

AZ Giving: Act One

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Everyone can recall a favorite field trip during their elementary or junior high school years. Perhaps it was an early-morning visit to the art museum or even a stop by the local theater for a matinee show of a Broadway classic.

Each trip was a magical and memorable one—for many, it was an experience that intrigued them and challenged their creative instincts. Unfortunately, this sort of self-discovery is now limited by minimal education funding and the general lack of access to the arts in Arizona schools. The issue is particularly prevalent in low-income communities, where students who could truly benefit from exposure to the arts are suffering the most.

This is where Act One comes in. Act One works to provide access to the arts, specifically artistic field trips, for students in Title 1 schools throughout low-income communities in the state. By the end of the 2018/19 school year, more than 200,000 students will have attended an educational arts field trip with Act One since its inception in 2011.

Sam Pinkley, field trip manager at Act One, serves as the chief coordinator in scheduling field trips and in understanding the needs of each individual school. "I think the arts is something that is overlooked so often. This is why it's so important to get kids in the door of these arts organizations," says Pinkley. "If they go to the art museum or the theater when they're younger, it makes them more comfortable when they're older, and they're more likely to [return] to these places."

The field trip program has grown significantly since Act One's inception. It starts by partnering with arts organizations on field trips throughout the state (there are now 51 partners between Phoenix and Tucson) to get tickets for students at discounted prices. The organization pays for the transportation and provides teaching guides to instructors, as well as educational books to individual students or classes that accompany the experience.

Geri Wright, president and CEO of Act One, is empowered by the influence of Act One, as she gets a front-row seat to seeing students discover their creative potential through arts education. "We believe that an arts-centered field trip can be a lifetime experience—it's not just about the art, it's about the whole experience," says Wright. "We play an important role in creating innovative thinkers. There's study after study that show that students who are consistently exposed to the arts can think more outside-the-box and their emotional intelligence is higher."

Outside of the student impact, Act One is providing opportunities for teachers to enhance their classroom work by making educational artistic field trips an option. Through the organization, experiences in the arts are becoming more tangible for low-income schools.

Katherine Cheatham, a teacher from Dietz K-8 in the Tucson Unified School District, is just one of the teachers who has benefited from the services of Act One. "Three of my girls, one from Iraq, one from Tanzania and one from Sudan, spoke all the way back to the school [from a field trip] on the bus," says Cheatham. "Their favorite characters, their favorite parts... As a teacher, hearing their reaction and comprehension was rewarding, exactly what you hope to achieve in bringing them world experience and academics. They were especially concerned about keeping their play booklet. The appreciation and wonder of my students who come from cultures where they have had very little exposure [to the arts] never ceases to amaze me."

To Learn More

Act One act1az.org.