



An arts program
for homeless children

"I am continually inspired by the children that I am privileged to work with at DrawBridge." – Sarah, DrawBridge Volunteer

History and Philosophy of Drawbridge

What We Do:

DrawBridge officially began in 1989, when its founder, Gloria Simoneaux, developed a highly effective method of using the expressive arts to help children and youth work through the complex emotions associated with homelessness and family challenges. This method has its roots in the founder's earlier experiences of working with terminally ill children. She often noticed that the nurses and doctors at the facility treated the children's symptoms while avoiding the difficult reality of their illness. They were not available to listen to or help the children cope with to what they might be experiencing during their final days. Gloria saw that creating art with the children allowed them to really be heard and have a space where their situations could be deeply acknowledged. This expressive way of working with children in the hospital was brought to the Hamilton Family Shelter in San Francisco, and eventually the program evolved into the method DrawBridge uses today.

After her work in the hospital, Gloria began offering art groups using this method at two emergency shelters; the [Hamilton Family Center](#), in San Francisco, and at the [Marin Housing Center](#). Social workers, community leaders, and formerly homeless parents had an opportunity to observe the transformative effect of this process on the lives of homeless children during the three years in which this program was developed.

In late 1991, these individuals joined together to create DrawBridge as a vehicle to expand this work. Today, DrawBridge has dedicated itself to mitigating the appalling effects of homelessness on children who are now residing, often for months at a time, in the Bay Area's emergency facilities.

A DrawBridge Introduction (video):

Please watch a [3 min video about our program](#)

Where We Work:

DrawBridge works with children at more than 20 different sites in various Bay Area counties. These sites include emergency shelters, homeless shelters and safe houses, as well as transitional and low-income housing sites.

Emergency Shelters:

Families live at emergency shelters ranging from 1 night to 2 months, receiving the basic services that help them through emergency situations. The art groups at these sites are often large, a lot of fun, and fairly chaotic, most likely mirroring what the children are experiencing. It can be difficult to develop a long-term relationship with children in these groups, since they may only attend the group once or twice before moving. Having volunteer support in these art groups is essential for providing both the one-on-one time children crave and the extra support children need when dealing with a traumatic situation.

Domestic Violence Shelters/Safe Houses:

These sites usually house mothers and their children and are kept completely confidential due to the nature of the services they provide. These sites often offer housing for 1-6 months. The art groups generally range in size from 2-10 children, and vary from calm to very busy, depending on what the children are coping with in their lives.

Transitional Housing:

These sites offer shelter and other services to families ranging from 1 month to 2 years. They focus on helping families get on their feet and into permanent housing. Since the children are in a more stable living environment, the art groups at these sites are often more relaxed and less chaotic.

Low-Income Housing:

These sites offer long-term housing in all of the cities that DrawBridge serves. Since the children live at these sites for years, attendance in the art group often remain the same. This enables the DrawBridge volunteers to develop a lasting relationship with them. The stability of working with many of the same children each week makes it easier to establish a consistent way of operating and communicating.

Community Centers:

DrawBridge offers one art group at a Community Center in the Canal neighborhood of San Rafael. The group is primarily composed of first generation immigrant children who may need additional support around enrichment activities and the English language. Since the children often live in the neighborhood for most of their lives, volunteers have the opportunity to develop long-term relationships with them. This art group is very organized and generally runs smoothly.