

# News & Views

## PUBLICLY SPEAKING

### A LETTER FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



We're nearly two years into the COVID-19 pandemic, a new normal has started setting in, and the Housing Authority of the City of Pittsburgh (HACP) is working harder than ever to promote health, safety, and a better quality of life for our residents, staff, and communities. Working together with a number of partners and organizations, we've mobilized to respond to evolving challenges and rise to the occasion.

As they have since the start of the pandemic, our staff continues to work diligently to provide the highest quality services possible. From wellness check-ins to food deliveries and on-site health and wellness events, our staff continually finds new ways to

serve our communities and improve the lives of our residents. We have faced a number of challenges these last two years, but the strength and resiliency of our staff has allowed us to navigate the bumps in the road without slowing down. Our mission to serve the people of Pittsburgh has continued uninterrupted.

In recent months, that mission has meant working with everyone possible to get "shots in arms" and promote vaccination. We've worked with organizations like Gateway Health Plan and the North Side Christian Health Center to host vaccination events, provide vaccination incentives and connect residents with reliable and accurate information about the COVID-19 vaccines. Our efforts have improved vaccination rates in our communities, strengthened residents' immunities and helped protect vulnerable neighbors.

Our community services are making a difference, connecting people to helpful resources, putting them on the path to self-sufficiency, and building strong community relationships. The Resident Self-Sufficiency and Resident Employment Programs have given people the opportunities they need to pursue their dreams. Clean Slate E3 empowered young scholars, providing scholarships and support for their higher education. And community events like the Day of Dignity, KaBloom, and Health Awareness Days brought people together to strengthen their relationships and combat the social isolation of the past year and a half.

The future looks bright, with a number of new developments breaking ground. Construction began on Phases 3 and 4 of the Larimer Choice Neighborhood Initiative, which includes the redevelopment of the historic Larimer School. In East Liberty, the redevelopment of the former B'Nai Israel Synagogue will bring more housing to the East End. Together, the two innovative initiatives will add over 100 new units of affordable housing to rapidly changing neighborhoods.

The HACP's recent efforts have centered around one question: how can we uplift the lives of our residents and leave our communities in a better place for the next generation? With that premise at the forefront, our staff and our community partners have remained focused on expanding our housing stock while simultaneously addressing service needs within our communities.

Caster D. Binion  
Executive Director

Housing Authority of the City of Pittsburgh  
Winter 2021/2022

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Everyone digs in to break ground on the redevelopment of the historic Larimer School.

# Residents, Staff, and Stakeholders Celebrate the New Future of the Former Larimer School at Larimer Choice Phase 3 and 4 Groundbreaking

This October, staff, residents, and community stakeholders gathered in Larimer to celebrate the groundbreaking for the final development phases in the Larimer Choice Neighborhood Initiative. Phases 3 and 4 will redevelop the former Larimer School into a new housing fixture, adding 84 new units of mixed income housing to a rapidly changing neighborhood, 80 percent of which will be affordable. These new units, set to be completed in early 2023, are on top of the 200 housing units that have already been completed as part of earlier phases.

The event gave special attention to community leaders like Ms. Betty Lane and Ms. Donna Jackson, who drove the Larimer Consensus Group to fight for the redevelopment of the Larimer School.

"I have lived in this community for 50 years," said Ms. Lane. "I'm so glad that I'm still here and able to see this vision come to life."

Part of that vision is making important services more accessible to the Larimer community, giving residents the opportunity to live prosperous lives. Partnerships with organizations like Urban Strategies have been instrumental in realizing these goals. Over the last year, Urban Strategies has been working directly with families to address issues such as

food insecurity, bridging the digital divide, and connecting people to rent relief programs.

"We have seen economic mobility, growth, and improvement in health and safety," said Roshia Furnace, a Family Support Specialist at Urban Strategies. "This phase is the continuation of years of planning, implementation, and results."

The Larimer Choice Neighborhood Initiative would not be possible without the help of the countless collaborations the project has forged. Collaborators such as the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, the City of Pittsburgh, the Larimer Consensus Group, the Kingsley Association, the Urban Redevelopment Authority, Urban Strategies, Inc., the Allegheny County Department of Human Services, and Pittsburgh Public Schools have come together to empower the residents of Larimer and East Liberty.

