



ART THERAPY

Gallery captures journey through drug abuse, recovery

by Morgan Souza

VIEW ART PIECES THAT CAPTURE AND CRYSTALLIZE the emotional experiences of the journey through substance abuse and recovery at the Collier County Sheriff's Office Community Gallery now through Friday, Oct. 25.

The gallery's 22 pieces are products of art therapy sessions that take place in the Crossroads Program at David Lawrence Center. Crossroads is an 18-bed, residential substance abuse treatment program for adults that addresses the physical, emotional and spiritual needs of individuals to create life-long recovery opportunities for individuals and their loved ones who voluntarily make a commitment to treatment.

"We hope that the gallery visitors will witness, through the art, the beauty of recovery. The art displays the intensity, the vulnerability and the courage of individuals in recovery," said Nancy Dauphinais, clinical supervisor of the Crossroads Program. Dauphinais is also responsible for bringing art therapy to David Lawrence Center.

Art therapy is an important part of the intensive treatment program because it helps provide patients opportunities for self-expression and self-understanding. Registered art therapist and licensed mental health counselor Susan Joy Smellie said, "Sometimes, we've told our story over and over and over and we start to

tell it in the same words every time. If we start to draw a piece of our story, we bypass the kind of rigid thing we've built up so we can look at it in a fresh way. I personally think every human being should be making art, even if they don't make it to hang on their walls."

After the pieces are made, patients also reflect on the process of making the piece and on the finished work. Through the creative, physical act of making art and the analytical, communicative act of reflection, the whole brain as well as the body becomes involved in art therapy to provide a holistic way of processing events and emotions.

Smellie said, "It's a very natural way of working because if you look back at history, one of the very few things we know about very early people is that they made art. They drew on their cave walls."

Crossroads patients didn't know they would have an opportunity to display their art until after the sessions, and each patient voluntarily entered his or her piece. The works of art may have been made on a person's very first day in the program or on the very last day when they were leaving, representing a continuum of treatment and progress.

"The exhibit brings to a wider audience the drama of addiction and recovery," Dauphinais said. "It is a way to touch people and communicate the hope

that is available for healing from substance abuse through treatment."

One of the exercises patients complete during art therapy is called "How are you feeling today?" The exercise helps patients recognize and feel emotions in a safe, supportive space. According to Smellie, when negative emotions are suppressed through substance abuse, positive emotions are often also suppressed, and through exercises like "How are you feeling today?," patients have a chance to reconnect with and confront both kinds of emotions as part of the healing process. Two of the gallery's pieces, both of which are heart-themed collages, are products of this exploratory exercise.

"I hope that people will gain a little better understanding of addiction, how difficult it is, and how hard people work to overcome it," Smellie said. "I hope they will gain the knowledge that one of the ways to help with addiction and other problems is through artwork." **TJ**

The gallery is located on the second floor of CCSO headquarters at 3319 U.S. 41 E., Bldg. J., East Naples. For more information about the gallery or how an organization can participate, contact CCSO Public Information Officer Kristi Lester at (239) 252-0604 or kristi.kester@colliersheriff.org.