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Ahwatukee

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## Artist's depicts bravery of abuse victims

by **Alison Stanton** - Oct. 9, 2008 08:20 AM  
Special for The Republic

Through Vickie Florschuetz's non-profit organization Bravery Project, which involves the artist creating portraits of survivors of domestic violence and combining them with their own stories, the Ahwatukee resident sees firsthand how a picture can portray powerful emotions like strength, inspiration and hope.

Florschuetz began working on Bravery Project about a year ago, and got her official nonprofit status in August. She said her husband Tim, a professor of English and director of the writing center at Mesa Community College, came up with the idea to combine Florschuetz's artistic talents with helping others.

"My husband sees students at college occasionally who are going through episodes of domestic violence and it disturbs him a lot because he can see how it can disrupt education and cause other problems," she said.

Florschuetz will exhibit 20 of her portraits and their accompanying stories tonight at the Bravery Night opening reception at the Jewell McFarland Lewis Fresh Start Women's Resource Center in Phoenix.

Florschuetz, 38, said she currently works with nine organizations that refer domestic violence survivors to her. Sometimes, she said, "someone will call me out of the blue." She meets with the survivors in their own home or in some cases conducts interviews via phone and gets photos through the mail.

In the 29 portraits she has created so far, a wide variety of subjects are represented: women, men, the parents of a woman who lost her life and a dog named Henry.

Florschuetz explained how the process works:

"I let the survivor choose which medium; it can be either graphite pencil, pastel or charcoal. They choose the imagery in the background, and they get to pick out what they want in the portrait that is connected to their life, like children, school, or other imagery," she said, adding that in one case, a woman chose to have lions painted in the background that represented her and her children. "I'm telling their story not just with their portrait, but with the visuals too. Then they are required to write about a page that describes their experience with domestic violence and how they are doing as survivors today. Some do it in song form or poetry, and depending on how comfortable they are, they can be very graphic."

When Florschuetz is finished, the survivor sees the original and then is given an 8- by 10-inch copy of the portrait.

Florschuetz said that so far, she keeps her project going through donations and fundraisers. She tries to show examples of her work as often as she can at shows like tonight's.

Although Florschuetz said it can be difficult to hear the descriptions of abuse, she is honored that the survivors trust her with their stories.



Charlie Leight/The Arizona Republic

Ahwatukee resident Vickie Florschuetz works with pastels on her current work, "Service to Others." The portrait will be part of an exhibit to draw awareness of domestic violence and solicit donations for Bravery Project, Inc.

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