A two-sentence summary of your project

Art & Agency’s goal was to use art to reinsert agency into people’s lives. Working together with Za’atar NGO, we were able to put together an art exhibit for refugees, asylum-seekers, and migrants in Athens. We were able to sell art from each artist, raise awareness about issues of migration, and connect various non-profits aimed at helping refugees together.

How did you decide what issue(s) you wanted to address and what approach(es) or strategies you chose to implement in your project?

I came to Athens with the intention of using art to share about people’s experiences. As the child of Nigerian-American immigrants, I have always felt truly inspired by the ways that people create community out of an environment that has been mostly unwelcoming. I also have always been committed to uplifting the stories of people dealing with vulnerable situations, rather than letting others control their narrative.

I want to pursue a career in law and journalism, specifically human rights law and essay writing. This project combined my passion for advocacy, media, and communication.

Why did you choose your host site? In what ways did local relationships support you or contribute to the project?

I chose my host site because I knew that I could integrate into the community more efficiently than starting elsewhere. I had previous experience with Za’atar NGO, and we were able to use their relationships and knowledge of the community to find artists for the exhibit.

What changes or adjustments did you make to your original plans, and why?

Originally, we had planned to offer art lessons to refugees and migrants, and structure it so that the exhibition would be held at NYU in Athens. Then, as time continued, we realized that the best way to structure things would be to seek out art from artists. Many members of vulnerable populations would struggle to come continually to art lessons, and so the best method was to seek out artists already creating, and highlight their work.

Did other fundraising efforts contribute to your project? What were they?

No, just the Davis Projects for Peace Committee grant.

Are there opportunities for continuing your work on this issue? If so, please describe.

Yes. Now that I have met the artists and the members of Orange House, I have set up a connection to the local community. Orange House has considered doing other exhibitions in the future, as well. I also have ambitions to return to Greece, perhaps on another grant, like a Fulbright. In addition, we have given a sum of money to the artists to continue their work.

How do you define peace?
To me, peace is not just the absence of violence. It is actively investing in equality and justice for everyone. It’s the warmth of community providing a safety net for the future.

● In what ways might your project contribute to peace? What changes occurred? Short-term? Long-term?

One of the long term effects of the project is that the artists got paid, received prints of their work, and gained exposure. This will help them to gain access supplies in the future and keep creating. Long-term relationships were made between artists and organizations, including Orange House.

● What did you learn about the dilemmas, challenges, or conflicts that underlie the targeted issues or utilized approaches/strategies?

I learned that people need resources. Fundamentally, people need their needs met, and the best thing we can do is help people help themselves.

● Has your project changed the way you think about the world? How has the project changed, challenged, or inspired you?

When the work for this exhibit began, I was hoping to learn how Greece and all other nations can be better hosts. I wanted to know where hospitality begins. When is a place home? What does it mean to be a neighbor?

I had my own ideas. But then, we asked every artist in the exhibit what hospitality means to them. I have since been sitting with their words. In particular, those of Deniz Kizil, who says this: “Why are we called immigrants? This world should be for every human being. We are also a host, aren't we?”

What makes a nation a home? If we are honest, it is no different than what makes a stranger a friend, or people into a family. It is the individual choices we make, to either be there for someone or not. The exhibit made me wonder how I can make the world a better home for everyone, as a guest and a host.

● A brief statement, suitable for use as a quotation, addressing the value of this project and what you have learned. Indicate the student’s name (yours or your teammates’) for quote attribution.

From the above: “We asked every artist in the exhibit what hospitality means to them. I have since been sitting with their words. In particular, those of Deniz Kizil, who says this: “Why are we called immigrants? This world should be for every human being. We are also a host, aren't we?” The exhibit made me wonder how I can make the world a better home for everyone, as a guest and a host.