

Chilling & Spilling with Foster Care Youth

by Jill Beagles

Art with Heart held a *Chill & Spill* workshop for youth in foster care and had over 30 teens and 'tweens in attendance. The population, to our great surprise, was largely Spanish-speaking, adding a little bit of added stress to the non-Spanish speaking staff.

The fast paced, private workshop took place at the YMCA Young Adult Service's "hang-out room" that we transformed into a pizza-eating, artistic studio environment.

Some teens arrived surly and moody, and promptly began sizing each other up. Others arrived excited to do art, but unsure of what they had gotten themselves into.

The workshop was centered around one of *Chill & Spill's* activities, called "Powerful/Powerless." *Chill & Spill* is one of Art with Heart's popular therapeutic books specifically created to help adolescents dealing with difficult issues. It's hip, engaging, and fun – so fun, in fact, that the kids never even realize that it is therapeutically based (or, as we adults say, "good for you!").

We invited community partners from YMCA, Treehouse, Catholic Community Services, and YouthCare, who brought a total of 30 teens and young adults to the event. A volunteer graciously translated our workshop handouts so that everyone could be involved without any barriers. When the kids first arrived, we offered pizza, grapes, and other goodies to help them "chill" and feel comfortable.

As they were eating, talking and hanging out, we explained (with the help of interpreters) the first step in the "Powerful/Powerless" project, which was a writing activity which prompted them to write a list of things (situations, people, places) that made them feel powerful and powerless. The room grew quiet for the first time as they explored their answers. Working side-by-side, the process began.

After writing their lists, we taught them about visual metaphor, and the kids began cutting out images from magazines to be used in their collages, based on their "Powerful" list

because we wanted them to realize that their personal power and strength is not something that's "out there" and unattainable, but rather something that already exists inside them. The images they chose formed the foundation for their the next step. We demonstrated our exciting mixed-media method of creating rich, textural collages that helped to enrich the images they had found. They then chose colors that made them feel powerful and painted backgrounds that they adhered their pieces to.

The workshop ended as it began – with a writing exercise. We asked the kids to explain what their artwork meant to them in an artist's statement. The final result was on display at the YMCA's Triangle Gallery for all to see. The kids were thrilled to see that almost half of the art was sold before we even opened the apple cider! Half of the proceeds went to the young artists, with the other half benefiting Art with Heart.

A therapist from YouthCare told us afterwards, "Tears come to my eyes as I walked into the gallery space with the soft lighting, the spread of good food, and the warm welcome. Events and processes like this one that you offered our kids give them a sense of dignity and hope – two things that sometimes seem out of reach."

Another youth worker also commented, "It was obvious at the exhibit how proud they were. The whole experience was wonderful and life-giving." The best thing of all was seeing how their body language changed from when they first arrived– their faces glowed with pride. Giving these kids a chance to feel a sense of accomplishment was a very, very good thing.



2011: Mark Your Calendars

For more information, details and registration, please visit artwithheart.org/events

Chill & Spill Trainings: March 21-22 • Oct. 24-25 • Art with Heart building

Art Buddy Workshops: April 14, 3-7pm • October 13, 3-7pm • Swedish Medical Center

Color of Hope Benefit Breakfast: September • Date TBD

Youth Benefit Gallery Show: First Thursday, Dec. 1 • YMCA Triangle Gallery, 909 4th Ave.