

breaking ground

Issue 100

2019/2020
ANNUAL
ARTS ISSUE



Council on
Developmental Disabilities



TENNESSEE
ARTS
COMMISSION
Cultivate. Create. Participate.



BORDERLESSARTS
TENNESSEE

breaking ground



On The Cover: *Dancers*, by Laura Hudson

Laura Hudson of Nashville uses vivid colors and markers and fills lush, natural settings with beautiful flowers, colorful birds, and a variety of large and small creatures. She said, "Art helps me calm down and have fun."

7



8

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Fine Art	4-6
Andrew Braach: Traditional Country Artist	7
Shining a Light on Hidden Talents	8
Poetry	9
Brent Edmond's Four-Wheel Art	10
Fine Art	11
Poetry	12-13
Telling Stories through Art	14
Fine Art	15
Disability Arts Access in Rural Tennessee	16
A Beautiful Legacy	18
Poetry	19

16



18



Learn more about the Tennessee Council on Developmental Disabilities.

615.532.6615 | www.tn.gov/cdd | www.facebook.com/TNCouncilonDD | Tnddc@tn.gov

Subscriptions to Breaking Ground are free and available through the Council website. Visit tn.gov/cdd to subscribe or contact us by phone or email with subscription updates or requests, and please include name and mailing or email address.





Welcome to the 2019-20 Arts Issue of *Breaking Ground* magazine!

Throughout history, art has offered a way for humans to tell our stories and express the deepest and truest things about ourselves in ways that rise above simple facts. Art can be an especially important outlet for those pushed to the edges of our society, whose experiences are least understood. Through art, we can connect with those whose voices we most need to hear.

This is our 100th issue of *Breaking Ground*. It is fitting that this milestone arrives with our annual arts issue. I look forward to this issue every year. In these pages, we celebrate the remarkable, beautiful, and sometimes heart-breaking self-expression of Tennesseans with disabilities.

I am personally moved to see artwork in this issue from someone dear to my heart. We grieved with Council member Karen West this past year, when she lost her daughter, Tabitha. Tabitha brought joy to so many during her short life. She did not communicate with speech, but her art gave us a window into her inner world. It's no surprise to anyone who knew her that those glimpses are stunningly beautiful. I hope you enjoy this 100th issue of *Breaking Ground* as much as we have enjoyed getting it ready for you.

Wanda Willis

Executive Director, Tennessee Council on Developmental Disabilities



TN Arts Commission

The Tennessee Arts Commission is once again honored to co-sponsor the Council's annual *Breaking Ground* Arts Issue. During this past year, we have brought arts programs to older adults, rural communities, people serving in the military, veterans and their families, and the homeless. Many people within these groups are living with disabilities.

To reach people who have limited access to the arts, the Tennessee Arts Commission, in partnership with the Tennessee Commission on Aging and Disability, received a \$1 million grant. The grant is through the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) and the Tennessee Health Department. The grant is to provide the Tennessee Person-Centered Music Program to more than 2,200 nursing home residents, including those living with dementia and Alzheimer's. The goal of the program is to use music to reduce medication use and negative behaviors while improving health and quality of life. Nursing homes throughout Tennessee can learn more about the program and how to participate by contacting the Project Director, Quiteka Moten, at Quiteka.Moten@tn.gov, 615-532-1834, or visiting tnpersoncenteredmusic.org.

The Tennessee Arts Commission is proud to work with partners like the Tennessee Council on Developmental Disabilities and Borderless Arts Tennessee to ensure that all people have the chance to engage in the arts. For more information about the Tennessee Arts Commission, visit our website at tnartscommission.org.

Kim Johnson

Director of Arts Access, Tennessee Arts Commission



Borderless Arts Tennessee

Borderless Arts Tennessee has been honored to partner with the Tennessee Council on Developmental Disabilities throughout the years to enhance inclusion for people with disabilities. We are proud of the progress that has been made by working together on projects like webinars, professional development certifications, and conversations on breaking down barriers. The *Breaking Ground* Arts Issue is just one more opportunity for exposure and awareness. Borderless Arts TN is proud to be a partner in such a worthy effort.

Lori Kissinger

Executive Director, Borderless Arts Tennessee



2 Nuzzling Horses in Iceland, by Houston Vandergriff

Photographer **Houston Vandergriff** has Down syndrome and lives in Powell, Tennessee, but is a globetrotter who has traveled to 47 states and 22 countries. He loves to share his unique way of seeing the world through his gift of photography.



Wild Blue Yonder, by Christy Earheart

Painter **Christy Earheart**, LMSW is a Quality Assurance Analyst with Greater Nashville Regional Council, a People to People Interviewer with The Arc Tennessee, and a Partners in Policymaking® graduate. She said, "Art is a means to re-energize after stress. This and growing plants are important hobbies I enjoy sharing with others."



Steven at St. George Island, by Jeff Harden

Jeff Harden lives in Cleveland, Tennessee, and is the father of an adult son with a disability. In Jeff's words, "I love to take photos of all the places we go, to have a picture to go along with the memory."



Watercolor Faces, by John L. Butts, Jr.

John L. Butts, Jr. lives in Clarksville and attends the Centerstone Peer Support Center. He said, "Making art relaxes me and I feel calm." John likes to draw faces of people of various cultures.



Life, by Erika Jensen

Erika Jensen is from Manchester and is a member of the Centerstone Peer Support Center in Tullahoma. Her picture, "Life," is an acrylic pour painting; each color was mixed with a small amount of glue and water, then several colors are poured without mixing into a cup. The cup is allowed to flow over the canvas, then left alone to dry.