"This project supports the residents' vision to ensure that all of our neighborhoods are the most livable, the most prosperous, and the most sustainable that they can be," said Lindsay Powell, Assistant Chief of Staff to Mayor William Peduto. "It has been a tremendous partnership of government and community leaders within all of our neighborhoods. We are so excited to finally break ground in this next and final phase."



The Larimer School redevelopment is part of the larger Larimer Choice Neighborhood Initiative.



The old school has been a centerpiece of the neighborhood for years, and will now have a new life.



Once completed, Phases 3 and 4 will add 84 new units to the neighborhood, 80% of which will be designated affordable.



# “Believe That You Can Do It”

## How a Former HACP Resident Forged His Path to Owning a Business

Marcus Kennedy, a former participant in HACP’s Resident Employment Program (REP), is living proof of how working hard can help you overcome challenging circumstances, and how HACP is more than just a place to live, but also a path to launch.

Unable to finish school for HVAC services, Mr. Kennedy approached REP Coordinator Lloyd C. Wilson, Jr in 2014 to ask for help getting a job in construction. He said that Mr. Wilson went out of his way to find an opportunity and get him a job in the field he wanted, something that would change the course of Mr. Kennedy’s life forever.

After working in new construction for a few years, Mr. Kennedy decided to go back to school and finish what he had started. He was determined to complete his schooling and get his certification for HVAC services, all while providing for his wife and five children. During that time, Mr. Kennedy worked with Central Mechanical four days a week, in addition to attending classes in the evening.

“Once you put in the hard work, in the end you see the fruits of your labor,” Mr. Kennedy said about the long days he experienced. “Go through the hard part and enjoy the benefits later.”

He graduated in 2018 with certification for HVAC services and began working with Giordani Heating & Cooling, until he was laid off due to an overall lack of work in the city. Again, Mr. Kennedy’s dedication to himself and his family motivated him to find a solution. That’s when, in 2019, he decided to start his own HVAC business: Revive Heating & Cooling.

Mr. Kennedy is humble about his success. His work is more about helping others than his own personal victories and gains. He is deeply committed to helping other people that were in his position understand that they can do more than they might think.

“I want to be the person that shows people that you can change, you can make a difference, you can actually provide for your family,” he said.

Mr. Kennedy understands what it is like to feel stuck, nailed to your past, unable to escape your circumstances or the ideas you have of yourself. He spoke candidly about his struggles finding good jobs while having a record and other barriers to success. Those barriers may be challenging to overcome, but Mr. Kennedy wants to be the person that breaks them down for other people.



Working with HVAC systems as part of the REP, combined with a little hard work, changed Mr. Kennedy’s life.

While owning a business can come with its own challenges, Mr. Kennedy knows that he can work through the things that come his way.

“It’s a mindset,” he said. “You have to believe that you can do that thing.”

For more information about the Resident Employment Program and how it can help you reach your employment goals, contact Lloyd C. Wilson, Jr. at [Lloyd.wilson@hacp.org](mailto:Lloyd.wilson@hacp.org) or visit [hacp.org/programs-services/resident-employment](http://hacp.org/programs-services/resident-employment).





Northside Christian Health Center provided vaccinations at the Northview Heights event.



HACP and Gateway's COVID-19 outreach events gave people the opportunity to ask questions and share experiences they've had with COVID.



Dr. Anita Edwards, M.D. answered resident questions about COVID-19 and the vaccines before an outdoor movie night at Pennsylvania-Bidwell.

# Working With Gateway Health Plan, HACP Helps Residents Get the Vax and Get the Facts

We're nearly two years into the COVID-19 pandemic, and HACP is still working hard to promote public health and keep our residents safe and well informed. Though we've settled into a new normal, people still have questions about COVID-19, new virus variants, and the different vaccines available. To connect residents with reliable and trustworthy information, HACP partnered with Gateway Health Plan and developed a public outreach campaign that centers resident concerns and voices.

"We wanted to meet residents where they are," said HACP Chief Community Affairs Officer Michelle Sandidge. "We didn't want to assume what their questions would be or what concerns they would have. We wanted to listen to their questions, their stories, and then uplift their voices."

