

Crocheted stuffed animals help cheer up abused children

By JO ASHLINE

Roxanna Moreno knows a thing or two about feeling lost, lonely and scared.

Sexually abused at the age of 8, Moreno, who is 24 now, has had to endure more than her share of pain and heartache over the years as she's struggled to put back the pieces of her life.

"Victims of abuse experience a severe loss of trust in people, especially since most abuse is at the hands of someone they know," says Moreno.

Though she says she's moved on with her life, remnants of her experience have remained, ultimately guiding her to a place where she never thought she would end up; providing hope for other young victims of abuse by using a talent she didn't even realize she had.

Until six months ago.

"I had always wanted to take up crocheting, since I was a young girl, but I never had the opportunity to follow through with it," Moreno said. "Finally I decided to learn using a tutorial on YouTube and discovered that I was pretty good at it."

Friends and family agreed.

"They encouraged me to start selling my hats and accessories, but when I came across a crocheting blog that featured a post on making blankets for foster kids, I knew that instead of selling my things I could use my new hobby to truly make a difference in children's lives," says Moreno.

Inspired by a poem entitled [The Burden Bear](#), Moreno found a pattern for a bear she liked and set out to make a difference, one crocheted stuffed animal at a time.

Her artistic nature, painful past, and deep desire to affect change, as well as the support of her two sisters Cecilia and Elizabeth, helped her found the Embracing Hope Project, whose goal, according to its [website](#), "is to crochet or knit a teddy bear for the children in foster or protective care who are dealing with trauma due to physical, emotional and sexual abuse."



Though Moreno herself was never in the system, as a victim of abuse she knows what most of these kids are feeling.

“You lose a sense of who you are, and it’s difficult to hear advice from people who have never been through what you’ve gone through,” Moreno said. "I want them to embrace these bears and know that someone is out there who cares, who understands, who knows firsthand what they are going through. I want them to know that they’re not alone, that it’s not the end of the road, that no matter what they’ve been through, they can overcome it and become whoever they want in life.”

That’s a tall order for a small bear, but Moreno knows a little goes a long way. Her [Facebook Fan page for Project Embracing Hope](#) welcomes guests with a simple quote: “When all seems lost, there is that little bit of HOPE to keep them going.”

It takes Moreno approximately one week to complete a bear, and though she would love more volunteers to crochet or knit the bears, currently she is doing most of the work. Once she has approximately 30-40 bears, she schedules a drop off time and donates the finished handmade acts of love and support to Child Protective Services / [Orangewood Children and Family Center](#) (OCFC).

OCFC estimates that there is an average of 144 children entering the assessment center per month. That’s a lot of kids who are suffering at the hands of adults they trust, who are displaced and terrified, their futures uncertain and their lives in turmoil. That’s a lot of kids going to bed each night without a hug or someone to tell them they are loved and safe.

Moreno wants to make a difference in each and every one, which is where you come in. Though Project Embracing Hope - which is not yet a non-profit - doesn’t want your money, they do want yarn, royal blue ribbons (the official awareness ribbon color for child abuse) and your crafty talents in the areas of crocheting and knitting.

“I’ve moved on with my life, and I know that what happened to me as a child does not define who I am today,” says Moreno, her voice strong and steady, her resilience coming through crystal clear. "These children have had their bubbles burst, and they need to know that they will survive, that they will come out of this stronger than ever, that it will get better someday. I want to give these kids hope, something to hold onto. It’s my way of helping them know they are not alone.”



Readers who are interested in participating in Project Embracing Hope - whether by donating supplies or your talents - and making a difference in the life of a child who desperately needs a seed of hope to cling to, contact Roxanna Moreno at morenorox08@live.com, Cecilia Galvan at cgalvanmar@hotmail.com, or Elizabeth Moreno at ta07emoreno@yahoo.com.



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