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## Bushwick Culture

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## A Beacon for Young Artists

By MIKE STEYELS APRIL 9TH, 2010



Brandon Perry talks with Tai Chi. Perry teaches the radio and rhyme-writing class at Beacon.

"A lot of people come to the game to take, not to give," says 20-year-old MC Riddic, also known as **Barrington Botswana Black**. "We want to give back."

As he speaks, he's sitting at a round table with his hip hop group, **Nine 11 Thesaurus**, while they broadcast their weekly internet radio program, **Real Talk**. The show is run out of The Beacon Center for Arts and Leadership Youth Program with nothing but two mics, a mixer, laptop, and internet connection.

The Beacon youth program, located after school in IS 261 in Bushwick, offers classes in hip hop, radio, fashion, and dance for 11- to 13-year-olds. It also offers a hip hop-based community service program for older teens that entails the radio program and various community-service programs such as transforming a vacant lot into a **community garden**.

**Real Talk** has been on the air for over a year and a half on Wednesdays from 7PM to 9PM on **Radio23.org**, an internet radio station created by a former pirate radio operator in Portland, OR. The show consists of discussions about hip hop, life, and politics, includes freestyling and, of course, they play hip hop

Brandon Perry, who also **DJs** under the moniker **Marty McSorely** and has a show on WFMU, teaches the radio classes, as well as a rhyme writing class. "We try to create an environment where they can figure out what they want to do, and then go from there," Perry explains.

**Beacon programs** are city-funded, school-based community centers that offer varying programs for both youths and adults. There's currently 80 of them citywide. This particular Beacon is



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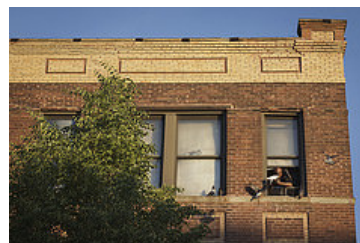
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operated by [the Coalition for Hispanic Family Services](#). At the beginning of this trimester, there were 225 kids enrolled in the Bushwick youth program, although that has shrunk to about 80 as it draws to a close.

Sam Hillmer, who's been teaching arts education for over a decade and is a sax player for the avant-garde band [Zs](#), is the manager of youth services at this Beacon Center. But Hillmer sees a disconnect between the art created in programs like Beacon and that of the larger art world. To bridge that gap, he created a private organization called [Representing NYC](#), which works closely with many of the Beacon programs. "I started it to broker a relationship between the broader arts community and the art work being created by youth in social service settings," he says.



One of the shirts made in Beacon's design program.

A number of prominent figures in the arts scene have gotten involved as a result. Most recently, the [Dutty Artz](#) crew participated in the group's Bushwick-focused performance series *¿REAL BUSHWICK/ BUSHWICK RÉAL?* [Mr. Lif](#) performed with the youth music groups involved in Representing NYC's launch party last year, which was held at the [New Museum](#). *Fader Magazine* put together a [mini-documentary](#) about the making of the first record resulting from the program by The Fly Girlz. And [Gang Gang Dance](#) is helping produce the next record by Nine 11 Thesaurus.

To Hillmer, meeting youth in the real world and shedding some of the restrictions imposed by more formal settings is an essential aspect of providing effective guidance. "The education community needs to get out of this romper room mentality," he expounds. "Kids are going home and getting into the illest stuff, and if we are not meeting them there, they are just totally unsupervised."

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