

How the art in hospital program helped me to recover.

My name is Sonia. I have been ill for quite a long time. Tallaght hospital has been my home since April of last year... and it has been a struggle. The one thing people forget when you're in hospital for so long is the sheer monotony that every day brings, especially if you are, like me, almost entirely bed-bound. When one battles daily an illness over a considerable length of time it can effect one's state of mind, one's ability to concentrate on simple things like reading... even a magazine. It's easier to allow yourself to slip into the trap of just watching the television, until you realise how it has become your mind-numbing window to the world outside. Who needs morphine when you end up watching endless episodes of 'Relocating your Cash in the Attic' or something else equally as trivial?

Then I was introduced to Deirdre Glenfield and her quest to bring art to where one doesn't expect to see it. I was sceptical. In the past I had shown some talent for crafts, dressmaking, and probably had an awareness of interior design... well at the minimum I knew what looked right in a room. I liked colour co-ordinating the world around me. I certainly couldn't draw and never ever put my hand to anything akin to fine art.

We started with window decorations, painted on acetate. Deirdre showed me how one should approach the task. Nervous at first about holding a paintbrush, I made what one could call 'a stab' at it. To my surprise it turned out fine too. Soon I was bitten by a new desire. I must have painted dozens of beautifully colourful window decorations. Most of my nurses and carers were gifted my creations. There were days I had a production line in place, each acetate with a specific destination. My inner drive seemed to click back into gear. I was thinking clearer, I had more energy, more focus, more contact with myself and those around me. There were days the television didn't even get turned on. Who the hell needed it anyway!

After I had experimented somewhat with acrylics, Deirdre suggested I try to do something using soft pastels. Another step into the dark for me. I was clueless. Nonetheless Deirdre steered me through the basics and then let me at it. It was like another door opened for me. It was a re-ignition of passion lost. It reinvigorated my imagination and sense of expression which had been dulled for so long. It has truly been a key to my rehabilitation, a break from my institutionalisation... and I am so thankful for it. I believe my progress with laying colour to paper has been remarkable. My husband, a graphic designer by the way, has been so supportive of me and says he is beginning to feel a little intimidated by my work and may have to 'up his game'... Funny!

In my opinion Deirdre Glenfield, and all those bringing such programmes to places like hospitals, deserve all the funding they can get. They bring joy and aid rehabilitation for people like me, they open windows for possibilities within ourselves and bring care and support for those who participate in the programme. It has been a great experience, one which I hope to be a part of for as long as I am a patient in Tallaght Hospital, and fully intend to explore further when I eventually get home.

I am hopeful that I will be physically able to make it to the exhibition on the 10th March in Rua Red. It will be a huge honour for me and my family. I want to wish all involved, especially Deirdre, the very best of luck.

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