

TOUCH THE SKY



REFLECTING ON 2021-22

**“We took time to do work,
but that work was more fun
than practically anything
else in school.”**

— Creative Schools Student

Have you ever touched the sky?

When was the last time you experienced the thrill of accomplishing a major dream? Rallied to overcome a seemingly insurmountable challenge? Or confronted a deeply held fear? Who helped you along the way?

Young people touch the sky every day in Arts Corps classes. From school day arts integration, to after-school enrichment, to paid teen leadership internships, our programming empowers young people to courageously explore their own creative power, to reach new heights previously thought impossible.

In 2022, the Arts Corps’ Creative Schools (CS) celebrated 10 years, having grown into a robust program working with **thousands of youth annually**. The reason for the program’s success is simple. When we bring the arts into core class subjects, students have an opportunity to engage and activate their learning differently. They take risks, think outside the box, all while **having fun!** As one participant put it, “We took time to do work, but that work was more fun than practically anything else in school.”

As students continue to recover from the the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as deal with the ongoing impacts of racism and other systems of oppression, **the need for holistic, arts-based learning** remains crucial. Arts Corps is working hard to meet this critical moment with culturally responsive arts education that centers the experiences, untapped potential, and nourishment of the youth we work with.

In this report, you’ll hear from teaching artist Meredith Arena on what it was like to spend time in session with youth during our revamped teen Art 4 Life internships this past summer, and also from two educators on the impact of CS programming at their middle school in Burien.

As we move deeper into the school year, we are reflecting on what it takes to move into the unknown with **boldness, playfulness, and care**. We couldn’t do this work alone. Thank you. ■

With gratitude,
Arts Corps



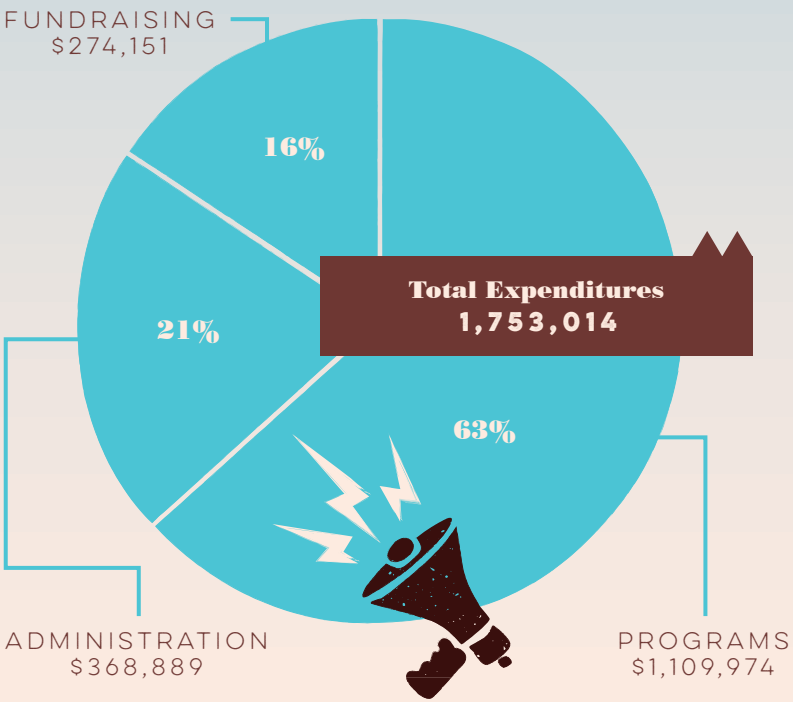
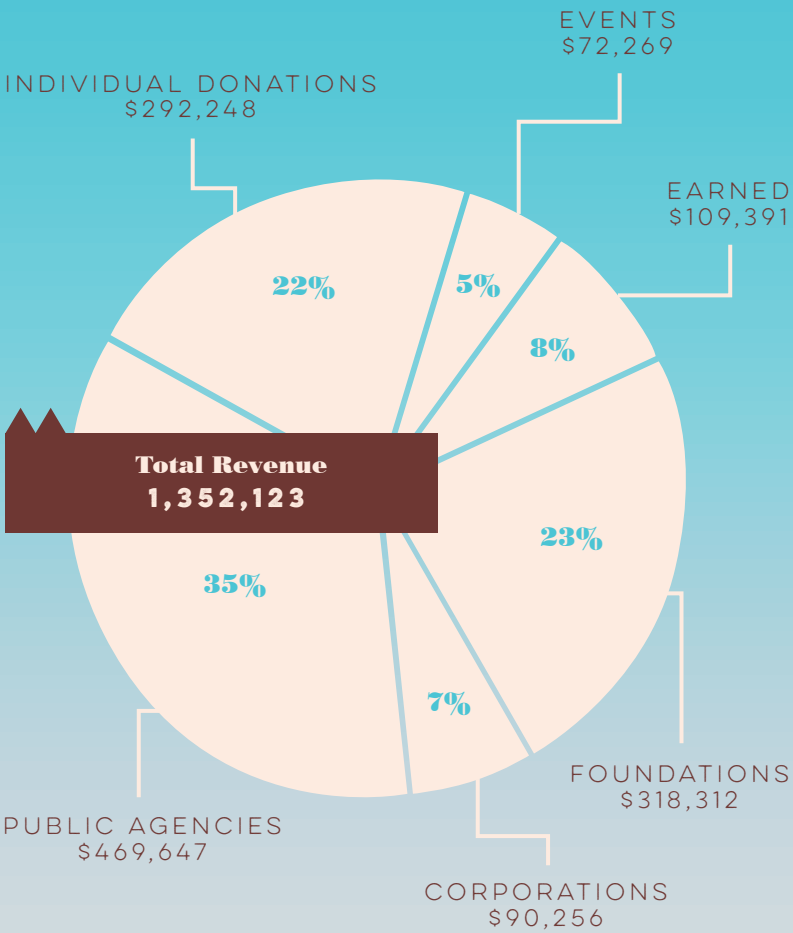
Pictured above: Arts Corps community members dance & celebrate the end of the school year at Art & Sol in June 2022.

