

## United Inner City Services: An Arts Oasis in a Cultural Desert



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**Deidre Anderson**  
Executive Director

For 250 preschoolers living in the poorest zip code in Kansas City, dressing up as peapods for a performance is an exciting and memorable experience. The children attend St. Mark Child and Family Development Center and participate in Arts@St. Mark, an integrated arts program that many community leaders consider a unique model that successfully prepares children for kindergarten.

“These kids feel a sense of satisfaction from arts activities that they may not receive elsewhere,” said Deidre Anderson, Executive Director of United Inner City Services (UICS), the multi-service nonprofit that operates St. Mark and its Arts@St. Mark program.

Integrating the arts – theatre, music, painting, science, puppetry, field trips and more – into the curriculum is critical because it promotes school readiness and enhances children’s intellectual, social, physical and emotional development. Both children and parents benefit, and the need is tremendous as the neighborhood is a cultural desert.

Anderson first hired Encore Nonprofit Solutions (Encore NPS), to help communicate the impact of the arts curriculum and address grants management issues. “We have grown very quickly, and Encore helped us to strategically pursue grants instead of chasing after every grant out there,” said Anderson.

Encore NPS quickly recognized that UICS should capitalize on its unique approach. “One of the key

factors in their success is their involvement of parents and families in the child’s education,” said Shelley Loethen, Encore NPS Owner.

Encore NPS created a grants management structure with a calendar for UICS to better coordinate grant applications and respond more quickly to donor inquiries. In addition, Loethen coached Anderson and the management staff on program design, and developing strong outcomes and evaluation systems.

“When we needed their expertise, Encore was extremely responsive,” emphasized Anderson. She cited an example of a grant application in which Encore NPS was able to better articulate the impact of their programming. UICS secured the \$500,000 grant, and the funder attributed the award in part to their strong outcomes measurement.

“They’ve done an amazing job,” said Anderson. “Encore has helped in ways they may not even know.”



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