



## For clinicians

Dear clinicians and fellow allied health practitioners,

I am offering you a note to accompany the information sheet about the Beyond My Body Group Art Therapy Program with the aim to provide you with information about the discipline of expressive arts therapies. As an art therapist, we typically need to illuminate and correct some of the myths about expressive art or creative arts therapies as many of us carry difficult memories around art making, including potential referring clinicians! If you have any questions about referring your client to this program as an adjunctive to the services you may provide them, please contact me on 0435 353 476 or [ashlee@bodyimage-therapist.com](mailto:ashlee@bodyimage-therapist.com).

### What is Art Therapy?

Art therapy is a mode of counselling which facilitates expression and processing through the creative process. This modality can engage clients on cognitive, symbolic, perceptual, affective, sensory and kinaesthetic levels encouraging whole brain integration. Art therapy seeks to work with the 'whole brain' to facilitate self-exploration for meaning making, develop greater emotional regulation and enhanced cognitive processing. Through a broad array of expressive possibilities, art therapy can offer clients ways of approaching their life experiences and current challenges, that may be more suitable to their strengths of expression, whilst facilitating growth in other modes of communication. Art therapy does not omit the verbal, instead it understands that expression occurs on many levels.

Art therapists go beyond simply using art making as an inherently therapeutic act. Multiple aspects of an art therapy session or group facilitation are considered and designed from art materials to therapeutic approach. Art therapists are trained to scaffold from traditional approaches and adapt them to include non-verbal, creative methods for example, and not limited to; CBT, ACT, IPT.

Art therapists in Australia must have a masters level of training to be a registered art therapist with the Australian New Zealand Asia Creative Arts Therapies Association (ANZACATA) <https://anzacata.org/>. Masters trained art therapists are extensively trained in talk based mental health counselling to effectively deliver creative arts modalities and are eligible to join ACA and PACFA.

### **Identifying suitable clients for Art Therapy**

Art Therapy is a modality currently employed in a wide range of community, educational and clinical settings in Australia, and internationally. Clients from all age ranges, abilities and cultural backgrounds can benefit from the universal language of art expression - without needing art experience, or even needing to be 'creative'. In fact, clients who do not identify as creative may especially benefit from this modality. If your current client/patient has described prior talk counselling experiences as "not for them," "not working," or "I feel like I wasn't being heard" - explore the possibility that an expressive modality may be more suitable - of course once other barriers have been identified.

### **Myths about art therapy**

- *Art therapy is only for artists or the creatively talented.* Art therapy is not about creating a pretty, or skilled piece of artwork, it is about the process and the act of expression.
- *Art therapists interpret their clients work.* Art therapists do not interpret client's artwork. We aim to offer reflective questions and aid the client in making meaning out of their own work.
- *Art therapy is really 'out there' or 'woowoo', not evidence based.* Art therapy is just as broad as traditional talk therapy approaches. Some art therapists work on a transpersonal level, whereas others work on humanistic, or cognitive behavioural, or psychodynamic levels. Art therapy has a growing evidence base and has been around since the 1950s. We are young as a discipline, but we are seeing more research emerging particularly in areas such as complex trauma, PTSD, eating disorders, chronic pain and disability.