

SOCIETY

Dealing with mental illness through art

Comedy cabaret to raise money for Healing Expressions

By TARA BRADBURY

THE TELEGRAM

A prime rib dinner, some prime entertainment and a prime way to raise money to support those with mental health and addictions — St. John's-based organization Healing Expressions has all the ingredients for a successful inaugural fundraiser.

The organization is hosting a cabaret night called "Out of the Darkness" at the CLB Armory on Friday, Feb. 8. Sponsored by Bell Aliant and hosted by actor Glenn Downey, the show will feature comedy performances by Amy House and J.R. Fagan, followed by musical entertainment by Frank Holden, Bob Rutherford, Neil Rosenberg, Terry Lacey and friends. Dinner music will be provided by Gayle Tapper.

The event will also include live and silent auctions, with prizes such as a giclée print by local artist Margaret Best and a dinner for four with VOCM "Backtalk" host Paddy Daly and his wife at Uptown, home of Yuk Yuk's on Kenmount Road.

"One in five people suffers from some form of mental illness at some point in their life," says Karen Hanlon, founder and executive director of Healing Expressions. "Mental health is a subject we all need to be more aware of and something we all need to bring out of the darkness."

Established in 2009, Healing Expressions provides a low-cost art studio as an outlet of expression for those dealing with mental health and addictions, with a focus on reintegration into the community.

Over the past few years, participants have come from every walk of life, aged between 18

and 65. Many suffer with depression, while others are dealing with eating disorders, anxiety, bipolar disorder, schizophrenia, Alzheimer's disease, dementia, alcoholism or drug abuse.

The empowerment, Hanlon says, brings participants closer to a positive spiritual sense of self. It's basically an artistic way to wellness, she says.

"I've seen people return to work, I've seen people have better relationships with family members, and increase their self-esteem. They just become more self-aware, more passionate about life," Hanlon says.

Participants generally come to the organization when they've already begun their journey to recovery, with counsellors or other support workers, and are ready to move forward with their lives.

"They look at art as their own therapy," Hanlon explains. "As you paint or draw and express yourself, you're able to move through things in a different kind of way."

Along with studio space, Healing Expressions provides participants with art supplies and peer mentoring. A program called Skills Enhancement Ensuring Competence (SEEC) sees the organization hiring local artists to teach the group new skills and techniques.

Money raised from the "Out of the Darkness" event will go towards the SEEC program, as well as art materials, framing, field trips and outings.

Tickets for the "Out of the Darkness" dinner and show are \$75, and are available at the CLB Armory, Fred's Records or by calling Healing Expression at 743-1442.



Amy House



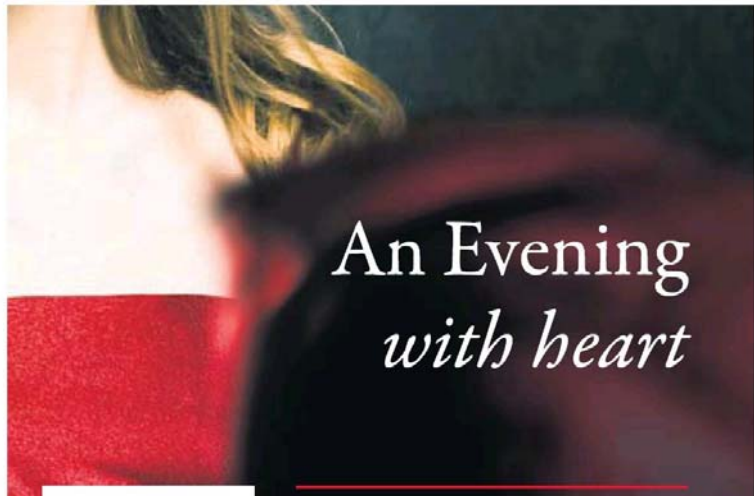
Karen Hanlon, founder and executive director of Healing Expressions. — Submitted photo

More information is available on the organization's website at www.healingexpressions.ca.

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Tracey Robinson, participating artist of Healing Expressions. Robinson is standing in front of her artwork, "The ideal wife, mother and daughter." As she was struggling with her illness and completing the piece, her father died. She completed the artwork through her grieving process, and it was selected for a local art show. — Submitted photo



An Evening
with heart