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Students partner with THRIVE for mental health art exhibit



The effort was a partnership between KMA and THRIVE Bedford | Lewisboro | Pound Ridge.

PHOTOS: DONNA CHRISTOPHER





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By Donna Christopher

KATONAH, N.Y. - Students working with THRIVE Bedford | Lewisboro | Pound Ridge, a community organization addressing substance abuse and mental health through education, resources, and prevention strategies, were recognized April 17 at the Katonah Museum of Art alongside New York-based artist Allison Montana. Their installation was on display during a celebration highlighting youth perspectives on mental health and substance use.

The reception drew about two dozen teenagers who participated in the project, along with their families, THRIVE board members, elected officials, and residents from the three communities the organization serves. The crowd filled the gallery and spilled into the museum's garden on a warm spring evening.

Working with Montana, students created a series of small canvases as part of a teen prevention program that used art to explore issues related to mental health and substance use. The centerpiece of the evening was a large-scale installation composed of approximately two eight-inch paintings per student.

The effort is a partnership between the museum and THRIVE Bedford | Lewisboro | Pound Ridge, formerly the Drug Abuse Prevention Council, which promotes healthy lifestyles through education, outreach, and community resources across the three towns.

The project brought together students, teaching artists, and museum educators, and centered on abstract painting as a way to explore themes of mental health and substance use.

Montana, an artist and educator, led the workshops, guiding participants through both the creative process and the development of the final installation. She said the goal was to encourage personal expression while building a collaborative work of art.

“The goal was to embrace abstraction and integrate their ideas about mental health and substance abuse,” Montana said. “The students spent a long time deciding how the different tiles would be placed, and I encouraged them to work together to determine how they wanted the final piece to look.”

Organizers said the project unfolded over two sessions, beginning with hands-on creation and culminating in a public presentation of the completed work. Montana is a mixed-media artist, art educator, and doctoral fellow at Teachers College, Columbia University.

Sharon Kennedy-Knoll, a poet and chair of youth programming and outreach for THRIVE, praised the organization’s youth ambassadors and the artwork unveiling, emphasizing the importance of community participation and volunteer support. She noted that THRIVE is actively seeking additional volunteers as it continues its work in Lewisboro and Cross River.

She said the THRIVE initiative focuses on youth prevention and on creating safe, creative spaces for learning, social connection, and community engagement through arts-based programming and outreach. Kennedy-Knoll, an educator and poet laureate, previously received an Academy of American Poets grant for work addressing opioid use in Sullivan County.

“My core vision was to bring kids together and give them an alternative space for learning, immersive experiences, and social connection,” she said.

Kennedy-Knoll noted that art therapy and art for art’s sake exist on a continuum that has long been recognized. In this program, she said, students have the opportunity to connect, explore shared themes, and learn from one another.

While the artwork itself was created during a three-hour session the previous week, she said the project took months of planning and preparation. Not all participants are practicing artists; some are youth ambassadors or volunteers. The opportunity is open to students from both public and private schools.

Students were recruited in various ways—some drawn by an interest in art and the chance to work in a museum setting, others motivated by a desire to support THRIVE’s mission.

THRIVE is funded in part by a federal Drug-Free Communities grant, which is renewed every five years and focuses on substance use prevention. In October 2024, the coalition was awarded up to $625,000 to support its work over the next five years.

At the end of that term, the organization will be eligible to reapply for continued funding. Bedford, Lewisboro, and Pound Ridge have also been consistent supporters of local substance abuse prevention efforts, Corbett-Turco said.

The grant allows THRIVE to expand its programming and build long-term capacity.

“Ultimately, the goal by the end of the five-year term is to become as self-sustaining as possible through in-kind contributions, volunteerism, and local support,” she said.

Youth and adults interested in learning more about THRIVE or volunteering are encouraged to attend a monthly meeting.

To learn more about THRIVE, visit www.thrive-alliance.net.

https://news.halstonmedia.com/katonah-lewisboro-times/katonah-lewisboro-times/stories/thrive-katonah-museum-art-bedford-lewisboro-pound-ridge,77547