

Jima Chester

Finding my “WHY”

One of the most important things I strive to live by every day in work as an artist, mentor, leader, entrepreneur, and individual is that "when you are blessed, it is mandatory that you bless others" - Joni Holifield. Being A mentor/leader over two years has reminded me of how much power and value there is in helping or influencing others through what I do.

In the fall of 2021, I began mentoring the most energetic, voiceless, and authentic youth group at an Enoch Pratt library in east Baltimore. The first-ever session with the teens was initially a one-time thing where I and a co-mentor would provide a space for the youth to talk about their hardships and trauma. As facilitators of the session, we would share stories and strategies of how youth can work towards addressing the trauma and hardships they shared. This first session was heartfelt; the youth shared stories of the death of family members and experiencing racism and discrimination from teachers and staff at the library. They shared hardships with parents or guardians and interpersonal conflicts with peers or friends. We discussed their goals for their upcoming academic responsibilities as 8th and 7th graders. After allowing the youth and judgment-free space, they offered us one by being respectful and attentive as we shared our current and past experiences with school, parents, and death. We shared various condolences, curious questions, and even advice from the youth about us. Time spares no one, and shortly after our hour session ended and as we said bye to the youth, they asked the question that led to many more sessions just like these "Can you both come back for

more sessions?". We have been mentoring the youth at the library since 2021, and we still do sessions there. We have had sessions where we laugh, cry, sit quietly or eat pizza.

Nevertheless, in every last session, we watched slowly as the 8th graders grew into 9th graders and the 7th graders into 8th graders and how they treated and cared for each other in their unique ways—through this mentoring journey, learning how impactful someone could be. Even in the slightest way of holding conversations with other youth and discussing topics or issues we all experience. Learning the "why" of leadership and that it is more than just a job, I am changing lives, mindsets, and generations through mentoring. Understanding from some point that whatever I choose in life has to include mentoring and positively impacting others. Considering my interests, like being an artist and entrepreneur, and loving research, community, and psychology. I plan to find a home in one of these interests during my journey after high school to further my work of helping and guiding others. Refusing to use my leadership, resources, and voice would be ignoring my purpose. Striving to carry the purpose of using my blessing to bless others and changing the lives of youth in my community my work as a mentor has to continue.