



DAILY RECORD / BIL BOWDEN

Karen Stabley works with a boy at the Lehman Center.

# Therapist uses art to help children

**Name:** Karen Stabley

**Age:** 33

**Born where:** York

**Title:** Registered art therapist

**Company:** Lehman Center

**Location:** 400 W. Market St., York

**Years with company:** 5

**What do you do?** I am a therapist, so we are working on whatever issues the child needs to deal with, such as divorce or behavior. Sometimes the kids are victims of abuse and neglect. Often, they are withdrawn and can't talk about feelings. I use art as a catalyst so they can begin to think about feelings. The final goal is for them to be able to verbalize their feelings.

**What is it that people don't understand about your job?** Mostly people don't understand that children's drawings contain very powerful feelings. The other thing that people sometimes don't understand is that it may take a long time in therapy for children to understand their feelings and feel better about themselves.

**What is the most rewarding part of your job?** Seeing kids grow, change, heal and feel better.

**What's the most difficult thing you have had to learn at**

**work?** That not every situation has a happy ending. Not every child's life is what we perceive it should be, and sometimes there is nothing that I can do about that.

**How do you spend a typical day?** My day starts at 7:30 a.m. I come in and read the hot line calls that came in from the previous evening, and I prepare for my clients. I see three or four children in the morning. They are children that I see weekly on an ongoing therapy basis. Then I return calls and make contact calls to schools or parents. In the afternoon, I may have a meeting or go to court. And I will see three or four more kids.

**What is your most memorable work experience?** It is memorable to see children learn to trust me and learn that they can make changes in their life; they don't always have to be angry or sad. That comes through learning to build a trust relationship with someone they can talk with.

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years, her work with clients was supervised by licensed therapists as she worked toward board certification.

"An art therapist has the same skills as any master's level therapist," she said. "Art therapists have added education to use art work and art materials to help people express feelings they cannot verbalize."

Once certified, Stabley and her husband Jeff moved back to their native York. "Philly isn't as much 'fun' when you have children," she said. "And we wanted to be near family."

But there was no job waiting for her in York. In fact, Stabley was one of the first art therapists to practice in this area.

"I had to talk my way into every job I had," Stabley said. "I would say 'Here's what I can do, how I can help. Now, can you pay me money?'"

She worked in the psychiatric unit at York Hospital and with the Lehman Center for more than 10 years before going into private practice in 1997. After nearly 15 years, she said she still has to convince people of art therapy's value.



Darlene Zuercher doesn't need to be convinced of the benefits of art therapy.

Zuercher is the supervisor of diagnostic services at the Children's Home of York; she's been with the Children's Home for more than 20 years, and in a supervisory position since 1989, when Stabley first approached CHY with her offer to help.

"She had just submitted a resume when I had just taken over the program," Zuercher said. "I was intrigued and thought it would be unique to have this type of evaluation, since it wasn't done by any other diagnostic program that I was aware of."

The Children's Home of York is "a crisis program," according to Zuercher. "Kids (at CHY) have been taken away

parent support groups, an safe place for parents bring children when the parents need a break.

The Lehman Center offers art therapy to children and their families when a situation suggests the approach would be beneficial. Stabley worked with the Lehman Center before opening her own practice; while she was there, she supervised art therapist Adrienne Brenner, who was working toward her registration.

Often, Brenner's last name gets her recognized before her impressive list of academic and professional accomplishments — but then being married to the mayor of the city you live in can give your name a certain cachet.

But before she exchanged marriage vows in 2002 with York City mayor John Brenner, she traveled a road that lead from her native Dallas town into the woods of North Carolina before bringing her back to York.

Whereas Stabley initially trained as an artist before going into art therapy, Brenner has always focused on the study of psychology. In 1995, she received a bachelor's degree in psychology from Lenoir-Rhyne College in Hickory, N.C.; her master's degree was earned at the College of New Rochelle in 1998.

Between degrees, she lived in a tent.

"After college, I went to work for a residential treatment program where (offenders) can go to jail or live in the woods," Brenner said.

Three Springs was the name of the facility in North Carolina where Brenner spent a year with another counselor and eight adolescents in a tent. No electricity. No plumbing. But at least the tents were up on a wooden deck.

"I am really proud of myself for doing it for a year," Brenner said. "It was a hard year, but I am really glad I had that experience."

"I learned a lot about adolescent depression, oppos