

A NEW CHAPTER OF HEALING: TRANSFORMING LIVES

EXPRESSIVE ART PROGRAM

THE MOST SIGNIFICANT CHANGE APPROACH

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Introduction

➤ Abstract

In a world where trauma and emotional scars often go unspoken, the Expressive Art Program stands as a beacon of healing and transformation. By using art as a tool to tackle the deep-seated impact of gender-based violence (GBV), the program provides a safe, therapeutic space where women and girls can express themselves freely, confront their pain, and begin their journey toward recovery.

This report highlights the impact of the Expressive Art Program, facilitated through the Most Significant Change (MSC) approach. Through this method, participants are empowered to share their personal stories of change, offering a window into the profound effects of the program on their emotional, social, and psychological well-being. These stories showcase how art has become a lifeline for many, helping them to overcome trauma, reclaim their sense of self-worth, and gain new behavioral strategies to navigate the complexities of their lives.

Through this program, women and girls not only found emotional release but also learned valuable skills to rebuild their lives. These sessions focused on emotional regulation, stress management, and assertiveness, empowering women to set personal boundaries and foster self-confidence. By providing this therapeutic outlet, the program offers more than relief; it equips survivors of GBV with the tools they need to face the future with confidence, resilience, and renewed hope.

This report draws on the personal stories of women who participated in art therapy at the Queen Rania Family and Children Center (QRFCC). These stories vividly illustrate the profound psycho-social impact the program has had on survivors of GBV, highlighting changes in areas such as emotional and social well-being, health, education, and personal identity. The MSC approach, with its focus on participant narratives, helps capture the tangible transformations these women have undergone—shedding light on both the immediate and long-term effects of the program.

The Most Significant Change Approach

The Most Significant Change (MSC) approach was chosen for this activity due to its participatory nature and its ability to capture personal transformations from the perspectives of those directly affected. By empowering women to tell their own stories, the MSC method gives beneficiaries a sense of ownership over their experiences and provides a deeper understanding of the diverse and complex impacts the program has had, as perceived by various stakeholders.

The flexibility of the MSC approach allows each participant to choose how they wish to present their story and the specific area of change they feel is most important. Participants were also given the freedom to decide with whom to share their experiences, creating a comfortable space for self-expression. The approach not only focused on verbal storytelling but also considered body language as an indicator of emotional release and comfort, particularly as participants shared their stories in front of groups.

A core goal of the MSC workshop was to establish a supportive environment where participants could openly express their emotions and experiences. Thanks to the dedicated efforts of the staff, this was achieved, enabling each participant to fully embrace their journey of change. The results were evident: participants demonstrated significant emotional growth, better handling of personal challenges, and noticeable improvements in their communication skills and social interactions.

- The implementation of the Most Significant Change (MSC) approach followed these steps:

Step 1:	Identifying Domains of Change
Step 2:	Selecting Participants
Step 3:	Story Collection and Group Sharing
Step 4:	Analysis and Classification

✓ **Step 1: Identifying Domains of Change**

Identifying the main domains of change based on insights gathered from the facilitators. These domains serve as measurable indicators for tracking the impact of the stories shared by participants. The key domains identified were:

- **Emotional (psychological) development**
- **Behavioral development**

✓ **Step 2: Selecting Participants**

854 women attended and benefited from the expressive art sessions under the FCDO project till September 2024. Based on the trainers' observations; 15 women were nominated for the Most Significant Change (MSC) process. The nomination was made due to notable changes observed during the sessions, reflecting significant emotional or behavioral transformations. Of these, 9 women gave their consent to share their stories and participate in the MSC process, allowing for a deeper understanding of the impact of the program on their lives.

✓ **Step 3: Story Collection and Group Sharing**

The Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning (MEL) Department introduced the concept of MSC to the beneficiaries, explaining the key questions their stories needed to address:

- How did you find out about the training and what motivated you to join?
- What immediate changes did you experience during the training?
- What was the final impact on you after completing the activity?

The 9 participants were grouped at tables, with group formation left to the participants to create a comfortable atmosphere for sharing. Three groups were formed, with 3 participants per group. Each participant shared her story within the group, which was then written down exactly as told in their own words.

After sharing, each group voted on the most significant story, resulting in four stories being selected. A second round of voting was held among the four stories to determine the most significant overall, which was highlighted as the key story of change from the expressive art activity.

✓ **Step 4: Analysis and Classification**

The strongest stories were then analyzed and classified according to the domains of change—emotional and behavioral development. This structured and participatory process ensured that the MSC approach captured authentic stories of change, providing a clear understanding of the program's impact and areas for further development.

Findings

A total of 9 stories were analyzed, focusing on two primary areas of change: Emotional (psychological) and Behavioral development. Many stories touched on multiple domains, highlighting the program’s wide-reaching impact.

The Expressive Art Program enabled participants to experience emotional healing, improve interpersonal relationships, and develop healthier behaviors, leading to personal growth and stronger family dynamics.

