

Annapolis Kids Learn About 'Contributing to the Community They Live In'

Local kids of all ages gathered to paint wooden lighthouses, which will be auctioned off to raise money for the Light House shelter.

By [Mary McGuirt](#)

[Email the author](#)

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M.J. Bruneman works on a lighthouse.

“It makes me feel good that I’m helping other people,” said 14-year-old M.J. Bruneman as he dabbled his brush with blue paint.

M.J. was one of dozens of local kids of all ages who gathered at the Light House shelter to paint wooden light houses Saturday. The kids’ work will be auctioned off at the Annapolis Rotary Club's upcoming [gala](#) next month, and the money raised will go toward the shelter.

The event was part of the [Creating Communities Arts Mentorship Academy](#).

After painting, the kids heard a powerful message from two residents at the shelter.

“It’s been a long struggle for me...,” said Jeffrey Monroe, who spoke of moving to the area from Austin, TX, and raising three girls on his own.

Monroe encouraged the kids to stay focused on their future.

“Go to school, stay in school, learn and be productive. And just be a part of programs like this and help people,” he said.

Kristen Watkins, who also lives at the shelter with her 4-year-old son, said she came there after she lost her home to foreclosure and had nowhere else to go.

She said she hoped the children learned from what she had to say.

“I just want to tell people there is hope,” she said.

After the children listened to these messages, they were encouraged to write down what they learned on a piece of paper.

Lilly Monroe, 6, stood beside her dad smiling. When she got back to her seat, she held up her yellow piece of paper. “I learned how to love people. I learned how to help people. I learned how to share with others,” she wrote on it with the help of a volunteer.

“I learned that homeless people look like regular people,” wrote Tykiara Chew, 12.

Rob Levit, founding director of Creating Communities, said he wants the kids to understand “that we’re all in a community together. And that people that are homeless are just like us and we’re just like them.”

Levit said he hopes the children learned the importance of sharing talents in a community, and that by sharing their talents they are allowing others to succeed.

“We want to make sure the kids understand that when they create something and when they use their talents it’s not just for them.”