

Teaching Clients To Shake, Rattle And Roll

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For Helen Dolas, the beat of a drum, the rattle of a maraca and the thrum of a guitar are more than music; they're the tools she uses to heal and give hope to thousands of intellectually and developmentally disabled children and adults.

Dolas is the founder and CEO of Arts & Services for Disabled Inc., (ASD) a Long Beach-based private nonprofit started in 1982 that brings the healing magic of music to the disabled through educational, vocational and volunteer opportunities.

The Long Beach native says she learned an appreciation for the arts and the power of music growing up in a large Greek family with a rich cultural heritage.

"This is something that was an integral part of me, and I realized that the power of music was really huge," says Dolas, a board-certified music therapist with a bachelor's degree in music and music therapy and a master's degree in special education from California State University, Long Beach. "I wanted to explore that and how it affected human behavior and psychology and emotions and how it could be used in other ways to motivate and inspire, and I discovered music therapy."

She and a partner founded the original company, but their legal partnership later dissolved.

Today ASD has a staff of 50 with its main offices on Studebaker Road, in addition to program sites in Hawthorne and Gardena. It also operates two art galleries, the George V. Deneff Gallery at the Long Beach location and the Artifact Gallery in Hawthorne. The galleries showcase clients' work. ASD also maintains a year-round art exhibit at the Long Beach Department of Health.

Painting A Path To Health

ASD's primary mission is to provide lifelong learning, community service and career opportunities through the creative arts for people with disabilities in an environment of warmth, encourage-



Hae-Sung, left, shares a hug with Art & Services for Disabled Inc. founder and CEO Helen Dolas as they stand in front of a wall filled with paintings and drawings and a table displaying pottery. All the items were created by clients of the nonprofit, which uses the arts to teach the disabled the power of self-expression and to promote life skills. (Photograph by the Business Journal's Thomas McConville)

ment and respect. It accomplishes that goal through a program of arts-based education and therapy that uses a wide range of visual and performing arts. Therapists may have clients wield a paintbrush on a mural one day and play a drum or guitar the next as a way to develop their memory and motor skills. ASD also uses drama, literary arts and dance to build self-esteem and communication and social skills.

"I think one of the reasons why this program was even developed was because [it] was not available to [the disabled] back in the '70s and early '80s," Dolas says. "The way that it's evolved has really been an amazing journey. In terms of the needs specifically for the

families and the students, [they] haven't really shifted in terms of . . . their desires, their hopes [and] their dreams. We have opened doors that afforded them more opportunities so that they can fully envision a life of quality and envision a life for themselves."

ASD typically serves 150 clients a day through its day programs designed for those 18 and older with intellectual and developmental disabilities. Services are free for eligible families that qualify for state funding.

The nonprofit also operates a popular outreach program called "Accessible Arts" that is available to adults and children with disabilities and often mixes ages and skill levels. The workshops, which include activities such as mask making, tambourines, puppetry, drum circles and pantomime, have served 4,000 students in the last two years.

"We promote inclusionary settings so that you have students with and without disabilities that are being brought together to create friendships," Dolas says. "And music is the beautiful bridge to allow that to happen because it's so accessible and creative and you can have a lot of fun."

The Accessible Arts workshops also serve at-risk youth, teens in juvenile detention centers and young adults who are intellectually



Inside the Long Beach offices of Art & Services for Disabled Inc. (ASD), client Hae-Sung shakes a maraca while ASD founder and CEO Helen Dolas guides a music therapy session with clients Sergio on guitar and Christina on drums. For 27 years, the nonprofit has used arts and music to empower and teach the disabled. (Photograph by the Business Journal's Thomas McConville)

and developmentally disabled and are transitioning from high school to adult-community living.

Can You Feel The Beat?

Last fall Dolas and her staff launched "Artbeat for Humanity," an innovative social enterprise partnership between ASD and Valencia-based REMO Inc., the world's leading drum company. REMO donates drums that students decorate with original artwork. The art-embellished drums are then exhibited and sold online and at the new Artbeat for Humanity gallery at the REMO Recreational Music Center in North Hollywood.

Dolas says company founder Remo Belli toured an ASD location, fell in love with the program and said, "Let's create something together."

"So I created this idea of using the drumhead as a unique canvas," Dolas says. "Now our artists are creating what they call the Artbeat for Humanity drums. We're looking for other galleries that will help to promote this so that people can support our students [and] they can be gainfully employed. We're hoping that we can continue to sell because 50 percent of the proceeds go to our student artists, and the other 50 percent goes back into Arts & Services."

ASD receives about 85 percent of its \$1.2 million annual budget from the state as a registered service provider for the disabled that works with several regional centers, including Harbor Regional Center in Torrance and Westside Regional Center in Culver City. These regional centers are nonprofit private corporations established by the Lanterman Mental Retardation Services Act of 1969. They operate under contracts from the California Department of Developmental Services to provide stated-funded services for eligible California residents.

"We have to fundraise the other 15 percent because the funds that they give us [are] not really enough to provide the quality

services that we want," Dolas says. "We wouldn't be able to have the art gallery or some of our other programs . . . if we didn't have private funding. The Accessible Arts workshops are not from the state; those are all private funds from grants and donations that we have to raise."

In addition to private donors, ASD supporters include the Arts Council for Long Beach; the City of Los Angeles Department of Cultural Affairs; the Long Beach Junior Chamber; the J. Paul Getty Foundation; the Los Angeles Arts Commission; the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors; Supervisor Don Knabe Arts Education Program; the National Charity League, South Coast Chapter; and the Employees Community Fund of Boeing California.

Dolas says she's encouraged by the fact that music and art therapy have gone mainstream and are now receiving widespread acceptance.

In fact, Dolas recently returned from spending a week in the Arabic State of Qatar, where she was one of 12 U.S. delegates invited by Her Highness Sheikha Mozah Bint Nasser Al Misnad, the wife of the Emir of Qatar. The delegates were chosen to share their skills with their Middle Eastern counterparts in an effort to improve programs for Qatari children with special needs.

Dolas says her future goals are to grow public support for ASD programs and to continue to serve those who need her services most.

"I [have] quite a passion for being able to offer the arts and being able to offer a place of change and growth and healing for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities," she says. "I really love who they are and what they have to offer. I have learned from them for the past 27 years."

For more information, call 562/982-0247 or visit www.artsand-services.org. ■