

Art and “the Language of Well-Being” in Adolescent Health Care[†]

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Abstract

Feeling effective as a young person depends on a capacity to draw upon one’s own resources in the service of healthy living and development. In adolescent health care, there is the need to call upon the talents and creativity of young people, to introduce new and exciting experiences, and to facilitate involvement in their own care in order to nurture optimal growth and development on a physical and psychological level.

While hospitalisation can represent a major crisis point in adolescence, the provision of a stimulating environment and the opportunity for creative activities offers an exciting, transformative and healing experience. Art allows adolescents to use alternative languages beyond illness, to engage in endeavours that are distanced from overt therapeutic intent, and to embrace attributes of self-esteem and resilience. Through the process and production of art, and the inclusion of music, poetry, film or theatre, young people can experience personal growth, acquire skills, develop socially and contribute to environmental change.

In seeking to illustrate the value and importance of such approaches, this paper draws upon the experiences of a youth arts program attached to an adolescent ward. In a project called Art Injection, art students worked with adolescents to make sculptures from old hospital equipment, with startling results. More recently, the development of personal totem poles and an imaginative mosaic mural has powerfully engaged creativity and community in care. Group and individual art sessions, including the media arts project Creative Well, are offered on weekdays as part of the general hospital routine, enabling hospitalised young people to experience creativity as a daily part of their lives.

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