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Artstart is a place to grow ... a place of discovery

By LORRAINE MCCLISH

How does red make you feel?
Let's dance to yellow.

Paint a picture showing the music.
The preschoolers who were set to thinking, feeling and experiencing these things are all part of Artstart who meet with drama, music and art teachers several times a week in Mercy Center.

"The beginning of growing is to like yourself so whatever comes, you know you're OK," said Nancy Bates, who started Artstart as a ministry outreach to the community from University Hills Christian Church.

She describes Artstart as "Not a turn on because kids are born turned off. It's a place to grow. It's a place where it's OK to be angry. A place where there is no imitating, no models. A place where kids can discover themselves, their friends, their world."

ARTSTART activities run simultaneously in three rooms with Monica Leaning, who handles the art sections; Barbara Burgess, who heads up the music portion; and Sally Sawyer, a dramatist.

"Miss Sally," as the children call her, does double duty with mini-puppet shows using psycho-drama techniques to more often than not send home a lesson, or get across what otherwise might be a touchy point.

An example of this is the script she wrote about a bunny who wet his tail, which buries sometimes do, and that is OK.

The day we visited, Mrs. Sawyer and two of her puppets carried on a running dialogue with Dr. John Richardson, a veterinarian. The talk, which the children felt free to enter, told a little about the care of pets, and explained a veterinarian's work-a-day job. But it was specifically geared for those children who had gotten pets as Christmas gifts.

Mrs. Sawyer will use the same format in a series she's planning about what dads do after they leave home every morning.



When hugging, rocking, or holding is needed, Artstart borrows a grandmother from down the hall. Christa Chrovian's guest grandmother is Rose Fleauris, who left her activities at The Gathering Place to spend some time with the little one.

"We found out a lot of the children simply don't know," she said.

THE THREE teachers, together with coordinator Sue Ingram and Mrs.

Bates, lay out lesson plans so a substitute can take over in an emergency.

"But that is the only reason," Mrs. Bates said. "If one of our kids come in and announces that he's just learned he is about to have a new baby brother or sister, he wants to talk about that. Our teachers respond and our lesson plan goes out the window."

"We are structured, but there is always enough freedom for the child to be whatever he needs to be that day," she said.

On occasion the teachers have found that the need was "rocking, hugging, holding."

The need is filled now, Mrs. Bates said, "by borrowing a grandma."

One of the deciding factors in moving Artstart to Mercy Center, Mrs. Bates said, was that the senior citizen's Gathering Place is there.

"That is another part of our growing and discovering process as Artstart developed," Mrs. Bates said. "A great many children now have grandparents who don't live nearby so we share part of our Halloween party and part of our Christmas party with them."

"It introduces our children to another generation and when we see a need for just hugging, we go down the hall and ask. We've never been refused."

MRS. BATES thinks of Artstart as an exposure to the arts, but with lots of freedom within each facet.

"What works for one youngster doesn't work for another," she says, "so we respond to individual needs, and try to channel interests in a creative manner."

"We had one little boy who told us he didn't like the dumb drama class. But after a while it was pretty evident that he couldn't stand not knowing what was going on in there, so he chose to go back. That was important. He chose," Mrs. Bates said.

"Each child is unique. And we treasure that uniqueness."

All Artstart semesters and sessions are set up so that a child can integrate easily at any time.

Inquiries will be taken by calling Ms. Ingram, at 478-3142, or Mrs. Bates at 474-7175.



Nancy Bates, (at right) who is probably best known in the community for her work with senior citizens and her position on the two-cities' Commission on Aging, spends several mornings each week at Artstart. Here she chats with Ann Wilson.



Music teacher Barbara Burgess and John Wilson respond to "The Red Rug Song." When the song is played, everyone gathers on the red rug for Artstart's only full-group activity.



No question here that what the puppets have to say is important to David Adams and Jenny Harms.



Dr. John Richardson, immediate past mayor of Farmington and a local veterinarian, is the guest for the day, along with some common, and some not-so-common animals. Those who make up his captive

audience are Sally Sawyer, Artstart's drama teacher with Zakir Husain, Todd Liljestrand, Ann Wilson, Jenny Harms and Jimmy York.



Artstart art teacher Sue Ingram, who doubles as coordinator for the tots' program, takes Deidre Heindl on her lap to watch the puppet show. (Staff photos by Harry Mauthe)