



Touchstone Community Expression Art Program Evaluation Summary

Touchstone Mental Health, a community mental health agency, expanded their services to include a Community Expression Arts program for the adults who are served through their mental health programs. The goals of evaluating this program were to learn more about how this program impacted client well-being, and to gather client feedback about the program. This report highlights findings from this evaluation.

- Overall, clients were very satisfied with the program, and felt it helped them in their mental health recovery.
- Clients described how the program helped them relax, socialize, and express their thoughts and feelings.
- Clients were comfortable attending an art program affiliated with Touchstone. If the art program continues, it should be affiliated with Touchstone.
- Clients stated transportation services allowed them to attend the program, especially if they lived in a suburban area. If Touchstone continues the art program, they should consider client feedback about some program logistics. For example, Touchstone should continue to offer transportation for clients attending classes in the community, and should consider the days and times the program is available.
- Clients felt the open, accessible class environment was important to them. Should the art program continue, it will be important to maintain a comfortable, non-threatening environment. The program should continue to hire instructors who do not pressure clients to complete projects on specific time frames, who are open to client suggestions, and are generally welcoming and open.
- Clients who participated in more than one session of the program showed increased positive impact. If the art program continues, clients should be encouraged to participate in more than one session.

Background

Touchstone Mental Health, a community mental health agency, received a grant to offer a series of art classes for clients starting fall 2014. The program was voluntary for all clients, and was designed to supplement other client services. Twenty five sessions of 6 week classes were offered from fall 2014 through December 2016. An artist in residence led eight classes at various Touchstone residential programs for clients. An additional fifteen classes were held at Articulture, a community art nonprofit. Two videos were developed so clients could tell their stories about the programs impact in their life. Touchstone contracted with Wilder Research to evaluate the art therapy program from November 2014 through July 2016. This report highlights findings from this evaluation.

The impact of art on mental health and well-being

Art, including drawing, painting, acting, and writing, or culture-specific arts and crafts, such as quilting and storytelling, can be a medium to assist someone with their mental illness, to reduce social isolation, facilitate social interaction, and ease communication about difficult life events. A key component of art therapies is discussing the artwork, and emotions that may have been triggered through the artwork process, with a therapeutic group. The Communal Expression Arts Program did not employ traditional art therapy, but focused on creative expression (art) as a way for clients to learn about their feelings, express themselves, and connect with other people. The art program did however have a “check-in” before class started and at the end of class, which allowed time for clients to process their thoughts and how they felt prior to and after creating art. Although brief, staff reported that clients told them the brief check-in was therapeutic for them.

Evidence from case studies supports the use of art, such as painting, drama, and quilting, to supplement group therapy with clients who have experienced trauma (Baker, 2006; Danner, 2007; Schwartz & Melzak, 2005; Wall, 2008). Baker (2006) describes using quilting, writing, and painting to supplement group therapy with a group in Chicago. Women in the therapeutic groups made story quilts using traditional needlecraft. Men in the therapeutic groups painted, drew pictures, and wrote. In each group, arts were used as nonverbal activities to facilitate group discussion. As Baker describes, "art provides a focus for self-exploration and discussion. The artwork serves as a voice for what cannot be said in words" (p. 187).

There is growing evidence that creative activities can have a healing impact, and may boost protective factors for mental well-being (Leckey, 2011). Some of the positive outcomes associated with creative activities include relaxation, self-expression, and reduced stress (Teall et al., 2006). Some studies have also found significant improvements for individual with depression and anxiety after they engaged in a creative activity session (Leckey, 2011). Curry (2005) found that coloring, even for as little as 20 minutes, can reduce anxiety. Recently, the therapeutic benefits of coloring have also been explored by several popular media outlets, including National Public Radio, the Star Tribune, and other journals.



Evaluation goals and methods

The goals of the evaluation included the following:

- Learn how the art program impacted client well-being
- Gather feedback about any improvements that could be made to the art program in the future
- Assess client satisfaction with the art program

In order to do this, Wilder Research used a mixed methods approach. First, art program participants were invited to complete a brief survey during the final weeks of each art therapy session. Ninety-three surveys were completed, although participants may have completed more than one survey if they participated in more than one art program session. This survey asked about their general satisfaction with the program, their suggestions for improving the program, and their perception for how the program impacted their well-being. Second, Wilder Research conducted two focus groups with art program participants. Third, Wilder Research conducted interviews with two staff members who worked with and referred clients to the art program.

