

**The Royal Conservatory's
Living Through the Arts Program
ARTS-REHAB PROJECT**

ARTS-REHAB UPDATE
March 2017



Making inspiration cards at St. Joseph's Continuing Care Centre of Sudbury led by Visual Arts Artist-Facilitator Liz Lott.

With the generous support of the Ontario Trillium Foundation, The Royal Conservatory's Living Through the Arts Program is wrapping up the ARTS-REHAB Project – a multi-year initiative that examines how meaningful engagement in a creative arts program can assist rehab patients to re-enter their communities more positively than under standard treatment regimes. The ARTS-REHAB Project enables specially-trained Artist-Facilitators to work with patients, exploring themes such as new personal stories & identities, sense of purpose, and positive images of the future.

The ARTS-REHAB Project aims to: raise awareness of how creative arts can serve an experience of social and personal wellness for patients; expand our understanding of whole person care beyond simple clinical needs; and communicate an arts-based model of care that can be adopted by hospitals across the province and throughout Canada.

The ARTS-REHAB Project is currently partnering with the following hospitals across Ontario:

- ❖ Bridgepoint Active Healthcare (Toronto)
- ❖ St. Joseph's Care Group (SJCG) (Thunder Bay)
- ❖ St. Joseph's Continuing Care Centre of Sudbury (Sudbury)
- ❖ St. Peter's Hospital (Hamilton)
- ❖ West Park Healthcare Centre (Toronto)

The ARTS-REHAB Project at the Canadian Association on Gerontology Conference

Our ARTS-REHAB Research Manager, Dr. Lisa Meschino, had the opportunity to present some of the research results that have emerged from the ARTS-REHAB Research Study at the Canadian Association on Gerontology (CAG) 45th Annual Scientific and Educational Meeting – Fostering Innovation in Research on Ageing in October 2016 (Montreal).

The ARTS-REHAB presentation was called “Caring for the whole person through The Royal Conservatory’s ARTS-REHAB Project” and was very well received by the audience.

Please see below some of the research results that were presented at the conference.



Patients participating in ARTS-REHAB Creative Movement sessions led by Artist-Facilitators Angela Pepin (Sudbury) and Claudia Otto (Thunder Bay)

ARTS-REHAB Research Study

The ARTS-REHAB Project Research Study seeks to answer the question:

How can meaningful engagement in a creative arts program serve the personal and social wellness of patients in rehabilitation?

The ARTS-REHAB Project aims to describe and interpret the expectations and experiences of patients’ evolving sense of self in recovery as informed by their participation in The Royal Conservatory’s Living Through the Arts program. Many different arts disciplines are offered: visual arts, music, drama, creative movement, storytelling and creative writing.

Patients who are eligible to participate are randomly assigned to one of two groups – the Arts Intervention group or the Control group. The Arts Intervention group receives an hour of the creative arts program per week in addition to their scheduled rehabilitation activities. The Control group only receives their rehabilitation activities.

Findings To Date

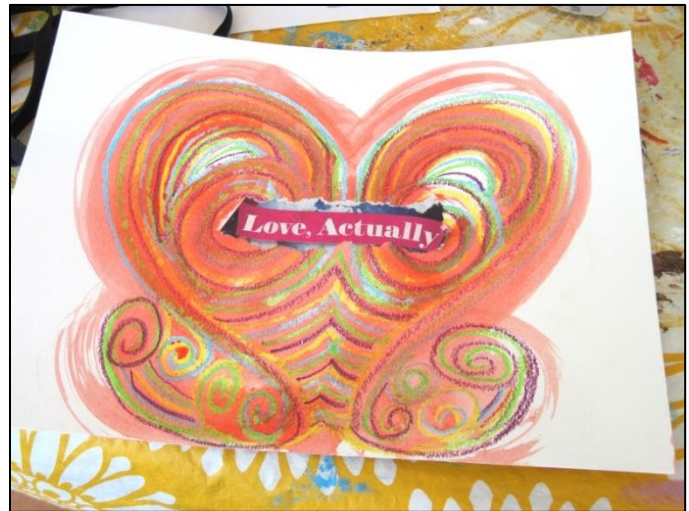
The following is a summary of the findings from participant questionnaires and Artist logs over a 15 month period, from March 2015 to May 2016. We gathered the stories and experiences of 50 Intervention participants and 63 Control participants across 5 hospital sites. The information in this report focusses on participants' **expectations and experiences in recovery** and **their outlook for the future both before and after their time in rehab and, for some, the arts program**. Here is what we have found so far:

PRE-REHAB / ARTS PROGRAM TRENDS

I. EXPERIENCE OF RECOVERY AND SENSE OF SELF

Upon being admitted to hospital, participants completed an ARTS-REHAB questionnaire. According to patients' pre-questionnaire reflections on their recovery process, the following themes emerged in *both* Intervention and Control groups:

1. **Being humbled by the process**
2. **Returning to normal life**
3. **Being in the right place**
4. **Improving physical function**
5. **Having a range of emotions**



Visual Arts session at St. Joseph's Continuing Care Centre of Sudbury led by Visual Arts Artist-Facilitator Liz Lott.

All participants expressed an impatience and desire to return to their normal lives – a longing for the way their lives used to be. However, they acknowledge that they are in the right place for recovering physical function. Their immediate focus is on the day-to-day efforts toward **physical improvement**, e.g. being able to walk, to stand, or to move without losing oxygen. Their levels of optimism vary, with emotions running a spectrum of excitement to see improvement, uncertainty and boredom, disappointment in themselves, and fear.

II. FUTURE OUTLOOK

Regarding their pre-questionnaire reflections about the future, once again, similar themes emerged for *both* Intervention and Control participants. Their hopes for returning to a “normal life” centre on:

- **Seeking the security of familiar and simple things**, such as, family, friends, home, pets, and garden/outdoors;
- **Maintaining basic conditions for survival**, such as physical function (being able to work or walk again) and having no pain;
- **Meeting their Self-care needs**, such as patience, trust, knowledge, faith, and companionship.

In terms of actively attaining these goals, participants in both groups find themselves **being humbled by the process of recovery**. That is, participants feel daunted by the possibility of not getting better, of being a burden to care partners, or of having to live day to day.

III. ARTIST-FACILITATORS' PERSPECTIVE

Artist-Facilitators' observation logs provided additional perspective on the humbling process of patients' rehabilitation and the challenges it poses for patient engagement in the creative arts program. Based on their logs, Artist-Facilitators observed the extreme fragility of this slow-stream patient population, as well as the transient nature of their time in hospital. As a result, Artist-Facilitators often faced the disruption of participants arriving late or leaving early. Artist-Facilitators were challenged to use the arts to nurture a sense of social connection and community within this vulnerable, "moveable" population.

Based on their reflections, Artist-Facilitators indicated how they adapted to meet patients' needs and nurture engagement in a creative process. The key component with was **sharing story**. By incorporating storytelling into the sessions, Artist-Facilitators of all artistic modalities were able to:

- **Build trust / building relationship**
- **Be flexible / being responsive**
- **Hold a safe space / creating community**

As one Artist-Facilitator said:

"It was affirmed for me, once again, that the act of creating builds community, begins conversation, and ultimately makes connections...reminding us of our shared humanity."

From the Intervention participants' perspective on sharing story in a creative context, they said:

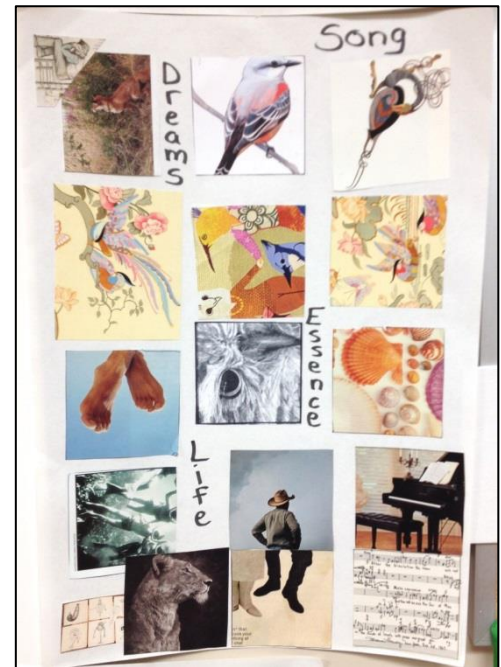
"This program helped to take my mind off my illness. I got together with friends, like normal people having fun."

POST-REHAB / ARTS PROGRAM TRENDS

EXPERIENCE OF RECOVERY AND FUTURE PURPOSE

At the end of our participants' hospital stay, we once again asked them to reflect on the experience of their recovery process. As before, both groups spoke of the following themes as important to their recovery: **Living a normal life**; **Seeing oneself as "a healthy person"**; **Being with others**.

