

The Treasure Coast Art Project
Program Proposal
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Art in Alternative Settings
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As a cancer patient in 2010, I began researching ways to deal with the stress that comes with battling disease. In the process, I discovered *visual journaling*. I used this very personal and transportable form of art as a way to document my journey through treatment. It helped me look beyond my circumstances and provided a way to share my experience, while receiving the therapeutic benefits of the process. Today, I am cancer free and eager to share what I learned about art with children in the Martin County, Florida community that are struggling with cancer. For these children, art offers a gateway to more adequately express what they are feeling when they may not have the language to do so (Johnson, 2009).

Although there is no way to scientifically gage the value of art for people with cancer, there is a wealth of information supporting the positive effects of art for people struggling with physical illnesses. Leeuwenburgh, a licensed professional counselor, states that art therapy is “currently considered a ‘Complimentary Medicine’ with elements necessary to produce healing” (p 41). The *American Cancer Society* describes art as being “a way to help people manage physical and emotional problems” that may occur as a result of the disease. Their research concludes that it helps people express hidden emotions, reduces stress, fear, and anxiety, and provides a sense of freedom (Art Therapy, 2008).

Today, art is being successfully used to help children struggling with disease and help their family members cope with the disease. One example is the Harlem Horizon Art Studio (HHAS) at Harlem Hospital Center in New York. HHAS started in 1989 and has been operating for over twenty years. This program offers an art studio where pediatric inpatients suffering trauma, as well as outpatients and community members of all ages, can express themselves through creating art. Participants are encouraged to develop their own personal artistic styles through drawing and painting freely. Patients' work is displayed in the hospital and at galleries throughout the northeast. HHAS states that “evidence indicates that participation in or exposure to the arts reduces pain, improves quality of life, and helps caregivers too.”¹

Another program is the Children’s Art Program (CAP) at MD Anderson Cancer Center. The forty-year-old program, made possible with assistance from volunteers and art instructors, is for children diagnosed with cancer. It provides the opportunity for these children to work

¹ This statement is retrieved from http://www.thefundforhhc.org/Arts_and_Healing.html

alongside each other, building a bond between them. As the children create art, they support, inspire, and encourage one another. Many children and parents have benefitted from the program and many participants eventually return to volunteer at the center. Shannan Murray, CAP's executive director states, "During treatment so much is out of the patient's control, but the time spent creating artwork allows each child to feel empowered. It's a creative outlet that provides a way to look beyond the disease, and this offers the patient hope" (Fitzgerald, 2011).

CAP is a testimony to the benefits of an art program for children with cancer. What began as an idea, has returned more than \$30 million to programs that benefit pediatric cancer patients and their families, and has touched more than 26,000 pediatric patients and families.

Fortunately Martin County, Florida, is family oriented and strong in the understanding of the importance of the arts and their contribution to the community. There are many art-based businesses and excellent educational programs within the school system. Sadly, the majority of children battling cancer do not spend time in school so they miss out on these programs. With health concerns and the extra burden of medical bills, any classes at art-based businesses are usually put on hold.

Understanding from personal experience how difficult struggling with cancer can be, it is important for the children to have something to divert their attention from the reality of what is going on. Emily R. Johnson (2009), an artist and expressive art therapist with Norton Cancer Institute at Kosair Children's Hospital states, "Artwork provides children that do not have any control over their lives, to have an area that they do have control over".

The Treasure Coast Art Project (TCAP) will provide expressive art workshops for children with cancer and their families. The workshops will be a bi-yearly outreach program held at Treasure Coast Community Church in Jensen Beach, Florida. The workshops will be held from 9:00AM until 12:00PM on one Saturday morning in the fall of the year and one in the spring. Each workshop will have five stations of art activities specifically designed for children struggling with cancer. Area oncologists and the local *American Cancer Society* office will be notified well in advance of the workshops so they can inform families that have children with cancer. People will be asked to sign up so the appropriate amount of supplies can be bought, prepared, and set up.

Special care will be taken in the preparation details beforehand. The art-making process will be simplified as much as possible. The art materials will be clean, easy to use, and non-toxic. Hand sanitizer and disinfectant wipes will be available. The room will be odor and fragrance-free and consideration of the temperature and seating arrangements will be taken into account (Allen, n.d.). The station volunteers will be asked to help any children that want help and to watch for any children struggling with the activities. These projects are available for the children to enjoy, not to cause stress. The children can choose the stations at which they would like to work. The station projects will include the following.