Main Domain of Change	Sub- domain
Emotional (Psychological) Change	Increasing self-confidence: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Participants reported that the art-making process allowed for emotional release, which led to increased self-confidence. - By expressing themselves creatively, they began to value themselves more and gain a stronger sense of self-worth.
	Overcoming fear and trauma: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Participants were able to confront and overcome past fears and emotional trauma.
Behavioral Change	Improving relationships: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Participants experienced strengthened family bonds and improved dynamics. - Participants enhanced communication, particularly with children, spouses, and the community.
	Practicing self-care: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Participants learned to prioritize their well-being and practice self-care.

Table (1): Main and sub-domains of change

Each story could be subjected to more than one domain of change:

All of the MSC participants were victims of violence, whether inflicted by family members or the broader community, with abuse occurring both psychologically and physically, often from a young age. The domains and sub-domains of change identified through the process were interconnected, each leading naturally to the next. Regardless of the type of violence experienced, its effects were a combination of emotional and behavioral consequences.

Change	Sub- Domain of Change	Number of Stories	Percentage out of the total stories
Emotional	1. Increasing self-confidence	7	78%
	2. Overcoming fear and trauma	6	67%
Behavioral	1. Improving relationships	8	89%
	2. Practicing self-care	7	78%

Table (2): Main and sub-domains of change analysis

This table breaks down each story into specific sub-domains of emotional and behavioral change, providing direct quotes that highlight the transformation experienced by the participants.

Story #	Emotional	Behavioral	Quote
Story #1	Increasing self-confidence Overcoming fear and trauma	Improving relationships	<i>“I felt that I had an opportunity to let go of all the burdens... I became calmer and more understanding.”</i>
Story #2	Increasing self-confidence Overcoming fear and trauma	Improving relationships Practicing self-care	<i>“I realized I needed to prioritize myself... Now, I confidently say 'no' when necessary.”</i>
Story #3	Overcoming fear and trauma	Improving relationships Practicing self-care	<i>“The fear of loss gripped me... I realized I could breathe again... my family felt the change too.”</i>
Story #4	Increasing self-confidence	Improving relationships Practicing self-care	<i>“A happy home starts with a happy mother... I learned how to care for myself and my family better.”</i>
Story #5	Overcoming fear and trauma	Improving relationships	<i>“I found the courage to confront my fears... Instead of opposing my son’s relationship, I supported it.”</i>
Story #6	Increasing self-confidence	Improving relationships Practicing self-care	<i>“I began to value myself more... I see myself as worthy of love and care, which changed everything.”</i>
Story #7	Increasing self-confidence Overcoming fear and trauma	Practicing self-care	<i>“Each brushstroke felt like a step forward... I started to love myself again and shed negative thoughts.”</i>
Story #8	Increasing self-confidence Overcoming fear and trauma	Improving relationships Practicing self-care	<i>“I forgave myself for neglecting my own needs... I learned to set boundaries and care for my well-being.”</i>
Story #9	Increasing self-confidence Overcoming fear and trauma	Improving relationships Practicing self-care	<i>“The transformation I experienced wasn’t just a change in behavior—it was a deep, internal shift.”</i>

Table (3): Stories break down

Story #1: A New Chapter of Healing!

My name is Ahlam, I am 40 years old, and I live with my family, which includes my husband and 4 children. A while ago, I heard about a workshop held at Queen Rania Center from my neighbor, So, I registered for the workshop. I have always loved art, but I had no idea that this workshop would bring such a drastic change to my life.

When the workshop began, I thought it would just be about drawing, but the surprise was that the sessions were not just a simple drawing class. It was about self-expression and releasing pent-up emotions. For the first time in my life, I felt that I had an opportunity to let go of all the burdens I had been carrying on my shoulders for years. It wasn't easy, but I was determined to face what was inside me, even if it was painful. In one of the sessions, we were asked to draw a circle and place our feelings and identity within it. At first, I hesitated; what should I put in this circle? How do I express everything I carry inside me? I had been living under the shadow of harsh experiences: from being beaten and humiliated to the difficulties I faced as a mother trying to raise her children under tough circumstances. Despite all of that, I decided that I wouldn't hold onto this pain anymore.

When I finished drawing, I felt like I had placed a part of my soul on paper. That moment was the beginning. After that, we started talking about forgiveness—something I didn't think I was capable of. I had a long list of people I felt had wronged me, starting with and extending to family members. I had bitter feelings toward them, but through these sessions, I began to truly let go of these feelings, and I began to forgive. It was like a massive weight was lifted off my chest.

When I returned home after the sessions, I felt like a new person. For the first time in my life, I felt that I could communicate with my daughter in a different way. I used to be very strict with her, and sometimes I felt like I was losing control of my anger. But after the training, I became calmer and more understanding. My children noticed the change and asked me, "Mom, how did you become like this? You used to get angry so quickly, but now you seem completely different." Not only my daughter, but also my son Mohammad, who suffers from speech and hearing issues, noticed the change. I used to feel helpless about his condition, not knowing how to help him. But after the training, I learned how to deal with him differently, using the techniques I learned in the program to help him express his emotions. I monitored him at school and observed how he interacted with his peers and how he tried to overcome the challenges he faced. Gradually, I began to see the change in his behavior, and he became more confident.

