

SIUE Head Start/Early Head Start Boosts Staff Wellness With Art Hives

by Megan Wieser
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EDWARDSVILLE - Southern Illinois University Edwardsville Head Start/Early Head Start staff members are creatively focusing on wellness as they navigate through the COVID-19 pandemic.

Recently, staff from each of the Head Start/Early Head Start Centers participated in a series of SIUE/STL Art Hives hosted via Zoom where they used artistic expression to connect, relax and decompress.

“It is important for SIUE Head Start/Early Head Start to continue to support wellness of staff, children and families, especially during times of crisis,” said Head Start/Early Head Start Special Services Program Coordinator Tammy Wrobbel. “As a program, we are committed to helping children, families and staff find ways to reduce stress in their lives and promote physical and mental well-being. We look forward to providing even more new and innovative ways to increase our family and team’s ability to care for one’s self.”

Art Hives is an open-source model pioneered by Janis Timm-Bottos, an art therapist and associate professor at Concordia University. Shelly Goebel-Parker, professor in the SIUE College of Arts and Sciences’ Department of Art and Design’s art therapy counseling program, along with colleagues across campus and art therapy counseling graduate students, has put SIUE/STL Art Hives on the map.

An Art Hive is a community art studio that welcomes everyone as an artist. It’s a place to talk, make art and build communities. It emphasizes responding in creative ways to things that matter. Art Hives’ core principles include consensus decision making, solidarity, positive kind regard, radical hospitality, everyone an artist and each one, teach one.

During eight Head Start/Early Head Start sessions, participants were encouraged to get creative using household items for art activities such as painting nails, making paper mache masks, folding tin foil into figures, building from toilet paper rolls or using cardboard boxes as canvases.

“We learned how certain activities and movements are more calming than others and why,” Wrobbel explained. “Shelly Goebel-Parker and art therapy graduate assistants shared their knowledge as participants share their creations. My favorite material to work with was used coffee grinds. I also created jewelry using broken items, and added my own touch to old greeting cards that I had lying around.”

Art Hives foster inclusion, respect and learning. During the sessions, participants were reminded of a few “Things to Keep in Mind,” including:

Working side-by-side is expected and encouraged

Trust your therapeutic helping skills

Model being open to diversity

Head Start/Early Head Start successfully offered Art Hives as a wellness activity for its families in November 2019 as part of its wellness program. According to Wrobbel, the creative experience is just one example of new strategies and opportunities the program hosted in the past year and plans to continue.

“In addition to Art Hives, we created several new wellness opportunities this year including, but not limited to, having on-site social emotional support for staff and parents, as well as establishing a wellness space for staff and children,” Wrobbel said.

Follow SIUE/STL Art Hives on social media using @SIUeSTLArtHives.

With a focus on empowering people and strengthening communities, the SIUE East St. Louis Center is dedicated to improving the lives of families and individuals—from pre-school through adult—in the Metro East region. The Center offers programs that give the community renewed hope and an opportunity to reach educational, career and life goals. It does so by providing comprehensive programs, services and training in the areas of education, health, social services and the arts.