

Shelter to Shelter

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A WOMEN'S WISDOM INITIATIVE

By Caroline Lovell (<http://shelkertoshelter.org/author/caroline/>), July 20, 2013



“Art does not profess to rid the world of suffering and wounds- It does something *with* them, realizing that the soul is truly at a loss when afflictions cannot be put to use.” Shaun McNiff

In trying to define all the various aspects of Shelter to Shelter and make sense of the pain, resilience and joy we see everyday, I am reminded why I do what I do...it is because art heals. In Shaun McNiff's words “It is *presence of the creative process* that transforms life.” I want to be witness to that transformation.

We are bringing the sanctity of a healing art studio to the shelters we visit. Each time we carry a huge trunk filled with books, paper, paint, glue, ribbon and scissors and create a healing space filled with color, light, options, choice and discovery. Sometimes I feel like we are setting up a big circus tent! We have been so welcomed, and certainly the shelters we visit are already providing refuge for so many. What we can do is enhance their sense of self within this refuge by transforming isolation and providing connection that feels meaningful and sacred.

Over and over again I see women encouraging one another during the art making process and then affirming their creations with compassionate caring. Every Traveling Postcard that is made is a personal portrait of the woman who made it and she is applauded for sharing her most vulnerable heart so publically. For those of us who see these beautiful creations everyday, it has become my greatest honor to be a witness to so much light and love that remains present even during the darkest of times.

We need to make meaning of our individual and collective experiences in a way that is transformative. I believe that after emotional crisis there is an imperative need to make sense of it. Art can provide an unexpected path through this hardship that often results in a simple sense of peace. During the workshops I see women begin a card and then suddenly stop. Fear, resistance, old patterns can all arise to block the process, but if in that moment I can gently



encourage them to trust...to trust the process that will continue to pull them through, I inevitably see so much joy in their eyes at the completion of their card!

Engaging in a creative process offers a

greater sense of control if we can let go of daily distractions even for a moment (the time it takes to make a single card!) and involve ourselves in a process where we have choice. So many of the women we have met have been beaten severely, and have only recently left their abusing partners. I know that we are empowering them to be the decision makers for a change and to value their process as right and meaningful.

Art has the ability to heal and I often wonder if that is enough...I struggle with wanting to include more activism in my work and I am awe struck by the sheer volume of resources every shelter we have visited provides their survivors. Should I be doing more? Just yesterday a woman in Kansas made a card that said loud and clear "Your Enough". I looked at her card and at her and we both fell into each other's arms and held tight.

We *are enough* and I am so grateful for the opportunity that Shelter to Shelter has provided me to witness such glorious transformation right before my very eyes!

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