

Silence to Spoken

Ten-year-old Everly had been identified in her elementary school as a child who was in need of extra support, but little of her situation and trauma was known by school administrators. Soon after, she started AWBW art workshops facilitated by Rachel Cross as part of the Art from the Heart program.



"I still have anger in me but learning to draw it out has helped me a lot. Art pushes me to keep going because I get to express my emotions."

- Everly, 10-year old survivor and art workshop participant

Everly wore her hurting heart on her sleeve. The look in her eyes read broken, sad and lonely. I knew right away that this sweet little girl had been through something major. At first, Everly did not talk, and I didn't push her to speak. I knew that in her own time, when she was ready, she would share her thoughts and feelings with the group. Four weeks went by in silence but on the fifth week the Monster In Me workshop sparked something in her.

In this workshop Everly was asked to look within and to identify her hurt or anger and to give it a face, a monster if you will. Everly wanted to focus on her pain. In AWBW there is no wrong way to do art so Everly was free to express herself in the way that she needed so that healing could begin.

As she created, she was silent as usual, but by the end of the workshop, we all got to hear what her voice had to say. She described her drawing as, "This is me, I'm crying, this is all of my pain; and my eyes are like hearts but they are broken because of my mom. This reminds me of my mom."

After that workshop, Everly asked if she could stay and speak with me privately. During this time, Everly expressed to me the deep pain she felt from the trauma she endured that led up

to the separation of her from her mother and siblings. I could see the pain roll down her face in the form of tears, I could hear in her voice a desperation to get better, to find some relief.

After she had finished sharing, I made a suggestion to her. I asked her, if she would like, she could do the Write a Letter to a Parent workshop. In this workshop the participant writes a letter to a parent and they get to express anything they may need to. I suggested that she write a letter to her mother. Upon Everly's return with the letter, she allowed me to read it and discuss it with her. When we were done, Everly shredded the letter! As soon as she put that letter into the shredder she began to smile. The first smile I had ever seen on her face!

Today Everly is thriving in areas that were previously darkened by her trauma. Both her teacher and other school administrators have commented on her positive changes since attending the group.