*This experience was full of surprises. **I was no longer the woman who feared confrontation or let things control her.** I became stronger and braver in expressing myself. I even managed to rid myself of the feelings of injustice I had carried for years toward my husband and family. These sessions were a turning point in my life, and I have now become a more understanding and patient mother and wife.*

The biggest lesson I learned from this experience is that I don't have to carry all these burdens alone. Everyone goes through difficult experiences in their lives, but the most important thing is how we deal with those experiences and come out of them stronger.

I am better today than I was yesterday, and I am ready to face all the challenges that may come my way in the future.

I encourage every mother, and every person who feels lost or burdened, to go through such an experience. It's not just a program; it's a journey of self-discovery and letting go of everything that weighs down your life.

Reflection

Ahlam's story is a powerful example of how the Expressive Art Program enabled her to move beyond her traumatic past, rebuild her self-esteem, and foster more positive and compassionate relationships with her family. Through the program, she gained the tools not only to heal but also to empower herself and her children, transforming her outlook on life and her approach to the challenges she faces. A noticeable aspect of her journey was developing the skill to organize and express difficult emotions, choosing to confront and articulate her discomfort rather than suppressing it. This shift allowed her to reclaim control and face life's challenges with newfound strength and resilience.

Story #2: Reflecting Inner Change to the Outside World

My name is Manar, I'm 36 years old, and this is the story of how my life took a turn I never expected. For years, I felt invisible in this world, like I was carrying the weight of the entire universe on my shoulders. I lived in a constant state of brokenness and confusion, always putting myself last, trying to please everyone around me—my husband, my children, and society. But I completely forgot about myself.

When I began attending the program at Queen Rania Center, I had no idea that it would be the beginning of a drastic transformation in my life. Initially, I approached the sessions with a sense of curiosity, but it didn't take long before I realized I had been drowning in a sea of unresolved emotions and overwhelming pressures. During each session, I would return home and reflect on everything we had discussed. Gradually, I came to the stark realization that I had been living an unbalanced life and that I needed to reorder my priorities.

The workshop wasn't just a series of sessions; it was a turning point for me. For the first time, I stood in front of the mirror and looked at myself differently. I realized that I was the most important person in my life, and that if I was balanced and at peace on the inside, everything else in my life would naturally fall into place. There was no longer a need for me to struggle to "fix" my life; it began to change organically as my internal state shifted.

One of the biggest changes was my newfound ability to set boundaries. I learned that some people in my life had no place in it anymore, as they were draining my energy and diminishing my sense of self-worth. Now, I confidently say "no" when necessary. I no longer tolerate people who don't add value to my life. In fact, I've realized that I was the one bringing value to their lives. Now, anyone who is no longer in my life is the one who has lost something, not me. It might sound like arrogance to some, but I see it as newfound confidence—confidence that I had long been missing.

When it comes to my relationship with my children, it has undergone a complete transformation. Where once I would issue orders without room for discussion, there is now open communication, laughter, and honest conversations. My children used to disregard what I said, but now they come to me for advice, seeking my opinion before making decisions. I'm no longer "just a mom" in their eyes; I'm someone they trust and depend on.

The most profound change in my life came when I faced a fear that had been with me since childhood. I had always been haunted by the fear of losing loved ones, especially after the death of my father when I was only eight years old. This fear of loss seeped into every part of my life, holding me back and filling me with anxiety. Through the sessions and the support I received, I learned to confront and accept this fear. It no longer controls me.

*Today, I am a new Manar. **My face looks different, my spirit has changed, and my whole approach to life has shifted.** Even my children have noticed, saying, "Mom, even your face looks different now!" And it's true—I am a different person, inside*

and out. I now look to the future with confidence and optimism, knowing that I have the strength to face whatever comes my way.

This experience wasn't just a journey of learning—it was a journey of self-discovery. It made me stronger, clearer in my vision for the future, and more in tune with who I am and what I want from life. I encourage every woman who feels lost or overwhelmed to take the time to discover herself and embrace the changes that come with it. Don't be afraid of change—it's the key to unlocking the life you deserve.

Reflection

Manar's story is a powerful example of how the Expressive Art Program allowed her to break free from a life where she felt invisible and unworthy. Through the program, she not only rediscovered her sense of self but also gained the confidence to set boundaries, prioritize herself, and communicate more effectively with her family. The journey wasn't just about art—it was about reclaiming her life, her confidence, and her future. Manar's transformation demonstrates the profound impact of the program on her emotional and behavioral well-being. She moved from being burdened by fear and doubt to becoming a woman who knows her worth, communicates openly, and nurtures a stronger relationship with her children.

Story #3: The Art of Seeing Beauty in the Simple Things!

