Arts4Life: The Art of Digital Photography

Cuyahoga County Public Library

Intergenerational

Arts4Life: The Art of Digital Photography

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Byline

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*Editor's note: This Program Model is part of a series highlighting the work of the **Lifetime Arts Affiliates**, a cohort of 20 libraries that has been working with Lifetime Arts Inc. to launch professionally conducted arts education for older adults. For more information, check out **Lifetime Arts' Creative Aging Toolkit for Public Libraries**, a free online resource for librarians that provides information about creative aging research, best practices, and practical advice for planning and implementing creative aging programs.*

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In our library system, we focus on lifelong learning and offering convenient and engaging programs for all ages that inspire curiosity and support individual growth. The Art of Digital Photography program was an eight-week, beginning photography series for adults 55 and older. The program ran from April 9 to May 28, 2015, on Thursdays from 10 a.m. to 12:30 p.m.

Participants were instructed by a local teaching artist on the technical and artistic sides of digital photography. Homework assignments were given, and program attendees took fields trips so they could practice their skills. The program finished with a photography showcase and reception.

Advanced Planning

The goal of this program was to provide a meaningful creative arts program for the older adults in our Strongsville community. We needed to choose an arts discipline that would increase mental engagement, skills, knowledge and appreciation of the art form. We also hoped our participants would make new friendships or connections and build a stronger bond with the library.

Beginning in January 2014, I began surveying older adult patrons to gauge their interest and preferred art forms. Surveys were distributed to program attendees, library users, local senior living facilities and the local senior center. Based on participants' responses and after meeting with staff at the local senior center, we decided to host a digital photography art series. The senior center already offered many programs in painting, dance and other art forms; digital photography is something that is always popular in our community, and it wasn’t offered anywhere else.

Marketing

Promotion for our photography arts series began in January 2015. With the help of our amazing Cuyahoga County Public Library graphics and marketing team, we were able to begin promoting the program three months prior to the beginning of the series. We created an Arts4Life brochure to highlight the creative arts program series for older adults. (Strongsville Branch was just one of four branches in the

system offering arts programs for older adults.) In addition to the brochure, we created a special program display, and we had posters and a digital media player slide to promote the program in-house. **(View the program's brochure and poster under Attachments at right.)**

For promotion outside the library, a special Arts4Life website was created (and taken down after the series), an article was sent as an email blast to our library patrons, press releases were sent to local newspapers and community members, and a blurb about the program was published on an Ohio news website.

We were very successful in spreading the word about this important arts series. Registration for the program started in February 2015 and the class filled to the 20-person capacity quickly. We also had a lengthy waiting list of patrons eager for a space to open up for the series.

Budgeting

Our budget for this grant-sponsored program was $2,500. **(View the project planning form with budget details under Attachments at right.)** The grant required that we interview and hire a professional teaching artist with experience in teaching sequential arts classes. We chose Mark Nowak, lead photographer of Image Visions Studio and president of the Erie Shores Photography Club. The majority of our budget was spent on his instruction and planning fees. We were grateful to have this programming budget as it helped us secure a dedicated and knowledgeable teaching artist. He put in a great deal of time, both in and out of the class, for this eight-week art series.

The remainder of our budget was spent on the supplies needed for the culminating event: a photography showcase and reception to display the participants' works. The instructor purchased 11-by-14-inch enlarged prints and had them matted to a 16-by-20 size. As a cost-cutting measure for the future, I would suggest exploring the possibility of donations for supplies and prints from local community businesses or arts organizations. As this program was very successful, I anticipate that the library system will seek funding from outside agencies that would be willing to support further arts programs for older adults.

Day-of-event Activity

As the program coordinator who facilitated this art series, I made sure the meeting room space was set up classroom-style with access to AV equipment for the instructor. Class handouts, name tags and sign-in sheets were distributed each week for the class. Through the generosity of our local Friends group, coffee and refreshments were provided for the class. I attended the classes to observe, take notes and assist with any technical challenges that might come up during instruction. The instructor and I formed a strong partnership, which helped each week's class go smoothly.

The only unexpected challenge we faced was that many of the participants were not as tech-savvy as others. They were learning about cameras settings but had trouble emailing homework assignments and changing the size of their images in photo editing software. With help from myself and other participants that were more comfortable, we were able to instruct those who needed a little more guidance.

Program Execution

Our photography series was a tremendous success. We were surprised to see that the participants were so committed to this program. Our group of 20 adults, with an average age of 64, came every week eager to learn and enjoyed Mark Nowak's teaching style. The class also participated by submitting homework assignments, which were then critiqued by the instructor.

You could really see the progression the class made as the series went along. They learned a great deal of information on how to use the different settings on their cameras and how to improve their composition. We had participants with both point-and-shoot digital cameras and those with more professional DSLR cameras. It didn't matter what type of camera they had because all the participants were able to take beautiful photographs, which were displayed at the showcase reception.

We were so pleased to see the friendships that formed over the eight weeks. A photo class Facebook group was created for the series, which the participants still

use to communicate!

At the end of the series, participants were asked to complete both a library program evaluation and a Lifetime Arts post-program participant survey. The library program evaluation was used to rate the participants' satisfaction with the program as a whole and to find out how they heard about it. The majority of participants surveyed were very happy with the program, and they felt they had learned a great deal. Many hoped to continue practicing and taking photos in their spare time. The Lifetime Arts survey was used to rate the teaching artist and overall quality of the program, as well as find out what areas of growth the participants experienced. We also used a culminating event audience survey to gather statistics on the photography showcase, and we asked attendees their thoughts on arts programming for older adults.

Advice

If you have a large older adult population that you serve in your library community, I would recommend offering an arts program series. Older adults are so eager to continue learning and are open to different art forms. It's important to survey your patrons to gauge interest in different art forms.

I would also recommend spending a good amount of time finding a teaching artist. Make sure to search local arts agencies to find candidates and conduct phone interviews before inviting an artist for a site visit. It’s important to find someone who is an art expert and can teach, but it's also equally important to find someone you feel comfortable with, someone you know will be on board in making your program successful. This program series was highly rewarding and helped form stronger relationships with our older adults in the community.

Did you try this program at your library? Share your experience using this form.

Supporting Materials

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Document

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