

# Style, Health & Everything Else ...



## business feature

# Higher Art helps build and support the parent-daughter relationship through art

By Clare Marie Celano

**E**lissa Bowes moved from what could have been a promising career as an event planner to pursue art therapy, a career she felt more suited to.

Bowes said that event planning lacked the substance she needed to feel connected to and fulfilled in her work.

Bowes now works as an art therapist in her business, Higher Art, in Manalapan, having found the niche that seems carved just for her.

"I knew the minute I got into art therapy that it was a good fit for me," she said.

The art therapist, who has been practicing for eight years, has a Master of Arts degree from New York University and is a registered board-certified art therapist.

She works primarily with preteens and teenage girls, ages 7-18, teaching them and their parents how to feel better about themselves and their relationships.

"I specialize in working with preteens, low self-esteem issues, anxiety and shut-down behaviors. We work on speaking their problems rather than shutting down, and speaking their words rather than acting out. They learn to feel more confident, connected and happy again," Bowes said. "And ultimately, they enhance their relationships with family and friends and come in contact with their feelings."

Bowes' office is filled with an assortment of things that foster creativity, such as watercolors, oil paints and brushes; woodworking and sculpting materials; and more. These are the tools that she begins the process with. Initially, Bowes will speak to the parents to see what they believe the child's challenges are.

"I let the youngster take the lead and see what materials she is drawn to," Bowes advised.

"I also take a history on the phone and see if we are a good fit, and then have a consultation and collect details about the child's world, during school, with their friends, and their relationships with their family. We will talk about setting two or three goals that they really want to work on," Bowes said, and added, "I then ask them, if they can imagine life better in six months, what would they need to work on to get to that point?"

Bowes' sessions include 10-15 minutes of "talk time" before the art therapy.

"I encourage parents to list one thing that their child did since the last session that they are really proud of, and another thing that has been very difficult for them," Bowes said. "We create problem-solving skills and we all work together. We work on obstacles that keep us from getting to where



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Elissa Bowes' art therapy practice, Higher Art, helps parents and children to feel better about themselves and their relationships.

we want to be."

Bowes works hard to make sure both parents and children are completely comfortable with her, so they feel safe enough sharing their problems, emotions and feelings.

In addition to the art project for the session, Bowes may also incorporate an exercise that may be particularly helpful to the child.

After working with her, Bowes said that children feel validated and empowered.

"One of the really exciting things about art therapy is that we can tap into our creative thinking ... to help us explore and problem-solve about things in a creative way, a way that we might not have been open to before," Bowes said.

She added that she uses art as a tool to help girls express their thoughts, feelings and emotions.

"By creatively tapping into their emotions and putting words to feelings, they become more aware of the behavior. Once they become more aware of their behavior, we can then explore the different options and choices they have in their challenge/situation. This can lead to better emotional management, better decision making and ultimately positive and effective change," she said.

Bowes explained that the art process and the final art piece becomes a reflection of their experience and what they have uncovered and learned along the way.

"It can be used as a keepsake or a way to reflect upon how far they have come. It also serves as a bridge between therapist and client," Bowes said, adding that the artwork is also a nonthreatening way for them to share and tell their stories.

"It gives them the opportunity to change their story, create a new ending or explore the possibility of something even more fulfilling," she said.

In addition to creating Higher Art, Bowes developed and implemented the first children's social skills art therapy program for the Community YMCA in Monmouth County and brings art therapy services to many other organizations throughout New Jersey. Through her partnership with Essex County's Youth Consultation Service and the Bergen County Special Services School District and Division of Family Guidance, she has had extensive experience with children, adolescents and young adults with emotional, behavioral and social difficulties.

Bowes has worked in traditional and alternative settings both in New York City and New Jersey, including in-patient and day-treatment programs, community outreach, schools, private homes, and grief and bereavement summer programs. She is an active member of the American Art Therapy Association and the New Jersey Art Therapy Association.

When she is not working on her own art, she makes time to fund-raise for causes she is passionate about. She is inspired by the life-affirming and positive effects creating art has had in her own life and is dedicated to bringing the healing benefits of art therapy to her community.

Higher Art is located at 28 Plaza 9, Manalapan. For more information, call 732-252-5489 or visit [www.higherartnj.com](http://www.higherartnj.com).

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