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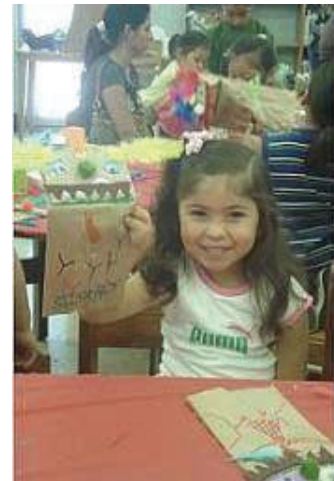
Our mission is to provide comprehensive mental health and social services to children and their families. Developing healthy alternatives to abuse and violence, addressing emotional and behavioral challenges, results in healthy children, families and communities.

## Art With HOPE

“Yay it’s Tuesday! It’s art therapy day!!”

Cheers like these are commonplace on the ICGC playground on Tuesday afternoons when art therapist, Denise Fanelli, comes to conduct art therapy for the children in the H.O.P.E. program. As part of their intensive and specialized after-school program, the H.O.P.E. children participate in art therapy, which was made possible by a generous grant from Los Angeles County Supervisor Don Knabe, 4th District. In addition to these children, foster care families undergo art therapy at ICGC as well. For all who participate in art therapy, the immediate and long-term benefits are apparent. Not only is art therapy extremely enjoyable, as the enthusiasm of the children demonstrates, but it also provides a number of mental, emotional, and behavioral benefits as a form of psychotherapy.

Art therapy is an innovative form of clinical therapy where children and families receive the benefits of therapy through a different medium of communication—art. A licensed therapist who is also a registered art therapist guides the sessions as the client seeks to improve his or her mental, emotional, and behavioral state, much like



traditional therapy.

Art therapy is especially insightful and effective for children because children can easily and comfortably express themselves through art. As you may know from personal experience, art is very natural to children. Oftentimes, children have trouble communicating their emotions, thoughts, and feelings to other people, which can present a significant obstacle to a child in therapy. Young children especially may not have developed the vocabulary to accurately express how they think and feel. Through art, children can express cognitive and emotional processes they may not have even been aware of. For instance, if a child is asked to draw an animal or a fairy tale character they identify with, the animal or person they choose usually reflects their self-image. Children may not have realized the connection between their drawings and their personal lives, but through art therapy, they may be able to achieve a greater sense of self-awareness.

At the conclusion of each art therapy session, each child has a chance to share something they feel comfortable disclosing with the rest of the children. The children are greatly encouraged to share, whether it is as complex as describing what their artwork symbolizes or as simple as why they chose a certain color. Both the art therapist and the children are allowed to ask questions, and this is when most children gain the most insight into their artwork. As 7-year-old Ian\* states, "Art therapy helps me get all of my anger out. It helps me talk about my feelings more. At art therapy we always talk about our feelings." By sharing with their peers and with the art therapist, the H.O.P.E. kids often discover things for themselves, which can be self-empowering. Throughout the course of the year, children become more comfortable sharing and are able to progressively gain more insight and awareness into themselves and their personal situation. At the end of the year, they are able to look back at all the artwork they created and with almost every case, each child's progress can be visibly illustrated.

### Quotes

"Art therapy is like a guitar; it rocks and helps me express myself."

— Brian\*, age 10

"Art therapy is wonderful and peaceful"

— Michelle\*, age 11

"Art therapy helps me get out all of my feelings and I feel like an artist too."

— Tony\*, age 7

"Art therapy is cool, nice, and the best"

— Ethan\*, age 11

"I love art and it's fun!"

— David\*, age 6

\* Names have been changed