Joyous Explosion, by Debbie Hanson

Debbie Hanson of Flintville enjoys trying new materials and techniques as she creates her artwork. Debbie helped set up an ongoing Healing Arts Project, Inc. art exhibit, which features art created by people in mental health and addiction recovery.



Untitled, by Joey McNinch

Photographer **Joey McNinch**, age 14, has had several photographs published in "Breaking Ground." Joey has autism and lives in Mount Juliet.



Winter Beets, by Nancy Olson

Nancy Olson lives in Murfreesboro and likes to paint watercolors with her art class at Our Place Peer Center. She said, "Creating art distracts my worries and I feel productive." She reflects the time of harvest in rural farms with her painting, *Winter Beets*.



What Tom Saw, Peeking, by Kathy Tupper

Multi-talented artist **Kathy Tupper** has more than 50 years' experience in graphic design, illustration, and writing. She is also a watercolor design and techniques instructor.

Andrew Braach *Traditional country singer*

by Ned Andrew Solomon, Director, Partners in Policymaking® Leadership Institute, Council on Developmental Disabilities

Listening to Andrew Braach sing live, or on his first CD, *Talkin' to Ghosts, Volume 1*, is like being transported back to another time. It's a time when seminal country artists like Hank Williams, Sr., Merle Haggard, and Johnny Cash – three of Andrew's all-time favorites – could slay you with just an acoustic guitar and some raw, poignant lyrics.

"I've been listening to older country music all my life," said Andrew. "When I was a baby, my dad played Hank Williams, Sr. music for me, then later on I started listening to Johnny Cash and Kenny Rogers, and then not too long ago, I started listening to Hank Williams, Sr. again. 'Folsom Prison Blues' was my first recital song. I don't know what it is about the older country music that I like so much, but I just like it."

Whatever it is that drew Braach to traditional country music, it's working for him. In a relatively short time, Andrew has been able to perform on numerous occasions, at various venues, sometimes even sharing the bill with more established artists. That takes a lot of self-confidence, which wasn't always there.

"The first time I ever performed, I couldn't even look at the audience," Andrew recalled. "I had to go somewhere they couldn't see me. I sang from a side room. Now it's fun to get on stage and sing. When I first get up there, I'm super nervous, but once I start performing, the nervousness falls away."

Andrew has overcome other personal obstacles, which might have kept another, less determined individual from pursuing a career in the limelight. "When I use music, I need it in large print so I can see, which is due to [my] ocular cutaneous albi-

nism," Andrew explained. "Also, when I perform outside, I need to be in the shade or [use] lots of sunscreen and a hat. Socializing with fans is hard, since I have autism. It's not that I don't want to talk to them, but I can't find the words to speak.



"I have a Golden Doodle who is being trained to be my service dog," continued Andrew. "He'll be trained to go with me to some of my venues when I sing. Maybe he will even howl along to the songs!"

In other ways, Andrew's disabilities have been a plus. "I'm very focused, which helps me practice until a song is performance-worthy," he said. "And when I'm writing a song, if I can't think of a lyric, I just keep thinking until I come up with something. My memory is really good, which helps me remember song lyrics. Since I overcame speech problems because I didn't talk for a

long time, it's made me feel like I can accomplish more."

Andrew is 17 now, and has been playing the guitar since he was 10. That's when he started taking lessons and got his first guitar. "I wanted one after my older brother started taking

guitar lessons and asked for one," said Andrew. "We bought it at Toys 'R' Us."

He's also been taking singing lessons from Vera Warrick for the last two years, because Andrew has big, professional aspirations. "One of my recent goals is to get on *The Voice*," he said. "I'd also love to play on The Grand Ole Opry. I also want to gain more experience playing in front of crowds. I'm hoping to make a living from doing it. One of my biggest goals is to help people realize what country music really is, like reviving the old country music. I've also written some

Continued on page 10

Shining a Light on Hidden Talents

by Debby Throckmorton

IndicatorArt is a not-for-profit agency that provides programs that teach creative skills and encourage self-expression. Matt Palmo started this organization in Buffalo, New York five years ago, and hired me to start the Nashville branch. I am an acting, songwriting, and singing performance coach from Nashville. Some of my students have worked on television shows such as *American Idol*, *CSI*, and *Hannah Montana*, and starred in films like Tim Burton's *Alice in Wonderland*.

How we treat vulnerable groups and individuals is an indicator of how advanced our society is. IndicatorArt's mission is to enhance the lives of those with significant challenges. Our programs help every participant explore creative expression in an inclusive, fun, and respectful environment. In the time we've been in Tennessee, we have helped more than 50 adults accomplish their dreams of having an artistic voice in the community. Most students had never been on stage nor had an audience to enjoy their artistic gifts. We want to shine a light on their talents.

We shine that light through several art mediums:

Film

Students learn every aspect of filming a movie, by helping write an original short screenplay and then fully producing it in the six-week



IndicatorArt students filming a *Scooby Doo* sketch

PHOTO BY DEBBY THROCKMORTON



Singing students with Kylie Frey

workshop. Students not only act but learn about all aspects of film production, from creating sets to operating cameras. At the end of the workshop, the film is premiered at a showcase event where the public is invited, and each student receives a DVD of their original work.

PHOTO BY DEBBY THROCKMORTON



Student singing.

Singing

Each student sings a song of his or her choice, and participates in a group singing performance. The students receive vocal training and learn about professional singing techniques. They visit an established recording studio to record the group song with a professional singer. At the end of the workshop, the singers

perform their songs for the public at a showcase event. Every student receives a CD of the group song.