Photo by Adam Collet

ARTS CORPS ENROLLED



2,524

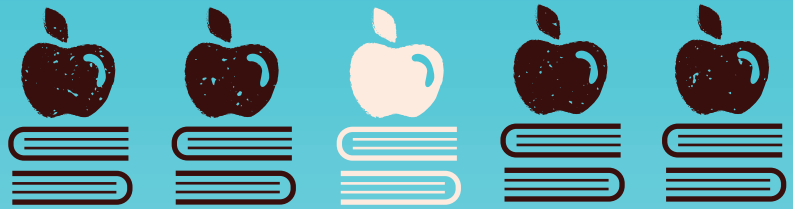
STUDENTS IN 2021-2022.



 17 SITE PARTNERS

 89 ARTS CLASSES

 4 out of  5 class teachers reported that youth took risks, practiced a growth mindset, and saw a positive role model.



100% of partners rated the quality of their Out of School Time program as excellent and/or good.

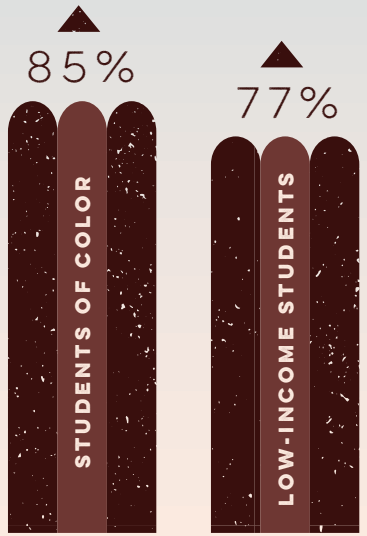


participated in a total of

37

efforts of advocacy, like local legislative meetings, roundtables, and youth development conference presentations on teaching artist pay equity as well as general arts funding.