Survey respondents

Ninety-three client feedback surveys were completed. Clients were asked to complete the surveys near the end of each session. Clients could take more than one survey if they participated in more than one session. Participants were enrolled from every program at Touchstone Mental Health programs. Twenty-six percent of clients who completed the survey were from the New Hope Assisted Living program. Twenty-three percent were from the Intentional Communities program. Eleven percent were from Care Coordination, and 11 percent from Targeted Case Management. Eight percent were from Residential Treatment, and 8 percent from the Intensive Community Rehabilitation Services (ICRS) program. The remainder of participants were from the Assisted Living Rising Cedar (6%) and Home and Community Based Services (1%) programs. Thirty-seven percent of participants participated in an art program session more than three times. Fifty-nine percent were female, and 41 percent were male.

Focus group participants

Two focus groups were conducted with art program participants. One took place at Articulture, a community art nonprofit. The second took place at a Touchstone residential living program. Six clients participated in the first focus group, and four participated in the second.

Client satisfaction

Client feedback about the art program was overwhelmingly positive. Among clients who took the session surveys, all agreed or strongly agreed that they enjoyed the art program, and that the instructor was helpful and friendly. Nearly all clients agreed or strongly agreed that the instructor helped them think of ideas for their art and that the program gave them opportunities to be creative. Ninety-five percent of clients felt that the amount of time for each class was just right, and 88 percent felt the number of classes was just right. All but one client agreed that they would be interested in doing the art program again (Figure 1).

1. Client satisfaction ratings (N=93)

	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Overall, I enjoyed the art program	13%	87%	0%	0%
The instructor was helpful and friendly	10%	90%	0%	0%
The instructor helped me think of ideas for my art	73%	25%	2%	0%
The art program gave me opportunities to be creative	86%	13%	1%	0%
The amount of time for each class was just right	72%	23%	5%	0%
The number of classes was just right	61%	27%	12%	0%
I would be interested in doing the art program again	87%	9%	1%	0%

Source. Client feedback survey

Note. Numbers may not add to 100% due to rounding



Overall, satisfaction ratings were similar for who participated in the program at their residential programs and those who participated at the community art nonprofit. However, clients who participated in the program at residential programs were less likely to strongly agree that the number of classes was just right (49%) than clients who participated at the community nonprofit (69%). In addition, clients who were participating in the program for the first time were less likely to strongly agree the number of classes was just right (55%) than clients who had participated three or more times (70%).

In general, focus group participants were also very satisfied with the art program. Participants shared with program staff that the check-in at the start and end of every class as helpful to them. Clients stated they felt less angry, calmer and happier at the end of class than at the beginning. They also talked about how supportive the instructors were:

The staff have been very supportive for everyone.

I like having an educated art teacher who has gone to art school, she knows all the techniques and the right products.

- Program participants

[Instructor] won't pressure me to get going on my art. I can be myself.

[The instructor] gave us a few very simple ideas of exercises that have made me very relaxed.

- Program participants

While clients were generally very satisfied with the program, they did offer a few suggestions for how to improve the program. Most of their suggestions had to do with improving transportation, and offering the sessions during more varied times of day (for example, both days and evenings) and days of the week. Staff also emphasized that offering transportation was an important factor for clients who attended the program in the community. In addition, staff thought that the program being affiliated with Touchstone was important for helping clients feel comfortable with trying something new.

Program impact on client well-being

Overall, participants felt the art program had a positive impact on their well-being. All participants who completed feedback surveys felt the program helped them express themselves. Ninety-six percent said they felt less stress since starting the program, and 96 percent said they had new ways to cope. Participants also felt the program helped them to better identify (91%) and express (88%) their thoughts and feelings. Nearly all clients (98%) felt the program was helpful to their recovery (Figure 2).

2. Client self-report on how the program impacts their well-being (N=93)

	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
The art program helped me express myself	32%	68%	0%	0%
Since doing the art program, I feel less stress	61%	34%	4%	0%
Since doing the art program, I have new ways to cope	59%	37%	4%	0%
Since doing the art program, I am better able to identify my thoughts and feelings	46%	44%	8%	1%
Since doing the art program, I am better able to express my thoughts and feelings	47%	40%	11%	1%
Overall, I feel the art program is helpful in my recovery	69%	29%	1%	1%

Source. Client feedback survey

Note. Numbers may not add to 100% due to rounding

There were a few notable differences in the impact of the program on clients between residential program participants and community art program participants. Clients who participated in residential programs were less likely to strongly agree that the program helped them to better identify as well as express their thoughts and feelings than clients who participated in the community art program. It should be noted, however, that this may be due to differences in the client population, with clients who participated in the residential program tending to have more active symptoms and inconsistent mental health stability. As such, they may generally have more difficulty identifying and expressing their thoughts and feelings than clients who are receiving services in community housing.

