

Drawing Memories: An empowering and enjoyable aged care activity promoting confidence, independence and engagement

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This paper presents the outcomes from the Drawing Memories program, developed and implemented with the aim of promoting quality of life indicators for elderly people with diverse physical and cognitive abilities.

Drawing is a way of thinking, communicating, and understanding. Drawing expresses our experience of the world (Ramm 2005 p.63). It is a fundamental human activity, a universal language of early childhood, yet often discouraged, even discarded as we grow up. This is particularly evident in our senior population, many of whom being denied the opportunity to explore drawing and creativity beyond their childhood years.

It is well documented in the health sciences, psychotherapy and art therapy fields that active participation in stimulating, creative activities improves quality of life and clinical outcomes across many health care sectors (Cohen, 2006; Gottlieb-Tanaka, 2011; Kaplin, 2000; McNiff, 1992; Rusted et al., 2006). With the population growth in aged care services, particularly in dementia care, there is an increased demand for research into the health benefits of non-pharmacological interventions such as creative expression activities. Moon (2010) argues materials and media play a central role in these activities. The role of drawing material and media choices, acting as an intermediary between thought, communication and the physical experience of creating, was a key aspect of the study.

This paper reports the outcomes of sixteen people who participated across two residential and community aged care services. To accommodate the multi-disciplinary nature of the study, a heuristic inquiry into the useability, practicalities and therapeutic potential of drawing media, was used in conjunction with

evaluation instruments and clinical assessment tests to analyse the results.

The observed responses to a variety of tools, activities and media will be discussed. An interesting outcome was the Apple iPad rating highly in useability and enjoyment. It was found that participants' confidence, independence and engagement improved while undertaking the drawing activities.

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