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In an old church on 6th and Ann, in need of renovation, people are doing amazing things. The church is home to DREAMS of Wilmington, an organization created to give kids in need the chance to participate in the arts, free of charge.

DREAMS opened in 1996 by its current executive director Tracy Wilkes and six founding artists. The organization now offers performing and visual arts classes to children, ages 8 to 17, in multiple sites throughout the Wilmington area. Wilkes explains, "Exposure to and participation in the arts is necessary for the education of the 'whole person.' DREAMS uses the arts as a youth development tool." Local professional artists teach classes in dance, music, painting, sculpture, creative writing, weaving and much more, striving to transcend cultural barriers and emphasize self-discipline and teamwork.

The idea for DREAMS grew out of Tracy Wilkes' life experience. Once a family therapist, Wilkes had long used the creative arts to help children and their families explore painful emotional issues. "When kids could not talk about the pain of being moved from an abusive

# Making DREAMS Come

## True: Enriching the lives of Wilmington youth

home into foster care or the death of a parent from drugs, they could draw a picture, create a poem or act out their feelings with puppets—the arts were curative."

She had firsthand experience on the ability of art to work miracles." Involvement in arts had played a major role in helping me negotiate a very difficult adolescence." I was lucky enough to have been encouraged to get involved in theater and creative writing—I really believe that art saves lives." DREAMS embodies all things that Wilkes believes in—the power of art, community building and the importance of families and children.

"I do have a spiritual bent and, for me, I feel the chance to build this organization and be involved with the families and students of DREAMS is a gift from God."

It is easy to see why an organization like DREAMS would have an immediate impact on

the community it serves. Involved kids have somewhere safe and fun to go after school. Some kids go to the DREAMS home location where several classes run everyday. Others get to participate in the program right from where they live. The organization runs outreach classes in the recreation centers of Wilmington's housing developments. Parents can breathe easy knowing their young ones are with responsible adults doing wholesome things.

But DREAMS is much more than an after-school program that fills up time before dinner. It provides a creative outlet to disadvantaged youth who otherwise would not have access to an arts edu-

cation. A 12-year-old DREAMS student offered one explanation of the benefit of the program by saying, "My teachers encourage me to follow my dreams."

Wilmington artist Deborah Cavanaugh has been working with DREAMS to create a new fundraising strategy. She finds that the teachers and staff "are creating a new idea in children's minds about themselves. That impact is the quintessential ripple effect. If you change the life of one child, you impact the lives of a hundred."

Ideally an organization that does so much good would have all the money it needs to operate. Sadly, like with most arts organizations and many non-profits, it's a struggle. DREAMS accepts individual contributions in exchange for membership, and holds a variety of fundraisers throughout the year. This year, holiday cards are part of a new initiative for raising much needed money.

The idea is simple: DREAMS students designed 24 different cards, each with a unique

