

Art With Elders Program Harnesses Creativity and Yields Greater Health

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Art with Elders celebrated its 25th anniversary in October with a lively reception and art exhibit at Laguna Honda Hospitalâ??s Gerald Simon Theater.

Many of the students in the Art with Elders program have overcome significant physical and cognitive obstacles to produce their art, including the loss of the use of their dominant hand.

â??One of our objectives is to promote how our students use their wisdom and experience to overcome these obstacles. Itâ??s tough!â?• said Mark Campbell, executive director of the program. â??And we want to let people know how they do it.â?•

An annual exhibition â??most recently in October celebrating the programâ??s 25th anniversary â?? offer the artists a public display of their work, as well as the experience of having their art go through a jury process. What does the jury look for in the submitted artwork? First, Campbell said, they evaluate the level of risk that a student takes, either by using materials in a different way or by choosing a political or socially conscious subject. Next, the jury considers the level of virtuosity demonstrating the students can learn skills and progress as an artist. Finally, the jury considers the overall aesthetics of the piece, how it works as a whole.

AWE now provides 2,000 art classes per year for more than 400 seniors in long-term care facilities throughout the San Francisco Bay Area. Students gather in small classes for two hours a week to learn skills and to create their own art. The programâ??s focus is on building solid abilities in the elements of visual art, color and composition to perspective and background. â??Itâ??s also the first opportunity many of our students have had in decades to explore their creativity, and just have fun with it and with each other,â?• said Campbell.

Besides providing social contact with like-minded residents, the program helps challenge the stereotype that aging inevitably means isolation and decline. A 2006 controlled research study, Aging and the Creative Arts, sponsored by the National Endowment for the Arts, measured the results of taking part in a professionally conducted art program on the health and well-being of older adults.

Fewer doctor visits reported

The outcome? Seniors who participated in the arts had fewer doctor visits, took less medication, suffered fewer falls, and reported better morale. Those in control groups experienced an overall decline in health.

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The AWE program confirms these findings in every class, said Campbell. â??Art With Elders uses the power of art, creativity and community to enrich the journey of aging.â?•



Artist and Laguna Honda resident Ida Marksman says she feels happiest in the art studio.

The anniversary exhibit showcased 90 pieces of the most outstanding student artwork, juried by a panel of professional artists. Each piece of professionally framed art includes a photograph and a brief biography of the artist, to give an idea of the person behind the artwork.

Sitting in the light-drenched Laguna Honda hospital art studio, resident artist Ida Marksman said, â??I feel â??happiest in this place, here with a brush in my hand. I feel more alive.â?•

Check the AWE website for more exhibit locations in 2018. For more of the work done by artists at Laguna Honda Hospital and Rehabilitation Center, click here.

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1. All Posts

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mhunt

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