

# 1,2,3... LES TIMIDES



## SEVERAL TESTIMONIALS FROM SOUTH AFRICA :

### Art Therapy in the context of Migration and the Scalabrini Centre's Work :

As migration to South Africa has accelerated, there have been growing tensions over the struggle for access to basic services, especially in periurban slums here poor South Africans and poor immigrant workers, refugees and asylum seekers congregate. Their influx is easily identified by locals and has led to tensions resulting in the massive xenophobic violence of 2008. This violence has continued within the Western Cape, notably with the displacement of 2500 Zimbabweans from their homes in De Doorns in November 2009 but also with numerous isolated individual incidences of violence and intimidation across Greater Cape Town.

Due to deteriorating political and economic conditions at home, it is broadly estimated that 2 million people, including Somalis, Congolese, Zimbabweans, Malawians and Mozambicans and others are in South Africa seeking work and asylum. Whilst the South African government has ratified the Organization of African Union and United Nations conventions on refugees, adopted its own refugee legislation in 1998, and reworked its immigration legislation in 2002, it has failed to implement these legal provisions as a result of many factors including lack of resource, lack of political will, lack of skills, lack of management capacity, corruption and high staff turn-over.

It is within this context that the Scalabrini Centre offers welfare and development programmes to refugees, asylum seekers, migrants and local South Africans.

Our work is developed by the following guiding principles; our development work strives to stimulate opportunity for our clients, by increasing skill, platforming talent and offering access to information while our welfare work encourages a pro-active response from beneficiaries.

We are conscious that a sense of well-being is essential to achieving success and that welfare must work alongside a demonstrated willingness from clients to change their own life circumstance and confront their own fears. We believe that skills training, sports, arts and culture are excellent tools to enhance social transformation, personal healing and growth of individual confidence; and that through these activities and by encouraging people from diverse backgrounds to participate we can promote unity in diversity Art Therapy offers our clients a therapeutic space to express and interrogate the trauma from violent past experiences and through this process to heal."

*Miranda Madikane, Director Scalabrini Centre Cape Town*

## Body Mapping at the Scalabrini Cape Town 2011 - 2014

It was very interesting to see how the members of the Art Therapy workshop translated their life into picture form and how they embodied their lives in a creative way. The exercises were interpreted either quite literally or quite symbolically and each individual produced their own unique artworks. Comments of participants :

«I see there is a way to achieve my aims and inspirations »

« It's not for me but for other people too. My goals are not only for me but for the society in which I stay »

« What I want is for my life and my family »

« I'm going in the good direction. I must leave behind even though it's hard; Go to a better place inside myself”

« I liked the way that everyone, at some point, wanted to come with their children or a friend so they could also participate and create ».

« The group helps me talk about my issues, maybe overcome or organize my Thoughts »

« The art making makes me feel and think different, become stronger. »

*Taryn Harverson, Monique Simon, interns Scalabrini Centre, Cape Town*



I was able to participate in the facilitation of the AMKA Art Therapy module led by Sylvie Phillips from the 19th of May to the 22nd of May 2014. During the Art Therapy module I was able to gain valuable insight into the true nature of this workshop, allowing me to fully understand why this module serves as such an integral part of the AMKA programme. I observed that the Art Therapy module promoted positive reinforcement, encouragement towards finding work, as well as serving as a platform to allow clients the self-reflection needed to move forward from certain traumas.

I was able to participate in the mandala, bodymapping, and clay mask e the clients to understand their own boundaries, making it easier for them to respect the boundaries of the participating clients around them.

The clients that were selected to participate in the AMKA Art Therapy workshop were becoming too dependent on welfare's assistance, thus the workshop was created to give these candidates a sense of independence and self-worth. Furthermore, it was very inspirational to be a part of the body mapping, mandala, and clay mask exercises, as it granted me the ability to see my clients taking charge and owning their opinions. Overall this workshop is extremely therapeutic for clients of the Scalabrini Programme that have experienced a trauma in their life.

*Lylah AMKA Project Manager Scalabrini Centre, Cape Town, Art Therapy Module May 2014*

In January 2011 I had the opportunity to sit in as an observer in the Art Therapy sessions conducted by Sylvie at the Scalabrini Centre of Cape Town. Although unsure of what to expect from these particular sessions, I arrived confident

in my own convictions of the valuable role that art can play in the healing process and the benefits of creativity for selfexpression.

I missed the first session but was fortunate to join the group by the second one.

The room felt calm, open and bright, filled by participants originating from the Democratic Republic of Congo and Zimbabwe. A few late stragglers came and joined us but their tardy arrival did not disrupt the flow of the session, as participants worked in silence, absorbed in their task of writing a letter defining themselves. After almost an hour of work, the participants shared their pages with one another :

“I am a woman – a mother –

I pray to our creator to stop xenophobia – war – destruction.”

