

Collective Creativity: Local Artists Form Naudain Street Art Collaborative

By Bonnie Eisenfeld

The newly formed *Naudain Street Art Collaborative*, made up of artists on Naudain Street between 21st and 25th Streets and their friends, will be mounting exhibits six times a year. The inaugural show, featuring Ed Bronstein, an urban impressionist, and Emily Squires Levine, a polymer clay designer, was held on January 23.

The second exhibition is scheduled for March 5, featuring artists Betsy Alexander of Ravenswing Studio, who works in mixed media, and Lauren Sweeney, who creates still lifes and city scenes in watercolors.

Among the other member artists' names you may recognize from past Philadelphia Open Studio Tours and *Center City Quarterly* articles are: Bhavisha Patel (cityscapes and African scenes); Burnell Yow (mixed media, Ravenswing Studio); and Bill Silver (murals, oil paintings, mosaics).

Other artists covering a range of media and styles are joining the collaborative: Priya Patel is a photographer; Karen Villarreal is a realist painter; Sally Eisenberg creates abstract art on paper; and Leslie Sudock is a textile artist and SAORI® weaver. (SAORI®

is free-style hand weaving, originated in 1968 by Japanese artist Misao Jo.)

The exhibits are free and open to visitors at the home studio of Bhavisha Patel, 2503 Naudain Street, from 11:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m. Dates will be announced and visits can be arranged by appointment.

For more information or to get on the email list, please contact Bhavisha Patel, bhavisha.h.patel@gmail.com

Town Square

JEVS Human Services Offers First-time Non-violent Drug Sellers Better Choices

By Bonnie Eisenfeld

In some neighborhoods, drug dealing might look like a profitable career choice, a way to make money quickly and acquire luxuries. Unfortunately, many who try it—even first-time offenders—end up in jail for significant periods of time.

A 2014 national survey conducted by the Pew Research Center found that two-thirds of the public now favor a move away from mandatory sentences for non-violent crimes. But what's the alternative? A new program, run by JEVS Human Services, called *The Choice is Yours* (TCY), offers first-time non-violent drug sellers a way out of jail and an alternative to a life of crime. The objective of the program is to help these offenders become productive citizens, stay out of jail, and avoid the lifelong stigma of a felony conviction.

In the 13-month program, participants receive—free of charge—individual plans; skills and job-readiness training; basic educational services; job-placement assistance; case management; mentoring; academic tutoring; and assistance obtaining housing, child support, and public benefits. Participants give 220 hours of community service.

JEVS Human Services employs three full-time and one part-time experienced professional staff to run the program—a director, case manager, program assistant, and instructor. A dedicated Municipal Court judge monitors participant progress and motivates compliance.

The Choice is Yours has proved to be exceptionally effective. In the pilot group, 89 percent completed the program. Of those participants with employment goals, 89 percent attained their goals, obtaining jobs in factories, warehouses, construction, property maintenance, hospitality, and other service fields. Of those with educational goals, 52 percent attained their goals. Only 12 percent were rearrested within one year.

In a comparison group of offenders who did not accept the offer or did not complete the program, 44 percent were rearrested. Since the start of the program, JEVS has served over 175 participants and is continually enrolling more. The cost per participant is \$5,200. The cost for a year in jail is almost \$40,000.

Originated by Philadelphia District Attorney Seth Williams and operated in partnership with his office, Municipal

Court, and the Public Defenders Association, TCY is based on a similar successful program in San Francisco. Through a competitive bidding process, in 2012 JEVS Human Services was selected to run the program in Philadelphia. The program targets offenders who were caught selling small amounts of crack, powder cocaine, or heroin and are facing one- to two-year prison sentences. The DA's office selects offenders and offers them the option of joining the program instead of doing time in jail. If they complete the program, all charges are dropped; and if they are clean after two years, their criminal records are expunged.

The Choice is Yours is funded by both public and private sources, including the Philadelphia Prison System and The Lenfest Foundation.