

# ART Notes

## Art Expression!

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Problem solving – that's what we do in [Art Expression](#).

What inspired me to create Art Expression was my own traumatic experience growing up as a child. I lost my father when I was 12 and lost my mother when I was 18 then became orphaned. I then came to Pittsburgh, to live with an aunt. Coping with loss, I turned to the arts. Art has been a calming influence for me, a way to express myself and gain the confidence to communicate through my artmaking. Art has been a support for me.

As a parent, I saw that art could help others, especially children who had needs for social and emotional learning. Children of all abilities and backgrounds could be included in an art program and be accepted. Through art children can learn social skills from their peers and their peers could learn about them, and differences would be valued instead of differences dividing people.

In 2001, I went to my home school district and presented the idea of Art Expression to them. I expressed that I wanted to have a program where ALL children would be included and teach social skills, increasing self-awareness and confidence by making art.

We have several programs in Art Expression, Inc. Our flagship is Creative Partners, which serves K-12 children in schools. From the Heart, our shelter program, serves toddlers up to teenagers as well as the parents who are with them. Our target group is 15 – 20 students. We serve approximately 1,000 students a year, and almost half are from the homeless shelters in Allegheny County through with the Homeless Children's Education Fund, and the Ward Home. Musical Partners is our program where we integrate the auditory world of music with the visual world of art. Art Expression also offers STEAM, science, technology, engineering, art and mathematics programs in local school districts.



It's more about the process than the art product, although students do improve their artistic abilities. We have professional art and music therapists and certified teachers conduct the program. The program is free of charge to all participants.

Giving children a voice through their art in a place where they are not judged, they can become friends with people they would never would not have gotten to know because art levels the playing field. Through Art Expression, students gain the confidence to become artists.

Our programs are fully inclusive and include regular education students alongside students with a variety of disabilities. It is a wonderful group where people come together. The children can take the goals of Art Expression into the classroom.



I never thought our pilot program in 2001 would expand to serve over 10,000 children in six counties. We recently expanded to Johnstown in Cambria County, where we are serving the Christian Home and young adolescents that are coming from traumatic situations. We also have a new program that we're starting which is a parent-child art program in the shelters through support from the Pittsburgh Child Guidance Foundation.

We recently received an esteemed grant from the National Endowment for the Arts. We were also a finalist for the National Arts and Humanities Youth Program Award in 2013 and 2017. These honors distinguished us as one of the top arts- and humanities-based programs in the country for 2017. The NAHYP awards have been known as the country's highest honor for out-of-school-time arts and humanities programs. In 2013, the program received a NAHYP Award Certificate of Excellence from the President's Committee on the Arts and the Humanities and again received one for the 2017 honor as well.

For more information about Art Expression, please visit [www.artexpressioninc.org](http://www.artexpressioninc.org).

*Photos by Susan Novak, Kristen Watt, and Megan Miller, top to bottom.*

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