My name is Safa. Before joining the Expressive Art Program, my life felt bleak, like a constant cloud of sadness looming over me. I had lost everything—my homeland, my family, and the life I once knew in Syria. I was living in exile, not just physically, but emotionally. The pain of separation from my loved ones had left me feeling isolated. I had shut myself off from the world, avoiding close relationships, fearing the inevitable heartbreak that comes with losing people I care about. The fear of loss gripped me tightly, and no matter how much I tried to move past it, it clung to me.

When I joined the program, I wasn't expecting much. I was merely looking for a distraction from my inner turmoil. But what I found was far more than I anticipated. The workshop opened my eyes to a side of myself I had never truly explored. It wasn't just about the pain I had carried with me for years; it was about finding a new perspective, a new world of possibilities through art, creativity, and self-expression.

During one of the sessions, we practiced breathing exercises, and that simple act of breathing made me feel alive again. I realized that even in the depths of my despair, I still had the power to breathe and release the tension that had built up inside me. The art exercises we did—especially working with colors—helped me in ways I didn't expect. I began to express my emotions through drawing, even though I never considered myself an artist. I found that the colors had a way of freeing my spirit, lifting the heaviness off my chest.

What truly surprised me was the change I saw in my family. One day, I walked into the living room to find my husband—a man who had never picked up a paintbrush in his life—sitting with a set of watercolors, painting a landscape. He told me, "I'm just trying something new." It was a shock to me because he's always been so serious and stressed, especially since we left Syria. But somehow, through my participation in the workshop, calmness and creativity had seeped into our home.

My 16-year-old son, who has always struggled with anger, came home one day with a set of paints and said, "Mom, I want to try painting." It was as if the tension in our house had finally found an outlet. Even my youngest daughter, who is usually quiet and reserved, started drawing to express her feelings. Instead of lashing out in anger when she came home from school upset, she would grab a piece of paper and sketch what had happened that day. I could see through her drawings what had bothered her—someone upsetting her, or a friend who had hurt her feelings. The drawings became a way for her to express what she couldn't say in words.

Through the program, I realized how much I had been missing out on the beauty in life. Before, I was consumed by the grief of what I had lost. But now, I see the beauty in the smallest things—the smile of my daughter, the way my husband paints, or even just the sunlight streaming through our window. Every small thing became a source of gratitude for me. I started to see life differently, focusing on the blessings around me rather than the pain.

I used to listen to stories of others in the workshop, and their journeys inspired me. Islam, for example, never gave up on her ambitions, no matter how hard life had been for her. She reminded me that no matter how old we get, we are always meant to keep moving forward, to keep striving for something better. We are still capable of growth, of creating change in our lives.

*Through the program, I learned to embrace life in all its complexity. I started to appreciate the small, everyday blessings that I once took for granted—the roof over our heads, the window that lets in fresh air, the trees outside. **I realized that even in the darkest times, there is still so much beauty in the world if you choose to see it.***

Now, instead of focusing on what's missing in my life, I focus on what I have. I have my family, my children, and my health, and for that, I am grateful. The challenges we face can be overwhelming, but they can also be overcome. The workshop didn't just teach me about art; it taught me how to find peace in chaos and how to recognize the beauty that surrounds me every day.

Reflection

Safa's journey through the Expressive Art Program reveals the profound impact that art can have on healing deep emotional wounds. From the sorrow of losing her homeland and family to the struggles of living in exile, Safa carried a heavy emotional burden. Through the program, she discovered the power of self-expression and learned to embrace the beauty in life's simplest moments. This newfound perspective not only transformed her own outlook but also had a ripple effect on her family, fostering creativity and emotional healing in her home. Safa's story is a testament to how art can serve as a gateway to emotional freedom, helping individuals reconnect with the world around them and find peace within themselves.

Story #4: Happy Home Starts with a Happy Mother

My name is Islam, and I have participated in several psychological support sessions at QRFCC before, but the art therapy workshop was completely different. From the first moment, I felt like this session delved much deeper than expected. It wasn't just about drawing; it was about unlocking emotions and memories that I had buried deep inside, memories that still impacted me, even though I had long forgotten about them.

I started my journey with the art therapy sessions after I moved from Syria, which was a strange and difficult adjustment for me. I didn't understand the local dialect, and this made communication challenging. In addition to the struggles of war and displacement, I faced new hardships in my new environment. In the very first session, we were asked to share significant experiences, and I immediately thought of the worst memory I had during the war. I never expected a simple art session would bring that memory back to the surface. The workshop felt like an invitation to enter a new world—a space where I could confront the emotions I had been avoiding.

What set this training apart was the way it was delivered. The facilitator didn't treat us like students in a lecture, but rather as equals in a safe, informal space. She shared personal experiences and gave us room to open up and express ourselves. I've always loved drawing, but after getting married early and moving to a new life, I drifted away from it. During the workshop, I rediscovered the power of art—not just as a hobby but as a therapeutic tool. Even when I absentmindedly doodled, I realized that every line, every color had meaning, revealing something about my inner state.

