

Sawhorse Revolution

Organization mission/vision

Sawhorse Revolution's mission is to foster confident, community-oriented youth through the power of carpentry and craft. The organization is inspired to create equitable change within a framework of "feet-on-the-ground" education, empowerment, and leadership, in and for our community.

What are the compelling reasons for Impact 100 to partner with this organization?

Sawhorse Revolution is supporting youth with confidence and viable long-term skills while at the same time building structures that meet community needs. The organization provides a unique, hands-on learning experience which provides confidence and job skills, as an alternative to college, during a time when non-college options are few in Seattle schools.

What community/communities does the organization serve (include geographic location as relevant, as well as size of community)?

Sawhorse has served 800 high school students in Central and South Seattle, primarily those attending Franklin, Rainier Beach or Interagency Academy, a school that offers an alternative to standard high school for students. Sawhorse students are 71% youth of color, 58% women and 80% from low-income communities.

How does the organization deliver on its mission and strive to make its vision a reality (what are its core services and initiatives... in its simplest form, what does the organization do)?

Sawhorse Revolution offers courses in different formats teaming experienced professionals with high school students in a mentorship collaboration to design and build various community-based creative projects including tiny houses, treehouses, libraries, and more. Students work in a cohort of approximately 12-18 students for over 40 hours per program; many students participate in more than one program. The organization has built 57 structures to date, in partnership with more than 100 community groups.

How does the organization maintain proximity to the community it serves?

Sawhorse Revolution's projects are driven by community partners and students, with an emphasis on anti-racist and high-needs structures in the community (e.g housing) identified through neighborhood impact processes. The organization has a growing set of community partners including Seattle Housing Authority (e.g. for tiny homes) and Seattle Office of Arts & Culture (for land snippets that can be used for local structures such as Estelita's, the new social justice library on a tiny parcel of reclaimed land off of MLK Ave). BIPOC food justice became a pressing need during the pandemic. Sawhorse staff, board and mentors, while not all from the community, have identities that support connections including as trans, refugee, indigenous and more. The organization recognizes hiring from the community is the next critical step.

Describe how the organization plans to use an unrestricted grant to further its transformative impact on the community it serves. What would be the impact of the grant? The organization just completed an intensive strategic planning process to add a vertical dimension to their programming which will provide more offerings for students who want to go deep in a specific type of design or project work (e.g. residential design, neighborhood impact). They are looking to offer diversion work, so students can do work with Sawhorse and wipe a record clean, and they would like to offer more community service hours and stipends. The organization has more requests for support than it can provide; staff and carpentry tools are the two limiting factors to growth. Given the safety requirements around their work, bringing on new staff is a slow process.

Describe how the organization affects individuals and communities

Van moved to the US from Vietnam when she was 12. She was very shy and hesitant to participate. The project she worked on was a tiny house specifically for women. Over the course of the project she participated more and more, drawing things, putting them on the wall, and finally, on the last day, using the chopsaw. The team decided the door to the house needed to be very special and visible as it was the symbol of safety, so they made it bright red. On the last day, the mentors asked if anyone wanted to say anything about their experience. Van said “Sawhorse changed my life”. One of the formerly homeless women who lived in the house wrote a poem about the red door and what it meant to her. Sawhorse changed her life too.

Describe how the organization impacts systems:

- Overhauling local land use code to make it more equitable for community groups to use land effectively;
- Training all mentors at design and construction partners like Element and Olsen Kundig to be allies in anti-racism and work toward diversifying the construction industry;
- Mentoring educators in a “failure positive” model of education which is non-punitive and supportive (“*Carpentry is not building, but fixing your mistakes as you go along.*”);
- Increasing respect for trades as a viable career option where “non college” has long been second class yet still critical to the future success of many students.

Does the organization’s leadership and financial position reflect stability and capacity to execute its mission?

Yes, impressive and knowledgeable executive director; committed staff and long-time board who understand the organization’s opportunities and limitations and are willing to support it through its next phase of growth.