



Amplifying the Arts

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Early in 2020, artist **Meridy Volz** was hired by the Riverside County Office of Education, to teach an art program at Indio Juvenile Hall. Meridy began with 45 students and taught two-hour long classes each week. Her “Art With Heart” program was an instant success and staff at the facility reported an immediate decrease in discipline issues with the young men who were participating. Meridy quickly created a safe space for social and emotional learning as the students began to draw and create artworks with her as their guide. Each week she helped them to explore new artistic concepts and mediums while at the same time expressing their feelings and creativity in a positive way.

Fast forward to March, when COVID-19 prevented Meridy from entering the facility. She knew that the art lessons were something that the students looked forward to each week and that during the pandemic they would become more important than ever as an outlet and a refuge. She immediately, and for the first time in her career, converted to teaching her lessons online via Skype. Teaching from her home studio, where the students were able to see her own artwork, she extended her teaching to four days per week so that she could accommodate all of the students in small groups for health and safety purposes.

Meridy has been essential in reducing anxiety and providing hope to these young men as they grapple with their incarceration, the COVID-19 health issues, and the social unrest that set in as a result of the national protests around the deaths of people of color. She is an excellent example of how the arts provide social and emotional learning, cultural relevance, and social justice as she makes her talent and expertise available no matter how challenging the circumstances.

Her program will resume with the start of the new school year and is supported by both the Instructional Services (Visual and Performing Arts) and Alternative Education units of the Riverside County Office of Education. She truly makes a difference in the lives of her students on a daily basis.

