

# Art for Life — Something to Celebrate

“Give a child medicine to take and heal their body. Give a child art to create and heal their soul.” – Anthony Knutson



## Art for Life — Something to Celebrate

This week our therapeutic recreation and child life team celebrated the importance of art in the healing process. For the past 10 years, the Art for Life Foundation has brought *Ceramics & Kids* to our Shriners Hospital, providing patients with a unique opportunity to express themselves safely, positively and creatively. Staff and volunteers organized a party to honor the contributions Art for Life has made to our patients and families. We are honored to share our conversation with Art for Life founder Anthony Knutson as he draws from experience to paint a picture of his program.



**When did you begin Art for Life?** Eighteen years ago in May 1998. We are a nonprofit 501(c)3 organization.

**What was your inspiration?** I wanted to help kids who are undergoing physical, emotional or mental crisis to use art as a part of their healing process. In 1998, that was quite a stretch. However, now art as a healing modality is quite acceptable in the healthcare experience – so much so, that Art for Life programs have become an integral part of children’s hospital services and are recognized as an important adjunct to educational, developmental, recreational and psychosocial support services.

**When did you connect with our Shriners Hospital?** I contacted the Shriners Hospital in Sacramento in January 2006 to see if they had a need for our type of healing programming. Then, with our CFO and Art for Life volunteer Jeff Russo and Art for Life volunteer Susan Anderson, we met with the manager of the Shriners Hospital therapeutic recreation and child life program. We then launched our *Ceramics & Kids* Sacramento program on March 30, 2006. The three of us still participate each month.

**Do you take your program to any other hospitals?** We are located in 8 states and Washington D.C. Last year, we helped over 31,000 kids and their families in our healing arts programming. It is important to note that our *Ceramics & Kids* program is also located in two other Shriners Hospital locations – Honolulu and Boston. Information on all our locations and programs may be found on our website at [artforlife.org](http://artforlife.org)

**Please describe some of the activities you do with kids at Shriners?** With Shriners, we only do our *Ceramics & Kids* program. The kids and family members each paint a selected, themed piece each month. We use acrylic paints so no firing is needed. It is a paint-and-keep project.

**What have you learned from the kids at Shriners?** The same as all kids in our programs – kids love art! Kids find healing through art. And kids are amazing artists. They are experts at taking how they feel inside and translating it into a piece of art. Their artwork represents a tangible way of expressing how they feel and who they are – quite specific to that point in time. Therefore, every piece is a unique masterpiece because it comes from a place of love and of self-expression.

**Do you have any Shriners Hospital / Art for Life experiences that stand out in your mind?** After 10 years, it is just amazing to see some of the same kids we have helped over the years to grow up and become charming young adults. Many of them tell us that art still continues to be an important part of their life: proof that art at any age is healing.

**Anything else you would like to add?** Somewhere, every day through our network of healing arts programs nationwide, we are helping kids and their families to use art as a form of self-expression. And through their participation they find a way of moving through their illness into wellness. At Art for Life, we have a saying “Give a child medicine to take and heal their body. Give a child art to create and heal their soul.”

## Patient Referral

- 916-453-2191
- 916-453-2111 (Emergency Referral)
- 916-453-2395 (fax)
- [referrals.ncal@shrinenet.org](mailto:referrals.ncal@shrinenet.org)

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