



مؤسسة نهر الأردن
Jordan River Foundation

The Change Journey Has Just Begun: When The Pain Is Erased By Art

Expressive art program
Most Significant Change Approach

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Introduction

Abstract

The expressive of art is innovatively and effectively highlighting and tackling the issue of GBV. Thus, JRF is conducting expressive art sessions that not only raise awareness on concepts of GBV, but also play a major role in providing a therapeutic release for GBV survivors, fostering a dialogue about the pervasiveness of GBV, and inspiring the belief that girls and women can be empowered with new behavioral choices.

The sessions allow girls and women to understand the concept of GBV, the impact is on their emotions and emotional well-being, create a safe space for them to talk about their feelings, practice empathy and active listening, emphasize self-worth and self-value, positively encourage the expression of emotions, as well as learn about the importance of being assertive and setting personal boundaries as means of prevention. JRF is following a blended learning approach through the implementation of the sessions, to help women at-risk or survivors of GBV understand the different types of violence and overcome their personal trauma through several skills; skills and techniques in artwork, mindfulness skills, interpersonal and communication skills, emotional regulation skills, and stress management skills.

The personal stories of women who have experienced and participated in the expressive of art therapy activity on the ground in Queen Rania Family and Children Center (QRFCC) and the impact it has had on their lives on improving women's psycho-social situations after being victims of GBV are presented in this paper that illustrates the findings of applying the Most Significant Change (MSC) Approach. This monitoring and evaluation approach, in particular, was used to collect stories from beneficiaries, who were willing to share their experiences and discuss the differences they felt prior to attending the sessions, the change they felt during the session, and the impact of participating in and benefiting from the session on various domains; self-confidence, presence of fear, social-emotional, health, educational, and identity.

The Most Significant Change Approach

For several reasons, the MSC was the most appropriate technique to be used for this activity. Since it is a participatory technique that enables in identifying changes in people's lives from their own perspectives which gives the beneficiaries a sense of ownership, as well as gives a better understanding of how changes of complex and diverse impact are perceived by various stakeholders. Furthermore, the MSC approach is regarded as a highly flexible technique in which each beneficiary had the freedom to choose the way of presenting her story and domain of change, as well as the group with whom she shared her story. Different outputs were also produced as a result of the MSC, as beneficiaries' body language was observed when they had to stand in front of other groups to share their story.

The implementation of the MSC included the following steps:

1

Determining the domains of change.

2

The names of the nominated beneficiaries who had success stories were gathered from the facilitator's journal.

3

Storytelling and identifying the MSC through self-voting

4

Analysis of the stories and comments (challenges and opportunities).

Step 1: The domains of change were identified in this step based on the information gathered from the facilitator's journal; the domains of change are to provide a measurable indicator when stating the stories. The main identified domains of change are:

- Emotional (psychological) development
- Behavioral development

Step 2: It involved the initial filtering of the nominated beneficiaries, 108 girls and women attended and benefited from the expressive art session under She Leads. 25 young women were chosen based on the trainer's nomination that was recorded on the facilitator's observational journal of different training rounds (7 rounds), which included the change observed during the session. Out of these 25 young women, 19 gave consent and participated in the MSC.

Step 3: The MEL department introduced the MSC concept to the beneficiaries in order to attract their interest by explaining the main three prepared questions that each story must include, and the flow of the approach. The 19 beneficiaries were grouped to sit on tables; the group formation was left to the beneficiaries themselves in order to give them freedom of choice and to allow them to open up easily; 5 groups were formed, and each group consisted of 5 beneficiaries except for one, which had 4.

In this step, the stories were collected and written down exactly as they were told by the beneficiaries' voices, with each story had to answer how they found out about the training and the reason for joining, what was the immediate change on them while attending the 10 day training, and finally, the final impact after finishing the activity.

Each young woman shared her experience within her group; after everyone had shared their stories, the most significant story from each group was elected, and a total of 5 stories were chosen out of the 19 stories. Another election was held to determine the most significant story out of the 5 that were chosen, and only one story was picked as the most significant story and change from the expressive art activity.

Step 4: The strongest 10 stories were analyzed and classified according to the domains of change, and the remaining 9 were excluded because there was a repetition of stories where they all stated that they had improved self-confidence. In addition, challenges and opportunities are highlighted to be used in future sessions.

