

### **Update on the project with Soroptimist International Kenilworth.**

Members may recall that I reported on this project, which was to run arts workshops for groups of disadvantaged women in the community, in my annual report for the 2021 AGM. This update has kindly been prepared by Kenilworth Soroptimists and shows what we have helped to achieve by virtue of our donation to this project.

Brenda Hillier, our lead artist and I have been able to have 15 workshop sessions since we started in mid June; each session lasting 2 hours. The workshops run weekly but some have had to be missed because of illness or holidays. The numbers of women able to join the workshops have varied over the weeks. The maximum number we could expect to attend the workshops is six and we have regularly had four women taking part. One young woman has been to every session and it has been great to see how she has grown in confidence, not only with regard to her painting, but also in her willingness to put forward ideas for what activities the group might enjoy. She initiated and led sessions where three women collaborated on one painting – each one of them contributing ideas as to how the work might progress.



This is the work after three sessions.

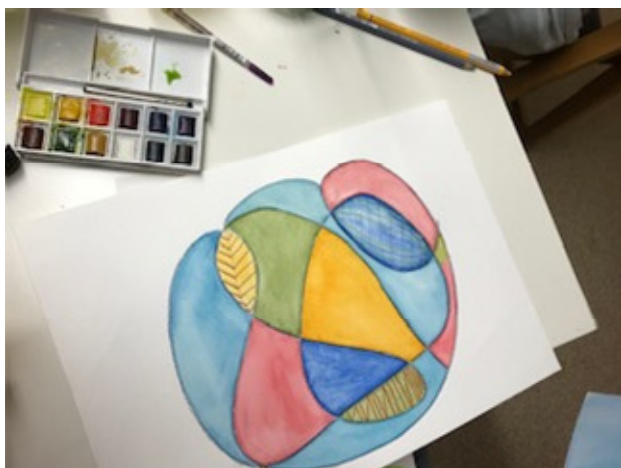
Many of the women come from chaotic, noisy environments and the workshops allow them time to be peaceful, to have only themselves to think about and to become absorbed in their painting. During one session, Brenda demonstrated watercolour techniques useful to represent different skies.



This is one woman's 'rainy sky over the sea'

I asked the woman whose work is pictured above if she had enjoyed the session and when she said she had, I asked her what she had liked about it. "It felt like praying", she said. This same young woman now brings her music player to each workshop and we enjoy light jazz, piano, and compilations to aid relaxation or evoke sounds of the rain forest.

The women have a close and supportive relationship with each other and are quick to praise one another's work. One woman, who cannot remember ever having an art lesson, has found that she has an aptitude for the subject. She is very keen to learn, listening and watching intently as Brenda demonstrates techniques. When she applies these techniques, she is confidently self-critical, adjusting and correcting the work to her satisfaction. She selects the appropriate brush for each part of the work and has developed a real curiosity for mixing colours and achieving effects. Her confidently drawn, in one sweep outline, with colour mixed infill and texturing techniques, is shown below.



The women will often photograph their work to show to their friends and family. When one of them sent this image of her work to her sister, her sister replied that she could see a lion.



We were all delighted when we could too.

There is always a good atmosphere at the workshops. Sometimes there's absorbed concentration with the only sound the quiet background music, at other times there's laughter or excited pleasure at their own or each other's achievements. One of the women, whose two boys are aged 5 and 3, said that she is going to keep her painting of leaves to show her grandchildren, "So they can see what I could do." She laughed and her delight made us all laugh too – but we all knew she meant it.



Painting for the future

In all, what's great to see is that the women feel safe to make mistakes, to experiment, express themselves and ultimately do it their way.



Julie Pemberton October 2021