Rising through Art: Cultivating resilience among vulnerable young people.

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IMPACT REPORT

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Rising through Art: Cultivating resilience among vulnerable young people

Background
The Acacia Network Housing and Loisaida Center After-School Art Program (ASAP) is a collaborative effort to promote wellness and empower community members through creative practice in contexts of displacement. Our collaborative sought to empower young children and adolescents in transitional housing contexts (e.g., Acacia Network Housing Tier 2, The Bronx and Queens) where access to art curricula promoting self and collective efficacies (including resilience) are typically absent.

Specific Aims
Aim 1. Strengthen participants’ understanding of themselves and of their experiences through cultivating a solution-oriented mindset.
   a. Teach effective forms of communication that enhance a stronger communicative process among participants.
   b. Empower participants through articulating, acknowledging and celebrating individual strengths.
   c. Validate their emotional feelings and promote the search for ways to benefit and grow from their present situation into a more self-valuable and positive one.

Aim 2. Offer a sense of belonging and psychological wellness in the midst of a stressful context.
   a. Provide a space for healing, self-respect and social bonding that fosters resilience, especially between participants that have suffered physical, psychological and emotional damage from extreme violent situations.
   b. Support the development of healthy relationships, offering important learning processes in a non-formal educational context, and flourishing the emotional intelligence of the participants.

Theoretical framework
Prolific sociologist Erving Goffman (1978, 2009) comprehensively studied the importance of the context over social interactions, and how the latter give way for the formation of an individual’s sense of self. Strong advocate of the school of symbolic interactionism (Blumer, 1986), which concerned itself with identifying key sources of meaning in an individual’s context, Goffman gifted us with a blueprint for understanding the individual after identifying and analyzing his/her sources of meanings, which can only be found in her/his context.

While aligned with Goffman’s overarching take on symbolic interactionism, ASAP’s theoretical framework is perhaps more precisely guided by socio-cultural theory (MacGillivray & Heise, 2011), which contends that meaning necessarily stems from the interaction between people and their contexts. For these theoreticians too, people come to understand themselves after processing the complex interactions that unfold in their immediate environments (e.g., homes—including shelters, schools and communities). Importantly, MacGillivray & Heise apply their socio-cultural framework to art implementation in contexts of displacement, and specifically with children in shelters.

This perspective (socio-cultural theory) positions learning as grounded in cultural practices and student interest (MacGillivray & Heise, 2011: 326).

The student’s interest is unavoidably imbued with her/his peculiar context. For this reason, for our ASAP team it was crucial to understand the complexity of the cultural underpinnings of The Bronx and Queens, where the shelters we implemented ASAP are located. Not understanding these contexts prior to intervention development and implementation would have undermined our work theoretically and in praxis. Hence, we included mostly TAs who were already active agents of the cultural contexts specific to these neighborhoods, and with marked communicative dispositions and engagement. Thinking along these lines, we curated the ASAP TA team to maximize our ability to spark participants interests for the arts as ways to become empowered in spite of difficult circumstances.

Indeed, contextualizing ASAP to the homelessness and emergency contexts of our participants is a requirement within the theoretical framework we observe. We sought to strike a balance between the positive personal experiences along with the silver lining of our participants’ contexts. A technique we used to achieve this was to promote the “normalization” of negative situations students shared in order to welcome (and legitimize) any negative emotionality triggered by their contexts. With this process we sought to encourage communication skills, emotional intelligence, and coping skills. Moreover, we promoted looking at our lived experiences as learning tools that ultimately equip us to grow stronger and more resilient. This powerful work can only be done in an inclusive space where our participants could feel encouraged to express themselves without fear of being judged or mistreated (our TAs were particularly aware of the language they used to safeguard participants).