The collaborative campaign had two components: in-person information and vaccination events, and the production of a public service announcement (PSA) that shared residents' experiences with COVID-19. The two in-person events, in Northview Heights and Pennsylvania-Bidwell, featured Dr. Anita Edwards, M.D. of Gateway Health Plan, who hosted a presentation with general information about COVID and an accompanying question and answer session.

"I'm here to answer your questions," she told residents. "Ask about whatever you want to know."

From questions about vaccine safety to mask-wearing, Dr. Edwards helped clear any confusion and made sure residents were presented with accurate, up-to-date information on the ever-evolving science driving COVID-19 safety efforts.

Following the information session, vaccinations were offered on-site. A number of residents received their first or second vaccine dose, boosting their immunity and protecting their neighbors. Residents who attended the information sessions and got their second vaccine dose (or showed proof of vaccination) received a gift card for each activity. Residents who only got their first dose could later show proof of their full vaccination and get their second gift card then.

The in-person events were also community events. In Northview Heights, 412 Food Rescue delivered Grab n' Go meals. In Pennsylvania-Bidwell, the event was followed by an Outdoor Movie Night.

"People really came to discuss these things, get vaccinated, and just be together," said Ms. Sandidge. "We owe Dr. Edwards our gratitude for presenting essential information in a manner that we all could understand and relate to, and for taking the time to listen to the unique questions and concerns posed by our residents. This is the type of lively, honest discussion that helps us reconnect as a community and safely navigate the dangers posed by COVID."

To supplement these in-person events, HACP and Gateway Health Plan worked together to interview residents, collect their stories, and create an insightful PSA video that shares information about COVID-19 and people's pandemic experiences. This impactful video is playing on digital signage throughout our communities, giving the residents who participated the ability to speak directly to their neighbors across the city.

HACP and Gateway Health Plan share a deep commitment to public health and keeping our residents safe. Plans are already underway to connect HACP residents with a broader scope of public health programming coming in 2022, made possible through the long-standing partnership between the two organizations.

A Northview Heights resident proudly shows off her vaccine card.



To watch the PSA video, visit [bit.ly/HACPCovidPSA](https://bit.ly/HACPCovidPSA)

# COVID-19: MYTHS AND FACTS

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a major impact on our community and our neighbors. You deserve accurate information to make informed decisions. Here's what you need to know.

**MYTH:** COVID-19 is the same as the flu.

**FACT:** Though they have similar symptoms, they are different viruses and COVID-19 has a higher fatality rate.

**MYTH:** Only older adults should worry about COVID-19.

**FACT:** COVID-19 affects older adults at higher rates, but people of any age can get sick, including young children.

**MYTH:** You don't need to wear a face mask to protect yourself.

**FACT:** Masks prevent the spread of COVID-19, keeping you, your family, and your neighbors safe.



**MYTH:** COVID-19 vaccines are unsafe and contain harmful ingredients.

**FACT:** The vaccines were developed with rigorous procedures to ensure safety, and contain no harmful ingredients. Evidence shows that COVID-19 vaccines slow the spread of the disease and prevent people from getting severely ill.



For more information to keep your family safe,  
go to [alleghenycounty.us/coronavirus](https://alleghenycounty.us/coronavirus) or  
call the Allegheny County Health Department at 412-687-2243



# Clean Slate E3 Awards Scholarships to 14 Students and Raises Funds to Continue Expanding Educational Opportunities



This summer, Clean Slate E3, HACP's non-profit affiliate, disbursed scholarships to 14 young HACP residents for the 2021/2022 academic year, including funds for six new students. These funds will empower HACP's young scholars to pursue their higher education goals despite any obstacles they may face.

"It allows me to attend Robert Morris University with a full ride, debt free," said Rynique Durham, part of the most recent class of scholarship recipients. "It is such a relief for my family and I knowing that I can go through school without worrying about how I will pay for it."

HACP established Clean Slate E3 in 2009 to expand educational programming and opportunities that enrich the lives of HACP youth. Clean Slate E3 got its name from the long-standing Clean Slate program, which began in 1998 with the goal of steering young residents away from drug use and gang-related crime.

"One thing I can remember and love to this day," said former Clean Slate participant Jasmyn Sledge, "was the opportunity and enjoyment it brought to so many children's faces to be able to participate in this program."

