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BuildSomethingTogether.com

Artist Statement

Build Something Together is a collaborative handyman service I offer to people needing help with projects they don't know how to do. I have hosted this service in Portland, Toronto, Joshua Tree, and Kansas City to complete over 40 projects with people who needed my help.

Build Something Together became a way for me to have collaborative experiences with strangers, which was something I missed about working construction. After doing a few of these projects I began realizing most of my best friends were people I had met on jobsites, and by hosting this kind of a project I could potentially begin to rebuild a network of friends in my new home of Portland.

Kindred and Hollis had been talking with their Mom about building a tree house in their backyard but she didn't know where to start, and submitted a proposal to Build Something Together. Their original design included an escape hatch, a sky chair, and a pulley system.

To find all the materials needed we got on Craigslist's free ads and found some people who were rehabbing their home, so we went and filled up my truck with materials. We got back to their house and worked together to remove all the nails and have safe wood to work with. We continued working through the weekend to complete their tree house.

The final result met most of their requirements except for the escape hatch, which seemed like a safety hazard to their parents. Hollis and Kindred really liked their new tree house, and invited me to come over anytime I wanted to. They told me their Mom wanted to make a shed to store their bikes and now they could help her do it as a family.

Being a native Missourian, Mark Twain has always had a grasp on me. His books taught me how to understand myself and what I was capable of through doing the things I enjoyed. Twain studied language by working his way up to being a steamboat captain on the Mississippi River. His experience on the River taught him the language of his time, which reinforced the content of his books. Twain's River experience was more educational than spending time in any school, and I believe this model of experiential education is still a valid way of understanding the world.

Diane from Recycle Art invited me to help run a public art making workshop at Nutter Ivanhoe Neighborhood Center in Kansas City. She asked 20 kids to come to the workshop and said they would be making a piece of public art for the neighborhood from recycled trash. She wanted the workshop to serve as a way to learn about urban blight in a neighborhood with 7/10 homes in foreclosure. We thought that by using the trash to create something together we could demonstrate a new way of thinking about the blight for the kids who live in it everyday.

As kids started to show up we had the idea to start wrapping sticks with yarn to use for weaving. Kennedy thought we had enough string running between two trees that were about 150 feet away from each other. After going around the trees 50 times Patience had the idea of starting to weave it all together. She taught a couple of us how to weave, and we taught more people. After awhile we were all weaving, and by this time everyone had his or her own style. Each person worked away on their section and started adding other objects in between the weaves.

Towards the end of the day we all decided our efforts were worth it because the new public art was very nice to look at, and even better knowing we all worked on it together. We finished the project and everyone was excited to have participated in the public art workshop.

By entering people's homes and neighborhoods to work with them I am in the same position of having to understand the language being used in order to make a connection. Language is more than a tool for speaking, it is also the unique way each person lives their life, and in order to understand those characteristics I must listen with all my senses.

The projects people propose to me are valuable because they are an undefined idea, which demand attention in order to be realized. Each proposal received is an opportunity for development, and every one is valued as much as any other. My hope is to help in the realization of a project's potential and leave the person with both their idealized project completed and knowledge about building it in order to empower continual shaping of their surroundings.