

UNITED FOR MENTAL WELL-BEING

Your 2026 Mental Well-Being Impact Report



UNITED WAY
Pickens County

SHE DREW HER WHOLE LIFE ON ONE PIECE OF PAPER

In the art classroom down the hall, a third-grade girl bent over a circle of paper and filled it in, color by color. Her teacher called it a mandala. She called it her life: the hard parts and the beautiful parts, the sad and the happy, all in one place. When she finished, she did not keep it. She wrapped it up and gave it to her mom for Christmas.

Children come to this room carrying things no child should have to carry. A parent who is gone. A home that changed overnight. The heavy weight of grief, or worry, or a year that has been too hard. They often do not have the words for it yet. So Dr. Dale Savidge, a Registered Drama Therapist whom the children simply call Mr. Dale, hands them clay, or paint, or a stack of cards, and helps them find another way to say it.

You made that possible. Because of you, she had a safe place to set her grief down and pick up something hopeful instead. Because of you, a “real-life saver,” as one of his students called him, showed up every single week.

For 30 minutes, she was not the girl whose life was hard. She was an artist. And she had something beautiful to give away.



“I love doing art. It makes me feel better about myself, and I feel like I can share my feelings.”



SOME FEELINGS ARE TOO BIG FOR WORDS

Children feel more than they can explain. A second grader does not always have the words for grief, or fear, or a home that has come apart. But hand that same child a lump of clay, a box of paints, or a tray of sand, and the feelings find their way out.

That is what Expressive Arts Therapy does. Through drawing, painting, storytelling, sand tray, and other creative work, it helps children say what they cannot put into words. Art becomes a safe language for the feelings that are too big, too scary, or too confusing to speak out loud.

It is not an art class. No one grades the work, and there is no way to get it wrong. What matters is not the finished picture but what happens while a child makes it. The child leads. Mr. Dale gently follows. The meaning always comes from the child, never from a grown-up deciding what it should mean.

Children bring all kinds of weight with them: the loss of someone they love, anxiety and anger they cannot explain, a parent struggling with addiction. Some carry more than that. A few come to Mr. Dale in real distress, struggling with thoughts of hurting themselves, or with pain so heavy it keeps them from learning at all. Whatever they carry in, the art gives them a way to set it down.

No child is simply placed in therapy. A teacher or the school counselor notices a child who is struggling, and families are always asked first. Then Mr. Dale meets each child, alone or in a small group, for 30 minutes a week, in a space that belongs to them.

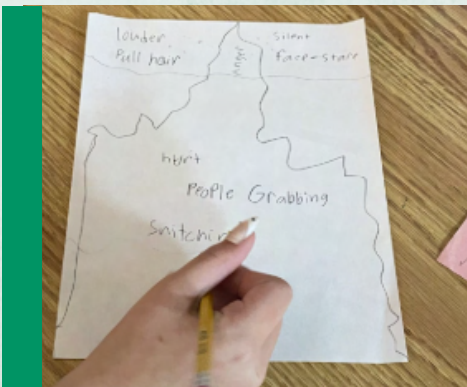
Because of you, help is there.

ONE PROGRAM, MANY STORIES

Because of you, children have a place to turn big feelings into something they can see and hold. Here are a few of their stories:



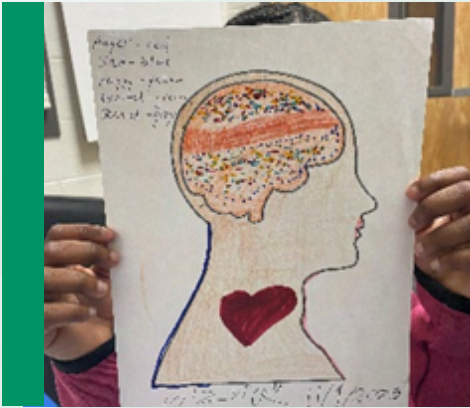
A second grader drew her family as a nest of birds. She was the rainbow bird. Her little brother was the small bird, her mom a penguin, and her dad a bald eagle, because his work felt so important to her. Her parents live in two houses now, and she was carrying the picture to her dad's for the weekend. Then she stopped, and gently lifted the penguin off the page. If her dad saw the mom-bird there, she worried, it would make him sad. The penguin would go to her mom's another day.



A fifth grader built an iceberg out of her anger. At the top, above the waterline, she drew the part her teachers see: the outbursts, the flashes of temper. Below the surface she drew everything that feeds it, the fears, the hurts, and the needs no one had noticed. Seeing it laid out that way, she could finally begin to name what was underneath, and to face it.



A third grader sat down to a tray of sand for the first time in her life. She had never been to a beach, never run sand through her fingers, and for a few minutes she just felt it, calm and curious. Then the stories came. She built small worlds and told their tales, worlds of separation and loss, of families split between houses. She ended on a rescue: a character pulled safely out after being buried in the sand.



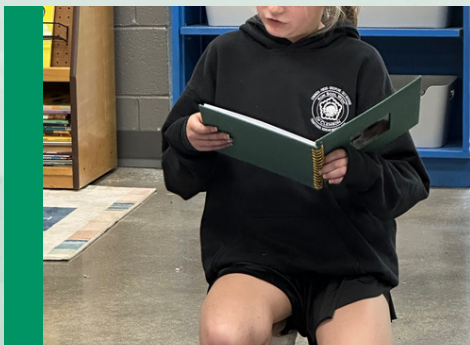
A second grader came to the program because of her anger. But week after week, in color and repeated dots, something else showed through: underneath the anger was fear. Home was unsteady, and steadying herself was hard. No one made her explain it. She drew it. And over the semester her drawings changed, growing bolder and surer, the work of a child starting to make sense of her own feelings.



