

Waterside Workshops 2014

Waterside Workshops uses vocational education as a method of promoting youth development, encouraging sustainable and healthy lifestyles, and cultivating positive change in the Bay Area community. We provide job-training, classes, and recreation opportunities for some of the Bay Area's most at-risk youth while offering services to the community including a bicycle shop and repair facility, a full service wooden boat building shop, and Berkeley's only youth-run coffee shop. The structure of our organization is based on a hybrid business model combining the ground-level, real experience of a small, locally owned business, and the mission-driven focus and financial accountability of nonprofit organization. It is structured and run like a small, income-generating business that fully integrates youth development into its daily operations.

Our organization consists of two primary programs: Berkeley Boathouse and Street Level Cycles. Berkeley Boathouse replaces now-extinct woodworking programs in local high schools and takes the concept a step further by using an internship/apprentice model. Street Level Cycles is a full-service community bicycle shop that combines a do-it-yourself studio with a youth education program, creating a space where members of the community can fix their bicycles for free while supporting local vocational training. Our Youth Internship Program encompasses internship opportunities in both Berkeley Boathouse and Street Level Cycles.

The structure of our program has been designed on the day-to-day experience of working one-on-one with extremely at-risk youth. When we started Waterside, we didn't know we were going to work with "at-risk" teenagers. We knew we wanted to teach hand-skills and bring the community back to Aquatic Park. Soon after we opened, we were approached by many "alternative" schools. Before our first classes with these students began, teachers and administrators warned us, "these are bad kids." Prepared for the worst, our instructors were relieved when the kids prospered in our classes. As we got to know the kids, and their stories unfolded, the next evolution of our program design began. Many questions filled our staff and board meetings. How could a 17 year old nearly die of starvation before someone did something? How could an illiterate 18 year old who just got out of prison be expected to find a job? With that, Waterside was born, and the framework for the design of our programs was created. Since then, we have continued to research these questions and build the answers into the design of our programs. We quickly discovered that in order to teach "job-skills" we had to employ a comprehensive, holistic, and personal approach.

Grant funding will go directly to helping some of the Bay Area's most at-risk youth reach their full potential. Funds will be applied to our program staff salary in both Berkeley Boathouse and Street Level Cycles. Our staff is composed of a small group of founding staff and former youth interns. Funding that supports our staff roles has the dual effect of providing programming for youth and providing stable, consistent income for young adults from disadvantaged backgrounds who have overcome adversity and secured staff roles in our organization.

With RMFY Funds, we aim to accomplish the following goals:

- Provide a safe space for emotional and cognitive development
- Connect youth with partner organizations to ensure basic needs are met
- Train interns in the use of mechanics and carpenters tools
- Use boat design and bicycle mechanics as a method of teaching math, geometry, and physics
- Prepare youth for jobs in the maritime trades, construction trades, mechanics positions, food service, and retail environments
- Through partnerships with local colleges, expose youth to the possibility of pursuing higher learning in areas of engineering, naval architecture, civil engineering, product design and similar fields
- Through relationships with area businesses, place interns into jobs in the local economy