**Project Mission:**

The mission of Project: BECOMING is to nurture self-actualized women. Through the use of expressive modalities, such as dance, writing and discussion, we promote creative exploration. These experiences encourage an outgrowth of limitless possibilities. We increase self-esteem, social, individual and academic responsibility as well as community engagement. We progress the critical thinking skills of our participants by fostering independent and authentic thought. “Project: BECOMING picks up where the Public Education System leaves off.”

As a freshman, I took my first formal dance class with Professor Christal Brown, the dance department chair of Middlebury College. Under her mentorship, I learned about Project: BECOMING, an initiation she created is a spin-off of INSPRIT’s 2004 performance entitled BECOMING, which explored the evolution of the modern day woman. During the course of creating the work, our ensemble delved into the many issues we as women deal with in relation to health, self-image, relationships, education and careers. Professor Brown’s Project: BECOMING began in New York City, opened another chapter in North Carolina and was sustained by summer volunteers as an after school activity. While every community is unique, this project and its goal, to empower women as future leaders of their communities, is malleable and needed.

**Community:**

The program was expanded to Chicago. As a first-generation Mexican American student and a graduate from the Chicago Public School system, I am first-handeledly aware of the challenges
faced by certain populations. Being from an underserved community I believe that the arts are a wonderful catalyst for bridging the gap between underserved and more privileged communities.

Pilsen, a predominately Mexican-American neighborhood on the Southwest Side of Chicago, faces issues concerning violence, an inflated high school dropout rate, and gentrification. Our community partner Mujeres Latinas En Acción (Latina Women in Action), an organization that “empowers Latinas through providing services which reflect their values and culture,” donated their space and served as a liaison to the community and its needs. Mujeres Latinas En Acción offers women counseling and guidance. The populations they serve often come from households facing domestic violence and sexual assault. Participants were recruited through Mujeres Latinas En Acción and local middle schools.

Curriculum:

The idea of becoming is at the core of the curriculum. Participants are provided with sustainable resources to further their aspirations. BECOMING Pilsen curriculum uses yoga, creative writing, dance, meditation, capoeira and other expressive modalities; thus taking our participants on an invaluable journey into womanhood. All of our activities are discussion-based and designed to encourage an outgrowth of limitless possibilities and equip each and every young woman with the tools necessary to take independent steps towards her life goals.

The program was a week-long program that reached thirteen participants ranging from ages ten and fourteen. Three interns from Columbia College, a visual and performing arts institution in downtown Chicago, were hired. The interns and I led workshops everyday that focused on a series of developing questions: Who am I?, What do I like about my body?, What makes me strong?, Who do I want to become? Who am I now?
The workshops focused on identity development and included themes like healthy living through nutrition and fitness, yoga, meditation, communicational skills, fostering confidence and trust within individuals and communities.
WELCOME to Project: BECOMING