



Art for Life Programs Help Blind Students 'See' the World

Imagine understanding the significance of the contemporary art movement, or being able to articulate the nuances of the Hopi's choice of colors. Now imagine having that knowledge as a blind youth. Arizona Blind and Deaf Children's Foundation used its imagination, and, through a variety of partnerships, has helped bring the insights of art to some of Tucson's blind and low-vision students.



Arizona Blind and Deaf Children's Foundation, established in 2002, *invests in the future of Arizona's blind and deaf children*. Statistically, these children stand to face a future of up to 70% unemployment, and lives marked by isolation and poor health due to inactivity. The Foundation's mission is focused on four key areas lacking in most academic curricula, but which are critical to blind and deaf youths' ability to not only survive, but thrive as adults. Focus areas include: Art for Life, Fitness for Life, Literacy for Life and Success for Life.

Art Shed Program a Top Accomplishment

Within Art for Life, one of the Foundation's top accomplishments to date has been to establish the Art Shed program at Arizona School for the Blind. In the spring of 2007, the Foundation funded the Art Shed program through its Art for Life program area, and local artist Dawn Smiddy was hired.



In less than two years, Art Shed students have been introduced to a variety of tactile concepts, primarily in the medium of clay. Additionally, they've learned about color, opening a completely new and exciting world that was helping them to develop skills in interpersonal communication, positive self-expression, subject research, and cultural awareness while expanding personal creativity.



In spring of 2008, several students' pieces were submitted to a national competition of the American Printing House for the Blind. The results proved what we've known all along: southern Arizona's low-vision and blind students are true winners! Three of the students' works were chosen to be presented in a national exhibit in Louisville, KY, from a total of 400 entries! Many of these award-winning pieces are featured annually at the Foundation's gala event, Lariats and Lace.

The beginning of the 2008-09 school year has brought exciting new opportunities for the Art Shed. In August, the Foundation secured funding through Ward 1 Councilmember Regina Romero's Youth in Philanthropy program to support The Heritage Program. When fully realized this spring, the Heritage Program will culminate in a spring festival on the ASDB campus, celebrating the diversity of the school's student body—25% Native American, and more than 35% Hispanic. The centerpiece of this year's celebration will be students' artistic expressions, ranging from performance art and cooking to the various clay and other tactile pieces produced in the Art Shed.



With all the great work that's come out of the Art Shed, it's easy to understand how these young, talented students have truly expanded their horizons through art!

For more information, or to contribute to the Art Shed program, contact Arizona Blind and Deaf Children's Foundation, 520.577.3700, or e-mail info@azblinddeafchildren.org.



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