

“Art is important for self-development and self-empowerment for children. Art is a tool for survival.” - Salifu M., former DrawBridge Artist in Residence

Welcome to the DrawBridge Online Volunteer Training!

Volunteering for DrawBridge is a special experience that is both rewarding and challenging. In order to prepare you, we have created an online training that will help you to understand the DrawBridge philosophy, how we conduct our art groups, and how to work with children experiencing homelessness. The children we serve often take on adult concerns, and as a result, they may feel stressed and out of control, as their basic needs are not being met. DrawBridge provides these children with a consistent and loving space where they feel safe and can relax, have fun, and express themselves freely.

The key points we hope you will take with you from this training:

1. **Let Kids Be Kids:** The environment we provide is aimed at giving back to children a piece of their childhood that may have been lost. The art group should be both safe and carefree.
2. **Listen:** You don't have to be a great artist! It's your attention and your ability to listen that children appreciate. Art is used as a vehicle for creating healthy relationships. Listening and allowing children to freely express themselves helps them to trust, open up and experiment with relating to mentoring adults.
3. **Be Non-judgmental:** It's important not to have expectations of the children or their artwork. Remain open and realize that what they make is not about you or how you think it should look, but about the child's need for expression. You are a safe and caring witness.
4. **Provide a Safe Container:** Structure and discipline are needed to provide safety for children, but structure at a DrawBridge art group may look very different from a classroom or more controlled setting. We do our best to allow free exploration of art materials, and that can sometimes be messy.
5. **Model Healthy Boundaries:** Having healthy boundaries with children can sometimes be difficult, but is so helpful in teaching them appropriate ways of relating to others. When working with children in homeless shelters, there can be a desire to grant their every wish. Establishing clear boundaries can be a very important gift for children, one they can repeat with others in their lives.

As a volunteer, the quality of your presence and attention, as well as the behavior you model during the art group, can have a profound effect. The poem, “Children Learn What They Live” [next] illustrates this concept beautifully.

Children Learn What They Live

If children live with criticism,
They learn to condemn.

If children live with hostility,
They learn to fight.

If children live with ridicule,
They learn to be shy.

If children live with shame,
They learn to feel guilty.

If children live with tolerance,
They learn to be patient.

If children live with encouragement,
They learn confidence.

If children live with praise,
They learn to appreciate.

If children live with fairness,
They learn justice.

If children live with security,
They learn to have faith.

If children live with approval,
They learn to like themselves.

If children live with acceptance and friendship,
They learn to find love in the world.