

TotalLink2 Community's ArtLab for EveryONE

By Alisa Martorano | Charity Spotlight



Northbrook nonprofit TotalLink2 Community believes communities thrive when individuals with disabilities have valued roles and meaningful relationships within their community. That is why the nonprofit, which helps young adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities find jobs within their community and provides social and life-long learning opportunities, began their ArtLab for EveryONE programming five years ago.

"ArtLab for EveryONE is an inclusive community of emerging and established artists that nurtures individual and group creativity, self-expression, and personal growth by creating and sharing art," explains TotalLink's Executive Director, Emily Raming.

Since the start of the pandemic, TotalLink's art programs have been virtual but continue to promote artists' expression and continued learning of artistic techniques. "During ArtLab, I have seen the artists' growth with enthusiasm. When the participants see themselves as artists, it gives them this beautiful freedom in other areas of their lives to shine, knowing they can do and be anything they want," said TotalLink's ArtLab Facilitator, Kathleen Heitmann.

TotalLink was awarded a 2020 Power the Arts grant from ComEd and invited two Chicago artists to lead virtual painting workshops for the TotalLink artists. Anastasia Mak, a contemporary expressionist artist, led a five-week class where she taught about expressionist painting techniques to create a stained glass tree painting. Impressionist artist Julia Hagen's five-week program taught the artists to create a cityscape painting in the modern Impressionist style. "It's really cool to learn from other artists. They give me the techniques, tools, and advice to express my thoughts and be creative. It's really fun to try something new," said Naomi Talsky, one of TotalLink's artists.

Several of Talsky's pieces are on display at Georgie V's Restaurant in Northbrook. "I love having my work displayed and getting comments from people in the community and my family and friends. It makes me feel proud and accomplished when my work is acknowledged," Talsky explained.

In addition to Georgie V's, TotalLink artists' work is displayed at the Restore Hyper Wellness Northbrook and Deerfield locations. "Having their artwork on display allows the artists



to contribute to the community, show independence, and create a sense of belonging. This is a way the artists can give and share of themselves. It helps to strengthen their self-confidence and esteem," said Heitmann.

Many of the pieces of art on display are for sale, and the artists receive a commission upon the sale of their work. "We are the proud owners of a collection of artwork by TotalLink artists. We love that we can support TotalLink and the individual artists by purchasing their pieces. The artwork is a source of joy for all," said TotalLink art collectors Barb and Steven Lirtzman. "The artists are so talented, and we have enjoyed watching their growth over the years. Their talent just shines."

For more information about TotalLink2 Community's ArtLab for EveryONE program, to view the artists' work, or to inquire about displaying their artwork in a business or gallery, stop by TotalLink's booth at the Northbrook Farmers Market on the last Wednesday of each month, visit www.totalink2.org, or contact info@totalink2.org.



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