Memory Box

"Memory Box" is a collaborative mosaic containing the stories of 23 women who have been affected by gender-based violence. This artwork, donated to the hospital by Women's Interval Home, was a collaboration between Jennifer Vansteenkiste, former Executive Director of WIH, and local artist, Mary Abma. It was Jennifer's vision to materialize intimate partner violence through permanent art installations that bring these stories into public view and educate the community. The first of these artworks is located on the south wall on the exterior of WIH.

Mary worked with the women during several workshops sponsored by WIH. During the workshops, they were encouraged to use the language of art to tell their stories. In the background of the artwork, the predictable, even grid that we expect to see with mosaics breaks down and is reconstructed in an energetic, free form to tell a new communal story. The squares in the centre panel are abstracted expressions of 12 women's experiences. Here, they use colour, shape and line to represent their stories. The colours they use to tell their stories stand out and cannot be hidden in the sea of white. This represents how women's stories have value and must not be hidden away.

The side panels represent a "memory box". Polaroid pictures containing specific memories from 11 more women are scattered over a background that, from bottom to top, moves from grey to colourful, representing transformation. Hidden within what could be viewed as a butterfly's purple wings are photographs of women from the past held together in solidarity with the women who are telling their stories today.

The triptych format for this work is also symbolic. It is an ancient format that is often used to tell sacred stories.