

FCA Youth Programming

Employing
Artists.

Empowering
Youth.



The Beginning



Florida CraftArt launched its Youth Arts Program in 2024 in response to a need identified through conversations with local community partners. Many youth-serving organizations shared our belief in the power of art but lacked the capacity, staffing, or resources to implement meaningful creative programming or had art programming in place but could use a helping hand to lighten their load.

Our Approach

Our response was simple: build collaborative, flexible art experiences designed around each partner's mission and the youth they serve.

Youth programs are never one-size-fits-all. We shape each alongside the organizations who know their youth best with the approach:

Accessible Design — Workshops remain welcoming, engaging, and adaptable to diverse abilities and backgrounds.

Creative + Social Impact — Artistic skill-building is paired with social-emotional learning and nurtures a sense of belonging.

Educational Alignment — Programs support broader learning goals such as literacy, critical thinking, and creative problem-solving.



Big Brothers Big Sisters

Our partnership with Big Brothers Big Sisters began with a simple intention: to create meaningful, accessible art experiences that strengthen the mentor-mentee relationships at the heart of their work. Understanding how full schedules can be, we designed a program that fits seamlessly into their time together while offering something truly memorable.

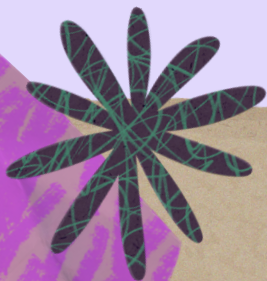
Each session begins with a guided tour through our galleries, where conversation about the artwork encourages reflection, curiosity, and self-expression. The experience then moves to our Creative Loft classroom, where Bigs and Littles share a meal and sit side-by-side to create artwork inspired by one another. Using colorful papers, textures, and mixed media materials, they thoughtfully design pieces that highlight the qualities they admire most in their match.

The program concludes with a heartfelt exchange, as each participant presents their finished artwork. These moments are often filled with pride, laughter, and genuine affirmation. What begins as a creative afternoon becomes something much deeper — a tangible symbol of trust, encouragement, and connection. Through art-making, mentors and mentees discover new ways to see and celebrate one another, strengthening bonds that extend far beyond the classroom.



"Support from partners like you allow us to provide unique opportunities through generous programming. Florida CraftArt provided the space, all the materials to create, an instructor to facilitate and assist through the creative process, as well as a meal; thus, contributing to our value of providing low cost, no cost activities in the community."

Olivia Tiffany, Senior Partnerships Manager, Big Brothers Big Sisters



Academy Prep Center



Our partnership with Academy Prep Center of St. Petersburg emerged from conversations about enriching their existing art curriculum. Through dialogue with their art teacher, we identified students' strong interest in fiber arts and an opportunity to connect creative learning with African American heritage. This led to a collaboration with Dr. Genevieve Hill-Thomas, a Ringling College professor specializing in African textiles.



What began as a single-semester pilot quickly proved so meaningful and enriching for students that the program has continued to grow — now entering its fifth semester. The resulting curriculum teaches crochet, a technique deeply rooted in African textile traditions and reflected in the work of contemporary artists of color.

Twice weekly, semester-long sessions allow students to build skills progressively, and the program's impact is evident in its organic growth. Students not enrolled often wait outside the classroom, eager to learn from their participating peers.

"The impact of this program goes far beyond learning a new craft. It has enhanced emotional regulation, focus and self-confidence in our students, offering them an outlet for creativity and self-expression they may not have otherwise explored. It is partnerships like these that make Academy Prep a truly transformative place for young minds."

-Lacy Nash Miller, Executive Director of Advancements, Academy Pre

Special Moments

As the program blossomed, so did the students' confidence and sense of possibility. What has brought us the greatest joy is discovering that some students were so inspired, they took the initiative entirely on their own - using their personal savings to buy supplies, crocheting after school, and proudly selling their handmade creations to family and friends.

What began as a classroom experience has unexpectedly sparked entrepreneurial curiosity, self-belief, and the thrill of turning creativity into opportunity.



Ronald McDonald House

Our partnership with Ronald McDonald House Charities offers families a moment of comfort and creativity during one of the most difficult journeys they may ever face. Florida CraftArt brings hands-on art experiences directly to the House, sitting side-by-side with parents, siblings, and caregivers to create together in a spirit of calm and connection.

