YMCA Teen Tech Center

Arts Programming Overview + Teaching Artist(s) Bio

PROGRAMMING

The Republic Bank Foundation Family YMCA opened in 2019 and is a beacon of opportunity for West Louisville with Norton Healthcare, Republic Bank, ProRehab, Family & Children's Counseling Centers, and the Y operating together working to address the health inequities of our community. Through the Teen Tech Center, we are bridging the digital divide and weaving this into our continuum of community benefits along with physical and mental health, financial literacy, and more. This space is specifically designed to target and engage youth aged 13-18 with an integrated tech, music, video and app & gaming youth space. Throughout a year, we reach at least 600 unduplicated youth through our programs and we have the capacity to host groups of up to 30 youth.

While open to the public, the Teen Tech Center is also used to enhance our other youth programs, including the following: YMCA Safe Place Services – youth shelter and center for teens in crisis; Work Ethics Academy – for Summer Works and Y teen staff, and Newcomer Academy – serving our immigrant youth population. The Teen Tech Center is also utilized by the YMCA Black Achievers program, particularly within the Computer and Technology cluster. YMCA Black Achievers' program objectives are to help youth view themselves in a positive way, raise academic standards, build character, show students various career options, have role models whose success and knowledge will help inspire and motivate, and provide business and industry leaders the opportunity for community involvement. Youth plan and participate in leadership training seminars, college enrichment, community service projects, and special events.

Outside of our internal program use of the Teen Tech Center space, we are continuously developing new partnerships with other local youth-focused community organizations to further expand its utilization. Grace James Academy transports 100 sixth and seventh grade students for a 6-week music course. Included in their curriculum are instruction and practice in the following skills: writing music and lyrics, recording music, using beat-making and DJ equipment, and creating album art. Further, we will be partnering with Prominent Youth of America, a minority-led nonprofit, to host a Geek Squad Academy 3-day camp for music production at Grace James Academy. In addition to the above skills, youth will also learn how to use music editing software, create music videos, and read music industry contracts. As we continue to grow interest and recognition, we hope to expand regionally – our first opportunity will be to host a field trip for the Bullitt County Virtual Learning Academy as a way to increase the interest of their students in STEM.

Teaching Artist(s) Bios(s)

Shawn Wright, Best Buy Teen Tech & Healthy Living Director, is responsible for developing relationships with youth, providing technical support, supervising two part-time staff, and building local partnerships to increase the reach of the Teen Tech Center. Through his role, he has expanded access to approximately 600 youth per year with a capacity of 30 youth at a time. Experienced in video game design, Shawn also created a class curriculum and teaches youth how to code and design their own video games

Lashawnda Pilgrim, Teen Tech Center Coordinator, acts as an instructional resource for youth by providing technical support and leading creative workshops. With her extensive graphic design experience, she hosts classes for youth to develop their own design skills in a variety of forms - from designing album cover art to making unique apparel. Lashawnda is currently pursuing a business degree and shares her expertise in monetizing digital graphic designs.

Caden Gun, another Teen Tech Center Coordinator, is an experienced artist and digital animator who leads youth in bringing their imagination to life through technology. As an alumni of the programs offered through the Best Buy Teen Tech Center, Caden is a role model who exemplifies the possibilities available in the digital arts field. First learning his graphic design and animation skills at the Teen Tech Center, Caden received a scholarship to Bellarmine University and is currently a sophomore pursuing a degree in Digital Art Design and Technology.

The three-person staff team creates a fun and safe atmosphere, facilitates education about technology, and contributes to the development of each child to their full potential. All staff are trained in CPR, first aid, child abuse prevention and awareness, emergency protocols, safety measures, and behavior management.

Artistic Content of Programming

As its name implies, the Teen Tech Center hosts a wide-range of the newest technology and provides a safe, educational space for youth to develop both their technical and creative skills. Some of the technology available includes a computer lab, podcast recording equipment, music recording studio, DJ equipment, digital art software, and virtual reality video gaming. Youth are welcome to visit to experiment on their own or they can participate in structured classes taught by professionals to further develop their skills. We view youth as vital to the future of our organization and community. We are excited to see what these teens will develop and learn when given the tools, space and freedom to create and express themselves in healthy ways.

Free-range kids are healthy kids. This concept of informal learning environments has been part of the YMCA since its inception and is making a healthy comeback in the areas of camping, afterschool programs, open playgrounds, sports, and other Y leadership opportunities. The Y has long known that in working with teens that they want greater independence and control in programming, but our facilities

had few of these dedicated teen spaces prior to the Teen Tech Center. As part of the Republic Bank Foundation, the Teen Tech Center is a unique draw for teens as it capitalizes on their interest in the latest technology. Once they're in the door, they are also encouraged to participate in a variety of wellness activities to promote an overall healthy lifestyle spiritually, mentally, and physically – from working out to swimming and more.

Educational Content of Programming

The Teen Tech Center is part of our efforts to bridge the enrichment gap created by the lack of access to quality after school programs, summer camps, extracurricular activities, STEM and reading enrichment, and parent interaction. Studies show by the time they reach the 6th grade, low-income youth are 6,000 hours of enrichment behind their more affluent youth peers. By providing this safe and educational space to Louisville's youth, we have created a low-barrier option for low-income youth to access the latest technology in computing, sound production, video gaming, digital art, and more. These opportunities are not only beneficial to youth as they build technical skills, they are also tapping into creative outlets while writing lyrics, creating art, singing, rapping, and many other healthy coping skills.