Songwriting

Students learn how to write and perform an original song. In the workshop, they are taught the basics of songwriting while working on their original songs. Students also spend a class co-writing with one of country music's hit songwriters. At the end of the workshop, students perform their original songs for the public, and each one receives a demo of his or her song.

Sketch Comedy

Think "clean *Saturday Night Live*." Students learn acting, improvisation, teamwork, and comedic timing, as well as how to write and film an original comedic scene. At the end of the six weeks, the final scene will be shown to the public at a showcase event, and each participant receives an edited version of the show on DVD.

Starting this branch of IndicatorArt has changed my life! I am always so excited to see how my students grow from the first class to becoming stars on stage at the end performance. I have learned way

Continued on page 17

How Long Does it Take to Say Goodbye?

by April Meredith

*A tribute to Tabitha Paige West (2003-2019)
and her mother Karen.*

May we never say goodbye to Tabby's legacy.

How long does it take to say goodbye

When everyday her beauty
Is painted in the sky
When I feel her breath
Carried on the wings of butterflies
When I see her sweet face
As I close my eyes

When I stand lost
At her bedroom door
When I sense her presence now
As much as I did before
When I have waves of emotions
Like those on ocean shores

When I continue to hear
Her keyboard music sounds
Resonating in the hallway,
Echoing all around
When everywhere I go
Parts of her legacy can be found

When glimpses of her spirit
Are on happy children's faces
As they play with friends
In accessible places
When my heart aches
In its empty spaces

When I miss fixing
Her gorgeous curls
When her colorful art
Still decorates my world
When I yearn to hold
My precious girl

How long
Does
It take
To say...

Tennessee Partners in Policymaking® graduate **April Meredith** has had numerous poems and feature articles published in *Breaking Ground*. Besides being an avid writer and reader, April works at Empower Tennessee, where she teaches youth and adults about using their voices and developing their independent living skills.

A Beautiful, Anxious Mind

by April Meredith

Sometimes I feel like
I am barely clinging on
To a glimpse of hope
Like the last brown leaf
On a dying tree
In fall

Sometimes I feel like
Endless space
Speckled with starry spots
Of brilliance
But tortured with
Infinite choices

Sometimes I feel
Powerful and purposeful
As crucial as the air we breathe
But just the same
Taken for granted and unseen
As if not there at all

Sometimes I am
As motivated and determined
As the hungry lioness
Prowling for prey
While other times completely immobilized
By my internal voices

BRENT EDMOND'S *FOUR-WHEEL ART*

by Deborah McMillan, Director, Dept. of Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities Services, East TN Personal Care Service

Art comes in many shapes and forms. For Knoxville native Brent Redmond, it comes on four wheels.

There are no off-the-shelf model-car kits in Brent's workshop. His replicas are absolute works of art, complete with hand-sewn leather seats, "suicide" doors that open automatically, and functioning windows. Brent uses a huge range of skills to build his model cars, which are sometimes up to three feet in length.

The artist begins by developing the design for his vehicle using one of several methods: searching the internet for ideas, studying information from car dealerships, or, more frequently, using his imagination to create concept vehicles with futuristic features. His craft is so absorbing, Brent often spends several hours each day in his workshop. He devotes extra time to making sure the finish stands out, with vibrant colors like candy-apple red with flecks of gold. Pearlescent black



Brent's model police cruiser he designed and built

diamond and metallic silver are two of his favorites.

Brent enjoys the challenge of buying materials and beginning projects from scratch. He and his personal assistant, Kimberley Kerr, regularly visit local hardware stores and hobby shops, and Brent has built lasting relationships with employees at sev-

eral suppliers. Brent and Kim recently spent the day in Pigeon Forge for the annual Fall Rod Run, where Brent decided his next vehicle would be a street-rod replica.

This past March, a jury presented Brent one of four Silver Easel awards for outstanding creativity, expression, and design at the "From My Perspective: An Exhibition for All Artists" event hosted by Trousdale School in Cleveland, Tennessee.

Most recently, Brent won first prize as a TVA & I Fair exhibitor with his ultramodern version of a Knoxville Sheriff's Department cruiser, which featured a working red and blue light bar and front wench. In October, Brent was invited by Sheriff Tom Spangler to display his art at the Knox County Sheriff's Department.

Brent has no intention of putting the brakes on his craft, and plans to expand his designs and exhibiting. For Brent, his art is an avenue of expression, and a way to connect with car enthusiasts worldwide. ■

Andrew Braach... *Continued from page 7*

of my own songs and hope to write more in the near future."

Andrew benefits from family and friends who are 100 percent supportive of his dreams. His mother, Angela Braach (a graduate of the Council's Partners in Policymaking® Leadership Institute), and his dad, Chris Braach, keep Andrew's career news up-to-date through social media. His friend Dalton Barrett, a producer at WGNS Radio, helped Andrew make his CD. Another friend,

Amanda Johnson of Creative Photography, takes stunning pictures of Andrew for his CD covers and flyers. Country artists Brian Warren and Brenda Lynn Allen invited Andrew to sing with them at Duck River Country Store, and he's opened up for The Cooter River Band and Daniel Rothwell and the Overall Creek Band. "All of my family and friends that live in Montana have been supportive as well," said Andrew. "This past summer, they invited me to sing at

church, around campfires, and [for] my grandparents' anniversary and birthday party."

If you're interested in listening to Andrew's music, he's in the process of setting up a YouTube channel. Currently, Andrew has videos posted and CDs for purchase on his Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/andrewmarkbraach/>.

"I like that people are inspired by my music," said Andrew. "That's a good feeling." ■



Marshlands, by Barbara Shirley

Barbara Shirley of Madison incorporates a variety of mediums including ink, charcoal, acrylics, and oils, and is continually seeking new combinations of materials to create her art, which often expresses her love of nature.



