



## Healing with Art

February 14, 2018 changed Broward County, the State of Florida and the entire country forever. On this typical beautiful South Florida day, a young adult male armed with multiple weapons walked into Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida and killed 17 innocent people, severely injuring another 17 and tormented over 3,000 people for 7 minutes, which in the moment is, an eternity.

Over these 7 minutes, good, decent children and honorable, hardworking adults lost their lives, some of them losing their life while saving that of another - a fellow student. These members of Broward County, these children, these adults, were not only the prey of a presumed sociopath but also witnesses to death as they watched their friends, classmates and teachers die in the most horrific, extremely violent and torturous manner during those 7 minutes. No one in Northwest Broward will ever be the same again.

In a deluge of hindsight, local and national political battles have ensued as a result of the Stoneman Douglas horror. Battles about gun control. Battles about mental health services. Battles about law enforcement protocols. Perhaps all of these battles are necessary, perhaps only some of these are - only time will tell. What is necessary, what is one of the most important needs for this community right now is to heal, and this need will be one that will unfortunately last for years.

Time...it is a profound and interesting topic. And, while they say that time heals all wounds, to a parent that must bury their 14-year-old child, no time is enough. Nor is there enough time to heal the wound of losing a spouse. These wounds are never easy, and these are especially difficult when these wounds are inflicted because of the unforeseen and senseless actions of another – such as the horrendous shooting that occurred just two miles from the Coral Springs Museum of Art, at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School, on February 14, 2018.

Unfortunately, wounds caused in this way produce other emotions that are far reaching, wounds such as fear, guilt, anxiety, anger, paranoia and depression – wounds that could be summed up by an unfortunate common term, post-traumatic stress disorder.

According to the National Institute of Mental Health, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is a disorder that develops in people who have experienced a shocking, scary or dangerous event. Some symptoms of PTSD include:

- Trouble remembering key features of the traumatic event

- Negative thoughts about oneself or the world
- Distorted feelings like guilt or blame
- Loss of interest in enjoyable activities
- Flashbacks—reliving the trauma over and over, including physical symptoms like a racing heart or sweating
- Bad dreams
- Frightening thoughts
- Staying away from places, events, or objects that are reminders of the traumatic experience
- Avoiding thoughts or feelings related to the traumatic event

In addition to the symptoms above, teens tend to show other symptoms such as:

- Disruptive, disrespectful or destructive behaviors
- Feelings of guilt for not preventing injury or deaths
- Thoughts of revenge

There are a great many ways in which people deal with trauma, talk therapy, group therapy, prescribed medications or even self-medication. But just like the diversity of this great community, not one method for healing and dealing with PTSD is the correct or best method for everyone. Because of this, and to respond to the need of the community, the Coral Springs Museum of Art developed *Healing with Art* for those impacted by the MSD horror. *Healing with Art* combines the calm, serene environment of the Museum's galleries with art-making and board-certified art and music therapists to help in the healing process. Art therapy is part of expressive therapy that provides a sensory-based intervention to dealing with trauma. In a 2016 article in *Psychology Today*, Cathy Malchiodi PhD, LPCC, LPAT, ATR-BC, REAT states that art therapy “provides purposeful psychotherapeutic experiences that capitalize on the body's senses in ways that verbal psychotherapy does not...by tapping the senses (through visual, tactile and kinesthetic aspects of art making) traumatic memories can be retrieved and with further interactions, restructured and repaired”. Dr. Malchiodi further provides that “there is some evidence that art therapy may help reconnect feelings (implicit memories) with thinking (explicit memories), a process that may reduce posttraumatic stress reactions”. Further, while there are a great many forms of therapy that continue to evolve to help treat those who have experienced a trauma, art therapy has been proven by various studies to be highly effective in dealing with the aftereffects of trauma. Regrettably, a common occurrence after experiencing a trauma is an inability to discuss the incident verbally – repressing thoughts and feelings is a reason for this. With art therapy, words are not necessary for expressing emotions and healing can be achieved with little to no words as the art medium serves as a safe connection between the art therapist and the person in need for communication and help. That steadfast saying of time heals all wounds may be helpful to those who are trying to comfort someone, but the reality for the Northwest Broward community is that

time does not heal all wounds. Rather, it's what you do with that time that will heal these wounds.