Whilst creating a healthy environment for participants, we focused on offering the necessary tools for fomenting diverse modes of expression (or communication) that encouraged a reflection about their personal experiences. Communication skills lead to psychological wellness (and certainly emotional intelligence) and pave the way for generating solution-oriented mindsets. This is the core of our work. The expression of emotions is vital to validate and channel moods and preoccupations into a materialized object (such as art mediums), which promotes the release of negative feelings and augments positive emotions.
As external agents, the ASAP team was aware of the sources of negative meanings and emotionality (e.g., housing instability, parents’ financial stress, violence, etc.) that were ultimately transferred onto our workshops (as attitudes denoting rejection of some of the activities). Often, kids who displayed negative attitudes towards the workshops were kids who were particularly in need of feeling trust, having attention and love. Our ASAP TA team welcomed them and showed them the activities with patience, respect and always valuating their emotions to foment trust. It is indeed a long process of giving loving responses to participants and showing them trust, but within months the transformation in these kids were noticeable. Overall, because our theoretical framework prepared us to expect these challenges, in practice we were able to maneuver around them, and remain focused on our main goal: to promote wellness and empower community members through creative practice in contexts of displacement.

Concurrently with socio-cultural theory approach we also drew from resiliency theory to implement our workshops. Resiliency refers to a person’s ability to overcome adversity if important protective factors are present in that person’s life. (…) an asset or resiliency paradigm recognizes young people may be exposed to hardship and can be empowered to overcome adversity [emphasis added] (MacGillivray & Heise, 2011: 326).

For the ASAP team, empowerment starts by creating a space of inclusiveness, nurture and care. An environment where TAs set up high expectations but do so with purposeful support. TAs created on giving opportunities for meaningful participation. Once we provide with empowerment opportunities, participants (especially these young minds) thrive. We systematically offered the tools participants required to develop their creativity and problem-solving mindsets. Ideally, the type of engagement ASAP fostered could be conducive to generating aptitudes for approaching problems outside of the art classroom with patience, emotional intelligence, and self-efficacy.

Approaching these workshops with a flexible mind-set was so essential that we created a pliable curriculum with modifiable workshops. We wanted to level with participants’ interests to adjust our curriculum, becoming more effective and culturally appropriate. Stemming from the idea of creating a community art program, we offered participants an alternative way to create community between themselves, where love, empathy and creativity could flourish.

Significance

According to the 2017 American Community Survey led by the New York State’s Census Bureau, there were nearly 1.7 million New Yorkers — or 1 in every 5 city residents — living below the poverty line (e.g., $10,000 annual household income) between 2011 and 2015. And of those residents, children under 18 were more likely to be living in poverty than any other age group, with 535,700 kids, or roughly 30 percent of the city’s population. Overall, because our theoretical framework prepared us to expect these challenges, in practice we were able to maneuver around them, and remain focused on our main goal: to promote wellness and empower community members through creative practice in contexts of displacement.

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Curriculum

We developed an interdisciplinary curriculum designed to address the issues faced by the participants in their context. It included a variety of art media as a source of emotion expression techniques. We considered that providing the exploration of different art mediums would inspire children to express ideas and feelings in a variety of ways by using materials that encourage diverse responses. Artistic and creative processes are deeply embedded in our emotional world and offer concrete ways to materialize feelings. Oftentimes, it is more difficult to verbalize feelings than to simply externalize them through a drawing or a painting. That principle lies at the core of our curriculum.

Children engage art with particular ease partly because they haven’t fully developed verbally. Hence, to them it is natural to draw and represent their comprehension of their context through art. Tapping into this organic ease with which they approach art, our curriculum used exploratory nature activities (open-ended) for participants to develop independent and autonomous explorations leading them into their own conclusions based on their personal experiences. For example, one of our activities was to paint freely with the brush without having a specific shape in mind and later finding in the shape some sort of figure. These were core activities for developing problem identification skills and solution-oriented mindsets. In addition, our curriculum also had structured activities (pre-defined) focusing on depth of content and progress. For instance, we used a “scaffolding technique” in which all of the activities and workshops were connected in a progressive manner, and where participants were asked by our TAs to apply their previous learning process (in previous workshops) into the next one to develop their learning process beyond one day workshops, giving importance of all the activities, at the same time we were able to adapt them constantly to new participants.