However, subtle but striking differences emerged in the way they described these themes. Overall the Intervention Group's experience of recovery integrated a **greater sense of agency** into a regime of physical improvement. By contrast, the Control participants' reflections on their recovery suggested a **lack of control or agency** in their own health. Also, Control participants focused mostly on the past and the life that was. For Control participants, the future meant wrestling with their limitations and mortality.



Visual Arts session at St. Peter's Hospital – Hamilton Health Sciences led by Visual Arts Artist-Facilitator Catherine Mellinger.

	CONTROL PARTICIPANTS	INTERVENTION PARTICIPANTS
Living a normal life	Getting back to the "old" normal	Adapting to a new normal
Being a healthy person	Retaining physical functional	Being productive and capable
Being with others	Sharing the experience of illness and rehabilitation	Inhabiting a creative community of new learning and fun

Conclusion and Further Thoughts

Overall, the themes emerging from the pre- and post- questionnaire data on participant expectations and experiences of recovery, rehabilitation, and the arts suggest that there are patient needs that must be valued and addressed over and above the immediate physical ones. In other words, patient care is care for the whole person.

As we continue our conversations with patients, Artist-Facilitators, and hospital staff over the remaining months of data collection, we hope to deepen our understanding of how to sustain a meaningful creative arts program across the different hospital settings in order to support the work of caring for the whole person.

“It was the highlight of the week. Inspirational at times. It stimulated a lot of soul searching at a critical time.”

“I got to clarify my own feelings and to share them and to hear others.”

“It gave me a positive attitude. I was more engaged and talking to people I would normally talk to – but [it] gave us a culture to talk about and share (not just talk about the weather).”

ARTS-REHAB TEAM

In this, our final ARTS-REHAB Update, we want to acknowledge the incredible hard work of all the Managers and Leaders of the ARTS-REHAB Team across Ontario. They have been responsible for liaising with hospital staff, conducting patient interviews (data collection) and mentoring Artist-Facilitators. They have also made an incredible contribution to the impact and value that this project has had in their individual communities, working tirelessly in advocating for the value of professional Artist-Facilitators bringing the creative process into the lives of vulnerable populations. We are deeply grateful for their diligence, persistence and passion for the work in this field.



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Song “Wings (of Hope)”

At West Park Healthcare Centre in Toronto, Artist-Facilitator Ciara Adams led a series of music sessions with the patients where they were jointly creating a song together. They wrote the lyrics as a group based on their personal experiences in rehabilitation. A CD was created of the song and copies were given to each patient in the group. It was so well received that patients and staff wanted it to be played during their physical rehab sessions to support and inspire them. The Research Assistant who interviewed patients post sessions said: *“The patient was raving about the CD that they had made in the session. She said they were astounded by their own capabilities to create this song together. Another patient mentioned that the songwriting was an amazing and enriching experience. She couldn't believe what the Artist-Facilitator had pulled out of her and the rest of the group creatively.”* The Occupational Therapist who sat in on one of the sessions when the song was being created said: *“When I observed the songwriting session with Ciara I could see how the patients found their strengths to draw on. You could feel the energy in the room - they felt hopeful.”* The Artist-Facilitator Ciara Adams said: *“I'm thrilled by the commitment the patients had to this creative process and how deeply they thought about their experience as we worked to finish this lovely piece of music together. It has taught me a lot and inspired me too!”*



Artist-Facilitator Ciara Adams leading an ARTS-REHAB music session at West Park Healthcare Centre in Toronto.

Wings (of Hope)

With such high goals before me,
Discouragement comes so easily.
I'm feeling it's impossible,
Too much for me to face alone.

Now I appear disabled,
Still reaching to the sky above me.
Striving for emancipation,
Strengthened by my progress.

We're working for our independence,
We're trying to return to "Us" again.
Like the spring rejuvenated,
Coming back from winter's storm.

With renewed hope we're reaching goals,
In confidence, breaking through them.
Empowered by the tools we now have,
We're spreading our wings to freedom.

CHORD PROGRESSION:
Dm G Am Em

For more information about the ARTS-REHAB Project – www.rcmusic.ca/arts-rehab
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St. Joseph's Continuing Care Centre Of Sudbury
Centre de soins continus St-Joseph de Sudbury