Since its inception in 2019, the Teen Tech Center was there for Louisville's youth during the COVID-19 pandemic while many other teen-friendly options were closed. After reopening in 2020, when Jefferson County Schools closed as a result of COVID-19, the Teen Tech Center served as an open site for students. Non-Traditional Instruction requires youth to have access to a computer and internet, which is not readily accessible to all youth. For many families, parents needed to return to work and could not be present at home to assist their children with their education. As the largest childcare provider in the region, the YMCA is already trusted by the Louisville community to provide safe supervision to youth. By providing the space and technology, the Teen Tech Center ensured these youth had the same opportunity for their education as their well-resourced peers.

Process for hiring, training, and evaluating performance/effectiveness.

Serving our rapidly changing community requires culturally competent leaders, who reflect the community, understand and embrace all dimensions of diversity, and consider the larger world when addressing local issues. The Y's commitment to recruiting and developing such leaders ensures our continued relevance, supports staff and volunteer retention, and strengthens our ability to address critical social issues now and in the future. We offer diversity and inclusion training, provide experience-based learning opportunities that allow staff to strengthen their competencies as cause-driven leaders, and support a network of multicultural peers and mentors.

Multicultural Leadership Development exists to identify, engage, inspire, develop, promote and retain multicultural staff in order to create a pipeline of diverse cause-driven leaders at all levels and to ensure that the leadership of YMCAs reflects the diverse communities we serve. With a focus on multicultural staff (and volunteer) development as a part of Y-USA's Talent Management department, we work in

partnership with the Diversity & Inclusion and International departments, in solidarity, to ensure access to all.

The Y measures youth program effectiveness in many ways through a combination of self-report, parent report, staff observation, connections to the school and community resources, and Metro United Way tools developed by the David P. Weikart Center for Youth Program Quality. The YPQI - Youth Program Quality Intervention and annual electronic SAYO - Survey of Afterschool Youth Outcomes youth survey process help us deliver best practices in our programs for our youth. Our staff use these to monitor and report outcomes but also to guide program offerings and improvements. The Y now has two internal staff trainers and we use these tools in our non MUW funded programs as well. These will be great evaluation tools for this technology learning environment.

As part of our ongoing commitment to serving the entire Louisville community equitably, including meeting the needs of our multicultural staff, our Y will be working with Metro United Way and Spalding University in the 2022 Leverage cohort. Throughout this year-long program, Spalding University faculty will provide an in-depth policy and protocol analysis. Based on these recommendations, we will build upon our existing strengths and develop goals to address growth areas.

How are participants of all backgrounds and abilities included in programming?

Outside of our Republic Bank Foundation YMCA, the nearest Teen Tech Center is in St. Louis. As recognition for this important space expands, our hope is to expand its accessibility outside of the Greater Louisville area to reach more youth. It serves as an informal drop-in center with opportunities for exercise, basic needs, use of computers, and access to caring adults. In comparison to our other youth service programs, such as YMCA Safe Place Services, programming and case management with these young adults is not scheduled and controlled – rather it occurs organically. Youth develop a trust in one another, the Y staff, and volunteers, which helps attract additional youth and produce healthy outcomes.

Ask anyone in Louisville what separates the west of the city from the east, and they will tell you 9th Street. To the street's east is Louisville's booming Central Business District, and to its immediate west sits the Russell Choice Neighborhood. In the early 1900's, Russell was a vibrant, racially-diverse neighborhood with a thriving African American business district comprised of bustling shops, theaters, and restaurants. But by the mid-1900s, white flight and slum clearance initiatives had decimated the business district and concentrated large subsidized housing complexes in the neighborhood.

The Russell neighborhood is challenged with high vacancy rates, a heavy concentration of poorly designed, subsidized housing complexes, and a perceived dividing line that cuts the neighborhood off from downtown. According to the most recent city records, 58 percent of the 9,651 residents who live in the neighborhood have an income below the federal poverty level, including over 71 percent of children. Of adults in the labor force age range, 31.7 percent are unemployed, and fewer than 10

percent of those over the age of 25 have a college degree. The neighborhood also has been one of several in Louisville to be plagued with a dramatic increase in shootings and homicides over the past two years. The Republic Bank Foundation and Teen Tech Center are on the southwest edge of Russell. The Teen Tech Center has given ownership of a program and space within the Republic Bank Foundation YMCA to this teenage group. This YMCA is breaking the mold in many ways and seeking the best strategies to serve the holistic needs of this community.

How do we engage teachers and community center staff before, during, and after programming?

Through the Teen Tech Center, local schools and organizations can connect their youth with our equipment and experience. During the school year, our space was utilized by the Grace James Academy for 6 weeks every Monday for music lessons. Growing from this successful partnership, the Teen Tech Center also hosted the Prominent Youth of America for a summer music program each Tuesday and Thursday. Youth explored their creativity with a wide-range of music production equipment, including instruments, microphones, recording and editing software, and DJ equipment. In addition, facilitators led youth in discussions about the business of the music industry and how to grow as an upcoming musician and artist. This program not only enhanced their love for music creation, youth also learned tangible and transferable skills they can carry with them into their careers. Similar to the successes of the Grace James Academy and Prominent Youth of America, we are excited to be partnering with Real Young Prodigies this fall. Youth will be engaged in designing and developing music with positive and uplifting messages. Future program partnerships are always on the horizon with the wealth of opportunities the Teen Tech Center offers.

How do we engage participants in the creative and learning process?

As important as developing IT skills, the Teen Tech Center also fosters Youth Development skills. Our center is an informal drop-in place for group mentoring and case management to connect with youth through technology and open up conversations about life, careers, school, and interests with these youth. For instance, with the podcast equipment, youth have created an episode discussing dating relationships to give insight to other youth and adults the importance of healthy communication. In addition, youth express stories about their lives through their production of music and writing lyrics. This demonstrates the importance of connecting with youth through their interests as it opens a door to foster meaningful connections and nurture healthy support systems.