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Art reveals a deeper world, and a new way to communicate

By Jeannie Kever

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Forget the artist as a tortured soul. [Kate Matthiesen](#) is happy to show off her work.

"I'm the artist," she says, sweeping an arm to indicate dramatic works in acrylic and pastel, sometimes incorporating objects, letters and words.

Matthiesen's paintings have been accepted into juried shows and sell for thousands of dollars. She had her first one-woman show when she was 22.

But her life is about more than art. She is an animal lover, a volunteer at the [Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals](#). She works only with cats, deeming the dogs "too annoying," although she dotes on Finn, a golden retriever.

Matthiesen shares the dog with two housemates and [Donna Wilson](#), house parent at their home near the [Monarch School](#), where the three young women have learned to hold internships and jobs and generally set an example for younger students. She also volunteers at her neighborhood YMCA.

Matthiesen was 16 when her parents approached Monarch's founder, [Marty Webb](#), about enrolling their daughter, who has pervasive developmental and language delays.

Earlier attempts to interest Matthiesen in art hadn't seemed to work, but that changed in 2004 when an art teacher handed her black paper and oil pastels.

Months later, the teacher approached David and Andy Matthiesen with their daughter's work, and later sent images to the [Jung Center](#). She was chosen for a one-woman show there in 2006.

It was a career- launching moment, but it was also more than that.

For the first time, she was judged by what she could do, rather than by what she couldn't do.

"Not only had the art come out of her, but this whole new person," Andy Matthiesen said.

The "new" Kate Matthiesen, now 27, is busy - painting in a studio at her parents' house, volunteering at the SPCA and the Y, juggling chores at home with responsibilities and field trips through Monarch.

Several nights a week she and her housemates, [Patricia Threatt](#) and [Emily Hayes](#), join friends from other houses in the school's transitional living program for dinner.

Painting gave her a way to communicate.

"I had often said, if I could have one wish, it would be to be in Kate's head for an hour, to understand what's up there," Andy Matthiesen said. "I don't have to say that now. It's red and gold. There are letters. There's lots of writing. A lot of it is hidden, but it's all there."

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