

Thank you from Community Arts Network

I'm writing to say thank you so much for the art books you have been donating to us with via Margaret Cameron-Hooper.

She mentioned that you may like to put some information about the art programs we are running in a news letter. I've written a little about what we do below.

Community Arts Network (CAN) <http://communityartsnetwork.com.au/> is a social enterprise linking art to health and wellbeing. The programs are made up of collaborative fine art workshops facilitated by professional and emerging artists. We work with marginalised and disadvantaged communities, some of Melbourne's most vulnerable people.

We are contracted by health and community service providers such as Cohealth, Salvation Army and ISIS Primary Care.

We provide high quality art materials and equipment and deliver workshops in a number of mediums such as drawing, painting, sculpture, ceramics, printmaking, mixed media and more. The people involved are making the most amazing and beautiful art.

At the moment there are two art groups who are enjoying the books Rotary have provided. One group have named themselves Arts of Gold, with ten regular participants meeting every Tuesday in a Cohealth homelessness service waiting room in the city. These are people currently homeless or with lived experience of homelessness.

The other group have named themselves 'The Wild Women of The West' and they meet every Wednesday in Footscray. This is funded by Cohealth as well as part of a mental health and wellbeing program for women.

It has been great to work with our clients and see a clear commitment to linking their clients to healthy activities outside of mainstream service provision.

These groups have been running for over 12 months now and we are working very hard to secure the funding support we need to make them ongoing.

The books are being used by the workshop facilitators for references to various art movements such as impressionism, cubism, abstract expressionism, the renaissance, surrealism and more. Participants also borrow them and we give them away too.

CAN also provides mentoring, training and employment opportunities for people who participate in the programs who wish to become workshop facilitators themselves. We find that this enables community empowerment.

We also represent the participants and sell their artwork at exhibitions, markets and via another social enterprise offering an e-commerce platform <https://www.redbindle.com.au/> for people to sell their work on line.

We are very proud of the work we do. We evaluate the programs and are now providing data which is showing significant health outcomes. People are using art to as a means to help manage serious mental illness, addiction and even physical health conditions. The collaborative group setting is also delivering amazing social outcomes as well.

Some group members share stories about how art has impacted on their lives. One guy gets an urge to gamble everyday at the same time and now pulls out a drawing pad and draws. He told me once how he walked down to the docklands and drew an insect on a leaf.

Another lady who suffers from Tourette's syndrome finds that the symptoms of her condition are reduced significantly while participating with the group and while being creative in her own time.

A lady who suffers from severe anxiety who might otherwise find it difficult to set foot outside her front door is able to navigate public transport to attend the art group and even to help man a stand at a fair in the city.

Most people are trepidatious about getting involved at first saying, "I can't draw and I'm not very creative"

We gently explain that 'there is no such thing as a mistake in our workshops, every mark is meant to be, we don't need to fix or erase anything we just need to keep adding' We say 'let's just make a mark and see where it takes us'

As for creativity, we gently explain that everyone is creative we use creativity all day everyday, at home, work, in our sleep, even to cross the street.

Once a workshop is underway there is a real transformation that occurs as people become immersed in the sensory activity, they are focussed on the present moment and all other thoughts, stress and concerns disappear.

Once an activity is underway there is often what we describe as a magical silence, where all the chatter of day to day life stops. The therapeutic nature of these activities is often very profound.

Participants quickly realise this link between health and art as we encourage people to make art part of day to day life and we come up with lovely little sayings such as "a drawing a day keeps the doctor away!"

The sense of pride and delight participants experience when a beautiful piece of art is made is a joy to see.

We use quotes which support CAN's philosophies:

19th century writer, Joseph Conrad
"Creativity is linked with imagination. Imagination is the instrument of compassion."

Author of the Bushman of the Kalahari, Lawrence Van der Post:
"We are the only species on the planet able to imagine consciously and can therefore add something new to the pot of existence."

The American writer Naomi Wolfe wrote;
'Devotion, dedication and hard work makes the artists. Imagination is the flame and art is the match. Creativity is the answer to universal understanding and personal growth and will fill people with joy.'

French Post Impressionist wrote Edgar Degas, wrote,
'It is very good to copy what one sees: It is much better to draw what you can't see anymore but in your memory. It is a transformation in which imagination and memory work together. You can only reproduce what struck you, that is to say, the necessary. That way your memory and you fantasy are freed from the tyranny of nature.'

Please feel free to stay in touch and we would be happy to show you some of our art. I'll keep you up to date with exhibition dates.

Thanks again Ken, we are very grateful to Rotary for your support.

Kind Regards
Dan

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