

Building robots, friendships and futures

By Rachel Basso

Magic happens when teens teach teens technology skills

Despite an abundance of cutting edge technology a stone's throw away, Silicon Valley youth from low-income families have limited exposure to the inner workings of high-tech companies. Marginalized students lack access to technology learning experiences and exposure to STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts and Mathematics) career opportunities. The absence of technology in the lives of underprivileged youth hinders exploration of their true potential.

On the other end of the spectrum, youth from high-income Silicon Valley communities are surrounded by STEAM education from a young age. With parents and role models in technology and engineering jobs, students are overloaded with opportunities to learn skills like robotics and coding.

When these two groups of students come together with a shared desire to learn



Photo by Rachel Basso
Program volunteer Ashwin Hingwe and Jazmine Hernandez, a Y Full STEAM Ahead program participant appear very involved with their work in the Y program.

and grow, pure magic happens.

For 6 weeks this summer, learning runs rampant every Monday, Wednesday, and Friday at Lewis and Joan Platt East Palo Alto Family YMCA, where teens teach teens the fundamentals of robotics and coding as part of the Y's Full STEAM Ahead program.

Student and parent volunteers from Los Altos Botball Robotics bring equipment, expertise, and enthusiasm to East Palo Alto teens. Volunteering offers academically driven teens the chance to slow down, appreciate the opportunities

they have, and pay it forward.

Now in its second year, the peer to peer program engages middle and high school students in a fun and accessible

technology experience. The unique learning environment offers participants a safe space to explore technology through robotics and coding, while volunteers develop leadership skills and experience the joy in giving back.

Reluctant participants have changed their minds with heavy doses of peer encouragement. Meera Srinivasan, a volunteer and rising senior at Homestead High School in Cupertino is excited to inspire girls her own age to consider a STEAM career. "Even if they're not feeling confident in themselves, I'm fortunate to be in the position where I can build

them up. I can help them and maybe push them farther into STEAM than they thought they could ever go."

Whether the teens acknowledge it or not, both participants and volunteers are learning valuable life skills and building self-esteem. Volunteer Andy Wang, a rising junior at Gunn High School in Palo Alto, sees so much potential in the teens new to robotics that he's inspired to push himself in pursuit of his own potential.

"I really enjoy trying to teach someone." Ashwin Hingwe, rising senior at Mountain View High School says of volunteering. "I feel like this leadership experience is valuable because not only is it helping others, which is a goal for the rest of my life, but it's also reinforcing for me the concepts that I'm teaching."

Each week, bonds strengthen and excitement towards coding and robotics grows. "With robotics, it may seem hard at first, but it's never as hard as they think. I like that we're able to break down barriers with STEAM," Srinivasan says of watching her peers start to recognize

their own potential. "They realize they can do whatever they set their mind to."

In addition to gaining technology skills, Full STEAM Ahead participants receive access to a variety of wellness activities, including swim lessons, nutrition counseling, and career exploration field trips.

"Although other programs offer coding or robotics, ours is the only one that offers everything," Y Staff Loree Watanabe explains. "It's an outlet for youth during the summer. We'd rather have them here being interactive and engaged versus being home alone or playing video games all day."

Instead of spending summer at home glued to the TV, these teenagers are learning building blocks for a bright future. Wang describes, "It doesn't matter your background -- if you put an equal amount of work into robotics you get the same result. It's all built on hard work."

Rachel Basso is the marketing communications manager for the YMCA of Silicon Valley.

Candidates can now file

candidates is posted online and updated every evening. To view the roster, go to Roster of Candidates at www.smcacre.org.

For more information, call 650.312.5222 and or visit the www.smcacre.org website. Those who are interested can also get voter informa-

tion on Twitter@smcvote.

Candidates are also encouraged to get information that is contained in such online resources as "Candidates & Campaigns- 10 Things you need to know to declare your Candidacy for Local Elective Office" at <https://www.shapethefuture.org/campaigns/declare-candidacy/>

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ture.org/campaigns/declare-candidacy/

Candidates interested in running for city council in East Palo Alto can get important information on the City of East Palo Alto website at <http://www.ci.east-palo-alto.ca.us/index.aspx?nid=552>

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supports local organizations in Belle Haven, East Palo Alto, North Fair Oaks, and Redwood City that are working to meet pressing needs in their communities. Organizations that are selected will receive year-long grants ranging from \$25,000 to

\$100,000.

More information can be found <https://www.chanzuckerberg.com/newsroom/the-chan-zuckerberg-initiative-invites-bay-area-organizations-to-apply-for-new-grant-funding>

Amidst gentrification

one person), and (c) have tech companies and universities contribute significant amounts of housing to the region and simultaneously limit their expansion, so as to ultimately create a jobs-housing balance. These pieces require humans to enact them, they won't happen on their own. I don't feel we have fully reached these wins, but they are ideas to

work towards when people say they "don't know how to address the tech issue."

Also, I don't know any tech company that's strictly run by engineers. For example, they hire people in departments other than engineering: human resources, management, marketing, operations, project management, and legal, just to name a few.

5.Expect pushback – People will disagree with you about what is best for EPA, this is normal and happens in community work, but keep going.

Pushback may come in the following forms: people discrediting your work as a community organizer as "not a real job," people calling your allies (on an issue) "anarchists," transplant EPA researchers

hesitant to meet/speak with you, being excluded from meetings specific to the issue you're working on for fear that your analysis/stance on issues (as a local!) will jeopardize an organization's relationships with incoming entities such as Facebook or Amazon (in other words, corporate interests will take precedence over community interests) – keep going!

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Realize you're planting seeds that you may/may not see in your lifetime. Let the spirit of God and change-makers that came before you (especially those who incorporated the city!) guide you as you agitate/advocate for your community. I'm grateful for locals, who amidst gentrification and all of the politics... STILL give back!

Medication Assisted Treatment

MAT to broaden treatment options for the untreated opioid addict.

However, people struggling with addiction still face barriers to treatment. Currently, Medicare does not cover MAT medications for

beneficiaries in opioid treatment programs. Fortunately, there is bipartisan Congressional support for providing such Medicare Part B coverage to Medicare beneficiaries, who are treated in opioid treatment programs.

Similarly, many state Medicaid programs and commercial insurers don't cover MAT. A number of policy making groups and organizations, including the American Medical Association and the President's Commission on Com-

bating Drug Addiction and the Opioid Crisis, have urged them to change these policies so that everyone has access to treatment.

MAT is a tragically underutilized tool. Coordinated policy initiatives -- ones that

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increase MAT use, implement prevention programs, and use balanced enforcement -- offer the best chance to end the opioid epidemic.

Mark Parrino is the President of American Association for the Treatment of Opioid Dependence.