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### ***Under-Resourced doesn't mean Unable: Art Programs***

*Tuition:* a common obstacle for high school students researching summer opportunities in their community or in local colleges. Programs are often a hundred plus dollars, and could add up to be more depending on transportation or housing. The price is usually dependent on the materials, equipment, and experienced faculty. (Dr H) Because of this, many students find themselves doing very little during the summer, unable to afford any sort of opportunity that could greatly impact and benefit their resumes.

But what if there were specific programs designed to eliminate those barriers?

ACU, better known as Art Changes Us, a program specifically designed for under-resourced students, was founded in the Mountain View-Los Altos area by Carol Damonte, Katie Provesjil, and Bill Scull. ACU deliberately serves under-resourced youth, providing them with a chance to grow or enhance their communication and artistic skills, giving them an opportunity to gain experience.

They don't have any sort of application or enrollment fee. In fact, they give any student taking their *beginners iphone photography* course with them, a 100 dollar visa card stipend.

"I've spent most of life working with, as I would say, over-resourced young people at Los Altos," said Damonte, founder and creative director. "And I wanted to do

something that had to do with working with people who didn't have those same opportunities.”

The Mountain View-Los Altos district area is certainly a divided community in terms of income and stability. While there are definitely well-off families living here, there are also those who face a bit more struggle in being financially stable. In a place rich in opportunities for growing generations of students, it's harder for those struggling families or communities to take advantage of those opportunities, which is why ACU is so important.

Programs outside of school are quite significant and necessary for a student's life in high school. These programs support and “increase academic achievements and participation,” says Kayla Anderson in “How Art Programs Benefit At-Risk Youth.” Art programs have proven to stimulate parts of their brains that later benefit their success in school or even at home – which sets them up for future success. (Anderson)

“The creative process itself fosters innovation and critical thinking, essential skills in today's world,” said Nancy Reyners in “The Impact and Influence of Art in Culture and Community.”

Programs generally aim for extra guidance and experience in a young adult's life, challenging their thinking and opinions to strengthen and prepare them for the future.

Programs like Art Changes Us have to recruit those who want to take advantage of the given opportunities, who want to learn, and who have been looking for programs but have been declined because they couldn't afford the tuition.

“AVID made it easy for us,” said Damonte, “because we wanted to do a program that reached out to people who are under-resourced.”

AVID, which stands for *Advancement Via Individual Determination*, is a four-year high school commitment course that students can select that will aid them in

the process of applying for a four-year university. Their program is specifically made to benefit students by providing them with endless opportunities that can enhance their resumes and experience, increasing their chances of success.

Selva Arroyo, a Junior AVID student at Mountain View High School, said, “they [AVID] advertised it and I was like, sure, why not? I’ll give it a try.” And that was what AVID essentially did. They were a class full of students scouting for opportunities, and with their advertisement for the program, ACU received worthy applicants.

“I actually really enjoyed it, and appreciated that it wasn’t something I had to pay a lot of money for, so I continued on,” said Arroyo, who has attended a total of 3 Art Changes Us classes. Now, Arroyo said she has found a love for photography, which she wouldn’t have known if she hadn’t taken the beginner’s photography class taught by ACU. “I think it was worth it, the course and getting to know them [the founders], and I’m glad I was able to participate.”

Art Changes Us is one of the few low-income-friendly programs in the Mountain View-Los Altos community. Its ability to recruit and hold classes comes from the help of their community, all pitching in to provide an opportunity for those less fortunate.

One organization that greatly helps ACU is the Los Altos Methodist Church, which sponsors the program, providing a room upstairs in their building for Damonte, Povejsil, and Scull to hold their classes.

“We get the space that we use at no cost,” said Damonte. “We’re not paying a rental fee or a lease fee. We don’t pay for heating, water, anything like that, and when we do our exhibitions, we do them over at Los Altos. That’s just because it’s a larger space and we don’t pay for any of that.”

Being sponsored by the church significantly impacts the overall price for a program, she said. Expenses are a huge part of programs, and it is understood that big

projects like Art Programs require a good amount of money. However, adjustments like being sponsored by a particular place could very well help with housing expenses, which is exactly what Art Changes Us intends to continue to do.

