

Long Island Volunteer Hall of Fame Archive Project

Archive Project

Inception to Induction

Splashes of Hope

Year of Founding: 1996

Issue Addressed: Speeding the Medical Healing Process through Aesthetic Enhancement of the Healthcare Environment

Induction Category and Year: Children & Youth Services, 2005

Founder: Heather Buggee

Operations Manager: Richard Liebowitz

Personal Quote from Founder: “Artwork, color, and different imagery lift hospital patients’ spirits a little more.”

History: While she was in art school, Heather Buggee had a classmate who was suffering from Hodgkin’s disease. As a result, Heather spent substantial time visiting her friend in the hospital. The two art students found the atmosphere of the hospital “stark” and depressing and thought it was not conducive to the healing process. Artists at heart, they believed they could make the hospital surroundings more positive using their artistic ability. Her friend died before their plans took shape, but Heather decided to carry out the mission on her own.

The first request Heather received was from Blythedale Children’s Hospital in Valhalla, NY. Nurses there requested hand-painted ceiling tiles to place in the rooms of bedridden children. Since the tiles could be replaced or moved easily, they could be moved to various areas of the hospital depending on where the patients were residing. A tile could be added to a hospital room ceiling to help a child’s imagination while he/she was confined to a small space surrounded by four bare walls. At the same hospital, Heather painted her first mural of a train coming around a bend. A hospital spokesperson said the painting, “Reduced crying, stress and the fear children naturally feel when entering a treatment room.”

Since that first mural was painted, over 200 volunteer artists have joined Heather’s plan to make the hospital environment more comforting and peaceful for patients. Splashes of Hope Operations Manager Richard Liebowitz says that the murals bring “Joy, happiness, and a sense of calmness” to the children. Today, Splashes of Hope employs 40 volunteers and 3 full-time professional artists, as well as a part-time administrator at their Huntington, Long Island location. Additionally, they have an executive committee of dedicated business leaders and professionals who raise funds and run the financial segment of the organization. Splashes of Hope have grown

into an international organization, receiving mural requests from various healthcare facilities throughout the United States and the world.

Agency Mission: Splash of Hope collaborates with art therapists and medical professionals to produce customized murals that address the emotional and psychological needs of the particular patients of each healthcare institution. The organization's mission is to produce paintings for medical settings as an aid to pain management, to distract patients from surgery and other procedures, and to create positive focal points during their hospital stay. Liebowitz sums up the agency's mission by declaring that "Every day we help brighten the lives of our youngest patients." The murals are conceived using themes, colors, and images chosen by both the hospital staff and the artists to accelerate the healing process.

Scope of Activities: Splashes of Hope has been dedicated to creating custom murals in medical and social service settings with the creation of original, therapeutic art installations. Each mural is designed to address the unique needs of patients, their families, and their health care providers. In addition to painting murals, Splashes of Hope recently created an 80-page coloring and activity book called *Friend on the Mend* for child patients. To support the costs of running the non-profit organization, the staff runs fundraising events such as the Bay Cruise and Pub Crawl.

Process: Creating custom murals is a lengthy process which involves six steps. First the professional artists evaluate the walls or ceilings that hospital personnel designate for the murals. Then the artists meet with facility staff, patients, medical professionals, and therapists to discuss the proper way to create a mural that serves the unique needs of that facility's patients. Second, Splashes of Hope artists then create a layout design and present it to the hospital staff. The layouts are custom-designed to fit each facility's specifications. If the design is approved, the layout design is framed and presented to the sponsor upon completion of the mural project. Third, the artists begin to paint the murals on the hospital wall or ceiling or on portable panels in the studio that will be installed on the wall or ceiling. The fourth step consists of a protective varnish being applied so the murals can be washed if necessary. Fifth, if the murals are not painted directly on the wall or ceiling, the panels are brought to the hospital and installed on the walls. In either case, the edges of the murals are camouflaged over so that the murals appear to be part of the structure itself. As the sixth and final step, a ribbon-cutting ceremony takes place and the artists, facility staff, and news media are invited.

Volunteer Involvement: The organization has a steady workforce of a dozen volunteers, but always has a need for more and that includes non-painters. In particular, it has a need for volunteers in the following areas: office help, board, committees, grant writing, gala staff, priming and varnishing, studio maintenance, utility van driver, delivery/installation of murals, special events staff, fine art donations, marketing and PR, event planning, graphic arts, and fundraising.

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