

C Care's Be a Part of Art program



Project overview

C Care's Be a Part of Art is a volunteer-led art therapy program that seeks to engage socially isolated and disadvantaged older people in diversion therapy. It started as a pilot to get seniors involved in creating art bags to send overseas to disadvantaged children, but the activities proved so popular that C Care set out to make it more widely available.

Project description

The project aims to create a safe place where people can come together to focus on art as a form of diversion therapy. The sessions give participants a chance to take some time out of their everyday lives, forget about their worries, and focus on creating art.

Sessions are facilitated by volunteers, and attended by a professional art therapist who can provide a safe space and support if any difficult issues arise for participants through the practice.

The project is held every two to three weeks at various accessible community locations throughout Melbourne, such as neighbourhood houses or local libraries.

Project model

- After the success of the pilot program, C Care consulted with art therapists, volunteers and other stakeholders to examine what the needs and gaps were.
- The team codesigned a model based on diversion therapy that would act as a form of relief for participants, and give them a break from the challenges of their day-to-day lives.
- The model was based on C Care's overall mission to provide wrap-around solutions, inclusiveness and community connectedness, rather than one of service provision.
- The project team used focus groups to determine the direction the project should take.
- From there, they tested and refined their approach.
- In the final stage of implementation, early notices of activities were made available to ensure people were aware of them.
- The best approach to raising awareness was one-to-one through volunteers informing the people they worked with.
- All brochures and publicity material is multilingual, and session facilitators make sure people from different cultural and language groups can be accommodated.
- The art therapists played an important role, and were mindful of participants' unique needs.

Budget

Total cost	\$10,000
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Project challenges

Finding the right activity for the art therapy sessions was challenging. Some people were hesitant with painting and drawing, and others lacked the fine motor skills needed for other activities such as knitting.

C Care undertook a trial and error process around people's physical limitations and psychological barriers to find something that everyone could enjoy.

In the end, soap making proved to have the most appeal. It was something that everyone could do, and it provided a tangible outcome from the sessions that people could take away with them.

Taking small steps was the key to determining the best focus for the therapy sessions.

Project outcomes

- The original intent of the project was not to try to solve the world's problems, but rather to give socially isolated and disadvantaged people respite for an hour or so, as well as something to look forward to and get excited about.
- Being able to provide a safe space for participants was also a key outcome.
- Another key outcome was the intergenerational experience generated by including youth groups in the sessions. Art turned out to be a great medium that both young people and seniors could connect with, bridge the generation gap, and diminish stereotypes that each age group had of the other.
- On an individual level, the project has helped people improve their social connections and their confidence. A 92-year-old participant who had never drawn in her life gained so much from creating a beautiful and remarkably sophisticated picture. Her pride and enthusiasm had a ripple effect on the people around her.
- Overall the project has worked with more than 150 participants.

Project sustainability

Funding the project is an ongoing challenge, but the volunteer model has allowed C Care to run it at a low cost.

The next iteration of the project is focusing on the products being made during sessions, such as soap, and trying to find ways to harness that value – perhaps through setting up a social enterprise to sell the products.

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