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After-School Art

Linda Lee
t is 4 p.m. on a December afternoon and a dozen middle-school students cluster around a bucket of gooey white liquid at the front of a classroom at Legacy Charter School in Greenville. Each clutches an unglazed clay plate as they await instructions about what to do next.

Standing over the bucket, Emily McPeters ’18, a Furman art major with a focus in ceramics, dips each plate one by one into the white goop in the bucket. She explains that the liquid is a ceramic glaze that will need to dry before the students can move on to the next step.

These middle schoolers (fifth to eighth grade), led by Furman art students, are all participants in an after-school art club, a partnership between Legacy Charter School and Furman that began last September.

The idea for the Art Club was hatched when Jessica Auguste, the coach of Legacy’s girls’ basketball team, met Ross McClain, chair of Furman’s Art Department, last summer when she was working at an on-campus sports camp. In the course of their conversation, McClain learned that the Legacy Charter School was short an art teacher.

McClain mentioned this to Marta Lanier, his department’s art program specialist, and the wheels began to roll. She connected with Elizabeth Toney, instructional coach and special education coordinator at Legacy Charter School, and proposed an after-school art club that would meet every other week.

Thirty Legacy students signed up for the club, which was taught by a core group of five art majors. Lanier and the Furman students designed the curriculum, and the university provided the needed materials for each session.

Back in the Legacy Charter classroom, the middle school-
ers retrieve their plates after
the glaze is dry and take them
to their seats. Now comes the
fun part: painting the plates.
Laurie, a seventh-grader,
is painting a “pirate fox” on
her plate, while Stephanie
(seventh grade) brushes on a
rainbow, and Aaliyah (sixth
grade) decorates her plate
with a snowflake. “I like
making the plates,” Laurie
says, “I can use my own
ideas and no one tells me
what to do.”

Now Alexis Hawkins ’17 demonstrates how to stitch a journal designed by one of the students. (Bottom) Listening closely to a lesson on journal-making.

Toney sees it from a
different perspective. “Our
school’s mission is that every
student goes to and com-
pletes college, so being able
to build a relationship with
the Furman students is so
beneficial to them.”
The middle schoolers,
though, aren’t thinking that
far ahead. “I love Art Club,”
Stephanie exclaims, “be-
cause we can do whatever we
want—and I like getting my
hands messy!”

The global experience is
closer than you think. You
don’t even need to buy a plane
ticket to immerse yourself in
other cultures.
That’s what I discovered
when I interned with the
Catholic Charities Diocese
of Charlotte Refugee
Resettlement Office this
past summer. For the first
time in my life, I, a white upper-
middle-class male, was in the
minority. And it was liberating.
People who didn’t look
like me, sound like me or have
a background similar to mine
surrounded me. I worked with
the most diverse group of clients
and coworkers in my brief work
history. Many of my colleagues
were former refugees, and
almost all of them spoke at least
one foreign language, including
Arabic, Farsi, Pashtu and
Swahili. Our clients came from
countries all over the world,
including Burma, Bhutan, Syria,
Iraq, Afghanistan and Somalia.
I found all of this diversity
without even having to leave the
Southeast, where I have lived
the majority of my life. Despite
everything I had heard about a
sudden increase in immigrants
and refugees, I realized that
they have been a part of our
communities for years. As
I learned in my American
Immigration History class at
Furman, every American comes
from an immigrant family,
myself included.
Through my time working
with the refugees, helping
them with job and benefits
applications, apartment bills
and bus orientations, and
adjusting to the culture, I saw
what America can mean to an
immigrant. For some, it is
just a safe place away from
the terrorism that dictated their
lives in their home countries; for
others, it is a land of opportunity
greater than anything that was
ever available to them before.
I doubt I would have been
prepared to help our clients
this summer if it weren’t for the
classes I had taken at Furman
before starting my internship,
like Poverty Studies 101, a
required course for all poverty
studies minors. The core
concepts of the class helped
me grapple with the everyday
struggle of poverty, the
challenge of education, and the
search for meaningful gainful
employment that I saw each one
of our clients go through.
My exposures to such
struggles in the internship and
my classes at Furman have
taught me much about the world
and myself. Being a student
at Furman has given me the
opportunity to make the most of
my college experience by fully
immersing myself in the areas
of my interest while engaging
with the backgrounds and
experiences of others.

About the Author
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