
NEWS

Bridge collapse survivor launches youth center

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PUBLISHED: July 28, 2013 at 11:01 pm | UPDATED: November 7, 2015 at 12:38 am

It will be six years ago Thursday that Lindsay Walz was plucked from the Mississippi River in Minneapolis and set atop a slab of concrete near the collapsed Interstate 35W bridge to wait for help.

That's when and where the survivor of the bridge collapse made up her mind.

Walz said she decided she was going to pursue the dream she adopted as a 16-year-old and open a youth center.

She wanted to do the good work she had witnessed and participated in as a youth at the Christian Community Outreach Center in Olivia, Minn.

"I realized I was still alive and I couldn't explain why I was alive or how I was alive or any of those things," said Walz, 30, recalling her decisive moment on the concrete slab.

"It became clear to me then that I had to make that dream come true."

She will formally launch her dream Thursday with a screening of a documentary film at the Riverview Theater in Minneapolis.

Proceeds from the showing of “Inocente” will help fund the work of courageous heARTS, a youth center that Walz and other volunteers are opening at 42nd Street and Cedar Avenue in south Minneapolis.

She was 24 years old when the I-35W bridge collapsed under her Volkswagen Passat and she was dropped into the darkness of the Mississippi River.

Thirteen people died as a result of the collapse, and 145 were injured.

Walz doesn't know how she escaped her submerged vehicle, but she remembers kicking her way to the surface. She emerged from the river with crushed vertebrae and the mental trauma of her experience.

Walz said her recovery continues: “I still have flashbacks, still have panic attacks and different things I have to work through regularly.”

The tool she uses to aid her recovery was one she discovered after the collapse. She was lying on her futon in a back brace weeks after the collapse when she read a brochure offering a class on soul painting.

She enrolled and discovered how the process of creating art helped in her recovery.

She wants to offer the same opportunity to youths who face trauma in their own lives.

Volunteers at the courageous heARTS center will offer classes each night, Monday through Thursday, to introduce youths in middle school and high school to different opportunities to create their own art.

The goal is to make sure youths know all of the different ways of expressing themselves and using creativity, she explained. “Whether it's through your body and performing or visual arts or writing, all those things are up for grabs,” she said.

Every Friday night, the center will be reserved for youths to come together in a circle and talk and be listened to.

Walz lives in the Twin Cities, as she did at the time of the bridge collapse. She married her boyfriend, David Walz, on Jan. 1, 2012.

He had stayed with her through the trying times after the collapse. She said her way of handling the trauma was to mentally “disappear.”

“I was there but I wasn’t, so it took a really big strain on our relationship,” she said.

She holds bachelor’s and master’s degrees in youth leadership and counseling from the University of Minnesota. She works with youth in a professional role through Lutheran Social Service. Her work with the center is entirely on a volunteer basis.

IF YOU GO

“Inocente” tells the story of a homeless, undocumented Latino youth and highlights the transformative power of art. The event starts at 5 p.m. Thursday and will be followed by a panel discussion with the subject of the film, Inocente Izucar.

Tickets are \$10 and can be purchased at <http://inocente.eventbrite.com>.

Learn more about the center and Lindsay Walz story of recovery at <http://www.courageous-hearts.org/index.html>.

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