

Arts & Culture Research Symposium 2020

21 July 2020, Tuesday, 3-5pm

Zoom Videoconferencing

Theme: Arts & Health

Conference Proceedings

1.	Culture Dose: An arts engagement program for mental health and wellbeing Professor Katherine Boydell Head of Arts-based Knowledge Translation Lab, Black Dog Institute, University of New South Wales
1.1	Black Dog Institute (Sydney, Australia) has trialled an arts-on-prescription programme for individuals experiencing depression. Based on findings of this intervention, and with the growing recognition that consumer needs related to health can be better met by other kinds of support in the community, the programme was transitioned to Culture Dose, an online art for wellbeing programme catered to the general public.
1.2	About Social Prescribing Social prescribing or ‘Culture Vitamins’, is about linking people to non-medical services in the community and creating intentional pathways between clinical care and non-clinical support; social prescribing recognises the social determinants of health, where health and wellbeing can be affected by social, economic, and environmental factors. Social prescribing is holistic, person centred, and is tailored to individual need. It focuses on non-medical needs affecting health and wellbeing by linking people to local community and cultural groups or organisations. Examples include lunch clubs, exercise-on-prescription, walking groups, creative or cultural activities, or even debt advice. All of which, provide help with a wide range of issues including social isolation, housing issues, or unemployment. Individuals experiencing mental health issues often have difficulty engaging with the community due to stigma, isolation, and marginalisation leading often to social isolation and loneliness. A recent study on loneliness indicates that social isolation is associated with a 29% rise in mortality. ¹ Arts-on-prescription is only one offering of social prescribing, but such arts interventions are considered non-invasive, low risk treatment options that are increasingly being used to supplement more traditional biomedical treatments. Global response to social prescribing: a. UK has been at the forefront of social prescribing where it has received substantial funding and is increasingly scaled up across the country as a core component of the NHS;

¹ J. Holt-Lunstad, T. B. Smith, et al, ‘Loneliness and social isolation as risk factors for mortality: a meta-analytic review’, *Perspect Psychol Sci*, 2015, 10(2), pp. 227-237.

	<p>UK has responded to the epidemic of loneliness with strategy to tackle loneliness including the appointment of a Minister of Loneliness to address related issues.</p> <p>b. In several Canadian provinces such as Quebec, GPs can prescribe museum visits (or entry passes for family members) for patients. In the province of Ontario, community mental health centres have social prescribing as integral to their services.</p> <p>c. In Australia, a rising interest in social prescribing with eyecare is also observed as it is increasingly scaled up for injured workers. A Social Prescribing Roundtable November 2019 report was also published last year that outlined the findings of a roundtable co-hosted by the Consumers Health Forum of Australia and The Royal Australian College of General Practitioners (RACGP) in partnership with the NHMRC Partnership Centre for Health System Sustainability. Early findings are showing positive results of social prescribing on the individual, community and societal levels.</p> <p>Evidence on Effects of Social Prescribing</p> <p>Social prescribing programmes are underpinned by rigorous research; evidence of social prescribing programmes include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Reduced blood pressure b. Less panic attacks c. Cost effective d. Decreased anxiety and depression e. Increased self-esteem f. Greater quality of life g. Enhanced social connectedness h. Reduced ED presentations <p>Global research would suggest that engagement with the arts affects social determinants of health, improve social cohesion and reduce social inequities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. One such research is the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Arts, Health and Wellbeing Inquiry Report, <i>Creative Health: The Arts for Health and Wellbeing, July 2017</i>. This report demonstrated the beneficial impact of engagement with the arts on the individual, community and societal levels; the report noted that an arts-on-prescription project has shown a 37% drop in GP consultation rates and a 27% reduction in hospital admissions. In addition to the cost-effectiveness of arts-on-prescription, the sharing of personal narratives by people from all walks of life on the impact the arts on their lives is a positive outcome. b. World Health Organisation Health Evidence Network Synthesis Report 67, <i>What is the evidence on the role of the arts in improving health and well-being? A scoping review, Fancourt D, Finn S, Copenhagen: WHO Regional Office for Europe, 2019</i>. Based on the review of over 3,000 studies, evidence showed positive impact of the arts on physical and mental health, extending across social, physiological and psychological spheres.
1.3	<p>Black Dog Institute: Efforts on Social Prescribing Programmes</p> <p>Black Dog Institute (BDI) held a design thinking workshop in 2019 and subsequently wanted to focus on what would constitute an ideal clinic. Stakeholders' gave feedback on what an ideal clinic comprised, which includes a holistic approach encompassing social determinants of health. BDI committed to addressing social determinants of health with the exercise-on-</p>