Art mediums embedded in ASAP curriculum: Drawing; Painting; Collage; Sculpture; Textiles; Mask and puppet making; Theater; Dance; and Video.

Prima facie, shelters are the most improbably settings for a community art project to unfold. But we believe it is an ideal context to do resilience work. Because the shelter is a main source of (often convoluted) meanings for these kids, ASAP had the opportunity to truly incorporate into the curriculum palpable symbols with profound capacities for generating troubling emotions. Because ASAP took place in shelters, these contexts prompted participants to manifest their frustrations, and the ASAP team was able to gauge the opportunity to help them take control of their realties through art. In a way, this kind of work is practically designed to be implemented in untenable contexts.
The ASAP team was not satisfied with implementing its curriculum and took it upon itself to evaluate its work as it progressed. We used a mixed-methods approach (quantitative & qualitative) to assess ASAP's curriculum implementation. While quantitative approaches provide clear general pictures of the problem at hand, and in our case ASAP's impact over its students, qualitative approaches tend to be best to help evaluators grasp the perspectives and experiences of program participants in regard to the ASAP program. For an even clearer picture of our approach, please refer to ASAP’s timeline (Appendix A).

A. Quantitative
1. To assess ASAP’s impact over students’ “mood & feelings,” we administered surveys with a small group of students (N=24).
2. To assess ASAP’s reception among students, we administered surveys among students (N=47).
3. To measure students’ behaviors, our ethnographer (OG) completed student evaluations with input from TAs & shelter staff (N=9).
4. To assess ASAP’s reception, we administered surveys with parents (n=15).

B. Qualitative
1. Triangulated ethnographic assessment
   a. Semi-structured in-depth interviews (N=4) on perceptions of ASAP were conducted with shelters’ staff (OG)
   b. Semi-structured interviews (N=6) on perceptions of ASAP were conducted with TAs (OG)
   c. Thematically structured fieldnotes (OG & TAs)
2. Visual documentation (TAs, OG & Coordinator)
3. Data analyses
   a. To assess ASAP’s impact over students’ “mood & feelings,” we administered surveys with a small group of students (N=24).
   b. To assess ASAP’s reception among students, we administered surveys among students (N=47).
   c. To measure students’ behaviors, our ethnographer (OG) completed student evaluations with input from TAs & shelter staff (N=9).
   d. To assess ASAP’s reception, we administered surveys with parents (n=15).

Because the ASAP program delved into under-chartered territory (art as a tool of resilience for youth in New York City shelters), for B1-B2 we used a 13-item scale. We assigned a numerical value of “0” to “Not True,” “1” to “Sometimes,” and “2” to True.” Scores of 8+ of a maximum of 26 (13x2) were considered “significant.” For A2-A3, we conducted basic mathematic analyses (averages of positive and negative responses, and attendance progress). For A4, we also used a 13-item scale. We assigned a numerical value of “0” to “Not True,” “1” to “Sometimes,” and “2” to True.” Scores of 8+ of a maximum of 26 (13x2) were considered “significant.” The higher the score, the more positive the parents’ perceptions of ASAP.

A total of 130 participants ranging from the ages of 4 and 15 years old participated of ASAP (~19 children per shelter). All participants belonged to a racial/ethnic minority group. In each shelter, ASAP was implemented two days a week, two hours a day, two consecutive groups each capped at 10 children. This system allowed us to maintain structured activities with specific outcomes each day, and where participants had a defined goal to achieve, a skill to learn and develop, and final product to show their effort and commitment. In addition, TAs incorporated their individual approaches to our purposely pliable curriculum by emphasizing their area of expertise along with the children’s inclinations and interests. We developed a variety of art works ranging from the mediums of painting, drawing, masks and puppet making, dance, theatre improvisation and video. As a closure celebration at the end of each session we held the Family Day, which was a day celebration that exhibited the work of the participants and parents’ reactions to ASAP (Bourgois & Schonberg, 2009).

