

I am painting my story

Experiential evidence from NDIS Participants
who have engaged in Arts Therapy with ANZACATA
registered Creative Arts Therapists.



We acknowledge and pay our respects to the Traditional Custodians of Country throughout Australia. We appreciate the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who have contributed to this publication and their community members. We recognise their continuing connection to land, waters, and culture, and pay our respects to their Elders past and present.



Acknowledgements

I am painting my story: experiential evidence from NDIS Participants who have engaged in Arts Therapy with ANZACATA registered Creative Arts Therapists.

“I am painting my story, I am a crow, a raven and when I look in the mirror, I disappear but I come back with the paint” - NDIS Participant M, Queensland*

This report was compiled by Su Hanfling AThR, Professional member of ANZACATA.

Su compiled stories and images sent directly by participants and families, guardians or carers, or received via ANZACATA members. The stories featured in this report were shared by participants between December 2024 and January 2025.

ANZACATA thanks Su for her work in bringing forward the voices of participants/ clients and highlighting the work of Creative Arts Therapists in Australia. ANZACATA also acknowledges and thanks its registered practising clinician members who put us in contact with participants and families directly, so they could have their voices heard.

All images appear with the consent of the participant, parent, and/or guardian, and the original titles and captions (where provided) are retained.

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Content warning: This report contains descriptions of traumatic experiences, including sexual assault and abuse, self-harm and suicide which some readers may find distressing. While these accounts are important to understanding participants’ therapeutic journeys, readers are encouraged to engage with this content at their own pace and seek support if needed.

*Cover photo and quote used with consent of participant

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Summary



This report presents the experiences of 95 National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) participants who have accessed arts therapy through registered Australian, New Zealand and Asian Creative Arts Therapies Association (ANZACATA) arts therapists. The participants span all states and territories of Australia, including major cities, regional and remote areas. Six participants identified as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander.

Participant stories demonstrate Arts Therapy significant impact, including across all six NDIS functional domains:

- Enhanced mobility and motor skills through artistic activities
- Improved communication, particularly for those who struggle with verbal expression
- Increased social interaction and relationship building
- Strengthened learning and decision-making capabilities
- Development of self-care and emotional regulation strategies
- Greater capacity for social and economic participation.

Key findings include:

- Arts therapy provides an effective alternative when traditional talk-based therapies have been unsuccessful
- Arts therapy has demonstrated value across our diverse community, including for autistic people, individuals who have experienced trauma, people with complex disabilities, and those who communicate through means other than speech
- Individual sessions allow for personalised therapeutic approaches that accommodate specific disabilities and needs
- For First Nations participants, arts therapy offers meaningful ways to connect with culture and identity
- Benefits extend beyond the therapeutic setting into daily life, education and community participation.

The stories highlight arts therapy's role in building participant capacity, fostering independence, and supporting achievement of NDIS goals through creative approaches to therapeutic intervention.

The evidence presented demonstrates that arts therapy delivers outcomes aligned with NDIS objectives of increased independence, community participation and improved wellbeing for participants.

About this report

The voices of participants are essential to understanding the impact and value of arts therapy. Their lived experience provides unique and irreplaceable insights into how these therapeutic supports contribute to their wellbeing, goals and quality of life. Direct participant evidence reveals benefits that might not be captured through standardised assessments alone, particularly for those who find verbal communication challenging.

These firsthand accounts illuminate how arts therapy integrates into daily lives, supports goals, and enhances capacity for independence and community participation. The diversity of voices – from children to older adults, across various disabilities and circumstances – demonstrates both common themes and individual variations in therapeutic benefits, reinforcing the importance of maintaining flexible, person-centred approaches.

By centring participant voices, we acknowledge that service users are best positioned to articulate their impact and value.

Some participants wrote directly to ANZACATA following the November 2024 announcement of the changes to NDIS arts therapy funding and the subsequent announcement of the *Independent Review of Art and Music Supports in February 2025*. Participants sought ANZACATA's support in advocating for continued access to arts therapy as a therapeutic support. An invitation to participants

to contribute stories about their experiences of arts therapy was circulated by ANZACATA via Australian arts therapists during December 2024 and January 2025.

Contributions include personal narratives, reflections on therapeutic experiences, and artwork. Participants were invited to respond either to their arts therapist or directly to the report compiler, guided by resources designed to help share meaningful stories while maintaining ethical considerations and personal safety (See Appendix One). All participants, parents or guardians provided express consent for their stories and images to be used in this report (See Appendix Two).

Some participants requested anonymity whilst wanting to share their experiences. Others requested to have their names made visible. To address these concerns and align with professional ethical guidelines, all responses have been de-identified. Participants are referred to by their chosen pseudonym or their initial even in cases where their preference was to be named publicly. This is in consideration of therapists' responsibilities to uphold ethical practices around their client's privacy. Complex or rare diagnoses and situations have been summarised to maintain anonymity; and locations have been generalised to minimise the possibility of participants being identified from their stories.

Major Themes



All submissions received were carefully considered. Contributions were included when they directly represented participants' voices, or if appropriate, their parents, or guardians. Stories about participants that were written by others (not the participant, parent, or guardian) were not included in this report. Submissions written as correspondence to the NDIA/NDIS were referred to the independent review's email address. Where personal information could not be adequately de-identified, we either included relevant excerpts or set these contributions aside to protect privacy. We appreciate everyone who shared their experiences and perspectives.

Stories are arranged by State/Territory. Location descriptions follow the Australian Statistical Geography Standard (ASGS) Remoteness Structure.

The 95 participants were located across Australia as follows:

- ACT: 3 participants
- NSW: 31 participants
- NT: 2 participants
- QLD: 12 participants
- SA: 4 participants
- TAS: 4 participants
- VIC: 37 participants
- WA: 2 participants

Of the total participants, 6 identified as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander.

Participants', parents' and guardians' choice of language and terminology has been respected and maintained, including instances where terms may differ from current use in therapeutic practice.

Light edits which aim to increase readability but preserve meaning and authentic expression are indicated in square brackets [].

The cover photo and title phrase is used with consent of the participant.

All images appear with the consent of the participant, parent and/or guardian, and the original titles and captions where provided are retained. Thumbnails of the images appear next to the stories with supplied captions, please check the Gallery for the full image.

Content warning: This report contains descriptions of traumatic experiences, including sexual assault and abuse, self-harm and suicide which some readers may find distressing. While these accounts are important to understanding participants' therapeutic journeys, readers are encouraged to engage with this content at their own pace and seek support if needed.

A thematic analysis revealed outcomes across all NDIS Functional Domains alongside several related themes.

Mobility/Motor Skills

Arts therapy supported development of fine and gross motor skills through various artistic mediums and practices. This was particularly evident for participants with physical disabilities and developmental delays.

“Various postures and movements involved in creating art—such as reaching, bending, and holding materials—are strengthening her arms, hands, and core. Given G’s diagnosis of spina bifida, these physical benefits are particularly important.”

- G’S MOTHER, NSW

“When I roll, knead, or flatten the clay, I have to use my arms and shoulders, and that helps make them stronger. It also helps me sit straight.” - D, NSW

“Art therapy has also addressed the physical barriers experienced by A by improving his fine motor skills and coordination.” - A’s mother, NSW

Communication

Arts therapy provided alternative communication pathways for participants who struggle with verbal expression, particularly beneficial for autistic people, those with trauma histories, or communication difficulties.

“Speaking words are like moving boulders, but it’s actually marbles and a game you don’t know the rules to. That’s what talk therapy feels like. In art therapy, I can see my insides.” - J, Victoria

“Through drawing and writing things down, it has helped me express things that I have carried inside me. I feel so much better when I can do this with my therapist.” - JL, Queensland

“Before arts therapy it was really hard because I didn’t have a place to understand how to communicate and show how I feel.” - Viper, Victoria

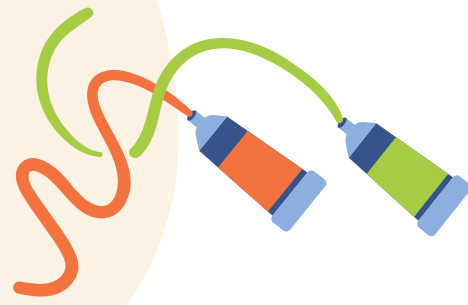
Social Interaction

Arts therapy enhanced participants' ability to engage socially and build meaningful relationships, both within and outside the therapeutic setting.