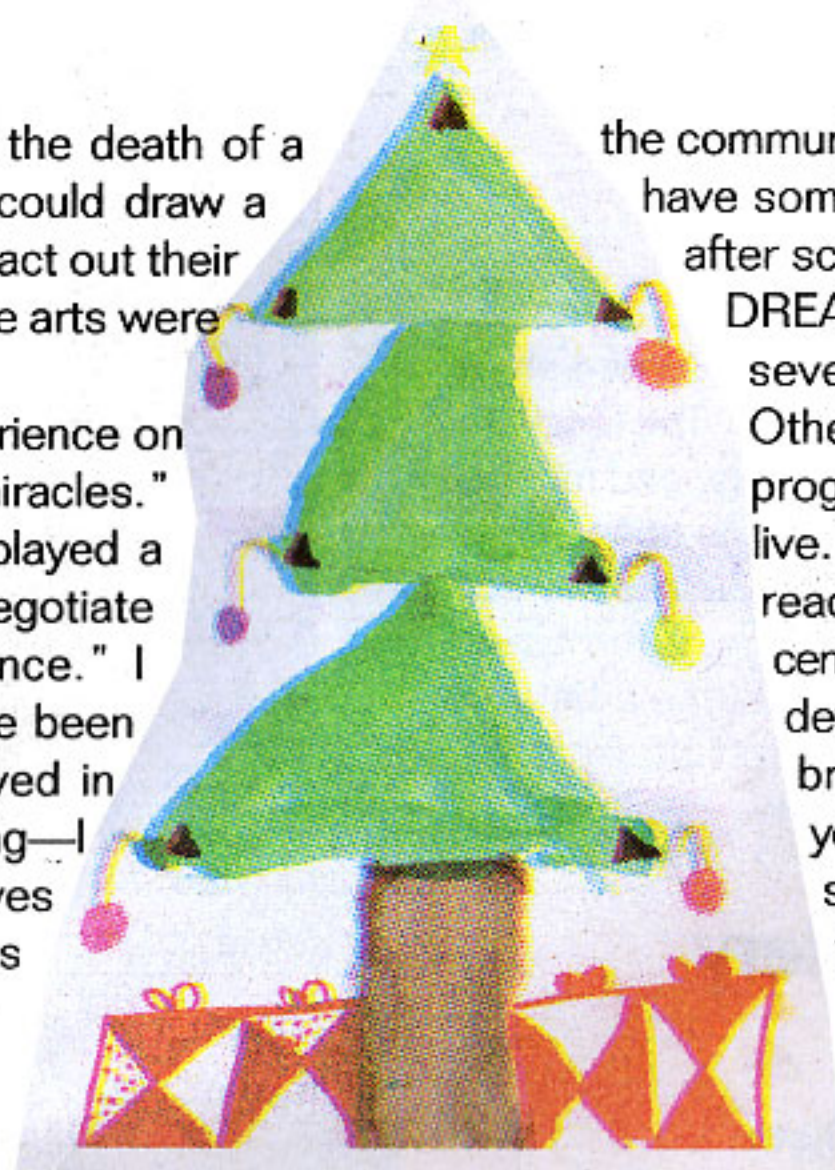
winter/holiday-related drawing, which will be sold for one dollar each and printed on demand. DREAMS is marketing the cards mainly to small businesses that make a yearly holiday card purchase anyway.

Cavanaugh came up with the idea and covered all start up costs. "One person really can change a lot of lives," she enforces. "DREAMS' people are taking folks who need that one person. What I hope to create, in my own little way, are ongoing projects that can generate the money they need to change lives." Cavanaugh believes the cards will allow people to directly participate in the spirit of the season, knowing their money is not being wasted. Since 100 percent of the profits go directly to DREAMS, the holiday cards serve as an investment in our community.

Fritzi Huber is an artist and teacher at DREAMS as well. It was in her class that the students created the artwork for the holiday cards. Out of all art that was made, only a portion could be chosen. "We all knew their would be winners and non-winners," she recalls. "The thing that struck me most about the young people involved in this project was their mutual support in a competitive setting. The naturally-talented remained modest while encouraging each other and those who were shy about their efforts. Older or more skilled kids mentored younger ones. Sisters and brothers nurtured the efforts of their siblings. New friends, summer acquaintances or the odd child out would all treat each other with a general kindness."

The benefit of the work that DREAMS of Wilmington does is evident in the holiday card project, which represents only one example of the organization's yearly efforts. Every year, over four hundred kids who might not get a chance otherwise, take part in a DREAMS class at the church. Countless other kids benefit from their outreach efforts.

On Thursday, September 1st, DREAMS students will perform "A Midsummer Night's Dream V—a Cabaret" The show is a benefit for the organization, where they will launch their new holiday card line. For more information on the show or to order holiday cards, you can contact DREAMS through [www.dreamswilmington.org](http://www.dreamswilmington.org) or by calling 772-1501.



Don't miss the launching of the DREAMS Christmas card line, created by the organization's students, which can be purchased beginning September 1st at their annual A Midsummer's Night Dream V—a Cabaret; card by Julissa Garcia.