HF2743
Health Finance and Policy Committee
Position: **Favorable**
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Testimonial from Liz Bechel, MA, LPCC, ATR
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**Chairwoman Liebling and Committee Members,**

Art therapy is a unique therapeutic discipline that utilizes active art making and specialized training the creative process, neurobiological implications of art-making, art-based assessment models, and applied psychological theory within a psychotherapeutic relationship to enrich the lives of individuals, families, and communities across Minnesota and the nation. The two primary reasons that licensure for Art Therapists at the state level is important is to increase accessibility for necessary and effective mental healthcare and to prevent public harm that comes from inadequate training and limited regulation.

As an Art Therapist working with the incarcerated populations of Minnesota for 7+ years, I have had the incredible opportunity to witness the power and healing that Art Therapy has with these individuals. Art can be a catalyst for interactions, learning to support peers, give and receive criticism in a conducive way, an impetus for identity formation outside of the oppressive labels they’ve grown accustomed to and give them an opportunity to create a new identity. Thus, giving them an opportunity to rise above the labels that make it difficult for them to succeed not only during their incarceration but in the community as well.

Art therapy provides the individual an opportunity to express themselves in a safe and acceptable manner, instill, a sense of hope, self-value, and humanity. The left hemisphere of the brain is primarily where verbal information is processed, information is organized, and where logical thought and categorizing of information takes place. The right hemisphere of the brain is primarily where the majority of emotional and conceptual information is processed and where spiritual connections are made. Art therapy engages both hemispheres of the brain at once, allowing them to work in sync strengthening neural pathways and communication across the corpus collosum. Overtime, this can lead to an increase in overall mental health, improved cognitive performance, improved memory, increased intellectual functioning, and overall improved brain function.

Engaging in non-verbal therapies, such as Art Therapy, appeals to those who may be intimidated by traditional talk therapy. Non-verbal therapies are especially beneficial with populations that do not have the capacity to participate or fully benefit from talk therapy. By engaging in the Art Therapy process, it is opening up the individual to an alternative and perhaps easier way to talk about difficult things that may be holding them back from being the person they want to be. Art Therapy has shown significant efficacy when working with individuals that have experienced trauma. Using Art Therapy with trauma affected individuals allows them to externalize the sensations, memories, and visual images shaped by trauma. Since trauma impacts the individual’s physical and emotional reaction, Art Therapy engages the body’s relaxation response which helps counteract the adverse reaction to the trigger. These interventions can result in improved coping-strategies, self-esteem, self-regulation, and overall awareness and better understanding of their body’s responses and how to better manage them in the future.

Respectfully,
Liz Bechel, MA, LPCC, ATR