

IN THE COMMUNITY

Women cope with transitions through art at YWCA gallery

By Meredith Blake
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Art therapist and town resident Sally Markley works with domestic abuse victims at the YWCA Greenwich, and this month, which is Domestic Violence Awareness Month, some of their works are hanging in the Gertrude G. White Gallery at the YWCA.

Can you tell me about the show?

When I held the art therapy sessions, it was optional for the women to show their work. So they weren't creating work for the show — they were creating work for themselves. And they had the option to go further and share it with the public. And it's up there for the month of October ... I really commend the women, because of the amount of courage it took for them to not only allow themselves to try something new at this time in their life, but to also share their expression with the public.

What are some of the themes that emerged in the works displayed?

The theme of the show is Safe Places and you'll notice each group of artwork has a certain theme ... For example, I introduced them to lines ... and then I asked them to think about transitions in their life and the line and how it may



change over time. And they can think of one transition or more. And then they explored the materials and made different kinds of lines and showed those on one paper to begin the project.

How do you use art therapy with victims of domestic abuse?

With people who have been going through domestic violence, often there is a coping skill — to not feel, because it would be too painful. The art allows for a sense of safety. There's no wrong way to create, so that they may then feel safe in the setting to express themselves and work through pain or it can also be feeling safe enough to have dreams and to find hope.

Do you think that the art work is a form of expression of what's really going on within themselves — some of the conflict?

Yes. There are different approaches to art therapy ... I'm trained in both, but some people slant more toward analysis and using universal symbols to determine what the art means and being more of

an informant for what's possibly going on. But I use the art more as a means for process for the person to get in touch with themselves and to strengthen their self-awareness through their art and to empower them with their own choices in who they are and who they want to be.

Are you going to continue to do work with YWCA?

Yes. I would like to continue to work with them ... But I am in the midst of starting my own business called Creative Ways (where) I'll be working with various populations and one focus will be women in transition and it's to use art as a means for a coping skill through transition.

What sorts of transitions?

It can be moving, career change, change of professional identity; it can be recovering from an incident — the many phases that women encounter; even empty nest syndrome.

Why transitions?

I think transitions are a normal part of experiencing life and it's something that people may not go into clinical counseling for but it might be something that they may have the need to have some support, and the art is a great opportunity for self

reflection for transitioning into the future ... Some people get stuck in a pattern. Art therapy can work hand in hand with counseling — it can complement any degree of what someone is going through, or if they just want to do some self-exploring.

When did you move here?

My husband and I moved here a year ago. I was working as a licensed counselor in Arizona in art therapy. For me this is a transition. I realize this is an opportunity for me to shift so I decided to focus more on art therapy.

How did you get started with art therapy?

I always had art growing up. My mother's an artist and I didn't realize so much about what it meant to me until I went to undergraduate art school and I began doing paintings, drawings and sculptures and various things for four years and it came to the point of deciding to have the focus be to create art to be in galleries, and through that reflection I determined that the purpose for myself doing the art was that it was helpful to me, so I wanted to share that with other people by having them create art, not just by showing the art. So that's how I began working with people in need.



Helen Neafsey/Staff photo

Sally Markley, an art therapist and town resident, helps women cope with events in their life by expressing themselves through art.