



SURVIVING An artist composes a painting that will be on display at the upcoming Art of Healing event in November.

Finding Support

Survivors Healing Center expands its services | BY CHRISTA MARTIN

She first remembers something happening around age 2. It's cloudy, but there are some details: Jan was in her crib and a shadow was looming nearby. Suddenly, yelling ensued and the shadow disappeared. Years later, a story surfaced, explaining that the shadow—her uncle—was crazy, that he'd left the house that day with only his underwear on. But Jan didn't quite put the pieces together until she was much, much older. By the time she hit her 20s, she knew something was sketchy about her childhood. By the time she was in her 30s, certain memories that she had disconnected from began to surface.

From ages 2 to 5, Jan says that her uncle sexually abused her. She remembers an incident when she was in a bathroom and her uncle was in there with her "doing whatever he was doing," she says, and "my grandmother caught him. She went berserk. She disowned him."

In her 30s, after the discovery of what had happened to her, Jan did two things: She moved to Santa Cruz and she began writing songs. Not long after her arrival in town she heard about an event that was going on called "Art of Healing," where survivors of childhood sexual abuse put on an evening of music, poetry, art, etc. She returned to the event the next year and the next, and somewhere in the mix, she became a participant in the event (as a singer) and an active member of the Survivors Healing Center (SHC), a nonprofit organization on the Westside of Santa Cruz that offers, among other things, group therapy to survivors and training for people who offer services to them.

The SHC has "empowered me," Jan says. And it seems the group has been doing that for thousands of people. Since its inception 20 years ago when therapist Amy Pine and author Ellen Bass launched the organization, SHC

says it provides outreach to about 2,000 people per year. Unarguably, the work that SHC does is vital.

"One of three or four girls and one of six or seven men have experienced childhood sexual abuse by the age of 18," says Pine, who is still on board with SHC. "It's a worldwide epidemic. It's a pandemic. ... When children are sexually abused, they internalize a lot of beliefs about their own worthlessness. Children tend to believe that somehow they're at fault. Sometimes they're told they're bad or they did something to bring it on. ... Those beliefs steer the course of their lives."

And because of that, among other reasons, SHC was established. The center offers numerous group therapy sessions, the annual Art of Healing event and more. In the last six months, SHC has expanded its services to care for more people. In addition to a women's and men's group, the center has added on a group for Latinas, a few groups for teens and a group for gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender (GLBT) people. The teen groups reach out to those who are ages 15 to 18 and there are currently openings. The sessions are based on a sliding scale income, and scholarships are also available.

"It's a strength-based approach," Pine says, "giving girls who have been sexually abused a chance to explore their strength and talk about some of the ways they've been impacted."

In addition, the center is operating during a crucial time right now to receive funds from the community. A matching grant program is currently in effect and any donations between now and Dec. 31 will be matched, up to \$18,000.

"One of the most challenging things for people when they're considering calling [the SHC] is breaking through the shame that a lot of survivor's carry," Pine says. "Making that call breaks through."

To learn more about the Survivors Healing Center, visit survivorsh healingcenter.org or call 423-7601. The center is currently accepting submissions for the upcoming Art of Healing event and art show. The Art of Healing event will be from 6:30 to 9:30 p.m. on Saturday, Nov. 3 at the Pacific Cultural Center. An art show will be at the UC Santa Cruz Women's Center from Oct. 29 to Nov. 30, and an artists' reception will be from 2 to 4:30 p.m. on Sunday, Nov. 4.