



Simone Hicks from Heartists

Simone is a contemporary artist, a mother of three children, two of which have special needs and disabilities, and is also in her final year of study in a bachelor of contemporary arts degree at ECU. As a parent and a carer, Simone saw a great need to provide carers with a creative and social outlet, enabling them to support one another and focus on positive, creative projects and skill building.

Simone initially began a textile workshop with a small group of carers of children with disabilities in 2007. The group was named Jean Therapy, as a focus on wearing jeans and being relaxed whilst stitching. The group soon expanded to include other community members interested in the textile workshops. The group was renamed 'Heartists' as Simone explains, "Textiles as a medium essentially comes from your 'heart to your hands', hence the name Heartists being relevant to the carers who work tirelessly looking after loved ones."

The workshops provide an opportunity for members to support each other with the issues they face as carers, learning new creative skills as well as meeting other community members. In addition, non carers attending the workshops gain creative new skills and an insight to the challenges carers face.

The idea for the group came whilst Simone volunteered alongside Sister Mary Keely and Uniting Minister Sister Bev Fabb as they taught refugees art and music in the Immigration Detention Centre in Port Hedland. Having seen the difference art made to the isolation and depression that the refugees experienced, highlighted to Simone the parallels with the isolation and loneliness that carers also experienced. After working with the refugees, Simone believed that starting an art group for carers

would definitely create change for the better by teaching them new skills and expanding inclusive social networks.

Simone explains, "Becoming rundown and depressed is often a by-product of being a carer and can cause social isolation, all of which I have experienced. Heartists is a way to establish social networks and understanding between carers and community members whilst also creating textiles, which is therapeutic in itself."

Simone is always trying to find ways to creatively link carers to the community. Simone's enthusiastic creative approach to her life as a carer, her art and her community is inspiring.

"I get as much out of running Heartists as I put in. I sometimes think that the 'what's in it for me' culture of our society prevents people from pushing the boundaries of what is possible instead of just going for it because it is a great or worthwhile idea or cause", said Simone.

We would like to congratulate Simone on her generosity of time, spirit and wonderful 'can do' attitude. Without wonderful volunteers such as Simone Hicks our community would not be the rich and interesting place it is today. For more information about Heartists please contact 9295 0343, or email – wasim@westnet.com.au.

If you would like to nominate someone for our 'Inspiration Zone', call 9290 6682 or visit the Shire web site and follow the volunteer links. The Shire thanks you Simone her hard work and wishes her the best for the future.