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Somerville youth express individuality through the free of cost "Youth Arts Arise" visual arts program

The Arts at the Armory in Somerville, Massachusetts has recently launched Youth Arts Arise, a free multi-disciplinary after-school and summer arts program for children ages 11-19. This free visual arts education is given by seasoned artists who specialize in such mediums as pen and ink, watercolors, oils, pastels, mixed media, and more.

Arts at the Armory is multifaceted arts and cultural center for the local community and community at large. "If Arts at the Armory did not exist as it is, Youth Arts Arise would not have come about. Lea Ruscio works tirelessly to help it continue," emphasized Bridget Seley Galway, education programs coordinator of Youth Arts Arise in an November 5, 2014 interview with *Wilderness House Literary Review*.

Ruscio, the executive director of Arts at the Armory, gave Galway the guidance, administrative, and hands on support needed to develop this intensive youth visual arts program. Originally Galway had "approached Lea Ruscio (as a volunteer)... to investigate funding sources that could support free arts programming for youth," Galway said. "I came aboard last March 2014 to do just that!"

Galway is no stranger to directing after-school and summer programs. A former arts editor of *Wilderness House Literary Review*, Galway had also previously run and taught art workshops at El Arco Iris Youth and Community Arts Center in Holyoke, Massachusetts during the early 1990s.

"It was a free multi-disciplinary every day after-school and summer arts program which was based in the poorest neighborhood of Holyoke and served all four of the lower wards of Holyoke," she said.

Prior to Youth Arts Arise, Galway volunteered at the Armory. Her responsibilities "included developing and instructing free artistic workshops, drop-in arts and crafts projects for all ages and families, as well as for the outside community events that Arts at the Armory took part in since last summer to recent months," said Galway.

Youth Arts Arise has been doable because of a grant from The Boston Foundation's Vision Fund. The grant allows Youth Arts Arise to meet two days a week in the after-school time frame, as well as to support artistic programming in the summer.

Yet it is through a stipend from Operation Able, an organization that discourages workplace age discrimination, Youth Arts Arise became a reality. This stipend gave Galway the opportunity to focus on the Arts at the Armory's mission: to make high quality artistic art programming accessible to all. She could now create youth oriented arts programming available to children between the ages of 11-19, Galway said.

With her strong background in after school and summer arts programming, Galway naturally thought about the possibility of the Armory offering free arts programming for youth. She came up with the name of this program "Youth Arts Arise" when she was volunteering her time at the Arts at the Armory.

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Now, in 2014/2015, Galway's interests focus primarily with middle school aged children who are in the process of developing mentally. "[They're in a stage where] they need more autonomy. They're struggling between childhood and becoming older in the adolescent time frame and they want to express their individual rights and views. What's a more perfect way to do that but through the arts!" Galway said.

Galway mentioned that there are currently limited free visual arts programs available for middle school aged children in the Metro Boston area. Yet there seem to be more free artistic educational opportunities for younger children. Youth ages 14-19 have the opportunity to start working part time in variety of way throughout the year and summer.

With the Youth Arts Arise program, children ages 15-19 will have the chance to be peer leaders, help out the artist teachers, and may get a stipend. They will also be role models for the youngsters. The aim is to get the children ages 11-14 motivated to one day advance into becoming peer leaders and role models for future children ages 11-14 who want to learn visual art, said Galway.

While the program is not ready to assist special needs children at this time, Galway said, "We're not limited to not include special needs [youngsters].... It's for all youths because it's important. It doesn't have to be just for young people who can afford it."

Galway has designed specific curriculum guidelines. She wants "the youth to have a high quality exposure to arts just as though they were going to the School of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. I want them – when applicable to the workshop – either to be addressing the techniques, to be exposed to artists that relate to the workshop that they are learning, and to learn the language of materials and the techniques that they are using," she said.

There will be four semesters per year. The classes are scheduled for Tuesdays or Wednesdays from 3:30 – 5:00 p.m. and are either two days or three days. There will be approximately eight workshops per month. The participants sign up for the whole semester. Each course is a workshop. And once a child has registered for a semester, he or she can attend any or all of the workshops desired. "This philosophy creates more commitment and support for the programs going on," she said.

