

SENIORS MAKING ART: AN INNOVATIVE NEVILLE PLACE ASSISTED LIVING ART PROGRAM BECOMES A REALITY WITH LOCAL ARTISTS' SUPPORT

These days Jane Nardone can be found diligently creating artwork in a gorgeous space overlooking Fresh Pond. From what the staff of Neville Place know of her, until now she has never picked up a paint brush. With a little guidance, at the age of 81, she has revealed a talent that she was not aware of. She has discovered an outlet of expression that allows her to reflect and imagine despite her advanced memory loss.

Jane is just one of a group of residents at Neville Place Assisted Living that have embraced the new Neville Place Art Program, introduced just a few months ago. The vision for the program initiated as a conversation between Angela DeAngelis, Neville Place's Resident Care Director and Susan Miller-Havens, a local artist whose husband is a resident of Neville Place. Both share a background in art, with Angela having studied fine arts, and Susan having a degree in studio art. Angela explained, "We shared our stories of our life-long love of art and my desire to have a studio with classes here at Neville Place." They learned of Seniors Making Art, a Seattle-based organization that has supported art instruction classes for seniors in over 100 locations. The premise is that art is not just about craftsmanship, but rather about the feelings and memories we all have within us. Seniors of course have a wealth of life experiences to draw from, and to share with others.

At Neville Place, a group of staff members and local artists, including Susan Miller-Havens, have now joined together to make the Neville Place Art Program a reality. Angela DeAngelis describes the process they went through. "We started with a spare room in our community that needed repairs and was being used for



storage. We kept walking into the room and seeing great potential... there are floor-to-ceiling windows, high ceilings, and plenty of space for tables, easels and art materials. We felt like we had discovered a hidden treasure that was going to waste. It took some time, donations from the community, and a lot of elbow grease to renovate the space and stock the shelves with art supplies. Artists like Susan, co-founder of the program, were a tremendous help- willing to donate their own supplies and offering to teach our residents."

Classes are now held two to three times a week, taught by local artists and interns from nearby Lesley University. Lisa Jones is a Lesley student pursuing a degree in art therapy. She is completing an internship at Neville Place and teaches classes regularly. She describes her experience, "The residents come into the studio expecting to create artwork; that's a given. What they walk away with, however, are new social connections, community integration, and a sense of pride in previously undiscovered talents. My favorite thing to hear from any resident is 'I'm back to finish my piece.' This implies that not only do they remember that they were here (a milestone for those with memory loss), but that they are engaged in the process of art-making and that it is as important to them as it is to me. I think we all truly enjoy the time we spend in this space."