

IN 1998 LISA FITZHUGH HAD A HIGH-PROFILE government career working as senior adviser on the environment to the mayor of Seattle. But her ambitions—and her life—came to a screeching halt when she was diagnosed with Stage II breast cancer.

"Being faced with tragedy forced me to confront who I really was," Fitzhugh, now 38, recalls. After six months of intense chemotherapy, she quit her job. "I always knew I had an innate passion for art. Since I'd grown up watching my mom struggle to make ends meet as a professional photographer, I had just dismissed my passion. But after I got sick, I realized that art is a powerful force that is missing in much of our society."

Fitzhugh believed that children's lives, in particular, could be transformed by the arts. So in May 2000, she founded Arts Corps, a nonprofit that offers underprivileged Seattle kids a variety of after-school classes, including Brazilian drumming, dance, and poetry. "Art gives kids the confidence to reach inside and tap into their potential," says Fitzhugh, who lives



**lisa  
fitzhugh**

For exposing kids to the life-altering power of the arts.

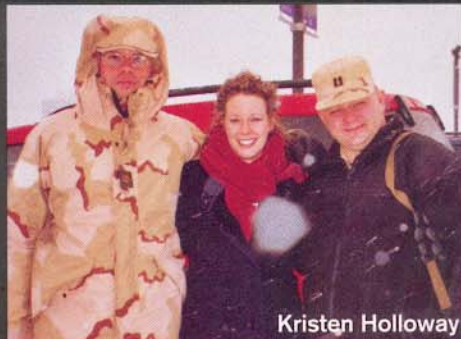
in Seattle with her husband and 3-year-old son. "It shows kids that there's a bigger horizon than the one they know."

Arts Corps's horizons quickly expanded beyond Fitzhugh's expectations. The rock band Pearl Jam gave \$25,000 to the group soon after its inception, and band member Stone Gossard offered his private studio for children to learn how to use recording equipment. In 2002, Arts Corps became the first arts-education program to receive major funding from the \$29 billion Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. Arts Corps now offers 54 classes to 800 kids throughout King County, and Fitzhugh serves as an adviser for similar groups launching in New Jersey and Tennessee. She also speaks frequently at art conferences to drum up support for more programs nationwide. But perhaps the most effective ambassadors for initiatives like Arts Corps are the students themselves: Craig Louis, a tenth-grader who took a hip-hop and spoken-word class, says simply: "Art has made me confident." —Elise Nersesian

# mothers & shakers



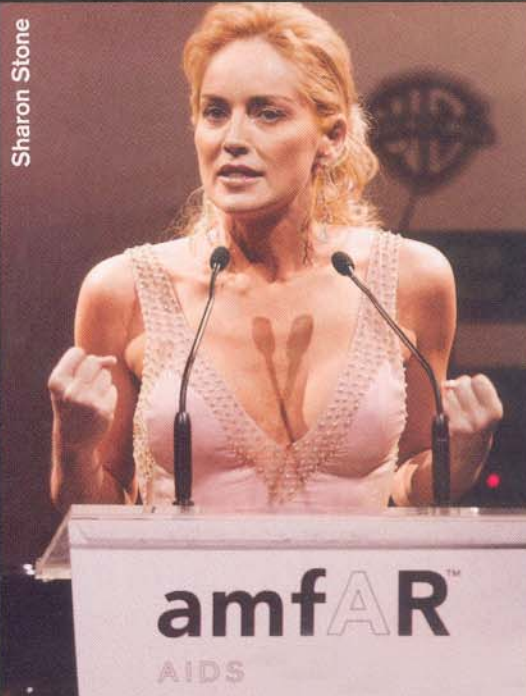
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