Number of art sessions and impact on well-being



Clients who participated in the art program for three or more sessions were more likely to strongly agree with statements about the program’s impact on their well-being than clients who participated one time (Figure 3). It should be noted that because clients were invited to take the program survey each time they participated in a session, that these groups are not mutually exclusive, and likely include some of the same clients. Rather, it is more likely that these differences are due to clients receiving more services, which could increase the impact for clients who attend more than one session.

3. Client self-report on how the program impacts their well-being by number of sessions attended

	Client participated in 1 session (N=34-35)		Client participated in 3 or more sessions (N=41)	
	Strongly Agree		Strongly Agree	
	Count	%	Count	%
The art program helped me express myself	24	69%	32	78%
Since doing the art program, I feel less stress	20	57%	29	71%
Since doing the art program, I have new ways to cope	16	46%	30	73%
Since doing the art program, I am better able to identify my thoughts and feelings	12	35%	24	59%
Since doing the art program, I am better able to express my thoughts and feelings	12	35%	25	61%
Overall, I feel the art program is helpful in my recovery	21	60%	31	76%
Making art helps me relax	27	77%	36	88%
Making art gives me new ways to cope	22	63%	31	76%
Making art improves my overall quality of life	26	74%	34	83%

Focus group participants described the impact of the art program on their mental health recovery, describing how the program helped them relax, socialize, express themselves, and connect with others.

I like it because I can get out of the house and it eases my mind to do the artwork. It helps a lot.

There’s kind of a camaraderie about being connected with each other through this creative process. The biggest part is to have connectivity with other people who are working on the same types of things.

I feel really relaxed from doing my art. I forget about my problems some of the time.

I think for me, it’s a kind of emotional literacy.

- Program participants

What we've learned here about what we can create with our minds, we can make ourselves feel better by applying ourselves and doing something, no matter what we are doing. Doing simple things makes me feel better. It's nice to know that coming here we can let it all come together and create what we do, talk and express our emotions and feelings and not be judged.

The program makes me happy. Just doing the colors and thinking ahead. Can be a challenge, but it's just wonderful. I'll keep coloring after the class ends.

The chance to express myself without judgement or being rated.

- Program participants

Staff also described how the art program helped clients with isolation and with managing their symptoms. One staff member described how the program helped a client be more social, and the impact that socializing had on the client's wellbeing:

He hadn't been engaging in socializing activities or anything, so getting him out to do that was great. It opened him up, and kind of helped him, it was another place where he could go and interact with people and teachers helped him gauge where he was at. There was one point he was becoming more symptomatic with his mania, and he got feedback in the class, and he said maybe he needs to go to the doctor and get handle on it, it was the feedback the reflections that he got from the class that helped him recognize that he was becoming more symptomatic, and talking too much. That was really worthwhile.

- Staff

Clients also talked about how having a structured program helped them with isolation:

All my social workers were worried about me becoming too isolated, and I'm starting to get over it by coming here. It gets you out of your shell and feel comfortable around other people....coming here is not threatening at all.

Sometimes I come here to converse and be around people, sometimes I don't even do my art.

Meeting new people.

- Program participants

Conclusions and recommendations

Overall, clients are very satisfied with the art program. Many clients participated in several sessions. Focus group participants talked about how they would like the art program to continue, and many would like it to be expanded to multiple days of the week and new times of day.

Furthermore, participants felt the program helped them in their mental health recovery. The program helped clients reduce their stress, learn new coping strategies, socialize with others, and express their thoughts and feelings.

If Touchstone Mental Health continues the art program, they should consider the following recommendations:

- Continue to engage instructors who are welcoming, non-threatening, and who will help clients explore art on their own terms and in their own time. Many participants described how important it was for them to be in a supportive, welcoming environment. This program element is essential to client participation.
- Continue to offer the program as a program that is affiliated with Touchstone Mental Health. Staff felt that the program being affiliated with Touchstone helped remove barriers to participation for clients who may not be comfortable going to a program outside of Touchstone. Programs outside of Touchstone may be more appropriate for clients who have participated in the art program multiple times, or for artists and clients who are further along in their mental health recovery.
- Continue to provide transportation for art classes, and consider other possible barriers to participation. This may include learning more about the days of the week and times of day that work best for clients to participate.
- Consider ways to encourage clients to participate in more than one session of the art program. Clients were more likely to strongly agree that the program had positively impacted various aspects of their recovery if they had participated in three or more sessions than if they had participated in just one session.

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