*As the sessions progressed, I started to notice a change in my home life. I began to feel happier, more at peace. **I realized that a happy home starts with a happy mother.** When the mother is content, it creates a ripple effect that spreads to everyone in the household. I learned to leave my worries and responsibilities behind when I entered the art therapy space, focusing entirely on myself. This was a big shift for me as I had always prioritized everyone else's needs over my own.*

One of the most profound changes came in my relationship with my six-year-old daughter. Before the workshop, I struggled to understand her emotions. In one session, I brought one of her drawings to the facilitator to analyze. Instead, she suggested I ask my daughter directly about the meaning behind her drawings. That simple act of asking my daughter about her artwork opened up a new line of communication between us. I learned that through art, children can express emotions they don't yet have the words for. Since then, I always ask her about the meaning behind her drawings, and it's helped me understand her better.

The workshop didn't just change how I interacted with my daughter—it also changed how I felt about myself. During my second pregnancy, people would make insensitive comments like, "Maybe this time you'll have a boy." It was as if having another daughter wasn't enough. These remarks used to bother me deeply, but after the workshop, I learned to let go of what people thought. I became more focused on my happiness and that of my family, rather than letting external judgments affect me.

I also learned to appreciate my own appearance more. I used to be self-conscious about my body, always worrying about my weight or whether I looked “good enough” by other people’s standards. But now, I stand in front of the mirror, look at myself, and feel proud. I tell myself, “I am beautiful, just as I am.” This newfound confidence even extended to how I approach my daughters. One of my daughters has darker skin, and people would often make hurtful comparisons between her and her fair-skinned sister. After the workshop, I became more intentional about encouraging both my daughters to embrace their unique beauty. I remind them that they are strong, beautiful, and capable, no matter what others might say.

The workshop was also a revelation in how it helped me deal with stress. I learned that whenever I feel overwhelmed, I can turn to art as a release. Whether it's drawing, painting, or even working with clay, these creative outlets have given me a way to express and process my emotions in a healthy manner. I remember the comfort I felt working with clay during one of the sessions—it was like the tension in my body melted away with each press and shape of the material.

By the end of the workshop, I realized how much I had changed. Not only did I become a calmer, more patient person, but I also found a way to reconnect with my creative side. The experience gave me the tools to build a better relationship with my family, especially my children. It’s as if art gave me a new language to communicate with them—one that’s filled with empathy, understanding, and love.

Reflection

Islam’s journey through the art therapy workshop is a testament to how creative expression can unlock deep emotional healing. Like many others, Islam faced significant hardships due to war, displacement, and societal pressures. But through art, she was able to process these challenges, find her voice, and heal. The workshop empowered her to reconnect with herself and her family in meaningful ways, turning art into a therapeutic tool not just for herself but for her children as well. This story highlights the transformative power of art therapy in providing a safe space for self-discovery, emotional release, and personal growth.

Story #5: Embrace Love Over Fear!

*For 50 years, I, Rabaa, carried the weight of my past, trapped under the pressure of societal expectations. I spent much of my life overwhelmed and anxious about what people think. When my son fell in love with a Brazilian woman, whose culture and religion were different from ours. **I was afraid! Afraid of receiving judgements from family and society.** This fear drove me to oppose his relationship, controlling the whole situation, trying to hide his passport, and prevent him from following his heart.*

*I know that my actions were rooted in continuous fear. I wasn't just fighting against my son's love; **I was fighting against the invisible chains of societal judgment that had bound me for years,** the same chains that had kept me from living the life I wanted when I was younger. I didn't want my son to go through what I had endured, a life marked by unfulfilled love and emotional struggle.*

*When I joined the Expressive Art Program, everything began to change! It wasn't just a workshop for me. It was the key to unlocking the emotional cage I had built around me. **Through art, I found the courage to confront my deepest fears and insecurities.** I learned to set boundaries, to understand where my freedom began and where it ended, not just for me but for my children as well. For the first time, I began to feel free from others' approval of my life.*

By the end of the Art Therapy sessions, I realized that I was imprisoning not only myself but also my son. In a moment of self-confrontation, I decided to meet the woman he loved, so I asked him to bring her to Jordan. I didn't want to do injustice. What I discovered shocked me, she was kind, loving, and deeply respectful. She was making my son happy. That meeting broke the walls of judgment that I had built. Instead of standing in the way of their love, I chose to support them, allowing their relationship to turn into a beautiful marriage.

Meeting her broke the walls of judgment I had built in my mind. Instead of standing in the way of their love, I chose to support them. This decision allowed their relationship to grow into a beautiful marriage. She became part of our family, and I came to love her like a daughter. I even helped with all the necessary paperwork in Jordan so they could get married. One day, while we were together, she told me that she wanted to convert to Islam out of love for my son and because of the kindness we had shown her.

Now, my son and his wife are happily married and living in Brazil. What I gained from the Expressive Art Program wasn't just personal growth—I was able to rebuild a relationship with my son, create a new bond with my daughter-in-law, and finally free myself from the weight of societal judgment that had burdened me for decades.