STUDENT DEMOGRAPHICS



Q & A

Sylvester Middle School, located in Burien, Washington, is in its fourth year partnering with us and chose to allocate a substantial portion of its budget to Arts Corps programming. In the following conversation, interim principal Chad Kodama and classroom teacher Tatiana Hahn reflect on the impact of arts integration in education and youth development at their school.

Arts Corps: Tell us a little about Sylvester more broadly, for those who may not be familiar.

Chad Kodama: Sylvester is a part of the Highline School District and we're a 6th through 8th grade middle school. There's a portion of students on free and reduced lunch plans and we're also pretty diverse comparatively, serving around 50% white students and 50% students of color, the largest groups represented are from Latino and/or Hispanic, Black, and Pacific Islander communities.

Arts Corps: What were your impressions of the arts in school prior to the Arts Corps partnership?

Tatiana Hahn: I just celebrated my one year anniversary here last week, and before that, it was really limited. We only have the one art class and we have some art clubs and after school groups, but there are many, many, many kiddos here that have a lot of artistic ability — a lot of drawing, a lot creativity, stuff like that — and there just aren't a lot of outlets for that kind of thing. Kelly, another teacher across the hall, was telling me about Arts Corps curriculum

when I first got here and she was like, 'Just wait until [Arts Corps] gets here, it'll be a blast.' That's how I first found out about your work. Kelly got me all jazzed because she'd had such a positive experience every time.

Arts Corps: Sylvester Middle School recently designated \$6,000 to Arts Corps programming. Why?

CK: Right, so I'm the custodian of public funds, meaning that I decide what to prioritize based on both community and staff input. Having worked with Arts Corps in the past, we saw the immense impact that it had on our core content areas. It was very important for us to keep the program up and running and to expand it beyond just one grade level, so now we're doing three grade levels! Our teachers love it and our students engage with the lessons in a way that they might not otherwise in a more traditional setting. It's really about making sure every child has something, an activity or interest, that they can connect with at school.

TH: You all just do amazing work with our kids. After I sat in on a lesson, I was like, 'OK, I understand why kids love this and I understand why classroom teachers are totally willing to give up their teaching time to have Arts Corps come in. It's a lot of time, but it's worth every minute.'

Arts Corps: Can you take us through what it's like to sit in on an Arts Corps class?

TH: We spoke with teaching artist Meredith beforehand and then when her and Brian came in, they just had such beautiful control of the class in a way that honestly surprised me.

They created this wonderful energy that the kids immediately picked up on, one of discipline and real respect. Even students who usually have problems in class were able to be quiet and positive just so they could participate, which you know, they're not always able to do.

Arts Corps: What is the value of integrating the arts in with other academic subjects?

CK: Kids learn in so many different ways and so we educators need to make sure to offer multiple avenues to authentically connect with subject matter. When we started partnering with Arts Corps, there were so many robust, culturally responsive options for students to find their entry point into lessons. That is hugely important.

TH: The arts make learning more fun, engaging, interactive, and really accessible. I have many students who won't say they're mathematicians or good readers, but they will say that they're artists. That's so awesome, right? A lot of them are willing to take that title of 'artist' on and really own it. That pride is beautiful to see in a 12-year-old student. With other subjects, there's this perception that you have to be an expert or be really comfortable with it to succeed. With art, students get to create something that's all themselves. No judgement, nothing quantifiable or measurable, just pure creative expression. ■



Student performs with teaching artist Sirichanh Sisavatdy.
Photo by Adam Collet

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ZAG Awwad



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Secretary
Vice President
President

FROM THE BOARD

Our board is a mix of visual artists, writers, singers, performing artists, and lovers of all things art. We come together with a shared fire for the work happening at Arts Corps, and for helping to make the organization's vision and mission a reality.

During this season of change, we are asking ourselves questions. What is the role of the board? How can we best support the staff and teaching artists, harmonizing meaningfully with their work efforts?