Some of the workshops and the instructors who teach them include "Winter Mosaics" with Emily Bhargava on December 2, 9, and 16, 2014; "Halloween Mask Making" with Anya Malkina on October 14 and 21, 2014; "Graffiti Art" with Maureen Medeiros, on January 6 and 13, 2015; "Threads, Traces, and Surfaces" with Cheryl Hirshman on January 20 and 27, 2015; "Free Expression Day" on January 28, 2015 and "Visual Language of Film" with Ben Murrow on February 3, 10, and 24, 2015, said Galway.

Galway has led some Youth Arts Arise workshops herself, including "What's in your head", where images, letters and words are used to make landscapes and portraits.

On November 4 and 11, 2014, Lexington's Susan Dahl had the opportunity to be a Youth Arts Arise art instructor, too. She taught the workshop,

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“Magical Mix.” A professional arts therapist, Dahl is an expert in mindfulness art, an art form that she usually teaches to adults. “Mindfulness is a meditative art. That’s how I present it to adults,” Dahl explained in a November 14, 2014 interview with *Wilderness House Literary Review*. “Mindfulness is about how to pay attention using art to develop your mind or heart or both, maximizing being or maximizing human being.”

Galway found mindfulness art intriguing and requested that Dahl adapt her teaching style to be youth friendly. So Dahl did. For the Youth Arts Arise workshop, Dahl had the children explore different ways to understand different states of mind – a whole range of expressions dealing with emotional minds versus rational minds.

For a workshop activity, she had the students divide a piece of paper in half. One side was assigned to be for the emotional art exploration and the other side was for rational art creativity. Dahl found that the children had great ideas. “A lot of the art that came out of this workshop was fun and exciting. The kids seemed really to have fun doing it!” she said.

Dahl finds Galway’s motivation to provide a free after-school and summer visual arts program in Somerville truly special. “It’s a young program so word may not be out there in Somerville yet. But the program is there, and Bridget has worked hard to get the funds. She’s done all kinds of grant writing,” praised Dahl.

Artist Jessica Liggero is also an instructor for Youth Arts Arise. Held on November 18 and 25, 2014, “Expressive Self Portraits” was the first workshop that she taught. Her second workshop, “Family Flag”, is to be conducted on February 4, 11, and 25, 2015. These two courses deal with portraiture and use drawing and collage elements.

Liggero happened upon the Youth Arts Arise program through a peer artist who, like Liggero, has a studio at Vernon Street, Somerville. “I enjoy teaching children and adolescence, their art is so authentic and natural,” she said in a November 17, 2014 interview with *Wilderness House Literary Review*. “And I liked the mission of the program so I decided to get involved.”

Like Galway and Dahl, Liggero believes Youth Arts Arise has much to offer Somerville’s youth as “[It] provides a safe, supportive, creative space for children 11 – 19 years of age. Those are such delicate, transforming and confusing years. Children need a place where they can go and learn to express themselves without judgment or criticism. That’s what art is for,” she said.

Somerville is fortunate to have a free of cost visual arts program that caters to youth during the after-school hours and the summertime. There is a need for such educational activity for youth, according to Liggero. “Somerville is a great neighborhood to have this program because of its ongoing involvement in the arts. There is a lot creative energy here. After school is when children can get into trouble or float around. Having the program free of cost allows youth from all backgrounds to attend!”

Youth Arts Arise has workshops in all mediums and styles ranging from realistic, conceptual, impressionistic, two dimensional, three dimensional, etc. Galway stressed that the main concentration is not only indi-

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vidual expression and identity but also is exposure to cultural traditions and diversity, too.

On December 22, 2014, Youth Arts Arise held its first exhibition showcase. The second exhibition showcase will take place on March 31, 2015 or April 1, 2015. A spring exhibition showcase at the end of June 2015, and a summer exhibition showcase will occur at the end of August 2015. There will be a showcase exhibition at each semester's end.

Local retailers have donated materials to assist the Youth Arts Arise program. Stanhope Framers in Union Square has given mat board, foam core, and frame pieces towards artistic endeavors. Boulter Plywood in Somerville has contributed wood for slanted boards to be painted and for free standing walls that need to be built for displaying participants' artwork upon at the showcases, said Galway.

Money has been raised through individual donations in a fundraiser set up through Blick's Art Room Aid site.

Program supporters include David Lusted, a volunteer for Youth Arts Arise since August 2014 until November 2014, and Anna Seeman, a Tufts University intern.

To find out more information about Youth Arts Arise, please visit its website at www.artsatthearmory.org or email education@artsatthearmory.org