Students who are awarded the scholarship attend universities across the United States, including Howard University in Washington, D.C. and Lincoln University in Oxford, Pennsylvania. Clean Slate E3 partners with NEED to disburse \$20,000 over four academic years. Since its inception, the program has awarded over \$400,000 in scholarships to HACP youth.

One student, JaMese L. Williams, received the Officer Calvin Hall Memorial Scholarship. This scholarship began in 2020 in memory of Officer Calvin Hall, who was killed while serving his community in July 2019. Created in partnership with Officer Hall's family, the Officer Calvin Hall Memorial Scholarship is awarded to a resident of Northview Heights or Allegheny Dwellings -- the communities Officer Hall served during the last year of his life. JaMese will use the funds to study Criminal Justice at Alabama A&M University in Huntsville, AL.

"Due to your support, high school students within Northview Heights have an incredible opportunity to further their education without severe financial constraints," said Eugenia Miller, Officer Hall's sister. "Calvin would be so proud to be honored in such a special way, as he valued his education and his community."

The Clean Slate E3 Scholarship Program's success hinges on public support, and our neighbors rose to the occasion in 2021. Despite COVID-19 still posing many challenges, Clean Slate E3 was able to raise over \$62,000 through its Virtual Fundraiser in August. These efforts ensure the fund is able to assist Pittsburgh's low-income students for years to come.

"Our communities are full of bright students with bright futures," said Michelle Sandidge, Chief Community Affairs Officer for HACP. "For many of them, the Clean Slate E3 Scholarship Program opens doors that would otherwise be closed."

For more information about the Clean Slate E3 Scholarship Program, visit [hacp.org/programs-services/scholarship-fund](https://hacp.org/programs-services/scholarship-fund).

The Housing Authority of the City of Pittsburgh  
Congratulates the 2021 Clean Slate E3  
Scholarship Recipients

**CLEAN SLATE E3**



**Ndora Desueza-Moon**  
HCV  
Reach Cyber Charter School  
Liberty University



**Naomi Benita**  
Northview Heights  
Taylor Alderdice  
Indiana University of PA



**Ja Mese Williams**  
Allegheny Dwellings  
Pittsburgh Perry  
Alabama A & M



**Paris Bowles**  
Bedford Dwellings  
University Prep  
LaRoche University



**RyNique Durham**  
HCV  
Pittsburgh Westinghouse  
Robert Morris University



**Mekka Lloyd**  
HCV  
Pittsburgh Obama  
Howard University



# New Housing Set to Come to East End as Part of B’Nai Israel Synagogue Redevelopment

Once completed, the initiative will add 45 new units, 38 of which will be affordable, and a sustainable community space. (Artist’s Rendering)



The historic B’Nai Israel Synagogue will be transformed into sustainable, mixed-income housing and a new space for community.



Stakeholders grabbed their shovels to officially break ground on the exciting development.



HACP Executive Director Caster D. Binion joined stakeholders to celebrate the new future for the former B’Nai Israel Synagogue.

A new day is dawning for the former B’Nai Israel Synagogue in the Garfield neighborhood. Together with the City of Pittsburgh, the Urban Redevelopment Authority, Beacon Communities LLC., Allies & Ross Management and Development Corporation, and the Pennsylvania Housing Finance Agency, HACP is part of the team redeveloping the historic building into new and affordable housing. This August, stakeholders converged on the old congregation to commend the groundbreaking of this innovative development.

“The structure and character of the historic synagogue and adjoining school buildings can now continue to be an important asset for the neighborhood,” said HACP Executive Director Caster Binion. “More importantly, this adaptive reuse & rehab development will create a vibrant mixed-income housing community by adding affordable rental homes for low-income families and individuals in this transitional location where Garfield, East Liberty and Bloomfield converge.”

There’s a lot of potential in the old building, and the development team plans to both utilize unique architecture and modernize the site. The Rotunda, for example, can hold

up to 1,000 people and was once the site of worship activities, but is now set to host art, classes, and performances. As part of HACP’s commitment to sustainability, the development will also adhere to the highest standards of green building, becoming both Enterprise Green Communities and Passive House Certified.

