The city of Minneapolis has set out to teach youth unique ways to approach violence in their communities.

Through the program, Summer 612, the city engaged nearly 1,000 youths from ages 10 -17 in the arts including film, theatric photography and visual art.

"By utilizing creative arts based strategies in our youth violence prevention initiatives we have been able to encourage young people to get involved in the issue," said Alyssa Banks, Youth Violence Prevention Coordinator for the city of Minneapolis.

By raising awareness on the epidemic of youth violence and empowering youth to identify solutions, Banks said the youth were able to address the problems in their communities.

With financial support from the Minneapolis Department of Health and Family Support, Banks was able to provide micro grants to eight different organizations across the city as part of the Summer 612 program. The program is part of Minneapolis' Blueprint for Action, a public health initiative created to reduce youth violence based on the use of four objectives which are to place a trusted adult in the life of every child, intervene at the first sign of risk, rehabilitate incarcerated youth and unlearn the culture of violence.

Summer 612 primarily focused on the fourth objective, unlearning the culture of violence. Besides raising the awareness of youth violence, this grant program has enabled youth to develop specific job skills and interact with professionals in the art field. Summer 612's goal was to give youth the ability to take ownership and build leadership in their communities.

"Youth aren't empowered until you put the power in their hands and not just in their heads," said Barbara Weiner, executive director of TVbyGirls.

By giving youth the opportunity to create their own artistic pieces, she said that the program has given youth the responsibility to make a difference as well as the opportunities to tell their stories.

"It shows you the talent that is in our community if given the chance to flourish," said James Williams, teen programing director for Pillsbury House Theatre. "The program gave them the opportunity to see that they could be an artist, be political and still make a difference in the community."

The youth's creative artwork touched on many different aspects of violence from sex trafficking, to bullying, teen angst, gang life and early learned violence.

The summer grantees included the Black Storyteller's Alliance, Asian Media Access, Holy Rosary Youth Group, TVbyGirls, Pillsbury House Theatre, Emma B. Howe Family YMCA Youth Intervention Services, Protect Minnesota and Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board and the Phillips Neighborhood (Main Street, Hope Community and Waite House).

Parent, Makeda Zulu-Gillespie said she was impressed to see youth using art as an educational tool to unlearn violence.

"I am a fan of art. It's a great mechanism for teaching, for communication and for change," said Zulu-Gillespie.

Banks believes programs like Summer 612 help youth become more aware of how youth violence impacts their peers, communities and themselves.

Like Banks, Zulu-Gillespie said by using art, youth not only became aware of their surroundings, but also gained self-confidence when given the chance to show their creativity.