“Through art therapy, she has had opportunities to engage in collaborative projects, providing her with a structured environment to practice social skills and make connections with others.” - A’s parent. Victoria

“Art therapy has supported R and G to manage strong emotions such as frustration, anger and anxiety... supported both of them [with] increased independence and self-esteem by participating in art exhibitions with other participants.” - R and G’s mother, NSW

“Art therapy has helped him out so much. S has a lot of trouble of saying about his feelings but through art therapy he can show how he feels through art, and he has been learning about boundaries.” - S’s mother, Tasmania



Self-Management/Self-Care

Arts therapy supported emotional regulation and development of coping strategies, enhancing participants' ability to manage daily challenges.

"Through the creative process, my child has started to gain a better understanding of her emotions and started to develop strategies for emotional regulation." - L's parent, Queensland

"Since starting art therapy sessions, we've seen a remarkable change... A has learned to express his emotions through art, giving him a valuable outlet to communicate his feelings which has been incredibly empowering for him."

- A'S PARENT, VICTORIA

"Using different modalities, I have been guided how to release and process my feelings in a safe environment, a space I can be vulnerable, with guidance I trust absolutely." - A, NSW

Learning/Executive Functioning

Participants demonstrated improved focus, decision-making abilities, and cognitive processing through artistic engagement.

"Art therapy has helped me learn to deal with my frustrations. I can try things and not be worried when they don't work as I can try again."

- K, Queensland

"At the beginning, she struggled to stay engaged for long stretches of time. However, she is now able to focus on her art for up to 60 minutes, completing multi-step processes." - G's mother, NSW

"With my art therapist's help I have found some of my favourite ways for combatting big emotions such as sensory overwhelm, not feeling good enough, stress, and [it has] aided me to feel a sense of stability and peace." - S, Victoria

Capacity for Social and Economic Participation

Arts therapy facilitated increased community engagement and, for some participants, pathways to employment or educational opportunities.

"Art therapy has allowed me to re-enter my chosen field as an artist and engage in meaningful work and I am very grateful for that." - J, NSW

"I feel more confident now, like if I keep practising, I could get better at other things too. Maybe if I put as much effort into other stuff as I do with art therapy, I could be good at those things too!" - D, NSW

"Art therapy has helped me meet goals that I didn't necessarily have to begin with because life was chaotic and distressing. I went from surviving to thriving." - R, Queensland

Cultural Connection

For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participants, art therapy provided meaningful ways to connect with culture and identity.

"Art therapy has helped me build an essential connection to land and culture as a young Aboriginal woman by storytelling through dot work and weaving."

- X, VICTORIA

"I am painting my story, I am a crow, a raven and when I look in the mirror, I disappear but I come back with the paint." - M, Queensland

Trauma Processing

Many participants reported Arts therapy's effectiveness in processing complex trauma, particularly when verbal therapies had been unsuccessful.

"Art therapy has helped me through the pain of the past and find new ways to experience myself through artmaking, visual narratives and dialogue."

- V, Victoria

"Art therapy can help to prevent these symptoms through hands on expression which can halt the progression of these symptoms." - A, Victoria

"When words fail, my art expresses my despair and leads to the emergence of hope and light at the end of a grim tunnel." - Private Misery, Victoria

Alternative to Talk-based Therapy

Many participants emphasised Arts therapy effectiveness compared to traditional talk therapy, particularly for autistic individuals and those who do not use words to communicate.

"We've tried lots of different people - psychologists, equine therapists, counsellors - but it was once we started art therapy that we saw a difference."

- N, parent, Victoria

"We've found this style of therapy has been much more successful than talk therapy for her."

- L's parent, Queensland

"For many autistic people including myself, we have trouble speaking to others, we have other ways of expressing ourselves, and art therapy is very helpful at bringing out our inner problems to the therapist and getting help." - L, Victoria



Participant Statements

Australian Capital Territory

Australian Capital Territory

K
Child | Major Cities, ACT

Story by K's parent

Drama therapy is a form of psychotherapy that uses drama and theatre techniques to help individuals resolve conflicts and problems. For my daughter, K, who has severe autism, it has been particularly beneficial. It has allowed her to develop self-awareness, express emotions, and improve relationships.

Drama therapy encourages K to make connections through imagination and creativity, exploring alternate worlds and ways of thinking. These imaginative worlds give her the freedom to innovate and try new things. The playful activities in drama therapy help her participate, explore, and experiment with objects and ideas in ways that other therapies might not.

The power of drama therapy comes from its diverse techniques, including games, role-playing, and guided imagery. These approaches allow K to delve into her feelings and navigate difficult life situations. By participating in drama therapy, she has found her healing journey to be more interactive and memorable.

Overall, drama therapy has been a life-changing experience for K, equipping her with valuable tools and skills that greatly improve her quality of life.

Australian Capital Territory

V
Adult | Major Cities, ACT



After over 20 years of psychotherapy with a clinical psychologist who then retired, I have moved to Art Therapy and attended for nearly 12 months.

This therapeutic approach has been amazing for me as it allows me to build a safe connection with a mature, well-trained adult who has frankly been much more useful to me than several psychologists I have met over the years.

This therapy experience has expanded my understanding of myself, and experience of life, through creative expression and discussion.

I feel less alone with my challenges with the person-centred approach away from a clinical setting.

Australian Capital Territory

B
Adult | Major Cities, ACT



This artwork from art therapy is very special to me.
Since being diagnosed with multiple psychiatric conditions life has looked very different to how I planned it. Yet I've come to accept it and am pressing on. Indeed, I am truly glad as I have faith there's wonderful joy ahead!
Hopefully art therapy will continue to help me on my journey.



Participant Statements

New South Wales

New South Wales

J Adult | Major Cities, NSW



I have a severe intellectual disability and Autism Level 3. Art therapy has played a significant role in my life.

I suffer from severe anxiety and difficulty in any new activities or group activities which limits my engagement in the community.

Working with my art therapist, I have developed my confidence, producing art works that have been exhibited in local community events. My art has given me a sense of pride and enough confidence to attend these events which I previously would not have ever considered.

With the help of my therapist, I have also improved my social skills to interact appropriately with others. Art therapy has improved my ability to transfer these skills in the community setting.

The NDIA's continued support of art therapy is crucial to my ongoing growth, and [I] urge that funding for these services be maintained to ensure that individuals like me can continue to benefit from its positive impact.

New South Wales

T Child | Major Cities, NSW

Story by T's parent

T was diagnosed with Aspergers, Sensory Processing Disorder and Anxiety. He was first flagged at the age of 8 but in hindsight, it was obvious he's struggled with these conditions since birth. He was born at 36 weeks, and a very fussy baby but not from colic; it was sights, sounds, smells, bedding textures and sleeping positions that all affected him. He's always been an anxious child, resistant to try new unfamiliar things, and as an older child, this has progressed with social anxiety, the continual need to have a routine, and know what is coming next. This can cause him much anxiety and due to his ASD/SPD and can be very triggering in ways most people would dismiss.

The therapies he's had over the years have greatly affected him, and improved his outcomes to manage stress, self-regulate, reduce anxiety, understand himself and become more self-aware. I've watched my son grow with these NDIS supports and scaffolding into a highly functioning young man.

He's been engaged in art therapy for over 5 years now, and this approach has been fundamental in his development and ability to cope socially, and his willingness to engage.

When my son was younger, he found the traditional, structured psychological approaches overwhelming due to his heightened sensitivities and anxiety. Art therapy with its more play-focused and non-threatening style, gave him a safe and engaging space to express himself. The therapist's style of creating an environment that was playful and pressure-free allowed my son to quickly build trust in a way that other psychology means could not match. This was instrumental in him building confidence, reducing anxiety and engaging with the therapist in a deep and meaningful way to further his progress.

As he has grown older and into a teenager, art therapy continues to be his lifeline, and meets his changing needs, again in an approach that supports sensory needs and anxiety. Through art therapy, he has been able to process emotions, improve his social and communication skills, and gain better self-regulation. This has been critical in helping him flourish and bridge the gap between sensory overload and emotional expression.

Over time, I have seen remarkable progress in his ability to handle sensory challenges, improve social understanding and coping skills, and build meaningful connection with others that other therapies were just not able to match.

Art therapy has been a core part of my son's NDIS supports, offering an approach that bypasses the traditional "couch therapist" style. It emphasises creativity and sensory engagement--through paints, clay, textures and other mediums--and has provided him with an outlet he trusts, feels safe and can deeply engage in. This unique method has been an instrumental part of his development and self-regulation journey, and in ways that more traditional psychology could not achieve for him.

