

LEE LIMING
PROGRAMME IN
AGEING URBANISM

Making an Art of Ageing

Arts and Culture for the Elderly¹

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Artful Ways to Therapy

Neurological research has shown that making or viewing art can improve cognitive function by rewiring the brain. Art activities can help seniors who have lost their ability to communicate due to diseases such as Alzheimer's and dementia express themselves non-verbally. The art-making process encourages self-expression and promotes communication with caregivers and peers, giving rise to numerous benefits including increased self-esteem, sensory stimulation and building a sense of identity.

Art therapy can be employed in two ways: the first emphasizes the creative process, helping the patient express their imagination and creativity; the second uses art activities to achieve specific therapeutic objectives and treatments guided by a trained art therapist.

¹ This is an evolving database. We will be adding more examples and cases over time.

In Singapore, a nine-month study on the effects of art therapy and museum visits on seniors who are at risk of developing dementia began in July 2016. This is part of a 10-year longitudinal Jurong Ageing Study that started in 2013. Preliminary results show that art and music therapy has reduced anxiety levels and depression symptoms in participants.

Making art is a low-cost and engaging activity. It can be nurtured as a hobby done at home with materials easily available at craft stores and stationery shops. Box 1 introduces some tips to get started in art therapy by doing simple crafts with an older person at home.

Box 1: Tips for Home-based Art Therapy

- **Be cautious.** Do not use anything that would be harmful if digested.
- Use **sensory heavy materials** such as things with bright colours and various textures.
- Have them **draw something from their childhood** like a favourite place or season.
- **Talk during the activity.** Discuss the actual project or ask questions that might help bring back old memories.
- **You may have to start the project** for them. Get them going and then let them take over.
- Use the experience as a way to help build morale. **Be encouraging and positive** during the activity. Compliment the finished project

afterwards.

- **Display their art work** somewhere that they will be able to see it.

Source: How Art Therapy Helps People with Dementia and Alzheimer's, <http://www.arttherapyblog.com/art-therapy-seniors/art-therapy-helps-people-with-dementia-alzheimers/> accessed 17 August 2016.

Art to Life – Alabama, USA

This intergenerational programme is a collaboration between the University of Alabama Honors College and art therapists from VSA Arts of Alabama and the Sowing Seeds of Hope Foundation. It is a special elective under service learning for students at Honors College.

Each semester, for the past five years, Honors students from various majors are paired with community-dwelling seniors with mild to moderate Alzheimer's from impoverished Perry County, Alabama. Before the programme commences, the students undergo instruction on Alzheimer's disease, person-centred care techniques and art and other expressive art techniques. The lessons emphasize the importance of honouring and preserving participants' life stories. Students also spend time in a dementia day care centre and undergo a Virtual Dementia Tour to experience the realities of dementia sufferers. The programme consists of eight weeks of weekly group art therapy led by trained art

therapists. Students assist to capture the life story elements of participants, which they later use to create individual life memoirs. The students also visit participants in their homes to gather additional material for the memoirs such as scanning old photographs or documents, recording audio of participants' favourite music or interviewing family and friends. The final products – a leatherbound memoir and artistic works produced by the participant – are presented to participants and their families at a dinner banquet held to commemorate the end of the programme.

The benefits of the programme are numerous: it connects older people in the community to young people, fostering intergenerational relationships, which help to build compassion and inclusivity in society, and helps to remove the stigma often associated with Alzheimer's and ageing.

Recollection – Bath and North-east Somerset, UK

Recollection is a therapeutic community art programme for dementia sufferers and their families. It is a collaborative effort by Rose Pickett, an art psychotherapist from BANES Older Adults Therapies Team in Bath, two artists from Bath Artists' Studios and the Holburne Museum in Bath.

The programme is conducted in a group setting at the Holburne Museum in order to downplay the disease and enable participants “to access their provision of care in a creative space associated with imagination and wellbeing rather than a clinical space often associated with ill-being”. Participants are not labelled as ‘patients’, but are instead united by their creativity, refusing to let the disease define them. Such efforts have contributed significantly to the success of the project, which has secured funding to rotate the programme at museums across Bath.

The free 12-week programme runs for 3 hours each time. It begins with participants viewing art in the museum galleries to gain inspiration. Therapists decorate a meeting room table beforehand with linen and bring in china tableware to serve cakes and tea. Participants then settle in for afternoon tea where they discuss the art they have seen before getting to work on their own creations. Techniques used include painting, drawing, plasterwork and screenprinting based on art in the Holburne collection. Participants are seen to regain a sense of control and autonomy through the process of art-making and reminiscence while the group setting provides opportunities to socialise and forge positive relationships.

