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## Heathcote Art Program Empowers Kids Through Creative Expression

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A local after-school art program has resumed for Term 3 at Heathcote Community House, offering children the chance to grow their artistic skills and self-confidence. The Heathcote Contemporary Art program, led by seasoned teacher Charley Leader, aims to help young students explore various creative mediums in a way that encourages independent thinking and personal expression.

Charley Leader, a Swinburne University of Technology fine arts graduate with nearly two decades of teaching experience, believes that art should be a tool for self-discovery, not

conformity. “I teach them about the different ways an artist works,” the Leader said. “Then I encourage them to use the knowledge they already have. I want them to feel empowered and to find confidence in their art so they can articulate their own experiences.”

This approach to arts education places less emphasis on rigid instruction and more on helping students tap into their creativity, something often overlooked in more standardized education settings. The leader explained how visual art connects with what children are already learning elsewhere, helping reinforce other areas of development like storytelling, observation, and empathy.

The program’s return has been welcomed by the local community. Heathcote Community House Executive Officer Vicki Forde expressed her appreciation for the Leader’s dedication. “We are very fortunate to have Charley, a professional teacher with loads of experience in the arts and with children alike, available to our local community,” Forde said. “We look forward to displaying some of the artwork in the future.”

Classes are held weekly on Wednesdays from 5:30 p.m. to 6:30 p.m. and cost \$15 per session, or \$10 for concession card holders and siblings. The program not only offers local families a creative outlet for their children but also supports community cohesion and local involvement, something many regional areas are seeking more of in today’s rapidly shifting cultural climate.

Programs like these may not grab national headlines, but they reflect a meaningful pushback against one-size-fits-all educational models. They emphasize the importance of nurturing individual voices and practical skills, values that are often drowned out in today’s overly bureaucratic systems. For communities looking to foster grounded, self-assured young people, this grassroots approach offers a hopeful path forward.