

VIEW



MARISA BOTT / For The Times

Fernando underwent drug therapy during his temporary stay at Angels Flight. His art piece is called "Drug Withdrawal."

At Angels Flight Shelter, Children
Use Art to Cope With Their Troubled Lives

Unmasking the Hurt

By CAROL CHASTANG
Times Staff Writer

The 17-year-old lifts short strips of wet newspaper that cling to the fine mesh in the damp beige clay mold of a "This is my homeboy, Blinky," he says, glancing down at the papier-mache face. "I was there when they shot him four times."

They is a Canoga Park gang, and Blinky was 14 when he died.

Gustavo stops talking and tenderly looks down at his mask, as if he were paying his last respects.

Gustavo and the other mask-makers in this class are mostly runaways, victims of abuse or drug users sheltered at Angels Flight, a temporary home for

children ages 10-17. The Los Angeles facility, which can accommodate 16 children, is run by Catholic Charities and offers services including family and drug counseling and an accredited education program. In addition, the youths participate in art therapy, "each without my lecturing him," says Judy Levanthal, an art therapist consultant for Angels Flight.

Levanthal began teaching there last November after meeting one of the shelter's case workers at last year's festival. The artist has been teaching art therapy via mask-making to adults for 10 years.

The youth in her classes "can put their pain and sadness into the artwork," she says. They are dealing with complex

hurts and realities in their lives. If a parent is abusing them, no one in their family is going to talk about it."

In addition to enabling the children to deal with their hurts, Levanthal says art therapy allows the youth to unleash

"She [Levanthal] approached me with the idea of having the kids' work displayed," she says. Knoll became excited when she saw the youths' work on display on the walls of the Angels Flight shelter. "The masks I saw are incredibly beautiful," says Knoll.

When the students make masks, they are asked to write a description of the feelings they have tried to convey.

Junior, a 14-year-old who lived in the

Please see MASKS, E3



Art therapist Judy Levanthal works with Abraham at Angels Flight shelter. "Making masks is a constructive way to deal with the mix of feelings that they have," she says. Left, "Kapman" by Valerie.

