



## SFCC art students create a splash in aquatic center

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State Fair Community College students continue to leave their mark in the Center for Human Services' Jack Bluhm Memorial Aquatic Center.

Occupational therapy assistance students perform some of their required field work in the aquatic center's pool, and each of the past three years, they also have created artwork on foam core to brighten the center's environment and improve acoustics.

Two years ago, students made large acoustic art boards for the walls. Last year, they created a long beach scene mural. This year, students made smaller, decorated acoustic tiles that have been hung over the pool.

Student Candy Koonse, 50, said it took two weeks to finish the boards, and the students received material donations from Lowe's and Herrman Lumber Company. They cut down 4-foot by 8-foot sheets of foam core to squares about 18 inches on each side.

Samantha Yonley, 22, said the stars, moons, flags, geometric patterns and other designs "keep with the same format as what was here" in the other pieces. The students considered "if (therapy clients) were laying on their back, what would they like to look at?" Yonley said.

The students work in the pool with a wide range of therapy clients. Some, Yonley said, are working to overcome injury or illness that has reduced their mobility.

"We help individuals help themselves to get back to their everyday activities," she said.

They also work with clients who have cerebral palsy, are on the autism spectrum, have suffered a traumatic brain injury or need physical therapy to help them with proper use of their muscles. On Thursday, they assisted a senior group that walks in the pool to help increase their mobility.

Student Paul Arias, 49, said clients learn how to get better range of motion in the pool, and Yonley added that individuals can stretch out in the warm water, which allows the students to work with them in a safe, fun environment.

"We get kids with autism who are introverted to come out and express their feelings," Arias said. "Occupational therapy is client-centered; so we get to know our clients and what they enjoy doing, then we use it as therapy."

And while the water therapy is good for the clients, Arias sees value for the students, as well.

"It's great to see improvement, it's all about getting better," he said. "But its about friendship more than a client/therapist relationship. We grow with them as we watch them get better."

The students' field work is not restricted to the pool. Koonse said they work in different areas of field studies; she also has worked with infants, then was assigned to work in a residential center. They perform four hours of field work each week for eight weeks.

Janet Proctor, aquatic program coordinator, said the students "are doing an awesome job. They are a wonderful representation of SFCC's programs."

Arias said creating the acoustic tiles was somewhat therapeutic for the the students.

“We got to spend time together outside of class and got to know each other better,” he said.

“We got to talk about why we do what we are doing.”

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