked to share our expertise overseas. In addition to our work with Iraq, CV provides consultation to family programs in the Netherlands and Australia.

Read more here: childrensvillage.org/cv-in-iraq-a-special-report



Senator Gillibrand Selected CV for National Award

In October, The Children's Village received the Angels in Adoption Award presented by the Congressional Coalition on Adoption Institute. Each member of Congress selects an awardee who exemplifies excellence in services and advocacy for adoption. CV was Senator Gillibrand's choice for New York.

In her nomination, Senator Gillibrand wrote "From their efforts to help disconnected youth, to community outreach programs, and so much more, The Children's Village consistently reminds the entire foster care community that the children come first. Under the careful guidance of Dr. Kohomban, The Children's Village does an exemplary job of supporting the New York Metropolitan Area's families and at-risk youth."

CV staff accept Angels in Adoption Award in Washington



Letter from China

"Thank you for believing in me," writes CV alumnus Maurice to President and CEO Jeremy Kohomban.

Maurice is currently a student at NYU spending the semester in Shanghai where he is "learning about myself and the world while getting highly motivated to craft my career." In his letter from China, Maurice wrote, "I just wanted to check in with you to let you know that China has been a wonderful experience. I'm really grateful I got the chance to make it out here for the semester. Without your support and the help of The Children's Village, this experience would have been challenging to make happen. Thank you."

We are so proud of Maurice's determination and success!



"I am grateful and blessed that my son is with you, praying for him each day that he is given the tools to walk his path without anger and knowing that he is a unique individual that can achieve great things. Thank you for all that you do in the lives of the children that come to you.

Peace and Blessings."

- A Mother

CV Alum Rises to Top...

Andre left CV and returned home to the Bronx. He tried to get a job at the supermarket, but he still wasn't able to read or write very well. "I would be in line with pretty girls and I was embarrassed that I couldn't complete the applications. That's when I knew I had to be my own boss."

Rather than selling drugs, he capitalized on the thriving drug trade in his neighborhood and sold custom t-shirts to the dealers. "I wasn't a crack dealer. I was a crack t-shirt dealer." Everyone in his neighborhood was buying custom clothing from Andre. Businesses were paying him to decorate their storefronts. He became the leader of a graffiti crew in the Bronx.



"I learned to be a leader at CV. You either followed bad kids or you became your own leader and did good. People followed me and it was my choice to do good or bad. I always chose good, but I never judged anybody for their hustle. All I could ask was that you be the best you can be. If you're going to be a drug dealer, be the best drug dealer. If you're going to steal cars, be the best. CV taught me to choose my career and to be the absolute best I could be at whatever I chose. I always chose art."

Today, Andre welcomes neighborhood kids into his studio to help with projects and events. He gives kids a safe place to hang out. "They hear my story, they see my energy, and they're motivated to do stuff." One of these teens, Isaac, was helping in the studio during our visit.

Isaac said, "I'm trying not to be in the street a lot. I know I can help out here and I'll be doing something positive. Andre is full of energy. He's a kid at heart and he has something new for me every time I come, so I keep coming back."

Andre's advice for current CV youth: "If you're smart and you have an idea, stick with it. No matter what, don't believe that you can't do it. Take advantage of everything that's free up there. Grab it. Learn from it and hold it in your life forever. When you come back from CV and into the jungle, nobody is going to give you a break like they do at CV. There are no breaks in the real world. Be grateful for everything you're being given and taught. It will shape the rest of your life if you know how to use it."

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For more information, visit our website or contact Linda Stutz at lstutz@childrensvillage.org or 914-648-3319.



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Your donation really matters.



The New York Giants, along with Whole Foods, the Rosemark Group, and CV's Leadership Council, gave away 500 turkeys and bags of fixings to families at CV's Polo Grounds Community Center in Harlem.



Top: CV programs hosted Thanksgiving dinners for kids and families (pics from the shelter--top left and foster care--top right).



Left: CV's Leadership Council hosted their holiday fundraiser with more than 100 guests. Proceeds will be used to fulfill holiday wishes for CV teens.



Volunteers from United Water NY packed boxes of Thanksgiving food for CV's most vulnerable families.



The children, families, and staff at The Children's Village wish you a happy holiday season and thank you for your generous donations of funds, food, and gifts that make our holidays so very special.

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