

## Homeless Not Hopeless

Like a number of homeless individuals, unresolved childhood challenges led Julie down a road that ended in homelessness. Her mother died when she was 9. Her father remarried and her relationship with her stepmother was very hurtful and estranged. Julie grew into an angry person filled with unresolved grief and regrets over her life and loss.

Finally, after battling alcohol and sleeping in a hallway of an oceanfront apartment building or on the beach against the concrete walls at the boardwalk she had enough.

She turned to The Lighthouse Center, operated by Volunteers of America Chesapeake, and decided to get help. She began attending AA meetings and taking advantage of the services the Center offers – like employment and housing support. She even decided to give the Center’s Art Therapy classes a try.

At first she attended the art classes just out of curiosity – she had heard that if you write down your feelings it may help you get all “that junk” out that you have been holding inside for years.

Julie immediately became one of the most faithful and dedicated art journalists in the group. Week after week she poured out her feelings onto the pages and discovered that as the negative anger and regrets left, it made room for new opportunities and positive life changes.

As spring came Julie found a tourism related job at the oceanfront. She found a place to live, started taking GED classes and joyfully counts each month of sobriety.

“I would like to go on and become a nurse and maybe even a substance abuse counselor one day,” she said, “I really like helping others.”



Since coming to the Lighthouse Center she has been helping others – and giving back – all along. She volunteered during the holidays, even dressing up like Santa’s elf to bring cheer to the center. She has flourished in the Art Therapy program and participated in the Women’s HeART project – an art class founded by Lighthouse Center Director Debbie Maloney – where clients crafted paper-mache hearts sharing their stories that were featured at the Virginia Beach Contemporary Art Center.

Julie’s “Heart” read “Homeless not Hopeless” an important message she not only relays to the other participants she mentors but to the public.

“I believe it is important to find the good in someone and believe in them,” she said.