The impact of the program was profound. I felt a new sense of freedom, liberated from the opinions of others that had once dominated my thoughts. The energy that once drained me turned positive, and I no longer cared how the world saw me or my children.

Art therapy didn't just help me manage my emotions; it transformed me. I mended my relationship with my son and found inner peace, breaking free from the emotional prison I had been living in. I now encourage other mothers to explore the healing power of art therapy, knowing how it can release long-held negative energy and lead to deep personal change.

Reflection

Rabaa's story is one of emotional liberation and personal growth. For years, she was weighed down by societal expectations, allowing fear and judgment to dictate her decisions. However, through the Expressive Art Program, she learned to confront her fears and ultimately found the strength to free herself—and her son—from the chains of societal pressure. Her journey highlights how art can serve as a powerful tool for self-discovery, emotional healing, and personal transformation. Rabaa's courage to change not only mended her relationship with her son but also allowed love to flourish where fear once stood.

Story #6: From Chaos to Clarity: A Better Version of Myself!

*There was a time in my life when I felt like I was falling into the abyss of chaos. The same chaos of daily life made me overwhelmed, struggling to keep everything together. I am 23 years old, and I was juggling my role as a wife and a mother, yet I felt that I lost my life compass! I came across an art therapy workshop through a WhatsApp group, and while I wasn't sure what to expect, something inside me whispered that **I needed this.***

*From the very first session, I could feel a shift. Art became my outlet, my way of processing the emotions I had kept buried for so long. **I learned how to value myself and reorganize my life's priorities.** For the first time in years, I realized that I needed to care for myself as much as I cared for everyone else. This was not selfish, but necessary.*

*The change wasn't just internal, it reflected on every part of my life. My relationship with my husband improved dramatically. I became calmer and more patient, and instead of the tension that once filled our conversations, there was now understanding and compassion. **My children also noticed the shift.** They used to see me as just their mother, someone who provided for them but was often too overwhelmed to engage. Now, I was fully present in their lives. I listened to them, played with them, and showed them the kind of love and attention they craved. It was like a fog had lifted, and I could finally see them clearly. I was no longer just a caretaker—I was a mother who was truly involved in their lives.*

I felt my confidence grow. I began to prioritize my well-being, something I had never done before. I now understand the importance of taking care of myself to take care of others. This simple yet profound realization changed everything. I began to see myself as worthy of care, attention, and love, and that made all the difference.

*By the end of the Art Therapy, I felt like a new person. Art became my medium to express emotions I didn't even know were buried deep within me, and with each stroke of the brush, I released more of the stress and tension that had weighed me down. I became more organized, more focused, and more at peace with myself and those around me. **My relationships flourished because I had finally learned to flourish within myself.***

Looking back, I can't believe how far I've come. I went from feeling like I was drowning in my responsibilities to standing confidently in my own power. I now see myself as someone worthy of love, care, and happiness, and that shift has changed everything for me. My home is no longer a place of tension but a place of peace and joy, where my husband, my children, and I can grow together.

*I now look at life with fresh eyes. **The chaos that once overwhelmed me has been replaced with clarity, and I've learned to prioritize what truly matters.** This experience didn't just help me, it completely transformed my life.*

To anyone feeling lost or overwhelmed, I say this: Take care of yourself. Take that step toward self-discovery and healing. You deserve it.

Reflection

Faten's experience highlights the journey from chaos to clarity, from being overwhelmed to gaining control of her life. Through the therapeutic process of creating art, she unlocked buried emotions, gained confidence, and learned to prioritize self-care. Her transformation was not just personal but also positively impacted on her relationships with her husband and children. Rabaa's story is a powerful example of how prioritizing one's own emotional well-being can lead to profound changes in all aspects of life, from inner peace to stronger family bonds.

Story #7: Each Brushstroke is a Step Toward Healing!

It all started with a simple message on WhatsApp! I have always loved art and drawing, so when I heard about an art therapy program, I immediately reached out. I wasn't entirely sure what to expect, but something inside me pushed me to try it. My love for art and curiosity about how it could help me emotionally were enough to make me take that step.

From the very first session, I felt a shift deep inside. Art therapy wasn't just about painting or creating pretty pictures, it was about learning to care for myself in a way I had never done before. For so long, I had neglected my emotional needs, and this program taught me to focus on self-care and self-love. As the sessions progressed, I found myself letting go of the heavy thoughts that had once clouded my mind. It was like peeling away layers of negativity that I didn't even realize had been weighing me down.

But the journey wasn't always easy. There were moments when I felt a deep weight in my chest, emotions that I couldn't fully express with words. My father had passed away, leaving a void in my life, and my mother had taken on the role of both parents, sacrificing so much to take care of us. There were so many things I wanted to say, but the words just wouldn't come out. (She cried and couldn't continue...) Even though there was pain I wasn't ready to verbalize, the act of creating art gave me a sense of calm and healing. Each brushstroke felt like a step forward, a way of processing the emotions I had buried for so long. Slowly, I began to rebuild my confidence, something I had lacked for as long as I could remember. I started to love myself again. The heavy, negative thoughts that once dominated my mind started to lift, making way for a more positive outlook on life.

