

## BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS

### Citizen Schools

Martha Eddison says middle schoolers are “peeking through a window into the bigger world. It’s a critical developmental period for them; the hormones haven’t really kicked in yet, and they can just handle some adult skills. Any after school programs they do have are scarce and mostly mediocre, and lots of them have ‘aged out’ of the programs that are offered.” These kids, ages 11-14, are the target constituency of the Citizen Schools program. Eddison, now Director of Communications for Citizen Schools, began as a volunteer teacher in its programs, in which adults offer “apprenticeships” to groups of eight to ten adolescents, typically meeting them three hours a week for ten weeks, guiding them in the completion of an active focused project. “So the kids can see results,” says Eddison, “the projects are not about work, they are work. Teachers teach what turns them on, but with the focus on a product that is helpful in the larger community and works as much as possible with the middle school curriculum. Courses range from cooking (which is set up to include math, writing, and social service), through political speech writing and data analysis, to civil law. Each program ends with what Citizen Schools calls a “WOW,”—a high-focus product, performance, or result. WOWS have included publication of student journalism stories about local subway stops that led to the installation of safety call-boxes; mock trials before real judges in a federal courthouse; the filing of legal briefs which helped to close a building owned by a slum landlord.”

John Werner, a long-time Citizen Teacher and now a Campus Director for Citizen Schools, says “I was a public school teacher for years, and then joined this band of merry folks, and it’s been one amazing adventure after another. We bring in experts ranging from corporate lawyers to local grandmas to morticians—anyone who loves their topic and wants to work with kids to make projects that make a difference in the community. In one class a while back, some of the kids started a holiday greeting card business; it has now become a continuing project that has sold over thirty thousand cards. One of our campuses is near a senior center and about thirty seniors come every day. It’s a kind of Mickey Mouse Club for seniors—they hang out and support each other. I stopped there one day and asked the Club if there was anything that Citizen Schools kids could do to help them out. They took me to an entrance by some glass doors where there were a bunch of chairs. ‘When we sit in these chairs,’ they said, ‘we get stuck. If our behinds are below our knees we can’t wiggle out so well.’ So the kids, working with a local expert carpenter, built a specially designed huge, red, rocking-chair-kind-of-bench-thing that can hold three seniors at a time, and it keeps the right part of their bodies elevated above their knees. It’s a wonderfully obvious example of where kids made a difference.”

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