Giraffes, by LeeAnn Wilson

Artist **Leann Wilson** lives in Clarksville. She said, "I love to paint. It brings me peace of mind."



Expression, by Augie Collier

Augie Collier has a gift for drawing out the personal strength of the subjects in his art. Augie works in various mediums, including acrylics, oils, charcoal, and oil pastel, and used oil pastels for *Expression*.



Dove of Peace, pottery by Louise McKown

Louise McKown is a potter who has a rare progressive neurological condition. She worked for 20 years at the East TN Technology Access Center, and is a Partners in Policymaking® graduate. She takes pottery classes at the Oak Ridge Art Center.

CONTENT WARNING: The following poem is an important reflection on the author's struggle with depression. It contains a description of suicide, and some readers may find the content disturbing.

Make Believe

by Timothy "Urban Thoughts" Moore

My favorite moments of childhood were playing
make believe.

Pretending to be Spiderman,
hanging off furniture that became sides of
skyscrapers.

My mother yelling,
"Boy, if you don't get yo butt off of my couch!"
Me - Jumping, landing and posing
"Yes - Ma'am."

Even had the full costume
with the nerf gun web shooters.
Depending on the storyline,
With the flick of a wrist,
my brothers became either:
bank robbers to punish
or citizens to save.

I became really good at playing make believe.
In fact, as an adult,
I still do.
When people ask: "How Are You Feeling?"

Most expect you to answer with "I'm okay,"
even if you aren't.
In the South, answering honestly
leads to awkward conversations
about praying the sadness away
like these knees and palms ain't got callouses
from pressing these frustrations
in between àse and amens.

I've taught myself to be quiet
rather than voice
that I am one of the 300 million diagnosed

with the mental illness disorder, DEPRESSION,
the number one leading cause of disability
worldwide.

And even still - it's difficult for me to give it name
or space
or to admit that sometimes these tears just come
like long lost friends that ain't good for nothing
but reminding you of the past fun
you used to have.

Or worse, moments that you don't even realize
that there are tears on your cheeks.
or sadness that has no origin.

It just is -
A black hole hovering over a black body
daring any and all not to come too close
less they be consumed.

In moments of depression,
I forget that I can breathe.
Suffocating seems so normal.
My lungs lose muscle memory
of how to inflate.

My chest feels like a casket
for my breath to bury itself in.
Saying "I'm awesome" is me -
pushing back the walls that are always closing in
even when I stand outside to count to ten.
"Alright", is easier than stomaching the statistics
that over 800,000 people struggle to be "Alright".
Nearly one person every forty seconds disappears
into total eclipse.
I embraced the moon's shadow once.
Slit my wrist 'til the blood painted a crescent on
my hand.

Timothy (Urban Thoughts) Moore is a nationally-recognized spoken word artist and award-winning educator based in Memphis. Timothy has been an outspoken voice regarding his own diagnosed depression. He uses hip-hop, poetry, and spoken word to educate youth and advocate for civil rights, mental health/disability awareness, and homelessness.

When it's crushing you to answer,
"Are you good?",
I empathize with Atlas.
I know how the weight of the world feels.

I want to explain on those days "good"
is just getting out of a bed that
seems to be more quicksand than comfort on
most mornings
that sometimes the only good
is the classroom that I teach in.
Good are the moments, I get to ask kids:
"How are you?"
Days that I get to paint a smile
that is often more times Joker to me.

On most days,
in these classrooms,
I get to silence my fears and become some-
one's hero.
I get to show them that no matter how bad it
hurts
that you can get up
one more time.
That the villains of my experiences won't force
me
to make believe
all the time.

One day I'll be able to stand in the moment,
shoulders back
and when they ask,
look them in their eyes
and say: "I'm doing just fine,"
and mean it.

Life on the Spectrum

by **Samantha C. Teasley**

Hold my hand, and here we go
In this big world, so much to know
Let's go at my speed
Let's stay at my pace
Here we go, Mama
I'll put on a brave face
Noises, colors, smells and lights
For them it's okay, for me it's a fight
What's coming next?
I need to know
I don't like it here
I have to go
This place is too much
And I need to leave
Take me home, Mama
I need to breathe
I've made it to my safety zone
It's quiet here, and it's my home
You hold me close and say my name
You know that my feelings are not just a game
You calm me down and make me smile
Mama, can we just stay here a while?
I'll try again some other day
We can do this, I'll be okay
This world is big, this I know
Just hold my hand and here we go

Samantha Teasley lives in Sumner County and has two children with autism. She wrote this poem to describe how everyday experiences may be difficult for those on the spectrum.

Telling Stories through Art

by Commissioner Brad Turner, Tennessee Department of Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities

“Art is not always about pretty things. It’s about who we are, what happened to us, and how our lives are affected.” – Elizabeth Brown

This quote is simple, yet very powerful when it relates to the arts in our community. Every single piece of art inside our hallways at the Tennessee Department of Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (DIDD) and our community tells a story about not only the artist themselves, but the world they live in. It allows us to expand outside verbal communication, and better understand the artist’s spirit and soul through picture.

As many of you are aware, my daughter, Kinsley, is nonverbal. One of her favorite things to do is communicate through photographs. She will pull me down next to her and want to snap a picture with me on her iPad. She’ll also scroll through the pictures and find her friends, favorite teachers, and other people or images that have meaning in her life, and then hold the iPad up so I can see the picture. She’s telling me her story through the art and images that she helped to create.

