



Relax... It's Just Art!

By Andres Acosta

Everyone has stress. It is a normal part of life. However, how we are managing it is important, as it can have long-term effects on our overall health and wellness. It can lead us to unhealthy coping mechanism like risky behaviors and substance abuse. Well you have a lot more control than you might think. In fact, the simple realization that you are in control of your life is the foundation of managing stress. So what is there for the community to do? Relax...It's Just Art! Embraces the philosophy of locus of control and teaches members of the Central Florida Community how to cope with stress in a healthy and creative way.

RELAX.... IT'S JUST ART IS THE BRAINCHILD OF THE ORLANDO UNITED ASSISTANCE CENTER AND PREPARE.

OUAC was first established as a collaboration between the Orange County Government, City of Orlando and United Way to assist the members of the community in the healing process after Pulse. It has since grown into a beacon of hope and a valuable resource for the Central Florida Community. PrePare is a program of Aspire Health Partners dedicating itself to the mental health of the community as well as providing resources

like PrEP. Since both organizations put mental health and self-care first, it is no wonder they created such an innovative way to help the Central Florida Community.

Relax... it's just art focuses on the healing power of art. It encourages the participants to channel their daily stress into a creative outlet like drawing, painting, or terrarium building! **"WE WANTED TO CREATE A SAFE SPACE FOR THE COMMUNITY TO COME TOGETHER AND HEAL"** Says Gabriella Rodriguez of the Orlando United Assistance Center. "Mental health is a very important issue especially in communities of color who are often less likely to seek help due to cultural and societal stigma." Relax... it's just art manages to provide the joy and fun of a paint night with the stress relieving powers of a therapy session. Best of all, the entire program is completely free. Whereas a paint night at a local gallery or a terrarium building session would cost anywhere from 25-50 dollars per person. "It's all about giving people the chance to express themselves and enjoy activities without the financial burden" Say Maria Buckley of PrePare. "We help build resilience in the community and teach how to manage stress."

The program has been a hit so far. The last session included an aromatherapy

component that left participants at ease and peaceful while painting a rainbow rose that looked stunning. **The next activity is the creation of a Terrarium and will take place on July 18th and August 15th.** Both OUAC and PrePare have active Facebook pages and their events are often reposted to the Central Florida HIV Planning Councils Facebook Page as well.

So if you are feeling stressed, anxious, and ready to blow. Come join these great organizations for a fun night of creativity and relax, after all life is just a work of art.

