

School uses art to engage struggling students

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For Linda Cunningham, obtaining the funds to help academically struggling students was the easy part.

What wasn't as easy was finding a way to get those students excited about learning.

But the Immaculata High School engagement coach found inspiration in the form of visiting art instructor Jelena Mitric, who is using a mosaic artwork

project to help the students with their concentration skills.

"It was shocking," said Cunningham as she described the effectiveness of the project. "It's been really positive ... the students feel connected to something and they get to be themselves."

The finished work of art created by Grade 7 and 8 students at Immaculata was put on display in the front lobby of the Elgin Street Ottawa Police station on May 12, where it will remain until May 24.

With the environment as their main theme and using objects like clay, tiles and glass as their medium, the students created a mosaic depicting images of animals, trees, and insects.

Cunningham said the students who were selected to take part in the mosaic workshops are those who were struggling with their schoolwork or were dealing with mental health issues like depression.

She said the project helped encourage them to engage with their schoolwork, co-operate with other students and teachers and make a contribution to their community. Since 2008, the Ontario government has been supporting student engagement projects in publicly funded schools across the province.

For Mitric, the time spent on the art project was essential for stimulating inspiration and a sense of self worth among the participating students at Immaculata, a feeling that helped them to stay both creative and excited about school.

"They don't think about other things or sit around bored," the instructor said.

About 30 students at Immaculata participated in the workshops this year and last, Mitric said.

It is not yet clear what the school will do with the artwork created by the students, but Cunningham said most students would like to donate their work to different people as a contribution to their communities.

Their artwork has already attracted interest from the first travelling Children's

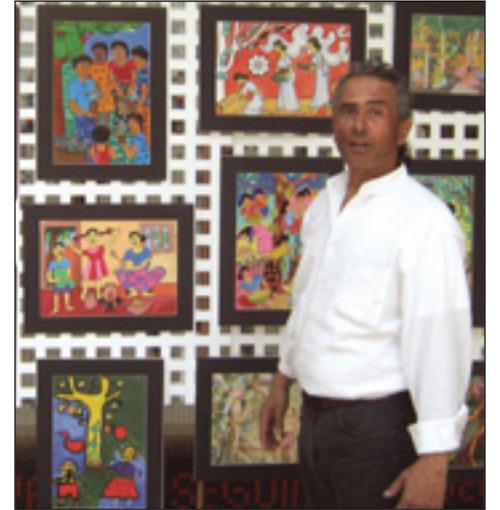


Photo by Eugene Kwibuka

Graham Smith displays artwork created by children in Sri Lanka at Ottawa police station

Enviro-Art Show put on by the Church of St. John the Evangelist.

The church's artist in residence, Graham Smith, was at the unveiling of the mosaic at the police station to promote the students' work, especially their thoughts about the environment.

Smith made a suggestion to Mitric about using the environmental theme to engage the students after seeing artwork created by children in Sri Lanka.

He said he would like to create a collection of students' artwork that would travel around Canada to help raise environmental awareness among youth.

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'Recovering Love' makes its Ottawa debut at MayFair

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Recovering Love, a documentary directed by Laura Sky, makes its Ottawa premiere at MayFair Theatre in the Glebe today.

Based on a true story, the film highlights women and addictions, challenges these women face, their courage and the factors underlying their addictions.

"It is a story of a journey of mothers who have been struggling with addictions but still committed to their relationship with their children," said Sky.

According to Sky, her film counters the stereotypical view that addicted women abandon or damage their children.

"It looks at ways we can support children and their mothers to stay together rather than having the kids apprehended," she said.

Executive director Diane Massicotte, who recently settled in Greely in Ottawa South, came up with the idea while volunteering at the Iris Addiction Recovery Centre in Sudbury, where she saw the need for an educational tool to help children speak out about their experiences.

"Children affected by alcohol or addiction, they never talk about it. It's a shame-based secret, and it's in the family

as a secret," said Massicotte, who grew up with an alcoholic father and can relate to today's children. "I want to show it to children and perhaps they can open up, because there is a stigma."

Massicotte explained that the film is meant to be an educational tool for shelters, agencies, schools, unions and other workplaces either to train employees on how to deal with the issue, or to reach out to people struggling with it themselves. She said most of the funding for the film, which took five years and about \$270,000 to make, came from unions who want to use the film in their employee assistance programs.

Sky indicated she thinks addiction is an ever-growing problem that requires everyone's attention.

Recovering Love peels away the layers of prejudice and punishment that confront women.

The 72-minute documentary shows the impact of that condemnation, and also looks deeper into the systemic issues that lead to addiction in the first place.

The film also includes the wise voices of the kids who have experienced their mothers' substance abuse and are a part of reclaiming hope.

Admission is free, but donations will be accepted at the door.