

Art program opens a new world

By CORINNE ABATT

At Michigan Council for the Arts, it's called an artist in residency grant.

At Oakland Training Institute, Lamphere, it's labeled a miracle.

As arts and activities coordinator, Martha Segal, a lady who moves around the Madison Heights center for training the mentally impaired like she was plugged into a super general, arranged for two artists to spend 10 weeks at the center.

The culmination of this endeavor which is an area first and possibly a first in the country, was the multi-media event, "The Flip Side," held one day recently at the center. Michigan legislators who attended later sent the center a special award, they were so impressed.

But, the long lasting award of the program which Christopher King and Raken T. Leaves implemented is just as treasured.

King, a Detroit artist who likes to combine dance and visual arts, is so enthusiastic with his results that he plans to continue working with one particular student on his own time. Ms. Leaves, mime and puppetry, voiced the same sentiments.

MS. SEGAL said of the artist-in-residency program, "It was all done within the curriculum and it helped both teachers and students by opening up many new ways of teaching language."

THE YOUNG people in the sheltered workshop, ages 20-26, were earning money making an order of red velvet boxes for Frank's Nursery and Trims — a project they will be working on most of the summer because 200,000

bowls have been ordered. The first 42,000 were already carefully packed and neatly packaged in boxes ready for delivery.

Now all of this kind of training and job skills helps build confidence and satisfaction. But it was the arts program that provided the thrills for these young people. For the first time in their lives they were dancing, acting and freely showing on paper some of the things that had been long buried inside for lack of a means of communication.

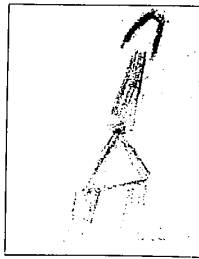
King said he had noticed a difference in the way they walked. He attributed it to the dance classes. Not long before, most had moved and stood with shoulders bent and arms hanging limply, now they stood with heads held high like dancers.

After contour drawings of thumbs, King introduced his art students to still life drawing — a new word for them.

"It was an incredible experience for them to try to draw something they could see — and none of them were aware of shadows until I showed them what they were," he said.

THE STILL life he set up was a simple cone, the kind used to mark an area on a street. Yet for many of these young people the cone took on new meaning, shaded it, others elongated it and still others turned it into an abstract form.

Ms. Segal said that because of the dance program, "Instead of going home



Kathy Ruckle was drawing like this before the artists-in-residence program started.

and watching the box, when the music comes on, our kids get up and dance."

King nodded in agreement and added, "Now the minute they hear music, they want to get up and dance."

Realizing that most mentally impaired persons are programmed for failure, he designed his instruction in art so there were no failures, no rights and wrongs — just creative expression.

Center supervisor Bernard Travnitzkar reinforced what King and Ms. Segal had said: "We've had nothing but positive results from this and we're hoping to work this program into all

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Figures in Kathy's charcoal drawings improved dramatically in both concept and skill. Her work shows an increased awareness of self through the definition of body parts and their function.

the centers in Oakland County."

Ms. Segal, who sees few limits to the kinds of exposure to the arts for these young people, had taken most of the students to the Detroit Symphony, a performance of "Annie" at the Fisher and a performance of "Showboat."

She's now preparing a resource book for the Title I program under which much of this was possible.

"It's been instant success," she said, "and the next person I want in here is a musician."

Her only regret is that it wasn't started sooner. But, once started, she's not about to let it get away from her.

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