Snapshots of Success

Portraits of Triumph from Manchester Craftsmen’s Guild’s Youth & Arts Program in Partnership with Public Education
Within this booklet, you will find a small sampling of the countless students, many of whom attended Pittsburgh Public High Schools, who have participated in the MCG Youth & Arts program since its 1968 inception. The achievements of these individuals underscore and highlight the effectiveness of our partnership with the public school system. By using art to teach critical and analytical thinking, professionalism and presentation skills, we complement traditional education. These abilities are transferable to many different careers and situations in life.

We would like to share with you the first in an ongoing series of alumni success stories. Step inside, walk in their shoes, and see through their eyes the need for empowering educational environments like MCG.

William E. Strickland
President & CEO, Manchester Bidwell Corporation
Founder, Manchester Craftsmen’s Guild
Mentorship is a key component of our arts education programming.

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As a teenager in 1960s Pittsburgh, Bill Strickland was disengaged from his education. He began to follow the wrong path until he stumbled upon the right way.

Walking through the halls of his urban public high school, the smell of coffee and the sounds of jazz caught his attention. Entering the unfamiliar classroom, Bill saw a man sitting in front of a mound of clay, shaping it in the beauty of the afternoon light. Captivated by something he had never experienced in an educational setting, Bill started questioning the man behind the potter’s wheel.

That man, art teacher Frank Ross, decided immediately to invest in the potential he saw before him. Frank invited Bill into his studio and his life. Eventually, with the help of Frank’s mentorship, Bill obtained admission to the University of Pittsburgh.

While an undergraduate, Strickland resolved to provide the same transformational experience to other inner-city youth. In 1968, he founded Manchester Craftsmen’s Guild to bring art, light, hope and education to his struggling neighborhood.

Since then, MCG has reinvented itself to effectively meet our community’s evolving needs. From our humble beginnings in a row house basement, our Youth and Arts program now encompasses four studios with industry standard equipment, a college admissions information area, and a professional art gallery.

Staffed with teacher/mentors who are professional artists in their own rights, our programming is designed to go beyond traditional pedagogy and address students as individuals with unique learning styles. We instill the values and skills — goal setting, respecting yourself and others, critical thinking and problem solving — needed to achieve in an academic setting and in life.

Our alumni are as diverse as Pittsburgh. Taking with them their experiences here, they have gone into banking, teaching, medicine and science as well as art. They are minorities and they are not. They started in poor neighborhoods and affluent ones. The majority of them, regardless of background, were at-risk.

Discover their stories. Help us continue to mentor at-risk youth through our empowering educations environment.
Alecia, by her own admission, was a painfully shy child with little direction. In her sophomore year of high school, she quietly followed a boy she liked to Manchester Craftsmen’s Guild. MCG stuck around, the boy did not.

She was drawn to the classes, the creative environment, and the teaching artists. The staff showed her that education is not only about working hard and also the relationships built during the process. Alecia immersed herself in an environment that enabled her to let down her walls, relax, and “finally see in myself what others already saw.”

“I don’t think I would have gone to college without my experiences at MCG.” She attended Alfred University and has a degree in Sculpture and Education. In addition to teaching, Alecia gives back by being active in many community organizations.
Celebrating success is part of the creative process at MCG Youth & Arts.

“Clay is not only a material, but a metaphor for life.”

— Dr. Bryson Lesniak (‘93 – ’94) Assistant Professor of Orthopedic Surgery, Miami University

“The city — and the world — was an open book waiting to be read. MCG put the book on my desk.”

— Dr. Bryson Lesniak (‘93 – ’94) Assistant Professor of Orthopedic Surgery, Miami University

“The staff at MCG mentored me. They gave me responsibilities, accountability and leadership roles that weren’t available at my high school.”

— Alison Spatz Levine (‘01 – ’03) Medical Student, University of Pittsburgh
MCG provided more than just a creative environment for Dexter Fairweather. It was, in a very real sense, where he grew up. When Dexter was in ninth grade, he moved to Pittsburgh from Chicago to live with his aunt. His mother had recently passed away; now a part of the foster care system, Dexter was looking for a new start and new experiences.

“MCG taught me time management and how to be a calmer individual,” he says. Dexter knew he did not want to be a professional artist, but he attributes the skills learned at MCG to helping him become a successful and accomplished individual during his days at Peabody High School (2002–06).
“I was a young man in a situation that offered few outlets. MCG represented a meeting place for ‘alternative’ creative personalities.”

— S. Adrian Massey (‘94 – ‘97)
Creative Director and Harvard University Graduate

“MCG was instrumental in helping me intertwine multiple areas of thought including science and art.”

— Abigail Benson (‘96 – ‘99)
Natural Resources Specialist
Lori Hepner

Current Occupation: Professor, Penn State University

Years Attended: 1996 – 99

Lori Hepner had an interest in art from a young age. What she didn’t have was the confidence to pursue art as a career.

“MCG let me see that an artist can do and be and some of the different ways you make a living as a working artist,” Lori says. She now teaches at Penn State and is a working artist with several of pieces in the Carnegie Museum of Art’s collection.

How to be a professional artist wasn’t the only thing Lori discovered at MCG. “The people I met there were my best friends — we connected in a way most people do not today,” she says. “It’s a very special place and I hope it lasts forever.”
“The process is as important as the outcome.”

— Karina Steren (’03 – ‘06)
Research Specialist

“I can say that I would not be where I am today if it weren’t for this creative safe-haven. MCG influenced my decision to become a teacher.”

— Rebecca Rodgers (’03 – ’07)
Student, Dickinson College

Students show off wearable self-portraits made by screenprinting on paper bags.

“The actual skills I learned in the classes – like using Photoshop – I am applying to my work and my life to this date.”

