

Art for Wellness - Final Report

Huff Family Fund Grant

Project Completion

We are thrilled to report the successful completion the Art for Wellness pilot project for which we received a 2021 Huff Family Fund grant. The full **27 weeks (54 hours)** of Art for Wellness workshops concluded in June 2023, with the final workshop taking place on June 7th, 2023.

Our original launch date was January 2022, but to keep participants and Facilitators safe during the pandemic's Omicron wave, we ended up delaying our start to March, which extended the project timeline into 2023. Due to illness and scheduling challenges, the youth series ended up being 8 weeks, and the senior series 10 weeks.

A portion of this grant was also allocated towards purchasing art materials, tools, and equipment to help us set up the County Arts Lab. The impact of this support has been instrumental in helping us:

- Welcome nearly **750** community participants through our doors, including **500** unique residents of all ages
- Provide **500** hours of free or sliding scale artist-led participatory arts programming, and
- Create **70** new teaching opportunities for - and pay **\$50,000** in teaching fees to - local artists!

We sincerely thank the Huff Family Fund for this support, which will continue to be used and enjoyed by the community for many years to come.



Art for Wellness - Impact and Overall Result

Three was the lucky number for this project - we recruited **3 Artist Facilitators**, who each led 3 weeks of workshops with 3 different groups of residents, in collaboration with **3 partner organizations**. In preparation for the project, The Facilitator team, alongside several other local artists and the County Arts staff team, attended a 2-hour training session with an Arts-Based Occupational Therapist, enhancing our local capacity for delivering art for well-being style programming.

For each 9-week session, our aim was to have the same group of 10 residents participating, to enable participants and Facilitators to develop trusting relationships. In total, **more residents than we had anticipated - 40 compared to 30** - ended up attending at least one Art for Wellness workshop. While there was some fluctuation among the youth participants - 21 local youth ended up attending at least one workshop! - it was wonderful to see the bonds that developed between fellow participants and Facilitators throughout each session.



Impact - Adult/Senior Participants

For our first 9-week series, we recruited participants in collaboration with community partners such as Addictions and Mental Health Hastings Prince-Edward and the Prince Edward Learning Centre to target **adults facing social isolation or mental health challenges**, and also welcomed any adults who felt that their mental health could be supported by participating in art for wellness style programming. For our final 9-week series, we worked with Community Care for Seniors to recruit **older adults**. Below we share feedback from participants about the impact on anticipated outcomes including well-being, new skills/perspectives, and social connection.



Testimonials - Impact on Well-Being

- "This class allowed us to carve out a little time each week to do something just for ourselves, which I found nourishing. Having a creative outlet is very restorative. We create these opportunities for our kids, but often neglect our own creativity."
- "It was healing to share the stories and experiences that influenced our art. There was something very beautiful about being vulnerable and open with strangers."
- "The class pulled me out of the house and out of my fear of inadequacy. I have put up my own art on our wall and intend to continue to practice."
- "It really helped me get myself motivated and out of the house during a period where I was struggling to do that. Also overcame personal anxiety of new situations and being open and vulnerable to strangers."
- "Thank you for building this opportunity to nurture our creativity, providing materials and guidance to be able to explore and play, and a safe environment where we could reconnect in person. I feel very lucky to have gotten a spot."

Testimonials - Social Connectedness

- "Just being given space to explore and play, in a space with people with shared interests, built a sense of social connection."
- "Having a scheduled weekly activity made me come out on days I otherwise would have not, and introduced me to new people."
- "I made some friends and enjoyed sharing conversations and visiting within class to share each others' artwork."
- "The staff were very sociable and caring and helpful and I felt better because of that."
- "Made a couple of friends there; looked forward to seeing people; attended social events afterwards!"



Testimonials - New Perspectives / Skills

- "I learned so many amazing strategies to help unlock my creativity and find joy in art again."
- "I initially felt very out of my comfort zone but was made to feel less critical of myself. It was a very supportive atmosphere."
- "I learned a lot about the process of art and about how I approach anything that involves me being creative!"

Impact - Youth Participants

We also collaborated with the ROC Youth Services, and were invigorated by the creative energy of our 21 youth participants. This feedback process was more ongoing and organic throughout the workshops themselves, and we gathered testimonials from some of their parents to understand the kinds of impact the program had on participants.



