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BREAKTHROUGH

“Did I do that?!”

Everyone remembers their favorite teacher. Mine was Ms. Baumann. She taught 8th grade history and art with a dry sense of humor, and somehow made the boring content engaging. She treated every student as an individual and challenged us to be our best.

Growing up, I had a speech impediment and was somewhat shy. This may be hard for some to believe, but I rarely said more than 30 words a day. Ms. Baumann was very attentive, though, and saw that the 30 words I spoke made my friends double over, crying with laughter. During the prep for the talent show, she asked me to be the host. I just stared at her. She continued, **“you’re very funny, and I think the audience should see you up there.”**

I continued to stare at her.

Then she said, **“I know you’re good at impressions, so I think you should host the show as Steve Urkel.”**

“You mean Steve Urkel from Family Matters, the TV show?!”

When I told my family that evening, they wanted me to do it. They asked me to do an Urkel impression. Reluctantly, I said, **“Did I do that?”** I saw my little brother giggle, so I told them I’d think about it. At school the next morning, I declined. Ms. Baumann responded that the most important thing a person can do is take risks.

Needless to say, after much consternation, I hosted the show as Steve Urkel. Not only did the audience love me (obviously), I found out that I was pretty good at it. It was a breakthrough for me, and that is the power of the arts.

Arts Corps’ federally-funded Highline Creative Schools Initiative (HCSI) wrapped up this year, and the breakthroughs made in the classroom were outstanding. By integrating theatre and visual arts into core curriculum in 5th & 6th grades, we saw a 5% increase in English Language Arts test scores. Students classified as having special needs reported statistically significant growth in learning mindsets and sense of belonging.

Thanks to funding from King County’s Best Starts for Kids initiative, we’ll break through to even more students, with more art forms this year. Building off the success of HCSI, we’ll provide dynamic after school and family engagement programs in the Highline district. We’ll also continue a newly formed partnership with Southwest Youth and Family Services, providing arts education to families living in Burien and SeaTac.

All of these breakthroughs could not take place without the teaching artist. They are the he(art) and soul of everything Arts Corps holds sacrosanct. I wouldn’t be the leader I am today without Ms. Baumann urging me to host that talent show. She helped me break through my self doubt; to open my eyes to a side of me that I didn’t know needed to be released.

> This is what we do as artists; we break rules, we break down barriers, we break through. This is what we strive to achieve at Arts Corps.

Stay Gold,
James Miles
Executive Director

BREAKTHROUGH 2018

ARTS CORPS DELIVERED OVER

61,875

CONTACT HOURS THROUGH

4,853

ENROLLMENTS

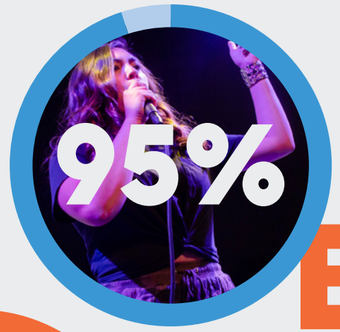
DOUBLING CONTACT HOURS OVER LAST YEAR

"I like how the leaders were very understanding and always curious about us because it shows they care about us more than just music. I like how they motivate us to do what we love."
~ Teen Leadership Participant (The Residency)

100% of participants in our Teen Leadership Program agreed that they are more likely to share their voice through their art in the community as a result of Arts Corps.

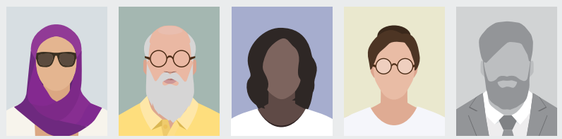
"The best thing about this class is the amazing, supportive, unconditionally loving mentors and participants. I feel like I'm with family."
~ Teen Leadership Participant

95% of 2017 Residency participants report increased professional knowledge and skills.



94% of youth in our teen after school classes reported that they found confidence through their participation in Arts Corps classes. As one student put it,

"I learned that I can be more talkative, and be a leader."



MORE THAN 4 OUT OF 5 classroom teachers and assistants report that they often see creative growth among students in Arts Corps programs.

73%
Arts Corps students come from families that qualify for free and reduced lunch.

82%
of students in programs are students of color.

