

The Power of Art: A Mental Health Therapy

Introduction

Art therapy is an application of visual arts in a therapeutic context. It supports self-discovery, self-esteem, and emotional release (Cohen, 2018). The Healthy Minds Study conducted at LWTech found that "53% of people would think less of someone who has received mental health treatment" (Eisenberg, 2017). The creation of the Lion's Pride Healing Art Club was intended to help students that are familiar with mental illness and/or addiction develop healthy coping skills. The goal of this study is to better understand the benefits of participation in creating art to aide participants' mental health condition. Baylor University has conducted similar studies and practices (Baylor University, 2011). Participation in such clubs has been positively regarded by students and campus communities. Creating safe spaces for people in need is an important extension of the support that can be found on campus.

Research Design

- Qualitative research design based on 12 in-depth interviews with students, staff, faculty, and administration
- Interviews provide information pertaining to participants' experiences and viewpoints on the students' healing art club
- Content analysis is used to analyze interviews, cluster and categorize their data, and highlight main themes

To understand the effects that the healing art club has on its participants, I am conducting in-depth interviews with key students and staff. I hypothesize that participation in the healing art club helps students express themselves in a therapeutic way, fosters feelings of belonging to the community, and contributes to their overall health. The data collected is a helpful start in encouraging college communities to adopt similar programs and to promote positive mental health on campus.



Findings

Students struggle with mental illness and substance use disorders and are looking for some sense of community in a non-judgmental way

Students feel that participating in the club helps them connect with others and be an active part of the community

Participants feel that art-related activities contribute to their overall health

"I see a fair amount of students struggling with either current or previous addiction that are looking for a sense of community on campus"

"Students who participate in the club feel that being part of it helps them connect with others on campus"

"Being involved in an artistic activity contributes to overall health. Students draw parallels between physical and mental health and want more mental health support on campus"

"(The club) could lead some people to the identification of risks and the appropriate supports"

"It's a moral imperative for us to offer a healthy, safe alternative to keep students from moving into old patterns"

"Students come to us with [issues] that impact their ability to be healthy. We have limited services to provide" -Student Leader

Conclusion

- Students find that participation in the art club is beneficial to their mental and overall health
- Students feel that the club can be a safe space where expression of feelings and struggles are welcome without judgment
- The Healthy Minds Study shows that most students struggle with mental health-related social stigmas
- Students also express their feeling of connection to the college community
- Overall, participating in the art club is regarded very positively by students and the campus community

"Making art with the Lion's Pride Art club gave me a wonderful break, where my stress and anxiety took a backseat to creativity and art" -Student