We're grateful to the staff, faculty, partners, and donors who have brought us to this place and who keep this work moving forward. We also want to say thank you to outgoing board members Mylen Huggins and Aurelio Valdez and to former Acting Executive Director Carrie Siahpush, for the time, creativity, energy, and love that they have each poured into Arts Corps.

As we enter 2023, we continue to find inspiration from the youth — their bravery, vision, and voice. They remain at the heart of our work and their creativity and joy will guide us through this season of renewal and growth. ■

In community,

Tanisha Brandon-Felder, Board President
Stone Gossard, Board Vice President

Feeling the cool air this morning reminds us how much our lives are touched by nature's cycles. It's pretty cliché, but the patterns of birth, growth, death, and renewal are fundamental markers of our existence and it's something we can all agree on, which makes it pretty special. So, what season is Arts Corps in now?

Arts Corps has existed for over 20 years. Its DNA is in the dreams of its founding members and the hundreds of inspired and revolutionary folks who animate its mission: igniting the creative power of young people.

And we have done this. Through changes in leadership, Arts Corps did this. Through a pandemic, Arts Corps did this. Through an ongoing search for Co-Executive Directors, Arts Corps does this.

Arts Corps touches thousands of lives and we can't begin to know its full impact. But what we do know is that it must also go through its own cycles, and here we stand together, ready for the transition of seasons. Ready to reach higher heights through transformation.

“I value my voice more because I know people will want to listen now.”

— Teen student



REIMAGINING TEEN PROGRAMS

ART 4 LIFE

Arts Corps stepped into our future in 2022 when we launched our revamped teen arts program, Art 4 Life. This program offers youth 13-18 years old paid creative internship opportunities. This summer, Art 4 Life Digital: Art on the Web, was held virtually on Zoom and Art 4 Life Analog: Sustaining Expression, was hosted by Yes Farm, a Black Farmers Collective in Seattle. Teaching artist Meredith Arena got a chance to observe both cohorts:

When I visit the Art 4 Life Analog at Yes Farm, youth participants are scattered around the bountiful garden sketching. They circle up under the biggest tree to reflect on the activity and then buzz around, eager to see one another’s drawings before moving into the greenhouse to continue designs on some garden boxes. Art 4 Life curriculum was designed to replicate working on commission, so Yes Farm tasked them with creating a mural and designing garden boxes as a part of their learning process. The boxes are low to the ground, so most sit or lie down to paint. They collaborate, studying their sketches and planning how to bring them to life.

Hassiel, a youth who wears sunglasses and headphones, paints a strawberry with sunglasses and headphones while his fellow group members paint green vines all the way around the box. Another group paints PRIDE radishes, each radish the colors of a different pride flag.

They create endless new color blends — oranges, purples, a snappy mint green, bubblegum, and fuchsia to name a few. I watch another group split their paint roller into two tones of blue and apply a sky to their box. When the blue dries, they fill the space with sunflowers and butterflies.

Youth creativity is thriving here, saturated in the greens and yellows of the garden, dappled with long awaited sunlight. They break for a hot organic meal, which includes food from the garden made by Chef Steph, a local chef who regularly cooks for the farm.

In 2021, teen programming at Arts Corps was at a cross-roads. The organization needed to choose between revamping the offerings for teens or turning fully to K-8 programming. Co-Director of Arts Education, Olisa Enrico, describes the process of creating Art 4 Life, named after teaching artist Greg Thornton’s Print 4 Life, a longtime Arts Corps program. “When we stepped back to reassess, we still wanted to work with teens.” Teens are crucial to what Olisa calls the “spectrum of youth development” and she wanted to design a program that was relevant to teen lives and desires.

Olisa and other staff combed through years of student surveys, held focus groups with past and current

students, and spoke with younger teaching artists who had participated as youth in Arts Corps’ previous teen programs. What would they create if they had to reinvent teen programs? The idea that emerged is now central to the Art 4 Life ethos: “You can utilize your passion for art, for success in your life. You can use your creativity toward an outcome.” They defined four main areas “like the branches of a tree,” Olisa explains. “Connecting to community, career connected learning, social justice awareness, and creative practice.”

