



EXPRESS YOURSELF! ARTISTIC ENDEAVOURS PROMOTE MENTAL HEALTH

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Art is good for us.

Just ask anyone who paints, sculpts, crafts, does photography or engages in any other type of visual art. Chances are they will list a variety of benefits.

The most obvious psychological benefit of creating visual art is the opportunity for self-expression. For some, creating art gives them the outlet for emotions that might otherwise be kept bottled up. For others, the art form itself provides a deeper and more meaningful expression of their thoughts and feelings.

Why is self-expression helpful?

Well, being human, we all have the need to connect with our inner self and with one another. Art can provide the venue to say how you feel, to portray a certain emotion or possibly to make a statement about your beliefs. In any case, self-expression is good for our psychological well-being because by expressing ourselves we enhance our self-awareness and understanding.

Another benefit of creative arts is stress relief. When people are engaged in producing art, they often enjoy a sense of calmness and a distraction from the worries and stresses of the day. For a period of time they can focus on

their art, which brings with it a feeling of pleasure and satisfaction. When our workday is filled with problem-solving and other analytical skills, it can be a very refreshing change to let the mind explore a completely different type of challenge. In fact, it is just this sort of shake up that can inspire creativity and innovation within the workplace. Forward-thinking employers take advantage of this natural connection and host creative workshops for their staff to promote team-building and innovative thinking. The ability to think “outside the box” is viewed as one of the most valued skills in the workplace, especially within our rapidly changing society.

Creative art can also play an important role in our sense of accomplishment. Learning and sharing a creative skill takes time and effort. Some people like to set goals with their creative pursuits, while others are more interested in letting the creativity flow on its own.

What seems to be the common denominator is the personal reward of seeing a work in progress and the completion of a project. When we see the final results of our efforts, we feel good about what we have accomplished. This, in turn, leads to feelings of fulfillment, satisfaction and personal reward.

The social side of creative pursuits may be another important benefit to our health. Quite often, though not always, art has a way of bringing people together. Classes, workshops, sales, groups, clubs and online communities can be a source of social engagement for people who share the same passion for their art form.

Some examples of the social connections formed around artistic interests would include craft classes or workshops, photography clubs, craft sales and artist collectives. Being able to share your passion for art with others who also share that passion is very rewarding. People can share ideas or skills and be a form of inspiration and encouragement to one another.

What about the relationship between creative arts, healing and recovery?

Because of the link between expression and the arts, there is a natural link between creative arts and healing. A number of organizations across the country provide opportunities for people living with mental illness to tap into their artistic interests and talents as a means of recovery and healing. More formally, art therapy uses art as a way of helping people to heal



1. Walkabout - Guy LeClair
2. Jaguars - Wesley Feschuk
3. Muse - Thereza Smartt
4. Hildi Jansen, Artbeat board member



psychologically. Art therapists work with individuals, couples, families or groups in settings such as counselling agencies, schools, treatment centres, rehabilitation facilities, hospitals, correctional institutes and elder care locations.

In Winnipeg, Artbeat Studio Inc. was established in 2005 to enable consumers of mental health services to engage in artistic expression that promotes recovery, empowerment and community. The studio can accommodate up to nine artists living with mental illness over a program period of six months. Artbeat Studio supports a variety of mediums including painting, pottery, textile art, graphic arts, stained glass, weaving, music and poetry.

We instinctively know that we enjoy expressing ourselves through the creative arts, but what does science say about the impact?

Studies on the potential health benefits of practising a creative art form confirm that there are significant benefits. The science also supports the concept of art-based practices for recovery, demonstrating in a recent review that people benefit from personal aspects such as improved self-esteem, self-confidence, fostering hope and creating a sense of meaning and purpose. People also clearly benefit from the social aspects of creative arts such as the development of friendships, social connection, sense of belonging and improved communication.

What are some things you could do to take advantage of the connection between creative arts and well-being?

First, ask yourself if you have explored your creative side. Is there a hobby or art form that you have thought about trying or getting back into? Have the demands of everyday life squeezed out any time for creative fun?

To get started, why not carve out a bit of time to delve into something creative. How about starting an art class, joining a hobby club or attending a workshop? Other ideas to get you inspired could include visiting art galleries, craft shops, or hobby stores. Check out your local community club and the *Leisure Guide* for more opportunities.

Give yourself a prescription for creativity; you may be pleasantly surprised by all of the positive side-effects!

Laurie McPherson is a mental health promotion co-ordinator with the Winnipeg Health Region.



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