

Bringing it all together

# Guidelines for Arts and Mental Health Projects

COMPILED BY

Simone Gillam

Arts and Mental Health Development Officer with Country Arts SA

Country Health SA in consultation with statewide peer assessment panel



**Government of South Australia**

SA Health



# Introduction

**The intersection between arts and health is playing an important part in the area of mental health and wellbeing.**

As the discussion grows and the benefits of this area of practice are documented, focus is now being shifted to how practitioners from both the health and arts sides of the conversation deliver their business. In regional South Australia, artists are showing health practitioners new ways of engaging with their clients, creating more positive health outcomes, but also generating creative new ways of delivering health messages and practices.

These protocols and guidelines for arts and mental health projects have been developed to better equip artists and mental health workers in this arena. It is intended this initiative will generate a more skilled workforce and employ more innovative models of delivery.

This is a result of a long standing partnership between Country Health SA and Country Arts SA responding to the call from both the arts and health sectors for resources such as these Guidelines. One of the main aims of the partnership is to increase opportunities for social connection using arts and culture as an opportunity to improve wellbeing. The program has a regional state-wide strategic approach and one of the outcomes is the development of a set of workable, respectful, ethical standards for people working in the arts and mental health. This resource will assist artists and mental health workers to demonstrate best practice when working with participants and to support them to achieve their health and artistic goals.



**Steve Saffell**  
Country Arts SA CEO

New ways of delivering our business for:

**Participants**  
**Mental Health Practitioners**  
**Artists**

# What is this document?

This document is a quick reference resource to provide support and guidelines for artists, mental health workers, and participants in arts practice.

It is designed to aid access and inclusion to arts and cultural activity. It is not a resource for art therapy (a form of psychotherapy used within a counselling framework).

However it is a resource for art activity where participants do not need to have any experience or skill in art making. The process is not about creating aesthetic outcomes but about effecting change and growth through artistic expression in a safe and supportive environment.

Projects that incorporate social inclusion, value diversity, enhance cultural expression and develop skills benefit the individual and the community as a whole. Where creativity in all fields is nurtured and appreciated, opportunities for community contributions arise.

Mental illness can be a barrier to participation in community involvement. However, participation in arts and cultural projects can link people back to their community providing pathways to self-expression, recreation, training and employment. Art and Mental Health projects can be an effective way to engage, educate and promote a positive health message. Engagement in the arts provides the opportunity to come together and share experiences which can be healing and transformative.

Community art projects provide the opportunity to share stories which is particularly important for isolated, regional communities. Creating art provides a powerful medium for change and contributes to personal development. It is through the creative activities that we participate as individuals, groups and communities that we gain a sense of collective identity, a sense of place and a sense of belonging. Meaningful creative activity can provide the opportunity for personal growth and a way to make connections between individuals and the broader community.



# Mission statement

The guidelines are a useful resource for planning successful projects and developing positive outcomes. It can be used as a “check list” outlining principles for mental health workers and artists working in mental health. It is a resource that aims to provide professional support and advice to achieve best practice when working in arts and mental health. It has been developed by the Arts and Mental Health Development Officer for Country Arts SA in conjunction with a statewide peer assessment network of professionals in the field of Arts and Mental Health.

The main philosophy behind the guidelines is to foster mutual respect between artists, mental health workers and participants. These guidelines can be used in all art and cultural fields; visual arts, dance, music, performance, digital media, literature, sculpture, textiles etc

The following four sections outline responsibilities for:

- Joint responsibility of the Artist and Mental Health Worker
- Participants/Consumers/Carers
- Artists
- Mental Health Workers

**With these guidelines we aim to encourage and enhance social inclusion by promoting best practice for all involved in the field of arts and mental health.**

“Regional Arts Australia improves the lives of regional and remote Australians through arts and culture by providing access to outstanding home-grown cultural experiences and supporting community well-being and development.”

– RAA

# Checklist before you start

- Mental Health First Aid Training  
<http://www.sahealth.sa.gov.au>
- WHS compliant art spaces and materials  
<http://accessarts.org.au/index.php/about-us/quality-assurance/workplace-health-safety-policy/>
- Undertake risk assessment/management and have strategies in place to address issues that may arise
- Have access to support staff from mental health services during the project
- Create a nurturing, safe, supportive, positive environment
- Marketing of the workshop, event, and/or activity
- Be responsible for the logistics of a project
- Ensure arrival of materials and equipment well before the event
- Organise housekeeping, tea, coffee, refreshments, ventilation, light, heating and/or cooling
- Provide the appropriate amount of materials for the number of participants
- Obtain consent forms from all participants **before** taking any photographs  
Be clear about where, if and how images are to be used
- Ensure suitable insurance has been obtained for the number of participants

# Joint Responsibility

## of Artist and the Mental Health Worker

- Prior to projects starting it is important that the artists and the mental health workers discuss special needs, protocols, the project brief and the evaluation model.
- Have a clear understanding of how group norms are established and how to address the importance of maintaining confidentiality in the group as well as limits to confidentiality if someone is at risk.
- The artist, mental health workers and participants should have a discussion about what is going to be achieved with expectations clarified.
- Discuss with potential participants to get their ideas and input.
- Ensure ordering of materials, booking of equipment, venue and preparation of the work space is achieved well before the commencement of the project.

