

2h
4-16-11

Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today regarding arts funding in the City of Alexandria. My name is Lisa Hawkins. I am the Founder and Executive Director of the Arts Center at Convergence on Quaker Lane. We are a creative community dedicated to serving the needs of local artists and arts organizations. Convergence's programming is concerned primarily with the physical, mental, emotional, creative and spiritual health of the artist— all of which are tied into being a healthy, whole, productive member of society.

One of the biggest stress factors artists face is the challenge to find affordable space in which to do their work. Performing artists especially find it difficult in our area. To meet this need, what was Fair-Park Baptist Church became Convergence and opened its doors to local artists. Currently all of the space in our two buildings are available, at very accessible cost to theater, dance, music, literary and visual artists. Some of the organizations hosted at Convergence are the 7 Sopranos, Port City Playhouse, Empowered Women International, The Lab All Ages – a unique open mic venue where young adults experiment artistically and gain confidence in a safe, supportive environment. We also have two exhibit spaces featuring shows designed to encourage discussion and exploration of diverse issues.

We believe in the power of the arts and the responsibility of artists not only to create enjoyable, meaningful work, but to serve as catalysts for community development. The economic value of a thriving arts community is even greater than the revenue it brings, the arts enhance the public welfare. In a report from Americans for the Arts it states that sustained, consistent access to high quality arts experiences (in particular) creates a community in which people are healthier mentally, have reduced anxiety, a higher sense of community identity, capacity for collective action and are more open to diversity.

Bringing as many people as possible into engagement with their culture through meaningful experiences of the arts leads not only to financial revenue for the city and attracting visitors, but to attracting a high-quality workforce and creating an involved, healthy, proactive community. We at Convergence are eager to continue doing our part and we urge you to continue your support of the vital role the arts play in Alexandria during the budget process. Thank you so much for this time to speak with you and thank you for your continued support of the arts in Alexandria.

Lisa Hawkins
Convergence
Apr. 16, 2011