

giving  
back

By Tracey Campbell

## HEALING THROUGH ART

Steffanie Lorig's Art with Heart has helped thousands of youngsters who are facing difficult futures.



ANNE DOUGHERTY

**Steffanie Lorig (right) works with a young girl on an art project as part of an Art with Heart class program.**

It was a chance meeting in 1999 that helped change Steffanie Lorig's life.

The graphic designer, who three years earlier had launched Art with Heart, a Seattle-based organization aimed at uniting artists with children in crisis, ran into a friend who had spent the night in the hospital.

The woman had been keeping a friend's daughter, Hallie, company as the youngster fought through another recurrence of cancer. The girl had first been diagnosed with cancer at 12 months old. Four years later, Hallie was once again back in the hospital battling the deadly disease.

Lorig remained troubled throughout the day, thinking about the girl so young surviving such a difficult battle with cancer. That night, Lorig had a vivid dream of making an activity book for hospitalized kids.

That dream was the genesis for what would become, "Oodles of Doodles", a book that brings to life the work of 97 illustrators — including Harry Potter's illustrator and the "I (love) NY" logo designer — in a 100-page workbook that is visually stunning and mentally stimulating. Included in the book are find-a-word games (featuring medical jargon), tags for decorating I.V. poles, face-painting patterns and doorknob signs that reveal how the patient is feeling.

Today, the book has become a major success, with more than 16,000 copies donated to hospitals

across the country. Through the book's art projects, illustrations, games and posters, Lorig wants to help these brave young people find self-empowerment and a way to talk about their feelings.

"Art is a vehicle for healing," says Lorig, who speaks with great conviction about the powers of art.

The book has also been the most famous product from Lorig's Art with Heart organization, which is aimed at empowering children in crisis through creativity and self-expression. With nearly 1,000 volunteers in its database, Art with Heart has helped thousands of children, many facing difficult futures, to smile, laugh, eat, emote, write, and paint.

The program was an outgrowth of Lorig's experience directing community outreach for the American Institute of

Graphic Artists (AIGA) in Seattle. In addition to the workbook, Lorig oversees three other programs, including a monthly self-portrait workshop for children with cancer.

"Kids can be quiet at first, but give them paint and they just explode," Lorig says. "Self portraits help them focus on who they want to become."

Another program named "Soul Food" literally brings nourishment to the streets. Artists are in charge of planning and preparing a meal that is served to homeless teens at Seattle's Orion Center. Lorig has also spearheaded an inter-generational book project that unites senior citizens, inner-city children and artists.

The organization has grown to the point that Lorig separated from AIGA last year, making Art with Heart an official nonprofit organization and is now working full time as its executive director.

"We are now a typical nonprofit, facing the reality that grants are not as plentiful as they once were," says Lorig.

Lorig is also hoping to expand the organization's board of directors from nine to as many as 15 members as she works to generate more support for its programs.

And Hallie, the child who helped inspire "Oodles with Doodles"? She's a healthy, happy 10-year-old that is celebrating four years of being cancer-free.

*Tracey Campbell is a Seattle-based freelance writer.*