

Local group helps at-risk youth score downtown jobs

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CHICAGO (WLS) -- A local organization is making us Chicago Proud by helping some of the city's most at risk youth.

The **All Stars Project of Chicago** is marking 10 years of reaching young people in some of the city's poorest communities, and giving them hope through the power of performance.

For Jakira Robinson and Michael Chester, the games they play aren't silly - they are helping them to get outside their comfort zone and build confidence.

"I've changed dramatically, I have a different outlook on life," said Robinson.

"It brings out the fact that everyone can be silly, everyone can perform and it's OK to be who you are," said Chester.

And once Chester realized that, he and Robinson said they've been discovering their full potential. Thanks, in part, to the All Stars Project of Chicago, and the Development School for Youth.

"I think it's really important for more organizations like this because you're giving kids a second chance but a different perspective on life," Robinson said.

"We are a youth development organization, we are developing young people through the use of performance," said David Cherry, City Leader of All Stars Project of Chicago.

Not just through traditional performance on a stage, like at the All Stars talent show network. But also by taking young people from some of Chicago's poorest neighborhoods and introducing them to the thriving business community downtown.

"You can show young people that they can access all sorts of new ways of being in the world, new ways of talking, new ways of sitting, new ways of relating to people that's all performance that doesn't change who they are but it adds to who they are and who they can become," said Julie Lenner, executive director of All Stars Project of Chicago.

"We introduce young people to our partners in the business community we do that through workshops on resume writing, public speaking how to interview for a job," said Cherry.

And all this leads to a paid summer internship for many of the youth.

In fact, this year, 75 young people will get a summer job, the largest group ever.

"Being in an internship in the summer it gives us a chance to learn from our mistakes, in a way that helps us grow," said Michael Chester, a DSY graduate.

"I never had my mind set that I was going to work in a corporate world, where I come from that's not what people do, it's not our norm," Robinson said. "And now here I am with three big corporate companies on my resume and I'm only 20, just getting started."

The All Stars Project is just starting a five-year campaign to build a new after school center in downtown Chicago. It's going to be all privately funded, and modeled after two successful centers in New York and New Jersey.

The center is expected to open in 2020.



Jakira Robinson, an All Stars Project Graduate of Development School for Youth, describes her experience with the program to reporters.