



EXPLORATORIUM SPONSORS TECH OUTREACH PROGRAM

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By [Lyanne Melendez](#)

SAN FRANCISCO -- Many teens spend their summers just lounging around, but San Francisco's Exploratorium has a tech program for underserved youth. The idea is to keep them out of trouble by having them focus on a career in science or engineering. For some, it's a door to eventually get into college and be the first in their families to do so. If Noemi Rivera wasn't working on computers she'd be doing something else.

"At home, watching my brother play video games," says Rivera.

Instead, she plays with computer parts and lasers and all sorts of gadgets that teach her and her group how things function in today's world.

"A laser actually burns things and through that, they learn that you can cut away material from a body or a cancerous cell or something using a laser. It actually just melts it away," says Pablo Dela Cruz of the Exploratorium's X-Tech Program.

Some may end up being scientists, but the real goal is to make them critical thinkers in any field.

San Francisco's Exploratorium sponsors a technology program for middle school kids who are underserved. These students are picked from two programs that serve low-income families, Aim High and First Graduates, which helps kids be the first in their families to graduate from college.

"It means a lot to me because my parents didn't graduate from college and they would be proud of me too and I am looking forward to graduating from college too," says Rivera.

The program is a two-year commitment, including summers. During the school year they are here on Saturdays and during holiday breaks. Nearly 90 percent of them stick with it.

Julian Morrisette says the program has magnified his ability to learn.

"I learn what you are supposed to do and what you are not supposed to do and how things work and you really can't learn that from a book," says Morrisette.

"We want people who want to do things, make things, be engaged, not just told what to do," says Dela Cruz.

"You get a good feeling out of it to know that they are getting the same opportunities that other kids will get. It's good to know that they are not just moping around getting into the bad stuff," says Ben Luo, one of the facilitators.

Helen Yu-Lei is a former Aim High student who went through the Exploratorium's outreach program. She just received a degree in civil engineering.

"This program helped me actually be more aware of physical science, learn it more in a different way, instead of text books. It was more hands on so I can see it. It was a better way for me to learn science," says Yu-Lei.

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