Our challenge is preparing ourselves to listen to an artist so we don’t just *hear* persons with disabilities, but we work to *understand!* Art is compelling on its own account, but when used to relay stories, experiences, realities, fears, and futures, it demands an audience that seeks to better understand. Throughout history, art has been used to inspire change and unite societies. In our own recent history, photographs and images from Vietnam showed the harsh reality of a world halfway around the globe, and it began to turn public opinion on the conflict. Videos and photographs from the civil rights struggle in the 1960s moved the needle in public perception, after many American homes saw the injustices towards African-Americans for the first time.

I want to share a few pictures from my friends Derrick, Austin, Morgan, and my daughter Kinsley. These pictures and crafts give us a glimpse into their souls as people. It reminds us that everyone not only has something to say,



Purple Nexus, Austin King



Untitled Abstract, Derrick Freeman

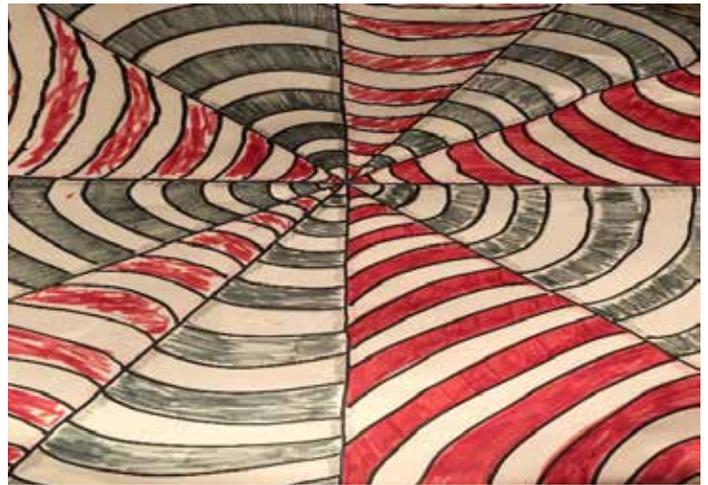


Messy Flag, Morgan Vice

but a specific message and meaning behind it. Are we seeking to listen, as opposed to seeking to respond? Are we working towards providing ways for their voices to reach more people? These are just some of the questions we ask ourselves inside the Department of Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities every day.

I'm proud of our partnership with the Tennessee Council on Developmental Disabilities and the privilege we have to work side-by-side. Previous DIDD leaders Jim Henry and Debbie Payne provided the foundation for change and empowerment through their belief in our community and the individuals we support every day.

I want to encourage all of us to find ways to see a picture, sculpture, painting, or any other form of art in a deeper light. Let's work to better understand not only the artist but what they want us to see through their creation. Understanding others is something the world needs more of. Art can bridge cultural, language, socio-economic, and other barriers. Let's challenge ourselves to see every indi-



Kinsley's Web, by Kinsley Turner

vidual for who they are and what they're saying through the reality they create in their art.

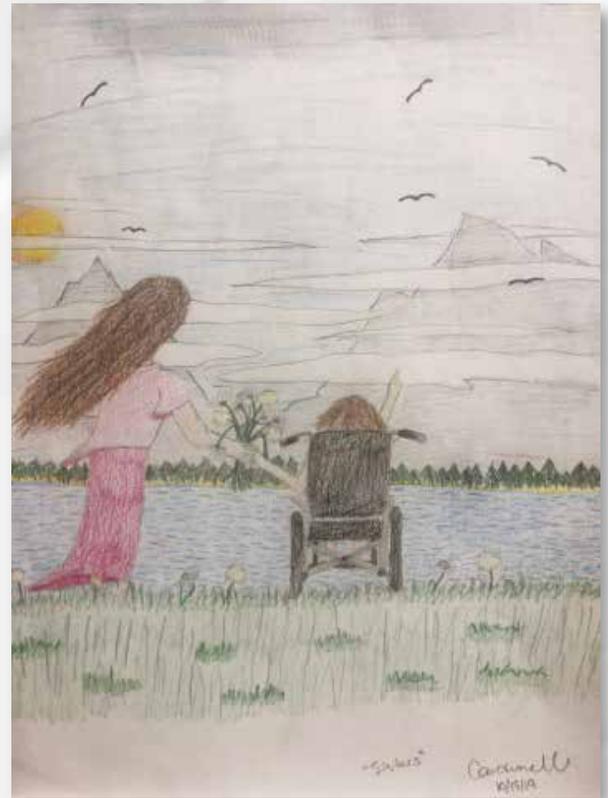
Let the kind of change that can be generated from art start with me! ■



Golden Garden, by Derrick Freeman

Derrick Freeman is a self-taught artist with autism. He has exhibited his artwork throughout Tennessee, including the Tennessee Governor's Mansion, Vanderbilt University, Lipscomb University, Tennessee Disability MegaConference, and the Knoxville Museum of Art. Derrick has been the recipient of several awards for his community advocacy work, including The Arc Mid-South's Outstanding Artist and Performer Award and the Future Horizons Inc.'s Dr. Temple Grandin Award for Outstanding Success.

Fine Art



Sisters drawing, by Caroline Mattheis

Caroline Mattheis is an 8th grader in Chattanooga. This is Caroline's picture of herself and her older sister, Emily, who love to spend time outdoors together.

Disability Arts Access in Rural Tennessee

A program of Friends Life Community

by Waverly Ann Harris, Executive Director, Friends Life Community

Walking in for the first time must have been scary. As a 26-year-old with autism, it was not facing the unknown that took courage. It was facing the expected rejection that often happens in new places with new people. Similar experiences had often led to bullying, being asked to leave, and embarrassment. However, there are limited opportunities in rural Tennessee for individuals with intellectual disabilities to find community and belonging outside the school system. When John's family learned about a new program for young adults with disabilities to access arts in Carroll County, they decided it was worth the risks.

