

INTRODUCTION

Northeast Arc is an organization that changes lives by discovering abilities in individuals living with disabilities. It serves more than 15,000 people in approximately 190 cities and towns in northeast Massachusetts, and ensures that children and adults with disabilities live, work, engage in civic life and play in the community. The organization provides various programs such as autism services, early intervention, deaf services, recreation, personal care assistance, family support, and day habilitation. Moreover, the organization is guided by a volunteer board of directors consisting of individuals with disabilities and business and community leaders who ensure rights and liberties are guaranteed in social activities. Under the organization's community integration, most individuals with disabilities have felt a significant presence in the community following the effective programs that ensure equal access to opportunities. (Northeast Arc, 2022)



Related Literature

Art has and continues to be a key method for expression. However, artistic communication and representation provide for cognitive resonance by engaging the individual's collective psychosocial abilities to engage with their audience. According to Athessey (2020), engaging in creative arts is particularly useful for persons with disabilities as it provides art-based interventions where such people can engage with their individual goals thus developing their well-being and functionality. Equally, artistic communication and representations for instance rock paintings allow people with disabilities to engage with their affective selves. In this sense, art serves as a therapeutic tool that not only enhances the individual's emotional awareness but also their ability to be emotionally expressive" (Irene et al, 2008, p. 37). This allows people with disabilities to become further expressive and thus engage better socially.

"The multisensory nature of artistic activities such as rock painting further elevates the psychomotor abilities of persons with disabilities by promoting sensory regulation" (Koch et al, 2015, p. 338). By becoming more physically apt, art enables, therefore, such persons to develop a more positive self-outlook of themselves and society. "The explorative and creative nature of artistic productions enables the individual to develop a rather positive self-image. A positive self-image enhances the ability to interact freely thus fostering meaningful engagement and interaction. Artistic forms such as rock paintings in this sense due to their rather flexible nature and improvisatory construction allow for art that is tailored to the individual's responses to be realized" (Hackett & Bourne, 2014, p. 43). According Ahessey (2020), creative art therapies anchored in a therapeutic relationship enables the individual to further develop traits such as resilience, and coping through unique artistic properties such as spontaneity, creativity, and escapism realized through working on shared experiences as a people.

Objectives

- Develop the fine motor skills of the participants
- Develop their social skills
- Help them Acquire artistic techniques
- Integrate them in their community as valuable members

Materials & Methods

Activities:

Rock paintings and drawings are used as community activities to create artistic work aimed at decorating a place. Rocks, multiple acrylic paint, brushes, and drawing materials like craft paper, pencils and rulers were provided to perform the following activities:

- Search for perfect/smooth rock
- Using Folk Art Multiple-Purpose Acrylic Paints
- Holding painting brush
- Choose pictures of art rock to replicate
- Going outside to pick stones
- Combine painting and outdoor exploration
- Creativity- mixing paints and drawing
- Hiding and finding painted rocks
- Decorating with painted rocks



Observations & Data:

Baseline data serving as a defined starting point for comparison purposes was collected from the group homes data books. We found that 9 out of 10 individuals were struggling to use their fingers for activities of daily living, and 8 out of 10 were unable to connect with others, and 10 out of 10 expressed their desire to be active in their community.

One week after the implementation of the rock painting project, a semi structured Interview was conducted to measure its impacts on the individuals lives. Three questions were asked:

Question 1

Has your participation in this project improved your ability to use your fingers for activities of daily living?

Question 2

Do you now feel more connected to others than before?

Question 3

By contributing to the creation of artistic work aimed at decorating a place in your community, do you have the sentiment of becoming a more valuable member of this community?

A total of 10 participants had to answer "yes" or "no" for each question.



Results

For Q1: Yes (7) No (3)

For Q2: Yes (8) No (2)

For Q3: Yes (10) No (0)

Q1: Seven out of ten participants acknowledge that this project positively impacted their ability to use their fingers to button, unbutton their clothing, to zip, unzip their lunch bags, to write or play card. Three participants believe that they did not experience any change.

Q2: Nine out of ten participants feel more connected to their peers than before. They reported becoming more empathic, and feel more skillful in communicating with others.

Q3: Six out of ten participants believe that their artistic work aimed at decorating a public park should change people's negative assumption about them, and that they are more valuable as members of their community.

Limitations:

A finger dexterity test to measure the participants ability to use their fingers, and the Social Skills inventory (SSI) to measure the participants social skills could have been performed. However, these tests were not approved by the internship site supervisor, citing the participants intellectual challenges.

Conclusion

This project brought a great opportunity to the participants by engaging them in various activities such as learning how to use drawing tools, how to hold paint brush, how to mix paint and drawing. Moreover, they performed leisure activities by going outside together to pick stones, hiding and finding rocks, sharing tools and food. Finally, they beautifully painted some rocks, which they used to decorate a place in their community. After the implementation of this project, a semi-structured interview was conducted with the group, and they reported achieving their objectives as their ability to use their fingers seriously improved, and that they feel more connected to each other, and have a sense of becoming more valuable as members of their community. This experience by which the participants showed their artistic talent is a proof that disability is not inability.

Lessons learned:

I learned that disability can be resourceful in different ways in an organization. Moreover, the other lesson entails developing a positive attitude which is a significant component in community integration as it improves individuals' social activities.



References

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Acknowledgements

This research was supported by the internship site supervisor, Mrs. Kaitlyn Standley who provided significant information on relevant initiatives to accommodate individuals with disabilities, and by my instructor, Professor Dr. Amy Everitt who provided significant guidance during the research. I thank my friends as they were significant in selecting the relevant literature for the study. Moreover, I would like to thank MGB for the award, which funded my internship, and gave me the opportunity to further my education in behavioral health.

