

January library art exhibit will decode dress codes

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What's in a dress code? What are your clothes saying about you? A group of local girls have been reflecting upon those questions — and ones like them — as part of an art project that will be on display in the bistro area of the People's Place Library, Jan. 5.

Dress (de)Code is the product of an eight-week workshop drawing on the talent of 10 local girls between the ages of 12 and 14.

It is a series of 11 art projects created out of textiles — something that couldn't have someone better at the helm than co-ordinator Regina Marzlin, who specializes specifically in the medium of textile art.

"I taught them about basic design principles in artwork. We talked about materials, and I taught them about some of the basic methods," Marzlin said, describing how she tutored the girls as part of the project.

What resulted was a number of very distinct pieces of artwork, reflecting those girls' thoughts on clothes and the role they play in their lives.

The works to be featured Jan. 5 are made out of several layers of fabric, padded and textured in a variety of styles.

"It's like pictures but rendered in textiles. We used fabric as you would use paper in a collage, creating fabric collages," Marzlin said.

"There's a bit of sewing involved, and there was a lot of surface design, which involves painting of fabric with fabric paints, stamping on the designs and making your own stamps and incorporating them in the designs."

"We thought about the theme, and how it would appeal to girls, and decided on the size of the group at the Arts House," Regina Marzlin, a textile artist and co-ordinator of the project, said. "We actually filled the class in two days, and it had a wait list. It was very popular, and it was a free class because of the funding."



The girls who created the art featured in Dress(de)Code. Contributed

The girls got to work on their artwork in mid-October, and created artwork that, true to its name, explored the participants' relationships with clothing and dress codes.

Themes of peer pressure, and societal pressure for young women growing up in society were touched upon in the program, Marzlin noted.

"We talked about what kind of body images are projected, and all that. We had a lot of talk of those things, and they all came up with very different ideas," Marzlin said.

The artwork also looks at dress codes in more general terms, Marzlin noted, "like what you'd wear to a certain occasion, just geared in that direction. It's all about what they know, and what comes first for them."

Topics such as peer pressure, and acceptance — or mockery — from one's own peers are themes that informed the artwork that will be on display in the library.

"It was about what was allowed at school, how we present ourselves, wearing what clothes we do and what kind of personality you are showing or hiding with your clothes," Marzlin said.

Marzlin emphasized that the goal of the project was for the girls involved to express themselves without boundaries.

"Each girl has a very different take on what we spoke about, and we let them do whatever they wanted, so they could show it to the public, by putting their work in a real exhibition."

Although the idea of having their artwork displayed in a show was a bit daunting to some of the girls, Marzlin said she hopes doing so will instill confidence in them.

"I love teaching kids that age, because they're so fearless and spontaneous. I teach adults, and sometimes they overthink, and are very cautious or serious," Marzlin said, noting that is not the case with younger students she has taught.

Dress (de)Code was funded by a grant from the Cultural Innovation Fund, through the Department of Communities, Culture and Heritage.

"I was thinking about doing something this year for Antigonish, and asked Sarah O'Toole, the Antigonish Culture Alive (ACA) co-ordinator, what we could do this year."

O'Toole proposed that they seek funding from the Nova Scotia Cultural Innovation Fund, and work with local community groups, to come up with a program.

"I said 'I would love to work with the Antigonish Women's Resource Centre (AWRC), to further their cause, and thought it was a good fit with my art,'" Marzlin said.

What resulted of a partnership between Marzlin, the AWRC and ACA that Marzlin described as "the three coming together beautifully."

"I think it was a great project with great results. We got together, had a couple of meetings, set up the grant and we were a bit late in getting it going, so the project did not get done for Antigonish."

That lateness, however, didn't discourage Marzlin or the others working with her, and the project went ahead in the fall.

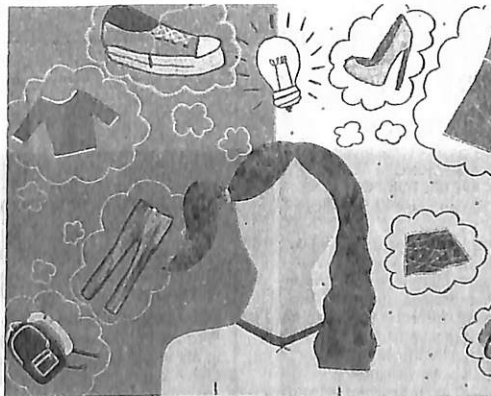
Marzlin said she had help carrying out Dress (de)Code from Faye Fraser, youth violence prevention and awareness co-ordinator with the AWRC.

"Faye kind of leads the group. You have to kind of lead an age group like that — we were a great team," Marzlin said. "It was a lot of fun, and I hope they are proud of the results."

The artwork of the girls involved with Dress (de)Code will be officially unveiled Jan. 5, starting at 2 p.m., in an exhibition at the People's Place Library.



Some of the works that will be on display at the People's Place Library Jan. 5th as part of the Dress (de)Code workshop's official exhibition.



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ART SHOW OPENING AT LIBRARY



Pictured during the Dress (de)Code art exhibit opening, Jan. 5 at the People's Place Library (bistro area), are artists and facilitators Norah McCoul (left), Keira MacDuff, Kate Connors, Regina Marzlin (project co-ordinator), Anika Broussard, Enya Sawlor, Coira Reeves, Kaylee McLean and Faye Fraser, youth violence prevention and awareness co-ordinator. Unavailable are artists Nour Almashhod, and Alexis and Jaden Hawboldt. Richard MacKenzie

ART SHOW OPENING AT LIBRARY



Folks check out the artwork which was is part of the Dress (de)Code art exhibit, at the People's Place Library. An exhibit opening event took place Jan. 5.

Richard MacKenzie