

Tools for any trade

ART WITH A HEART

Sarah Pitcock

Walking into the Art with a Heart store and workshop space is like opening up the windows for the first time after a long winter. The airy, light-filled former police stable is decorated from floor to ceiling with handmade crafts and works of art. Dozens of mirrored mosaics bounce bright colors from wall to wall. It's easy to see how the time spent here can be so restorative. Art with a Heart is more than a place to learn art and crafting skills, though its 11,000 community classes are certainly popular. It's a place where many young people come to make a major change.

"Antonio and me, we're woe," said Ashley Knofski, a recent graduate of Art with a Heart's jobs program, using a slang term for "best friend." "He wants this as much as I do." What is "this?" I ask. "A life," she says.

Ashley is 21 years old and experiencing homelessness. She and Antonio know each other through their connection to Youth Empowered Society (YES), a nonprofit that provides youth experiencing homelessness with a comprehensive set of health, education, housing and employment services. Art with a Heart works with groups like YES, providing jobs and training to their clients.

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"The first week's paycheck felt so good," she said. "I have a job, something to wake up to and look forward to."

Ashley tells me she likes meeting new people. She's the funny one, and she's great with foreigners. It hardly sounds like the person who walked in the first day of the program.

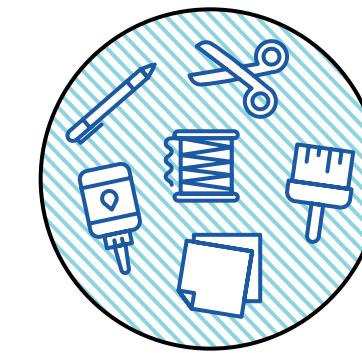
"Youth come in very angry at where they are in life," says Christina Ralls, director of workforce development and social enterprise for Art with a Heart.

Ashley shows me the Dr. Seuss-themed table and chair set she's working on for a customer. This project has tested her patience. She is having a hard time painting the lines straight. She tells me she has come close to throwing the chair at the wall a number of times. But, she hasn't. Christina says Ashley might not have been so successful at the beginning of the six-week program. Art therapy has opened the door for Ashley to build deeper relationships and essential coping, communication, workplace and life skills, which are also part of the jobs program.

Ashley and Antonio earned the coveted apprentice spots at the end of their jobs program, gaining eight additional weeks of employment and a percentage of the sales of all of the art they make. Ashley is studying for her GED diploma and thinking about careers, perhaps something in the culinary arts. Though she's not interested in becoming a professional artist, the skills she's learned can be applied anywhere.

Perhaps most importantly, the relationships and trust she has developed have given her the confidence to believe she deserves something better.

"I've had jobs before where you had to work hard to make your family," Ashley says. "Here, you're family when you walk in the door. It brings out my best side. You can trust people if you put your mind to it."



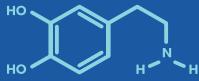
Try this

- Think of someone you want to make a gift for. Imagine what you might create.
- What would you need?
- What are the steps for making the gift?
- It could be simple or complex.
- How do you want the person to feel that you are designing it for?
- Making and sharing boosts positive self-image and connection.

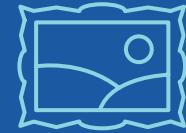


Art With a Heart

Science of the arts



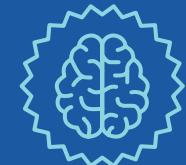
Feeling good - when you produce art you increase the neurotransmitter, dopamine.



Visiting an art gallery can reduce production of cortisol known as our stress hormone.



Involvement with the arts can help you get better grades!



When you focus on the type of art you love, you strengthen your brain's attention networks.



Art heals – it helps us to produce healthy levels of cytokines, helping to boost our immune system.