

Impact: Art Therapy and Aging Adults

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An overview of a grant funded study for aging adults in two facilities will be presented. This includes program and internship development, and the accompanying study of the benefits of art therapy on mood and quality of life in aging adults.

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ABSTRACT

United States Census Bureau (2017) reported that older adults currently make up 14.9% of the population in the United States. They project that the population of adults 65 and older will double by 2060 to approximately 98 million comprising 25% of the total population (United States Census Bureau, 2017). The Federal Interagency Forum on Aging Related Statistics (2016) reported that adults 55-75+ spent 58-60% of their time watching TV and 11-13% of their time in “Other Leisure” activities. These included reading, computer, arts, hobbies, and travel. The Administration on Aging (2018) found that there are unique needs of older adults including mental stimulation to reduce cognitive decline, developing new skills for cognitive improvement, social interaction/engagement, redefining purpose, building on existing strengths, and promoting autonomy.

Art therapy and the creative process supports the life review, which is a normal and healthy developmental phase in later life (Haber, 2006; Hanneman, 2006; Magniant, 2008). The use of imagery supports memory recall and provides tangible evidence of the therapeutic process (Kelley, 2017; Hinkle, 2018). Learning a new task supports the development of new neural pathways, strengthens existing pathways, and supports a healthy brain (Alders, 2012). Art making requires a curious process that encourages cognitive flexibility, risk taking, decision-making, and autonomy. It provides older adults with the ability to explore, process, and heal from life experiences and build resilience and understanding of the aging process (Alders, 2016).

A grant from the Healthcare Initiatives, Inc. supported the development of two art therapy programs within two agencies in the Indianapolis area. Additionally, the grant supported

IMPACT: ART THERAPY AND AGING ADULTS

2 art therapists and 4 graduate students who developed individual and group sessions providing structured and unstructured tasks geared to address the unique needs of older adults. The outcome of the grant-funded program studied changes in perceived mood and quality of life. The evaluation tools used the Brunnsviken Brief Quality of life scale (BBQ) (Lindner, et al. 2016) and the Geriatric Depression Scale (GDS) (2018). The scales were administered pre, mid, and post study to provide baseline, progress, and end results of participation in the study. The researchers also tracked participation in individual, group, and open studio as well as material choice, themes, and session directives. Additionally, the researchers collected participant and caregiver testimonials regarding participation throughout the research study.

The paper presentation will include an overview of the grant proposal; an understanding of program development as it relates to the aging population; the identification and use of the BBQ and GDS scales for aging adults; successes and challenges faced in the implementation of services; and the short and long-term benefits of this program.

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