

Crislin Christian
Critical Youth Media
Letter Home—Fall 2018

It's one thing to simply have an idea. It's an entirely different game to be given the opportunity to bring that idea to life.

My journey began in September. I'd already been in Chicago since the first week of June and had taken a 10-week summer job as a Program Coordinator at Free Spirit Media, a westside-based nonprofit organization. Originally, Free Spirit Media was on board with supporting Critical Youth Media as an independent program for their youth, but in a meeting with the CEO in mid-September, I was told that they would no longer be able to support the program in that capacity. Critical Youth Media's relationship with Free Spirit Media would remain amicable, but we were now just acquaintances instead of partners. This was incredibly disappointing and essentially sent me back to square-one, desperate for partners and sponsors to support my workshops and expand my program's influence, but I chose to remain optimistic. I had already established a Critical Youth Media board consisting of myself and three very reliable peers, Dixon Romeo (operations and fundraising), Trina Tyler (policy and outreach), and Yarnome Hamilton (production and editing).

In October, my mom asked me to connect with Margaret Caples of the Community Film Workshop of Chicago, a southside-based nonprofit with 30 years of experience that my mom had interned with after graduating high school. Margaret was happy to meet and discuss how the Community Film Workshop could support Critical Youth Media, something I am truly grateful for. We decided on a timeline for the first 6-week workshop; it would be every Tuesday and Thursday from 4pm to 6pm from November 6 to December 13. I purchased the cameras and made really awesome flyers to post around the Hyde Park and Woodlawn areas. Unfortunately, I was unable to recruit inside of local high schools because this required a process of background checks and fingerprinting that I am still unfamiliar with and have yet to get much clarity on. I believe this, and the timing of the workshop at the end of the year, during the cold, after daylight savings (darker outside earlier), etc. is why I was unable to attract any students to the workshop. Although I was sad, Margaret, and my board members assured me that things would come together eventually.

In November, I attended a reception for the City of Chicago's Department of Cultural Affairs and Special Events (DCASE) and Chicago Public Schools' (CPS) Year of Creative Youth, which was a convening for all the organizations that participated in arts education programming for Chicago youth during 2018. While representing the Community Film Workshop, I was happy to be among peers from Free Spirit Media as well as other familiar youth organizations such as Chicago Park Districts. There, I met Julia deBettencourt, the Director of Arts Education for CPS and we have a meeting scheduled in early-January to discuss Critical Youth Media and getting my background check and fingerprinting sorted out so that I can recruit more effectively for my 2019 workshops. Recently, December has been extremely slow and disheartening. However, I have created a survey to send through my newly-developing network of fellow youth organizations and gain insight from teens on

what they would want from a media production youth group and how they already interact with multi-media platforms. I will use that feedback to curate my curriculum for 2019. I will use January to prepare for my spring and summer workshops and explore different solutions to recruitment and seeking partners and sponsors.

Personally, I have been experiencing a tumultuous range of emotions during this massive transition. I just graduated from college. I just moved back to my hometown after being away for eight years. I just turned 25. I just established a nonprofit organization with minimal support (outside of Stronach). Everything is new and terrifying and exciting and overwhelming. I feel incredibly blessed to be on this journey of serving, uplifting, and empowering young people, and I use this energy to propel me forward, even when I have to push through disappointment and (most of all) my own self-doubt. I know that I wouldn't have even made it this far had this path not been meant for me, so even when I do get discouraged, it never lasts very long. I have an incredible support system of family, friends, and peers who remind me that I am the right person to accomplish this task and to see this idea through until it is a reality. I've had to learn to be flexible, to have standards without expectations, and to prepare for the worst while always hoping for the best. It has only been a few months, so I resolve to giving myself grace and maintaining faith that 2019 will have incredible opportunities in store and that Critical Youth Media will have successful and impactful media production workshops for Chicago youth. Even if I can't see it now, I know that everything will soon fall into place.