It has provided him (continues to do so) with tools to navigate a world that often feels too fast-paced, overwhelming, and has been the core foundation of his growth into a more highly functioning young man, more socially equipped and confident, and self-aware.

New South Wales

D
Child | Major Cities, NSW

Story provided with consent of D's parents.

D has global developmental delay/learning disability and was referred by his occupational therapist [to] art therapy to improve and maintain his cognitive and language skills in communication and emotional regulation.

D says:

Art therapy is seriously the best part of my week. It's my favourite time, even during school holidays when I don't have school, I still look forward to it. I love using modelling clay. I've been doing it for about 36 weeks now, and every week I feel like I'm getting better at it. I make portraits of my heroes and even some of myself, and I feel so proud of what I create now.

When I first started making these clay models, I was kind of clumsy. My hands didn't do what I wanted, and the tools didn't work how I imagined. My figures looked okay, but not great. After going to art therapy for a while, though, something started to click. I've gotten better at using small pieces of clay and making tiny details, like eyes, noses, and mouths. Now, I can show my feelings in the faces I make, and it feels just right. I've improved my hand skills, and I can tell because my models look so much more detailed now.

It's not just my hands that are getting stronger. I'm also working on my whole body! When I roll, knead, or flatten the clay, I have to use my arms and shoulders, and that helps make them stronger. It also helps me sit straight, which is something I never really thought about before. But now, when I sit for 90 minutes each week, I have to keep good posture and balance. I feel like I'm getting better at focusing and sitting still, and that's something I'm proud of. Sometimes I have to use both of my hands to hold or move the clay, which helps my coordination.

It's not easy, but I get better with each session. When I pound or pull at the clay, I can feel my arm muscles getting stronger. After each session, I feel a little more relaxed, like my body is less tense. My movements feel smoother and more controlled, and it's awesome to feel like I'm improving.

Modelling clay is helping me get stronger, more balanced, and more flexible—all while I'm making cool things. It's not just about being creative and having fun, it's about building skills I never knew I could have. I feel more confident now, like if I keep practicing, I could get better at other things too. Maybe if I put as much effort into other stuff as I do with art therapy, I could be good at those things too!

My son A has been engaged in art therapy for the last 8 months. Art therapy has been an invaluable service that has vastly improved many aspects of A's life. A has Asperger's and anxiety disorder, in addition to other physical limitations such as hypermobility and low muscle tone.

Art therapy has supported A's emotional wellbeing by providing him the tools to successfully manage his generalised anxiety, whilst giving him the confidence to voice his experiences and seek assistance when necessary.

In addition to the emotional benefits, art therapy has also addressed the physical barriers experienced by A by improving his fine motor skills and coordination.

Art therapy has been a key therapy that has supported A's mental and physical health, providing innumerable benefits that have directly improved the quality of A's daily life.

Art therapy has helped A to meet his goals of reducing his anxiety by providing the tools required to help him self-regulate his emotions, in addition to helping him build the confidence to voice his concerns and seek assistance where required.

New South Wales

A
Child | Inner Regional, NSW

Story by A's mother

Art therapy has helped A to meet his goals of improving his muscle tone, coordination and strength by working with him to complete a wide variety of different art mediums.

Art therapy has been the most effective form of therapy we have utilised.

New South Wales

D and W
Children | Major Cities, NSW

Story by D and W’s mother

I am a single mother with a 12 year old son and 10 year old son who both access art therapy. D has autism level 3, adhd, high anxiety, global developmental delay, mild intellectual disability and ODD. W has anxiety, mild intellectual disability and speech delay. They both have big emotions/feelings and have trouble regulating these feelings. My 12-year-old has been accessing art therapy for the last 6 months and my 10-year-old has started in the last month. Both were seeing psychologists previously, but art therapy is more beneficial as it’s not just sitting and talking.

I have seen improvements with both my sons they may not be big improvements but definite improvements. With my oldest son his big emotions can lead to big meltdowns which can become physical and with my youngest it’s more verbal meltdowns. We need art therapy to help learn better ways to deal with these as its difficult for everyone to deal with it.

Art therapy has helped my kids have some understanding of the zones of regulation and D has started learning how to identify different emotions has just recently said twice now when he has been worried/scared that his heart was beating fast. W has also learnt about the zones of regulation.

They have both learnt a bit about privacy and what that means and that sometimes we all need personal space. W also didn’t have his own space if he needed time alone so our therapist made a social story about privacy to help D understand and we changed W’s door handle so if he need space he go in his room and lock it and D is learning to knock and ask can he come. D will take time to learn this as he doesn’t deal with changes well.

Our art therapist has also been beneficial with me during our parent sessions offering me strategies on helping my boys deal with their emotions and what their bodies are doing during these big feelings and also helped me work out what maybe Ds triggers [are] when he has had a meltdown.

New South Wales

R and G
Children | Major Cities, NSW

Story told by R and G’s mother

I am a single mother. English is my second language, and I would like to apologise for my mistakes. I have two children R (10 yo) and G (8 yo). Both children are diagnosed with ASD Level 2 and ADHD.

They do art therapy for nearly 2 years. When they started, they were not confident and shy, now they have improved so much.

It helped them to improve from basic skills, for example fine motor (holding brush) to communication through painting (expressing their feelings, thoughts and mood). I can see it calms them down and they are very proud of their achievements.

In the past we experienced domestic violence, and it left a big scare on all of us. But after Art and Music therapies, I can see a significant change in their development and improvement, and it is amazing.

Art therapy help R and G develop social skills and establish new friendships. Art therapy has supported R and G to manage strong emotions such as frustration, anger and anxiety. [It] has supported both of them [with] increased independence and self-esteem by participating in art exhibitions with other participants. It also supported them in improving their coordination and fine motor skills.

[They are] more confident, [have] improved fine motor skills, participating in community events and exhibitions. I hope it will help them in the future to choose an occupation which is connected with art and be independent and financially support themselves by having a stable and interesting job.

New South Wales

S
Child | Major Cities, NSW

Story by S's parent

Before we started seeing [arts therapist] N and doing art therapy, S struggled with emotional regulation. She had severe behavioural issues at school; I was contacted daily to collect her or help calm and regulate her over the phone. She struggled with communication and regressed with every other therapy we tried before finding art therapy, such as psychology, speech therapy, and equine therapy. I was completely lost and did not know where to turn. Everyday life was a struggle for both S and me.

Since becoming a client of N three years ago (in 2021), S has found a way to express and communicate her needs and wants. I have noticed her behavioural issues have improved immensely (with a few exceptions), and she can better regulate her emotions with a little help from myself or other adults, using different art media. She is simply a happier child.

I have seen a huge improvement at school, with her receiving awards and achievements I never thought she would attain. She has also started to branch out and try new things and foods, all thanks to the hard work of N, her art therapist.

New South Wales

P
Child | Major Cities, NSW

Story by P's parent

P has always struggled with communication and identifying his feelings. He also struggled with behavioural issues at school, and I was often contacted by the school to collect him. He was often suspended, or, as they called it, “reset suspensions,” which I found problematic. P experienced significant anxiety about going to school or engaging in regular daily activities, inside or outside of school.

Since starting in 2023 with [arts therapist] N, I have noticed P has been able to express openly how he feels and what he needs. The number of phone calls to collect him from school has stopped; only on the rare occasion when he cannot regulate himself have I been contacted, but it is not very often.

New South Wales

D
Child | Major Cities, NSW

The number of times he has been suspended [has] dropped since starting art therapy. P's behavioural issues have changed, and last year he graduated year 10 and was first in his support unit, which was a huge achievement.

His anxiety has improved, and he has also started wanting to go places and see his friends outside of school, whereas before he would never have wanted to do that. I believe that since doing art therapy with N, he has improved immensely, and it is like I have been watching a completely different child, which has been amazing to see.

I am hoping and praying that art therapy can stay part of the NDIS as I believe it truly has worked wonders for both my children. I fear that if it is taken away, it will cause a massive regression in both my children, and we will be completely lost and back to square one without our regular visits with N for art therapy.

New South Wales

D
Child | Major Cities, NSW

Story by D's parent

Formally diagnosed with Autism level 2, sub-typed ADHD and depression all of which require daily medications. Art therapy has played a critical part with D developing and maintaining social development and emotional support through many challenging milestones that affect those with Autism.

It has given him a safe place to express his emotions and develop strategies to overcome them. It has helped and continues to help to develop social awareness, social cues in his surroundings in a creative outlet. This also helps D to manage his deficiency issues and anger issues.