— Karina Steren (’03 – ’06)
Research Specialist
Andrew Karaman

Current Occupation: Emerging Artist
Years Attended: 1995 – 96

In 2009, Andrew Karaman was chosen as one of the Pittsburgh Arts Festival Emerging Artists. However, his involvement in the art world began over a decade prior to this achievement. “As a Manchester Craftsmen’s Guild student, I had lots of opportunities to meet working artists.”

“MCG Youth & Arts taught me about the creative process, the importance of being professional, and giving back to the community.” After graduating from the Art Institute of Pittsburgh with a degree in multimedia and Web design, Andrew took a job at a local health care company. Even while working his day job, Andrew never stopped creating the art he loved. Sometimes, needing encouragement, he returns to MCG for inspiration.

Andrew is active in various organizations such as Bike Pittsburgh, Attack Theater and The Sprout Fund’s Hot House event.
Through photography, students are transported to an unexplored world of beauty.

— Josh Kramar (‘06 – ‘09)
United States Marine Corps Officer

“MCG was a place where you were respected by your fellow students and teachers; it was a very collaborative environment.”

— Jocelyn Horner (‘98 – ‘99)
Director of Operations, Robotics Institute
Carnegie Mellon University

“MCG taught me to be patient and persistent. It’s also a great place for teens to come together and be themselves.”

— Jocelyn Horner (‘98 – ‘99)
Director of Operations, Robotics Institute
Carnegie Mellon University
Erica credits skills she learned at Manchester Craftsmen’s Guild with not only helping her obtain entrance to a respected university, but succeeding in her courses once she got there. “MCG taught me to be persistent and consistent and, because of that, I was more prepared to handle a college environment than most people I knew.”

Additionally, her experience at MCG continues to serve her well as an AmeriCorps Public Ally where she is currently teaching robotics. “Art expands your mind and teaches you flexibility. That is very important when you are trying to be something more than what you are.”

Erica is currently applying to the Masters of Art in Education program at the University of Pittsburgh.
“Learning web design and general computer maintenance at MCG helped me decide on my field of study in college and eventual career path.”

— Perry Rajnovic (‘98 – ‘00)
Software Engineer

“I also learned to accept and integrate constructive criticism. These are skills that I have found absolutely critical in my life”

— Kelly Wells (‘96 – ‘00)
Law Student

Internationally renowned artist Julia Mandle teaches our students about performance art.
Wendell Wade was a creative and mischievous child who always wanted to be the center of attention — a typical class clown. Wendell’s father encouraged him to attend Manchester Craftsmen’s Guild. Wendell agreed because he wanted something different than the traditional high school experience.

While taking photography and digital arts courses here, he learned the academic skills he credits with preparing him for being a communications major at Norfolk University.

“MCG gave me the ability to speak on many different subject matters and that has made me more relatable in the business community,” he says.
Students learn computer skills that are transferable to many different careers.

Illustration and production are all in a day’s work in our Digital Arts lab.

“MCG taught me to be independent in my work while still listening to the advice of others.”

— Aaron Jackendoff (’03 – ’07)
Industrial Design Student

“MCG was the first place I felt comfortable being myself — it instilled me with confidence and motivation.”

— Casey Droge (’96 – ’00)
Professional Artist
Justin & Adam Meyer

**Current Occupations:**  
Biologist (Justin)  
Asset Manager (Adam)

**Years Attended:**  
1996 – 2000

Justin grew up in a harsh inner-city environment. MCG was a safe haven where he could escape from the negative attention of his high school classmates. “For me, MCG was a place to be weird … and to not worry about normal conventions and pressures,” says Justin.

Even after leaving MCG, despite not pursuing a career in the arts, Justin continues to use the creative process. As a scientist, hebrainstorms hypotheses, tests them, and then communicates the results. “Each step has an analog to the artistic method I learned at MCG,” he says.

Justin’s brother Adam also attended MCG. He feels the most important value he learned was giving back to your own community. Today, as a result of his time at MCG, Adam is involved with Pacific Beach Town Council’s “Safe and Beautiful” Committee. He helps select artists to create murals on utility boxes to enhance the aesthetics of his neighborhood.
We teach that giving back to the community is integrally valuable.

“MCG was the first place I did manual photography, learned to draw and understood that maybe I could pursue arts in a serious way.”

— Allison Dixon (’03 – ’06)
Cooper Union School of Architecture Student
Shannon Yon

Current Occupation: Art Teacher
Years Attended: 2001 – 04

Shannon “Shay” Yon spent her summers at Manchester Craftsman’s Guild. Time would fly and, before the day was over, she was already looking forward to coming back. “MCG was like a second home to me — I couldn’t wait to walk through those doors every day.”

“MCG was unlike traditional school. You were being taught to be a very skillful artist by a very skillful artist. That gave the experience a more open and free feel,” she says.

In addition to art, Shay learned to be confident in her own ideas and how to work with a variety of different kinds of people, expertise she puts to good use as an art teacher. “It’s because of my experiences at MCG that I wanted to become an art teacher.”
The Future

As you can see from our alumni’s stories, the impact of our programs resonates long after students leave our art studios. Whether it’s because of the unique learning environment, the life lessons our teaching artists instill, or the skills and values we impart, our alumni carry our vision of empowering educational environments with them into their diverse lives.

If you are an alumni, please help us continue to influence at-risk youth by telling us your story in person or through our Web site.

Call 412-323-4000 Ext. 116
or visit www.mcgyouthandarts.org

Thank you to all the alumni we interviewed to compile this book. You continue to inspire!

Please help us continue our mission of positively influencing at-risk lives. Make a contribution to MCG Youth & Arts or one of Manchester Bidwell Corporation’s other non-profits and help create a better way forward for the region and the world.

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