"I realized that if I'm in a positive mindset and I'm using the right tools, the sky's just the beginning."
~Creative Schools student

Thanks to Best Starts for Kids funding, in the 2017/2018 school year we engaged

399 ADDITIONAL STUDENTS

After two years of programming, students participating in our arts-integrated writing classes increased their Smarter Balanced Language Arts test scores on average by

5%

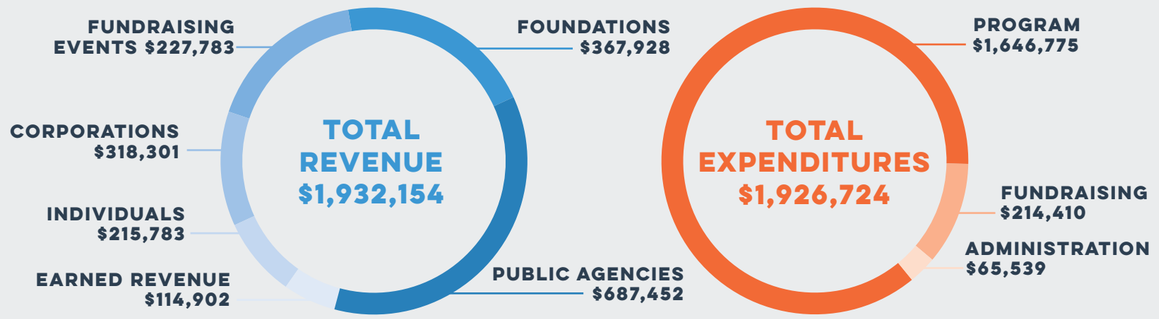
9 OUT OF 10 students in our out-of-school programs reported growth in their artistic skills.

photo by Sally Phnouk

174 students performed in Arts Corps showcases

1041 audience members attended these student performances

2017-2018 FINANCIALS



STAND UP

Stepping up to the podium, Azura Tyabji asked a gathering of Seattle art teachers to think back to the first time they had picked up a pen, a crayon, a mic, any art tool in the classroom.

"Stand up," she said, "if you gave art a chance because a teacher encouraged you."

Almost everyone in the room rose to their feet. The teachers had convened to set their intentions for the new school year. Their focus: elevating visual and performing arts as a priority in closing the opportunity gap between white students and students of color. Azura challenged the educators to encourage their students to create.

"It was such a meaningful moment," Azura recalls a few weeks later, recounting what a humbling honor it's been to speak at events like this as Seattle's 2018 Youth Poet Laureate. **"I felt like we united over the memories of when we first tentatively tried art — the insecurity, hesitancy, and curiosity we all probably felt."**

A self-proclaimed introvert, Azura discovered the power of her voice as a spoken word artist through our Youth Speaks Seattle open mic nights and poetry slams. She performed at her first Youth Speaks open mic night in 2015, when her poetry teacher at Nova High School nudged her to give it a try.

Awed by how safe such a vulnerable moment could feel in that tiny, crowded café, Azura experienced a breakthrough.

"There was so much love in the room," Azura marvels. **"People were fully present. Witnessing that kind of active listening from an audience blew me away almost as much as the performances did."**

She realized that poetry and the spoken word might just be her calling — an outlet to articulate the tension and insecurities she felt as a mixed-race person, and the anger that would surge in her head and heart every time she learned more about the history and realities of racism, sexism, xenophobia, and the many other oppressive forces.

"Thinking back to when I first got woke and learned about all the systems that are rigged against black and brown people, against women, against all kinds of oppressed people … it felt so overwhelming, I felt like I didn't have any agency and that I was just one tiny person," she says, her words as fierce and pointed as her voice is calm and thoughtful.

There's nothing tiny about Azura's presence on stage. Her performances set off waves of finger-snapping, feet-stomping affirmation from her audiences. She won her first Youth Speaks Grand Slam competition in 2016 and placed second the following two years.

Not that she's in it for recognition. She wants to inspire other young people to discover that they can be artists — even if no one has ever made them believe as much — and to realize that art and activism can be one and the same.

We are thrilled to have Azura on staff as the 2018-19 Youth Speaks Seattle Teen Leadership Coordinator, working to support the growth of more young artists in our teen leadership programs. ■

PROSPER

Greg Thornton was 7 when he started drawing for hours on end, huddling with the Sunday comics for inspiration. Eager to motivate him and nurture his creativity, his mom gave him an assignment: produce 10 drawings a week, and he'd get an allowance.

