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Unique Art Project for Foster Youth

By Cathy Tyson



"Hope Matters," a 4' x 5' multi-media collage that local foster youth made with the assistance of Marcia Barrow Taylor

the world almost break become the adults who save it."

Kathy Bowles, Development Director of Youth Homes, explains their work, "Ours is a story of stability in a sea of insanity, a commitment to neglected youth, and hope."

"Foster Care is a huge problem in California - over 68,000 youth are in foster care in California alone. Children who are abused, neglected and abandoned end up in foster care - removed from their homes by the Superior Court for their own protection. There are many different levels of foster care; placement of the kids depends on their emotional and behavioral needs. By the time kids get to our program, they have been in as many as 10-20 different placements in their short life. The stories of these kids break your heart," said Bowles in a statement.

Youth Homes provides counseling for foster youth along with a number of other services: they recruit foster families, have an aftercare program for 16 to 25-year-olds and a mentoring program. It's a challenging undertaking for this non-profit. Although they have a variety of fundraising efforts, this year they will be hosting their first gala event, "The Art of Hope - Celebrating Youth Homes and the Power of Community" on October 10 at the Blackhawk Museum in Danville. The collaborative collage "Hope Matters" will be auctioned off to raise money for the program. For more information go to www.youthhomes.org.

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Talented Lafayette artist Marcia Barrow Taylor had just left a position as a children's docent at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, to spend more time in the studio, "but I felt a little guilty not working with kids."

Wanting to get involved with foster youth, perhaps donate some of her art, she took a tour of a local facility, Anderson House.

One of the residents, a 14-year-old girl named Destynii, "happened to come home early from school that day while Taylor was taking a tour. "I came face to face with the limitations these kids have. I just couldn't shake it."

"That was the moment I knew I had to do something more than hang art on the walls." She committed to six weeks of Sunday afternoons, teaching teen foster youth at two Youth Homes about some of the many facets of art. "Hope Matters," a large multi-media collage, is the culmination of all their hard work.

"I think art is a gateway into our humanity - a way to tap into your value as a human being - a place to find refuge. It's especially important for at-risk kids, whether that's playing piano, gardening or poetry," said Taylor.

What started out as an art project became something much larger, "a way to address a social ill that I feel a responsibility to address as an artist and as a mother," said Taylor. Along the lower edge of the piece is an especially poignant quote by Frank Warren, "The children