

transformative art + design academy cultureworks

DIVERSITY, EQUITY, INCLUSION, & ACCESSIBILITY

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 along the lakeshore, while connecting them to mentors and professionals who can identify with their personal experiences and backgrounds.

We acknowledge the historical lack of diverse representation within nonprofit management, board leadership, and art/design careers, on local and national scales, and we seek to celebrate and equip creative individuals from traditionally underrepresented communities. Our strategies and policies for student/staff recruitment, curriculum development, board management, and leadership development reflect our continual efforts to nurture a creative and welcoming community where all students experience a sense of belonging.

Our core programs serve 6th-12th grade students, the vast majority of whom are split evenly between Holland, West Ottawa, and Black River Public Schools, with 18 total schools represented. CultureWorks provides hands-on art training for over 1,000 students per year, roughly 160 of whom are enrolled in 9-wk after school classes or 1-wk summer classes. Of those enrolled, over 30% live below the ALICE threshold, 44% are ethnic minorities (with 31% Latinx heritage), and over 50% are receiving treatment for ongoing mental and/or social health challenges.

CultureWorks makes every effort to foster an inclusive and supportive creative environment. We've become known as a place where foreign exchange students, LGBTQ+ students, neurodiverse and differently-abled students are welcomed and celebrated for their unique abilities, experiences, and perspectives. Our Student Advisory council is actively involved in organizational management, program planning, and community engagement. This group of 15 high school students represents diverse racial/ethnic, cultural, gender, socio-economic, spiritual, and academic experiences, and they meet weekly with staff for leadership training, fundraising initiatives, collaborative art projects, and community outreach events.

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 our staff and volunteers accordingly. We maintain small class sizes (10-12 students) and provide one-on-one assistance as needed. Our studio hosts separate learning spaces to limit noise and distraction and is approachable by foot/bike and wheelchair accessible.

We multiply impact and increase equitable access to arts education through strategic partnerships with over 20 local nonprofits including the Boys & Girls Clubs, Out on the Lakeshore, Children's Advocacy Center, Bethany Christian Services, I Am Academy, Latin Americans United for Progress, International Festival, the City of Holland, Arbor Circle, 3Sixty/City Walls Mural Festival, Saugatuck Center for the Arts, and Hope College TRIO Upward Bound.