Art therapy and his amazing provider, [arts therapist] N helped D through suicidal episodes, emotional regulation, social skills/ behaviours, milestones and so much more.

Without this continued support, I fear that this will have negative effect of D's development, emotional regulation and to be able to be part of the community as a 'normal' person could.

As in the past funding was abruptly stopped due to funding depletion, this had a huge impact on D emotionally and mentally.

We witnessed quite significant regression. This was displayed in negative behaviours, inability to regulate his emotions, affected social skills and affected his schooling also.

I feel ceasing this amazing service will have detrimental effects on D and other children/adults in the same position.

New South Wales

J and A
Child | Regional, NSW

Parents of child (unnamed)

Our child is 6 years old and has a diagnosis of ASD Level 2 and ADHD.

She has been seeing L, [arts therapist, for] Creative Arts Therapy for approximately 6 months every fortnight. Our daughter has difficulty regulating her emotions at home and within the school environment. She has experienced bullying at school and has found it difficult to maintain friendships which has affected her self-esteem.

The art therapy has helped our daughter express her feelings with the art and we have noticed a big improvement in her confidence. Our daughter loves and looks forward to her sessions, often asking for extra sessions because she says she feels so calm afterwards. She is learning to identify her feelings and her strengths through her art pieces which she is very proud of.

It would be a great loss to remove Art Therapy from her NDIS plan as she has progressed so quickly through her sessions. It gives her a non-verbal way of communicating and understanding her feelings that she has not had before.

New South Wales

T
Child | Major Cities, NSW

Story provided with consent of T’s parents

Art therapy helps me show my thoughts when I can’t find the words.

Through narrative art therapy, I have been working on improving my communication skills with my family and teacher at school.

Art therapy has helped me tell stories at my own pace and describe the world I live in. I can now share details about my life at school and use pictures to explain myself when words are difficult.

This process has helped me focus better and express my thoughts in ways I couldn’t before. I am a work in progress, and I continue to improve every day during my art therapy sessions.

New South Wales

G
Child | Major Cities, NSW

Story by G’s mother

G has a complex congenital scoliosis in and around the thoracolumbar area in addition to cervicothoracic congenital kyphosis and spinal bifida. G was referred for art therapy by her OT.... to develop and improve her muscular movement and to provide a therapeutic space for her to develop and improve her communication skills.

Over the past several months, I have observed firsthand how beneficial these sessions have been for her development in multiple areas, including communication, emotional regulation, concentration, and physical alignment. I firmly believe that Art Therapy is an essential and effective part of her ongoing support, and I would like to explain why it is crucial for her well-being and progress.

G has shown tremendous improvement in her ability to express herself. She has become more confident in using verbal communication to request specific items during her sessions, such as paint colors, brushes, and toys. The art materials themselves seem to help her express emotions and ideas that she may not be able to articulate with words.

I have noticed that she often shares the stories behind her artwork, such as describing the “house and garden” that includes her family and even her art therapist, which suggests she feels secure and trusted in the therapeutic relationship. This is particularly important for G, as she continues to develop her communication skills and ability to connect with others.

Emotionally, G has made significant strides. Art Therapy provides her with a safe space to explore and regulate her feelings. This is especially important as she navigates complex emotions like anxiety, sadness, and frustration. The creative process allows her to express herself without the pressure of verbal language, which can be challenging for her at times. Over the course of our sessions, I have seen G become more aware of her emotions and learn how to manage them in healthier ways. Additionally, we are working on her ability to separate from me, which has been a struggle, but the therapy has made this process easier, as she is gradually becoming more comfortable being apart from me in the room for short periods.

In terms of concentration, G has made noticeable progress. At the beginning, she struggled to stay engaged for long stretches of time. However, she is now able to focus on her art for up to 60 minutes, completing multi-step processes such as painting, adding glitter, and using mixed media materials. She follows instructions well and takes pride in her work. Her ability to focus and concentrate during these sessions will support her in other areas of life as she gets older, especially with daily tasks and activities.

Another key benefit of Art Therapy for G is its positive impact on her physical development. The various postures and movements involved in creating art—such as reaching, bending, and holding materials—are strengthening her arms, hands, and core. Given G’s diagnosis of spina bifida, these physical benefits are particularly important. The therapy is helping her with her muscle tone, posture, and overall physical alignment. I’ve seen her body awareness and motor skills improve, which is crucial for her long-term physical health and independence.



As a mother, I have seen how much G loves her art therapy sessions. She looks forward to them every week and truly enjoys the process of creating art. The therapy has become a vital part of her routine, offering her a space to express herself, build confidence, and improve both emotionally and physically. The therapeutic relationship with her art therapist has also been a source of comfort and trust, which has allowed G to thrive.

Given G’s unique needs and the remarkable progress she has made in just a few months, I strongly believe that continued Art Therapy will be essential for her development.

New South Wales

P

Child | Major Cities, NSW

Story by P’s parent

My daughter is 6 years old; she is autistic and has an ADHD diagnosis. She has been attending art therapy sessions since September 2023, and I truly believe this therapy has helped her develop her emotional regulation skills and her self-esteem and confidence.

After long, demanding school days, Art Therapy sessions provide her with a safe space which helps her decrease stress and anxiety.

My daughter has also attended Art Therapy group sessions, which have been extremely beneficial to improve her social skills and engagement in play (these are the main NDIS goals we are focusing on at the moment).

I feel we have come a long way since her diagnosis, and every therapy (Art Therapy, Speech Therapy and Occupational Therapy) has contributed to my daughter’s progress. A holistic approach is essential.

New South Wales

T
Child | Major Cities, NSW

Story by T's parent

T, diagnosed with ASD2, struggles with traditional therapy, exhibiting defiance and difficulty communicating with psychologists, occupational therapists and speech therapists.

Art therapy provides a transformative experience for my son because it enables him to access sessions to achieve his NDIS goals. By engaging with hands on art activities, T has been learning to manage his emotions effectively in a variety of contexts and situations.

Over the past 3 years, the calming and non-threatening environment has fostered a strong rapport with his therapist, enabling him to express uncomfortable feelings openly. In addition, sibling support sessions have significantly improved the relationship between T and his brother, fostering better communication and play.

This positive experience underscores the critical need for arts therapy, offering a valuable alternative for individuals with specific needs who may not benefit from traditional therapy approaches.

New South Wales

S
Child | Major Cities, NSW

Story by S's parent

S has a diagnosis of ASD level 2 and global development delay. Music therapy and arts therapy has magically connected everything, increasing cooperation with other therapies and even at school.

In Year 1, we dealt with strong resistance to school and frequent meltdowns. However, after starting art and music therapy, the resistance lessened, and meltdowns became more manageable. One afternoon, after a particularly difficult day at school, we went to an art therapy session, and our child's outlook improved immediately, as if nothing had happened. This was something we have never seen before.

Art and music therapy have been life-changing for our child. I am confident that with these therapies, my child will grow up to be a contributing member of society. The progress made in one year is tremendous, and while traditional therapies like speech, OT, and physio have helped, art and music therapies have paved the way for everything to reach its full potential.

I look forward to the day when my child may no longer need therapy. However, I am deeply concerned that if art and music therapy funding is removed, my child's progress may regress.



T
Child | Major Cities, NSW

Story provided with consent of T’s parent

Art therapy has helped me a lot with things that are hard for me, like feeling angry, sad, or frustrated. Before, I didn’t know how to talk about my feelings, especially with my sisters or when I was thinking about my dad not being around anymore. It’s still hard to talk about it, but art helps me express what I can’t say with words.

I used to get really upset and distracted a lot, and I didn’t trust people easily. But in my art sessions, my therapist is really patient, and that’s made a big difference. I feel like I can focus better and not get as frustrated. I’ve also learned to use art to calm down when I’m feeling really upset or when I get too distracted.

Art has helped me with my sisters too. We get along better now because I can show them how I feel through my paintings or the things I make. Before, I didn’t know how to explain things, but now I feel like they understand me more.

It’s also helped me with missing my dad. When I’m sad about him not being in my life, I can draw pictures or make things that show how I feel, and that helps me not feel so alone or angry. Even though it’s hard, I feel like I’ve learned a little bit about how to deal with those feelings.

I’m really glad I have my art sessions, because they help me feel better, focus more, and talk about my feelings without getting so frustrated. It’s been a big help for me.

F
Adult | Inner Regional, NSW

This is the only therapy that I feel helps me to focus and get through the hard times that I experience.

To me art therapy is more than enjoying art.

