

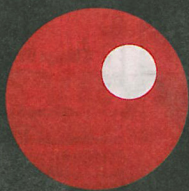
# ART WITH AN IMPACT

Creative programs give at-risk youth an outlet 16-17



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Brown  
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on- and  
off-screen 22



Vanessa Sanchez

## Yollocalli Arts Reach

The brightly colored exterior walls of Yollocalli Arts Reach in Little Village are barely a hint of the creativity that lies on the other side.

While the classes like screen printing, street art and journalism are a big draw to students, it is the staff's attitude that keeps students coming back.

"We're all a little eccentric or a little weird and goofy, and there's no judgment here," said Yollocalli youth development adviser Whitney Ross, 30, who grew up in Thornton. "It's kind of a fun place to be, and you can do crazy stuff and no one looks at you like you're the weird art kid."

The lack of judgment and close relationships between students and staff kept 18-year-old Elizabeth Ortiz hooked. She was introduced to Yollocalli through YCA's Louder Than a Bomb.

"It's an environment where your opinion feels just as valid as anyone else's," said Ortiz, who now interns at Yollocalli.

Fellow intern and former student Gabriela Ibarra said the attitude is infectious.

"It feels so welcoming when you meet them because they're so cheerful and they treat everyone the same way, and you pick that up right away when you go," Ibarra said. "It's a positive energy. When you get there you can't be mad, and when you leave it's just like, 'Man, I want to make someone else feel good.'"

Brenda Hernandez has lived the full Yollocalli experience, joining the organization as a student living in Pilsen and rising through the ranks as teaching assistant and teaching artist to become the current programs coordinator. She said that while Yollocalli, which in 2009

received the prestigious National Arts and Humanities Youth Program Award, does have a positive effect on the community, it's a little less verbal than most.

"I think it's about showing the subtler ways of social impact," the 29-year-old said. "It's not necessarily having a social protest art project but more like making public art pieces that kind of affect the communities every day." These public art pieces have become a huge part of Yollocalli's mission—more than

“You can do crazy stuff and no one looks at you like you're the weird art kid.”

—Whitney Ross, 30, youth development adviser

30 murals across the Chicago region were created by its students.

"We believe that by you being here, this is having a positive impact on you in the long run," said Yollocalli Director Vanessa Sanchez, 32. "All of them say that they had a great time because they were with adults who wanted to see them make great things."

## LEARN MORE

Yollocalli Arts Reach  
2801 S. Ridgeway Ave. 773-521-1621

Visit [yollocalli.org](http://yollocalli.org) for information about classes, volunteering, donating and more