

■ alumni profile

Portrait of an artist

Formerly an art teacher, Amy Grabowski now integrates art into her counseling practice at The Awakening Center

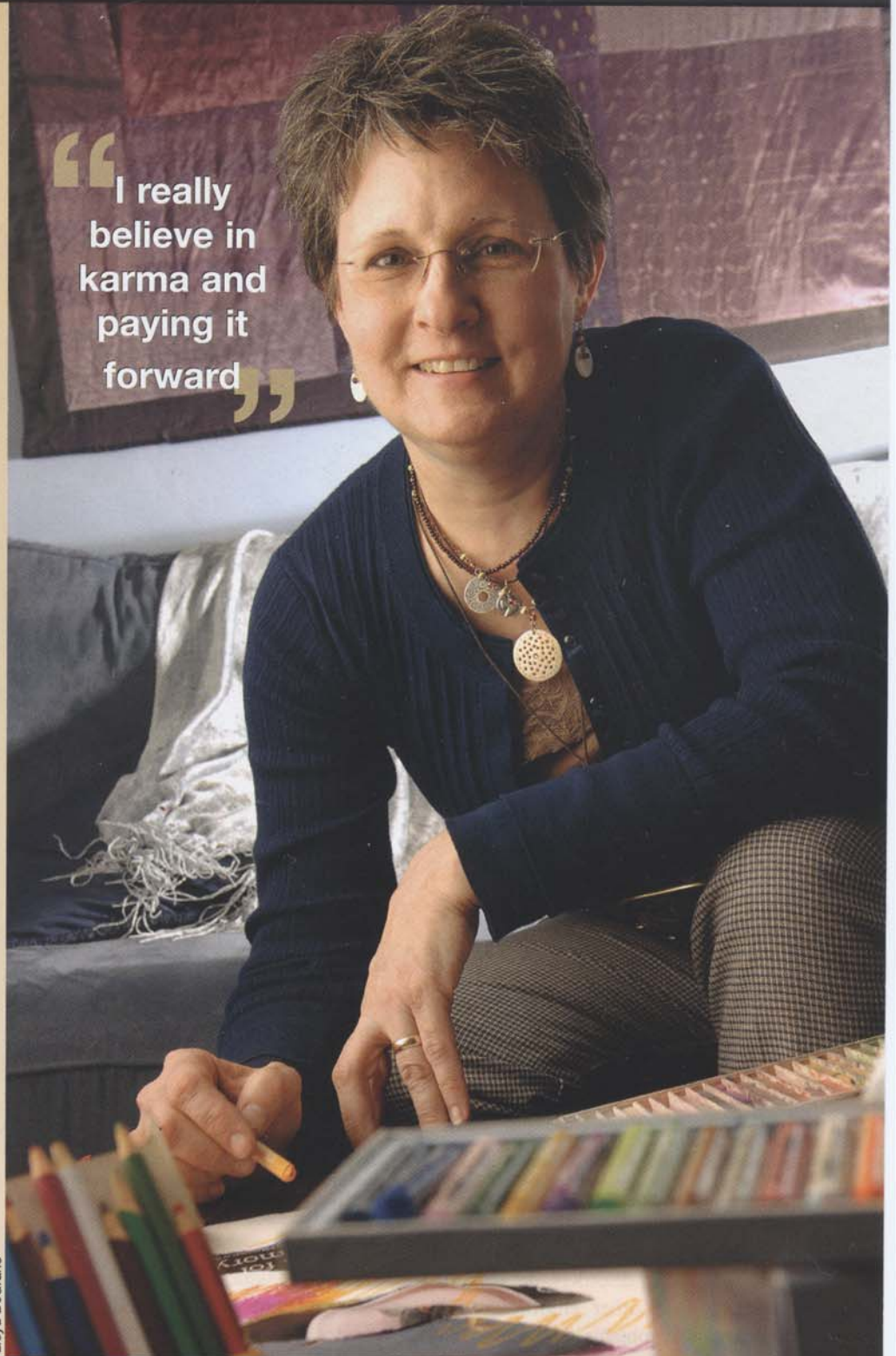
Amy Grabowski '78 AA, MA '86 AA, was trying her best. But the 30 students in her art class at Mannheim Junior High School in Franklin Park seemed more interested in sticking clay to the ceiling than listening to her lecture about the color wheel. The 23-year-old teacher couldn't blame them. "Why does this color wheel even matter?" she thought. "Who cares?"

When she was supervising detention, though, Grabowski felt like her work mattered. There, she was able to reach out to some of Mannheim's neediest students and help them with their behavioral problems. Even Mikey—a rebellious teen who had once been arrested for breaking someone's leg with a baseball bat—seemed to change after he opened up to Grabowski about being abandoned by his mother at a young age. It was then that Grabowski realized that teaching wasn't for her: She was meant to be a counselor.

Almost 30 years later, Grabowski has fulfilled that calling in more ways than one. Since 1995, she has served as founder, manager and clinical director of The Awakening Center, a Chicago-based practice that provides counsel-

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Lloyd DeGrane



“ I really believe in karma and paying it forward ”

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of the Art Institute of Chicago and Oakton Community College.

At TAC, Grabowski uses holistic, Eastern-inspired therapies such as “art therapy” (a counseling technique in which patients use art-making activities to express themselves) to treat her patients. She first became exposed to art therapy through an elective class at UIC during her senior year as an art education major. “I just loved it,” she says. “But it was like, ‘I’m 10 weeks from graduating, and *now* you tell me about this?’” That longing to learn more—and desire to do more than teach—compelled Grabowski to return to UIC years later and earn her master’s degree in art therapy.

Art therapy isn’t the only thing that differentiates TAC from other counseling centers. True to Grabowski’s original vision, many of its services are offered at a reduced price for low-income patients to help ensure that anyone who needs counseling receives it. TAC has several free or low-cost therapy groups (some sessions cost only \$5) as well as “sliding fees” for counseling sessions, which are based on a patient’s need. “It’s probably [my] worst business decision, but I don’t care,” Grabowski says. “I really believe in karma and paying it forward...[and] it’s so not money-centered here.” She also understands the position that her low-income patients are coming from. During her mid-twenties, Grabowski says, she needed counseling but could barely afford to see a therapist. Thankfully, she found a counseling center that was willing to work with her for only \$5 a session, overriding its regular \$35 fee. “If that wasn’t available, I don’t know what would have happened to me,” she says. “It was a lifeline.”

—Rachel Parker

Grabowski encourages her patients to use art-making activities, such as drawing or creating a collage, to express their thoughts and emotions. She learned about this counseling technique, known as art therapy, during her senior year at UIC.

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ing for eating disorders, depression, anxiety and other emotional and behavioral problems. Grabowski also coordinates and leads several local seminars and therapy groups for the

National Association of Anorexia Nervosa and Associated Disorders; writes and edits ANAD’s newsletter; and serves as a visiting lecturer for UIC, Northwestern University, School

Lloyd DeGrane