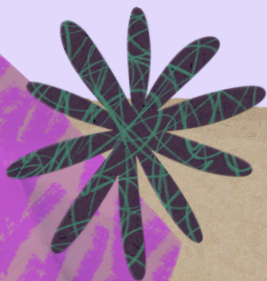
For families caring for a seriously ill child, moments of rest and emotional relief are rare and deeply needed. Our art sessions provide a gentle pause — a chance to set aside worry, if only briefly, and focus on making something beautiful together. These gatherings are especially meaningful for siblings who are staying at the House while their brother or sister receives care. Through shared creativity, families can reconnect, laugh, and support one another in a space that encourages both expression and healing.

What started as a once-a-month visit has grown into twice-monthly sessions due to the program's impact and the heartfelt response from families and staff. With continued support and funding, we hope to expand these offerings to reach even more Ronald McDonald House campuses, bringing moments of creativity, comfort, and connection to families when they need them most.



"Studies consistently show that when families are emotionally supported and able to remain actively involved in their child's care, patient outcome improves. Florida CraftArt plays a vital role in helping us meet this need. Their art programming not only enriches the daily lives of our residents but also supports our broader mission: keeping families close to their children and strengthening them psychologically during some of the most challenging moments of their lives."

Meghan Chisolm, Director of Program + Family Experience,
Ronald McDonald House Tampa Bay



The Heart Gallery



We first met the Heart Gallery during a time of transition. For years, their work centered on sharing professional portraits of the children they serve. When changes in regulation no longer allowed faces of participants to be shared, a vital storytelling tool was lost.

Together, we reimagined a creative way for these children to be seen and celebrated through their own artwork and voices.

Each month, Heart Gallery youth come to Florida CraftArt for an after-hours gallery tour, exploring how art can express identity, emotion, and inspiration.

The evening continues with pizza, conversation, and collaboration. Each participant receives a canvas and with hands-on guidance from FCA teaching artist, each creates a personal work of art that reflects who they are and who they aspire to be. Music fills the room, laughter flows, and creativity takes hold.

By the end of each workshop, every child now has a powerful piece of artwork that the Heart Gallery shares throughout the Tampa Bay area, at special events, and online.

These artworks spark connection, invite curiosity, and tell stories beyond what a photograph ever could, offering new pathways toward visibility, understanding, and the hope of a forever family.



*Kiddo adopted and pic shown with permission from parents

In these hands-on sessions, these young minds are encouraged to express themselves authentically, using craft materials and techniques to create images where they are the focal point. Through this empowering process, each child crafts not just an image but a reflection of their unique identity and story."

-Dr. Sandra Braham, President and CEO,
Gulf Coast Jewish Family & Community Services

Special Moments

During a gallery tour, a late arrival walked in and moments later, two siblings spotted each other and ran into a joyful embrace. Living in separate foster homes more than an hour apart, they hadn't seen each other in months and neither knew the other would be there.

That night, they created art side by side, catching up and laughing. And the icing on the cake? FCA made it possible for the brother, Levi's, self portrait to be included in a local exhibition where he proudly sold his first piece.



Police Athletic League

Our partnership with the Police Athletic League (PAL) of St. Petersburg began with listening. In conversations with PAL leadership, we learned about their strong focus on literacy, mentorship, and building confidence in the youth they serve.

Together, we envisioned a program that could bring these values to life blending reading, storytelling, and hands-on art into a creative experience that would truly resonate with students.

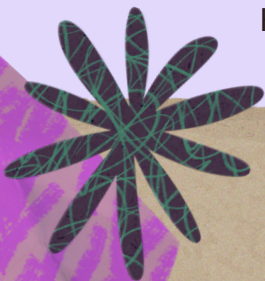
From those conversations, a collaborative quilt project emerged, inspired by the long tradition of quilts as storytellers. Through reading and discussion, students explored how quilts have been used to share memories, celebrate culture, and preserve personal histories—discovering through art that their own stories can be expressed as well.

Over a series of joyful workshops, PAL youth designed and created quilt squares inspired by their own lives, dreams, and memories. Through our partnership with the Suncoast Quilting Circle, the project also gained a meaningful intergenerational dimension, as experienced quilters worked alongside the students sharing skills, stories, and encouragement. Together, the squares were assembled into a finished community quilt that will hang proudly at PAL—a vibrant symbol of creativity, collaboration, and shared pride. The response has been so enthusiastic that PAL has already invited the program back this summer.



"The children who participate show creativity, patience, and perseverance and are proud to see their individual squares stitched together in one united piece of art. We look forward to our continued community partnership with Florida CraftArt."

Heather Robb, Executive Director, Police Athletic League of St. Petersburg



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Join us in empowering young minds through the transformative power of art. These life-shaping moments are only possible because of generous supporters who believe in access, opportunity, and the promise of every child. Your investment keeps this work thriving. Together, we can ignite imagination, nurture leadership, and ensure the next generation has the tools and the confidence to create a brighter future.

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For more information to support contact

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