Results
General
ASAP consisted of a series of structured art lessons taught by 6 TAs aiming to create a collective environment of artistic exploration and learning. ASAP was guided by a curriculum based on therapeutic contemporary art practices implicating different multimedia art appreciation competencies. This art media-diversity enhanced the program’s acceptability and provided TAs with the curricular pliability needed for effective implementation across seven culturally unique transitional housing contexts. The program consisted of two sessions (Winter & Spring), each composed of a 9-week cycle of structured workshops and interventions. The Winter session was implemented in three shelters (i.e., Carmen’s, St. Peters, and Henwood), and the Spring session in four additional shelters (i.e., Ketty, Crystal’s, Wales, and Corona).

Appendix B for form. Participant’s real names (including, children, staff & TAs) are not used in this report.
Quantitative results

A1. We conducted 24 "mood scale surveys" in 3 shelters: St. Peters- n=8; Carmen- n=6; Henwood- n=10. With scores of 8+ considered "significant" leaning to poor psychological wellness, participants averaged 19.7 of 26. Unfortunately (and yet predictably) these results show significant stress in all participants surveyed (except for two participants). This is so even after having been involved in ASAP for 3 weeks at the time of the scale administration. Yet, ASAP is a 9-week program and we are confident these results manifest the complexity and weight of participants' context, which the ASAP team expected would outweigh our efforts. We decided not to re-administer the scale because it was clearly capturing variables that were beyond ASAP's reach and control. As such, it was deemed unhelpful to assess the immediate influence of our program.

A2. We conducted 47 student-led assessments asking two basic questions from students: "what did you like?" and "What could change?" Results conclusively show all students loved ASAP and wrote statements in the forms such as: "This is fun because we paint and coloring!" "Yes! The messy parts!" "I like art and love to create!" "Helping people" and "How to express yourself," among others. These reactions denote a clear alignment with the ASAP program's goal: to help children communicate through art, vent through art, and ultimately develop resilience.

A3. We conducted 9 student behavior surveys ("Strengths & Difficulties Questionnaire") in which our ethnographer (OG) assessed children participating in ASAP in realms such as "helpfulness to others," "positive and negative emotions," "gregarious and antisocial behaviors," among others. OG found 3 students displayed some level of behavioral difficulty, mostly in the "easily distracted" and "some hyperactivity" realms, which are barriers to focusing on the tasks at hand. As with A1, however, results from these surveys are inconclusive and may reflect the weight of the complex contexts in which ASAP participants are located.

A4. We conducted 15 parent-led assessments of ASAP's impact on the children's lives. We used a 13-item scale. With scores of 8+ considered "significant" leaning to more positive the parents' perceptions of ASAP, participants averaged 24 of 26. While these results cannot be generalized for only a small fraction of parents completed these evaluations, they do denote a trend of approval of ASAP.

Qualitative results

B1a. General perceptions of ASAP were gathered from 4 staff.

Staff and team [ASAP] have been very flexible to how things have been changing day-to-day. A lot of kids want to participate and their parents are upset (Staff 1).

From the beginning, Staff #1 pointed out how what was perhaps our most obvious limitation: capacity. Staff #2 also made note of this limitation and explained the hardships of managing the frustration of the parents whose children could not join ASAP. Whilst there was little we could do to remediate this limitation, it denotes how well-liked, welcomed and needed ASAP is. Moreover, explaining how in the shelter youth cannot be together unless through a structured program like ASAP, Staff 1 continued.

Art is such a stress reliever. It benefits the kids, get them out of their heads. The hour that they're in ASAP offers a big difference to restrictions because in the shelter, they are not supposed to hang out with each other, can't even hang out in the same building. ASAP provides a forum for friends.

As stated in the "significance" section of this report, we see evidence of how this kind of work is practically designed to be implemented in unstable contexts. ASAP helped these youth do community, no matter how briefly. That is an experience likely to be positively remembered and perhaps even used as a skill in the future.