“The power of the Arts, and especially creative arts, is especially suited to playing a role in addressing social isolation and contributing to mental health recovery through building social skills and personal confidence.”

**Robert Petchell**

Program Director of The Jam The Mix  
The Gig program (JMG)





# Participant

Participants recognise that creative challenges and practice can lead to growth and wellbeing, and that participation is voluntary at all times.

- Develop and document agreed group norms in collaboration with stakeholders.
- Refer to group norms at the beginning of every session.
- Outline values including respect for others and their art practice.
- Feel free to ask questions and seek advice.
- Take part in the process and develop pride and ownership of your work through participation. Contribute to decision making.
- Attend out of choice i.e. the activity is not necessarily part of a mental health plan.
- Practise self-care strategies.
- Participate and explore the arts activity in a way that makes you feel comfortable.
- Provide feedback to inform art workers about their practice.



# Artist

Artists working in mental health must recognise that the wellbeing of participants in the creative activities they facilitate is paramount.

## Create a safe and inclusive setting. How do you do this?

### Establish and maintain group norms

- Work collaboratively to develop group norms including the importance of confidentiality.
- Value what the participant brings to the project.
- Remain open and respectful to the skills of others and foster these skills.

### Practise active listening skills

- One option is to choose a theme by consulting with the group – work with them, not at them.
- Prepare open-ended questions to encourage discussion.
- Practise and foster collaboration.
- Any theme should be positive, appropriate and relevant, capturing the interest and imagination of all participants.
- Allow personal preference to prevail.

### Support participants to have a positive experience

- Stress a positive “you can do it” attitude.
- Emphasise your willingness to give help when wanted.
- Practise non-judgmental (verbally or non-verbally) observations of the work.
- Leave interpretation of the work to the creator. (Never interpret somebody’s work).
- If you critique work it needs to be factual responses to the media and/or technique and not judgmental interpretation of the work. This should be done in an encouraging, motivating and caring manner.

“The act of creating again has enabled me to make some changes in my life that needed to happen. I am painting and drawing again and feel I am back in the creative flow.”

**Participant**  
**Mifsa Art Group**

- Never analyse a person's mental state through their work. What is happening is Art Activity not Art Therapy.
- Allow participants the time to opt out of an activity if necessary.
- Encourage, but don't push to achieve results.
- Be genuine, authentic and have fun.

#### Model professional practice

- Support independent arts practice and professional development and interaction beyond the group.
- Promote the value of independence within an arts practice by allowing people the dignity of risk within their own artistic journey - respect decisions to have a go in their own way.

#### Model positive behaviour

- Avoid "taking over".
- Demonstrate and encourage creative risk taking.
- Build participants resilience by modeling resilience. When something doesn't work demonstrate how to deal with "lessons". See them as opportunities and be "curious" when things don't turn out as planned.
- Seek feedback to inform the success of a project and the approach you are taking.
- Use either written or verbal feedback, for example "how did everyone go after the workshop last week?" People unfamiliar with an art form may benefit from support and encouragement within a group context.
- Do not single people out or directly discuss someone's practice until they are in a space to be able to. A group question is a good way of sharing where people are limited with their confidence and experience.

"Sometimes things that come up during these creative workshops are sensitive that is why it is so important to have access to a trained mental health worker, it is not the role of the artist to be the social worker."

**Arts and Mental Health  
Development Officer**

# Mental Health Worker

Mental Health workers recognise the value of engagement in creative activity for all, and the importance of effective facilitation and support in creating a safe, supportive and welcoming environment.

## Create a safe space

- Provide Accredited Standards
  - WHS with art materials and equipment
  - Mental Health First Aid
  - General First Aid
  - Police Checks
- Provide a welcoming space.
- Arrange transport for clients if necessary.
- Maintain confidentiality.
- Consider the physical set up of the space.
  - Is there room to move?
  - Is there disability access?
  - Are there any barriers that could restrict access / participation?
- Respect the nature of the creative process
  - time required
  - clear instructions to enable the creative process to happen
  - enable experimentation
  - evaluation

## Manage issues and concerns if they arise

- Refer to the group's norms.
- Oversee the wellbeing of the group.
- Assist in maintaining focus through encouragement.
- It is the responsibility of the mental health practitioner to refer to appropriate services if the involvement in the creative session brings up psychological issues requiring additional or specialised support.
- Check how the behavior of some of the participants might be affecting the other members of the group and manage appropriately.
- Regularly review, adapt and modify as required.
- Be flexible and tailor activity to people's individual circumstances/ interests.
- Be aware that plans may need to change to suit the situation.

“The project plan needed modification due to participants own personal circumstances and just being there was enough of an achievement that day. Observing and just watching what others were doing and listening to conversations provided a distraction and diversion to other issues happening in their life. Even though they didn't join in, it didn't matter, being there was part of their success.”

