

Volunteer Spotlight

Steff Echeverria

If you happen to walk past the Women's Wisdom Art program at Sacramento Food Bank & Family Services (SFBFS) and hear the room fill with laughter, chances are Steff Echeverria is behind the amusement. Steff brings in a contagious energy with a positive vibe to clients in the Women's Wisdom Art program every day since her internship through Sacramento City College began in the spring of 2009. "There is nothing like experience and you cannot trade hands-on experience for the world," shares Steff. She was aiming to gain experience in a creative arts field when Women's Wisdom Art volunteer opportunities appeared as a suggestion in class. Having been a client in the same program six years prior, she knew of the wonderful power art can have on a person's life. So much so, that her career path now

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has a clear direction of becoming an Expressive Art therapist. Steff exemplifies an individual with a desire to love and serve others. Hailing from San Antonio, Steff worked for the American Red Cross forming her passion for helping others. Steff proceeded to volunteer as a member of WEAVE's crisis line and helped open the WEAVE thrift store in Carmichael. Steff emphasizes the importance of giving back to the community in any way you can, even if it is as basic as making the clients in Women's Wisdom Art laugh. Steff not only volunteers multiple times a week in this program at SFBFS, but she also fills in as a substitute teacher for many art classes if an instructor is unavailable. On Fridays, she oversees three other volunteers during the week's most popular ceramics class.

Steff stresses the importance of community that accompanies the art, the healing and the experience of Women's Wisdom Art. "Our own little creative community in Women's Wisdom Art helps women overcome many challenges in their lives." Steff credits the support and encouragement from Women's Wisdom Art Program Manager, Helen Plenert. Steff shares, "Helen is the best manager I have ever had. She's very behind the scenes, allowing volunteers to connect with clients, but her energy and enthusiasm trickles down through the staff, volunteers and clients. I am grateful to be surrounded by that caliber of people. People dream of volunteer jobs like this."

When Steff's internship came to an end, she committed her time to remain a part of this creative community. She continues to be an encouraging and upbeat presence in Women's Wisdom Art. "When it comes to art as healing, it is just amazing to see what can be created by these women. We might think we are having a bad day, but when you hear some stories about what these women have endured, it just puts things into perspective. It's inspirational."



Steff (left) assists Women's Wisdom Art client Cheri with a beading project. Due to a stroke, Cheri can only use her left hand. Steff provides the assistance to create beautiful jewelry.

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