

COMMUNITY BELONGING THROUGH THEATER: CREATIVE ARTS INTERVENTION FOR LOW-INCOME OLDER ADULTS

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Creative arts can promote social contact and possibly reduce isolation. A professionally run theater group comprised of low-income older adults met for 12 weeks to learn basic skills and perform a play. Using a pre-post questionnaire, data were gathered from the treatment group (n=14) who participated in the class and a non-participating comparison group (n=5) to identify potential program effects on measures of social isolation, community belonging, and social exclusion. Participants were African American living in low-income housing in an urban area. The average age of the sample was 65 years, 21% were men, 83% had at least high school degree, 71% reported good to excellent health, and 58% reported at least one ADL. Regression analyses showed that a sense of community belonging was significantly greater for the treatment group than the comparison group at time 2. This was not the case when considering social isolation or social exclusion. When controls were added (age, health, and previous theater experience), the significant difference remained with higher age predicting a sense of community belonging. The greater number of class sessions attended was also associated with a greater sense of community belonging for the treatment group. Through the shared experience of theater, participants can gain a sense of community, but this activity does not seem to be related to social isolation or social exclusion. It could be that theater participation fosters a sense of belonging due to group dynamics but is not a significant enough activity to reduce a sense of isolation or exclusion.

FINDINGS FROM THE ALZHEIMER'S POETRY PROJECT LONG-TERM CARE IMPLEMENTATION STUDY

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Dementia interventions grounded in group participation in the cultural arts (e.g., poetry, storytelling, music, and dance) have been growing in reach in recent decades. Yet this growth has been stymied by a lack of empirical evidence to demonstrate measurable outcomes. In the current IRB-approved research study, the Alzheimer's Poetry Project (APP), in partnership with 15 Wisconsin nursing homes, provided staff training in an innovative non-pharmacological intervention for people living with dementia. The goal of APP is to facilitate creative self-expression, social and intellectual stimulation, respectful acceptance, validation of personhood, and valued inclusion of people living with Alzheimer's disease and other dementias through the performance and creation of poetry. APP's proven track record at over 500 facilities in 34 states and six countries internationally, serving over 40,000 people worldwide, demonstrates APP's ability to bring high-quality creative arts programming to people living with dementia. Through the implementation of APP

in three groups of five nursing homes in Wisconsin, activities and care staff were trained to deliver the intervention over three-month periods. After training was completed, researchers evaluated and compared APP to non-arts programming in the same facilities. A novel dementia arts mapping technique was created to document observable impacts of interventions on social engagement, alertness, vocalization, vocabulary, affect, and self-expression. 35 interventions were documented, and variability in participant experiences reveal significantly greater impacts on personhood and creativity during the 11 APP interventions than during the 24 non-arts interventions. Implications for promoting dementia care programming grounded in group participatory arts will be discussed.

GROUP-BASED PARTICIPATORY ARTS INTERVENTIONS: PRODUCING ART AND VALIDATION OF PERSONHOOD

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Participatory arts-based interventions for people living with dementia involve the collaborative creation and performance of poetry, story, song, dance, and visual arts. These programs are designed to support self-expression and productive collaboration among people living with dementia while stimulating positive social interactions and feelings of empowerment and validation. This paper explores the use and potential benefits of validation in the implementation of person-centered participatory arts interventions in the context of dementia care. The authors offer a theoretical framework for understanding validation as a common intervention method and participant experience during these interventions, organized into five themes: collaboration, connection, creation, communication, and confirmation. Basic validation techniques are easily learned and can be incorporated into a broad diversity of dementia care strategies and interventions including activity programs designed to stimulate cognitive, physical, and communicative abilities. Participatory arts programs offer tools for connecting to personhood in a population for whom such connections are under constant threat of erosion. As activity programs based in creative arts help to support self-expression among participants and serve as a vehicle for generating feelings of self-efficacy, such activities are well suited to fostering the person-centered goals of dementia care programming. Clinicians and other transdisciplinary care providers are encouraged to understand, use, and teach these and other validation-focused arts interventions with persons living with dementia. These validation experiences are suggested to offer direct clinical benefits for participants as well as indirect benefits when modeled in the presence of formal care providers and family members.

POETRY INTERVENTION IMPACTS PERSPECTIVES ON DEMENTIA AND CAPABILITIES AMONG YOUNG VOLUNTEERS

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