“People are interested in gathering spaces for communities,” said Michael Polite, executive vice president of Beacon Communities’ Pittsburgh office. “When it is up and operating, it’ll be a center point for the neighborhood and engage people from all over the region,”

HACP provided over one million dollars to the development as part of its PBV/Gap Financing Program, funding 13 project-based voucher units out of a total of 45. The PBV/Gap Financing program provides rental operating subsidy and last resort gap financing loans for the successful development of high quality, affordable rental units in the City of Pittsburgh. In addition, 25 other units will be subsidized by other stakeholders, bringing the total number of affordable units to 38. Construction is set to be completed by the fall of 2022.



In Northview Heights, people lined up to take advantage of the various services and resources available.



UPMC made an appearance, even hosting a vaccine clinic in Arlington Heights.



These events connected residents with critical resources, like the helpful people at the Center for Victims.



All of US was one of the providers that attended the Health Awareness Days across the city.

# Emergency Preparedness and Health Awareness Days

## Connect Residents With Critical Health Resources

At the heart of HACP's mission is providing impactful services alongside a place to live. Pursuing that mission means partnering with community groups and organizations to bring helpful and meaningful resources directly to residents.

This fall, HACP worked with groups like the Minority Emergency Preparedness Task Force (MEPTF), the Center for Victims, UPMC, Ursuline Support Services, Gateway Health Plan, and the Allegheny County Health Department to host emergency preparedness and health awareness events across the city.

In Arlington Heights, HACP worked with the MEPTF to distribute emergency preparedness materials and relevant giveaways to encourage healthy living. The event, which was part of wider Preparedness Month programming, featured collaborations like a UPMC-hosted COVID-19 vaccination clinic that provided gift cards as an incentive for vaccination.

MEPTF was founded in 2008 by Rev. Eileen Smith, RN after she witnessed the devastation of Hurricane Katrina. Rev. Smith was struck by how a lack of emergency preparedness led to so many African Americans losing their lives, and began advocating for the specific emergency preparedness needs of vulnerable populations. HACP has collaborated with MEPTF since its inception, ensuring that our residents stay safe and healthy.

To bring these same benefits to other communities, HACP hosted Health Awareness Fairs in Allegheny Dwellings, Bedford Dwellings, Homewood North, and Northview Heights. These events connected residents with vital resources and each other, combatting health inequities and lingering social isolation.

HACP will continue to work diligently to develop and implement emergency preparedness and health awareness initiatives like these to fulfill our mission of improving residents' quality of life.





Day of Dignity connected residents with COVID-19 vaccines.

# Northview Heights Day of Dignity Brings Resources and Neighborly Fun to Somali Bantu Community

Throughout the fall of 2021, Islamic Relief USA hosted a series of events nationwide as part of the Day of Dignity campaign to focus on community and giving back. One of those events took place here in Pittsburgh, where HACP and the United Somali Bantu of Greater Pittsburgh (USBGP) worked together to create a one-stop shop for health, family, and other needs for the Somali Bantu community in Northview Heights.

“We’ve been isolated for a whole year due to COVID, so it’s refreshing for people to come and see each other and enjoy each other’s company,” said Siraji Hassan, an organizer for the event. “That’s what our culture is all about — enjoying each other’s company.”

The Day of Dignity, held on November 13, 2021, brought neighbors together in a veritable celebration of community, but it also connected them with critical resources like COVID-19 vaccinations, flu shots, and hot meals. HACP often works with groups like Islamic Relief USA and the United Somali Bantu of Greater Pittsburgh to ensure that its immigrant communities have their needs met, and to overcome any cross-cultural barriers.

“We care deeply about all of our residents and communities, including our Somali Bantu families,” said HACP Chief Community Affairs Officer Michelle Sandidge. “We will continue doing everything we can, working with everyone we can, to meet residents where they are and make sure their needs are met.”



Islamic Relief USA worked to create an environment and event that encouraged community.



HACP staff distributed boxes of food at the Day of Dignity event.



# 2021 KaBloom Challenge

## Comes to an End, Winners Announced

Earlier this year, staff and resident volunteers came together in communities across the city to compete in the 2021 KaBloom Challenge. The landscaping competition asked participants to plant the best floral arrangements and was part of HACP continuous efforts to provide high-quality living spaces and build vibrant, active communities. All across the city, participants worked together to improve their community and make memories with their neighbors.

