



Rhema Muncy
Special Sections Reporter

Tissue paper became a conduit of movement as Pathways Hospice grief counselor and art therapist Amanda Hillman traced shapes with her fingers over ink. She often uses this form of art to encourage the creative process in her clients.

“We will give people a whole stack of paper and invite them to keep going deeper and feel what it is like in their bodies when they are creative,” Hillman said.

Depending on the therapist’s training and personal bent, an art therapy session could emphasize the finished product, focus on the creative process or a combination of both.

“Art therapy is about help-

ing people get their own meaning and insight from their art making,” Hillman said. “What somebody is experiencing internally will manifest externally in different ways.”

Hillman often begins a client with grief counseling and then works in art as they open up to the method.

“As people experience it, they find the power of the art process, and the relationship that is built between the artist, art therapist and the materials really has a power to support somebody as a primary mode of working,” she said.

The Pathways art therapy program primarily serves bereavement cases but counseling sessions are also open to the public on a sliding pay scale. Hillman also consults with chronically ill patients.

“People don’t like to talk about death, so for people who are grieving it doesn’t take long until they find themselves alone after the initial influx of food and support,” Hillman said. “We provide a place for them to come to.”

Hillman views grief as a vital healing process. Art can probe subconscious material in the mind by examining deep experiences and the felt emotions that haven’t been given a voice.

“A big part of grief counseling is really helping someone to feel what they are feeling,” Hillman said. “That can be scary — a lot of people feel like if they let themselves drop into the grief they will lose control and it will overtake them and they won’t survive

that. When we work with people using the art materials, we help them give an image to what is happening.”

Art therapy develops coping abilities, and Hillman gives patients the tools to bring what is inside to the outside.



RH Photo/Rhema Muncy
Pathways Hospice art therapist Amanda Hillman demonstrates touch drawing, an art technique for releasing creativity.