Each story could be subjected to more than one domain of change. All of the MSC participants were victims of violence, whether perpetrated by family members or the wider community, and the harm was imposed on them psychologically or physically at a young age. The identified domains of change and sub- domains are interconnected and lead to one another. Normally, no matter what kind of violence was used against women, the effects were a mix of emotional and behavioral, so the impact of the expressive art activity began with reducing fear, then progressed to empowering women by increasing self-confidence, allowing them to confront the source of violence and defend themselves independently. As a result, participants were able to modify their actions and interact positively with their family members and the wider community, thus reflecting on their relationships and allowing them to function effectively in their social roles.

| Change | Sub- Domain of Change | Number of Stories | Percentage out of the total stories |
|-----------|-----------------------|-------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Emotional | Presence of fear | 4 | 40% |
| | Confidence | 3 | 30% |
| Behavior | Actions | 8 | 80% |
| | Relationships | 4 | 40% |

Findings

A total of 10 stories were analyzed, with content analysis of the stories and comments used to classify the domains and sub-domains of change addressed within each story, resulting in stories being coded under multiple domains and subdomains.

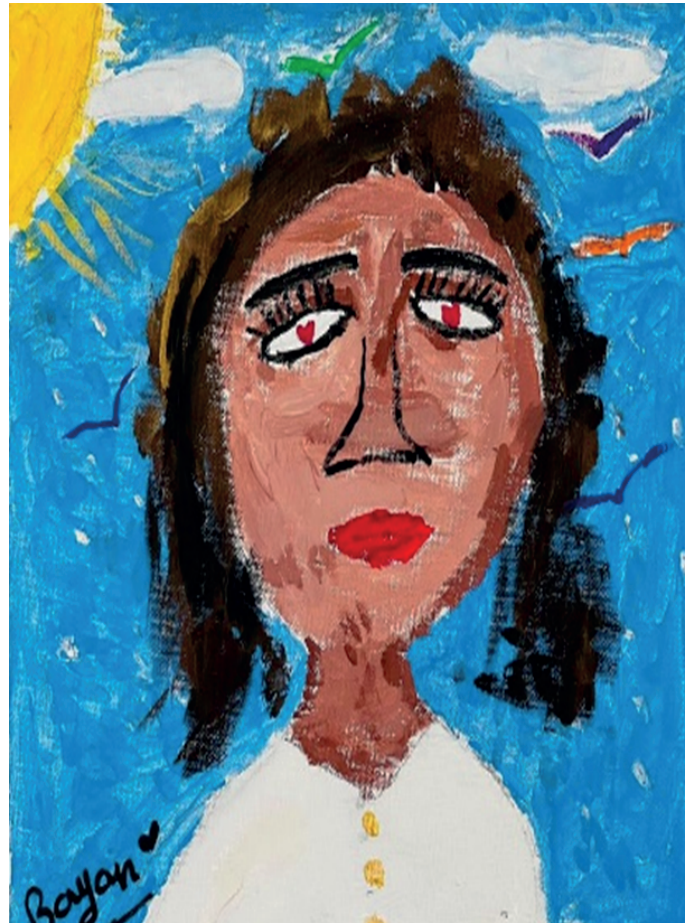
Table 1 provides a summary of the domains and subdomains of change coded within the data. The main domains of change are the Emotional (psychological), and Behavioral domains. Starting with the first domain that includes Presence of fear change and/or Self- confidence were made to the level of stress and fear, which then helps to grow personally and mindset and move from where they are and become a person of action which will conclude in gaining confidence to unlock another gate, which also focuses on the sense of independence and the appreciation sense. Then moving to the second domain, Behavioral that includes a change in the bad actions or the improvement in the relationships.

| Main Domain of Change | Sub- domain | Sub- domain |
|----------------------------------|---|---|
| Emotional (Psychological) | Presence of fear The change was made to the level of stress and real threats they experience, which then affected their ability to interact normally with the environment they live in and function well. | The self-confidence The change was made to their ability to defend themselves from the inside out in front of any source of violence, especially when they're feeling low and broken, and sometimes ready to give up and leading to their ability to be free from external control in order to ensure their protection. |
| Behavioral Change | Actions The change was made on bad actions against themselves, household members | Relations The change was made on relations with family members (spouse, mother-in-law) and people from the outer community. |

1

The first story is about a girl who lost both of her parents at an early age and had a major speech disability challenge that hindered her ability to interact with others due to the fear of being rejected, which made her very shy to talk.

