

I felt safe enough to share...

A Window Between Worlds workshops gave Karen Gonzalez the outlet she needed to tell her life story and express herself in ways she never had before. Now she facilitates workshops to provide the same opportunity for others affected by trauma.



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When I was living in an emergency shelter, I was introduced to A Window Between Worlds for the first time. After participating in the Story Trees workshop, I felt safe enough to share a secret I had been carrying for 29 years.

When I was 5 years old I was sexually abused. It affected my self-esteem and I was always hiding. As a teen mom, I experienced physical, sexual, economic, and emotional abuse at the hands of my child’s father, and it continued into my adult life.

The art helped me to stop hiding. I found I was able to express what I felt in that moment of pain and abuse by using different colors. I felt so much better after each session. In one workshop we were asked to paint ourselves, and where we saw ourselves in the future. I wrote the words life, hope and love, and remember that day I didn’t feel like a victim anymore. I felt powerful.

The workshop, Heart Stories, gave my heart a voice. The first heart I created represented my past; it was black and red, and looked jagged, broken and hurt. My present heart looked healthier. My future heart had bright colors that I never even thought I could carry. Through art, I was able to put my trauma somewhere; I didn’t have to walk with it anymore. I finally felt free.



In the shelter my vision to help others also became clear. I saw the brokenness and was inspired to create a place where no one would experience the aftermath of trauma alone. My organization, Helping Hands Resource Center, supports those affected by trauma and violence so they can move forward and rebuild their lives. Thanks to A Window Between Worlds I am able to hold weekly art classes. I see adults and children becoming stronger, and families getting closer through the art. Now that my heart has healed, I am grateful to use art to help heal the hearts of other survivors.

It has come full circle.



Art has been a powerful force that has helped me to rebuild my life and self-esteem. I have learned that I am strong and the things that happened to me are in my past. Today I choose to live and tell others about it through the art. I recently looked back on the words I wrote from that first AWBW workshop and found they still hold just as much significance for me today: “My pain and wounds had me fooled into thinking I was ugly inside. Today all I see is beauty. This is me, my tree, my life.”

Based on 3,960 participant evaluations submitted in 2015:

95% of adults found the workshops helped them more easily express themselves

93% of adults felt more positively about themselves after participating in a Windows workshop