



THE ART OF HEALING

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Art is powerful — it has the power to astound, amaze, and alter history. But as the participants of Pacific Shores Hematology-Oncology Foundation's "Artist Within" program can attest — it can also help to heal.

The Artist Within workshops meet once a week, at downtown institution Lyon Art Supplies. The program is run at no-cost to participants, as they receive instruction and even materials for free (Lyon donates the space and some of the supplies, and PSHOF takes care of the rest). The program is one of the ways that the foundation goes about its mission of improving the lives of those dealing with cancer. "The gift of being able to express and do art is something we should all have," said program director Jann Buaiz. "When you're thrown into

the trenches of cancer, you need to have all the weapons to fight that war."

The program was founded in 2008 as part of the foundation, and was a way to help improve the quality of life for cancer patients. One of the board members at the foundation, Elizabeth Lucas, is a locally known artist and cancer survivor, who was one of the participants in the first workshop.

There are 8-10 week workshops that run concurrently. At one of the more advanced workshops, several patients recently spoke about what the class has meant to them. "This is an amazing gift," said Daphne Walsh. "This organization has given me a whole lot of strength to get out of the house. It takes your mind off of things."

The program is also open to caregivers. Jo Ann Harvey attends with her husband, Richard, who is a brain cancer survivor. "You can escape from the world for a little bit," she said, praising the camaraderie among those taking the lessons. "Sometimes it's tough going through day after day with our realities."

Far from being just a cathartic experience for the artists, the workshop has produced challenging, technically skilled art. Instructor Vicky Andayo has condensed a full semester's worth of techniques into eight lessons, and she moves quickly from line and color theory to more advanced, stylistic methods. "We try to connect each [technique] to an experience," Andayo said. "As a result, the pieces created are incredibly personal, but also often chart a steep learning curve."

The participants — almost none of whom had any artistic experience prior to joining the workshop — have even begun work developing their own show and installation. The annual Open Canvas show, put on by the workshop, is an event in downtown, and this year's looks to be particularly strong. The theme will be "Sentimental Journey," and the artists are each creating three works, along with a written narrative about their yesterday (life before cancer), their today (their diagnosis and dealing with cancer), and their tomorrow (whatever they see the future holding for them).

The interpretations range from the literal

to the symbolic. In his vision of the past, present, and future, Richard Harvey is depicting his experience with brain cancer through paintings of a star, a black hole, and a supernova. One artist is portraying the future as a defiantly raised middle finger. The Open Canvas show will be held in September at a yet-to-be-determined location. Buaiz said the show — and the program — have been picking up momentum.

In addition to the powerful show being produced by these artists, the work they're doing is creating something wonderful in their lives. "I personally see and have

experienced how artistic expression improves the quality of life and heals in ways that are unimaginable," said Buaiz.

As this city continues to shape itself as an important presence in the Southern Californian art landscape, programs like Artist Within are invaluable. Through this kind of art empowerment, the exclusivity of the industry is stripped away, and the community can see how truly important art can be in anyone's life, despite any obstacle. ■

For more information about the Artist Within program, visit pacificshoresfoundation.org or call 800.303.0131.