

AT THE COMMUNITY KILN
Between the Wheel, A Friendship Forms

Early last summer, we were approached by a small group of community residents with a large concern. The ceramics program they were participating in as managers, students and teachers had been shut down by the Danforth Museum. They were looking for a new home for the program and wondered if SMOC could be a resource.

While at first glance, it would appear that housing a craft/art program at an anti-poverty agency would be a large leap, in actuality, we had already built a bridge in that direction. Earlier in the year, we had created an Artist-in-Residence program at SMOC. A well-known and respected Storyteller, Len Cabral, joined our team. By the time this small group of seekers had shown up at our front door, Len had held performances at both our Head Start/Day Care classrooms, and at our monthly community meals for children and their families living in shelter as well as holding workshops for our direct care staff. The goals were clear. Enriching vocabulary, aiding the link between parent and children, and teaching our staff to help the folks they work with reclaim their personal narrative, were tools that could be used to enhance self-sufficiency. So we took this group's request seriously.

Four months later, the Community Kiln at Brickstack Arts Center, a program of SMOC, was formed, and ceramics classes at our new program location at 46 Park Street in Framingham, started. Check out the website, www.brickstack.org

In addition to being the catalyst which allows an important cultural program to continue in our community, the vision and goals of the Brickstack Arts Center are not complicated. We aim to enrich the lives of disadvantaged and disabled people by providing them with additional tools to achieve and maintain self-sufficiency, and enhancing the culture of our organization. The immediate, specific goal was to open the ceramics classes to residents of our programs. What follows is a brief account of the connection made between one of the residents of Serenity

House and a local resident who both participated in one of our initial ceramics courses. I'll let Nicole Dacey, our Program Coordinator, tell this story.

Hi Jim,

Here is the story of how Karen and Linda (Serenity House) became friends.

After the first day of class, Linda wasn't sure she would come back. She confided in her classmates that she did not own many items of clothing, and she did not enjoy getting so messy while working on the pottery wheel. Bob says that he told her to just take it one day at a time, and that she could try hand-building, which is less messy. We didn't expect her to come back, but the next week, she was here. Both Linda and Karen were having a hard time on the pottery wheel, which can be more challenging for some. After a few weeks of trying out the wheel, they both decided they wanted to try hand building with clay on tables. They were able to sit together and chat. Karen had joined the class looking to socialize and be creative after her husband passed away, and the two struck up a friendship.

One day, Linda mentioned having to go to court, and was upset that she had nothing to wear. Without being asked, Karen went out and bought Linda a suit that she could wear to court. Additionally, Karen had a cute wallet at home that she wasn't using and wanted to give to Linda. The week after Thanksgiving, Linda came to me asking if Karen would be in class, because she wanted to thank her for her gifts. She shared with me that she didn't even think to open the wallet until Thanksgiving day, and found a little bit of money inside too - another gift from Karen. She was so thankful, and said it made her holiday that much better. Karen later told me that she was happy to do this for Linda, and I know that Karen is on a fixed income as a retired nurse, making her gift that much more meaningful.

The two plan to keep in touch now that the class has ended, and had planned to go to the movies together soon.*

When I first read Nicole's memo to me, the words of one of my favorite chapters of the Tao Te Ching (11) came to my mind.

Thirty spokes are joined in the wheel hub
The hole in the middle makes it useful
Mold clay into a bowl
The empty space makes it useful
Cut out doors and windows for the house
The holes make it useful

Therefore, the value comes from what is there
But the use comes from what is not there**

These words, written probably more than 2,500 years ago, still hold their importance in the present. The friendships, formed in the space between two people, often lead to bonds that are life sustaining.

I hope that the friendship and bond formed by Karen and Linda as they sat a short space apart from each other at their respective pottery wheels will sustain them both in their life's journey.

*I have changed the names.

** The Tao Te Ching has been translated numerous times, each version containing slightly different wording and implying slightly different interpretations. I like this one the best.

Finally, I wish to give a shout-out to Bob, AKA "The Dude," for his pro-active compassion. The Brickstack has come to life, largely through his actions.