She could not communicate with her brother or her grandparents whom she lives with. Having a speech disorder gave her older brother the authority to control her in order to protect her from the society in which she lives. Her parents' death turned her into an introvert; she couldn't share and express her feelings with her grandparents as she always felt like she was a burden on them and they wouldn't understand, so her only escape was to cry on her pillow alone. She was out shopping with her aunt one day and was fortunate enough to stand next to the QRFCC to take a phone call and get away from the noise. They were eager to enter the building in search of a career opportunity. While they were walking through, she ran into a staff who informed her that she was too lucky to join the expressive of art session because there was only one spot left. As a result of attending the expressive of art session gave her a sense of independence in that she no longer needed



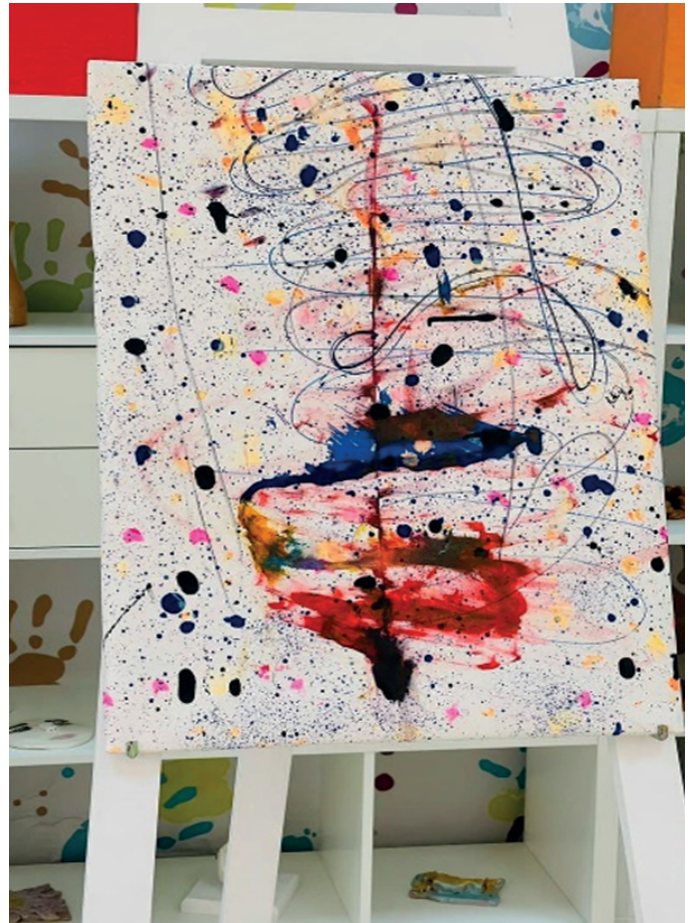
a family member to keep an eye on her to ensure her safety and protection, and she gained a greater awareness of herself and her place and role in the community Her self-confidence grew as a result of her participation, and she was able to speak in front of the entire group without any constraints or shyness due to her various disabilities. She was also able to overcome her fear of rejection as a result of forming different relationships with girls of her age who welcomed her warmly without any sympathetic look. Furthermore, she was capable of breaking free from the cycle of dependence to self-reliance, and from feeling inferior to feeling recognized, so she took the initiative to volunteer in QRFCC's puppet activity, and she is currently applying for job opportunities in school libraries, which corresponds to her field of study. Finally, this young woman stood in front of all the visitors in the art gallery, inspired and with the social courage to engage with people to share her experience.

2

“Here I am today sharing my story with you”!

A second story was told by a young woman about how her parents' divorce had a lifelong impact on her since she was a child.

The father had previous criminal records, which compelled him to enter jail. Sadly, the only way out for the family to feel safe was while he was put in jail. Having such a father and controlling uncle who follows the grandmother's instructions made her dislike the other gender (XX), including her siblings. Also, her mom being a divorced woman with children had limited their freedom and forced them to live under her grandmother's wing, which was more like a military shelter than a warm home. The grandmother was difficult to deal with, resulting in an unstable environment. Despite her hate for males, she acted and talked like a male, and was referred to as Sultan (male's name) rather than being called by her own name and treated like the female she is. Her only escape from the stress and loneliness she was going through was to cut herself with a sharp knife. She was hesitant to participate when she first heard about the expressive of art session, but finding a safe space to share her



experience with other people helped her see the beautiful young lady in herself, and as a result, it boosted her confidence. On the first days of training, she used to wear baggy clothes to cover her behind but it changed in the last days. The program's effect, on the other hand, enabled her to draw relationship boundaries with others, making her feel strong and comfortable, and she became someone to express her feelings. She expressed her displeasure with her grandmother, particularly the rules she imposes, which put her at ease. This was accomplished by inviting her grandmother for a cup of coffee on the balcony, which reduced tension with her uncle and was reflected in her mother, who became happier and more relaxed as a result. She set her goals and discussed them with the facilitator individually after successfully assisting her in deciding on what major to study at university, and the decision was based on grading the woman's preference. Most importantly, she no longer harmed herself.

