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ARTS, INDUSTRY AND COMMUNITY.



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Oakland Youth Get Creative with Bikes in Hot Programs at The Crucible

There's a force for positive change in West Oakland sparked by a growing bicycle program at The Crucible, the Bay Area's school of industrial and fire arts. That change is being forged in after-school and weekend classes, the popular Earn-A-Bike program, Youth Spring and Summer Camps and at community Bike Fix-a-Thons.

The Crucible is best known for its annual Fire Arts Festival, a two-day celebration of creation through fire and light, and its amazing Fire Ballet and Fire Opera productions. But The Crucible's youth program works to empower youth through the arts, and has exposed thousands of young people of diverse backgrounds to the arts and sciences through hands-on workshops and classes that build confidence, inspire creativity, and instill responsibility. Over the last few years, The Crucible's Bike Program has become the organization's most popular community outreach program.

In The Crucible's Earn-A-Bike program, a participant learns basic bike mechanic skills and fixes two bicycles: one to keep and one to sell. Proceeds from the sales of bicycles help support the program—and also teach participants the value of their own work. Many students return year after year to learn more advanced skills and to volunteer at The Crucible and in their community.

To serve the broader community, The Crucible offers Bike Fix-A-Thons eight times a year where West Oakland residents bring bicycles to be repaired in its bike shop. Volunteer mechanics patch and replace tubes, fix wheels and tires, repair cables, gears, and chains, adjust and repair seats and handlebars. Throughout the repair process the mechanics explain their work to the youth in order to deepen their understanding of bike repair and maintenance, and give tours of the studio to those interested in learning more.

The Bike Frame Alteration class is the next progression for youth who have moved beyond beginning bike mechanic skills towards intermediate skills," says Kristy Alfieri, Crucible's Education Director. "In this program a small group of youngsters learn metalwork and advanced bike mechanic skills necessary to design and build a project." They also learn about how people around the world have altered bicycles – for utilitarian needs, high performance, or just to look cool -- getting inspiration for their own projects. At the end of the workshop, participants have combined their love of bicycles, and their skills in design, MIG welding, oxy/acetylene torch, grinding and finishing, to create their own art bikes. Over 30 youth have participated in this unique workshop. When they finish their bike projects, students show off their creations during The Crucible's annual Gifty Holiday Art Sale and Open House, and this year they have been invited to display their works of mobile art at the deYoung Museum in San Francisco.

Now in its sixth year, the Youth Program serves over 3,500 youth annually through fieldtrips, classes, workshops, bike programs, educational outreach and community collaborations, reaching far beyond the West Oakland community. Through classes and camps, The Crucible teaches industrial arts to children of all backgrounds. This spring, The Crucible offers two sessions of camp (March 29-April 2 and April 5-9) where youth ages 12 to 18 can learn to weld, forge steel, work with molten glass, and make jewelry. During the summer, four weeklong sessions are offered in the Fired Up! day camp program (June 21-25, July 5-9, July 19-23 and August 2-6). With a wide range of offerings, from blacksmithing to mudslinging madness (ceramics), from glass flameworking to soft circuits, welding to woodturning, extreme gizmos, radical robots, and cartoneria, each youngster has a chance to learn something entirely new and walk away with some unique art.

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About The Crucible

The Crucible is a non-profit arts education center that fosters a collaboration of arts, industry, and community by teaching fire, metal, glass, and light art. Founded in 1999, The Crucible currently offers more than 600 classes to nearly 5,000 students annually in everything from bronze casting to neon, welding to glass working, blacksmithing to fire dancing. Dedicated to the creative use of fire and light, The Crucible is also known for its innovative and stunning public events and fundraisers, uniting artists from diverse disciplines.

For more information and to register for classes, visit: <http://www.thecrucible.org>