

Volunteer of the Month: Laura Essick, Art Therapist

Most people in Asylum Hill know that Youth Challenge has been dedicated to helping people change their lives for decades here. The change they focus on is going from drug and alcohol dependent to clean and sober. The main tool they use is faith in God. But there are a lot of ways to accomplish this goal and a lot of other tools that can be applied to the task. The one that Laura Essick knows and uses is called Art Therapy.

She's done it as a volunteer, for about 25 years, and most recently this year at Youth Challenge. In the past she mostly



worked with women, but the program at Youth Challenge is for men. And as Laura puts it, "The men are waaay much easier to work with!"

The men she works with are in what's called Phase 1, they are in residence at Youth Challenge and spend much of their very structured day in group activities. The art is one of those and Laura is the volunteer who leads them through it.

It's not so much about creating great art as it is about getting outside of their own heads, finding something that interests them and accomplishing something. Laura is clearly comfortable with what she is doing, and the men grow comfortable with her as well.

While most were shy, two members of the group, Calvin and Robert allowed photographs. It was interesting to watch the two of them.

Calvin got into the clay that was brought out right away and began playing with it, while Robert wasn't sure what he wanted to do.

After a while though he found some colored pencils and a book to color in and he became engrossed.

Calvin meanwhile found a mold to spell out "Love" and by the end of the hour he had something to take back to his room. He and the others were also an hour closer to their goal. For a few more photos go to <https://photos.app.goo.gl/xJPYUAOtYLFYHEYa2>

For more on Youth Challenge go to <http://www.youthchallenge.org>