On September 2, volunteer judges from HACP made their way around the city to see which community would win a contract for additional flower-planting services in their community next year. Competition was stiff, and our judges got to see beautiful arrangements in neighborhoods all over the city. After tallying the scores, the top three were:

1

**Mazza  
Pavilion  
(Brookline)**



2

**Morse  
Gardens  
(South Side)**



3

**Murray  
Towers  
(Squirrel Hill)**







Pennsylvania-Bidwell



Gualtieri Manor



Northview Heights



The Doc and Manchester



Caliguiri Plaza

**Congratulations**  
to all the winners, and  
thank you to all the  
staff, residents, and  
everyone else who  
came together to make  
KaBloom 2021 a reality.

# Emergency Housing Voucher Program

## Combats Homelessness and Connects People to Needed Housing

Funding from the American Rescue Plan Act has allowed HACP and the Allegheny County Department of Human Services to work together and establish the Emergency Housing Voucher (EHV) program. This new program assists those in Pittsburgh who are at risk of or currently experiencing homelessness or fleeing domestic violence situations. HACP received 142 EHVs to provide safe, short-term housing to people who need it. These vouchers are valid through September 30, 2023.

The EHV program includes a variety of services, all with the goal of securing affordable housing in the short term and working toward housing stability in the long term. From assistance with housing searches, application fees, utility deposits, and security deposits, to any expenses incurred in the moving process, the EHV program is part of HACP's commitment to Pittsburgh's most vulnerable.



To be eligible for EHV assistance, individuals must be:

- Homeless;
- At risk of experiencing homelessness;
- Fleeing, or attempting to flee, domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault, stalking or human trafficking; or
- Recently homeless and for whom providing rental assistance will prevent the family's homelessness or having high risk of housing instability.

The EHV program works with landlords to fight against homelessness in their communities. The program provides landlords bonuses for recruitment and retention, as much as \$1,000 for new landlords and \$2,000 for landlords who already have an EHV applicant in their unit.

If you or someone you know is experiencing homeless, or if you are a landlord interested in participating, visit [hacp.org/emergency-housing-vouchers](https://hacp.org/emergency-housing-vouchers) for more information.





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## Winter 2021/2022

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### Executive Director

Caster D. Binion

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Follow HACP on Twitter at <https://twitter.com/HACP1>

## WHAT WE DO

The Housing Authority of the City of Pittsburgh's (HACP) Creative Arts Corner offers an audio/visual training program that's free for all HACP Residents. CAC students are provided with a unique opportunity to cultivate their creative strengths in a state of the art studio environment, learning how to:

- Write, record and produce your own songs and video project, while gaining a better understanding of the music and film industries.
- Compose and contribute to broadcast quality productions using professional techniques and equipment.
- Take and develop high-quality digital photographs using SLR cameras and software like Photoshop. Use graphic design software to turn ideas into reality.
- Explore new marketing and distribution strategies that help develop one's brand both on social media and physical merchandise.
- Expand one's talents and skills in an intimate, collaborative environment, gaining the skills and confidence needed to accomplish your goals.

With facilities in Bedford Dwellings, Northview Heights Estates, and mobile labs in Homewood North and Allegheny Dwellings training programs are available to every HACP resident. CAC program participation provides students an opportunity to get hands-on with exciting new technologies and attain valuable and applicable skills.

## MOBILE STUDIO

Take high quality digital photos and videos using DSLR cameras and videos using Adobe Photoshop and Adobe Premiere software.

Learn how to play various type of instruments including digital keyboards, synthesizers, drum machines and samplers.

The HACP Creative Arts Corner mobile lab provides hands on experience using state of the art Audio and video equipment.

## GO REMOTE

The Creative Arts Corner offers remote learning via Zoom classes, providing students with video tutorials as well as live Zoom lessons on how to utilize an iPad to complete a range of multimedia projects. Focusing on how to use specific Apps on the iPad, along with catering to individual students to enable them to continue creating projects based on their interests.

## JOIN US

Nathan Williams, Studio Coordinator  
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Creative Arts Corner