Within minutes of arriving, John's shoulders began to relax and his eyes got brighter. A smile spread across his face. This was his first time participating in a performing arts class, yet he seemed to come alive. He spoke up clearly and was able to express himself to others. He experienced belonging through acceptance and connection with peers.

John was one of 12 participants in Disability Arts Access in Rural

Tennessee (DAART), a program where people with intellectual or developmental disabilities (I/DD) meet every month and learn to express and advocate for themselves. Through different arts activities, they connect with themselves, their peers, and the larger community through the common language of art.

DAART is a program of Friends Life Community, a day program that empowers each participant to live as independently as possible. Friends Life partnered with the Dixie Performing Arts Center in Huntingdon, Tennessee to offer DAART. It brings unique opportunities to adults with disabilities and helps them grow through the arts. Huntingdon is in rural Carroll County where, like many rural counties, there are few services after high school.

This effort began in 2018, led by Carroll County native Sarah Edwards, now performing arts specialist at Friends Life Community. It features partnerships with 10 local teaching artists, and has trained more than 50 volunteers from Bethel College. The volunteers ensure that more people



Teaching Artist Candace Gooch coaches participants of DAART in self-expression through pottery. Class sponsored by Lilo+Company.

in Carroll County are able to include individuals with disabilities into current and future arts programs.

"DAART has been the most important and impactful thing I have done in my professional career," said Sarah Edwards. "The Dixie Performing Arts Center changed my life when I was growing up in Carroll County. It gave me a voice and a place to belong. Now, to have the opportunity to facilitate the creative process with individuals who have never participated in arts classes before is a true honor. To see their own excitement when they feel heard and seen, sometimes for the first time, continues to inspire me in this field that I love and believe in."

Developing art skills is not often on the list of priorities for young adults with disabilities. Of the 12 participants in DAART, only two had been in an art class before. Most young adults complete high school



Group photo of seven DAART participants from Carroll County, two Teaching Artists, Sarah Edwards and Candace Gooch, and two volunteers, Arianna Whaley and Sel Montgomery.



Teaching Artist Pat Forgy leads participants of DAART in self-advocacy through musical expression. Class sponsored by West Tennessee Public Utility District.

and transition programs with a focus on employment in the community. Yet many adults with disabilities age out of the school system lacking the basic skills required for inclusive employment, like confidence, self-expression, and self-advocacy.

For individuals with disabilities to participate in community-based activities and employment, leaders in the community must create opportunities for people with I/DD to flourish. Participation in the arts is a powerful way to break through barriers and create connections between people

that go deeper than verbal communication and surface understanding.

Through DAART, participants learned 10 different types of art, including poetry, dance, songwriting, design, and pottery, all led by local teaching artists. Classes met once a month, working toward a community showcase in May. Each teaching artist was trained by Friends Life Community to help the participants experience the art form being presented, and to develop skills that will lead to greater self-advocacy. Through this experience, the teaching artists

This program is expanding!

The Council began an Advocacy Through the Arts grant with Friends Life Community in November. The grant provides funds to offer art classes for Tennesseans with I/DD – including continuing DAART in Carroll County – and then share the art on a statewide self-advocacy tour. Be on the lookout for more information in the coming year about an event near you!

For more information about Friends Life Community's programming, DAART/Advocacy Through the Arts, or how to increase advocacy through the arts in your own community, please reach out to us at admin@friendslife.org or call 615-730-9370.

and the participants gained a better understanding of each other, resulting, we hope, in opportunities that are more inclusive in the future. ■

Shining a Light... *Continued from page 8*

more than I have taught over this last year. The most important thing that I have learned is that there are no limits. I plan to keep expanding on what we can do, and eventually want to make a feature-length film.

Our first album comes out this year, and it's full of songs that the songwriters wrote and the singing students perform. We plan to have videos to accompany every song.

Staff, family, and friends shared that IndicatorArt has changed other lives, too. Our students are more confident in everything they do. They are developing friendships and learning to work together as a team, because they all have to work together to make a great show at the

end of each six-week workshop. Students are learning to use their voices through acting in the sketch comedies and singing workshops. The songwriters are learning that their thoughts matter and can become beautiful compositions. There's so much excitement in every show, and that translates to the audience.



Bruce Channel "Hey Baby" with singing group.

"Once you get on stage for the first time, you have all these people looking at you, and you start to get stage fright," said Matt Branch, one of the IndicatorArt students. "But once you overcome your fear, that's when you start to realize you're actually showing them what you learned through rehearsal. You understand that even celebrities [have] felt stage fright, but you can't back down, because you have to show them the gift that you have. You think, 'Yeah, I can do this.'" ■

IndicatorArt Tennessee programs are offered at two locations, in Nashville and White Bluff. For more information, visit www.indicatorart.com or the agency's IndicatorArt Nashville Facebook page.

