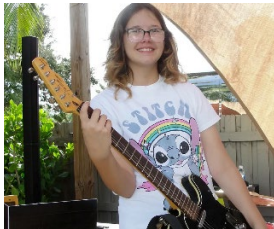


Englewood Coalition Turns to the Arts to Keep Kids Safe and Inspired



What began as a grassroots response to the fentanyl crisis in our country and the issue of teen substance abuse a decade ago has grown into a local and valuable 501c3 utilizing community partnerships.

The Englewood Community Coalition, formed to keep the Greater Englewood area “safe, healthy and drug free,” was launched after Executive Director Kay Tvaroch secured federal funding through the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Under the leadership of Kay, along with Kim Clark and Jeff Dillon, and the proactive Board of Directors, the group began offering prevention programs ranging from smoking cessation, drug education and beach cleanups and other healthy living alternatives.

In 2023, Tvaroch helped expand the coalition’s mission by launching Englewood Creative Arts, an initiative designed to give children and families healthy, positive alternatives through arts education.

“Our goal is to create a seminal moment in a child’s life that takes them in a new direction,” said Jeff Dillon, Director of Community Alliances ECA. “If they have a dream of becoming a professional actors or musician, we encourage that; however, ECA’s goal is to help kids appreciate the arts, build confidence, and make healthy choices.”

The first classes, Saturday guitar lessons at Elsie Quirk Library, launched in September 2024, quickly filled up. Since then, the program has expanded to include visual arts, drama, dance and drumming. Through partnerships with libraries, local musicians, theater instructors and dance academies, the classes

are offered at little or no cost to families. Loaner guitars are even provided for children who don't have instruments at home.

The coalition also collaborated this summer with Sarasota County libraries on the "Color Our World" program, combining art, dance and drama workshops. Parents praised the initiative, with some saying it was the first opportunity their children had to experience structured creative programming in Englewood.

As the fall session begins, classes are scheduled at both Elsie Quirk and Charlotte libraries, with local musicians Paul Quinn and Kellen McCarthy leading guitar instruction. Drama and visual arts programming are also expanding, thanks to a growing roster of community partners.

Beyond classes, coalition members remain active at community events, from hurricane-preparedness fairs to Fellowship Church festivals and Englewood's annual Halloween Safe Walk.

The organization will host its annual community meeting late in October, in Rotonda West featuring dinner, speakers and recognition of local leaders.

Long-term, the coalition hopes to establish a permanent arts center in Englewood. A previous space was lost to Hurricane Ian, and leaders say having a dedicated facility would allow year-round after-school and weekend programming.

"Ultimately, we want a place where kids can come and be exposed to all the Creative Arts — anything that gives them a healthy outlet," Jeff said.

Residents interested in volunteering, donating or enrolling children in classes can find information on the Englewood Community Coalition and Englewood Creative Arts Facebook pages or their website: englewoodcreativearts.org.