

# A Brief Report of Art Therapy in an Inpatient Mental Health Unit: Consumer Feedback and Experience

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## ABSTRACT

This study aimed to review consumer feedback of group Art Therapy sessions within an inpatient mental health unit. A post-evaluation study of consumers attending group art therapy sessions was conducted at an inpatient mental health unit. Twenty-seven consumers returned written surveys reporting on their experience of the Art Therapy sessions. A content analysis of the survey responses was conducted. Four consumers provided images from group sessions for a visual appraisal of their work.

Content analysis of the written surveys revealed that expressing emotions, relaxation, distraction, clearer thought processes and the enabling of creativity were positive outcomes engendered by the therapy. The four images illustrate the powerful relationship between the artwork and the consumers' cognitions, emotions and behaviours. The evaluation by consumers of the Art Therapy sessions reported varied benefits which warrant further investigations of this type.

## INTRODUCTION

The theoretical framework for Art Therapy has been around for many decades. The art making itself, within the therapy, was theoretically proposed as a healing process during the 1940s and 1950s, and Freud viewed art as a method of accessing the unconscious (Ruddy & Milnes, 2008). Odell-Miller, Hughes and Westacott (2006) argue that arts therapies provide a therapeutic intervention that facilitates change and growth, thus enabling the development of insight and resolution of problems. This 'change and growth' is reported as the outcome which Art Therapists seek to effect within a safe environment, as opposed to the interpretation of a patient's image (Ruddy & Milnes, 2008). The safe environment is said to enable the opportunity for patients to tell their stories, and to promote awareness and acceptance of their lived events (Johnson & Sullivan-Marx, 2006).

Art Therapy is also reported to offer therapeutic non-verbal ways of communication

which allow for patients to be understood in a less threatening manner (Johnson & Sullivan-Marx; Odell-Miller, Hughes & Westacott 2006; Oster & Crone, 2004). Argyle and Bolton (2004) report therapeutic aspects of Art Therapy as being of a healing, beneficial, curative or restorative nature. There is discussion within the literature as to whether the healing aspect of Art Therapy lies in the process of making the art, in the ensuing relationship between patient and therapist or is a combination of both (Ruddy & Milnes, 2008). The participatory effect is reported to offer social connection and an opportunity to express emotions via a creative process (Johnson & Sullivan-Marx, 2006).

## ART THERAPY WITHIN MENTAL HEALTH SETTINGS

A growing body of research suggests that engagement in creative activity can improve levels of mental and physical wellbeing (Johnson & Sullivan-Marx, 2006). It has