



ON DISPLAY: These Sensory Exploration Arts program works by (from left) Anthony, Phillip and Debbie are among those that can be seen at the A.M. Gallery.

GRAHAM PAINE / CANADIAN CHAMPION

Deaf artists' work speaks volumes

Sensory Exploration Arts program offers deaf and deaf/blind students creative communication outlet

By **Stephanie Hounsell**
CANADIAN CHAMPION STAFF

It all starts with a trip to a strawberry patch or sugar bush, or maybe a visit with some exotic animals. Add some time exploring with the senses — tasting the berries, petting the animals — and then expressing through art, and you've got the basis for a unique new initiative.

The Sensory Exploration Arts (SEA) program being held at Milton's Bob Rumball Associations for the Deaf (BRAD) isn't so

much about the end product as it is about the process its artists — most of whom are deaf or deaf/blind and also face a variety of developmental and/or physical disabilities and sensory impairments — go through.

For many of the program participants, communicating doesn't come easily. But this program gives them a chance to make their voices heard.

And program co-ordinator Corene Jonat couldn't be happier.

"Art's been like another form of communication for them," Jonat said.

Participants in this pilot program — which started in February and has been extended until March — are clients of the two organizations who've teamed up for this program, BRAD and DeafBlind Ontario Services.

It's funded by the Ontario Trillium Foundation.

So far, nearly 100 people have taken part.

Until the end of the month, some of the artwork produced through the program can be viewed at the A.M. Gallery at Milton Mall during the gallery's regular hours — Thursdays, Fridays and Saturdays from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m.

It doesn't take long to see the benefits of creative expression in individuals who have

likely never thought of themselves as artists, Jonat said.

"Lots of smiling, laughing, quiet focus and excitement can be seen from the artists," said Jonat, who's an artist herself and an expressive arts therapist. "They're given the freedom just to be... We could all use more of that."

Some of the themes the group has explored include animals, nature and weather. They've done this through a wide variety of media, including watercolour, scented paint, warm and cool Play-Doh, as well as materials such as barley, sand, beads, string and foil.

These allow for play and exploration of

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