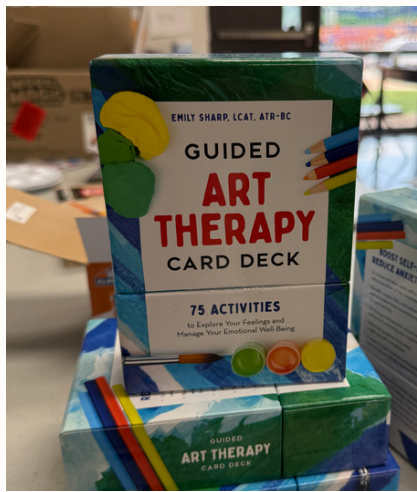
A fourth grader sat with a set of river images and matched them to the seasons of her life. This was where she had been. This was where she was now. And further down the river was where she hoped to go.



Early in the year, a small group made trees. Each child drew their roots, the people, values, and experiences that hold them steady, and the branches that grow from them. It was a gentle way to ask a big question: what keeps you standing, and what helps you grow?



A fourth grader made a memory book about her mother, who had passed away. She lives with her grandparents now, and the grief had made it hard for her to speak. So she filled the pages instead, with photographs, poems, and the stories she did not want to lose. Page by page, she was doing two things at once: holding on to her mother, and letting her grandparents in.



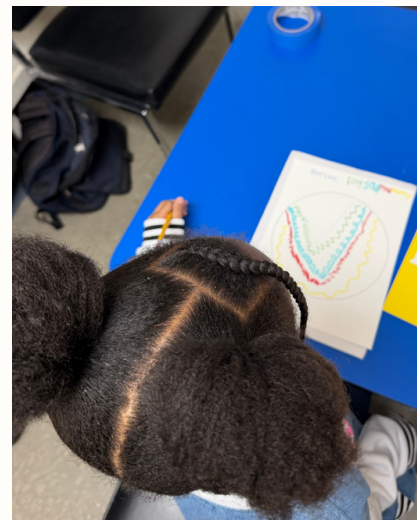
75%
understood their
feelings better



75%
got along better
with others



67%
learned ways to
calm down
when upset



75%
used what they
learned when
things got hard at
home or school



75%
felt happy and
calm in art
therapy



THE HALF HOUR THEY LOOK FORWARD TO MOST

All year long, children in grades two through five met with Mr. Dale in small groups, 30 minutes at a time. Some came for a few weeks. Some came for the whole year. They worked on grief, on trauma, on anger they could not explain, and for some, on thoughts of hurting themselves.

In the grief group, children drew the family members they missed and told their stories out loud, some for the first time.

By spring, the change showed. Children who had arrived in real distress were steadier. Children who had shut down were speaking up again. Their own survey answers told the story, and so did their teachers. “This is the one thing some of our students look forward to more than anything else,” one wrote. **“It’s been life-changing.”**

GROWING THE PROGRAM

One person can only be in one place at a time. So, through the Applied Theatre Center, Mr. Dale taught art therapy techniques to 15 school counselors and behavioral health counselors from across the county. They left with new tools in poetry, drama, and art for helping children open up, plus a basket of supplies to begin. Now skilled counselors have one more way to help a child open up.

“Expressive arts therapy reaches children who can’t yet put their pain into words, and gives them a safe way to show it.”
Dr. Dale Savidge, Registered Drama Therapist

The need does not stop at fifth grade. Many older students struggle too, and most never get this kind of help. The hope for the coming school year is to expand the program into two middle schools, so that more children can benefit from this life-changing program.



You helped Mr. Dale equip counselors with the tools, and the supplies, to reach the next child.



WILL YOU HELP THE NEXT CHILD?

A middle school student walks the halls and no one can see what's wrong. Maybe a parent who died. Maybe a parent in jail. Maybe a home that stopped feeling safe. Old enough to know the hurt, young enough to have no idea what to do with it.

For a child like this, help is hard to come by. Across Pickens County, there are far too few mental health providers to go around, roughly one for every 756 people. In South Carolina, more than half of the children living with depression went without care last year, kept from it by a parent's work schedule, a missing ride, or a waiting list that does not move.

Expressive Arts Therapy is already proving what is possible. At one school, a trained therapist helps children work through grief, fear, and anger they cannot put into words. It works. But it serves only that one school, while the need stretches across the county.

Next year, you can change that. Your gift will bring Expressive Arts Therapy to students at Liberty Middle and R.C. Edwards Middle, and keep it open at Central Academy. Because the help comes to them, inside the school day, there is no ride to arrange, no work schedule to juggle, no waiting list. You will give a hurting child a half hour a week that belongs to them. You can be the reason the next child gets the help they need.

Please give today.

YES! I'LL HELP THE NEXT CHILD.

I want to help children get the help they need to process grief, manage big emotions, and heal.

Enclosed is my best gift to help help a hurting child: \$ _____

Scan to give



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