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Art Expression finalist again for national award

After-school program promotes positive socialization through art

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A Trinity Middle School student intently works on his project during an Art Expression Inc. class.

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Art Expression Inc. has been named a finalist for the National Arts & Humanities Youth Program Award by the President's Committee on the Arts and the Humanities and its partner agencies, the Institute of Museum and Library Services, the National Endowment for the Arts and the National Endowment for the Humanities.

"It's the highest honor that an out-of-school program can get. We are thrilled," said Angela Lowden, founder and president of Art Expression.

If Art Expression wins, "It will help us reach more children in need. We are so honored to be chosen again this year," Lowden said.

Organizations from 46 states, the District of Columbia and two U.S. territories competed for the 50 finalist spots.

Art Expression Inc. is a 501(c)(3) charitable organization based in Mt. Lebanon whose mission is "to facilitate positive socialization through expressive art activities and provide academic enrichment in an inclusive educational environment."

Its after-school programs are offered free to students and focus on developing their social skills through art. The programs are offered in school districts, homeless shelters and community organizations throughout the area. Two Washington County school district, Trinity Area and Charleroi Area, are involved with Art Expression.

"We have a far reach," Lowden said. "We serve 1,000 children a year in schools and homeless shelters."

The organization relies on grants, as well as funding provided by the school districts. Lowden founded Art Expression in 2001.

"Art has always helped me," she said. "I had many challenges as a young person, and art always helped me to be able to communicate with others, calm myself and help me with my confidence and communication skills."

Lowden has a degree in education from Duquesne and a degree in art from the Art Institute.

"When my son was young, I observed him and his peers and I felt a program like this was needed, where all children could be included, especially those who had issues with social skills," Lowden said.

She presented her idea to the Mt. Lebanon School Board, which approved it, and the program was piloted in Mt. Lebanon schools. It soon had a waiting list.