“The Art for Wellness workshops have given our daughter Meghan a really unique, special opportunity to be who she is, and do what she loves to do, alongside her peers in an accessible inclusive environment free of barriers and judgment. She is not only trying and learning new things, and exploring new ways to express herself through art; it’s also been really meaningful and eye-opening for her to connect with and get a glimpse into the artistic process and life of the artists facilitating the workshops. Meghan’s teachers at PECL’s Life Skills program have noticed that since starting the Art for Wellness program, she has started taking the initiative to help out in the classroom, for example by setting up art supplies for her peers. Sincere thanks from our family to County Arts for creating these kinds of inclusive, accessible creative opportunities right here in Prince Edward County.”

“The Art for Wellness workshops helped kick off a phenomenal transformation in Abby’s artistic journey. Working with the different Artist Facilitators introduced her to a whole range of new artistic mediums, and helped her hone in her own unique style. The experience has taken her passion for the arts to another level, and connected her to like-minded community members of all ages. Thanks to these workshops, she entered into a mentoring relationship with one of the facilitators which has been an amazing experience for her. We’ve since started visiting local galleries, inspiring Abby to explore the possibility of submitting her own work for exhibition in the near future! I’m so thankful that Abby was able to access this and other youth arts opportunities County Arts is creating.”



Impact - Artist Facilitators

We also wanted to explore the impact of this experience on the local artists who facilitated the programming - Renee Hiltz, Kelly Cade, and Natalie / Ambivalently Yours. While the initial plan was to have one Facilitator and one Volunteer (Sharon Hart, a wonderful collaborator in our Lab programming) present at each session, at our first team meeting our paid Facilitators all decided that they'd like to volunteer at each other's sessions! This was a wonderful way to provide continuity and support for participants, and help Facilitators learn from one another's perspectives and approach. Below, we include some testimonials on how this experience impacted our Artist Facilitators:

"This was a perfect learning opportunity for me that gave me the chance to develop teaching curriculums and adapt my teaching to three very diverse groups of students. This opportunity provided me with a lot of valuable tools and experience, and helped me discover and develop my love of teaching art, opening up a new and exciting path in my artistic career."

"This was a new experience for me, in that the focus wasn't so much about the art projects as it was about community and having a comfortable space to gather and express oneself. Each group was so different- the energy, the focus, their comfort with making art etc. It was great practice for me to let go of expectations, get to know the group, go with their flow, and let the energy in the room determine the direction, pacing, conversation..."

The Art for Wellness program was the first public activity I engaged in since the beginning of the pandemic. While my role as a facilitator was to help demonstrate how art and wellness can be connected, the act of teaching at County Arts also positively impacted my own wellness, as it gave me a safe place to socialize with other creative people and helped me make new friends in my community.



Impact - County Arts, Partners & Community

The Art for Wellness pilot project allowed us to **form and/or strengthen partnerships with 3 fellow local nonprofits**: Addictions and Mental Health Hastings Prince Edward, the Recreation Outreach Centre, and Community Care for Seniors. These partners helped recruit participants by promoting the program with their clients and/or members, and in the case of the ROC, a ROC facilitator accompanied youth to and from the County Arts Lab each week and provided Facilitators with support during the sessions.

Together, we helped dozens of Prince Edward County residents at higher risk of social isolation and/or mental health challenges gain access to free

participatory arts programming, and explored its impact on their lives, and the potential of art in general to enhance our community's social connectedness and well-being.

This project also helped open up communications lines with these key local partners, enabling us to **pursue and facilitate other funding opportunities and initiatives**. For example, we have since:

- Partnered with the ROC to deliver a community-engaged mural program
- Collaborated with Community Care for Seniors on a grant application for an Arts Mentorship Program
- Worked with AMHS-HPE, PELC, and many other community partners to recruit participants to Art Together, our free drop-in artmaking studio pilot project... and more!

Finally, for **County Arts**, this Huff Family Fund grant was immensely instrumental in:

- enhancing our capacity for and expertise in delivering Art for Well-being style programming
- helping us explore and understand the potential benefits of arts engagement for mental and physical health
- helping us equip the County Arts Lab, and provide accessible community arts programming for 500+ residents over the past 18 months
- increasing our ability to serve local artists by creating meaningful employment opportunities





"It is so important to have spaces in our community where people can be together and learn together. This program really allowed that. It was wonderful to see the participants of each group form friendships throughout the sessions, while discovering new ways to express themselves through art. My particular approach to this program was to give students different tools to express their emotions through art, and it was really inspiring to see people open up while using these new tools. It was also wonderful to hear from many of the students how they were now incorporating the art activities they learned into their everyday lives. Some of my students became avid zine makers, others started making personal and self-referential work for the first time, others kept a sketchbook in their living room so that they could sketch whenever the inspiration came. This program helped strengthen our community by helping people feel less alone while also building their self-worth."

*Testimonial from Art for Wellness Facilitator,
surrounded by artwork by participants*

