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## All Kids Family Fest Features Innovative Arts Technologies for Children with Disabilities

The All Kids Family Arts Festival at the sparkling new South Miami-Dade Cultural Arts Center introduced nearly 5,000 children and parents to a range of ingenious technologies that empower children with disabilities to express their artistic talent.

The new, larger venue accommodated a bigger crowd than in years past for Miami-Dade County Department of Cultural Affairs' signature annual event, funded by The Children's Trust and produced in partnership with Arts for Learning, Creative Children Therapy and VSA Florida.

“Every single activity is designed to be inclusive, and many performances showcase children with special needs,” said Francine Andersen, chief of Arts Education for the Department. Organizations featuring children with disabilities included Karen Peterson and Dancers; the Shimmy Club, which teaches children and teens who are blind or visually impaired to dance the Argentine tango; the Civic Chorale of Greater Miami Hands in Harmony Choir featured sign language interpreters; American Sign Language (ASL) storytelling by John Paul Jebian and Patty Pero; and Drumming for Wellness.

In addition to the Saturday event, 500 additional children, identified through the public school system's Program for Children with Disabilities, were transported on two separate school days to the new arts center to sample the inclusive arts-based techniques and delight in the performances.

The festival's focus on inclusion – where children with disabilities are nurtured side-by-side with typically developing children – parallels The Children's Trust emphasis for its many out-of-school programs. “We envision the acceptance of children with disabilities into all aspects of life, and a community where all children have access to needed supports and services. This special event leads us in that direction,” said Modesto Abety, president and CEO of The Trust.



Special Zot Artz equipment allowed children with special needs to express themselves artistically.

At the popular Zot Artz – Arts for All sessions, facilitators demonstrated the “Chalk Walk and Roll.” Children were helped to attach a chalk drawer to wheelchairs, walkers and standers – and then make their artistic mark. Dwayne Szot, founder of the WI-based company, visited Miami in February and trained facilitators on the arts-based technologies he designs. Through painting, creating, drawing and printing, children not only express themselves artistically, but also strengthen mobility, coordination and self-esteem.



New Theatre actors presented shadow-interpreted scenes from a "Midsummer's Night Dream" for the hearing-impaired.

Jose Limon using signing, dance, props and drama techniques to make the story more accessible to the deaf and hard of hearing children.

“The audience enjoys seeing ASL because there are many different facial expressions, body languages and movements. People see sign language as something beautiful and different,” said Jebian, who’s participated at AKI since it began five years ago.

“ASL is very helpful for disabilities and non disabilities, hearing babies and deaf babies who can learn to develop the motor skills for children.

Ileana Lopez, a first-grade math and science teacher who lives in Cutler Ridge, brought her three children – Jason, Leila and Emily – and a friend to the festival. They were enthralled by New Theatre’s Shadow Interpreted mini-production of “Midsummer’s Night Dream,” only the second time this unique drama presentation has been offered in South Florida.

For the hilarious Shakespeare drama, sign language interpreters, dressed in simple black pants and blue t-shirts, shadowed each actor on stage and signed their lines to the audience.

“The kids love the it, the first time we did it at a demonstration a teenage boy in a wheel chair looked at the enormous mural spread out before him and said: ‘Oh my gosh, I get to do that?’ It’s a great way to level the playing field for everybody,” said Andersen, of the Cultural Affairs Department. John Paul Jebian, an American Sign Language (ASL) teacher at Braddock Senior High School, offered several ASL storytelling sessions at All Kids. Together with two of his students, Jebian dramatized the festival book Jose! Born to Dance: The Story of



The Diavalo troupe mesmerized the crowd with several riveting performances.

“It was so neat – I loved how he went ‘I die, I die, I die’ and then kept coming back up,” said Jason, 5.

The Diavolo Dance Company, based in Los-Angeles, filled the 966-seat auditorium and thrilled the audience for each of their breathtaking dance and movement performances. The troupe’s dancers, gymnasts and actors had the crowd gasping and guffawing as they shifted a massive metal cage around the stage, leaping and flying through its bars as they did. Diavolo gave several special performances for the groups of children with disabilities that were transported to the center.

The festival included, too, the crowning of the winners for “Dreams Take Flight,” a school-district-wide student art competition inspired by the festival theme: That all children, regardless of ability, deserve to be included in the community arts conversation.