

Touch of Art highlight benefits of creativity through Addiction Services Central Ontario



Having a creative outlet can be a powerful factor in maintaining body, mind, and soul ? and the importance of art to mental health and addictions was underscored last week through A Touch of Art, an event hosted by the Aurora-based Addiction Services of Central Ontario.

Addiction Services of Central Ontario (ASCO), which provides more than 10 community-based programs in York Region, South Simcoe, and North York, hosted the event at Richmond Hill's Boynton House.

The brainchild of ASCO staff member Audry Barton, who is also an area artist, the event was envisioned as ?a new way to build community and make a tangible difference for individuals, their loved ones, and communities affected by addictions.?

The event, which was based around the theme of ?Trees and Seas? as a symbol of resilience and renewal, featured works by Barton and five other local artists, hands-on workshops and more, with all proceeds going to support ASCO clients.

?For many years, I have been thinking about what could be done to support ASCO, knowing that the programs and services have been critically important for individuals, their loved ones, and the community more broadly,? said Barton. ?Art is very important to me, personally, and it creates connections and has a healing power. We have seen the benefits of art with ASCO clients. I'm thrilled that local artists have agreed to come together to support ASCO by donating works of art.?

The healing power of art was underscored by Penny Marrett, ASCO's Executive Director, who said one key piece of feedback they received from clients on the impact of art dovetailed perfectly with the show's ?Trees and Seas? theme.

This client, who painted a picture of a wave, shared: ?Life to me is like water; it sustains your life, but it can also take your life ? and just like water, life can be calm and soothing, or turbulent or stormy. Lately my life has been very stormy, but one thing I know about waves is you have to move with them and ride the wave. If you try to fight it, it will take you under and pummel you. You have to catch it at the beginning and move with it, and there's always that terrifying moment when you're not quite sure that you'll make it, but then you go over the crest, and with the wave of your back, you go forward.?

?Interestingly enough, a few years ago, we actually started to offer a sort of art workshop and Audry led them,? said Marrett. ?You can imagine that many individuals feel, ?Well, I'm not an artist, I can't paint, I can't do this,? and miracle of all miracles, everybody can do it in some way, shape or form. Now we have clients who always ask us, ?When's the next art workshop?'

There are all sorts of different ways in which they do art and it is one of the ways in which individuals affected by addictions can actually relax, have a cup of coffee or a cup of tea, and leave having produced something that's theirs and theirs only and that they're proud of.

This art exhibition an extension of how art can actually be one of the healing powers for the individuals.

Among the community leaders lending their support to the show, which also featured food created by those taking part in culinary programs led by 360 Kids, was Aurora-Oak Ridges-Richmond Hill MPP Michael Parsa.

The Touch of Art exhibit serves as reminder that healing is not just found in clinics or counselling rooms it is also found in creative community engagement, he said. By converting art into action through the commitment to donate all artwork sale proceeds to ASCO programs, Addiction Services Central Ontario has turned artistry into meaningful support for mental health and addictions care in the community.

For more information about Addiction Services Central Ontario, visit helpwithaddictions.ca.

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