



UNT volleyball starts conference play with Reagan Bedell's spark

>> Sports, 3A

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NONPROFIT



Newly painted murals line the hallways of Denton County MHMR Child & Adolescent Center, a project made possible through a collaboration with The Art Room.

Murry Chavez/DRC

The Art Room brings art to Denton County MHMR's Child & Adolescent Center

By Camila Gonzalez
Staff Writer

With scenes of nature and animals spanning the walls, this local mental health center now offers a welcoming environment for kids and teens seeking services.

For its annual community art project, nonprofit therapy art space The Art Room brought about 120 community artists to beautify Denton County MHMR's Child & Adolescent Center.

"Every year, in combination with North Texas Giving Day, The Art Room tries to find a nonprofit that's in need of some artwork or beautification," said Jennifer Diaz, art director and educator at The Art Room.

Denton County MHMR — my health, my resources — provides services for individuals struggling with mental health, substance use and developmental disabilities.

The Child & Adolescent Center now features six murals — three in the hallways and three in different rooms.

Pam Gutierrez, executive director of Denton County MHMR Center, said that the art project would help make the center a more welcoming and calming place for the children who receive services there.

"It touches every single child that's going to come to our center that has mental health issues, which is so critically important," she said. "It's important for our future and for the future of our children."

There are also new interactive elements for children to engage with, like the sensory floor. This was 9-year-old Vivien Valenzuela's favorite part of the updated facility.

Rebecca Valenzuela, Vivien's mom, said she liked that the space was designed "with kids in mind."

"I think having this new space designed with art in mind is going to be so wonderful for the community," Rebecca said.

Rebecca said that she went to MHMR for services as a teenager and brought Vivien to the Child & Adolescent Center when she began showing signs of autism.

Vivien was diagnosed with ADHD and autism and continues receiving services from MHMR. Her parents both said they are grateful to have MHMR as a resource.

"I personally have ADHD and autism as well," said Xavier Valenzuela, Vivien's dad. "But I didn't have the support that she's got now, and I'm really happy that she has the kind of help she gets."

Along with the murals, there were even more artistic elements. Diaz said that The Art Room gave out various art kits to allow community participation, including kits for making origami butterflies and crocheting animals.

"[The community art project has] kind of grown over the last few years," Diaz said. "We've involved more and more of the community and had more opportunities to kind of differentiate along the types of art you might make. By having things like origami, crochet and painting, it just allows for more artists to come in and help."

This is not the first time The Art Room and Denton County MHMR have worked together. The Art Room co-founder and executive director Marlys Lamar said that MHMR case workers



Murry Chavez/DRC

Pam Gutierrez, executive director of Denton County MHMR Center, and Marlys Lamar, executive director of The Art Room, hug at a dedication event for The Art Room's community art project at MHMR's Child & Adolescent Center on Wednesday.

frequently refer clients to programs at The Art Room for support.

She said that The Art Room does not specifically provide art therapy or group therapy but instead provides a space for people to use creativity to support their mental health journeys.

"We are a nonprofit art studio for people with mental health issues," Lamar said. "We provide the space, art supplies and some support from volunteer artists and mental health volunteers to help people engage in the creative process."

In 2020, The Art Room handed out kits to community members where they were prompted to write prayers or messages of peace and healing on pieces of paper. Those papers were then folded into cranes and strung up as a chandelier. The project was called 1000 Cranes for

Peace.

"We witness it every day in our studio that art really calms people, connects people and improves people's mental health," Lamar said.

Both Lamar and Gutierrez were excited to work together on this project.

"This is such a true partnership and collaboration between two very unique agencies that really have the same mission," Gutierrez said.

She said that funding is an ongoing concern for both of their organizations, but that any support goes a long way.

"If the passion is there for mental health services, substance use services and individuals with developmental disabilities in the future, then people will really get the services they need to help them live and have very happy, productive lives," Gutierrez said.

SANGER

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BUSINESS



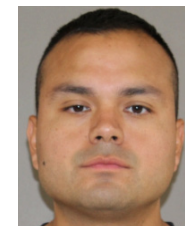
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