

MLW Delegates offer Maryland Humanities a glimpse of “Reality”

When a delegate comes to a Maryland Leadership Workshops (MLW) summer camp program, they’re given more than toasted marshmallows and bug spray—they’re given an opportunity to incite positive change in our society. Delegates of the Senior High Workshop (SHW), which is open to any high school student entering grades 9 through 12, are tasked with a project called “Reality,” where they are challenged to work with a non-profit or advocate for a cause.



MLW Senior High Workshop delegates teamed up with Maryland Humanities to bring new creativity to the non-profit organization.

Alison Curry, an employee of MLW, and her group of two dozen SHW delegates, teamed up with Maryland Humanities, a non-profit that brings educational experiences in the humanities to people throughout the state. With a goal of expanding Maryland Humanities’ footprint, the delegates set forth putting together a three-part plan

that they would present to the organization’s director of development, Aaron Heinsman.

“We approached it as ‘how can teenagers help a non-profit like Maryland Humanities,’” says Curry. “I got in contact with them and worked with Aaron Heinsman. We set up a Skype call so the kids could meet him. On the very first day they got to call him and ask him questions

about Maryland Humanities. From there, it was their project and they came up with everything.”

Their three-part plan started with an idea to develop a smartphone app that could increase engagement for their events and programs as well as incorporate user-generated content. Part two focused on increasing the organization’s social media presence, specifically on Instagram, and they presented their ideas with a video that illustrated the effect it would have.

The final part, and the part that resonated most with Heinsman, was called “Humanities on Wheels.” The team came up with an idea to refurbish a school bus and drive it to other counties as a sort of traveling museum or library, to bring art and literature to places where access may not be so readily available.

“They had this idea of it being an inviting atmosphere for young people,” said Heinsman.

“They could read and discuss literature or have spoken-word performances. It could be sort of a

quasi-coffee house atmosphere where people could write or draw. I loved the idea. They even made an estimated budget of buying a bus, refurbishing it, maintaining it, and what it would cost to continue it over the years. There was a lot of creativity in the idea as well as discipline and rigor in how it could actually be feasible.”



A mock-up of the Humanities on Wheels repurposed school bus, created by the MLW delegates.

Many of the ideas that the delegates came up with were ones that the employees of Maryland Humanities had already considered in the past, which was impressive to Heinsman as it showed higher-level thinking at such a young age. Ideas like incorporating crowdsourcing for funding and introducing more video content while expanding their social media presence are ideas that the non-profit organization may put into action in the near future. Overall, Heinsman was very impressed by the work the delegates did in the program and by the program itself.

“Any time I have an experience like this where I interact with a group of young people who are engaging with ideas and strategies, it reminds me that I can be positive about our future,” said Heinsman.

Being able to apply creativity and strategy in a way that could actually affect change in society is an opportunity that few students see in high school. Programs like MLW give young people that chance and encourages them to be leaders, thinkers, and friends.

“Maryland Leadership Workshops empowers people in a way that I haven’t seen in other arenas,” said Curry. “There’s no other chance you’re going to have to be surrounded by peers and staff, to grow, to take risks, and to challenge yourself. That uniqueness, the skills it gives the delegates, the tools they come away with, that opportunity for growth, you won’t get it anywhere else.”

To learn more about Maryland Humanities, visit mdhumanities.org.

To learn more about Maryland Leadership Workshops, a division of Leadership Maryland, visit mlw.org.

To learn more about Leadership Maryland, visit leadershipmd.org.