



"As great scientists have said and as all children know, it is above all by the imagination that we achieve perception, compassion and hope."

- American science fiction writer Ursula LeGuin

The arts are the great mediums and catalysts of imagination and creativity. Whether it's face painting, tap dancing, acting, or singing, every facet of art is an outlet by which kids can imagine, create and even find hope and confidence to heal and endure. No one can attest to this fact better than the staff and volunteers at Discovery Arts.



Discovery Arts is a non-profit organization that brings music, art, dance and drama to children with cancer, serious blood disorders and life threatening illnesses while they are receiving hospital treatments. Each month, their programs reach out to more than 400 kids at pediatric hospitals in the Los Angeles and Orange County areas. Says Marilyn Clements, co-founder and Executive Director of Discovery Arts, "We use the arts as tools to help children step outside the confines of their illness and into the world of creativity and imagination. Children with serious illnesses have enormous emotional needs: they need a safe place to express their feelings about their illness; they need relief from the pain and chaos of critical illness; they desperately need fun and normalcy that will help them cope and in turn positively impact their treatment and recovery."



So the sense of "fun and normalcy" is exactly what Discovery Arts provides. Each week the Discovery Arts crew come to hospitals with trunks, bags and arms full of costumes, props, musical instruments and art supplies. Kids get to engage in crafts and dances and face paintings. For those children who are too ill to participate in the group activities, Discovery Arts has developed "Bedside Adventure Kits" to bring the fun right to them. Each kit is filled with a variety of art-related materials and tools for them to keep and enjoy.



Discovery Arts also arranges for celebrities to come along on their "adventures." Star Wars mastermind George Lucas, former Broncos Quarterback John Elway, and tennis great Martina Navratilova, are just some of the celebrities who joined in on the fun. "Patrick Dempsey was the sweetest man and really gave a lot of love and attention to our kids. One of the children decided that I needed a makeover before I met him, which ended up being shades of brown face-paint all over my face! I had to explain that it wasn't a skin problem, just a special makeover," recalls Marilyn with a laugh. Besides the famous visitors to the hospitals, Discovery Arts will also have former Olympian and Broadway star of "Peter Pan," Cathy Rigby, as their spokeswoman for an upcoming feature documentary on

the organization, as well as for a new kid's book they will put out featuring stories illustrated by the children of the Discovery Arts program.

The results of such creative, fun and engaging activities are felt by everyone from the Discovery Arts staff, to the child patients and their families, to the doctors and hospital personnel. "Art affects our immune system, it affects the opiate levels in the brain," says Leah Dickstein, Ph.D. "Art gives them (patients) a sense of control, whereas in medicine you don't have a sense of control."

Dr. Ernie Katz, Director of the Behavioral Sciences Section of the Children's Center for Cancer & Blood Diseases at the Children's Hospital in LA called Discovery Arts "a real model for helping enhance the self esteem of children facing the harsh realities of illness. It also has had an incredible impact on the families and staff," he remarked.

Says one mother, "Priscilla is never afraid to come to the hospital for treatment because she knows that Discovery Arts will be there."

As for Marilyn and the Discovery Arts team, being a part of the programs is just as helpful and encouraging to them as to the patients. "One of the most wonderful things that has happened to us is that the patients return to visit even if they are not being treated. The doctors are always amazed and ask 'What are you doing here?' and the kids respond 'We are here for Discovery Arts!'" The benefits are not only temporal during treatment, but have impacted the lives and futures of kids as well. "I have had patients that have told me that when they grow up, they would like to work for us...wouldn't that be something!" says Marilyn. "One little girl named Sarah, after battling two different cancers by the age of 5, has gone on to study ballet and vocal training. Another boy continued in art and was honored by Mrs. Bush in Washington D.C."

"These children are very, very wise, very deep, very polite and very grateful. They are truly angels. I have had the privilege of being with them and learning about courage, faith and even acceptance when their passing is evident," Marilyn told us. "My wish, as well as the wish of everyone here at Discovery Arts, is to be a voice for them... to gather help for them and hopefully make their journey a little easier." -LG



For more info on Discovery Arts  
and ways you can get involved,  
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