

# Special Series: A Hip Hop Artist Pursues Progress in Silicon Valley

- “America’s Next Leaders 2015” is an Equal Voice News special series that highlights young people who are strengthening their communities.

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In December 2014, Andrew Bigelow helped residents living in “The Jungle” – a homeless encampment in San Jose, California – move their belongings in their search for affordable housing. It was one of the largest encampments of its kind in the country.

City officials were [closing the Silicon Valley encampment](#). If [the residents remained](#), they faced arrest for trespassing. Andrew, 25, knew he had to help.

Andrew Bigelow

As a youth organizer, he has been active for years in his community as an artist and grassroots advocate at [Silicon Valley De-Bug](#), a social justice and media organization [that works with anyone](#) who walks through its doors.

Each day, his friends say, he brings his passion for hip hop, economic rights, ending displacement and working with families whose loved one are facing incarceration to the grassroots organization and community members.

“I walked [into De-Bug] as an 18-year-old trying to find anywhere that I could rap at,” Andrew says. “I ended up becoming politicized and finding a large political purpose in [my art.]”

As an artist, Andrew inspires others to be politically active through videos and art calling attention to national issues, including homelessness and the minimum wage, says Derecka Mehrens, executive director of [Working Partnerships USA](#), a San Jose-based organization that is working on solutions to inequality.

“We followed a small group [of residents] from the encampment to further tell their story of what happened after ‘The Jungle,’” Andrew says. “[This documentary follows poverty](#) in one of the wealthiest places in the world, Silicon Valley, in a way not seen [before].”

As a member of [Silicon Valley Rising](#), Andrew is a key leader in engaging people to be vocal about expressing their concerns. Silicon Valley Rising is a coalition of organizations working in the tech-rich region to improve the economy for all of its residents.

“Andrew has been engaging working class, young people of color through his artistry, direct services and youth mentorship,” Mehrens says.

“His personal way of interacting and collaborating with communities across the spectrum makes him a powerful force for change.”

With his Shriver Award, Andrew wants to continue addressing homelessness and poverty through a statewide lens by holding forums and traveling to organizations and schools.

“We plan to use the documentary in the local political landscape, but also to spread the story out of [what is really happening in] Silicon Valley by engaging in the conversation around poverty and wealth inequality,” he says.

*Each story in the [“America’s Next Leaders 2015”](#) special series features a young person who contributes to his or her community and has received a Sargent Shriver Youth Warriors Against Poverty Leadership Award. Each year, [Marguerite Casey Foundation](#), which publishes Equal Voice News, honors young people with this award. The [Bay Area Equal Voice Coalition](#), which includes [Working Partnerships USA](#), nominated Bigelow for the award.*