

UD REVIEW

Artfest 2008 addresses creative challenges

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On a gloomy Saturday morning, art canvases covered with a multitude of brilliant colors span the tables and walls at the university's Center for Disabilities Studies. It's Artfest 2008, and people are painting, drawing and coloring using specialized tools that help them create, despite their disabilities.

Art therapist Lisa Bartoli is the executive director and founder of Art Therapy Express Program, Inc., a group that collaborates with the CDS for Artfest. The program serves children and adults with physical, cognitive and emotional challenges within Delaware schools, hospitals and community organizations.



Media Credit: [Brian Anderson](#)
The Center for Disabilities Studies
sponsored Artfest 2008 on
Saturday.

"People are finally beginning to see the value of art for people with disabilities," Bartoli says.

Art Therapy Express Program, Inc. is an instructional art program that allows children, teenagers and adults to create meaningful works of art. Bartoli says art therapy for people with disabilities is growing in popularity.

She says the goal of the program is to make the arts accessible to all individuals, even those with severe, multiple disabilities. By introducing adapted technology, such as wheelchair rollers, head sticks and holding devices, participants can be artistically independent.

However, the main goal of art therapy is self-expression for everyone, Bartoli says, especially those unable to communicate verbally.

According to the American Art Therapy Association Web site, art therapy integrates the fields of human development and visual art with the creative process with models of counseling and psychotherapy, providing students the opportunity to express themselves and interact with each other socially.

Artfest 2008 promoted group interaction and projects, in addition to individual artwork and activities - its main focus in previous years. Art projects included oil crayons, painting murals of vibrant colors on large canvases, pencil drawings and a fall project

involving tracing fabric leaves. Modified equipment included specialized rollers, sponges that attach to the feet with Velcro and paintbrushes or markers attached to a rod for those with limited hand function.

Michele Sands, a representative from the university's CDS program says the center, which opened in 1993, is one of 67 Universities for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities in the country.

"The goal of these centers is to make others aware of people with disabilities, the challenges they face and how they are gradually overcoming these challenges," Sands says.

She says the center stresses a "people first language," meaning individuals with disabilities want to be accepted as a person first, rather than disabled.

The group of approximately 20 people taking part in Artfest 2008 ranged in age from children to adults, and many of these individuals have never participated at the center or created artwork, Sands says.

She says the artwork created during the workshop will be on display in the center's annual report calendar, as it was in previous years.

Sands says while the center is not permitted to lobby, the members of the CDS work on educating the public about people with disabilities. As a research and public service center at the university, the CDS, as well as Art Therapy Express, rely on public and private support from individuals, corporations, foundations and state and federal entities to operate their programs. The center is also involved in conducting research through surveys and focus groups in order to continue advancement.

Junior Lisa Budinic, a health studies major and disabilities studies minor, attended Artfest for the first time Saturday. She says the disabilities studies minor is useful and growing because it aids those who want a career helping disabled people, such as an occupational therapist.

Budinic says the participants become quite involved.

"The people here seem to really enjoy the art activities," Budinic says. "One woman even started painting before the opening speaker was done and hasn't stopped."

Both volunteers and participants were actively working together to create bright murals with every color and shape imaginable.

Bartoli says other institutions that work with Art Therapy Express include the Delaware Art Museum, the Rockwood Museum and the Delaware Opera House.

"We all need to work together to make miracles happen," she says.