Reach for the HeART – Hong Kong

The project was initiated by art gallery, Sin Sin Fine Art and Art in Hospital, a registered charity dedicated to bringing art to public health institutions. Since 2009, twelve hospitals have hosted the programme, which aims to mitigate some of the anxiety burdening patients while they are warded in the sterile, unfamiliar environment of the hospital. The charity runs programmes for different audiences and Reach for the HeART is aimed specifically at elderly public hospital patients with chronic diseases such as depression, dementia or schizophrenia or terminal illnesses.

Local artists facilitate the creative workshops, conducted in group or individual sessions depending on the patient's situation. The artist-instructors announce a theme for each 90-min session and participants use acrylic paints to create their interpretations of the theme. Participants also draw, make flower banners and take photographs, among other arts and craft activities.

At the end of each session, participants are encouraged to discuss their own works and others' works. The programme serves to complement traditional psychotherapy at the hospital and has been well-received by participants. Results have been positive – psychological assessments conducted by Kwai Chung Hospital before and after the

programme saw significant improvements in patients' depression levels.

Art-and-Craft – Alzheimer's Disease Association, Singapore

This art therapy programme was piloted at selected Alzheimer's Disease Association New Horizon Centres (day care centres) in 2012. Since 2015, it has been introduced at all six of the Association's dementia day care centres as well as at the support centre for caregivers. For the latter group, art therapy can relieve stress and anxiety and provide an outlet to express emotions and find support. Initially, one caregiver had been reluctant to participate as he found the activities juvenile. But, after attending the programme, he found significant reductions in his stress and anxiety levels.

A full-time art therapist leads the 6-session programme where participants colour, draw or mould clay. Only trained professionals with a master's degree in art therapy can conduct such activities. Box 2 outlines some considerations for preparing art therapy programmes.

Box 2: Considerations for Art Therapy Programmes

- **Create a conducive environment** where participants feel safe, relaxed and comfortable.

- **Understand each participant's background** – past memories, interests, trauma – to help the therapist build rapport readily and understand participants' psycho-emotional wellbeing.
- **Share simple relaxation techniques** to help participants feel comfortable and build trust in the therapist.
- **Identify the best art medium for each participant** to let their unique personalities, sentiments and preferences shine through.
- **Guide each participant through the creative process** while responding appropriately to body language, facial expressions and verbalised feelings during the sessions.
- **Use proven psycho-therapeutic techniques** to gently provide guidance, assurance and prompts to support the creative process. This helps participants express their conscious and subconscious thoughts through the use of colours, shapes, symbols and other tactile or intangible cues.

Source: Alzheimer's Disease Association (2015) Bringing life to art in dementia care, *ALZnews* 15(02).

life/; *Bringing Art to Life: An Intergenerational Approach to Alzheimer's*, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/angel-duncan/bringing-art-to-life-an-i_b_9619446.html, Accessed 18 August 2016; *Recollection: Art Therapy for Individuals Living with Dementia*, <http://www.baat.org/About-BAAT/Blog/39/Recollection-Art-Therapy-for-Individuals-Living-with-Dementia> accessed 18 August; The Holburne Museum – Recollection and Afternoon Tea, http://www.holburne.org/events/recollection-and-afternoon-tea/?instance_id=9428, Accessed 18 August 2016; *The Recollection Project*, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uSFA38pCncA> accessed 18 August 2016; *Art's healing strokes*, <http://epaper.chinadailyasia.com/focus-hk/article-1354.html>, Accessed 18 August 2016; Reach for the HeART, <http://www.reachfortheheart.org/>, Accessed 18 August 2016.

Source:

Aging: What's Art Got To Do With It?, http://www.todaysgeriatricmedicine.com/news/ex_082809_03.shtml, Accessed 17 August 2016; GoodTherapy.org, <http://www.goodtherapy.org/learn-about-therapy/types/art-therapy>, Accessed 17 August 2016; *Art therapy for seniors at risk of dementia*, <http://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/art-therapy-for-seniors-at-risk-of-dementia>, Accessed 18 August 2016; Bringing Art To Life – Cognitive Dynamics, [Ageing Urbanism: Arts and Culture for the Elderly | 5](http://www.cognitivedynamics.org/bringing-art-to-</p>
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