3

“I feel empowered to say NO today, and I'm eager to start on my project”.

Another story of an early-divorced labeled woman who had left her parents and was living abroad on her own; she had a long-distance relationship with a fiancé; her in-laws were the only family she had here, but they were very harsh on her. After some time, she realized her fiancé was cheating on her, and her life had changed, including her family, who had become her worst enemies. Her health was deteriorating as a result of the separation, and the immediate rebound was to get engaged for the second time, but the relationship didn't last long. The only word that stuck with her was "divorced," and it was a barrier for her to meet new men, she said being a divorced young woman is a stigma in the Jordanian culture. And, in order not to be affected by stigma, she met her new husband on Facebook. The story didn't end happily, because he lost his job one day, which caused him to have some psychological issues, and his way out was to cheat on me. The trust was destroyed, and she began to

suffer from psychological issues, weight gain, hormonal imbalances, and high blood pressure as a result. She was looking for new experiences and wasn't feeling well, so her mother-in-law suggested she joins this session in order to improve herself. Her participation in this activity, as well as the benefits she gained from practicing the exercises and talking with the facilitator, were critical in helping her gain confidence and draw boundaries with others. The overall impact was that she was able to express all of her embedded feelings and thoughts, which helped her accept herself so much that she told the facilitator that she was hiding the truth about her feelings in front of others so that she wouldn't see the looks of compassion from other. She made the firm decision to be kind to herself, to love and appreciate herself, and to rely on herself by looking for funds to start her business. Finally, she plans to confront her husband about cheating on her, and she will decide whether or not to stay with him based on his response.

4

"I'm thankful that the tumor is not cancerous and that I can enjoy my life with my support system."

Another woman was labeled with "the young mom with the big breast", and was bullied by her community; she married at a young age, believing that marriage would be her way out and boost her confidence in having a big breast! She couldn't continue studying because she had a baby girl soon after her marriage.

The breast issue became a turning point when the doctor told her she had a tumor, and the only fear she had was leaving her daughter without a mother. She heard about this session through her mother, the session's title enticed her to attend and learn more about it. During the session, they were asked to choose colors that better reflected their personalities; she had to choose the black crayon and although her eyes were dropped on orange but there was a hallow on the orange crayon, so she couldn't pick it! The facilitator reaffirmed that they could choose any color on the table, and it was at this point, she realized she was putting herself in that zone of fear,



stress, and wanting to see the emptiness in everything! The program pushed her to accept her body, where she dared to wear colors rather than black, where she hid her breast behind to avoid the stares and whispers of others. She became aware of her husband's constant encouragement and support, which she had missed due to her distraction from people's comments. She knew that her husband, daughter, and herself were the most important ones, so she will devote all of her focus, energy, and attention to them. She decided to see a dietitian who will help her lose weight and join a gym to improve her health not to stop the comments of others.

5

“We can add it feel great that even when my mother is not present I can make her proud “

The fifth story was about a woman who had a miserable life after losing her mother and developing mental health issues. At first, she thought it was just a way to meditate, but as the session progressed, she realized it was much more.

During the training, she had no control over her feelings or thoughts, and things came to her unconsciously. By the end of the training, she has identified her challenges and confronted and addressed her emotions. When the facilitator introduced them to JRF's services, she was convinced that she needed to seek help and was referred to a counselor as a result. Her body language became more expressive as a result of the program's impact on her. She became receptive to the idea of losing her



mother after the crossing bridge activity and the use of clay, and she consciously cried. As a result, she became more sociable and was able to form new relationships with her colleagues, as well as become more proactive in volunteering and providing services to others. She is no longer afraid to express her love for her mother; on the contrary, she enjoys confidently sharing that attending law school was a way for her to please and make her beloved mother proud.

6

"I'm thankful that God allowed me to participate in order to apply the gained skill and information with my father's death."

As a result of attending the program, a significant amount of preparation was done for a woman who was afraid of losing her father after he was diagnosed as a sick man.

