



C0002

# Participatory Arts by Older Adults

Last updated: July 2023

## Summary

- This program involved weekly in-person creative activities offered to seniors over a 1-year period.
- The study hypothesized, based on past evidence from similar programs, that this intervention would improve quality of life – specifically bettering both the participant's mental and physical wellbeing.
- This type of program has been recognized by older adults and researchers in many jurisdictions as a preference for aging-at-home and in-community. It also provides social, cultural, and economic value to older adults and their communities.
- This program was run by art professionals trained to work with older adults. Activities were selected to provide seniors with a wide range of meaningful learning experiences, while providing a space for meaningful social interaction between participants.
- 130 older adults (aged 65+) participated in the program (122 seniors served as the control group).

## HSPP Focus Area

Improving social built environments to foster healthy aging

## Project Start & End Date

August 1, 2019 – October 30, 2021

## Organization/Agency

Art4Life

## Location

Greater Saint John area, New Brunswick

## Principle Investigator(s)

[Anita Punamiya](#), [Dr. Greg Fleet](#) and [Dr. Barry Watson](#)

Indicator	Impact / Outcome / Result	Quote
Physical health	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Participants reported improvements in level of vigour and physical functioning (as much as a 5-6 percentage point increase in basic and intermediate levels of physical functioning), having increased energy and being more “full of life”.</li> <li>• The intervention did not improve self-reported physical health, nor did it reduce the number of medications taken by the participants.</li> <li>• Some physical health impacts were less conclusive, possibly due to the confounding effects of the pandemic and insufficient program length.</li> </ul>	
Mental health	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Positively impacted participant mental health (e.g., reduction in likelihood of worrying and/or feeling sad) and emotional wellbeing (e.g., increased probability of considering themselves a “happy person”). This is shown by as much as a 10 percentage point improvement in mental health indices.</li> <li>• The program reduced feelings of isolation and loneliness, while enriching the quality of social interaction and increasing one's sense of purpose and belonging.</li> </ul>	<p><i>“It was like being given a key to open a door and explore what was inside. I feel more confident about trying something new and I understand how important learning something new is to one's overall health and wellbeing.”</i></p>

## Methods and Comparison

This project used both qualitative and quantitative methods. The qualitative work included one-on-one structured interviews and focus groups with project participants. The quantitative aspect involved regression techniques, which compared several mental and physical health outcomes to a control group.

## Conclusions and Learnings

- Results suggest that an art-based intervention improved the mental health, and to a certain extent, the physical health of seniors.
- Positive outcomes were more apparent toward the latter part of this program, especially among participants with initial low levels of wellbeing.
- Participants in the Art4Life program voiced hope for engagement in similar creative learning opportunities in the future.

## Recommendations

- Given that findings support past evidence: (1) Arts-based programming should be continued and extended to other jurisdictions, and (2) Similar programs should be implemented on a larger scale.
- Scaling up should move from municipal level to regional and provincial levels. At the provincial level, a framework is recommended to be established for long-term financial viability and scaling of the program (e.g., through Medicare or provincial grants).
- A multidisciplinary team should be assembled with the expertise to: (1) Develop the program, recruit experts (qualified artists), and competently monitor the endeavour's objectives and delivery, and (2) Liaise with government, foundations, and private sector's partnership.
- Different models of program financing must be considered (federal, provincial, municipal).

## Next Steps

- Art4Life has not applied for a funding extension or expansion. Art4Life is not seeking new research or partnerships.

## Disclaimer

The views expressed herein do not necessarily represent the views of the Public Health Agency of Canada.

*Financial contribution from*



Public Health      Agence de la santé  
Agency of Canada      publique du Canada