- It’s a way to help me to relax
- It’s a way to focus my thoughts in
- It’s a comfortable non-judgemental environment, where I can express myself uninterrupted
- It’s an outlet for built up stress

It is giving me confidence as many people say that I should sell my artwork. I would like to do this in the future.

One on one Art therapy is teaching me the skills at my level. I have trouble recalling methods if too much direction is given at once. One on one gives that firsthand help which makes the most of the one-hour session.

I have previously unsuccessfully participated in art groups. Group art sessions really only provided social therapy. If I started talking about my complex family issues or the inner working of my brain in a group class, all the participant enjoyment in art would dissolve. I found that group sessions teach things I already know, I’m a talented insightful artist. My brain just gets overwhelmed. I can’t process noise due to autistic sensory issues. Due to my ADHD, I get distracted easy. I am also a people magnet; everyone wants to talk to me. It’s nice to have friends but it breaks my concentration.

Many years ago on multiple occasions, I attended art lessons. The clients started comparing their art to mine. One by one they started dropping out of the groups. I stopped participating then gradually they returned. I tried to tell them that no artwork was comparable because I could not draw the way they do but it didn’t help...all of the focus went to the people who more obviously needed the help leaving me on the the sidelines.

I cannot attend group sessions because my needs are different. My needs are unique like me and one on one art therapy caters for them. Please don’t cancel my one-on-one art therapy or I’m going to be sidelined again!

New South Wales

J
Adult | Major Cities, NSW

[I am a] neurodivergent trauma survivor with multiple mental health diagnoses.

Arts therapy has allowed me to plan and hold an art exhibition of my work which had been a long-term goal; helped negotiate interpersonal relationships and increased community participation.

Art has always been part of my world and is essential for managing my complex PTSD and other mental health diagnoses. I have attended art therapy sessions privately and through the NDIS for many years.

For me art therapy has been much more effective than intensive psychotherapy with psychiatrists or psychologists.

For people like me who struggle to express themselves verbally, art therapy offers a way to access emotions and thoughts that get in the way of everyday life.

Art therapy has allowed me to re-enter my chosen field as an artist and engage in meaningful work and I am very grateful for that.

New South Wales

‘Kel’
Adult | Major Cities, NSW



Art Therapy has helped me find my voice. I’m an Autistic adult, and I have been doing Art Therapy for several years. K [arts therapist] introduced me to different ways of understanding the world through art. We’ve talked through some hard things, while my hands and eyes were distracted by some wonderful new medium.

K taught me safety skills - which no other therapy had managed to teach me - as we realised that I liked taking photos. Art Therapy provided me with a platform to have that voice I found heard, through my first exhibition.

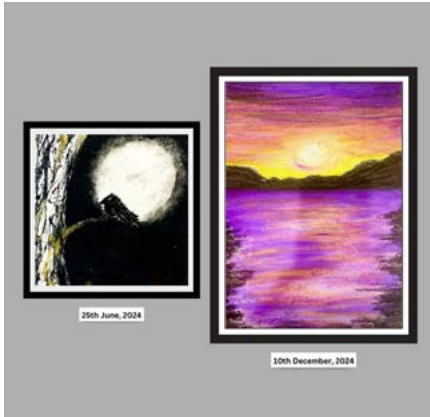
Art Therapy has taught me I can take on new and different things, which I am usually quite averse to.

I wish younger me had been introduced to Art Therapy, because it has shown me that I am quite acceptable, with a different brain, and ways of seeing the world that should be celebrated, not “cured”.

Art Therapy helps me meet my goals by increasing my belief in myself. K shows me that my brain is valuable and is capable of amazing things, given the right environment. This has translated to me taking greater control over my life, ability to try new things, a way of engaging with the world around me, and a way of communicating.

New South Wales

J
Adult | Major Cities, NSW



[I am diagnosed with] ABI (Acquired Brain Injury), cPTSD, Hearing Impair[ment], Short Term Memory Loss, GAD (General Anxiety Disorder), Clinical Depression, OCD, Chronic Pain and I’m Neurodivergent!

In 2020 I underwent an emergency craniotomy that took with it my hearing, short term memory, my ability to drive or to work, my independence and my self worth. My fortnightly NDIS funded Art Therapy sessions have been just as integral to my healing process as my other Allied Health Professional Services.



By providing a safe space for my creative and emotional expression and through guided art-making, we were able to create a visual narrative of my traumas, which has proven to be an incredibly cathartic and empowering process. Engaging in Art Therapy has significantly enhanced my mental and emotional well-being, allowing me to process those complex feelings and experiences, while keeping me safe, calm and grounded in the present. Additionally, the sense of accomplishment I feel from my artistic creations has fostered a new sense of pride in my abilities and overall self-confidence.

Art Therapy has been an absolutely vital and empowering part of my NDIS funded therapeutic supports and my healing journey. My fortnightly Art Therapy sessions with M [my arts therapist] provided me with a structured outlet for self-expression, which has allowed me to articulate feelings and experiences that I might otherwise have struggled to convey. This newfound clarity has helped me set more meaningful goals, both personally and professionally.

Additionally, the mindfulness techniques I've learned have enhanced my focus and presence in daily activities. I find myself better equipped to handle stress and make decisions, leading to increased productivity in my everyday life.

The creative process has also cultivated a sense of accomplishment, motivating me to pursue new challenges and engage in activities I once believed to be unachievable and seemed completely overwhelming.

I think these works I created at [my art therapy service] just six months apart, speak volumes as to the very positive impact -NDIS funded Art Therapy for Capacity Building - Improved Daily Living, has had on my mental health and overall wellbeing. [Signatures have been removed from images for de-identification purposes].

New South Wales

D Adult | Major Cities, NSW

Art therapy has helped me work towards and meet goals that previously I haven't thought attainable. I've also begun gaining confidence that I've never felt before.

As someone living with physical and psychosocial disabilities, I've experienced firsthand the transformative power of art therapy. For years, I felt isolated and trapped, struggling to express and cope with my emotions. But through art therapy, I've discovered a safe and empowering outlet.

It's helped me develop crucial skills in coping, communication, and emotional regulation. The creative process has given me a voice, allowing me to convey complex feelings and thoughts in a way that traditional talk therapy couldn't.

Most notably, art therapy has instilled in me a sense of confidence, helping me break free from the confines of my isolation. It's essential that others like me have access to this life-changing resource, as it can be a beacon of hope and healing in the darkest of times.

New South Wales

A Adult | Major Cities, NSW

[I have] psychosocial and physical disabilities: cPTSD, Chronic fatigue syndrome, ASD, ADHD, anxiety and depression.

Art therapy has helped me re-connect my creativity and emotions and improve my day-to-day mental health function.

I am finding arts therapy useful as it's helping rewire my brain through play, through exploring child states, and challenging my coping mechanism of intellectualising.

As someone who's done 10 years of talk therapy, I am realising that a lot of my trauma is stored somatically and needs to be explored from my body and subconscious up, rather than my thoughts downwards.

It's been really impactful on my life. It's helped me feel more connected to myself and helped me accept parts of myself I have shunned or locked away.

Removal of arts therapy support means taking away some of the building blocks of healthy exploration and coping mechanisms I've been building, which will mean that I'll struggle more in my day-to-day functioning.

New South Wales	
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‘Recovering Perfectionist’
Adult | Major Cities, NSW

[I have] psychosocial and physical disability – Dyspraxia, Major Depression, Anxiety, ADHD, PTSD, Fatigue Issues, Chronic Stress, and Headaches/Cluster Headaches.

Art therapy has helped me re-connect my emotions instead of over-thinking and intellectualising and it’s giving me a coping -mechanism to decrease dissociation and overwhelm. It’s lifesaving.

My life has been pure survival, so much struggles since young age and mental breakdown lead me to many mental and physical health diagnosis. Years of talking therapy helped me understand my conditions but also gave me a habit of over intellectualising my emotions.

My psychologist recommended me to try arts therapy due to my creative inclination, it has been transformational. Arts therapy allows me to get in touch with emotions without over thinking, intellectualising and dissociating. It’s simply lifesaving, giving me new coping tools.

AT is miraculously sustaining my mental health. It also helps me with my perfectionism. However, Arts therapy is not [a] stated support in my plan, I am very worried about losing [this] life sustaining [support]. I foresee myself going back to [being a] nervous wreck without this essential support.

New South Wales	
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L
Adult | Major Cities, NSW

I am a survivor of all sorts of abuse in various parts of my life including institutional care (I grew up in orphanage and experienced tremendous amount of abuse there). My previous arts therapist has changed my life. Ever since I choose arts therapy as my essential support for my function and mental health capacity building.

