

ESSEX TOWNS

Page **1** Thursday, December 11, 2003

Ailing children display talents at art museum

Children and young adults suffering from chronic and life-threatening illnesses had a chance to showcase their talents recently at a creative and performing art exhibition held at the Montclair Art Museum.

"Express Yourself New Jersey" provided an outlet that is critical for the healing process of children dealing with the frightening and exhausting struggle of a severe illness,

AROUND THE TOWNS



CARMEN JURI

according to Sue Cohen, supervisor of creative arts therapy at Tomorrows Children's Institute — Hackensack University Medical Center. More than 80 children from New Jersey hospitals submitted pieces to the event.

The event was run by ArtWorks, a nonprofit organization dedicated to helping children (and siblings) use art therapy as a medium for dealing with the frustrations and fears of a severe illness. Some 80 children from seven New Jersey hospitals participated.

"The ArtWorks exhibit is an amazing opportunity to celebrate the courage of these children," said Cohen.

"The event shows how creative arts therapies can truly help children cope with their illnesses. It allows the children to escape from the isolation of the hospital, to have a moment to shine, and to deal with the fears and sadness of their illness. That is very meaningful and therapeutic."

The event drew a crowd of 350. The ages of the participants ranged from 3 to 27.

There was a dance troupe of young girls in wheelchairs who performed, a young boy performed a rap song that he wrote. Two young cancer patients sang "They Can't Take That Away from Me" by Mariah Carey, and two brothers played the guitar and sang "Storm" by Lifehouse.

At the conclusion of the show, the artists and performers came up on stage for a final bow.

ArtWorks was inspired by the life of Naomi Cohain, who passed away in 1995 from bone cancer at age 15. At 14, when Naomi was diagnosed with cancer, her world was suddenly diminished.

Rather than falling victim to her illness, she empowered herself by using art as a vehicle for self-expression, an emotional outlet and a source of comfort. ArtWorks exhibitions are intended to stimulate dialogue about difficult issues, raise general awareness about the benefits of art therapy and raise significant funds to implement legitimate art therapy programs in hospitals that lack the resources to do so independently.

ArtWorks hopes to have creative and performing art exhibitions take place throughout the country. The first program was launched in 2002 in New York City.