B1b. Interviews with 6 TAs

It was very successful to sit them down and explain the rules and consequences of not following the rules. I was encouraging a girl who was very polite and always used please and thank you and then the other kids followed, it was beautiful (TA1).

Across the board, and despite the limitations mentioned above, all TAs perceived their work and ASAP overall as effective.

It was interesting dealing with siblings in this setting. Student 1 constantly competed with his sister and she often got distracted by what he was doing. A typical sibling rivalry dynamic. However, they were very well-behaved children. They got there promptly at 4PM and even helped me set up (TA2).

Not only were the children able to do community through ASAP, but they also brought in with them (and were welcome to do so) their personalities and behaviors, which within our pedagogical framework are not inherently defined as disruptive but rather understood and contextualized. The children clearly benefited from this pedagogical approach, and the caliber of our TAs.

B2. Thematically structured fieldnotes (OG and TAs)

OG on emotional intelligence

When I was helping Student 2, she says her mom doesn't love her and now she loves her mom because she got her Valentine's day gifts. Student 2 said her mom gave her a "light up unicorn, big chocolate" and I suggested she share it with other kids, she says she's going to share it with her siblings (OG).
During one of TA3 sessions, a TA appropriately used the Valentine’s Day theme (it was February) to engage ASAP participants. This excerpt shows how ASAP helped Student 2 vent an otherwise deeply negative and unaddressed emotion and enhanced Student 2 focus on a “sharing” action plan that helps with emotional coping and intelligence.

OG on resilience

During one of the sessions observed, Student 3 appears to be struggling with a project that involves making a heart. I engage and tell Student 3, ‘Let’s figure this out.’ Student 3 and Student 4 laugh and are silly about the activity—making a new kind of heart that pops out in the middle. Then TA3 says, ‘Making a mistake is great, in art there is no mistake’ (OG).

This is another great example of how ASAPs TAs and our curriculum’s pliability and underlying pedagogy worked to influence resilient kids. Making mistakes is embedded in the learning process and a tool for learning and improving, not surrendering. This feature was key for our efficacy.

OG on collective efficacy

During one of the sessions observed, our ethnographer documented how open (and yet structured) lessons lead to collective efficacy. TA1 lets them free roam for a while (does a 5-minute countdown). They run around and laugh with each other. They do another movement activity called mirroring. TA1 lets Student 5 share the rules for the game because he's played it before. They take turns while they play this mirroring game, where they mimic each other’s movements. TA 1 is firm and explicit when she says the make the movements considerate of the person who’s going to have to copy you. They continue to make each other laugh, and TA1 partakes. Then, TA1 transitions the group, ‘Now we’re going to sit-down and make music together’ (OG).

This interactive, structured and yet pliable exercise effectively engages students in the systematic awareness of the other. Specifically, art is used here as an awareness of the other, of being with others, and focusing on the other, being mindful of the other and getting out of yourself for a second. This was indeed a brilliant exercise on collective efficacy.

TA4 on emotional intelligence

Today, Student 8 struggles with concentration and focusing on one task. Also keeps making recurring comments regarding her mom's economic situation along with her brother (Student 7). At one moment Student 7 mentioned that Student 8 was crazy, but then apologized.

Today, the exercise revolved around rendering space. Students 7 & 8 worked on a couple of landscapes. I taught them the basics of rendering perspective and the horizon line and assisted in creating a couple of landscapes with them. Student 8 did a couple of basic forests. Student 7, besides wanting to paint Spiderman all the time, seems focused on a horror character (Slenderman) which shows up on a couple of the paintings, and which he’s painted before.

