

# Growing the World of Widgetarians

Looking for a place to send your child to explore the virtual world of Minecraft? Or just a place where they can enjoy technology alongside friends?

Fidgets2Widgets may be just that place. It was created out of the desire and need to provide youth with a productive, balanced outlet for their high-energy curiosities. Co-Founders Pam Simon and Sydney Ashland watched as their own children lacked engagement in school, constantly separating the knowledge of life from their school education. In an effort to engage youth in their own learning, Fidgets2Widgets has found a niche meeting students where their interests lie; technology. Pam and Sydney set out to create an environment where youth would be challenged to incorporate essential life skills into the creative world of technology.

Fidgets2Widgets was founded on the idea that students need a balance of technology, physical exercise and cooperative collaboration outside of the school day. In a world where technology is no longer just the future, it is the present, they have made technology a part of everyday learning. They focus on digital citizenship, project-based activities and maintaining a balance in all aspects of life as students learn and grow in this digital age. They have started the only program in Oregon that incorporates Minecraft.edu into a physical learning environment where students become friends in person and virtual allies. Students, age 9-14 years old, are given time each day to build a virtual world within Minecraft, collaborating with peers to create all that they can imagine. Each day also includes time for physical activity and topical studies in geography, reading, math, etc. using a variety of educational apps as group activities and individual study.

Pam and Sydney believe it is our duty as educators to help foster the next generation into producers of extraordinary technological advances, not simply consumers of world in front of them. Creative thinking and problem solving are just a few of the skills that Fidgets2Widgets works to impart and foster in each youth that comes through their doors. Pam and Sydney research best-practices for engaging students using technology, learning what skill sets transfer to the classroom and more importantly towards being productive citizens. As school days continue to be jam-packed with worksheets and exams, out-of-school time programs must make the most of every opportunity to meet students where their interests lie, in an effort to engage youth in active, continuous learning.

Fidgets2Widgets is one example of a student interest afterschool program that allows students to interact with and control multiple aspects of their environment while learning and exploring boundaries of the physical and virtual world. The program is currently open Monday through Friday from 10am-1pm for homeschool students and 1pm to 7pm for afterschool students in Eugene, OR. They continue to work towards expanding to serve more students as they meet the needs of youth and families across the state. For more information about Fidgets2Widgets program opportunities, you can visit their website at <http://fidgets2widgets.com>.