

# The Healing Powers of Art

Nearing its 10th anniversary of working with those recovering from addiction or issues with mental health, Lake Bluff's Art Impact Project welcomes a new executive director as the nonprofit works to serve a larger population.

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**V**ICKIE MARASCO'S MIDDLE CHILD STRUGGLED with substance issues when he was at Lake Forest High School in 2013.

"At that time, it was interesting facing an issue like this in a community that feels like they don't have these kinds of problems," Marasco explains. "But those issues do happen and are happening in places like Lake Forest and Lake Bluff."

Marasco's son ultimately went to rehab, followed by six months of intensive outpatient therapy. When he graduated from that program, Marasco contacted his provider to share something she observed in the group sessions.

"In all of my months participating in the family sessions my son was in, I saw over and over that the addictions these teens were suffering from weren't because of the drugs," she says. "There were mental health issues at the core. I explained to the provider that I was an artist and wondered if there might be a way for me to help some of their patients. I was clear that I wasn't a therapist, but I thought if we could get these kids work-

ing with their hands and being creative, we might be able to help them work through some things that were troubling them."

The center gave Marasco a chance. And on her first night working with the teens, the therapists in the room told her that the kids were opening up more in that one hour than they had in 12 hours of weekly talk therapy.

From there, the Art Impact Project was born, officially becoming a 501(c) 3 organization in 2014. Since then, it has defined its mission as enhancing emotional wellness through creative expression.

"We have more than 100 hands-on projects that we have designed with specific messaging for our partner sites," Marasco says. "When we are leading a project,



Mask by Vickie Marasco



Vickie Marasco and  
Liz Fales

Vickie wears  
Victoria Beckham.  
Liz wears Milly,  
available at  
Neiman Marcus  
Northbrook.

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we sit side-by-side with our participants. We do the project with them. And we require anyone who is in the room with us to be working on the project, too. That way, we're all on the same level, we're all doing the same things. There is so much power in art making and not having that direct eye contact that allows for creative problem solving. I'm still astounded after nine years how much people open up. They'll even catch themselves and say, 'I've never shared this before.' Safety and trust can be built in a group space. I've never walked out of a session and felt like we haven't reached somebody.”

The success of Art Impact Project has reached far beyond the teens in recovery Marasco originally set out to help. Today, Art Impact Project serves many in need of healthier coping skills, emotional awareness, and expression through partnerships with schools, mental and behavioral health facilities, veterans' groups, and an inmate program at the Lake County Jail.



As the need for the Art Impact Project continues to grow, so does the need for how this nonprofit will position itself to answer these calls for help. As Art Impact Project transitions into a new phase of development, Marasco has welcomed Liz Fales as the organization's new Executive Director.



“I will be working closely with Vickie and the Board of Directors to continue building on all of the wonderful things she started,” Fales says, “including growing our volunteer base, formalizing our structural framework, expanding our community engagement, increasing our fundraising and advancement strategies, shaping the new strategic plan, and leading our other operational and administrative needs.”

Fales first encountered Art Impact Project when serving as a Program Director at Zacharias Sexual Abuse Center in 2018, when Marasco was brought in to provide support for their program team.

“I saw first-hand how the walls came down as we made art,” Fales says. “I became a believer in Art Impact Project from the start.”

In addition to bringing Fales on full-time, Art Impact Project has hired Cassandra Anzelone to be its full-time Manager of Programming.

While Marasco will continue to be on the board as Art Impact Project's founder, she does plan to take a few months off so that Fales can take the reins without feeling like someone is looking over her shoulder.

“We've been very strategic about this transition,” Marasco says. “The timing is right. I feel so grateful that our partners value what we do so much that we have to expand in order to meet the demand. I'm excited for Liz to take Art Impact Project into its next chapter.”

*To learn more about Art Impact Project and how you can support it financially or as a volunteer, visit [artimpactproject.org](http://artimpactproject.org).*