

ART THERAPY

ST HELENS PRIVATE HOSPITAL

2004 - current

Project Description

Art Therapy for adult mental health patients, at St Helens Private Hospital. This program caters for both day and in-patients.

Host Organisation

St Helens Private Hospital

Funding sources

St. Helens Private Hospital

Highlights

'I just get a thrill out of the tiniest gains ... If someone comes in terrified and actually stays for the session and gives it a go, that is a huge huge hurdle that has been overcome.'

'Seeing people who have had limited exposure to art allowing themselves to open to the unknown ... or seeing someone have a little 'a ha' moment.'

Suzanne Calomeris
Art Psychotherapist

Art Therapist

Suzanne Calomeris

Keywords

Visual Art, St. Helens, Mental Health

Project Contact

St Helens Private Hospital

T: 6221 6444

objaydart@keypoint.com.au

Outcomes

Well-being is a hard thing to measure. Art Therapy draws on a person's strengths and capabilities without the need to focus on pathology.

However, in St Helens new brochure, art therapy is now listed in the same section as other 'Clinical Programs'.

The Art Therapist sees this recognition of art therapy's role in health outcomes as a huge achievement for the profession

Moreover, if people have been moved to embrace art-making in an ongoing way, to make time in their lives to engage their imagination in some way, then this is a big stride forward for those patients.

The program is currently being expanded with an offer to be implemented on the "Mother Baby Unit" at St Helens Private Hospital.

This program began as a pilot in 2004. The Art Therapist runs two sessions per week, one for in-patients and the other for day patients. A third has been added in January 2009 to serve mothers with post-Natal Depression, etc. Group size averages around 6 participants. The range of activities includes drawing, painting, collage, mask making, clay modeling and making constructions from recycled and natural objects.

All artwork produced is as confidential as any verbal disclosure made in a therapeutic setting.

The Art Therapist knows that she is often working with people whose lives have suddenly become very frightening. A key to Art as Therapy being effective is mindfulness. Whenever people are engaged in creative activity, they are held in the present moment, and this is very beneficial for people with anxiety and depression.

In the Art Therapy practised at St Helens, there is minimal praise and no judgment. The point is simply to be engaged. However there is encouragement to overcome resistance and The Art Therapist will often reflect back to a patient if, for example, they finish a session and the agitation they came in with has diminished.

In working in a hospital environment, The Art Therapist has had to concede to an Art as Therapy model over the Art Psychotherapy model of her Masters level training in the U.S.A.. Originally, the group came together and decided on a theme. Then art-making time was followed by discussion, with all the appropriate clinical boundaries in place. The Art Therapist admits that all the other commitments incumbent upon a patient during hospitalisation, means she has had to abandon this model to a degree. This is a frustration she has had to learn to work with given the constraints of the milieu.



Images: Artwork produced by the participants. The art therapist obtained written consent from the art maker(s) in order to have their images reproduced for purposes of publication and education.