

transformative art + design academy cultureworks

DIVERSITY, EQUITY, AND INCLUSION

CultureWorks seeks to cultivate creativity, build community, and empower students through the arts. Through after school and summer classes, workshops, and special events, we use creativity as a vehicle for fostering personal and professional growth. We explore issues of personal identity, social advocacy, and community development through individual and collaborative projects led by professional artists and designers. We also provide mentorship, leadership development, and paid internships to creative teens of color along the lakeshore, while connecting them to mentors and professionals who can identify with their experiences and backgrounds. With a background in International and Middle Eastern Studies, Executive Director Emily Christensen is passionate about promoting greater diversity, equity, and inclusion in and through the arts.

By networking with area school counselors, art teachers, parents, physicians, and therapists, CultureWorks targets at-risk, low-income, and minority students who are artistically inclined, but lack access to arts programming, because of mental, physical, or social challenges or geographical, financial, or transportation limitations. In order to make transformative art & design experiences more accessible to teens of all backgrounds, we offer a pay-what-you-can-afford system, transport students to and from programming when necessary, and recruit and train staff and volunteers accordingly. We consistently hear from students, parents, counselors, and teachers that our programs are affordable, welcoming, and accessible to students who rely on artistic expression for their well-being.

Our core programs serve 6th-12th grade students, the vast majority of whom are split evenly between Holland Public and West Ottawa Public Schools, with 18 total schools represented. CultureWorks provides hands-on art training for about 1,000 students per year, 160 of whom are enrolled in their 10-wk after school classes or their 5-wk summer classes. Of those enrolled, 50% qualify for free/reduced lunch plans, 44% are ethnic minorities (with 31% Hispanic heritage), and 31% experience ongoing physical, mental health or social challenges.

This summer 58% of registrations were from students of color, and over the past 2 years CultureWorks has provided paid internships to students of color who've recently graduated. One of these interns was Abbie Lopez, who served on the Student Advisory Council for 2 years. She'd nearly dropped out of school last year due to mental and physical disabilities and challenges, but 2 of her school counselors contacted CultureWorks to say that her internship there marked a drastic turning point in her motivation and mental outlook.

Abbie graduated this spring after 6 years in high school and is now working at Community Action House. She attributes her resolve and success to the support and relationships she gained through CultureWorks.

Knowing that Holland can be a difficult place to grow up as a minority, CultureWorks makes every effort to foster an inclusive and supportive creative environment. We've become known as a place where LGBTQ youth, foreign exchange students, ethnic minorities, and differently-abled students are welcomed and celebrated for their unique qualities, experiences, and perspectives. Our Student Advisory council is actively involved in program planning and engagement. This group of 10 students represent diverse ethnic, cultural, sexual, socio-economic, spiritual, and academic experiences, and they meet weekly with staff for leadership training, fundraising initiatives, collaborative art projects, and community outreach events.



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One of the goals of CultureWorks is to maintain demographics that reflect a greater percentage of ethnic minorities than the wider community. To this end, we begin our recruitment process at local public schools and nurture relationships with like-minded organizations to expand access to art programming. These partners include the Boys & Girls Clubs, Out on the Lakeshore, Children's Advocacy Center, Bethany Christian Services, Lakeshore Youth Leaders Coalition, LAUP, International Festival, the City of Holland, and Hope College's Upward Bound.



Through these partners, CultureWorks provides accessible programming throughout the year. In 2019, CultureWorks provided 16 free 2-hr workshops to students at the Boys and Girls Clubs and offered free high quality multi-cultural art activities at the International Festival, LAUP Fiesta, Herrick Fest, and Tulip Time. We offered instruction and mentorship to 15 Upward Bound Students this summer and also partnered with a local neighborhood development organization on several community-based art installations. This fall, we recruited Jamari Taylor (of Jaylei Art) to lead our Student Advisory Council in the creation of a mural in collaboration with the neighborhood organization, 3sixty. The mural reflects their experiences in this time of increasing racial and ethnic tension. CultureWorks is also offering instruction and mentoring to young women in the Lighthouse Treatment Program through the Juvenile Detention Center this fall. Since most of these programs are offered free-of-charge, CultureWorks relies on donor funding to pay for staffing and supplies. While our programming has expanded greatly over the past couple of years, it's been more difficult to find funding this year, since most grants have been redirected toward providing basic necessities.



CultureWorks is passionate about introducing young artists to the work of historical and contemporary artists of color. For example, students enjoyed a free performance of Lin Manuel Miranda's *In the Heights*, last year, and they were treated to an unforgettable backstage interview with the cast. Student Advisors explored issues of race and ethnic identity throughout last year and visited the Saugatuck Center for the Arts, where they discussed Angelica Dass' *Humanae* exhibit. This collection of portraits reveals the diverse beauty of human colors, and students were surprised and intrigued as they compared their own skin tones to those represented in the portraits. Student Advisors also visited the Detroit Institute of the Arts, where they reflected on the exhibit *Ofrendas: Celebrating el Dia de Muertos*, and they sat in silence before Diego Rivera's epic murals. In conjunction with the NEA Big Read last year, CultureWorks also advocated for women who continue to endure violence and oppression in the Dominican Republic and beyond, through a poster making workshop in the context of Julia Alvarez's *In the Time of the Butterflies*. Our Big Read workshop this year focused on the art of Inuit and Native American graphic artists, as we explored ways of seeing and interacting with our natural resources in the light of sustainability and conservation.

Through strategic partnerships and community relationships, CultureWorks continues to impact our community by engaging an increasingly diverse audience through the arts. This summer, 58% of our registrants were students of color, with 46% identifying as Hispanic/Latino. We want to continue to provide these young artists and designers with the best experience possible, including access to: teachers and mentors who represent them, field trips to museums and schools where artists of color are represented, professional-quality materials and supplies & curriculum and projects that empower them to think critically and create honest work that impacts our world.