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Creating Community and Well-being Through Art

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EVENTS / SEP 11, 2018 / TINA DEALWIS

Creating Community and Well-being Through Art



How can you harness the power of art to bring the Sheridan community together and foster well-being? When Art Fundamentals Professor and certified Art Therapist Susan Beniston discovered the Art Hive model, she knew she had found the answer.

"I thought it was a natural fit for Sheridan," Beniston says. "It's an empowerment model, it's about public art and creativity, and it's about creating sustainable and safe places for

people to come together and build community.” She planned and organized three pop-up Art Hives, which took place in February, March and April of this year at the Trafalgar Library.

An Art Hive can be defined as “a community art studio that creates opportunities for art making, dialogue and skill sharing between people of different backgrounds, ages, cultures and abilities.” At the Sheridan Art Hives, students, faculty and staff dropped in and connected while making art in a fun and informal environment. Attendees could stay as long as they wished, whether for a few minutes or hours.

“I thought it was a natural fit for Sheridan. It’s an empowerment model, it’s about public art and creativity, and it’s about creating sustainable and safe places for people to come together and build community.” – Susan Beniston

Button-making and brooch-making stations greeted people as they arrived, and helped ease attendees into the Art Hive experience. “The entranceway activities were a great ice-breaker,” says Patricia Buckley, Digital Curator and Special Collections Librarian. “They made people feel comfortable before they moved on to the other activities.”

These included a table from the Library that featured material samples from the Material ConneXion Trafalgar collection. Many of these innovative materials are made from sustainable matter such as textile dyes made from seaweed, or tiles made from snail secretions. “This collection is really tactile – you can plunge your hands into the boxes we keep it in and feel the materials,” says Buckley. “It was a lot of fun for people at the Art Hive to handle these materials and then to discover what each material is actually made



BUTTON MAKING AT SHERIDAN'S ART HIVE. PHOTO BY JULIE PASILA

from.”

The Art Hives received positive feedback from all who attended. “The Art Hives pulled you in in a way that really intrigued me,” says Buckley. “They really caught on. Some of the students stayed for two or three hours making things, and talking with people, it was a wonderful experience to watch.”



STUDENTS EXPLORING THEIR CREATIVITY AT THE ART HIVE. PHOTO BY OWEN COLBORNE.

is meant to diminish people’s level of anxiety, not increase it.”

The Art Hives saw students, faculty and staff from different areas of the college converge. “The idea of the Art Hive is that you don’t have to be in the arts to come. If you’re interested in wanting to try something out, and being curious enough to come, and allow yourself the opportunity to play or be creative, it will happen! So it’s about giving permission to yourself to allow that exploration to take place,” says Beniston.

She says she hopes to have more Art Hives at Sheridan in the future. “I believe the power of Sheridan is its people, and that we need more opportunities to share those riches together.”

They were also successful in delivering stress relief. While staff and faculty could take a break from a busy day to have fun and create, students could relax and make art without the pressure of having to perform for school projects. “For people to come together and make something because they want to is different than making for projects,” Beniston explains. “Students often have high anxiety about the quality of their work, whether it’s as good as it’s supposed to be for evaluation, so this is a way of coming together that

Pictured at top of page (left to right): Sheridan students Sara Boudreau, Caitlyn Kelleher and Syndi Weatherson, and Sheridan professor and Art Hive facilitator, Susan Beniston.

Written by: Tina Dealwis, Digital Communications Officer at Sheridan.

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