Taking your child to a museum is difficult enough as it is. You have to explain the rules, be prepared for an unexpected tantrum, and of course, you want to ensure that the outing be a great overall learning experience for your child—somewhat daunting tasks when attempted simultaneously. Now imagine taking 13 youngsters, ages 3-5—many of whom have never gone to a museum before—to the Metropolitan Museum of Art. Sounds like quite an undertaking, right?

However, these kids aren’t screaming their way through the halls. Nor are they whining and saying they want to go home. And they certainly aren’t complaining about how bored they are. Rather, they’re fascinated by what’s around them, and they’re curious to learn and see more.

The opportunity to visit world-class museums isn’t as readily available to all families in NYC as outsiders may presume, which is why BronxWorks and ArtMuse have paired together to create an art education initiative that gives urban kids fun and educational field trips to art museums throughout the city. While many families struggle with all of the difficulties that come with homelessness, children in particular are very vulnerable to various negative risk factors. Through ArtWorks, kids experiencing homelessness are exposed to settings that they wouldn’t otherwise have a chance to explore—they get to expand their education, and are hopefully inspired to stay in school.

Families come to the BronxWorks shelters in times of crisis, which is also the time when children tend to be the most vulnerable. By exposing these children to the arts, their critical thinking and problem-solving skills are improved, and they’re given a chance to express themselves through art, an opportunity which many children in shelters lack.
The Art Works program provides children from BronxWorks's three residences with fun and inspirational trips to museums and galleries they might not otherwise have the chance to attend. The program provides 24 total trips in the course of one year and each of the three family residences partakes in eight trips over the year, which breaks down to two trips every three months, one for younger children (ages 3-5) and one for older kids (ages 6-17).

On Friday, July 19, I joined BronxWorks and their youngest group of kids—a sweet crew of 13 kiddos ages 3-5—at the Met for an art tour. While some of them had gone to the Met on a previous ArtWorks tour, many of the children had never even been to a museum before, and they were fascinated by what surrounded them.

At the start of the tour, we were led to a painting made entirely up of shapes and colors. After all of the kids were seated, the instructor, Natasha, asked the kids to raise their hands and tell us if they saw any shapes or colors.

“I see a rectangle!” one of the kids shouted, and he was handed a paper rectangle.

“The man’s chair is yellow,” one girl stated, and she was handed a yellow paper circle.

Once all of the kids had pointed out a shape or color (some with the help of an adult), we split up into two groups. Just as the painting was made up of only shapes, the kids were instructed to work together to make their own “painting” as well, using only the paper shapes they had been given. Throughout the two groups, the kids created a clown, a cat, and even a train.

Afterward, the kids learned all about primary colors and how all of the colors that artists use come from mixing blue, yellow, and red. The little ones were fascinated.

By this point in the morning, everyone was ready to take a stab at their own piece of art work—using only shapes and colors, of course! Each child was handed a piece of paper in the color of their choice and were told they could decorate it however they liked using stickers and colored pencils. While some kids chose to simply randomly place stickers on their paper, others attempted to make figures out of the shapes, just like they had learned about. By the end, each child had a piece of artwork of their own to take home and be proud of. Some even thought their pictures were worthy enough to hang on the walls of the Met!

While the outline of a typical tour may sound fairly simple, a trip to a museum like the Met can inspire an interest in the arts, and possibly a lifelong love of learning.

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