

LIFESTYLE

■ ART

'A turning point'

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not-for-profit association has nearly 5,000 professional and student members who ascribe to the belief that making art can be healing.

The AATA sets education standards for art therapists, regarding a master's degree as key to entry into the profession. Art therapists certified by the AATA must complete a minimum of 45 credit hours of coursework and another 700 hours of supervised work in a clinical setting. Once a therapist has graduated from an AATA-approved program, an additional 1,000 hours of direct client contact must be completed before certification with the Art Therapy Credentials Board will be granted.

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Karen Stabley's vocation may be as an art therapist. At heart, she is an artist. She studied art at Rutgers University, getting her bachelor's of fine arts degree in 1984.

"I was trained as an artist. Only, during that training, no one explained how to make a living as an artist," she said.

Then she read an article about a psychiatrist who was using art to help patients.

"It was like a light bulb came on," Stabley said. "I thought, 'Wow! Who thought of that?'"

"In my own art, I knew how healing the creating can be. I could also see peers working through their feelings with their art, photography, sculpting," Stabley said. "And I thought, 'If I have to make money, I need to find something that makes sense to me and that I love.'"

Stabley completed her master's degree in creative arts therapy at Hahnemann University Hospital in Philadelphia. For the next five

from their homes. Just by virtue of being here, they are in a crisis situation. It is a stressful time for them.

"Half are here because they have committed crimes; a lot have mental health problems and/or drug and alcohol problems. Or there are family problems. When an agency gets a child in the system, they want to know what that child needs," Zuercher said.

To help make that determination, Stabley works with a team of consultants and case workers to take the child through a 45-day diagnostic program. During that time, psychological, drug-and-alcohol and educational assessments are made and a behavioral adjustment report is compiled.

"What Karen does for us is help with the evaluations," Zuercher explained. "She assigns the children various tasks, like 15 assignments to draw. Then, based on what the children draw, she interprets the issues, concerns and problems they may be struggling with."

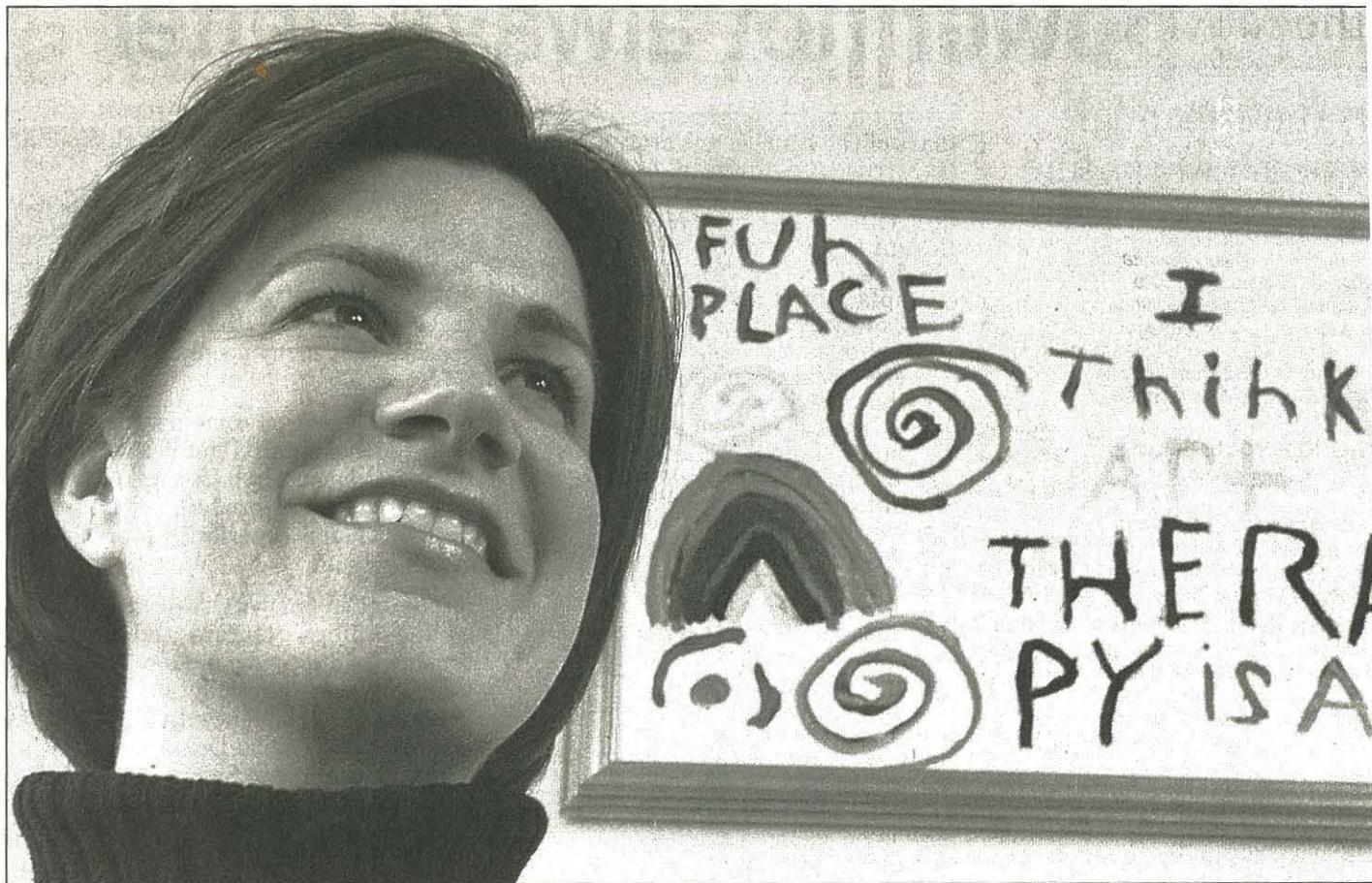
Stabley is given some background information on the child she is evaluating, but not enough for her to conclude what the child's needs are before she has a chance to work with the child.

