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Shoeless In The House

Everyone has a pair. Just admit it. You know that one pair of really comfortable shoes you go walking in or just kicking around in at the grocery store. You can most often find these shoes tossed off near the back door, in the garage or the mudroom.

Mudroom is the modern term used by millennials who install fancy benches, brass hooks and cubbies near the inside doors of their homes. We just used to call it the space by the back door. It usually included a plastic rug piled high with an assortment of wet boots and muddy shoes.

It's nothing new to remove your shoes before entering a house. Growing up, we were required to do so to keep the freshly waxed kitchen floor and the newly swept hardwoods clean. The real test was getting the dogs to adhere to the clean floor regulations.

However, the dawning of carved out mudroom spaces has led to no-shoes-in-the-house becoming an art form. It is more common to leave your shoes at the door in American homes than it once was. Other cultures have done so for centuries. They respected the science of not tracking dirt into a home or damaging floors with their shoes.

A study by the University of Arizona revealed that there are more than 421,000 different bacteria on the soles of our shoes. You don't really want to know what they include, especially if you are reading this while enjoying your breakfast. Let's just say, leaving our shoes at the door keeps a lot of germs and disease from coming inside with us.

It provides kids a more sanitary place to play and for babies learning to crawl across the carpet.

It's commonplace for carpet cleaners and other inside-your-house workers to don plastic or paper booties to cover their shoes. Even some realtors provide such temporary footwear when showing houses to potential buyers.

Maybe we should carry shoe coverings with us much like we became accustomed to wearing masks.

But going shoeless inside doesn't mean you can't cover your feet. It's a good time to show off your fancy socks or slippers. My aunt used to crochet us slippers all the time and they came in handy on those cold floors in the winter.

Foot specialists have varying views on going barefoot. Some claim it's healthy to walk barefoot inside or in the grass.

But older people may benefit from wearing shoes to prevent falls and other unforeseen injuries.



Photos by Nora Edinger
Kae (not her real name) can crochet at lightning speed. The teen learned the craft as part of a maker program for residents at Helinski Shelter on Wheeling Island.



The two administrators behind the crafting program are Linda Scott (left) and Margo Scott. While not related, the women are frequently mistaken for sisters and have worked together so long they finish each other's sentences.



Bea (not her real name), another Helinski resident, whipped up this doll skirt on her first day with a sewing machine.



Jae (not her real name), another Helinski Shelter resident, displays a hair tie she sewed by hand.

Crafting Brings New Skills, Fresh Outlook to YSS Residents

By NORA EDINGER
For the Sunday News-Register

WHEELING — Like many teen girls, Kae has a room decorated with string lights, high color and a big dose of wistfulness. Like many crafty types, she's also got a serious stash of yarn.

Colorful skeins and balls peek out of containers in her closet, on a shelving unit and on the floor next to her bed, where an afghan is in progress. A crochet hook is poised for whenever there's some free time — even if that's not until evening.

"It's very comforting to me," says Kae (not her real name) of the rhythmic motion and satisfying cascade of stitches that crochet offers. "It helps me fall asleep."

She whips the afghan onto her lap and gives a demonstration of her skill, her blue-polished fingertips flying. The project of the day is worsted weight, but oversized velvet yarn is her favorite. "I like to use it on blankets because they're big and fluffy and soft."

"I just like seeing the finished project. And, I can make stuff for people and they'll be happy."

And that — all of that — is exactly what the crafting program at the non-profit Youth Services System, Inc. is intended to inspire, according to two administrators there.

GLITTERPALOOZA

"I've got kids that can sit and crochet and you don't have to turn the lights on (for them to see their work)," said Margo Scott, who works with girls age 8 to 17 at YSS's Helinski Shelter on Wheeling Island. "It's a way of them keeping control and de-stressing. That means so much."

Margo Scott's young charges — and other youth aged 10 to 21 who are serving court sentences at a companion YSS property in Wheeling's downtown — are in residence for a variety of reasons. None of them are happy ones, they noted. But, Scott and fellow administrator Linda Scott (not related) make sure both programs' crafting time is all happy all the time.

Both women said crafting is, in fact, so popular with residents it can be used as a behavioral incentive. Residents know that crafting supplies that could be used as weapons are tightly monitored and missing ones lead to a lockdown. And, at least on the detention side of the operation, court officers can suspend crafting time if a youth

gets into a fight or otherwise breaks center rules.

That possibility matters, they said. Glitter, it seems, goes a long way.

The women — who are themselves so crafty they've each owned a ceramic shop, and one is so skilled at sewing she can alter wedding gowns — grimaced at the mention of the sparkly stuff. Glitter and sand art are a housekeeping nightmare. But, they do both anyway.

They also do machine sewing — think some 450 masks launched into the community during COVID — doll clothing and the occasional skirt or hair tie for the residents themselves. There's also hand sewing, painting, papier mache, origami, Christmas ornaments, blankets for babies born at Wheeling Hospital, card making, illustrations, jewelry and on and on.

"Anything you can think of, we will try to teach the children and, sometimes, learn something ourselves," Margo Scott said.

Linda Scott said the latter happened when some of the girls got hold of red furry fabric recently and went crazy for all things Christmas. She noted the girls also teach each other as they learn new skills.

"We've even had girls that teach the boys how to crochet," Linda Scott said, laughing about the most likely reason. "They just want to sit by each other."

Motivation aside, such skills have legs. "When we teach them how to crochet, they can take that skill with them when they leave," Margo Scott said. That matters, because residents like Kae — and even those in detention — will leave. "This is a part of their lives. They will move on from here, but they never forget it."

Linda Scott, who administers the detention side of YSS programming, has already seen the spillover. One former resident regularly displays her yarn work on social media. Another designs and sells baby clothing online.

You just never know what might happen when you put a crochet needle or a sewing machine in a youth's hands, they said.

Kae, the teen with the yarn stash is listening. And dreaming. She likes to imagine a life in which she could be a doctor by day and an artist by night.

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