CultureCase

How art-making aids recovery from mental health challenges

This research was conducted by **Karen Gallant** and **four others** at **Dalhousie University** and the **University of Manitoba, Canada**

Summary

This paper addressed the question of how art-making and exhibiting impacts recovery from mental health conditions. It asked artists themselves to reflect on their experiences. The study found that the arts helped recovery in three ways: by ‘providing structure and continuity’, ‘(re)creating personal stories’ and ‘building community’.

The paper offers a detailed portrait of how arts engagement aids recovery

Ongoing engagement in the arts provided continuity during turbulent times, and it gave people something to do when there were no other demands on their time. It allowed people to reflect on, and work through, their own experiences, telling stories of ‘escape, generating hope, processing emotions and thoughts, forming and communicating identity and achievement.’ The participants in the study also talked about the social and political aspects of their practice, specifically around ‘raising awareness and advocacy for mental health and mental illness, enjoying a sense of belonging to community, seeking and providing support and using the arts as a stepping stone’.

The study is based upon 19 short narratives by artists with mental health challenges and six follow-up interviews with a sample of them

The researchers say that a larger and more diverse sample would be a valuable follow-up to this study. They are also eager to discover more about the best

conditions for real engagement with mental health issues through art in a safe and supportive environment.

Keywords

interview **mental health** **Canada**

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