Coming to arts therapy literally stops me from suicidal thoughts and helps me with a sense of worthlessness. I feel heard and seen in arts therapy session because I can talk about what is bothering me without judgment and regain positive outlooks in life.

I feel fortunate to have my arts therapy as stated support in my plan, but I worry for other ppl who don’t have that option.

New South Wales	
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Coming to arts therapy is not a chore for me, it’s life sustaining essential support. I motivate myself to independently come to sessions by myself by catching [the] train and it literally helps me keep suicidal thoughts at bay.

K
Adult | Inner Regional, NSW

I came to art therapy to access creativity, self-expression and alleviate anxiety and depression.

Before coming to art therapy, I did nothing, I didn’t go anywhere or didn’t do anything. My life was quite restricted. I didn’t even sit on my phone. I’d just lost everything in the flood and lost my creativity with it. Life for me was dull and colourless.

Art therapy has improved my confidence and helped me manage my perfectionism. It has touched all facets of my life helping me to process and come to terms with the difficulties I experienced. It has helped me manage symptoms of my PTSD and the emotional instability that comes from schizoaffective disorder.

New South Wales	
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C
Adult | Inner Regional, NSW

My name is [C] I love art. It gives me good focus and I enjoy it because it calms me down and refreshers me. I have cerebral [palsy].

I enjoy the different types of art. I had done many project[s]. Weaving, mobile making, clay modelling, painting and sewing making bags and tablecloths. Also had a go at acrylic pouring. And Marchagee.

Art therapy has help me explore new activity and has helped me focus which has been a goal for me.

[Art therapy] is the best thing that has happened to me. I hope I can keep going to it.

New South Wales

L
Adult | Inner Regional, NSW



I'm a double amputee with a lot of other health conditions. I live in [an inner regional NSW] in a women's refuge community with my companion animal who helps me with my mental health.

I have bi-polar disorder. I have had a lot of trauma in my life from childhood all through to adulthood, struggling with drug addictions, domestic violence, abuse, being let down by the system. I've also had major heart surgery prior to my amputations, I'm also a diabetic, and currently have kidney failure (stage 3).

I have [been] using my Art therapist for about 7 years, and she has helped me progress through my art as I really love creating wonderful pieces of art. The Art Therapist helps me to express my emotions and the trauma that I have experienced.

My therapist isn't just helping me with art she helps me with my mental health. Doing art helps with my bi-polar and makes me want to become an Art Therapist so that I can help others like myself. [My art therapist] has helped me in a great way, she is persistent, caring, loving nature, and very understanding. She has already done a report for NDIS to help continue my Art Therapy funding.

Art calms me when I'm at my lowest. I have support workers who assist me when I'm doing art with [my art therapist] and they can see how much I'm improving life because of art therapy. I recommend her business to help others like me.

New South Wales

A
Adult | Inner Regional, NSW

I have been attending art therapy for approximately five years. My disabilities are spinal injuries, and CPTSD. I struggle with living with spinal injuries sustained in a MVA [motor vehicle accident] many years ago, that involve constant unremitting pain, and dysfunction, and a sense of grief from having lost my independence and ability to support myself. I also have CPTSD originating from multiple sources over a thirty-year period.

New South Wales

O
Adult | Major Cities, NSW

I am very analytical, and logical, and tried for years to bury my feelings, leading to multiple triggers.

I have a wonderful art therapist.

The difference art therapy has made to my life is incalculable.

Using different modalities, I have been guided how to release and process my feelings in a safe environment, a space I can be vulnerable, with guidance I trust absolutely, and trust is a rare thing for me.

I've been learning to process so many traumatic events, that can feel as immediate today as when they occurred when I experience flashbacks. However, long buried traumas still emerge constantly.

I need art therapy desperately. I live a very isolated life with no informal supports, this is my only safe space. The threat of it being taken from me literally steals my breath away with fear.

I don't think NDIS fully understands how art therapy works, and the amazing benefits, which lead to less reliance on support workers. So ultimately, it's a win-win situation for both participants and NDIS. I wish to add my voice to the appeal to retain art therapy as a vital therapy.

I was born with a movement disorder called GNB1, however when I was little the doctors didn't know what I had. They thought it was like Cerebral Palsy. When I was 15, I had a surgery on my brain called Deep Brain Stimulation (DBS) at [a] Children's Hospital. The surgery improved my movement significantly. When I was 17, I was diagnosed with GNB1, a newly discovered genetic mutation.

I make art as an expression of my emotions, love for others, and to tell stories. I love to make art because it relaxes me and brings me joy. I am passionate about making art and I would love to have a solo exhibition one day so that I can share my stories with others in the best way I know how.

I really love drawing, and I couldn't do it. I love art and wanted to be an artist. My DBS has helped me control my movement a lot better and now I go to art therapy.

My art therapist helped me so much to understand that ART is unique to everyone, and perception, technique and interpretation are all individual journeys. I am working on having a solo exhibition and I am so proud to have a solo exhibition. It will be a dream come true.

New South Wales

N
19 | Inner Regional, NSW



I came to art therapy two and a half years ago. It has helped me manage how I understand other people and how to manage my emotions in social settings and how to communicate healthily. Doing this in a creative way helps me to engage in therapy better. It helps to draw what I'm experiencing and to reflect how I feel through artmaking and to learn about myself and life

New South Wales

T and L
Adults | Major Cities, NSW

Story by T and L's father

T and L are Autistic and have attended fortnightly individual art therapy sessions since 2021. I am writing to express my dismay and concern over the exclusion of Art Therapy from the NDIS approved therapy list. This decision is inconsistent with research that demonstrates evidence that underscores the advantages of Art Therapy for individuals with disabilities, including autism spectrum disorder (ASD).

I can personally attest to the beneficial effects observed in my two children, T (25) and L (23), both of whom have been diagnosed with ASD. Art Therapy not only provided them with the means to express themselves but also assisted in emotional regulation and enhancing their interpersonal and communication skills, which contributed to a positive change in their social behaviour and focus of attention.

Participant Statements

Northern Territory

Northern Territory

D
Child | Remote, NT



Story by D’s mother

D is an Aboriginal boy from [Remote], Northern Territory.

D has sensory and speech issues (including a stutter and speech impediment) as well as an unspecified intellectual disability, social issues, and challenging behaviours including physical and verbal aggression. D struggles with fine motor skills such as colouring and writing his name, short-term memory, and following instructions.

Since engaging in art therapy all the above have improved greatly. He is doing better at school and is calmer in nature with very few outbursts. He uses art to settle him and use it as an outlet. D is more socially connected, and his memory has improved.

D continues to make, paint and create with his art therapist, and as he learns more about different art specialities, it forces him to seek out more knowledge which is helping develop his vocabulary and improving his language and stutter.

D’s fine motor skills have improved dramatically as the images [above and] below prove.

I am grateful for the experience of D doing art therapy and hope that he can remain in this program.

He enjoys expressing himself through art where he otherwise struggles to express himself with words due to his unique challenges.

I know D’s future will be bright with this ongoing support and outlet that art therapy allows.

Northern Territory

E
Child | Remote, NT



Past, Present, Future



Story by E’s mother

E has been completely non-verbal for most of his life. E has been diagnosed with Mild Autism and Mute Autism.

Since E commenced the Art Therapy sessions there has been dramatic improvement in his ability to manage himself and participate in the classroom. He also interacts with others more in the playground.

E talks during art therapy sessions which is incredible given he has been completely nonverbal.

E has commenced opening up to his Art Therapist about his feelings and expresses himself through his art.

E engages in art therapy regularly and I can really notice the difference in him since he has been doing art therapy.

Art therapy is the one thing that E gets excited about.

Participant Statements

Queensland

Queensland

S
Child | Outer Regional Queensland

Story by S's parent

S, my 13-year-old indigenous son, has FASD. We've tried countless supports in [our area], but nothing helped him like art therapy.

S struggles with communication, yet through art, he found a way to express himself.

His therapist formed a special bond with him, and over time, he started to open up in ways we never thought possible.

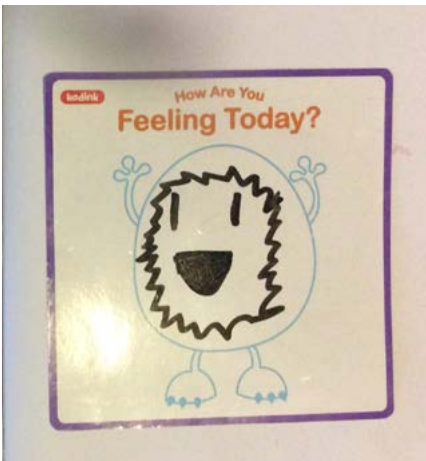
Art therapy helped him become more relaxed and happier in everyday life.

