

Gambrills native takes colorful approach to nurture child self-esteem

(Barbara Haddock Taylor / Baltimore Sun)

Janene Holzberg For The Baltimore Sun

<http://www.baltimoresun.com/news/maryland/anne-arundel/annapolis/bs-md-ar-tie-dye-owner-20160430-story.html>

Erin Cassell and her 7 year old daughter, Zoey. Ms. Cassell is the founder of "Colorful Abandon," a new nonprofit that seeks to use art to help children overcome self-judgement.



Tie-dye, the technique of creating distinctive spirals of neon color often seen on T-shirts, doesn't discriminate.

Anyone can produce an appealing tie-dye design — that's the beauty of the art, says Erin Cassell, owner of Roll Up N Dye, a studio that sells hand-dyed items and specializes in group parties.

It is also why the Gambrills native is launching a nonprofit called Colorful Abandon, using tie-dye as a vehicle for building self-esteem and compassion in children and teens.

"Tie-dyeing is about creating without the fear of messing up," said Cassell, who works with daycare centers in Odenton and Severna Park each summer teaching basic tie-dye to kids.

"You learn when you're tie-dyeing to let go of self-judgment and judging others," she said. "I am passionate about helping kids learn to love themselves and accept that they have value.

Cassell is hosting a spring festival with free activities from noon to 6 p.m. today at her studio, 9190 Red Branch Road, Suite 2DY4, Columbia, to raise funds to jump-start Colorful Abandon. Children can make a T-shirt for Mother's Day for a \$10 donation. Information is available at rollupndye.com/event/spring-festival

Her plan for Colorful Abandon is to hold month-long workshops for school-age children that combine lessons in tie-dye art and life in weekly, 90-minute sessions. Participants will make tie-dye tote bags and napkins, to

be environmentally conscious, and create T-shirts with positive messages, among other projects.

While they are learning tie-dye techniques, children will simultaneously be taught attributes such as gratitude and mindfulness.

"I struggled my whole life — as a lot of people do — with perfectionism and trying to do what other people wanted me to do," said Cassell, 36. "Putting that on yourself can stress you out and make you unhappy."

Cassell said she's motivated by a desire to ensure that her 7-year-old daughter, Zoey, has the skills to accept herself and others for who they are.

Zoey is already demonstrating community awareness — she started Zoey's Closet a year ago to sell lightly worn tie-dye apparel, with proceeds going to Let's Help Kids, a nonprofit that focuses on acts of kindness.

Let's Help Kids was started in 2010 by Rachel Harris, the daughter of family friend Jen Sterling of Arnold.

Sterling serves on the board of directors of her daughter's nonprofit — Rachel started Let's Help Kids when she was 6 — and said she admires Cassell for pinpointing a problem and finding a creative solution.

"Erin is a very compassionate person and sees herself in the kids she wants to help," she said. "She is using all of her energy, enthusiasm and emotion to turn art into something that solves a problem for kids."

Jen Lara, an education professor at Anne Arundel Community College, met Cassell when she enrolled in one of her classes five years ago.

"One of Erin's motivations for forming Colorful Abandon is that we often wait until people are adults to teach these life lessons. Why not teach them to kids so they'll have them under their belts as they get older?" said Lara, a North Laurel resident.

"Ultimately, the secret in the sauce will be Erin's ability to make the lessons nearly invisible, so these skills and values just become a part of who kids are," she said.

Cassell said she can't wait to get her nonprofit off the ground and help kids blossom.

"I'm here to reach out to kids and teens and get them to learn self-love," she said.

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