

My name is Jalen Rose, today I am representing B4 Youth Theatre. We support the PFPAD as a mechanism which derives its legitimacy from robust civil society engagement and participation.

As the B4 Youth Theatre Director of African Diaspora Initiatives, I have seen first hand the positive impact an organization can have when participating in robust civil society engagement.

B4 Youth Theatre mission is to empower youth through the arts. Our organization serves all youth of African descent, including first generation American African and Caribbean immigrant youth. We focus on culturally derived pedagogy to support our youth in their efforts to create change in their community. Not only are they engaging with each other and their local community but also with others who look like them globally. We have official offices in Liberia and the United States, constantly looking to strengthen our cross cultural connection. Most recently Liberia celebrated the Bicentennial of its founding. An anecdote that is politically, socially, and emotionally charged in many ways. But also demonstrates the direct impact we can have when banded together.

We took a group of Black Americans, most for the first time, to the continent of Africa. This group included 2 school-age youth who found themselves making friends everywhere they went. They were ecstatic to be in a place where they finally felt like they belonged. Now these were children from an inner-city Baltimore school, no strangers to seeing people who looked like them. But they still had never felt completely comfortable. They talked about how it felt good to know there were people who they could connect with outside of their families, outside of their friends, and outside of Baltimore. A whole world they didn't know existed emerged in just a few days.

The more we as a community engage with our community at large we make room for greater opportunity to develop as a people. Today's meeting of our people will have an affect on me that will transfer into the way I carry myself in the world for the rest of my life.