

# Program gives troubled youths a direction through creativity

BY JENNA M. MCKNIGHT  
DAILY RECORD

**MORRIS PLAINS** — Mark Hladyk was skeptical when he was referred to an art therapy program about two years ago.

The 15-year-old from Parsippany already had been to a string of therapists to address his issues: He and his twin brother were born in Russia with fetal alcohol spectrum disorder and were abandoned by their mother.

They spent their first four years in an orphanage and then in a home for retarded children, where they were neglected and abused, until they were adopted by an American couple, Ruth and Mark Hladyk.

A little more than a year later, their adoptive father died from cancer.

If that were not enough, the teenager, who attends the Children's Institute in Verona, was diagnosed with bipolar disorder when he was 11.

"We sought therapy. We sought lots of therapy," said Ruth Hladyk, a 52-year-old hospitality teacher.

"By and large, most of it didn't work."

That all changed, they said, after they found Cre-



Mark Hladyk of Parsippany pets Roscoe during the Creative Heartwork program on Thursday. 'It makes you be focused when you need to be calm,' Mark said.

ative Heartwork, a non-profit organization dedicated to healing Morris County children through the arts.

On Thursday, the organization opened the doors to its first permanent facility after years of working in churches, schools and convents. The new 4,700-square-foot facility sits inconspicuously in an industrial complex in Morris Plains.

Mark Hladyk, now an avid photographer, said the organization's various programs have helped him to be more sociable, confident and stable.

"It makes you be focused when you need to be calm," he said. "I get manic and silly, and I'm working on how to control that. I'm working on how to control my anger."

The organization offers programs in visual arts,

music, dance, poetry and theater for children ages 6 to 17.

Soon, it also will offer a culinary program for children with eating disorders, obesity issues or food-related illnesses, such as diabetes.

Karen Carbonello, president and founder of the organization, said she also plans to someday intro-

**SEE PROGRAM / A22**

## **MORE INFO**

For information about Creative Heartwork, call (973) 543-4449 or visit [www.creativeheartwork.org](http://www.creativeheartwork.org). The organization is always seeking donations and volunteers.

# **Program**

**CONTINUED FROM / A17**

duce horticultural and pet therapy programs.

The program's fees are on a sliding scale, up to \$25 per session. Each session lasts up to two hours, Carbonello said.

Carbonello is the organization's only full-time employee. She has five art therapists — all of whom are master level and board certified, she said — who come in a couple of days a week and are paired with an artist. A licensed psychologist supervises every session, she said.

For now, the organization offers only group sessions, but in time it might offer individual sessions.

Round-trip transportation is provided. The youths will be bused to the new facility in, surprisingly, a limousine, which Carbonello said was the same price as a van.

"It's part of self-esteem enhancement," she said. "They feel like they're special."

Carbonello, a Mendham mother of two, founded Creative Heartwork in 2001. Her interest in art therapy was sparked after studying coping mechanisms for people who had experienced trauma and finding that conventional techniques often were ineffective.

---

What did work, she discovered, was the act of creating.

"(People) told me they were drawing and painting," she said. "The things that were helping them cope were not therapists, not traditional therapy."

Carbonello enlisted the help of artists, art therapists and psychologists and since has worked with about 250 children who suffer from a variety of issues: serious illness, disability, loss and separation, poverty, abuse and neglect.

One medium that was featured on Thursday was glass-blowing, being demonstrated by a teacher from the Newark-based arts organization, Grass Roots. In an upcoming class, students suffering from trauma or loss will make glass story beads that will be strung on a leather cord. The necklace will be a story of their lives.

Laura Auster, a Grass Roots program development director, said she remembers one girl telling her that through a glass-blowing class she realized that her life is like glass — fragile, yet able to be made into something beautiful.

"It was poignant," she said. "It helps them to release their emotions, and make them feel special and proud of themselves."

---

DAILY RECORD *n. be*

FRIDAY, APRIL 15, 2005

---

# Kids experience art of healing



TYSON TRISH / DAILY RECORD

Caty, left, and Amity Matthews pound out a rhythm at Creative Heartwork, a nonprofit organization dedicated to healing Morris County children through the arts, in Morris Plains on Thursday.