

BUSINESS, LIFESTYLE, NEWS

RECOVERY IS AN ART IN LYNN

BY [ALLYSHA DUNNIGAN](#) | September 30, 2021



Amanda Cronin speaks about her art on display at Great Art Studio (GAS) that she created with a group of women from the Johnson Street residential treatment program to incorporate art into their recovery from addiction. (Spenser Hasak)

LYNN – The Great Art Studio (GAS) in Central Square has been working with five women from Bridgewell’s Johnson Street residential treatment program to incorporate art into their recovery from substance use disorders.

GAS has been working with the women since August to create a body of work called the “Bundle of Hope,” which includes written and painted reminders of why they are working to overcome addiction.

The Bundle of Hope has all of the things that the women need to hang on to when they leave the program, as reminders of all of the hard work they did to get clean.

Founder of GAS, Mary Flannery – who also founded Raw Art Works (RAW) – said the Bundle of Hope will travel with these women, in a box, so they can recreate a gallery wall of their art wherever they live.

The bundle includes abstract paintings that reflect on the concept “how do you paint yourself into a corner, and how do you paint yourself out?”

For example, one of the women said she paints herself into the corner by being attracted to the chaos of using drugs. What helps her get out of the corner is asking for help to get herself focused.

Another woman said she just needs to know how powerful “I’m sorry” is to get her out of the corner.

“They are amazingly courageous around owning it (substance-use disorders) and having no excuses,” Flannery said. “One woman said she can’t drown in the tub of self-pity.”

A big part of the women's recovery is owning their addiction, and Flannery said Johnson Street does a good job implementing the idea that the women have to walk back a little bit, but walk forward a lot.

Each concept in the bundle also has a meaningful question that Flannery said the women answered honestly, so that when they are out in the community and possibly tempted to use again, they can be reminded of all of the things that they worked hard for.

One woman in the program said, "I think of my collection of art as a constant reminder of the things I lost, gained, and fought for. As I am standing in my room where my art is, crying, yelling, and getting ready to say 'forget it all,' I can look at each piece of work and ask 'What was Mary wanting us to remember? How can I communicate my feelings? Who am I? What do I cherish? What can I lose?'"

The five women presented their Bundles of Hope at GAS on Wednesday night, walking friends and family through their thought processes and artwork that depicts their strength and dedication to becoming sober.

Flannery said all of the women are incredibly courageous and she is happy to have the opportunity to work with them and help them on their journey.

Flannery's partnership with women from Johnson Street began around 30 years ago, when she was trying to open RAW.

She was reaching out to community organizations with which to get involved, and Project Cope, which is now Johnson Street, responded.

RAW then spent more than a decade working with the women from the nonprofit Project Cope, but had to end that contract when RAW made the transition to working only with youth.

Two years ago, Flannery went to Johnson Street — which merged with Bridgewell in 2013 and changed its name — and said she sat with the women and instantly thought she needed to do some work with them.

Then when the COVID-19 pandemic hit, she had to wait until it was safer to congregate and people were vaccinated, so she launched the program with GAS in August.

"We have been working with five fierce, mighty women," Flannery said.

Flannery said the opportunity for the women to walk into GAS and feel a deep sense of "I deserve this," in a comfortable and supportive environment, is the goal of the project.

Flannery said that this is one of the projects she had in mind when opening GAS, which also works with the graduates of RAW and sells art out of the gallery.

To learn more about GAS, visit its website at greatartstudiolynn.com. To learn more about the Johnson Street residential treatment program, visit bridgewell.org/recovery-services/womens-program-johnson-street.



Allysha Dunnigan

Allysha joined the Daily Item in 2021 after graduating with a degree in Media and Communications from Salem State University. She is a Lynn native and a graduate of Lynn Classical High School.

Allysha Dunnigan can be reached at adunnigan@itemlive.com