A neighbor later hired him to draw a portrait of her. His mom's employer enrolled him in formal art lessons, where he honed his skills, broadened his perspective, and grew confidence — not just in his talent as an artist, but in his future. He could picture himself as a professional artist.

Many young people that Greg works with today as an Arts Corps teaching artist have never had anyone encourage them artistically, to see the arts as a path to a rewarding career. Greg works hard to change that, leading students to creative and personal breakthroughs they never knew they had in them.

For Daziel Jones, it started with a book of Jean-Michel Basquiat's artwork. Leafing through the thick volume in a class Greg co-taught at Seattle's Southeast Academy, Daziel intently scanned the bold, colorful strokes of Basquiat's graffiti and other neo-expressionist paintings.

It was the first time Greg had seen Daziel's eyes flicker with enthusiasm. Greg's art class was a first for Daziel, too. A junior at the time, he'd never taken an art class in school. Quickly mastering Photoshop and several other graphic design programs, Daziel started showing up for school with a sense of purpose.

"Really, it's all that makes me want to come to school," Daziel says. **"It's what really drives me."**

Toward the end of his junior year, Daziel and his Southeast classmates organized an art sale at the Columbia City Farmers Market. They sold $1,700 worth of screen-printed t-shirts, coasters made of recycled tiles, and prints of their paintings, drawings, and collages.

"I've always wanted them to get a sense of entrepreneurship," Greg says. **"All the money went back to the students. We want them to understand there are other avenues to prosperity besides the ones that might get you in trouble."**

It was a big deal, not just for the young artists, but for their families, too. Parents and siblings, aunts, uncles, and grandparents turned out to show their support. Spotting his third-grade teacher in the crowd, Daziel called him over and sold a screen-printed Jimi Hendrix T-shirt he'd designed.

"To see that what they're doing has worth to somebody they don't know … it was huge for these kids," Greg says. "What I saw is that they started to grow and believe in who they were. It wasn't something we had to prompt out of them. The community hoisted them up and put them on their backs."

Daziel returned to Southeast as a senior at the start of the 2018-19 school year, embracing a new leadership role as an Arts Corps Classroom Assistant in Greg's class. ■

SHINE

When it came time to teach her 5th graders how to multiply fractions, Tamasha Emedi knew exactly what to do. She had them take measurements of their bodies from head to toe and draw themselves in miniature.

The Make Your Own Mini-Me project took a fundamental math concept that's hard to teach and made it memorably fun. Kids got into it. They worked hard on their itsy bitsy drawings, and by the time they finished, they had figured out that multiplying by a fraction doesn't make a number bigger — it shrinks it down.

"It was really cool!" Tamasha says. "**I'd never seen them get so excited about fractions!"**

Tamasha adapted the idea from similar projects that teaching artist, Carina del Rosario, led in her classroom through Arts Corps' Highline Creative Schools Initiative (HCSI). Twice a week for two years, Carina would come to Tamasha's classroom at Hazel Valley Elementary and add visual arts to lessons that might otherwise seem boring, intimidating — or both.

Before Arts Corps partnered with Hazel Valley and three other schools, the Highline Superintendent's Council on the Arts called out that the high-poverty district **"has deficits in arts education that are impacting our students' full preparation for college, career and citizenship."**

After two years of programming, students who participated in our HCSI arts-integrated writing classes improved their language arts test scores by 5%, reported higher levels of sense of belonging at school, greater perseverance, and other improvements.

Writing is a challenge for many 10- and 11-year-olds, especially those who are new to the country and still learning English. For a personal narrative writing project, for example, Tamasha's students wrote their own graphic novels, building on a pivotal moment in their lives.

"I set up arts lessons so they're accessible," Carina adds. **"I try to create a lot of opportunities for success in the very beginning, so that their confidence can build, and that when the material becomes a little more challenging, then they're prepared."**

Lessons like these can also make young people feel seen and heard in powerful ways. One boy in Tamasha's class wrote and illustrated his graphic novel about spending months, sometimes years, apart from his father, who lives in the Philippines. His classmates were moved by his story. They showed him they cared.

> "Having a space for students to tell these kinds of stories is important," Carina says. "It values their experiences. They realize, 'My life is important enough to write about, and to draw about.'

"Students are able to break through teachers' perceptions of them as a particular kind of learner," Carina adds, **"because they're able to show — whether through visual art or theater — this other side that normally doesn't get to shine. They see their own talent being valued."** ■

photo by Carina del Rosario