



Art on a Journey Gallery
1900 Manchester Rd. | Ann Arbor, MI 48104
Journey of Faith Christian Church
(Logo by Ria Daugherty)

Background:

How do you define an “artist”? Do you consider artists to be jewelry makers, sculptors or painters? Creatives who make objects and images as artistic representations of their experiences? Someone who envisions a circumstance or happening that informs their “artistry” or the art that is borne out of a circumstance like homelessness or trauma?

A Story:

Rose, formerly homeless and an artist, agreed to serve an internship with Journey of Faith’s homeless ministry. Well-liked and connected to the homeless community in the Ann Arbor area, she brought compelling knowledge and lived experiences on how to better meet the needs of homeless community members in the county. Rose also “eastered” up a startling juxtaposition from where she had been to where she might be going.

Rose wasn’t formally trained to work with the homeless, but she was known for helping people in the community grapple with housing issues, unemployment, food access and self-esteem. Rose also wanted to create a safe space to bring community members together to support one another. As an artist, she wanted to combine her passion and came up with the idea of establishing a free gallery where her companions could come together, make art and sell it; receive services and earn one another’s trust.

Elementary and middle school children attending Journey of Faith Christian Church had already established a homeless ministry at the church with shower and laundry facilities – it became an obvious and ideal place for an art studio and gallery to display the artists’ works. Later, the idea of setting up an online art gallery was implemented.

Project Goals:

- Help the artists identify artistic and “soft” skills they want to improve by participating in training sessions, an internship or residency program to strengthen their artistic skills and gain exposure to other career opportunities to possibly earn income and increase their independence.
- Provide support navigating social services resources while artists are at the studio.
- Support the development of a business plan that potentially strengthens the art gallery’s profitability over the long term.
- Assist with the creation of a strategic plan to market and promote the art gallery and its’ brand.
- Assist with the planning and support of a public showing of the artists’ works. The effort to display the artists’ works at the Ann Arbor Public Library (Downtown Ann Arbor Branch) was an example of publicly showcasing the artists’ works.
- Help to create an awareness campaign to creatively inform the public about homelessness (why it happens and what people can do to support efforts to end homelessness in Washtenaw County).

Potential Pilot Artists:

We have 6-8 artists who are willing to participate in a pilot to reimagine the art gallery venture. All of the artists self-identify themselves as amateur artists with “intermediate skills” – meaning that they have experience with the media they’re using for their artwork and can carry out the skill, but don’t have knowledge of or direct experience with “advanced concepts.”

Potential artists willing to participate in the initial pilot include:

- Rose’s [bio and artwork](#).
- Ria’s [bio and artwork](#).
- Ben’s [bio and artwork](#).
- Sharron’s [bio and artwork](#).
- Walt’s [bio and artwork](#).
- Eric is a [mixed-media artist](#) specializing in using found or discarded objects as integral pieces in his artwork.
- Rhea, a social activist and niece of the late Rosa Parks, prefers painting [watercolors](#).
- Paul has started to explore and experiment with wearable art.

About Art on a Journey Gallery and Studio Space:

"Art lights up peoples' lives. It illuminates. It allows people to move toward their aspirations even if for a short time. It gives people a voice and acknowledges that they have been heard and seen even when they are homeless. It points to my presence in the world when I'm invisible to people as they walk by." — Rhea, formerly homeless

- Who We Are: When you browse the artwork of the Art on a Journey Gallery artists, you quickly notice that each of the artists has their own unique style. Their styles are reflected in the way they transform a canvas or capture an image in a camera’s eye ... the colors they choose, the objects they use to express themselves.
- Our Vision: A place where the homeless, unsheltered or housing insecure artists can heal, create and share their art.
- Our Mission: The Art on a Journey Gallery, soon to become a nonprofit organization, is a small coalition of local artists who are currently unsheltered; previously homeless or are housing insecure and at risk of becoming homeless. Each artist is encouraged to express and share their journey through stunning creations of visual art or unique textiles, jewelry or sculptures that are available for purchase.
- Our Values: While homelessness remains, we believe that everyone who is homeless should have a right to:
 - A safe, secure home of their choice with access to resources that help support an individual’s wellbeing.
 - Safety from violence, abuse, theft and discrimination, and the full protection of the law
 - Respect and dignity demonstrated by caring service, anywhere and everywhere, people are seeking help and support.
 - Equitable access to information and services.
 - Opportunity to employment, training, and leisure activities
 - Determine the solutions to their own issues and homelessness and that their voices and experiences are at the center of any involvement and engagement.

Online Art on a Journey Gallery:

Artists experiencing homelessness and housing insecurity showcase their artwork to the public in a virtual art gallery to provide a source of discretionary income. As a result, our artists potentially have an avenue for economic empowerment. Currently, the "virtual art show" consists of a website, that needs regular updating, with images and descriptions of both artwork and artists. While the website is available, we would also like to provide an opportunity for homeless artists to hone their creative talents and soft skills by participating in training sessions or an internship program at the church’s building.

We would also like to increase awareness and get help informing the public about the incredibly complex, real-world problem of homelessness. The purpose of the proposed project isn't just to revamp the virtual art gallery, or use various social media platforms to increase the salability of the artwork or the number of people exposed to the artists and their art. We hope the project will act as a dialogue between artists experiencing homelessness or housing insecurity and the public through art by demonstrating the creativity and innovation of our artists to counter biases often held regarding unhoused individuals.

General Thoughts:

At Journey of Faith, the studio space and online art gallery provides guests experiencing homelessness or housing insecurity a safe space to practice their art in several mediums. For some artists, the income from the sales of their artwork may become a pathway for economic empowerment. For others, art nurtures self-worth and self-care. For most, the studio space, laundry and shower facility foster a sense of home, radical hospitality and community.

In turn, artists interact with the public and through those interactions artists are given the realization of their dignity. The engagement decreases the stigma associated with homelessness and helps to increase the public's awareness about the care of individuals experiencing homelessness or housing insecurity. Furthermore, many of our artists rely on state benefits or have health challenges that precludes formal employment. Art sales from the studio have the potential to provide a source of supplemental income.

Perhaps, more importantly, we would love to use art as a way to tell the story of "homelessness" that changes our ability to respond more thoughtfully and with more informed, caring intent about the nature of one of the most increasingly complex, insidious and multifaceted challenges we face today.

Learn more about Art on a Journey & Gallery Space at www.artonajourney.gallery

We welcome your expertise, insights and guidance. Thank you for your interest in this project.