physiology programme embedded in BDI's clinic, and current research which explores the efficacy of the arts-on-prescription programme with focus on adults with mild to moderate depression.

BDI's Arts-on-Prescription Programme

BDI partnered Art Gallery of New South Wales (NSW) and provided an eight-week arts engagement programme for adults impacted by mild to moderate depression.

The weekly art workshop was delivered by a professional artist and programme producer at Art Gallery of NSW and was supported by a mental health professional. Each weekly workshop took place over two hours and included a range of visual art engagement experiences, starting with close observation and group led discussion on a selection of artworks which were carefully curated such as installations in gallery spaces to inspire and spark creative thinking prior to the art making experiences. The discussion process allowed the group to acquaint themselves with each other and aimed to create personal connections with the artworks as well as with the group.

The participants were encouraged to pen reflections of their creative experience and used a visual arts process diary. Each session concluded with a focus on sharing reflections about the art making, the process, the direction recipients aimed to take their artwork, the subject matter and the impact the process had on their lives. Participants created a portfolio through the sessions and selected artworks of their choice to develop into pieces for a temporary exhibit at the gallery, and at BDI. Participants were also supported to write an artist statement to accompany their artwork.

Programme Outcomes

BDI measured mental health and wellbeing, and social inclusion before and after the intervention in both the groups that received the programme and a waitlist control group. 32 participants were randomised, sixteen to the arts-on-prescription intervention and sixteen to the waitlist control group; there was only one drop out over the eight-week period.

Following the eight-week session, BDI held psycho-social group discussion that allowed participants to reflect on their experiences and to co-analyse responses together. BDI results showed that participants' mental health and wellbeing, and social inclusion increased significantly following the programme for the group who received the arts on prescription programme, but not for the waitlist control group.

BDI's analysis of the diaries and the narrative texts from group discussions and interviews show the impact of connecting with others and engaging with art together in a non-stigmatising social setting. BDI is aware that many of the participants continue to meet at the gallery on a weekly basis following the formal programme.

Quotes from the transcripts in the interviews that were conducted following the eight-week session include: "After last week's session I sang in the car on the way home, I can't remember the last time I did that.", "I felt cared for and valued with how the gallery had made this time for us.", "Simple things like weekly email reminders for a sign that someone cared about us

