

New Horizons murals aid in recovery

Courtesy of Jackie Holfelder

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FORT PIERCE — Legendary healer Florence Nightingale discovered that a “variety of form and brilliancy of color in the object presented to patients are an actual means of recovery.”

New Horizons of the Treasure Coast and Okeechobee, the region’s largest mental health provider, also recognizes how visual stimuli such as the color of walls and the art hanging on them can influence an individual’s mental and physical wellbeing.

The nonprofit agency’s current mural project is intended to contribute to the recovery process for local adults in crisis. Established in 1958, New Horizons has nine outpatient offices across a four-county region, with the main campus located in Fort Pierce housing 100 inpatient beds.

Each year, the organization serves an average of 15,000 children and adults, regardless of their ability to pay for care. Since the onset of COVID-19, 65% of New Horizons clients have no source of income or any insurance, yet no one is turned away due to lack of financial resources.

Many enter New Horizons emergency services escorted by police or other first responders under a Baker Act — a Florida statute that allows a person to be admitted against their will for assessment if they demonstrate they are a harm to themselves or others.

Others are brought voluntarily by family, friends and neighbors who have concerns about their mental health and safety. Coming to New Horizons for inpatient care often feels like the lowest point in a person’s life.

Andrea Gates-Gonzalez, inpatient division director, wanted to shift that perspective using art and inspirational words to encourage individuals to view their experience as a chance at a new beginning.

The mural project began in the entry hall in screening, where adults in crisis are admitted. The artists, Dinija Berkien, Cheryl “Charlie” Coté, and Sue Klahne — three award-winning mem-



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bers of Martin Artisans Guild — eagerly donated time and talent to work creative magic.

They turned plain cinderblock walls into bright beacons of color and light, accentuated by glitter, whimsical images and positive messages. Mary Baysinger, a board director at New Horizons, is underwriting the cost of the mural project.

The project’s second phase is a series of murals on canvas in the adult crisis residential unit. Mallo Bisset, another Martin Artisans Guild artist, has signed on.

The third phase will consist of murals in the adult inpatient recreation courtyard, where bright blue benches were recently donated by Pat Austin and Carol Buhl; Jeff and Debbie Clemons; The Overdorf Family; and Julianne Price.

Beth Lonnes is donating landscaping

to the yard. The agency is seeking someone to help fund a source of shade.

“One of my goals is to help end the stigma of mental illness,” said Klahne, a longtime advocate for mental health and addiction awareness who uses art to maintain personal wellness and often donates her art, percentages of sales, and her time to charities affiliated with mental health.

Klahne, who holds a bachelor’s degree in fine arts with a major in graphic design, and Coté, who is mostly self-taught, organized an art exhibit in March to benefit New Horizons.

Palm City resident Coté knows what it’s like to meet life’s challenges head on. In spite of losing her right eye to cancer when she was a 6-months-old infant, and a significant portion of central vision in her remaining eye due to retinal edema, Coté found a way to pursue her

passion in prolific fashion, hoping her art brings joy and encouragement to those who view it.

Dinija Berkien, a Latvian native, who like the others works from her own private art studio in Palm City, studied for three years mastering still-life with Conchita Firgau, and portrait and figurative work with well-known Russian artist Vladimir Volegov. As a painter, she says she finds inspiration in almost anything she sees or feels.

“It is an honor to be part of this amazing project,” said Coté. “Addiction and mental health affect us all in some way. If we can give back, even to just make someone smile, then we have touched a heart.” And that may make all the difference in the world to someone’s recovery.

For information about New Horizons call call 772-672-8333, or visit www.nhtcinc.org.