I used to dwell on negativity, but now, through the art therapy sessions, I've embraced a more optimistic mindset. I've learned that healing isn't linear, but with each session, I grew stronger, more confident, and more at peace with myself. Looking back, I can say with certainty that this program changed me on a deeply emotional level. It helped me see myself in a new, more positive light. While I still carry some things inside me that I'm not quite ready to share, I've learned that healing is a journey, and this was the first step in mine.

To anyone feeling overwhelmed by life, my message is simple: Art has the power to heal, even when words fail. It helped me find my inner strength, and it can help you too. Create inner peace.

Reflection

Hiba's story is a powerful testament to the healing potential of art. Through the process of creating, she unlocked emotions she had been unable to express in words and found a way to rebuild her confidence. While still on her journey, her experience highlights how art can provide a sense of calm, self-love, and inner strength. Even in moments of deep emotional struggle, art became her tool for healing and personal growth, showing that creativity can offer a path to clarity and peace when words fall short.

Story #8: Healing starts from within!

My friend told me about training sessions that were being held, encouraging me to attend. At first, I wasn't sure that these sessions would make a difference in my life, but deep down, I knew I needed something new to help me cope with the challenges I was facing, especially in my relationship with my children. As a Syrian mother who had experienced the harsh realities of displacement, I felt like my life was spiraling out of control. The pressures of mental strain, hunger, and fear had taken their toll on me, and I felt utterly "broken." I had lost faith in myself, completely overwhelmed by the weight of my experiences.

When I attended the first session, I could feel something shift within me. It was a session focused on "self-assertiveness", and it was all about rediscovering confidence and learning how to deal with feelings of fear and anxiety. This was an entirely new concept for me. I had always put everyone else first—my children, my husband, my family—forgetting that I had needs too. This idea of prioritizing myself was foreign but deeply necessary.

Art therapy was not just about learning a new skill; it was about reconnecting with myself on a profound emotional level. We would close our eyes and meditate, confronting feelings we had long buried. I remember learning that "We don't escape anywhere; instead, we go deeper within ourselves." In those quiet moments, I came face to face with the pain and anger I had been suppressing for years. I realized that the weight I carried wasn't just about the hardships I had faced—it was about the emotions I had avoided, emotions that were holding me back.

With each session, I felt myself growing stronger. I started to see the world—and my life—through a new lens. My fears began to fade, and I found the courage to make decisions without hesitation. I felt empowered in a way I hadn't in years.

*One of the biggest turning points in my journey was learning how to forgive. There was a person in my life who had caused immense damage, leading to the breakdown of my marriage and my family relationships. I had held onto anger and resentment for a long time, allowing those emotions to fester within me. But one day, during a session, we were asked to sit quietly and reflect on the hurt we carried. I realized that holding onto this pain wasn't serving me anymore. In a moment of deep clarity, I told myself: "Forgive and live your life; let God handle the rest." In that moment, **I felt as if a massive burden had been lifted from me.** It was as if the person who had hurt me no longer had any power over my life.*

As I let go of that pain, I realized how much it had been affecting my relationship with my children. Before, I struggled to connect with my teenage son. He was rebellious, and I often felt like I had lost control. But after the sessions, I learned to approach him with more patience and empathy. I stopped reacting with anger and instead chose to listen, really listen, to what he was going through. This change in my approach transformed our relationship. For the first time, I felt like I was truly supporting him, not just disciplining him.

The transformation I experienced was profound, not just on the surface but deep within. I no longer saw myself as broken. I became stronger, more resilient, and more intentional about how I lived my life. I began to reevaluate my priorities, realizing that I needed to take care of myself first, and only then could I be the mother, the wife, and the woman I wanted to be for others.

Today, I am more confident and capable than ever. These sessions didn't just change the way I see myself; they changed the way I engage with the world. I'm more present in my children's lives, more at peace with myself, and I've let go of the pain that once weighed me down. I've learned that healing starts from within, and that in order to nurture those around me, I must first nurture myself.

I am deeply grateful for the experience and the opportunity to grow in ways I never thought possible. I now live with a sense of peace and confidence that I never imagined having. For anyone out there who feels burdened by life's challenges, I say this: You are stronger than you think. Take the time to care for yourself, to forgive, and to grow—you deserve it.

Reflection

Amneh's journey reflects a profound transformation from feeling broken and overwhelmed to reclaiming her confidence and embracing forgiveness. Through art therapy, she discovered her ability to confront and heal deep-seated emotions, freeing herself from the weight of her past. This newfound strength helped her to not only restore her relationship with her children but also to prioritize her well-being for the first time in her life. Amneh's story is a powerful testament to the healing potential of self-care and emotional release, offering inspiration to others to embrace change and focus on building a life filled with peace and confidence.

