



Wellness Through Visual Arts - Expressive Arts Programs

Intended Audience

For all members including people living with cancer, family members and significant caregivers.

Program Description

Wellspring Calgary Expressive Arts programs build communities of hope and support, diminish feelings of isolation and create feelings of well-being and self-worth. Members are invited to sample a multitude of art forms, including (but not limited to): watercolour, mixed media, print-making, ceramics, sculpture, mosaics and beading. All our Expressive Arts programs are led by individuals who are recognized as experts in their fields. They are all talented facilitators who have worked with people with chronic illness and are well-versed in the powerful effects of creativity and personal expression with a wellness focus.

Benefits and Impact

Creative expression has long been considered a useful tool in health and wellness and its tangible benefits have been measured and documented in research. On the surface, exploring new art forms can be fun, inspiring and deeply gratifying. At deeper levels, creative arts can provide an effective outlet for self-expression and can lead to meaningful reflection, heightened self-awareness and cathartic transitions. Other measurable outcomes include reduced illness symptoms (i.e. pain, anxiety, fear, restlessness) as the focus shifts from what has been to what is possible.

What to Expect at a Session

Expect to lose yourself in a creative project and find yourself in a new 'happy place' - calm, focused, and at ease with your surroundings. These classes are not about producing beautiful pieces of art, they are about venturing down a new road in the company of others who are in similar places of change and transformation. Whether you are a beginner, a dabbler or an experienced artist... no particular skills or talents are required. The focus is on fun, self-exploration and personal empowerment.

**Most art sessions are two hours but there are also ArtShops and Silent Retreats offering full uninterrupted days of deeply personal expression and fun!*

**Drop in Friday mornings for volunteer-led Open Studio time.*

Participant Comments

"Thank you Wellspring, you are a lifesaving resource. I gained greater understanding and compassion for others."

"It's okay to be a beginner at something. It gets me motivated and inspired."

"It doesn't have to be perfect to be beautiful."

What the Research Says:

A study examining the health effects of music engagement, visual arts therapy, movement-based creative expression and expressive writing found positive outcomes for the potential use of art to promote healing in all four areas. Music reduced anxiety and pain and promoted relaxation. Visual art activities improved self-worth, enhanced identity and self-expression, and helped individuals focus on positive life experiences. Movement-based creative expression, such as dance, relieved stress and anxiety and promoted balance, acceptance, and self-awareness. Expressive writing studies demonstrated positive influences on the number of physician visits, immune system function, stress hormone levels, blood pressure, and social aspects of individuals. In summary, "Through creativity and imagination, we find our identity and our reservoir of healing." (Stuckey HL, Nobel J. 2010. The connection between art, healing, and public health: a review of current literature. *The American Journal of Public Health*. 100(2): 254 – 264.)

In art therapy (AT), an artist or an art therapist encourages and guides expression of participants' thoughts and feelings through visual creation methods such as water colour, stencilling, and acrylic painting. In a 2011 review, 12 different studies on adult cancer patients undergoing AT were analyzed. Although the studies varied in delivery of art programs, AT was commonly found to be effective in reducing participants' levels of distress, depression, and fatigue. Frequently reported benefits of AT were helping the patient assign meaning to their experiences, and helping them maintain their true sense of self, rather than adopting the identity of a cancer patient. (Wood M, Molassiotis A, Payne S. 2011. What research evidence is there for the use of art therapy in the management of symptoms in adults with cancer? A systematic review. *Psycho-Oncology*. 20(2): 135-145.)

Program Frequency:

2 hours per week

2-8 weeks per program

2-6 programs per session

Winter, spring/summer, fall

Optimum class size: 8-16

Related Programs:

Music: House Music, Music Speaks

Visual: Artist Trading Cards, Artshops, Ceramics, Film-Making, Story in the Photo, Watercolour

Words: Blogging, Storytelling, etc.