

Success Story:
**Overcoming the Odds to Work at an
International GIS Company**



Background on the WIRED grant:

The Visual Informatics Program run by Arts Street is funded by a grant from the Metro Denver WIRED Initiative. Arts Street's goal is to help high-risk youth gain the skills needed for successful careers. In addition to classroom education, students in the Visual Informatics Program are able to hone their technical and project management skills by participating in community service projects. The skills and experiences gained in the program often lead Arts Street's students to corporate jobs or to starting their own businesses.

The Visual Informatics Program at Arts Street has had many individual successes; here is one of them.

Individual success story:

When Kiawa Lewis graduated from George Washington High School in 2004 he didn't know what he was going to do with his life. Lewis commented "just graduating from high school was a feat for me given the obstacles I dealt with growing up." Lewis briefly studied at a medical college but found that it wasn't for him. In the next few years, Lewis held jobs at Wal-Mart, a cleaning company and a telemarketing firm. Lewis bluntly says, "I hated those jobs."

Hoping for a better job, Lewis sought out help from the Denver Westside Workforce Center. A counselor at the workforce center suggested Arts Street, to which Lewis replied to the counselor, "I don't want to learn to make art, I need a job." However, after learning that the Visual Informatics Program offered by Arts Street was in fact a job training program that focuses on Web site design and programming, video production and publishing, and GIS mapping, he decided to give it a try.

"Arts Street has opened so many doors for me and I see myself going no where but up!"

At Arts Street, Lewis found that he had a passion for Web site design and GIS mapping. Through the program, Lewis was able to learn industry-leading software programs like ESRI's ArcView, ArcCatalog and ArcMap.



Lewis worked on several community service projects while in the program. One of the projects required staffing a booth at STEMapalooza, a two-day event designed to create urgency and enthusiasm about the importance of science, technology engineering and math (STEM) education.

While on a break during the event, Lewis began talking with other exhibitors. When one exhibitor heard about Lewis' interest in GIS, they gave him information about a contact they knew at TechniGraphics, a multi-national GIS company headquartered in Fort Collins. Lewis called the individual at TechniGraphics that day and told her about the GIS skills and experiences he was attaining at Arts Street. The representative was so impressed with what Lewis was learning and his passion for GIS that she scheduled a job interview with him the next week. Lewis traveled to Fort Collins for the interview and was offered a job the very next day.

Lewis has now been working at TechniGraphics for the past four months as a GIS Technician and thoroughly enjoys what he does. In his job, Lewis collects and manages GIS data from across the world. Lewis says, "my job presents new challenges every day and there is always something intriguing that I am working on."

Lewis now has a plan for his future. He has decided to go back to school to study Web design and GIS while concurrently working at TechniGraphics. He will be starting at Metropolitan State College of Denver this fall and TechniGraphics is more than willing to pay for school.

Lewis is very appreciative of the Visual Informatics program and the caring individuals who work at Arts Street. "Arts Street has opened so many doors for me and I see myself going no where but up! Most people wouldn't believe where I am now considering where I have come from. Clearly Arts Street's Visual Informatics program has been a success."

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TO LEARN MORE ABOUT ARTS STREET, GO TO WWW.ARTS-STREET.ORG/

This workforce solution was funded by a grant awarded under the Workforce Innovation in Regional Development (WIRED) as implemented by the U.S. Department of Labor's Employment and Training Administration working in partnership with the Colorado Department of Labor and Employment, the Metro Denver Economic Development Corporation, and the City and County of Denver's Office of Economic Development. The solution was created by the grantee and does not necessarily reflect the official position of the U.S. Department of Labor. The Department of Labor makes no guarantees, warranties, or assurances of any kind, express or implied, with respect to such information, including any information on linked sites and including, but not limited to, accuracy of the information or its completeness, timeliness, usefulness, adequacy, continued availability, or ownership. This solution is copyrighted by the institution that created it. Internal use by an organization and/or personal use by an individual for non-commercial purposes is permissible. All other uses require the prior authorization of the copyright owner.