

Microsoft Philanthropies TEALS



Arabia Simeon barely knew what computer science was before she signed up for a TEALS class offered at the Young Women's Leadership School in Brooklyn, New York. TEALS increases access to computer science nationwide by creating partnerships between tech industry volunteers and high schools to build and grow sustainable CS programs. Arabia, now a sophomore majoring in both computer science and art at Smith College in Northampton, MA, shares her dream of combining computer science, art and social justice, to give back to the neighborhood where she grew up.

Community-building through coding

It's obvious if you look around at any hackathon that I'm not exactly your typical computer scientist. Not only have I been the youngest one in the room, but I've also been the only girl. It's kind of shocking.

Plus, I grew up in a three-bedroom apartment crowded with me, my four sisters and five cousins in the projects in Brooklyn—not exactly a center of coders. Bedford-Stuyvesant is a low-income area, and most people there don't have the opportunity to learn computer science—or even know why they should. I was lucky enough to go to an all-girls school that focused on STEM and took a TEALS computer science class my junior year.

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I love where I'm from. My neighborhood has so much culture. We're a family. But many people in my neighborhood can't vote, can't get a job or can't go to a good school because they don't have the money. My roots inspire me to do everything I can to give back to everyone who hasn't had the opportunities I have had.

So, while my first goal out of college is to be a software engineer for a big company like Google, Microsoft or AOL, eventually I'll start my own nonprofit to bring computer science to low-income communities like the one I grew up in. It would be kind of like an art studio, but a technical art studio—where kids can learn to code, make music, digital art or anything they want to create.

That's why I love computer science. You can use your passion, like mine for art and social justice, and combine it with technology to create new things.

Those creations could be as straightforward as a video game or as ambitious as a neighborhood community center.

TEALS changed my life not only because it taught me how to code. It also showed me that even though something like computer science may be hard, you can still be good at it—and it can still be worthwhile. So I'm not pursuing computer science just for me; I'm doing it for so many other girls and kids out there in low-income communities. I want to help people be who they want to be—without any limitations.

Interested in inspiring a student like Arabia? Sign up to volunteer with TEALS.