Story #9: From Silence to Strength and Self-Expression

My name is Israa, I'm 28 years old, and for as long as I can remember, I've been searching for something to help me organize my life and care for myself. That's what led me to join the art therapy sessions after some friends recommended them. I had previously attended better parenting sessions, but when I heard about the art therapy sessions, I knew I needed them badly. I've always been someone who puts others first—my children, my husband, my parents, and everyone around me—while neglecting my own needs for years.

One of the main reasons I joined these sessions was the overwhelming feeling that I couldn't control my emotions. I was quietly bearing the weight of daily life, dealing with struggles in unhealthy ways. I bottled everything up inside and didn't know how to express myself. This led to constant stress, anger, and anxiety. I had no ability to say "no," even when it came at the cost of my mental and physical health.

When I attended my first art therapy session, the experience was completely different from what I had expected. One activity asked us to close our eyes and imagine entering a series of rooms. First, I entered a room filled with people who had supported me in my life, and then another room filled with those who had hurt me. That's when my emotions really started to surface. I remembered all the people who had tried to bring me down with their words, those who underestimated my abilities. I felt sadness and anger, but at the same time, gratitude. It was their negativity that made me stronger. Their words, instead of crushing me, fueled my determination to prove myself and others wrong. I told myself, "If it weren't for them, I wouldn't be where I am today. They made me stronger, they made me believe in myself even more."

During the final session, I experienced a major breakthrough when the trainers asked us to forgive those who had caused us pain. This was an emotional moment for me; I decided to first forgive myself for all the times I had neglected my own needs, and then I forgave those who had hurt me. It felt as though a heavy burden I had been carrying for years had been lifted, as if I had closed a door on pain that had been open for far too long.

After these sessions, I started to notice significant changes in my daily life. I became calmer and less stressed when dealing with difficult situations, especially with my children. Before, I would get angry and shout at them in moments of frustration, but after the sessions, I learned how to control my emotions. I would take a deep breath before reacting. I became more patient and handled stressful situations with a sense of calm and clarity.

*One of the biggest challenges I faced was my inability to say "no." I always felt obligated to meet everyone's requests, even if they exceeded my capacity. But now, I've learned how to set healthy boundaries. **I can say "no" without feeling guilty, and I prioritize my own needs.** I realized that if I don't take care of myself, I won't be able to care for those I love.*

The transformation I experienced wasn't just a change in behavior—it was a deep, internal shift. I became more in control of my life, stronger, and more independent. I learned to put myself first and care for my emotional and mental well-being. I'm now better equipped to handle life's challenges with confidence and clarity, which has made me feel like a new person—someone who knows her worth and knows how to protect her inner peace.

This experience changed my life in a profound way, making me realize the importance of self-care and setting boundaries. I now live my life with more confidence, knowing how to maintain my peace and well-being, which has made me a better mother and a better person overall.

Reflection

Israa's story reflects a powerful transformation from feeling powerless and silenced to reclaiming her strength and finding her voice. Through the art therapy sessions, she learned the importance of self-care and setting healthy boundaries with others. The act of forgiveness was a pivotal moment for her, allowing her to release the pain of the past and regain her confidence. The changes she experienced were not just behavioral but deeply internal, enabling her to approach life's challenges with newfound calm and self-assurance.

Conclusion:

The Expressive Art Program has proven to be a transformative experience for the women and girls who participated. Through the Most Significant Change (MSC) approach, participants were able to share deeply personal stories of healing, growth, and transformation. The program not only facilitated emotional release and recovery from trauma but also instilled greater self-confidence, resilience, and stronger interpersonal relationships.

The findings clearly indicate that the program successfully impacted two main domains of change: emotional (psychological) and behavioral development. In the emotional domain, participants reported increased self-confidence and the ability to overcome fear and trauma. This newfound confidence empowered many to break free from societal pressures and embrace self-worth. In the behavioral domain, participants observed significant improvements in their relationships with family members, particularly with their children and spouses, and learned to prioritize self-care.

A striking realization from the stories is that the transformation experienced by the participants did not stop at their own personal growth. The emotional and behavioral changes they underwent began to ripple outward, **positively impacting their families, households, and communities**. As participants healed and gained confidence, they nurtured healthier relationships with those around them, fostering better communication and creating more harmonious home environments. Their stories reflect how personal healing through art has the power to initiate a broader social change, as their growth inspired and influenced their children, spouses, and even neighbors.

A common thread across all stories was the realization that healing starts from within. The participants embraced the power of art to confront long-held pain, express emotions they hadn't been able to vocalize, and, ultimately, create a more positive and empowered version of themselves. The transformation didn't stop at emotional or behavioral changes—these women now carry a renewed sense of purpose and strength, enabling them to face life's challenges with resilience and optimism. As their confidence grew, so did their ability to support and uplift others in their lives, extending the program's impact to their broader social circles.

The Expressive Art Program not only provided a therapeutic space for healing but also offered tools for lasting change, allowing participants to reclaim their lives, relationships, and identities. As they continue their journeys, their stories stand as powerful testaments to the potential for personal growth and empowerment through art and emotional expression, extending their positive impact to the wider community.