

PROMISING PRACTICES



Blue Shoe Arts answers the call for imagination

Gallery and studio encourage adults to communicate creatively

Marie Sowers burst through the art studio door one morning, eyes aglow, and announced that she knew exactly what she wanted to do that day. "I had an interesting dream last night, and I want to paint it on canvas," she exclaimed.

Marie's passion to create visual art is shared by the other artists who work alongside her at Blue Shoe Arts in Lancaster, Ohio. Their art is as diverse as the artists themselves. Paintings of people, places, and things; sculptures of animals and computer robots made with found objects; and dolls with clay heads and funky cloth bodies bring delight to viewers. Besides being displayed in the Blue Shoe Arts gallery, Blue Shoe Arts artists' pieces are featured in several other galleries and compete in juried art shows throughout the year.

In 2003, Fairfield County Board of Developmental Disabilities staff members envisioned ways to offer creative employment opportunities for adults with disabilities. Blue Shoe Arts was launched the following year with a mission to:

- Discover individuals with talent in and passion for the visual arts.
- Help individuals develop by providing studio space, materials, instruction, and encouragement.
- Offer the opportunity to market the works to help the artists gain financial independence and grow self-esteem.

Each participating artist works independently in his or her preferred medium in the gallery's studio one or two days a week. The artists receive 100 percent of the artworks' sale price minus supply costs.

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Putting Out the Good Word: Some Information about the Promising Practices Series

We are offering a series of short articles on a variety of promising practices that CARF surveyors have observed during surveys from 2004 to the present. There is no particular order that we will follow in presenting this series of short reports. The purpose is not to rate one organization over another, but to encourage U.S. and Canadian community providers to dialogue with one another and to encourage creative solutions to individual service designs and organizational business practices and thereby achieve effective and positive results in each organization's community.

Although there are indeed a number of ways to approach conformance to a standard, what makes organizations given an

Blue Shoe Arts artists also collaborate on collective art such as sculptures, butterflies, ornaments, and jewelry made of recycled materials. The artists' images are also applied on note cards, t-shirts, and jewelry produced off-site. Profits from these sales support the program, and Blue Shoe Arts has earned a profit for the past three years.

First to join Blue Shoe Arts was Joseph A. Greene, a self-taught cartoon painter who had created his own line of preteen characters by age 4. Now 51 and in his sixth year at Blue Shoe Arts, Joseph has sold more than 600 pieces of artwork, and many collectors prize his work. Unable to hear or speak, Joseph relies on his other senses and has become an adept communicator through his whimsical acrylic paintings. His art has won awards, and he was a cartoonist for the Lancaster Eagle-Gazette. Most important, Joseph has achieved his goals of earning an income as a professional artist and bringing smiles to people's faces with his unique art.

Being involved and competing in visual arts has helped level the playing field for adults with disabilities and connects them to the community. Jen England, writing in the spring 2009 issue of Southeast Ohio Magazine, noted that Blue Shoe Arts "has put a face on the adults, who often find themselves overlooked by the public."

Blue Shoe Arts continues to thrive in the community. Recently, the gallery and studio moved into larger quarters after the Fairfield County Board of Developmental Disabilities acquired Art & Clay on Main in downtown Lancaster. The combined businesses have become an inclusive arts center offering art and ceramic classes for the public and displaying works of regional and Blue Shoe artists alike.

Blue Shoe Arts Director Cheryl Fey observes, "Building social circles, increasing self-esteem, earning an income, and working at what people love to do -- this is what Blue Shoe Arts is all about."



Above: "Flying South" by Marie Sowers, 2' x 4' acrylic on canvas.

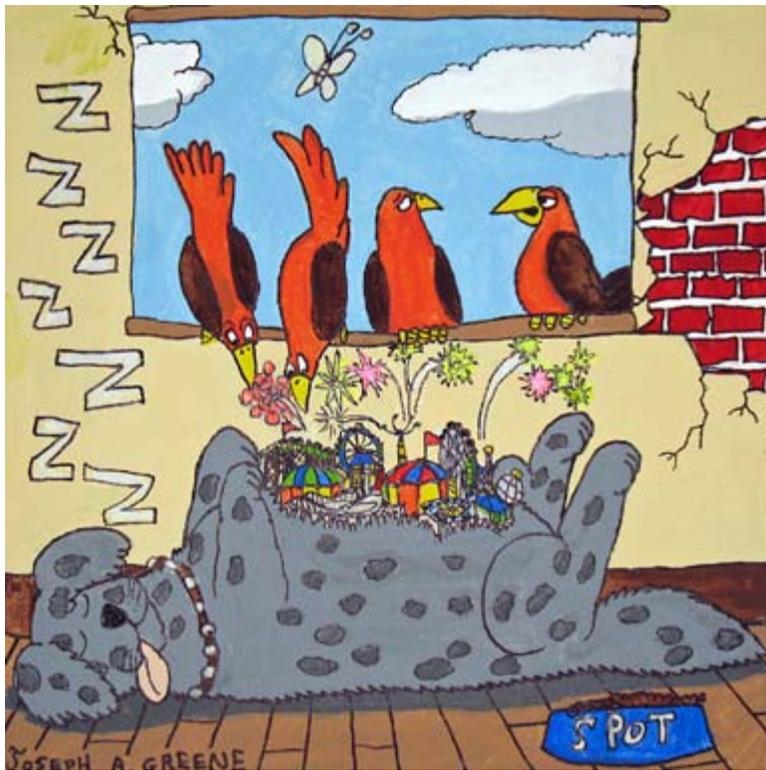
exemplary rating stand out is their professional and strategic response to an observed service or business need, always designed with input from their stakeholders and based on those individuals' quality expectations.

We hope you enjoy the series. We encourage you to contact the identified representative in the article to get more information about their services.

Promising Practices issues now archived online!

Do you remember a past article that you'd like to forward on to a colleague? Did you just join Promising Practices and want to see issues we covered in the past? Well, now you can! Old issues of Promising Practices are now available online. Find archived issues at carf.org/ecspromisingpractices and follow links to past issues. Past issues are categorized by topic so you can easily find articles of interest.

Below: "The Flea Circus" by Joseph A. Greene, 12" x 12" acrylic on canvas.



For more information about Blue Shoe Arts, including images of the featured artwork and profiles of the participating artists, visit www.blueshoearts.org or call Blue Shoe Arts Director Cheryl Fey at (740) 653-1755. The Art & Clay on Main website is at www.artandclayonmain.com.

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