

making a difference

MENTORS MATTER

in the Lives of Kids

By Kim Tarnopolski. Photos by Kim Tarnopolski.



Artist Christa Iceforest and child



Group of children at camp

Each year, over 78,600 Arizona children experience the pain of abuse, neglect, and homelessness. This type of trauma can trigger feelings of not being good enough and no one really caring about them. To counteract this toxic stress, an increase in cortisol has been found to reduce the negative impact of these life experiences. When cortisol is released in the body, this

hormone regulates metabolism in the cells and reduces stress within the body.

Artistic expression is one way children can increase their levels of cortisol. When this “release valve” is accessed, it offers the chance for kids to explore new ways of coping with their current situation. Fortunately, there is a Phoenix-based charity, Free Arts for Abused Children of Arizona, providing a comprehensive continuum of creative arts that builds self-confidence and critical life management skills among abused and homeless children in our community.

Free Arts believes anyone can help heal a child. Utilizing an “art with intention” model, mentors deliver thoughtfully planned activities that promote safety, self-expression, and a sense of belonging. These talented and compassionate individuals give freely of their time; they create and facilitate healing, therapeutic programs around painting, dancing, theater, music, and other artistic outlets. Free Arts offers many events throughout the year to showcase the children’s talents.

Survey data collected from children, volunteers, and caregivers indicate 91% of children involved in Free Arts programs experience increased resiliency. The emotional impact is evident when you ask a child benefitting from their programs. Tarah, age nine, explained it like this: “I am going to tell you about Free Arts. Free Arts makes me feel special. Free Arts makes me feel loved. Free Arts makes me feel safe. With Free Arts, I get to learn new things. People at Free Arts listen to me. They are helpful during our projects, and they are loving. Free Arts makes me feel alive. I love Free Arts.”

Rose Marie Stremel has been mentoring children for 20 years and is a volunteer at Free Arts. She is also a member of 100+ Women Who Care Valley of the Sun and shared her firsthand knowledge of the value of mentoring and how it contributes to the children’s emotional healing. In June, members of 100+ WWC donated \$8,625 to Free Arts, so they can continue to build upon their therapeutic arts programs.

To learn more about these meaningful organizations, visit www.FreeArts.org and www.100wwcvalleyofthesun.org. The next meeting of 100+ Women Who Care Valley of the Sun is August 23 at the Scottsdale Hilton. Guests are welcome.

ADDISON TAYLOR

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