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# CHANGING THE WORLD

THE EFFORTS BEING MADE TO CHANGE THE WORLD FOR THE BETTER

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SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 21, 2008

## Art: Helping Downtown LA Become A Better Place



Downtown Los Angeles is growing, but what is happening to the children who still live in low-income housing and who know the street gangs better than they know who the first president of the United States was? Although this has been a prevalent problem in downtown for over twenty years, there are inspirational people who are dedicated to getting these children off the streets --with art.

In 1989, funding cuts eliminated art instruction from the Los Angeles Public schools, It included cutting 20% of teachers and making the maximum students in one classroom to one teacher for over 40 students. The budget was cut by Prop 98 in 1989, the total budget from 80 million to 50 million dollars for public school education throughout Los Angeles.

**Bob Bates**, the co-founder and Artistic Director of **Inner City Arts**, was an artist living in Downtown Los Angeles when these budget cuts were made, and witnessed the amount of violence on the streets of downtown. Along with Irwin Jaeger, a local businessman and entrepreneur, Bob worked to restore arts education to the children in and around Los Angeles' skid row area.

ABOUT ME

**SAMIE SCHOTZ**

I am currently a senior at the University of Southern California majoring is American History, with a concentration in media in the United States. I am very passionate about social issues around the world, and hope to get more people involved and interested. This is a blog that examines and holds discussion about non profit organizations and people who are volunteering to make the world a better place.

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The organization has created a program where schools in the Unified Public School District are bused in to the facilities right off skid row, to have art education. The facilities include classes in the visual arts, dance, digital animation, music and drama. Most of the children that are bused into the inner-city arts program range in age from 7 to 17. It has catered to over 150,000 students to date and now [42 public schools](#) in the area attend the program. According to reports, these students are the largest group in the country who are at risk for dropping out of high school. The racial backgrounds of the majority of the students are Latino who have very poor English language skills. More than half of the students live in walking distance from the Inner City Arts campus, which is a block west of skid row. It is estimated that over one-third of the children are classified as homeless. Inner City Arts creates an "oasis" for these children removing them from the streets and giving them culture and a safe place to express themselves.

Bob Bates, founder, is a firm believer that the arts are important but it has also been shown in other studies just how important art is to a child and their success of excelling in school. Inner City Arts has been a [subject of a study](#) at the University of California, Los Angeles for the past five years. [This study](#) revealed that children who attend Inner City Art perform better on standardized tests in language, reading and math than those students who did not attend. These results became widely published, and interest peaked across the country. New York City public school systems (along with the rest of the United States) had to cut art classes because of the federal law, "No Child Left Behind." This law led public school across the nation to cut funding in many subject areas to spend more time in math and English. With Inner City Arts as a model, the program "[Learning Through Art](#)" was created and funded by the Guggenheim Museum. This program brings artists and instructors to the public schools in New York City for free after-school art classes. A study was also done on this program in 2005, and the results showed that these New York City kids, like those from Inner City Arts, achieved higher scores in critical thinking, through description, hypothesizing and reasoning. There is no clear reason why art education has this effect on other subjects, but [Cynthia Harnisch](#), executive director of Inner-City Arts, "There is no bad art. There are no bad feelings. In art there are no mistakes or wrong answers. Only endless opportunities to experience the success of creating something from the heart."

The first time I went to Inner City . . .



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Arts, it was clear to me that art does create a



difference to these children. When walking into the campus that is fenced with barbed wire and homeless people walking the street, it truly is an “oasis”. From the moment a car pulls into the parking lot which is covered in art, the culture and artistic expression is tangible and the purest form of an art gallery. In this sad and depressing neighborhood nothing but smiles fill the halls, the rooms, theater, offices, and art studios. The amount of creativity, dedication and pride each student takes in their art project, play, dance or new song they have learned, made me believe change for these at risks kids is possible. Free form expression is giving these kids a fighting chance against statistics and previous generations before them, failed to meet, they will succeed. One child at Inner city Art, a **fourth grader** who is considered homeless and lives below the poverty line said, “Being at Inner City Arts is the best and most important thing in my life.” As a personal connection to this organization and resident of downtown Los Angeles, I can honestly say I have seen this community grow and Inner City Arts is one of the reasons the Los Angeles Downtown area is able to become a metropolitan center again.

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