

Art as an emotional escape

STORY BY LAURA CANIDA
STAFF WRITER

Kellette Elliott was first exposed to art therapy at college in Virginia, but leaned on it heavily when her mom was diagnosed with cancer. "I would take art students from the college to work with the kids who suffered or witnessed abuse," said Elliott, an artist and art teacher at Clackamas High School. "We made arts and crafts, spoke with them and bonded with them. To see the power of art and healing was priceless."

Today, Elliott uses some of that experience to help high school students, and advocates for art to help struggles among college students and working adults as well.

Art therapy is an integrative mental health and human services profession that can help people express their feelings through art rather than words, according to the American Art Therapy association.

According to Kristine Bella, an instructor and clinical coordinator for the art therapy program at Lewis & Clark College, art therapy can be used in many ways.

"Whether brief or longer term, art therapy services on college campuses offer a means of responding to the diverse needs of students," Bella wrote in an email. "Art therapists are able to work with students to address concerns relating to academics, stress, anxiety, confidence, social difficulties or any emotional struggle a student may be experiencing."

The process offers a safe and confidential outlet through the art making process, Bella said. Individuals do not need to be artists to benefit.

"I am continually impressed with the power of art therapy and how art therapists are able to assist people in finding health and healing through the creative process," Bella said.

Elliott said she uses art therapy not just in her classrooms.

"This past summer, my mom was diagnosed with stage 4 cancer," she said. "Art was a regular practice in my life, but I knew I had to continue this practice to cope with my mom's decline in health. Each day, I created art, and shared the art with her over text message. She loved it! I made pieces about her and our relationship. She said she looked forward to it each day. As my mom went into hospice and her days were numbered, I saw how my art was changing. It was more explosive, darker, but that's how I was coping with her sickness."



"The Unknown" by Kellette Elliott was created when her mother received a serious cancer diagnosis in July 2018.