"It is just fascinating to see what she learns from these drawings," Zuercher said. "Things like sexual abuse, physical abuse. She picks those up where maybe we don't."

"The kids like the art, and they like Karen a lot. That's another strong point — to get someone the kids relate to well."

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The Children's Home of York steps in when a child is already in the court system. The Lehman Center tries to catch families before a crisis develops. The non-profit organization offers a variety of programs to assist parents seeking parenting guidance, including a crisis nursery



STEVE RUSS PH

Adrienne Brenner, a registered art therapist, works with children at the Lehman Center, which provides services families.

Answers drawn out, revealed over time

By KIM SCHUMER
Dispatch/Sunday News

When art therapists evaluate drawings or other art work created by clients, they don't necessarily react to the colors the client chooses.

It is how the client uses those colors that matters.

"Art therapy is really individual," said Karen Stabley, an art therapist with a private practice in York.

"There are no real patterns, so to speak," she said. For instance, red doesn't necessarily represent blood. Nor does a lot of black in a drawing mean the artist is suicidal.

"The colors don't mean as much as the pressure the artist puts on the crayon," she said. "Or the emptiness in the picture, the distance between the figures."

Adrienne Brenner, an art therapist at the Lehman Center, said different art materials can evoke different feelings and responses.

And Stabley said there is a danger in giving a person the wrong medium

"If I have a depressed client, they might start with just a pencil and work very small, so I will encourage them to use paint to help them think bigger."

Adrienne Brenner

terial," Brenner said. "If you are not ready to go there, it is not a good idea to bring it out. Finger-painting is also too messy and regressive."

Instead of allowing a new client carte blanche in choosing the art materials he or she naturally gravitates to, both therapists said they begin by giving the client a series of drawing to create, usually with crayons or pencil.

After evaluating the work, certain materials may be suggested to the

work very small, so I will encourage them to use paint to help them think bigger."

Just as the various art mediums evoke different reactions in individual clients, different issues respond better to art therapy than others.

"Art therapy is very good for depression," Brenner said. "And for people who are angry but not sure what at, or who have feelings they are not comfortable sharing."

Art therapy has also been beneficial for clients who struggle with stress and anxiety or are suffering with a chronic illness.

One thing all art therapists stress is that a client does not have to be artistic to benefit from art therapy.

Stabley said she believes clients who are not artistically inclined may have an edge over those who are, because "they don't know how to disguise things (in their art) like an artist does."

Whether a client is artistically gifted or barely able to draw a stick figure, both Stabley and Brenner