The youth at the farm tell me they joined this program to gain and practice art skills and to get to know other young people. They seem completely relaxed at Yes Farm, moving about with their paintbrushes and sketch-books in hand, serving themselves cold hibiscus iced tea. I watch them experiment, share ideas, ask questions, and work attentively on the task at hand. Their teaching artists Greg and Vega, along with classroom assistant ZAG, are available with suggestions and support.

Today is the fourth day of a 2-week camp and I can feel the care and commitment that teaching artists and Yes Farm have crafted for youth. Everyone belongs here in a magic that feels distinct from our everyday lives in Seattle. At the western edge of the farm, amaranth plants sway over a busy I-5, cranes and construction frame the eastern edge of the farm, where a condominium is literally being built around the young people as they **Make Art Anyway**.

Later, when I visit Art 4 Life Digital camp, teaching artist Sorel shares work made by Gran Fury, the propaganda artist collective of the AIDS activist organization ACT UP. Youth discuss the importance of that design work

within the context of activism and the AIDS movement. They look at current activist posters too, analyzing the use of color and the effectiveness of design choices. Today is a heat wave, but all students are present at their computers for camp.

Students in Art 4 Life Digital are learning Procreate, Adobe Fresco, and Vectorsnator. These three apps enable

“I joined Arts Corps for both the spring & summer internships because I like learning new things about art & the process of being an artist.”

Hayden, 17

them to design and draw digitally. They are working on Arts Corps-provided iPads with stylus pens. “I draw to show myself. I draw to heal myself,” writes student Ekram in an artist statement. Another youth, Sally, writes: “The world we live in is big and beautiful and should be shared with everyone.”

The posters students design that day showcase Arts 4 Life’s knack for teaching the totality of social justice

Continued on next page



Art 4 Life students work on their mural at Yes Farm in July 2022.
Photos by Alexa Strabuk

Arts Corps faculty, staff, & board play charades at the all organization retreat in September 2022.
Photo by Grecia Leal Pardo



awareness, from identity outward to environmental and political issues. They read: “Mental Health Matters,” “Proud to Be a Pacific Islander,” “Don’t Hide Your Identity,” “Wear Your Culture with Pride,” and “Beautiful World: Getting Crowded.”

Art 4 Life initially had its test run during Spring Break 2022, when four cohorts (two middle school and two high school) participated in week-long online intensives in digital art. The idea was to integrate career connected learning, which can translate to school credit, résumé building, networking, professional panels, entrepreneurship, financial workshops, and an opportunity to earn money from making artwork. Students sold their artwork through Red Bubble on stickers, tote bags and other marketable items. Similarly, Art 4 Life Analog participants this past summer designed for a specific client, learning how to actualize a vision from a sketch to painting murals.

In the chat, students tell me that they love the daily prompts, the wellness check-ins, and the opportunity to try new things and be creative every day, demonstrating how both the skills and lifestyle required to build an arts practice is woven into the Art 4 Life experience.

I speak with Hayden, a senior at Decatur High School, and Tyon, a junior at Kentwood High School, who took both the spring and summer Art 4 Life. Hayden tells me, “I joined Arts Corps for the spring and summer internships because I like learning new things about art and the process of being an artist.” Tyon adds, “Summer is 10 times better because there is more time.” He likes that the class is doing something new every day and learning more skills. Before Art 4 Life, Tyon didn’t know anything about Procreate, a digital illustration app, but now sings its praises. He jokes that Vectornator, a complex professional graphic design software, made him cry, but that he still appreciates learning it.

When asked what they would take away, Tyon says he is leaving with a better idea of how to maintain a daily creative routine and discipline with art making. It brought structure to his days this past summer. “If I weren’t doing this, I wouldn’t be doing anything,” he says.