Their words are simple, strong and powerful. For some, they require the assistance of those of their same nationality to help them express themselves more adequately. They make reference to themselves in relation to their families and to God, and address their desire to move forward from the way things currently are. To me as an outsider it sounds optimistic, but cautious the reality that even after many years in South Africa, they have not fully settled here, unable – or perhaps refusing – to put down roots here for want of another permanent home.

This week the group arrives on time, if not early.



There is a noticeable shift in the air, as participants exude a newfound sense of confidence evident not just in the way they are smartly dressed but also in the way they exchange friendly, genuine “hello’s” much different from the previous week. Interactions are starting to become convivial, and you can sense that trust and relationships are growing between the participants.

Indirectly, the art provides an opportunity for self-expression and exploration of these concepts, of working through the past and creating a new outlook for the future. It is hoped that participants don’t get stuck in their stories of the past, but come to understand them, integrate them into the reality of who and where they are today, and use them to move forward into the future.

At the same time, Sylvie also uses body maps to teach about art form contours, and uses clay work as a calming and therapeutic way to end the sessions. It is hoped that the sessions dig deeply into the traumatic issues while at the same time provide a safe, comforting place to come and enjoy making art.

Over time, the group became more comfortable sharing their inner selves and the sessions created a community of support; a place of understanding and acceptance.

It is hoped that what has begun to develop here will continue to move these individuals toward wholeness, integration, and acceptance.

*Tanissa Martindale, Intern Scalabrini Centre, Cape Town*

### Why an Art Therapy Project ?

Xenophobia has been an issue in South Africa for many years.

In 2008, it received international attention through wide spread violence and the displacement of thousands of foreign nationals. Since then, xenophobic attitudes and behaviours have continued to be a reality on South African streets, in public transport, township communities and institutions. Unfortunately, the issue has never been recognized and adequately addressed by state authorities, including the police.

Therefore, in late 2009 I drafted a questionnaire on incidents of xenophobic hate crime. The aim was to gain an understanding of the scope of the matter, to document cases of hate crime, to assist individuals with trauma counseling and, to follow up with the police where necessary.



I started interviewing Scalabrini clients who had been affected by some form of violence which they perceived as xenophobic and soon realized that a xenophobic attack can have physical, psychological and socio-economic effects that are a lot deeper and more serious than one would imagine. I furthermore realized that many individuals had not been attacked once, but repeatedly and sometimes over a period of several years.

The term “xenophobic attack/violence” thereby implies both verbal insults and physical assaults, both of which can have similar effects on the individual.

Xenophobic violence towards refugees and asylum seekers and the trauma it causes needs to be seen in relation with previous experiences of violence and persecution that many refugees face before they arrive in South Africa. Persons who have been repeatedly traumatized and cannot return to their home countries because of fear for their lives may get to a stage in which they perceive themselves as powerless victims in a foreign society. Hopelessness, constant fear, and distrust of everyone around them, makes people unable to take up employment, look after their families and make plans for their future. This in turn adds to financial struggles to pay the rent, school fees, transport, and food in order to survive.

Realizing that this situation of despair was not a problem of certain individuals, but a common phenomenon among people who had experienced repeated traumatising, the thought of offering an art therapy project came up.

Since the beginning, we planned to combine a variety of practical techniques which would allow the participants to go through a process of reflection by using their hands to release the mind. We wanted to avoid confronting people openly with their trauma by asking them to talk. Instead, we aimed at providing a safe space where people could meet and use clay, drawings, collages and acupuncture as means to release stress and start healing their inner wounds. The various art therapy techniques applied through professional facilitation would furthermore provoke the participants to become more conscious of their own identity and capacities.

The ultimate aim of the project was to restore people's emotional well-being, ultimately allowing them to confront their current challenges in order to shape their future in South Africa.

We selected the participants very carefully and invited them individually to explain the approach of the project. It was not easy to convey the concept and aim of the project beforehand. Considering this, today I am very glad to see that even people who were initially very skeptical and fearful of attending an event outside their 'comfort zone', decided to come and after a couple of sessions started looking forward to the next sessions.

Eight workshop sessions over a period of two months might be too short to achieve a deep change in the participants. However, we hope, and through the participants' feedback and comments we believe, that the project did succeed in providing a safe space that allowed the participants to engage in the activities, start reflecting on past experiences, their own behaviour patterns and mindsets.

All of this will in the best case mark the beginning of an inner healing process. At Scalabrini, we would be happy if even one of them left the workshop with a more positive attitude.

*Lena Opfermann, Human Rights Advocacy Officer, Scalabrini Centre, Cape Town 2011*