	<p>and where we were.”, “The arts on prescription programme kick-started me out of a dark place.”, “I can get through Monday and Tuesday because I have art on Wednesday.”, and “I'm so grateful for the authentic deep connections which were made.”.</p> <p>BDI found that the connections made between participants in the group were especially important and observed participants’ engagement in creating art responding to some of the artworks they had seen in the first segment of the session. The conversations that occurred as participants were creating, talking about their experiences of depression were held in an open, safe non-judgmental, non-stigmatising environment.</p> <p>COVID-19: Programme Interrupted</p> <p>The waitlist control group was offered the arts-on-prescription programme in February but was interrupted in mid-March with the closure of the gallery due to COVID-19. Participants had completed four of the eight sessions and indicated keen interest to continue the programme virtually. Consequently, the final four sessions were delivered online. Inspired by the positive preliminary results of the programme, BDI explored the idea of offering the arts engagement programme to the broader public, as an offering to assist people in these uncertain times as a result of the pandemic. Thereafter, BDI moved to produce a similar programme called Culture Dose: Arts for Wellbeing. BDI piloted the programme with a group of colleagues to test out a one-hour webinar offering that focused on engagement with three carefully curated artworks.</p>
1.4	<p>Culture Dose</p> <p>Culture Dose is led by Danielle Gullotta, a facilitator for the Art Gallery of NSW, and Professor Katherine Boydell; Culture Dose offers an opportunity to take time out to engage deeply with artworks and to find ways to respond creatively and discuss observations and insights with others. Participants are encouraged to take their own mindful journey and explore the resources provided by BDI, or they can join the webinars which are held fortnightly on Wednesdays, 12PM to 1PM (GMT +10), from 17 June 2020.</p> <p>In this process, participants are invited to consider artworks that are carefully curated from the gallery's collection, through very slow looking techniques, reflection, and sharing connections with individuals’ own experiences. A different range of artworks is explored in each session and dialogue is encouraged. Three sessions are completed so far, the first session focused on staying present, the second focused on the joy in everyday life, and the third session focused on imaging in colour.</p> <p>During the COVID-19 pandemic, it is observed through social media that people turn to the arts and creative activities; activities such as arts-on-prescription, virtual museums, puzzle making, knitting, cooking during the lockdown. Professor Boydell conducted a poll during the symposium to understand whether the audience had turned to the arts or creative activities during COVID-19 and the results showed that 90% of the audience had done so.</p> <p>Audience Response</p> <p>Following each webinar, participants received a Qualtrics survey and were asked to respond to several different questions about the programme. Some feedback from the audience include:</p>

	<p>a. “A dose of mid-week sanity in the school holidays in a pandemic”</p> <p>b. “Learnt about artworks I didn’t know. Relaxing and positive. Easy from my home especially on a dismal day and lockdown”</p> <p>c. “Interactive with participants and calm and slow...we all need to slow down and be present sometimes!”</p> <p>d. “Choice and sequence of artworks was excellent, facilitators were great – good mix of open-ended questions, prompts and ideas to stimulate thought and discussion. I really like how much time was spent on each week. In a gallery it’s often hard to find the time/space to contemplate the work in such depth. Also liked how inclusive and interactive it was – the facilitators did an excellent job of incorporating participant comments and using them to stimulate further discussion, but always coming back to the artwork and not letting us stray too far from the image and the present moment.”</p> <p>Individuals appreciated the mindfulness of the sessions, the slow pace, the moments of silence, the opportunity to share perspectives of others, the interactivity of the programme and group discussion. The use of the chat function and having facilitators read out the chats from individuals worked well. Other comments include individuals who value the Culture Dose programmes as a free resource that is accessible for people who may be living with depression for many years. Participants shared that they had the opportunity to learn about new artworks and revisit the recordings on their own time despite being unable to travel during the lockdown; participants spoke of the non-judgemental nature of the offering and how it was non-threatening. A participant commented that there was a right balance between allowing participants to observe on their own, prompts from the panellists, sharing and hearing input from attendees.</p> <p>Areas for Improvement</p> <p>Participants gave feedback that there was a need to zoom into the artworks online to look carefully and closely. In response, BDI start each session explaining the ways that individuals can zoom in on the artworks. Participants also gave feedback about the online chat function and wanting to be encouraged to use the chat function more.</p> <p>Professor Boydell conducted a second poll during the symposium to understand whether the audience would consider participating in an online arts engagement programme and the results were that 75% of the audience would consider participating.</p> <p>Individuals interested to sign up for the arts engagement programme can visit the BDI website or visit blackdoginstitute.org.au/research-centres/culture-dose/ to find out more.</p>
1.5	<p>Conclusion</p> <p>The role of arts and culture on health is an important one; individuals should be encouraged to reflect on social prescribing, especially arts-on-prescription, and how it has the potential to address mental health and wellbeing. It has a strong role in helping society focus on prevention and early intervention to increase health, consumer participation and engagement. With the huge challenges faced today, especially during these uncertain times, regarding mental health and wellbeing, social isolation, loneliness and the resulting costs, social prescribing offers an innovative solution.</p>