

# TEENS AND ART MUSEUMS

Art museums can feel like alienating places for teens for a few reasons:

- **Strict expectations**
- **Unfamiliar contexts**
- **High levels of monitoring**

Teens are often left with the options to either **visit in high-structure contexts** (school field trips, for example) **or not visit at all.**

"I'm comfortable in museums as long as no one, like, stares at me."  
--9th Grader

**The Goal:** Increase local teens' sense of belonging in the Museum of Northwest Art in La Conner, WA.

**The How:** Create the *Teen Takeover* program, focusing on creating opportunities for teens to work together to **explore galleries and make art** that expressed their interests and opinions in a **free-form, low-stakes environment.**

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**Thank you to...**  
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# TEEN TAKEOVER

## PROJECT CONTEXT 4 PROGRAMS TEENS AGES 13-18

*Teen Takeover* gave La Conner, WA teens a space in the Museum of Northwest Art.

Recruitment for the program utilized the existing Teen Art Club, social media, and drop-in availability. Considering the museum is situated in a rural town with **under 200 kids**, we had to consider that recruitment may be challenging.

By allowing the teens to have ownership and have fun, we worked toward a more comfortable and enjoyable museum experience.

## LOW-STAKES GALLERY VISITS

When we removed the need to **"get it"** and allowed teens to explore on their own, they were able to relax into the space. Teens could **choose** where to be and what they wanted to do with their time. Not only did they get to experience the museum on their own terms, they had peers to bounce ideas off of and talk about the art in a new light.

## MESSY, FUNNY, FREE-FORM ART

As the teens became more familiar with one another and the galleries, it felt **safer** to laugh and joke and be silly together. Giving them a general prompt and a few examples was enough for them to start putting art on the walls. Exploring the elements of art provided enough structure to be motivating, and enough freedom to still be interested.

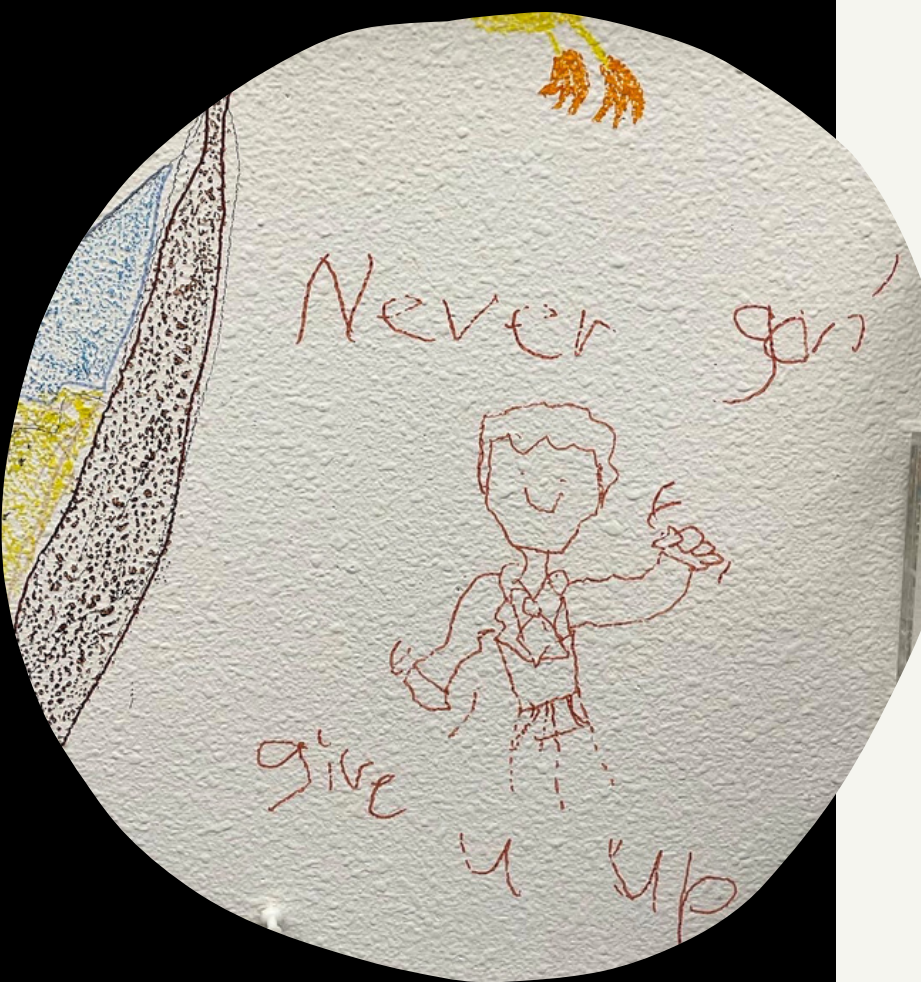
Seeing their art on the walls of the studio gives the teens a reason to come back, to bring their friends, to say, **"I was here, I belong here."**



# EVALUATION METHODS

The initial evaluation plans for these programs involved a pre and post survey based on Price and Applebaum's 2022 paper on belonging in museums. Once we committed to teen audiences in informal spaces, new methods were needed, becoming:

- **Observations throughout teen activity to mark changes in ease and belonging**
- **Guided conversations with teens regarding previous experiences with museums**



## WHAT WE LEARNED

The lessons we learned in this project were translated into an activity guide, *Teen Takeover*. The key takeaways include:

- A good informal teen program provides teens with **a sense of agency over their actions and level of involvement** over the course of the program.
- Encouraging teens' suggestions and changes to an activity will deepen their enthusiasm.
- Small rural community art museums can benefit more from drop-in recruitment in the form of **food, music, and teens' laughter** than relying on RSVPs and community boards.
- Many teens in rural communities have **only encountered museums in school contexts or at an early age**, and do not have people in their communities who attend museums.