Now that NDIS has cut the funding, S's progress is at risk. This therapy has been life-changing, and without it, he loses his most effective way to communicate. Please reconsider.



Queensland

T and K
Children | Major Cities, QLD



Story by T and K's parent

T and K are diagnosed with ASD and ADHD. I think that by receiving art therapy, my children have become aware of their inner emotions and have improved their ability to express themselves through communication with the therapist. They are also very relaxed during their art therapy, which helps to reduce stress levels.

Queensland

K
Children | Outer Regional, QLD



My busy Mind
Acrylic paint and mark makings

K's guardian helped them tell their story

When I was 10, I started to have less friends and people started to treat me different. School became harder and I got bullied because I was different and found some things hard to understand. I did not want to go to school anymore. I became angry when things became hard and stopped going. I was angry a lot. I am diagnosed with Autism.

Doing Art Therapy has helped me learn to deal with my frustrations. I can try things and not be worried when they don't work as I can try again. I have learnt that I like to be creative which I did not know before and I am learning lots of skills that have helped me at school. I have made some more friends who are creative as well and we have now attended some social events. I went to camp for the first time and enjoyed it.

I tried going to other therapy but did not keep going, I did not like it being on-line and having to answer lots of questions.

I now go to school most days and am passing.

Queensland

J
Child | Major Cities, QLD

Story by J's parent.

J has a diagnosis of Autism, Dyspraxia, Childhood Apraxia of Speech, Dysgraphia, Dyslexia, ADHD. Art Therapy (AT) is a key and vital part of J's support.

J is a very creative and sensitive boy and struggles with social engagement. AT provides a safe and confidential space to explore his creativity and a supportive environment to access and make sense of his emotions and learn how to effectively engage with his peers and discuss any concerns he may have whilst building his confidence undertaking an activity that interests and excites him.

Queensland

N and B
Children | Outer Regional, QLD

Story by N and B’s parent

N and B have a diagnosis of ASD; ADHD and have PDA profiles. Art therapy has been instrumental in supporting my NDIS child participant’s well-being.

Through creative expression, they’ve found a safe space to communicate feelings and experiences that are often difficult to verbalize.

Art therapy has helped improve their self-esteem, offering a sense of accomplishment and pride in their work.

This therapeutic approach fosters emotional regulation and provides a calming outlet for stress, empowering my children to better manage challenges in their daily life and development.

Queensland

P
Adult | Outer Regional, QLD

Story by P and his foster parent

P, a proud Indigenous man, came to us just after his birth, he has a FASD diagnosis and a severe mental impairment. I (carer) am 83 years old now and it has been a long journey. We are very involved in community, and sorry business, and I worry for P when I am not here. I have 7 children who help but also have their own lives.

We don’t know how to deal with the NDIS very well and P only has a small package, so we don’t get to do a lot to help him, especially living up here where there is not a lot of options.

P was referred to Art Therapy by his psychologist. P was reluctant to engage with traditional talking and I had to be there with him to help with questions. It is difficult to organise and make appointments and it didn’t seem to do anything.

The art therapist comes to our house and P loves it. He engages with ‘Aunty’ (this is a big honour for P to call her Aunty) and he has come out of his shell.

We have both learnt things and explored some of the things coming in our future. We wish we found this earlier, and he could do more.

Queensland

R
Adult | Inner Regional, QLD

I was diagnosed with Borderline Personality Disorder in 2018. Life and coping with it was debilitating and everyday functioning was more and more challenging. Every area of my life was affected from trying to hold down work, relationships, health and so on. I had had CBT, counselling, seen a psychiatrist and was on medication such as Lithium to try to help with the masked systems of anxiety and depression. After a suicide attempt in 2018, I was finally diagnosed.

Once diagnosed, I was informed that DBT was the treatment I needed. I could not afford to go to DBT Brisbane and get the help I so desperately needed. I sought out other options and supports in the form of government-funded programs and support groups. Part of these offered Art therapy. Two distinct environments that offered Art Therapy were such profound and helpful experiences for me.

Art Therapy helped me to discover deep-rooted trauma and process feelings of abandonment and rejection that had otherwise been too painful to uncover through other therapeutic practices. With the professional guidance of the Art Therapist, Art Therapy encouraged me to let my guard down as I felt safe and in control to uncover difficult emotions. I was also able to make meaning of the traumatic experiences by assigning characters in my story to objects I picked off the shelf.

Working on emotional regulation, Art Therapy also became a means of mindfulness to channel distressing emotions into one place and again feel safe and in control to do so.

Art Therapy has helped me meet goals that I didn’t necessarily have to begin with because life was chaotic and distressing. I went from surviving to thriving. It helped to turn murky water clear and gave me a framework to work in by helping me understand the emotions that were surfacing more deeply.

Art therapy helped to improve my well-being and life, and I believe it is a valuable and necessary therapeutic practice.

“You are not your diagnosis or disability. It is a part of you and your story, but it does not define or limit you”.

E
Parent of Adult | Outer Regional,
QLD

Story by E with consent of her son (unnamed)

I am the carer of a 25-year-old who has never been able to engage successfully with psychology but has made significant progress with his mental health since he has engaged with L, his qualified art therapist. He has diagnoses of FASD, ADHD, ODD, and a mood disorder.

As a counsellor myself, it has always been important that he has appropriate support for his mental health challenges. He has had six previous psychologists over 17 years, and he has struggled to even engage on a regular basis with them (he tries to think of ways to avoid appointments).

Through art he has been able to express his thoughts in ways that he has never able to do by written or spoken word. This tangible art expression has shown me a side to him that I did not know.

We live in a rural area, with restricted access to services. A lot of my son's psychology sessions have been by telehealth, but with art therapy there has been a face-to-face connection between the therapist and client. They have used a variety of art mediums to express raw emotion and frustration with life. Exploring these themes with colour and texture has resulted in light-bulb moments for him - that he has wanted to share with me, his mother.

What his art therapist is doing, cannot be easily done in a group setting - especially as we are in a rural area.

The connection between the therapist and the client relies heavily on building relationship, and art therapy is providing a trusting and positive environment for my son to grow.

A
Adult | Inner Regional, QLD



**How it feels when your brain
explodes - bleeding paper**

Due to my misreading of situations or not quite understanding them I have lost confidence in things that I can do. I have a support worker to help me keep appointments, but I don't have a social life, or many friends and my family is busy, I spend a lot of time on my own and struggle with the basics of life due to my mobility.

I have an acquired brain injury and live in a rural town so there is not a lot of supports. I am not mobile so rely on others. NDIS has been good but if there are no services then it's no help at all. I cannot manage online or talk therapy as internet is poor and I cannot manage lots of questions or remember things.

Doing Art Therapy has been like a combination of therapies, helping with my mobility, hands, body movement and building my confidence and capacity. I have got to look at things from a different perspective and found that I still do have some abilities and things to offer. I feel happier and don't have to stress about getting to the appointment as they come to me.



Queensland

W
Adult | Inner Regional, QLD

Story by W's mother

My son W is functionally blind, nonverbal, non-mobile and has severe cerebral palsy.

W finished special school 8 years ago. He is supported at home with a personalised program. He has received Art Therapy weekly for over 2 years.

Art therapy has been an absolutely amazing and wonderful journey for both W and I. I have always valued the learnings received from therapists which I am present. I am extremely impressed of the outcomes and benefits each and every time W participates in art therapy.

W is given materials to explore which amazingly he does for a very extended period of time. This is something he does not normally do. Much thought and preparation go into this.

A topic is chosen for W to express to gain greater understanding and embody his feelings and emotions through his Art.

When he has completed his art, we tell W what we see in the story he has created which he really enjoys and listens intently.

It has been an honour to experience what Art Therapy has provided for W. His and my world have opened up immensely.

W is more curious, happy, emotionally regulated, his skills, coping abilities, reduction in frustration, coping abilities, self-achievement have all improved and his enhancement of his life are all quite evident.

Queensland

J
Adult | Major Cities, QLD



I have CPTSD; severe depression/anxiety and epilepsy. Art therapy has helped me so much. It helps me to express myself to my therapist.

Through drawing and writing things down, it has helped me express things that I have carried inside me. I feel so much better when I can do this with my therapist.

Queensland

M
Adult | Major Cities, QLD



M is an Aboriginal person.