In these excerpts, TA4 notes how implicated ASAP participants’ contexts (family ones for sure) are in the process of making art. TA4 did not bring those emotional topics to the workshop, the students did. They felt safe and trusted TA4 with this intimate information. TA4 skillfully used the curriculum to welcome this emotional depth and ultimately help students develop emotional intelligence.
D3. Visual Documentantion
Notes on observations from the field as these relate to ASAP evaluation

While we qualitatively evaluated our work, we defined success as any tangible small victories that were palpable among participants. We gave special attention to physical signs of student engagement in the activities when it came to catalogue successful activities. It is difficult to engage kids in artistic activities if they feel they’re not capable of doing them. Every time a participant had a positive interaction it was important. If the participants were physically engaged, we could tell that the activity was being successful, and at this point it didn’t matter to us if the participant will complete the activity or not, but the process had the same level of importance as the final result.

Regarding constant participation in ASAP activities, if in a group of 10 kids 8 were engaged in the activity that represented a “success” for the activity itself and the TA’s performance. As our narratives show, it became really important for us to offer a safe space where participants can freely express themselves through artistic creation and develop pride in their work. Children were largely engaging with the art materials, exhibiting pride in their artistic creations and embracing an aesthetic approach, and artistic techniques. Moreover, they showed their artwork to their caretakers and families and had a positive attitude during and after the activities. Children’s desire to stay or return to the session and their level of engagement was also a noticeable sign.

More concretely on our curriculum, we were constantly aware of tensions between the curriculum and implementation and how these provide opportunities for refinement. Equipped with a pliable curricular approach, during this process we modified the curriculum including activities focused on the theme of safety in the workshop and activity time. We learned that engaging the children in brainstorming their assets and things that keep them safe as important elements to take into consideration. We also navigated relationships and expectations of curricular context, moving from structured instructions to an exploratory approach. We maintained an autonomous and democratic posture for participants whilst providing the required rules and structures to manage the children’s behavior. This way, we were able to successfully redirect sessions in which children seem disinterested into. We had responsive planning relevant to the context of the population and utilized the therapeutic properties of art education to foster resilience or the ability to cope in challenging times. Utilize the therapeutic aspects of art to help students express their needs, concerns, hopes and fantasies. We also focused on a pedagogy of play and the creation of art as a vehicle for understanding.

Conclusions

First, curriculum lessons. We learned that offering fewer instructions and even more flexible programming encouraged diverse responses and helped facilitate visual expression. It was our goal to encourage children to see themselves as change agents rather than victims of circumstances. Embracing their individual and collective assets as a source of inspiration, providing opportunities for reflection, problem solving and promote self-expression to help children cope with adversity. Our interdisciplinary approach provided avenues for observing, studying, learning and expressing through the disciplines of art. All centers have their own dynamics that we have to learn in order to work with them. We were aware of the vocabulary and potentially loaded words that could work against our goals. Essentially, in this process we developed a responsive curriculum and each TA provided their approach for the activities based on their area of expertise.

Second, the context. It was of most importance understanding the context for us to provide the adequate tools for expression and emotional coping. The TA’s had the ability to create learning experiences that make the subject matter meaningful, and support children’s intellectual, social and personal development beyond our expectations. We understood how children differ in their approaches to learning and how we could provide the specific scenarios for all of them while working with 10 kids at a time. The TA must be a reflective practitioner, where questioning, changing and flexibility was essential. Most importantly we wanted to answer How can the arts serve children living in crisis? No matter how small or short the ASAP intervention was, it will leave an impact on the kids that participated. They will remember it and reflect about it for a long time. But most importantly, we confirmed that it is through long-term implementations (longer than ASAP) that we can best reach homeless children and deliver an art education program that encourages creative learning mindful of the contexts and needs of the children.

Finally, it is clear how ASAP effectively promoted problem-solving skills and psychological wellness through artistic expression. Admittedly, the program is short and that is a noted limitation. Yet, we believe the program achieved its goals and objectives with ease and look forward for a future opportunity in which we could expand our resilience through art model.
References

Hello everyone. My name is Staff 3 and I am one of the social workers at Residence 1 and I worked very closely with Zule as well as the art instructors to ensure the success of the program.

