Expression Through Art

‘Expression through Art’ was a Ronald McDonald House Charities grant-funded program produced by the Mental Health Association and facilitated by art therapist Karie Schwartz, LCAT-P. MHA staff and respite workers also provided group support and individual assistance during sessions.

Sixty children aged 6-18 with a mental health diagnosis were welcome to attend this 4-week, cost-free series that ran through 2013. They were divided into two age groups, and sessions were held in three different locations to accommodate families across Erie County. The goals of the series were to allow each child time and space in a safe and contained setting for self-expression, and to develop mastery of their artistic style and mediums.

Feelings identification, coping skill development, relaxation techniques and group connection were emphasized throughout the series. Children used dry materials (chalk and oil pastels, markers, colored pencils), wet materials (acrylic and watercolor paint) and 3-dimensional works (mask decorating, clay, boxes). Some responded to a directive approach while others preferred to create freely using their own ideas and techniques.

Children were often told that there is “no right or wrong way” to make art, which may have contributed to the variety of expression demonstrated in this exhibit. After each session, they were given the option to take their artwork home or leave it with MHA to be included. Children often demonstrated a sense of pride in their artistic expression and were eager to participate in future therapeutic art activities.