



Art Therapy at the Scalabrini Centre: women show off their creative masterpieces

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Ten women coming from several African countries.

These are brave, aware, cheerful and smiling women.

They are full of self-confidence and self-esteem, which has been boosted by their recent completion of an art therapy course led by art therapist **Sylvie Groschatau-Phillips**. This course is set within **AMKA workshop**, a collaborative effort between the **Employment Access Programme** and the **Welfare Programme** of **Scalabrini Centre**.

AMKA, a Swahili word meaning 'wake up', is a workshop that consists of the several modules: life skills, stress management, HIV/AIDS awareness, basic computer skills, job readiness skills, human rights, information session and art therapy. Furthermore, it provides ladies with sustained career guidance via the Employment Access Programme, which provides the long-term support needed to successfully secure employment after their training. Only a pool of selected women can take part in this workshop.

The focus of the art therapy workshops was to promote group cohesion, trust and discipline as well as help assess individual needs and strengths.



*“Statistically, welfare programme receives majority of female clients who have under gone loads of trauma and hardships in their lives. The journey they encounter leaving their countries of origin and settling in a foreign land both contribute to the mental status of the person through Art Therapy which is part of the session they learn during the AMKA workshop”, says **Jane Kanswe**, consultant of **Welfare Programme** , “Art therapy has helped clients with their social skills. The benefits of art therapy in these types of situations has helped clients that are withdrawn or shy, or who, for some reason or another, have a difficult time functioning within social situations. Art Therapy has been seen as a tool to improve lives by helping AMKA clients improve their mental, emotional, and even physical states. It can raise the quality of life for many people, and it’s worth considering”.*

“The art therapy sessions are an invaluable part of AMKA, as they prepare the ladies for the second week of the programme, which focuses on life skills and job readiness. The main aim of the AMKA programme is to assist the ladies to become independent and self-sustaining, enabling them to better support themselves and their families”, comments **Kaelynn Macdonald**, working for the **Employment Access Programme** , *“Art Therapy sessions give the ladies the opportunity to reflect on themselves, recognize their strengths and skills, and develop goals and direction that will aid them in searching for, and securing employment”.*



Benefits of Art Therapy

Combined with several courses of the AMKA workshop, the art helped those ladies to overcome trauma connected with their past, to bring out new resources in themselves, to find an approach to the life more aware, positive and dynamic.

Sylvie Groschatau-Phillips tells us about the power of art therapy and comments on the achievements of women who took part in this workshop: *“Art Therapy offers individuals a process of personal evolution and development through artistic expression. The art therapist provides accompanying measures that allow a person to express, to give shape and to work out the said, and the inexpressible in such a way as to connect and give meaning to these various aspects of the self in a dynamic process of change”.*

Through art therapy, women have explored the roles they want to play in the family, in the community and in the country they are living in.

“During the course of the workshops, they asked very pertinent questions about both the programme and the art-therapy sessions which shows a strong inquisitive mind. They are able to enquire and clarify briefs, purpose

and objectives which will be of help when applying for work. I was thanked by each for the experience, my patience and dedication... I feel very proud to work with such strong women, embracing change, ready to do what it takes to succeed and enhance their lives” Sylvie ends.

During the final presentation, held in February 2017 at Scalabrini Centre, the women exhibited their masterpieces. Each participant created four paintings to express themselves and perceptions of past, present and future. Names, trees of life, footprints and self-portraits filled Scalabrini’s walls.

Within these artworks, the creators shared fragments of their lives: someone lost a family, someone is looking for love, someone is looking for a job, someone is over-skilled, and someone is filling gaps in their education. Although all have different stories and backgrounds, the participants have motivation and determination in common.



The art therapy outcomes

Flowers, hearts, trees, fruits and paths are the most common elements of their paintings. In most of the cases, the “tree of life” they have drawn is a tree that grows in the countries they come from. It is full of fruits, each fruit represents an achievement. The Body Maps are full scale. Linked to each part of the body, the participants, choosing their own words and colors, wrote down desires and goals: a specific job, family, happiness, awareness, dynamism, creativeness, independence or love for people.

Here some comments of women, while they introduced their art creation:

“In my tree of life there is my family, who taught me to love the life, to be brave and determined”

“I feel like a caterpillar because I want to overcome hate and difficulties that affected my past”

“I imagine myself as butterfly and I want to develop my creativity”

“I want to be more aware of the present”

“I consider myself as a responsible woman, that’s why my footprint is well grounded”

“I like to be defined a creative thinking”

“I believe in the life, I am trustful, I am flexible. The key word of my footprint is success”

“Thanks for the opportunity the Scalabrini Centre gave me! Through the art, I got aware that I must wake up, I want to be more active and economically independent. Now I am ready to face the life and look for a job”

We trust that what was expressed in their artworks and during each very moving presentation will soon turn into their reality.

See more about art-therapy and Body Mapping: www.123lestimides.net

