

Meet Elizabeth, a client from one of our programs

People have been relying on the arts to communicate, express themselves, and heal for thousands of years. Art can help in healing and managing emotions through immersing oneself in the creative process. Sometimes it can create meaning of past traumas or difficult experiences. Art gives us a safe way to sort uncomfortable feelings that can manifest



themselves in symptoms of anxiety, depression, distress, grief or pain. Making art can be a very personal, expressive, and empowering experience. Art provides an outlet when words fail.

Last week, I had the privilege of speaking with Elizabeth, a client from one of our programs regarding the incredible mural that she painted in one of our common rooms.

A: Why did you choose to seek help from Archway Society?

E: The multiple homes I came from were abusive, toxic, and not healthy for my 3 children and I. We came to the program at Archway Society for Domestic Peace about 2 years ago as I knew I needed help to step away from toxicity and abuse, and to learn to create self-awareness to stop allowing toxicity or be toxic as well. A lot of personal growth came out of being in this "program housing". With this program only being 2 years, my time is almost up. I struggle to find housing available as more people are not accepting families (children). With having my children in a lowered shared parenting time arrangement or percentage, we are also challenged with being accepted in low income housing as they are strict with parenting percentages (75%). With the rental increases, I cannot afford even a place on my own.

A: What is your connection to art? Have you always been interested in Art?

E: I've been dedicated to art since I was 5 years old. It was my therapy for my ADHD in school and dealing with trauma and abuse in my life. I started painting when I was in high school, I learned from both T.V. artists, teachers and my own experiences, however I still favor sketching. My favorite thing is to sketch emotions or things that are inspired by emotions. I didn't acknowledge my painting as skillful until 2-3 years ago and just kept practicing.

A: What was your plan when you first started this mural?

E: I was asked to do this mural about 6 months ago and I was so happy. I had a basic scribbled plan on paper of what I would like to do. It took time to have the mural approved and when it was, I started on it as soon as I could. On the one wall I had a basic ocean theme planned out. I didn't think of including the sunset, the beach or the tree until much later. The ocean is one of my favorite calming places to go mentally. I love the sea, it's like a secret spot to hide such beautiful and colorful animals. On the other wall I painted a forestry theme with a pond and some forest and amazon animals.



I've never traveled or been out of BC. So I gathered this beautiful theme to calm the mothers and children that come to this environment from stressful previous homes, and or relationships. This idea was to also bring the world to these mamas and children, as some of us cannot afford to travel and haven't seen the splendors of the world. I do believe that if I wasn't the one who painted this mural and it was here when I moved in, that I would feel lighter and happier knowing there is such a beautifully displayed welcome is on a wall available anytime I felt stressed. However, I'm so happy to be the one who was able to provide that for others instead.

A: Where can we see more of your work? Why isn't your artwork in the public more?

E: The answer to that merely comes down to lack of confidence and believing the old message that was once told to me by parental figures or peers "your artwork won't take you anywhere" "It's not good enough" "you're just an amateur". I've also had barely any interest in my artwork.

A: Where would you like to see your artwork? Any future plans for your artwork?

E: What I'm really interested in doing is making an abuse awareness artwork gallery, and having a fundraiser go to the program here and for my family as it is challenging to find jobs due to my learning disability and support for us. My future has been looking a little brighter now with a college course coming in Sept and fabulous emotional support. Since doing this mural hopefully more doors will open for me. I ask if anyone is interested in looking at more of my artwork to find my Facebook page, "Graphite Gerwing".

Thank you Elizabeth for taking the time to share your story with me.

