

Around Annapolis: Never a dull moment for the children at Seeds 4 Success summer camps



Seeds 4 Success tutors such as Ariana Perez of Annapolis try to build a lifelong love of reading through S4S's summer book club. Here Perez discusses a novel with one of the girls from the Eastport Girls Club at St. John's College. (Renee Houston Zemanski / Correspondent)



By **Renee Houston Zemanski · Contact Reporter**
Annapolis Correspondent

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In a tiny basement room of the Hammond Harwood House, a group of young girls are chattering, laughing and painting flowers.

Next, they'll pack up their brushes and watercolor pencils and travel up the street to St. John's College for a book club discussion with their personal tutors and mentors. After that, it's time for tennis instruction.

This is just one example of the summer camp program at Seeds 4 Success, or S4S, a nonprofit organization that guides children and families living in Annapolis public and subsidized housing to become healthy, successful adults.

The camps, a brainchild of S4S Executive Director John Palinski and his staff, were developed to keep the girls from the Eastport Girls Club active academically and physically throughout the summer.

"We want to keep them as active as possible with academics and fun activities," said Karen Feldman, S4S co-founder. "These are kids who, for the most part because of where they live with limited or no transportation, might not do anything during the summer."

The summer program is individualized for each child, which can make it challenging because S4S needs to work around schedules and organize transportation for each child. But the reward of getting the children away from the TV and outside participating in all the Annapolis area has to offer negates those challenges, said Feldman, who is also S4S board of directors vice president.

Plus, it keeps their brains active.

"There is evidence that the summer 'brain drain' is real," Feldman said. "All kids lose at least a month of academic achievement over the summer. And, our kids, without any encouragement, can lose even more."

University studies on "brain drain" from Johns Hopkins University, the University of Tennessee and University of Virginia back up Feldman. These studies acknowledge that children can lose up to two months of academic achievement during the summer. Low-income families face an even greater challenge because they don't often have the same opportunities for learning as children from middle or higher-income households.

"Our girls are engaged and busy throughout the summer with both academic activities and participation in the kinds of summer outdoor activities that Annapolis children who don't live in public housing get to experience," Feldman said. "For our children to experience camps — swimming, sailing and all kinds of water sports as well as exploring nature, history and art — it really enriches their lives."

The S4S summer program has been in full swing for the past three years, but a few of the aspects of the program have been taking place longer, such as some activities with the Box of Rain organization, a nonprofit that offers year-round programs for disadvantaged youth in Annapolis, and the summer book club.

Through the book club, the girls read age-appropriate novels and then meet with individual tutors to discuss the book. This summer the younger girls are reading the graphic novel, "El Deafo" by Cece Bell and the older girls are reading "Same Sun Here" by Neela Vaswani.

By all accounts, both books are a hit with the girls. Some of them have taken it upon themselves to read both. During the last three years, the summer book club added math games to its focus to bring a well-rounded academic experience to the program.

To make the camps happen for the girls, S4S partners with several organizations such as the Hammond Harwood House. For three weeks the girls attended the "Paint Like Peal" program, which began with an interactive tour through the museum to explore the collection of Charles Willson Peale's paintings. Then the girls created their paintings.

The museum's curator and assistant director, Rachel Lovett, said the idea for the program was inspired by a Winfred Gordon painting of Hammond Harwood House architect William Buckland.

"In 1947, Winfred Gordon painted a copy of William Buckland by Charles Willson Peale," Lovett explained. "This invaluable painting has been used to enhance the interpretation of the museum. This is where I took the inspiration for the name Paint like Peale.

"The girls really enjoyed the art classes," she added. "I hope they will continue to grow their horizons and visit more museums and do more artwork for the future."

S4S also partners with the Tennis Alliance for tennis lessons and St. John's College for use of its classrooms. Eastport Yacht Club works with S4S, as well, offering a weeklong water-focused camp for the girls.

Some kids attend programs with Jug Bay Wetlands and Box of Rain. And, for the past three years, some of the girls attend Indian Creek School's STARS program, a three-week academically intensive camp for underprivileged middle school students.

Over the past two summers S4S provided the girls with approximately six weeks of activities. Feldman anticipates expanding the summer program for the girls in the future, and to grow participation for the boys in S4S's I Am a Reader program.

"My hope is that we continue to expand this summer program to include more choices, form new partnerships and keep summer full and magical for our children."

Maryland Hall volunteers

If you would like to usher at Maryland Hall for the Creative Arts performances or assist at special events, attend one of Maryland Hall's orientation sessions. The sessions are being offered from 6-7:30 p.m. on Aug. 23 and Aug. 25 in room 205 at Maryland Hall. RSVP to Reilly Kelbaugh at rkelbaugh@mdhallarts.org or 410-263-5544; extension 23. Fill out a volunteer application at www.marylandhall.org/volunteers.

Cinema under the stars

The Annapolis Design District presents "The Princess Bride" on Aug. 11 at sunset. The event starts at 6 p.m. with food and drink available for purchase. Bring chairs.

Talent Machine Company production

A cast of 31 area teens will perform in the Talent Machine Company's "Sweet Charity" today through Sunday, and Aug. 11-14 at St. John's College Key Auditorium in Annapolis. Tickets are \$15 and are available online at www.talentmachine.com, at the door or by calling 410-956-0512.