“It [The church in Los Altos] serves a fairly wealthy community,” said Damonte, “And that community can pay for art school or art classes or private club sports. They could pay for all of these things. And there's a lot of people who can't.”

There’s a significance to representation, to reminding your community of the different lives that lie within.

Other art programs usually have high expenses from materials, rentals, and collaborations with well-experienced artists (Dr. H). Universities, like UCLA or UC Berkeley, sometimes offer summer courses as well – regardless of subject – however, fees are usually around the thousands for a week or two long stay with professors and others with experience in the workforce for networking.

UCLA’s summer residential courses for High Schoolers hold a default price of \$4,508, or \$2,450 for a virtual course. (Express yourself through art) While the debate of whether it is worth it or not is still ongoing, a concern we should focus on instead is *why is it still so expensive?*

Art School of San Francisco Bay, an actual program outside of a University, offers beginner courses for teens as well. However, their tuition begins at a \$200 monthly fee for an *online* course – the in-person option being \$45 more expensive. (SF Bay Art School)

“I decided to start this program, Art Changes Us, impacted and inspired by Artists for Humanity in Boston, which is the largest employer of under-resourced youth in Boston,” said Damonte. “Katie and Bill stepped in and said, ‘Hey, we’d be interested in working with you.’”

Katie Povejsil and Bill Scull, co-founders and artistic mentors for Art Changes Us, both hold extensive experience and credentials in the artistic industries, which you can find on the Art Changes Us website.

Povejsil has experience in marketing and business development with tech companies like Apple, Adobe, HP, and Scull, as a Silicon Valley tech executive and traveling photographer.

Artists for Humanity, the program that inspired Art Changes Us, also serves under-resourced students in their community. They collaborate with the teens of their communities on innovative art projects, which are later commissioned by clients.

The Mission statement of Artists for Humanity is to “transcend economic, racial, and social divisions” through creative expression. They collaborate on innovative art and design, using it as a way to share their voice and personality through public art. (“Our Mission.”)

The students who participate in AFH receive help from experienced mentors in their community. The importance of that alone, the mentorship these lower-income students can receive – that's why it's so important. Mentors in said Art Programs can help remind and show students they matter, and they deserve the opportunities other students are receiving as well.

“We really wanted to create something that did three things.” Said Damonte. “[Something] that gave opportunities to people who couldn't afford it, to have an opportunity to build a safe community, and to also just *give* opportunities.” Their main goal, as a group of co-founders, was for their students to receive leadership and entrepreneurial skills.

In one session, Povejsil and Scull took their students over to the Mountain View Public Library with various lighting equipment. “Those kinds of opportunities, people just don't always get,” said Damonte.

“I remember that they took us on a little mini field trip to this abandoned house by a high school,” said Arroyo. “They [the school that owned the land] allowed us to go and take pictures, and we got to rummage around outside of the house because the inside was locked, but it was fun because it was a little more interactive.”

Classes like these are intended to provide a more hands-on type of learning, allowing them to apply the things they’ve learned in the beginner's photography course with a more active, engaging approach.

“Those are really, really important concepts to understand,” said Damonte. “They can be transferred to any other art form.”

Arroyo plans to continue her work with Art Changes Us, and became inspired by her work there to strengthen the skills learned in future personal projects. “It got me into loving photography in general,” she said, smiling.

ACU’s minimum requirements for their program are to be committed and ready to learn. “What my greatest masterpiece is who you [the student] become through this. I care about you guys,” said Damonte.

The support and care given through a program is important, as the entire reason many apply and participate is for that extra mentor or experience. The safe space art programs create may provide an outlet to many students who have most likely never had one before.

In the end, art programs are places where people should be able to find a community to feel welcomed and supported – something *all* programs should provide. Being able to afford the program's tuition shouldn't be the first thing running through

their minds. Under-resourced students aren't *unable* to execute tasks, assignments, or programs – they're just not represented enough.

“I want them [students] to know that they are heard, they are seen, and that they matter.” Damonte paused, a smile curling through her lips. “And art is the way we get there,”

## Notes on AI

I did not use Generative AI at any point for this documentary paper.

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