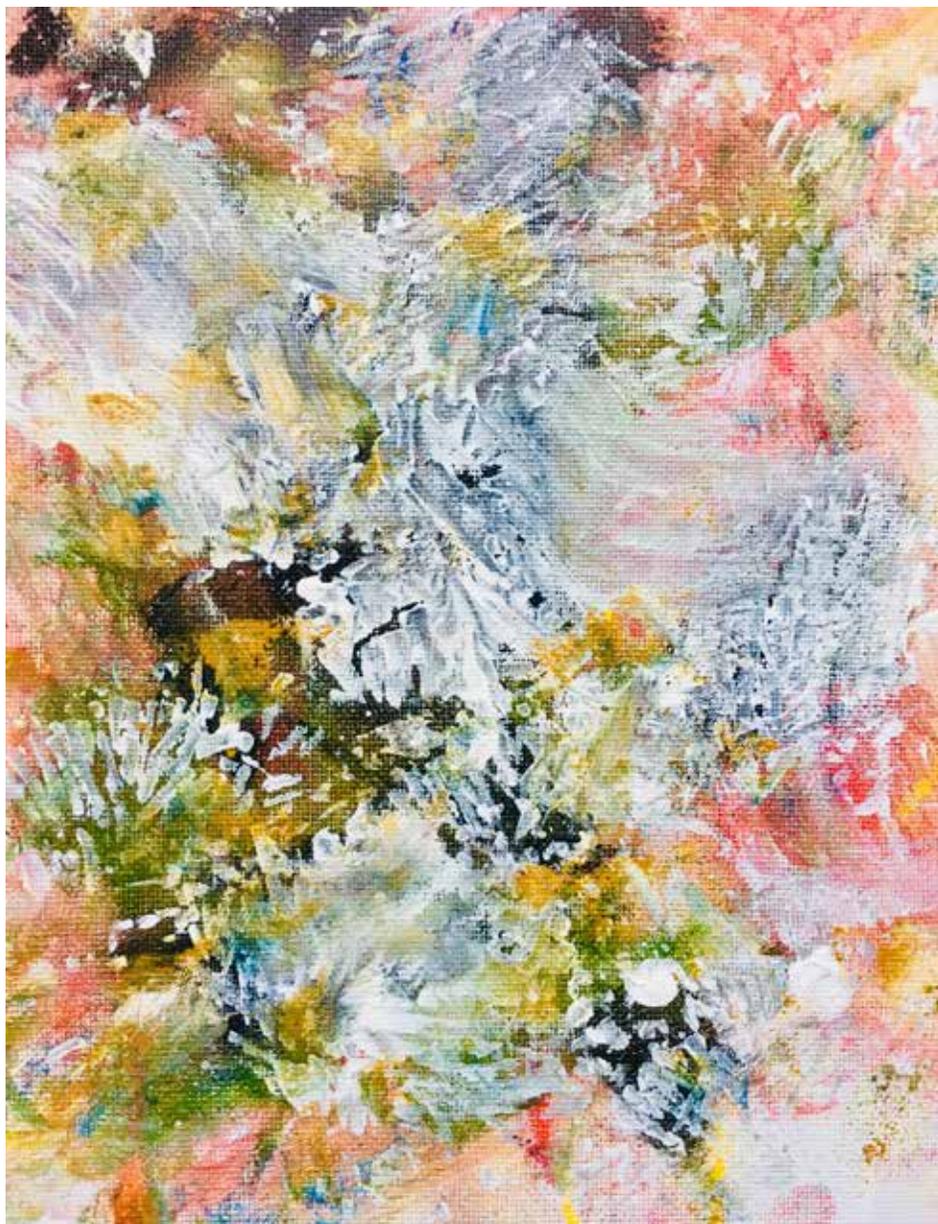
A Beautiful Legacy

by Karen West

Tabitha Paige West was born on December 26, 2003. At the age of one-and-a-half, she was diagnosed with the genetic syndrome 1p36 Deletion Syndrome, which caused her to have intellectual and developmental disabilities. However, Tabitha never let her limitations stop her from expressing herself artistically on paper or canvas.

At the age of four, she entered her first art contest (The Creative Expressions Art Contest for People with Epilepsy), and ended up as a national finalist. Her artwork was subsequently published in art books, calendars, and exhibited around the country in children's hospitals and art museums!

It was then that I realized what a



untitled by Tabitha West

beautiful gift Tabitha had been given. She went on to receive many more recognitions for her talent, including awards from the Vanderbilt Kennedy Center Creative Expressions art exhibit, and the Nashville Mayor's Advisory Committee for people with disabilities.

Around the age of 12, Tabitha began selling her original artwork, prints, and stationery featuring her work. All of her earnings went towards the costs of her own medical care. At the age of 15, Tabitha left her earthly body to go on to painting masterpieces in the sky. Her artwork remains to be a beautiful legacy for all to enjoy. ■

Karen West, Tabitha's mom, is a 2014-15 Graduate of the Partners in Policymaking® Institute and a Governor-appointed member of the Council on Developmental Disabilities. Tabitha's artwork and stationery is still available for purchase through her social media page at <https://www.facebook.com/TabithaWestArtist/>.

Ryan

by David S. Pointer

They called Ryan fast.
 They called Ryan to float through safety
 first minefields.
 They called Ryan their "Handicapable
 Hard Charger."
 They called Ryan their "Special Needs Knight."
 They called Ryan their "Differently-abled Amigo."
 They called Ryan their "Challenged Champion."
 Ryan called them back even when the language
 wasn't quite right, and wrenched things up right.

David S. Pointer lives in Murfreesboro with his daughters and kitty cats. David has recently published work in *Spitball* magazine, and "The 5-2: Poems on Crime," and has been a regular contributor to *Breaking Ground Arts* issues.

Brian C. McHan has been a faithful contributor to "Breaking Ground" Arts issues ever since he graduated from the Tennessee Partners in Policymaking® program in 2002. According to Brian, "This one is about my counselor who has to listen to the things I complain about with my schizophrenia."

