# Filling in Your Life's Outline

Body mapping promotes healing from the outside in.

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I crave love. I'm always searching for it," says Connie (not her real name), explaining the little hearts scattered across her drawing. "The outfit [I drew] represents going about it the wrong way." As Connie describes her creation—which showcases the demons that haunt her—I understand the purpose of body mapping. The therapy has participants fill in outlines of their bodies with images and symbols of their hopes, fears and desires. Body mapping "stimulates people to think and talk about themselves and [living with HIV]," says Meg Chang, a facilitator at the Center for Comprehensive Care (CCC) of St. Luke's–Roosevelt Hospital Center in New York City.

The CCC has offered body mapping for three years, but HIV-positive people around the world have been using the technique, which originated in South Africa, since the 1980s. Chang distinguishes body mapping from art therapy, which she calls more goal oriented. Intrigued, I wanted to experience the process myself; the CCC staff readily agreed.

In a room with a handful of women, some positive and some not, Chang and the CCC's Vani Gandhi, MD, were busy spreading large sheets of paper and making life-sized silhouettes of their patients. Before long, I was standing with my back against a long sheet of brown paper, a black felt tip tracing around my body.

Afterward, I stood up and stared at the empty outline of my body, wondering how to bring it to life. Without a preconceived plan, I stuck colorful feathers, gold stars and pink cloth to my sketch, illustrating the people and activities I cherish most.

During the session, I noticed that one woman seemed dissatisfied with her map. Still, the therapy allowed her to focus on things other than HIV. "There's something very stress relieving about being able to concentrate," Chang says, "and people really concentrate here."

Another woman came to the session because an acupuncturist deemed her clinically depressed. By the time the meeting adjourned, she wore a huge smile on her face. It's always a good sign for Chang to see positive clients in good spirits. "When they feel better," she says, "they take their medicine more often"—increasing the health of both mind and body.

Interested in body mapping? Contact the St. Luke's-Roosevelt Center for Comprehensive Care at

866.811.7275.

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