Accessibility, availability, and relevance are cornerstones of Art 4 Life. The programs are free and the online option means that youth who don’t have access to transportation or live far from where Arts Corps programming normally takes place in South King County can participate. The need is clearly there. Arts Corps received 560 applications for a mere 60 spots last spring.

Arts Corps Program Manager Cecelia DeLeon says that the success of the program is attributed to its relevance to youth needs: a hearty stipend for participation and “loving, caring” teaching artists who “are aware and know how to ask questions” of the youth. You will not find another program like Art 4 Life in the region right now and Cecelia imagines how popular the program would be if it were available statewide.

Bold imagination — something the entire team at Arts Corps has engaged with this year. Utilizing our collective experiences in youth development and arts education, we are responding to the ever-changing realities of the youth we serve. It is this imagining, listening, and care that will continue to nurture the development of Art 4 Life and all our programs.

We are now challenged to think creatively, just like our young people. The murals students created for Yes Farm depict landscapes with music notes, fiery sunsets, linked hands, and flowers. They are abundant, fertile, life affirming, and they implore us to imagine a future that is big and beautiful. ■



MAKE ART ANYWAY.

HOW DO

ARTS CORPS YOUTH TOUCH THE SKY?

“The youth we serve are truly remarkable; I am continually impressed by their ability to not only create incredible art, but to examine the world around them & use that in their art.”

ROWAN LENIHAN
DIRECTOR OF FINANCE & OPERATIONS

“When they go beyond what society has laid before them. They break molds & expectations. They create art that speaks truth to power, truth to soul, truth to self.”

OLISA ENRICO
CO-DIRECTOR OF ARTS EDUCATION

“Arts Corps students are constantly stretching themselves, constantly pushing boundaries. So many students begin an Arts Corps class or program timid or unsure of themselves, only to end the class with fierce confidence & joy in their creative abilities.”

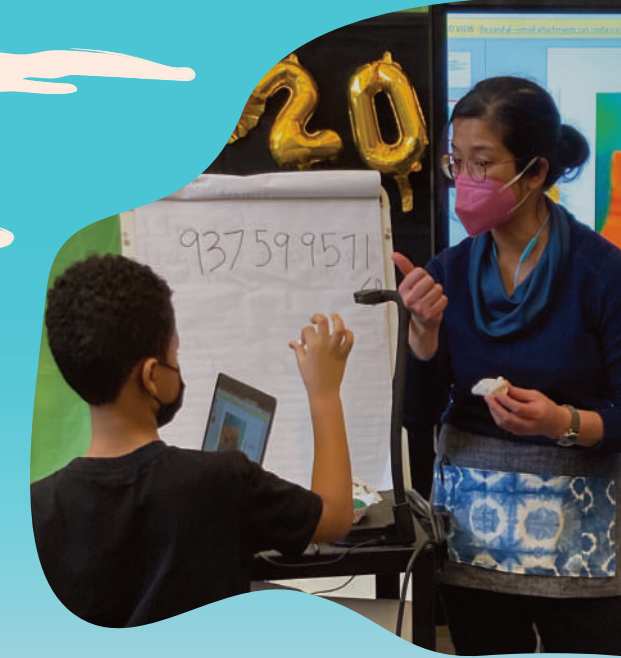
CHRISTA MAZZONE PALMBERG
INTERIM DIR. OF DEVELOPMENT & COMMUNICATIONS

“I see the youth tapping into themselves with power to sustain themselves through creativity & joy. Their ability to thrive from their own creations, to not be dependent upon oppressive systems & inspire those around them to do the same. They are truly revolutionary.”

SARBINA CHACON-BARAJAS
ASSOCIATE DIR. OF ARTS EDUCATION

“Embracing bravery to push their boundaries, their teaching artist’s boundaries, and their community’s boundaries. Jumping in and saying ‘yes and’ to a new challenge.”

HELEYA DE BARROS
CO-DIRECTOR OF ARTS EDUCATION



Photos by Chrirsta Mazzone Palmberg, Adam Collet, Carina A. del Rosario, and Alexa Strabuk