

Kids learn creative skills at annual Arts Alive camp

Reagan Walpole paints the galaxy in the canvas painting class. (Kassie Simmons)

By **Kassie Simmons**

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For local children at Arts Alive summer camp last week, five days wasn't nearly enough time to get their fill.

"I'm definitely coming back next year and every year until I'm too old to do it anymore," said Claire Richards, age 7. "Next year, I want to take ballet again. It would be my third time taking it."

Many children attend the camp year after year, building on their skills from the year before. Students sometimes choose to take the same classes, but many like to try something new.

The Arts Alive camp not only helps students learn about the arts, but also gives them a creative way to nurture their mental health.

“It’s an outlet for some of them,” said dance teacher Linda Betz-Coffield. “A lot of kids have anxiety and have panic attacks, but they haven’t had any in my classes.”

The camp offers a variety of classes including canvas painting and dance, and also the lesser-known arts, such as straw art and Aborigine art.

About 140 students and volunteers attend the camp each year, which is held at West Point High School and makes use of their classrooms, art room, gymnasium and auditorium.

“I’d have to say straw art is my favorite, because I like how cool the straw looks when you place it on the paper and the creativity behind it,” said Michelle Deveaux, age 10.

The summer program started more than 10 years ago for students in first grade to 14 years old. The camp is sponsored by the Charles City/James City/New Kent/York County Farm Bureau.

Arts Alive also receives funding from the Virginia Commission for the Arts, the National Endowment for the Arts and the surrounding area governmental bodies.

“It helps kids learn a lot of new things that sometimes they might not otherwise get to learn,” Arts Alive camp coordinator Donna Kline said. “It’s a rural area, unlike Richmond, where there’s a lot of exposure to these kinds of things.”

“It’s different than the other camps,” Jessica Evelyn said as she dropped off her two children for the day.

“There’s not enough time in school to learn this stuff, so it’s extracurricular and that’s great for the summertime.”

At registration, the children chose up to four classes to take throughout the week — favorite classes include mosaics, gymnastics and princess ballet. The week closed with performances and displays of the children’s work.

Although this camp may have come to an end, many children also plan to attend the Missoula Children’s Theatre Drama Camp Arts Alive will hold in August. Up to 60 children may sign up to learn about makeup, costumes, acting and to perform in the play “Peter and Wendy” at the end of the week.

Registration for the drama camp is open until July 16 and costs \$85. To register your child, go to artsaliveinc.org.

Simmons can be reached at ksimmons@dailypress.com or [@KassieLSimmons](https://www.instagram.com/KassieLSimmons).



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