

Judith Chalmer

Recipient: Arthur Williams Award for Meritorious Service to the Arts
Acceptance Remarks, November 14, 2018

Thank you so much for this this honor and for the opportunity to talk with so many wonderful people here tonight. In particular I'd like to thank Governor Scott and the Vermont Arts Council for bringing us together in celebration, as well as any legislators who are here for supporting the work of the Vermont Arts Council.

I'm especially grateful for the help and commitment of the Vermont Arts Council in learning together to lift barriers that prevent people with disabilities from full participation in the arts, full participation in one of the most beloved aspects of community and one of the most important ways we explore and express what it means to be human. I was privileged to be the Director for twelve years of VSA Vermont, a nonprofit whose mission is to engage the capabilities and enhance the confidence of children and adults with disabilities. The Vermont Arts Council was and is a leading partner with VSA Vermont in expanding opportunities, along with so many wonderful arts organizations eager to work together so that artists with disabilities can be recognized for the excellence of their work, students of all ages with disabilities can take part in classes, and arts lovers with disabilities can be welcomed into arts spaces with dignity. There's so much more to be done. And the results are so rewarding and important.

In looking forward to this night, I've been remembering Greg Sharrow who received this award last year and whose friendship and mentoring meant so much to me. With Greg in mind, I've been thinking about the meaning of Service in the Arts.

And I think of a girl who hadn't had an easy time in life, and who, in a VSA Vermont arts class one day smashed the sculpture she was working on. When that happened she was told, you can smash it. It's yours and it's ok. We'll use those pieces for something. Later, as she, herself, tentatively placed the broken pieces together in a new way, she looked at them and said, that looks like me. And she kept that one. It was her pieced together heart.

I think about a neighborhood, where a little pocket park had been used as a place for garbage, a place where unwanted furniture was dumped as people left apartments, a place no one really went to spend time. And I think about how those neighbors got together and picked up every brick, every stone and cleaned up that little park so that an iron filigree structure could be raised with stained glass panels on top, the panels lovingly made and then generously donated by VSA VT artists with intellectual disabilities, contributing to community. A chair or two might sometimes still appear under the dome on a sunny day, but now for reading or a quiet conversation. And eight years later, defying the predictions of the understandably concerned police, not a single pane of glass has been broken, because art honors the neighborhood and calls the neighbors to care, in return. Artists with disabilities care about and for communities.

These are the services of the arts. They're found on a bus, in a pew, in a prison, in a park, when a child is sung to sleep or in the quiet moments before death. I expect that each one of you

here tonight has a story, a moment of pride in your service in the arts. Let's continue to do all that we can together, to expand our welcome in the arts and make all of our arts experiences accessible.