

Abstract

Understanding the multifaceted nature of the dynamic relationship between art making and mental health recovery poses many challenges to researchers and policy makers. Art facilitators in the mental health sector play a unique and highly supportive role throughout the mental health recovery journey for many consumers and are an untapped source of wisdom and expertise which may assist us in understanding this complex phenomenon.

Our presentation will focus on one phase of a year long project conducted in collaboration with two major psychosocial rehabilitation services (Mind Australia and Prahran Mission). In both services a broad spectrum of arts-based practices are currently provided with visual arts being the main modality. The visual arts are practiced along a continuum of programs involving individual art making, studio art making, art making with emphasis on skill development and mastery, program facilitated and structured art groups, individual art making with a healing purpose and art psychotherapy. Most programs encompass a variety of these approaches whilst others have a particular adherence to one approach.

The focus of this study was to explore the role of art making in mental health recovery, drawing on the experiences and views of six experienced art facilitators within these two psychosocial rehabilitation services. The in-depth loosely structured interviews provided rich insights into their role, the art making process, the recovery journey and the impact of art making on recovery and personal development.

The art facilitators came from a variety of backgrounds within the field with different levels of experience and provided a rich and multi-dimensional understanding across the diversity of approaches. They also articulated a consistent recovery-focused humanistic attitude.

The thematic analysis identified key themes clustered within three groupings. The first focused on how the art making process brings self-knowledge, growth and development. The second grouping focused on how the qualities of the milieu promote self-empowerment and active engagement. The third group identified the beliefs, attitudes and approaches of the facilitator influence and support recovery. The findings provide valuable insight into the wide-ranging health promoting benefits of art making in mental health recovery programs, as well as suggesting important skills and competencies required by those facilitating programs.

Biographies

Patricia Fenner

Patricia works in the Master of Art Therapy program at La Trobe University where she has been engaged for the past ten years. Over the last five years she has been undertaking a PhD on place and art therapy with a key interest in arts-based research methods.

The La Trobe study on art making and mental health recovery follows many years working in both private practice and public mental health services engaged in management, supervision, art therapy and training roles.

Theresa Van Lith

Theresa received a Department of Human Services Mental Health Fellowship grant to conduct the presenting research. Theresa has been working as a research officer as part of the collaborative research project team since July 2007. The research began with a project titled 'Creativity, the arts and art therapy in mental health recovery: Developing a research agenda'. It involved developing an initial broad mapping of current models of arts-based practices in both services and building a systematic research agenda for the sector.

Theresa is currently doing her PhD at La Trobe University to further explore the role of art making in mental health recovery. Theresa also has a BA Psychology and a Masters in Art Therapy. She has

previous experience working in the psychosocial rehabilitation sector, as both an art therapist and support worker.