

## ArtStreet: Joining Community Through Art

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A psychotherapist, and especially an art therapist, should dive deep into the wrecks of psychic disasters, not merely skim the surface to look down from a distance at the barnacled, dismembered vessels on the bottom of the sea. (Wadeson, 1994, p. 153)

Perhaps because I do not swim very well, I was comforted by John Perry's (1993) lecture to our art therapy class several years ago. He said that we work according to how we are made. I was interested in his advice because I had been studying movement therapy for the past 15 years, working as a physical therapist, and through the Feldenkrais® Professional Training Program (Feldenkrais, 1977), I wanted to find new employment and a new way of working that bridged physical therapy and art therapy. I wanted to change the professional/client working climate that came with being an "expert," with the responsibility for fixing what was not working for someone else. I wanted to explore what was working in my own life and in those lives around me, and move, if possible, in that direction. I also wanted to have time to wait, if necessary, to hold and appreciate that which was not moving. Perhaps there are other art therapists who are "made" similarly. We don't swim that well in deep water or feel comfortable wading alone in the darkness of someone else's unconscious.

During winter break before my final semester in graduate school, Louise Kahn and I wrote a grant to combine an open art therapy studio with the teaching of parenting skills at a shelter for homeless families in Albuquerque, NM. Louise, a nurse practitioner for Albuquerque Health Care for the Homeless, had been providing health care at this family shelter for about six months. The proposal was accepted and we began our ten-week parenting/art therapy classes. The course followed the developmental sequence of growing-up, from infancy through taking care of ourselves, as adults. Our weekly discussions of particular phases of childhood were matched with appropriate art materials that served as catalysts to aid discussion. Often we just made art together and talked. The course ended with an unplanned art exhibit, "Roses Aren't Red," at the local library. This small project provided one avenue to the project ArtStreet.

During the period of the parenting/art therapy group, I attended a meeting of the Leadership Albuquerque Group Project as an art therapist who worked with "the homeless." The civic group, made up of leaders chosen from around the community, was interested in a project that promoted economic development within a community of homeless people. This project, chosen to produce a tangible result that would benefit a spe-

cific group, invited street people to meetings for relevant input. The consistent members happened to be artists who were homeless.

The group discussed a community-wide art marketing event and a permanent art gallery space, where artists who were homeless could sell their work. One way to explore ideas was to make art together during our meetings. It became my job to provide art materials, a direction in which to move, and witness the emergence of very powerful art-making. The diversity of the group and their visual art contributions enriched the discussions by identifying strengths that were not available through verbal sharing. Eventually, more grants were written by others and "ArtStreet: Joining Community Through Art" was created.

ArtStreet is a group of artists, art therapists, and interested community members who want to use art to build community and increase personal self-esteem, self-sufficiency, and hope among individuals and families who are dealing with homelessness.

ArtStreet found its home with the Albuquerque Health Care for the Homeless. The spacious art studio receives its funding, in part, from Save the Children Foundation. An Albuquerque Community Foundation and a private local foundation grant help to provide abundant materials at each studio session. Although all materials in the studio are available at each studio session (which run about 6 hours, 3 days a week), there is also an area set up to help guide newcomers. Materials change monthly; examples include printmaking, paper making, bee's wax sculpture, felt making, and photography. Artists from the community share their expertise in these speciality areas and everyone is invited to share ideas and skills. I am present to witness the process of artmaking, facilitate the practical workings of the studio, and plan, arrange, and install art exhibits. The directive in the studio is simple: Using the materials in this room, make something.

Within an environment of an open art studio, we can learn to value and respect our diversity. We work, as Perry reminds us, according to how we are made. Spending time, slowing down enough to value how one is physically made, can be as difficult as finding time to do art work. This self-knowledge reaps many rewards. An art therapist can draw rich metaphors from guided movement experiences that teach, for example, how your scapula learns to individuate from your shoulder complex by gradually differentiating from a global, unorganized motion, or how your stiff, stuck neck finds respect in the community of other effort-