### **Program – Immediate Response:**

Within hours of the Marjory Stoneman Douglas tragedy, the Broward School District, municipalities and community organizations pulled resources and banded together to open acute crisis centers in the northwest region of the county. One such site was the Coral Springs Center for the Arts, including the Coral Springs Museum of Art. Throughout the days of February 15 and February 16, 2018 the Coral Springs crisis center would see a countless number of children and adults who were afraid, grieving, confused and in dire need of emotional support and help. While these centers were short term, the need for healing was not. Because of this, the Coral Springs Museum of Art rallied its partners and developed an art-making program for the therapeutic purposes. The result, *Healing with Art*, a program to serve students, teachers, administrators, parents and community members in need of healing from a surreal and heartbreaking attack on a community.

February 20 through March 2, 2018 from 10 am to 5:30/6:00 pm the Museum was open for drop in services to anyone in need. Services took place in the main gallery of the Museum where tables were close in proximity to create a secure and cozy environment for people. Those in need were able to come at their leisure and comfort level staying 30 minutes, three hours or all day for *Healing with Art*. Art making projects were selected because of their calming nature such as working with mandalas, painting or sketching. Snacks, water and lunches were on site for anyone in need of comfort or sustenance. In addition, the Museum in partnership with Love Button hosted a community strengthening event to help those who lost a loved one heal through the strengths of others and art-making. In order to accomplish these healing activities, the Museum partnered with Stars of Hope, Love Button and the Florida Art Therapy Association and is grateful to have such steadfast partners. This daily service model was developed in tandem with the Marjory Stoneman Douglas school schedule and transition back to school for the students, teachers, administrators and parents of Marjory Stoneman Douglas.

Over the two weeks immediately following the Marjory Stoneman Douglas horror of February 14, 2018 (February 15 through March 2, 2018), the Coral Springs Museum of Art exhausted nearly \$11,000 in Museum funds.

### **Program – Long Term Services:**

Because the victims of the MSD shooting continue to process the tragedy and have emotions that are raw, the service model is flexible and still evolving.

March 6, 2018 the Museum opened its doors to students, teachers, parents and anyone in the community to drop in for services of art-making for therapeutic purposes on Tuesday from 3 pm to 5:30 pm. People are welcome to stay for 30 minutes, an hour or the duration of the offering – whatever is most comfortable to the individual. There is no limit to the length of time or number of times that a person can attend. *Healing with Art* will run, at a minimum, 18 months.

Therefore, the program launched March 6, 2018 and will continue through September 30, 2019.

During these times, attendees are offered various art-making tools such as painting, coloring, sketching or other sensory art-making project and are able to work independently or together with family, friends or fellow victims. The art-making takes place in the Museum's main gallery as it is soothing and tranquil.

The Museum's art therapists and Museum staff are prepared to make the appropriate referrals to community agencies or private therapists should the need arise. As well, the *Healing* program provides take home materials for more information on dealing with trauma, post-traumatic stress disorder, and signs of and ways to deal with anxiety.

Since its inception, findings of the *Healing* program show that more offerings continue to be needed. As such, the Museum has designed specific offerings for teachers, different and distinct from those provided to students. These offerings will officially launch on Saturday, May 5, 2018 with the partnership event, *Time to Exhale*. After this launch, program offerings will be provided weekly to teachers every Thursday from 4:30 pm to 6:00 pm. These services to teachers will be at no charge to any Broward County teacher in need of help.

Other Broward County Schools have reached out to the Museum for services as school administrators are finding fears and concern among their teaching staff. Because of this, the Museum will continue to provide outreach services of *Healing with Art* for those Broward schools that need and request it.

The American Art Therapy Association has found that an anniversary memorial has been proven to be a beneficial component to the healing process for victims of traumatic events. Because of this, the Museum and community partners have started maiden discussions of public art that may eventually be a part of the *Healing with Art* programming.