

FRESH ink

By Chaim Sinensky

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Art WORKS

Sometimes glitter and glue is all it takes to make a sick kid happy.

I stood there feeling very awkward selling T-shirts and greeting cards at the Montclair Art Museum in Montclair, N.J. I found myself surrounded by a lot of children with bald heads or sitting in wheelchairs. After a short while I realized all of the people here and their families are just like me and my family. All of the families just want a normal afternoon where they can forget their struggles.

About three years ago, when I was 12, I heard about an organization called ArtWorks and I wanted to volunteer. ArtWorks is an amazing organization that helps families and children with chronic and life-threatening illnesses. ArtWorks provides creative therapy for these children so that they can express themselves through art, music and dance. The children use these tools to express themselves and as a way to heal, communicate and cope with their illness.

The founder and person in charge of ArtWorks is Daniela Mendelsohn. After graduating from college in 2000, she started the organization in memory of her cousin Naomi Cohain, who passed away from cancer. Naomi was only 15 years old when she died in 1995, and she used art as an outlet and a way to express herself. When I asked Mendelsohn what she is trying to accomplish, she told me that she wants "to give as many people as possible the opportunity to express themselves through the creative and performing arts."

There are 22 hospitals throughout New York and New Jersey that participate in Art-

Works. Surprise!Supplies is a program where therapists work on art with hospitalized children. Surprise!Supplies provides the hospitals with mobile art carts which contain art kits and fun supplies which the children can utilize. The children also rehearse with their therapists so that they are ready to perform at the Express Yourself events.

The Express Yourself event takes place twice a year, once in New Jersey and once in New York. This is an inspirational event where the families and the children can come and view the art that the children made while they were in the hospital and perform what they have



practiced with their therapists. The children and their families come to see the beautifully presented works of art. Some children sing, others dance and some play an instrument on stage. Every child and family member is very excited when they see their artwork on the wall or their name on the program.

During the event there are different kinds of arts and crafts that the children can make.

Scenes from ArtWorks: While in the hospital children make art and practice their crafts, which they then display at the Express Yourself events. A child digs through supplies in the art cart, above. Chaim Sinensky, center at right, sells cards and T-shirts at the program in New Jersey.

COURTESY ARTWORKS



hopefully branch out beyond New York and New Jersey," Mendelsohn said.

I have been volunteering twice a year for three years at the Express Yourself events. I sell art supplies, holiday cards and T-shirts to raise money for the organization. I and many other volunteers and the children come back year after year. All of the volunteers are very kind and welcoming. They are all too aware that for some children this could be their last event. The volunteers know that the purpose of this event is for the children and they should be in an environment of normalcy unlike in the hospital.

What I love about volunteering is not what I get from it but I what I give. Rather than staying home I get to go and help others feel better. I liked it so much that I involved a few of my friends in it and they liked it just as much as I did. I decided to give a percentage of my Bar Mitzvah money to ArtWorks.

ArtWorks has not only helped many children and their families but it has also helped



me. I love helping people and this is also a way for me to express myself. At the events I love to help the children with any kind of arts and craft project, whether it's a door hanger or a square for next year's quilt. Each child makes a square at the Express Yourself event and the squares are turned into a quilt. ArtWorks helps me realize how fortunate I am and that I should give what I have to offer. I try to do anything I can to help the families forget about their hardships even if it is only for a short time.

Whenever the children in the hospital see the art carts rolling around, carrying all of their supplies, it brings a smile to their faces. That is what ArtWorks is striving for and what I try to accomplish by volunteering. ■

For more information about ArtWorks, visit the group's Web site at www.artworks-foundation.org.

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Of course there is also plenty of food. For many families it is a day not to embrace the struggles they face but a day to forget them and enjoy their children's many accomplishments. Mendelsohn told me that at the first Express Yourself event there were six hospitals involved and 58 children. Now more than 22 hospitals are represented and hundreds of children participate in each show. "I would like the numbers to continue to grow and

