

Healing of Shalom

by Barbara Wheeler

The hallways of First United Methodist Church, Hyattsville, MD, resemble an artist's gallery with leaf prints, photographs, and drawings covering the walls. Students and tutors sit in classrooms and complete assignments. Rehearsal space at the church fills with the music of piano lessons, and the sounds of tap dancers.

Welcome to the Shalom School for the Arts, Inc. Susan Starling is the director of the Shalom School. Starling envisioned a school that would give children access to multi-cultural arts experiences. She shared the vision with her congregation. With their support and the guidance of Communities of Shalom training, and specifically assets-based community development, Starling's dream became a reality. In its tenth year, the Shalom School is open daily from 2- 6 p.m. Ninety students attend lessons and also complete their homework during that time. Lessons include ballet, West-African dance, hip-hop, tap, stomp and South African boot dance. There are also lessons for instruments from recorder to saxophone.

One of the principles of Communities of Shalom is to bring healing and wholeness into a community. Starling understands healing through the powerful presence of music and the arts. As music heals individual souls, the community finds healing. As liturgical dancers and children's choirs perform for an audience of parents, family members and neighbors, the community finds wholeness. There is shalom here.

More details about the Shalom School for the Arts is available online at <http://www.fumchy.org/indexshalom.html>.