

## [How Jennifer Krueger Turned Art Classes into an Organization with a Big Mission](#)

Sep 22, 2017 by [Cherise Letson](#)



Jennifer Krueger. Image: Submitted

**In 2006, when artist Jennifer Krueger’s studio got too cramped to host her art classes for kids, she decided to start teaching them at a local school in Fredericton.**

Her classes followed the typical model, parents paid and their kids attended. Krueger, in her early 20s at the time, wasn’t sure what she even wanted to be doing with her life. She figured she’d just teach these art classes until she decided what was next.

But one day after class that all changed with a moment she’ll never forget.

“I was standing in the cafeteria at Park Street elementary school in Fredericton,” says Krueger. “A parent handed me a note at the end of our first session and it said to me, ‘My son was struggling in school, particularly with attendance and then we told him he couldn’t stay for the afterschool art program on Thursdays unless he went to school all week and he hasn’t missed a day since. Please come back again.’ ”

It was then she knew what she was going to do.

“That was after my very first session and to this day I get goosebumps,” says Krueger. “To this day I feel like this is my purpose, it’s what I’m supposed to be doing and I can share that. That has never left me.

And that was the beginning of the [Estey Art Initiative](#).

Today, 11 years later, the Estey Art Initiative (stemming from Krueger’s maiden name) is an official nonprofit that offers after-school art classes at schools in Fredericton, Saint John, Moncton and

Miramichi for students in grades three, four and five. The organization hires around 10 to 12 artists per year as instructors. Krueger says the reason why she decided to go the non-profit route was that she wanted to make the classes accessible to all students.

“When I started, it was parents wanted to pay for art lessons and if they could, they did. But as it grew and as I worked closer with schools, it became really apparent that not every parent can afford extracurricular [activities]. There were some students that were really losing out,” she says.

“We really want to help more students. We want to include schools in rural areas. We want to just take what we have and make it even better and we feel like the best way to do that was through this route.”

As Estey grew, Krueger sought out people and opportunities that could help her guide the business. She was accepted in May to the cohort of the Wallace McCain Institute’s Entrepreneurial Leaders program. She’s also taken advantage of the knowledge of her board of directors.

“For me, one of the scarier things and something I wasn’t sure of having started this on my own was when you become a non-profit you have a board of directors and you have a boss. I wasn’t really sure about that but it’s been incredible,” says Krueger.

The Estey Art Initiative’s board consists of a retired school principal, a financial expert and an art materials expert.

“They are bringing their expertise and their support to the program. I don’t have these scary bosses. I have more people with more resources, with more expertise that are lending their help to us,” she says. “We’re really in a year of transition and growth. We’ll be having more artists involved to come to new schools and bring new expertise.”

The Estey Art Initiative is on track to be in about 40 schools this year. Future plans for the organization include becoming a registered charity and expanding into more schools and communities across New Brunswick. The organization is also going through the process of becoming a registered charity, which Krueger says will help it expand and reach more students who otherwise may not be able to afford extracurricular activities.

“That doesn’t mean our level of programming will go down,” says Krueger. “If anything else, it will increase and we’ll have even more resources to be a better program.”

Expanding and growth are actually just parts of an even longer-term goal for Initiative: to help foster creative kids who will grow into creative adults.

“The long-term goal of mine is a little bit of preventative maintenance. By that I mean, adults are generally less creative or more afraid to be creative than students. I’m hoping to instill the creative spirit, the creative ability, the creative confidence in students before they lose it,” Krueger says.

“So when they continue the rest of their life, no matter if their and artist or doctor or an entrepreneur, that they can approach whatever they do with a creative mindset and a positive mindset.