Because she had a lot of free time while caring for her father, she was constantly on her phone and social media. It was favorable that she was able to find an advertisement for this activity, which aroused her interest in participating in the session to break up her daily routine. She was always viewed as a negative diffuser who spreads negative energy during training sessions, especially on the third day of training when she forgot to prepare the medicine for her father. She described herself as an aggressive, sharp, and emotional woman who makes people believe she is staring at them. When her father died a few days later, she was amazed at how



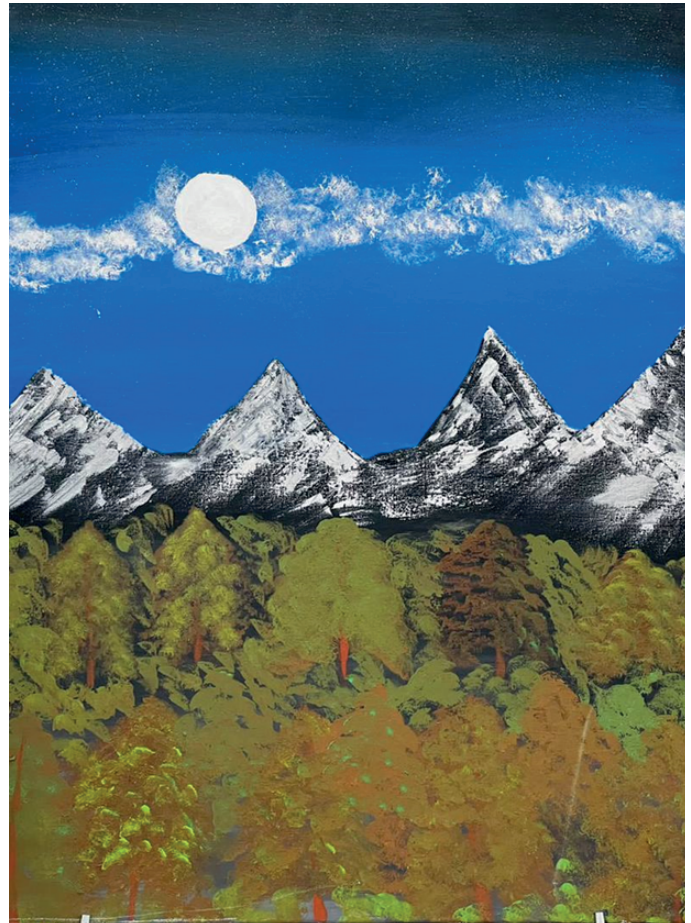
capable she was of dealing with her emotions, because she used the breathing technique, listened to soft music, and lit a candle up to feel calmer that she learned during the session. This program not only prepared her for the death of her father but also improved her personal skills. She dealt with her father's death with awareness and acceptance, and after a week, she was able to return to the QRFCC, where she became a volunteer after she participated in this session to provide awareness sessions to children. Her colleagues were astounded by her presence on the 4th day after the funeral, yet enjoyed sitting with her because of her positivity and how she let go of the negative energy.

7

**“Even if my identity is unknown,
I recognize myself as a human
being with many dreams”**

The hospital burned down, and a young woman believed that since the first day of her life she was unwelcomed to the world. She was born in Egypt and later relocated to Jordan.

Things became messed up when she discovered she had two birthdays and two cultures; "I am one person but with two personalities," she said. Because she was not registered, she lost her rights in both countries. My parents divorced after 12 years, and it was the best day of my life because my father was a drug addict and abuser, and the family couldn't sleep well because of this fear when he was around, and when the mother confronted the father about that fear, he used to hit her. However, due to her parent's divorce, she and her mother were forced to work long hours. She worked as a plumber, electrician, and painter at the age of 16, but she was unable to continue because these jobs were only accessible to men. Living in a neighborhood that judges her and her family because her father who didn't have a good reputation, made them feel unwelcomed. Due to the low income, the landlord had to cut off the electricity and water therefore, she tended to steal from them to keep her family safe, and as a result, she hated the neighbors and didn't have friends. She eventually



transformed into an introvert who was unconcerned about anything, including her family. She lives near the QRFCC and has always wanted to attend any of its services but when she heard about the expressive of art session, she was inspired because she is passionate about art. Throughout the session, she was unable to express her point of view, except for one activity Organizing the emotions activity by clay, in which she opened up and cried for the first time in her life since she believed no one could see her weaknesses. She can now say no and do what is best for herself and her dream, and she has never felt the need to seek assistance from anyone because she can achieve things on her own, but in this session, she was able to understand and be aware that seeking assistance may be a contribution to feeling better and accepted to be referred. She became conscious that there are both good and bad people in the world. She knew she was talented and capable of drawing, and she was so proud of the pieces she created!