I just wanted to take a few minutes and speak about how this program positively impacts our shelter children.

Primarily, as social workers, we always looking for what we call protective factors. As it relates to children, these are any interventions that we can put in place to ensure that the child is provided the necessary safeguards against the risk factors that are present due to their circumstances.

This can be anything from homelessness, domestic violence, bullying, and virtually anything and everything that can be a source of trauma for a child. In fact, many studies have shown that going through the shelter systems can be quite a traumatic experience for any child.

Two things that the arts and crafts program does is that it allows 1) a traumatized child to be present as children are meant to be. Please consider that when a child is not relaxed, he is living in his mind. This means that every experience he has is layered on top of this anxious and worried state. One can imagine how difficult and detrimental this is for a child's development.

Art in this sense is sort of like magic. It allows for the child, even for an hour or two, to forget all of the worries in the world and focus solely on the project at hand. And this is where all of the therapy takes place. Not so much in what they are doing but in what they are not doing which is being scared, anxious, and worried.

Secondly, in addition to allowing the child to leave his head and reconnect with his heart, the art work can also serve as an outlet for the child to express his challenging emotions. As adults we have developed the words and the sophistication to be able to manage our feelings. Well I guess that's not true for all adults. But the point is that for children who have yet to develop these faculties, art is an effective way for them to get in touch with their feelings and in a sense, validating themselves and their pain. This I'm sure most of you know, I know Julia knows, is the essence of any therapy.

Lastly, I would like to speak about one of our own children who really benefited from Loisaida's Arts and Crafts program. (And of course, as his social worker, also greatly benefitted me.)

So Student 1 came to Residence 1 a very a disturbed and angry boy. How could anyone blame him? His mother had been a victim of domestic violence at the hands of his father. Not only had he consistently witnessed the abuse of his mother but now, he had to deal with the mixed emotions of not being able to see his father. I'm sure we know that this can be especially tough for a boy who has developed a strong bond paternal bond.
As Student 1's social worker, I was tasked with ensuring that Student 1 would be provided the necessary protective factors as well as the resources to address some of the trauma that he had witnessed. Although he was already seeing a psychotherapist as mandated by his ACS Team, the one hour a week sessions were not enough to properly address what Student 1 was experiencing.

The peak of Student 1's outbursts came one day when he would not get up from the office floor. He would just lay there and scream, kicking and hitting anyone who came near him. When I called the ACS worker, she advised that I call the psychiatric unit and have him hospitalized. I am not sure if you are all aware, but this is essentially marking a child with the stigma of being mentally unstable. He would also be administered some very strong medicines.

Thankfully, Student 1's mother begged and pleaded that we do not hospitalize Student 1. With the help of the others we were able to ultimately get him off the floor and to his unit.

Fast forward a few weeks, Student 1 was now a completely different child. He would excitedly run to my desk when he came into the office and we would spend a few minutes each day talking about his artwork that he wanted me to hang up on my wall. During Loisaida's Arts and Crafts workshops Student 1 emerged as a star, helping the other children and inspiring the teachers and myself. This is where I try not to cry.

In reality, children act out only because they don't know any other way to express what they are feeling. And if we are locking these children up in psych wards after having labeled them as having behavioral problems, we are doing these children and their families a great disservice. On the contrary, if we continue to provide our shelter children with the protective factors that will ensure a safe passage through the shelter systems, we can be proud in knowing that we did our part to protect the livelihoods of the hundreds of children that we are momentarily entrusted with.

Thank you very much.

PSEUDONYMS USED IN ASAP REPORT

STAFF
Desiree – Staff 1
Jen – Staff 2
Yun – Staff 3

SHELTERS
Carmen’s – Residence 1

TAs
TA#1 – Charlene
TA#2 – Julianna
Lucrecia – TA3
Carlos TA4

STUDENTS
Christopher – Student 1
Maya – Student 2
Julieta – Student 3
Henry – Student 4
Silvestre – Student 5