Station one will be a collage project called *Who Am I?* This project takes into consideration the information from Caruso (2009), Géricot (2002), and Johnson (2009), that art projects on the subject of identity help children with diseases express their feelings. The children will create a collage that depicts components that make up their identity. They will receive a piece of construction paper and be asked to either write their name or draw a picture of them in the middle of it. This will represent them. Next they can draw pictures or glue pictures that depict things about them, such as a picture of a soccer ball if they like soccer. The station will include an array of pictures, paper, scissors, markers, and glue sticks.

Station two will be called *Decorate Me*. At this station children will get to choose from a variety of foam stickers, felt, and fabric paints to decorate hats. It is important for the hats to be made out of a soft natural fiber, like cotton and that there are no metal or rough surfaces.

Station three will have bright primary colored paint, white construction paper, markers, and syringes. The children will get a piece of folded, white construction paper (opened up). An adult will help them suck paint into the syringe and squirt a couple of drops of two different color paint on their paper. They will fold the paper in half at the crease and rub the paint around. Next, they will then open the paper up to discover what new color is made. They can use blow dryers to dry the paint and markers to create something out of their color creations.

At station four the children will hear the story of Frida Kahlo and draw a self-portrait. From the article, *Workshop for Children with Cancer*, authors Géricot, Hartman, and Oppenheim (2002) believe it is through self-portrait that the children find a way to explore their identities and the effects of cancer on their lives. It helps the children to preserve their personal identity

and reject the idea of being known only as a child with cancer (p. 345). The story of *Frida* by Jonah Winter is extremely helpful for children that struggle with disease. They can relate to her medical problems and continuous visits to hospitals and doctor's offices. Her use of art for the expression of her feelings, and share her thoughts, provides an example for them to follow.

Station five will be a drawing table. Pencils, erasers, colored pencils, and markers will be available. Children will be given the topic *A Day I will Never Forget* and be allowed to sit and draw. Volunteers and artists will be on hand to encourage and engage their creative spark.

How a child feels and how often they visit the doctor depends on the type and severity of his/her cancer. Some children may be in the hospital for over a month and others may only visit for tests every couple of weeks over several months. Some children sleep through treatments while others want things to do (N. Dennison, personal communication, 2013). Understanding from personal experience how difficult some of these trips can be, it is important for the children to have something to divert their attention from the reality of what is going on. To help with this, children with cancer will receive an art kit that can be taken with them for doctor's appointments, treatments, and tests. Wherever they are, however they feel, whatever they are thinking, they will have the tools they need to express themselves through art.

The kit will be stored in a lap desk with a storage compartment and handle which makes them easily portable. They will include disinfectant wipes, hand sanitizer, stickers and self-sticking foam shapes to decorate the medical masks they have to wear, as well as pencils, an eraser, a sharpener, colored pencils, and a small visual journal (E. Delacruz, personal communication, 2013; N. Dennison, personal communication, 2013). Wherever they are, however they feel, whatever they are thinking, the children will have the tools they need to express themselves through art.

As an artist, educator, cancer survivor, and active member of Martin County, I understand the benefits and the need for a program like TCAP. It will encourage hope in the lives of these children and provide them with a way to express what they are going through in a creative way. TCAP will be an outreach program of Treasure Coast Community Church (TC3) in Jensen Beach, Florida. A committee of volunteers will be made up of TC3 members, health

professionals, art educators, and local artists. Being under the umbrella of TC3 is important because it provides a safe environment for the workshops and is free of charge.

The workshops will be staffed with volunteers, medical professionals, local artists and art educators and the art kits will be prepared beforehand. Area youth will also be recruited to help with the workshops and distribution of the art kits. A training session will be held before the workshops to discuss health issues and station instructions and procedures.

Funding is an essential part of TCAP. Fortunately, with free facilities and volunteer staffing, all funding will be used for the purchase of art supplies and the art kits. The cost for a workshop and art kits for fifty children will equal approximately \$2200.00. Requests will be made for donations from Goods360, Target, Publix, B.J.'s and area professionals. Additional funds will be raised from the sales of patient's original artwork on seasonal note cards and gift items made available in local shops and businesses, TC3, and through the Treasure Coast Art Project website. With cancer being the number one cause of death in Martin County, and the community service providers having a history of actively forming partnerships in an effort to meet the health needs of its residents, I am positive this program will quickly gain community support and assistance (Gray, 2010).

During my illness, art was instrumental in helping me cope with the stress and anxiety that comes from cancer. Through this venture, I hope to provide a small glimmer of light in a very dark situation. I believe Géricot, Hartman, and Oppenheim said it best in their article, *The Fine Arts Workshop for Children with Cancer*, "Art provides the children with a creative way to explore and express their experience of cancer. It helps the children recognize their value and has proved to be a rewarding experience. Cancer is a destructive disease, but it does not crush creativity" (2002, p. 345).

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