8

"JRF is a place where dreams can come true, and I applied to the livelihood program to provide my children with life necessities and to strengthen myself".

A woman's life had changed after the death of her father; this loss affected her means of communication and reflected on her young children, who wanted to imitate their mom as being their role model and became mini versions of her of being upset all the time.

Also, her relationship with her husband, which had become unstable, full of fights and aggressiveness especially after needing her husband as she hoped he could be with her all the time to give her the love and care she desired, but life required him to work. As a result, her children experienced a lot of emotional distress and anxiety as a result of this type of relationship. She was a different person. She agreed to take part in the expressive of art session after the Jordan River Foundation's women's committee contacted her to inform her about its services and she wanted to be a part of it to get out of



this phase. In the heart chamber activity, she cried a lot and was able to talk about her father.

This program provided this woman with the opportunity and motivation to make a change. In addition, having a safe place to express herself that impacted positively on her mental health. She has accepted the fact that her father has died and has allowed herself to grow closer to her children. She and her husband decided to fill her free time by considering a home business that would also support her financially, ultimately leading to independence.

9

A story was told by the youngest child in a family with a large age gap between them. She was a spoiled child who had her wishes granted until her grandmother's illness when her mother was with her all the time.

She had a tense relationship with her mother as a result of her mother's absence from her life, and nothing had changed since. My mother used to say, "I have raised my older children, and now it is my time to follow my dream and focus on my work!" Deep down, this younger girl was unhappy, and she lost interest in education as a kid. The mother hired a tutor only 10 days before her final high school exam, but it was insufficient to study all of the subjects, and she failed, which had a significant impact on her because she saw herself as a failure. Her only way of attracting people's attention was to cause problems, particularly with her mother. This technique made her even more lonely since her surroundings avoided interacting with her. She has no friends or supportive



mother, which frustrated her and shaped her into an aggressive person who dislikes herself. She is grateful to have a family member who works at the QRFCC and registered her for this expressive of art training in order to improve her behaviors and well-being; she was hesitant at first to join but eventually agreed. Her self-consciousness was amplified as a result of the program's influence. She was able to gain the trust of those around her by expressing and describing her feelings and thoughts more clearly and directly. Her mother informed the facilitator of the noticeable difference when dealing with her daughter, and her keenness of registering for the Tawjihi exam after the session and is preparing her studying plan

10

" It feels like I was reborn again"

The most significant story and change was chosen by all women, was the change of a woman who lived her first 12 years of unending domestic violence and screaming, this caused her to be constantly afraid, anxious, and unable to sleep.

Back then her sibling and she were happy at first when they knew they would move to their grandparents when their parents got divorced believing it would be a new beginning, but the reality was the opposite of what they had imagined as it became worse and more oppressive, with no one to look after them, and felt they weren't heard. When a new stepmother and stepfather were introduced to their family, her only way out was to marry her cousin at a young age. The experience of being separated from both parents and having new step-parents had a long-term physical, mental, and behavioral impact on her. This marriage was not what she had hoped for a life full of roses and flowers, it actually stole her childhood from playing with the dolls and from continuing her education, and she realized she had made the wrong decision. She had a baby soon after her marriage, followed by another. She was never raised in a loving, hugging, or cuddly environment, and this carried over into her interactions with her children. She was



obedient to everyone around her as she felt that it would be useless to let her voice be heard.

This session was full of benefits and impacts, as she became happier after brushing off her emotions and consciously expressing them since this session was a heart-opening chamber. Also, it allowed her to respect her parents and not blame them for what she had gone through which made her sleeps comfortably without thinking about things that bothered her in the past. Her relationship with her children became more interactive, and she changed the language of communication by touching, cuddling, kissing, hugging, and expressing her love to them, and she stopped beating and punishing them, which relieved much of her nervousness and anger. She also enjoys sharing and playing with them. New terms such as love, affection, and having a goal were introduced into her life, as well as a willingness to change and focus on herself and her elegance.

"Thank you for changing my mom and making her a beautiful woman!"

She became stronger than before, especially after drawing boundaries with her surroundings and recognizing her right to ask her husband about her needs and the right to go for a walk in the garden with her children. She stated that she wanted to finish her

education so that she could help her children with their studies and be an inspiration to them. The pride in her child's eyes was visible to the attendees in the art gallery when he saw his mother confident enough in front of people sharing her journey in this project.



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