**Artist and Mental Health Worker**





# Arts and Mental Health Development Officer

The Arts and Mental Health Development Officer is responsible for assisting local and state-wide regional communities achieve their arts and mental health development aspirations.

- Provides opportunities for people with mental health issues to develop skills, pursue interests and develop as artists and arts practitioners.
- Provides opportunities for people to be involved in the wider community and access services.
- Provides opportunities for people to make a visible and valued contribution to the arts sector.
- Provides support for individuals in specialist areas of practice.
- Encourages organisations to collaborate in developing creative projects and programs which empower people with mental health issues.
- Support practices and projects that foster arts leadership.
- Assists in reducing the stigma sometimes associated with mental illness.
- Provides a vehicle to express feelings, and emotions in a positive, creative, safe environment that supports the "Recovery Process".

"The Jam, The Mix, The Gig has helped me greatly. It has provided an audience for my songs, given me performance experience, enabled me to work with other musicians and increased my life skills."

**Ben Martin**  
JMG program

# Acknowledgements

This resource has been developed with approval from Mike White and Mary Robson of the Centre for Medical Humanities, Durham University, UK (2009), who produced their document *Participatory Arts Practice in Healthcare Contexts Guidelines for Good Practice* which was developed through a consultation exercise commissioned by Waterford Healing Arts and Health Service Executive (South), Ireland."

It was their document *Participatory Arts Practice in Healthcare Contexts Guidelines for Good Practice* that contributed to the inspiration of the creation of this booklet.



# Peer Assessment Panel

- **Ava Leitner**  
Team Leader, The Cottage, Eastern Mental Health, CALHN Central Adelaide Local Health Network
- **Helen Crawford**  
Artist, Community Artist
- **Kate Eglinton**  
Former Senior Project Officer, Country Health SA, Mental Health SA founding member of partnership between CHSALHNMH and Country Arts SA
- **Kirstie Jamieson**  
Manager Arts and Cultural Development, Country Arts SA
- **Mandy Brown**  
Indigenous Arts and Cultural Development Officer, Country Arts SA
- **Martin Sawtell**  
Access2Arts
- **Melissa Burgemeister**  
Former Arts Coordinator – Neami National
- **Michelle Casserley**  
Art Facilitator for MIFSA, Mental Illness Fellowship South Australia (Port Lincoln)
- **Michelle Krieg**  
Art Therapist, Uniting Communities
- **Naomi Fallon**  
Arts & Cultural Development Officer, Country Arts SA, Tatiara District Council
- **Ollie Black**  
Creative Producer, Country Arts SA
- **Peg McCann**  
Former Team Leader MIFSA, Mental Illness Fellowship South Australia, Port Lincoln
- **Rebecca Farrant**  
Arts & Cultural Development Officer, Country Arts SA, Berri
- **Robert Petchell**  
Music & Program Director, The Jam, The Mix, The Gig Program (The JMG)
- **Robyn George**  
Mental Health Clinician (Occupational Therapist) Southern Fleurieu Health Service SA Health Government of South Australia
- **Simone Gillam**  
Arts and Mental Health Development Officer, Country Arts SA Country Health SA
- **Tracey Davis**  
Mindshare
- **Vicki Mau**  
Mental Health Service Coordinator, Uniting Communities

# Thanks to

**Helen Crawford**

Artist and mentor

**Country Arts SA and Country Health SA Steering Committee**

# Your feedback

This document is a dynamic resource that may change in response to the feedback we receive from people working in the field of arts and mental health. We hope you will take the opportunity to provide feedback.

Please send your feedback to:

**Simone Gillam**

Arts and Mental Health Development Officer

PO Box 2411

Port Lincoln 5606

Email: [simone.gillam@countryarts.org.au](mailto:simone.gillam@countryarts.org.au)

08 86397907

0427800157

# References

## **Mind Share**

<http://mindshare.org.au/>

## **SA Health**

<http://www.sahealth.sa.gov.au/wps/wcm/connect/Public+Content/SA+Health+Internet/Healthy+living/Healthy+mind/Rethink+Mental+Illness>

## **Rural Health Australia**

<http://www.ruralhealthaustralia.gov.au/internet/rha/publishing.nsf/Content/NSFRRH-homepage>

## **Mental Health in Multicultural Australia**

<http://www.mhima.org.au/framework/introducing-the-framework/glossary>

## **About.com**

[http://humanresources.about.com/od/teambuilding/qt/norms\\_sample.htm](http://humanresources.about.com/od/teambuilding/qt/norms_sample.htm)

## **Neami Arts Program**

Comet Arts Group Norms January 2012

## **Art Health Institute**

<http://www.artshainstitute.org.au/>

## **The Institute for Creative Health**

<http://instituteforcreativehealth.org.au/>

---

## **Universal declaration of human rights article 27**

(1) Everyone has the right freely to participate in the cultural life of the community, to enjoy the arts and to share in scientific advancement and its benefits.



**Government of South Australia**  
SA Health



**Government of South Australia**  
Arts SA

