

# Free housing, other efforts try to attract women to tech

October 23 2015, by Phuong Le



In this Sept. 29, 2015, photo, Aishwarya Mandyam, left, and her twin sister, Karishma Mandyam, write on an "idea board" for an upcoming hack-a-thon in the 3,100-square-foot home they share rent-free with six other female University of Washington computer science and technology students in Seattle. Tune, a mobile marketing startup, is paying the rent for the house with the goal of creating a supportive community for UW women interested in computer science and technology. (AP Photo/Elaine Thompson)

Free rent and groceries were selling points, but college freshman Aishwarya Mandyam was more excited about the chance to connect with like-minded women when she moved into the eight-bedroom house offered up by a Seattle software startup.

"There's inspiration. There's tech support," said the [computer science](#) major who is interested in a career that combines medicine and technology.

Mandyam and seven other women are sharing a 3,100-square home, rent-free, blocks from the University of Washington. TUNE, a software startup that provides technology for marketers, is paying the rent for the house with the goal of creating a supportive community for UW women interested in computer science and technology.

It's the latest effort to get more women into the male-dominated industry. Women make up more than half of the nation's workforce, but they still play a small role in inventing technology, according to the National Center for Women and Information Technology.

Efforts like the TUNE-sponsored house and numerous other initiatives are trying to increase the number of women interested in the field. Organizations such as Girls Who Code, a national nonprofit, are introducing more high school girls to computer science. Women-only training programs such as Hackbright Academy in San Francisco and Ada Developers Academy in Seattle are also teaching women coding and other technical skills.

"There is definitely a momentum, but I would caution that it's not going to be solved immediately," said Elizabeth Ames, a senior vice president at the Palo Alto, California-based Anita Borg Institute. "There are some real challenges and it will take time."

While there's a lot of emphasis on increasing the pipeline, more work has to be done to address the barriers that women run into later in their careers, she added.

UW, which is not involved in TUNE's housing program, has been closing the gender gap in its computer science program. Last June, 31 percent of UW's computer science undergraduate degrees were awarded to women, more than twice the national average. Nationwide, just 14 percent of computer-science college graduates were women in 2014, according to a Computing Research Association survey.



In this Sept. 29, 2015, photo, Aishwarya Mandyam, left, and her twin sister, Karishma Mandyam, sit in the living room of the 3,100-square-foot home they share rent-free with six other female University of Washington computer science and technology students, in Seattle. Tune, a mobile marketing startup, is paying the rent for the house with the goal of creating a supportive community for UW women interested in computer science and technology. (AP Photo/Elaine Thompson)

"There's no silver bullet. You have to do lots of little things all the time," said Ed Lazowska, UW professor of computer science and engineering. UW has introduced K-12 students and teachers to computer science through summer camps. A seminar explores the role of women in computer science, and about 40 percent of the school's teaching assistants are women.

Megan Hopp, a UW senior, said it was inspiring to see so many female teaching assistants when she took the intro courses. She's now a teaching assistant for an upper level course and makes a point to reach out to other female students to tell them to consider the field.

She had not considered computer science because she thought it was too nerdy, but her older brother pestered her to take the introductory course.

"I had that epiphany moment and realized how much I love it," she said.

At the Ada Developers Academy in downtown Seattle, a selective tuition-free program is teaching women—many with little or no coding experience—to become programmers.

Michelle McCarthy, 35, worked in retail selling computers and electronics and had no coding experience before she enrolled in the yearlong program in May. Her class includes a former clinical psychologist, a flight attendant, a teacher and others hoping to make a career switch.

"There's a lot of focus on technology. It's a part of every field and there're not enough people doing the work," said McCarthy, who just landed a five-month internship with Indigo Slate, a digital marketing agency.



In this Sept. 29, 2015, photo, Elizabeth Pendleton, left, helps her daughter, University of Washington student Anna Pendleton, 19, unpack in the 3,100-square-foot home the younger Pendleton will share rent-free with seven other female UW computer science and technology students, in Seattle. Tune, a mobile marketing startup, is paying the rent for the house with the goal of creating a supportive community for UW women interested in computer science and technology. (AP Photo/Elaine Thompson)

Elena Donio, an angel investor in Ada and president of Concur Technologies, said it's important to recruit and support women at different stages, from high school to early- or mid-career to leadership positions. "You don't have to be an engineer coming out of school to be able to learn how to code," Donio said.

All of the 37 women who graduated from Ada have software development jobs, said executive director Cynthia Tee.

At the TUNE-sponsored house during the first week of school, Mandyam and her twin sister, Karishma, bonded with their new housemates over dinner and reunited with another freshman whom they had met at a girls coding camp.



In this Sept. 29, 2015, photo, Aishwarya Mandyam, left, sits in a backyard chair as her twin sister, Karishma Mandyam, right, and Lilian Liang smile, at the 3,100-square-foot home they share rent-free with five other female University of Washington computer science and technology students, in Seattle. Tune, a mobile marketing startup, is paying the rent for the house with the goal of creating a supportive community for UW women interested in computer science and technology. (AP Photo/Elaine Thompson)

Lilian Liang, a sophomore, described how stressful it was when she took the introductory computer science courses last year. While she found some women to talk to, she's looking forward to having a built-in

network of mentors and women who share her interests in computer science.

TUNE's founders wanted to create a live and learn community because they benefited from living in an entrepreneur-specific dorm at Babson College, said Kristina Linova, manager of engineering growth.

Meredith Lampe, a junior who lives in the house, said she's heard of [women](#) in the field who experience feelings of isolation or feel like they're not part of the club. "You can give someone \$10,000 to pay for their tuition, but giving them a community of other girls who are likely experiencing the same thing and having that be another way to have them succeed."



In this Sept. 29, 2015, photo, Aishwarya Mandyam, left, reaches toward a lamp in the dining area as she stands with her twin sister, Karishma Mandyam, in the 3,100-square-foot home they share rent-free with six other female University of Washington computer science and technology students, in Seattle. Tune, a

mobile marketing startup, is paying the rent for the house with the goal of creating a supportive community for UW women interested in computer science and technology. (AP Photo/Elaine Thompson)



In this Sept. 29, 2015, photo, Aishwarya Mandyam, left, heads up the stairs followed by her twin sister, Karishma Mandyam, at the 3,100-square-foot home they share rent-free with six other female University of Washington computer science and technology students, in Seattle. Tune, a mobile marketing startup, is paying the rent for the house with the goal of creating a supportive community for UW women interested in computer science and technology. (AP Photo/Elaine Thompson)



In this Sept. 29, 2015, photo, Karishma Mandyam checks out a stuffed Husky dog, the University of Washington's mascot, at the 3,100-square-foot home she shares rent-free with seven other female UW computer science and technology students, in Seattle. Tune, a mobile marketing startup, is paying the rent for the house with the goal of creating a supportive community for UW women interested in computer science and technology. (AP Photo/Elaine Thompson)



In this Sept. 29, 2015, photo, University of Washington student Karishma Mandyam walks from a bedroom toward the kitchen at the 3,100-square-foot home she shares rent-free with seven other female UW computer science and technology students in Seattle. Tune, a mobile marketing startup, is paying the rent for the house with the goal of creating a supportive community for UW women interested in computer science and technology. (AP Photo/Elaine Thompson)

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