

These women find their voice

Original music captured on CD as part of local program

By KAREN P. CHYNOWETH
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Singer-songwriter Robin Lane came to the Turners Falls Women's Resource Center in 2002 by accident, but decided to take a class there, and said she benefited greatly from its art and creative writing programs.

Like many women who use the center, she in turn decided to give back to it by teaching a course.

"The programs that go on at Turners Falls Women's Resource Center help you to help yourself and to heal and give back to the community. There are just a lot of good programs there and they are free," Lane said.

She created a program to help women heal from traumas and build self-confidence by writing music and allowing them to find

to tell their story and they put it to music. Everybody is coming from a different point of view or different experiences in their lives," Lane said.

Lane received grant money to make 300 CDs that will be sold for \$10 each. Half of the proceeds will go to continue the program, 40 percent will be split by the women who wrote the music as profit and the rest will go toward other costs of making the CD.

Jerri Higgins is another woman who has both benefited and gives back to the center through teaching classes.

"For me, personally, music has always been the thing that kept me from going over the edge — singing with friends as a teenager or in my head," Higgins said.

But, she said, she was like many women who had been through trauma and had low self-esteem and let comparisons keep her from trying.

"I would think maybe I can do it OK, but I'll never be like so and so," Higgins said, but the song writing class helped her overcome that.

"It's a truism that there is a song in all of us, whether we can sing it or write it or we need help giving birth to it," she said.

Higgins said most of the women who come to the Women's Center have been traumatized, whether they characterize it like that or not, and are there to heal through the



Recorder/Paul Franz

Lela Ehalt, Robin Lane and Jerri Higgins contributed to a compact disc of original songs called "A Woman's Voice." Their music, along with music from other women in the CD, came out of a program from the Turners Falls Women's Resource Center.

their creativity.

What came of it is "A Woman's Voice," a CD of original songs written and, for the most part, performed by the women who par-

ticipated.

"(The Women's Center) is a place you can be yourself and tell your story. That's how I get them

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arts and through community. She said trauma can be things as common as having been put down by someone or having gone through a divorce or it could be more extreme like sexual or physical abuse. She said it could even be a more universal trauma like having watched the World Trade Towers crumble in the terror attacks of Sept. 11, 2001.

Irma Corona, who is from Mexico, wrote her song about just that. It's one of two Spanish songs on the album and it's called "Everything Has Been Different Since Sept. 11," and it's about how much pain there is in the world and how love can overcome that pain.

Corona said she has been writing poems and songs for a while and the program gave her the opportunity to make the CD and have her songs be heard.

Women came to the programs for different reasons and with different inspirations.

Francia Wisnewski, who is from Colombia, wrote the other Spanish song. She said it was challenging writing "Quero Fuego," which means "I want fire" because Lane doesn't speak Spanish so she could not help her as much developing the lyrics, but she still got a lot out of the class.

She took the class because she was feeling a lot of stress from her job and raising her 2-year-old son.

The Women's Center provided

her with a class that helped her clear her head.

"It's very interesting to me that all the songs are inspired by the heart, Wisnewski said. "You know how you buy an album and there are like three songs that are your favorite? I can say that all the songs on this album are my favorite because I know the story of how all of them were written."

Lela Ehalt was a songwriter before she took Lane's class. She admitted she joined the class for "selfish" reasons. It was an opportunity to set aside a block of time to force herself to write. She wrote "A Song For Us" as she was watching everyone in the class interact.

"It's exciting to see all those women come together and say, 'yes, I do have something to offer. I have a place here,'" Ehalt said.

The Women's Center offers free child care during their programs, a perk without which Ehalt would not have been able to take the class.

"It's a good place for people who think they can't do it to learn that they can."

For more information about programs at the Women's Center or to buy a CD, call Maria Rodman, executive director of the Women's Center and the Montague Catholic Social Ministries, which runs the center, at (413) 863-4805, or visit the center at 148 L St. in Turners Falls.