The Counselor On Vacation

by Brian C. McHan

He talked to clients all day
 Listening to their problems
 He dealt with management
 He dealt with staff
 He went home and
 He dealt with his family
 But the next day was vacation day
 He went into the woods
 And listened to the birds
 And the wind
 And when night fell
 He took pictures of the lightning
 When the storm came
 And listened to the thunder
 He spent a day
 No longer listening to men
 And listened to God for a while
 Whom he will meet
 When his time with men is done

Stir the coals for me

by Jese Hill

Let's awaken what once was fragrant
 The beauties, the things that made us laugh,
 the things that made us sing and dance
 Let's awaken the songs which God shuttled through our souls,
 the fibers--in all of their hues--
 creating beautiful, unfinished tapestries
 Stir the coals for me
 When life's Novembers hinder the springs,
 Deferring hopes, expiring dreams--
 When I am cold, a barren tree,
 Stir the coals for me
 When no beauties I can see,
 it is your love, the remedy.
 My love will warm you in the spring
 Please, stir the coals for me

Jese Hill has cerebral palsy and is a graduate of the Tennessee Partners in Policymaking® 2015-2016 Class. He lives in Watertown.

Tennessee Council on Developmental Disabilities

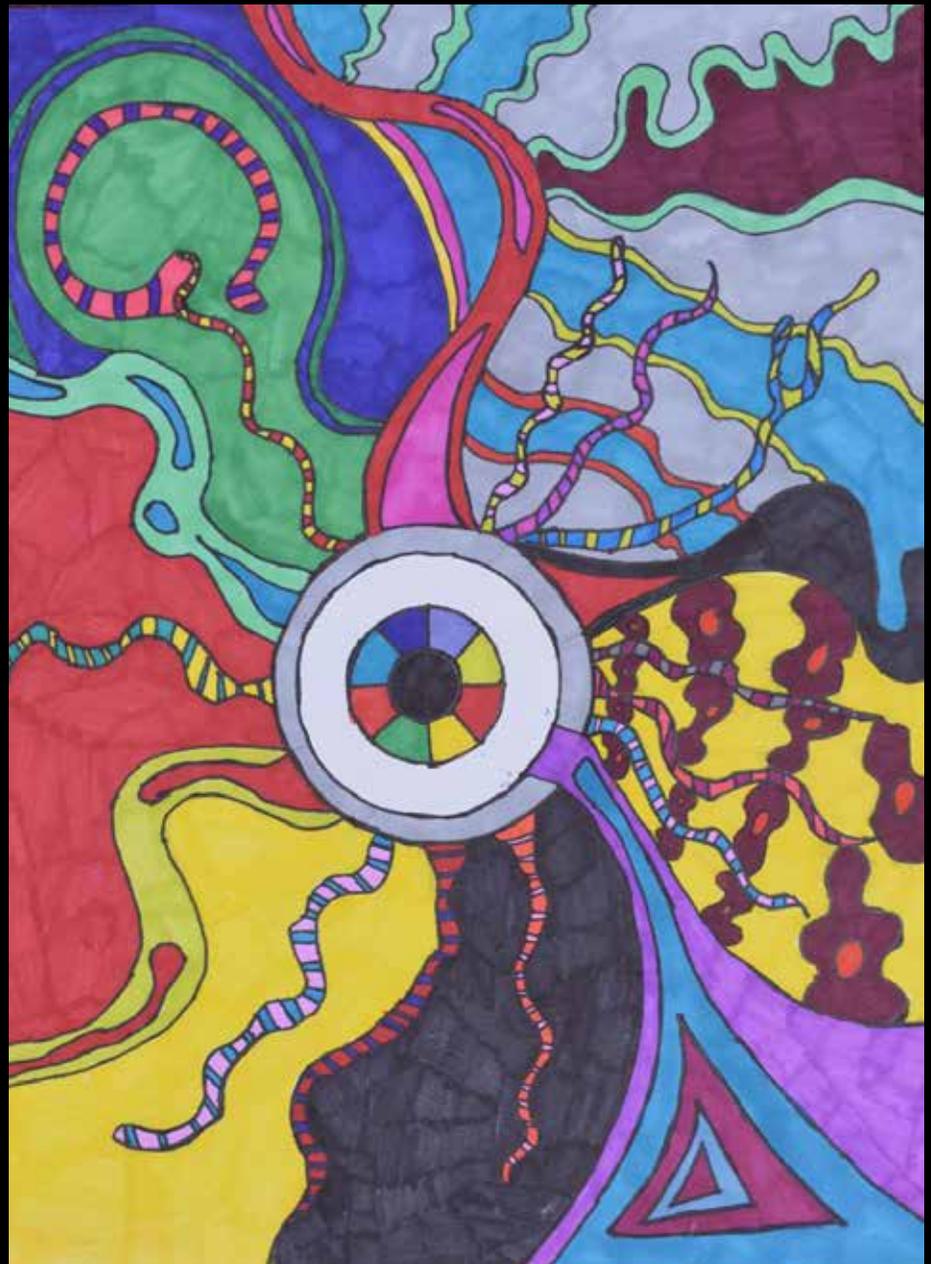
Davy Crockett Tower, 1st Floor
500 James Robertson Parkway
Nashville, TN 37243

Return service requested

PRESORTED
FIRST-CLASS MAIL
U.S. POSTAGE PAID
NASHVILLE, TN
PERMIT NO. 963

Trippy-Hippy, by Mitchell Wiseman

Mitchell Wiseman lives in Shelbyville, where he attends the Centerstone Peer Support Center. Mitchell expresses himself with his personal and unique abstracts. He said having others appreciate his work means the world to him.



A PUBLICATION OF THE TENNESSEE
COUNCIL ON DEVELOPMENTAL
DISABILITIES IN PARTNERSHIP WITH
THE TENNESSEE ARTS COMMISSION
AND BORDERLESS ARTS TENNESSEE