I am painting my story, I am a crow, a raven and when I look in the mirror, I disappear but I come back with the paint.

Queensland

L
Child | Major Cities, QLD



Story by L's parent

Art therapy has been incredibly beneficial in helping my child, 11-year-old diagnosed ASD Level 2 and ADHD Combined with Dyslexia, express emotions that are often hard for her to identify or communicate verbally.

Through the creative process, my child has started to gain a better understanding of her emotions and started to develop strategies for emotional regulation.

The sessions have also helped improve focus and social skills, which are areas of difficulty due to her neurodiversity.

Overall, Art Therapy has started to support my child in building confidence and providing a sense of achievement, while offering coping mechanisms that are helpful in day-to-day life.

We've found this style of therapy has been much more successful than talk therapy for her.



Participant Statements

South Australia

South Australia

‘Oak’
Adult | Major Cities, SA

As someone diagnosed with Autism in my early 20s, I rely on Level 3 support for daily living.

Art therapy has been pivotal in my emotional regulation, aiding in maintaining both professional and personal relationships. It allows me to manage stress while studying at TAFE SA by using art to express emotions, identify areas of improvement, and set goals within a supportive environment.

Art therapy truly transforms lives by offering a creative outlet for emotional and mental well-being.

Art Therapy for me has provided me with a space to express my thoughts and feelings in ways some may call unconventional, but as someone who at times struggles to articulate themselves and accurately explain what is happening internally, it has made a tremendous difference to my life.

South Australia

‘Jean’
Child | Major Cities, SA

Story by Jean and her mother

Jean has ASD which from an emotional perspective, results in her sometimes being inappropriate, has difficulty making friends and difficulty regulating her emotions. Jean also has [a rare] syndrome which results in global developmental delays, impeding her cognitive and physical development. She fatigues easily and has low muscle tone and hyper flexibility.

Art therapy provides Jean with a safe and calm space away from school and the possibility for a one-on-one conversation. This aligns with her medium-term goal of developing functional and social communication skills. In this space she can express herself freely, without the peer judgment or competition that she encounters at school.

T (Jean’s arts therapist) gives Jean steps to follow in the session which aligns with her medium-term goal of developing her cognitive ability to follow instructions in sequential order.

The activities T and Jean perform allow Jean to develop her fine and gross motor skills, through practicing cutting, sticking, drawing, painting, stirring, folding etc, which is in line with one of her physical goals.

Jean says:

Jean likes it when T comes over to our house.
T makes Jean feel good and happy.
T bakes rocky road with Jean.
T paints with Jean.
T asks Jean about her feelings.
Jean likes doing new things with T.

South Australia

K
Adult | Major Cities, SA

I was about 14 when I started going to art therapy. I had previously gone to a “traditional” therapist and found it difficult to communicate and the process felt silly. I was experiencing depression and anxiety and found the suggestions of deep breathing to be unhelpful.

My current art therapist was suggested because I often used art as a regulating tool. It was the first time I felt like someone understood how I felt and what I said. I was surprised by how I was able to communicate freely and how using art as a tool helped me to stay grounded during my sessions.

I started seeing my art therapist more seriously again when I was considering getting an autism diagnosis in 2023. I was hesitant and didn’t know where to go or what to do. I was supported throughout the entire process but when I found out I was autistic, I struggled with my new identity and what it meant to be autistic. I often felt as I wasn’t Autistic enough and had some negative interactions when I started telling others about my disability.

Art therapy has helped me learn how to advocate for myself, communicate my thoughts and feelings, and identify my goals for the future.

South Australia

T
Adult | Major Cities, SA

I have a [rare] Syndrome,an acquired brain injury and epilepsy. I was born with a craniofacial condition which led to hydrocephalus. From 3 years [old] for 20 years, I was in and out of hospital having 20 or so major and minor neurosurgeries. I developed an acquired brain injury.

I was bullied at school and the traumas of it all have affected me. Outwardly I was quiet and stoical but internally hadn't processed it all, including the anxieties that have often held me back. I went to counsellors and psychologists but talk-based therapy is useless when you can't think of an answer. But when I moved to weekly art therapy sessions the change has been fantastic.

My therapist encourages me to paint and then gently asks me to think about what each thing might mean. I've been able to work through a lot of my buried issues and come out better able to deal especially with my work and with leaving home and living independently. Talk therapy useless, art therapy my godsend!

It has built my confidence and, in that way, enabled me to leave home and live independently.

My workplace goal has been to develop my skills so that I can rise above the basic work I do in one office. I now work (four days a week for four hours) over three work sites and also once a fortnight work in the Disability Studies Department at [a] University.

Things like anxiety and an inability to explain myself to managers held me back and going to counsellors and psychologists to talk things through never worked. My weekly art therapy sessions have helped me to understand more about myself and to learn to explain myself. It's a slow process but I and my family can see how much it's helped me.



Participant Statements

Tasmania

Tasmania

S
Child | TAS

Story by S’s mother

This is about how art therapy has helped my son out. He has autism and ADHD he is 7.

Art therapy has helped him out so much. S has a lot of trouble of saying about his feelings but through art therapy he can show how he feels through art, and he has been learning about boundaries as well this has helped our family out so much.

I have a disability, so I have trouble understanding things, but art therapy is so amazing for my son we are so thankful for it.

Tasmania

‘Sonic’
Child | TAS

Story by Sonic’s mother

My son is autistic and has anxiety. Art therapy has helped him regulate his emotions and communicate his feelings in a way that is therapeutic and natural to him.

This expressive therapy enables him to portray how he is feeling without having to use words. He often goes mute when dysregulated, therefore narrative therapy is not effective; nor is a therapy which involves a direct approach in that he is spoken to/at.

Allowing him space to express himself via a different medium is beneficial to him as it provides a safe space to be his true authentic self and to express himself without judgement.

Having a severe stutter also limits his ability to effectively communicate his feelings, therefore this form of therapy has helped him gain confidence and self-esteem.

As a single parent, having a therapy that helps a child self-regulate effectively has been invaluable. This type of therapy helps children be seen and heard in ways that direct therapies cannot extract.

Tasmania

P
Child | Major Cities, TAS

Story by P’s mother

My daughter P, 13 has been participating in Art Therapy sessions with N [arts therapist]for approximately 12 months. P is an Autistic ADHDer with Generalised Anxiety Disorder.

P is a very creative young person, so Art Therapy matches her interests perfectly in helping her express and explore her thoughts and feelings. Emotional regulation and processing those emotions in a healthy way is an ongoing challenge for her.

Over the months she has worked with N, P has used her art, particularly clay and tactile materials, for emotional regulation and grounding. During these activities I am told she is also more relaxed and will talk more readily. She thoroughly enjoys her sessions with N and often emerges from her sessions with little creations she has made for her family members.

Tasmania

NL
Child | Major Cities, TAS



Story by NL’s mother

Story by NL’s mother. NL has a diagnosis of ASD level 2, ADHD, ODD. When NL first started I was skeptical, all he did was play with toys or do art.

During the period NL has worked with N [his arts therapist] we have seen improvement in the way he interacts with his family and peers, emotional regulation and understanding.

He is beginning to understand his emotions and others around him.

He is learning the difference between fact vs fiction.

We have learnt that sometimes NL doesn’t seem to understand an emotion but through his art he shows that he does somewhat understand.

He had never drawn a person until he started with N.

The image I have attached is the first time NL drew a person.

[Please note: the original image has name of mother, child and arts therapist written beneath each figure and it is mounted and presented in a frame – it has been edited for privacy.]

The story to the image:

We spent years trying to get help for NL to be told he was normal and would grow out of it. That week NL had been diagnosed with ASD level 2. While NL was drawing, I was filling in N about his diagnosis. During this I was upset, confused and relieved. N showed compassion and empathy.

At the end of this discussion NL had presented this picture. Not only was it the first person he had ever drawn but he had in fact drawn 3 specific people.



Participant Statements

Victoria

Victoria

X Young Adult | Major Cities, VIC

I am a young Kamilaroi woman with [psychosocial disabilities]
I am supported by the NDIS and my art therapist.

Art therapy has helped me immensely to build a positive connection to myself and see that I am capable of being productive and making positive impact and produce beautiful pieces that help me process trauma or simply make me feel better and view myself in a nicer way.

Art therapy has helped me to build an essential connection to land and culture as a young Aboriginal woman by storytelling through dot work and weaving.

Art therapy has helped me build a mind-body connection by using bilateral movements and breathing techniques and other practices found in art therapy that build my capacity to feel safe in my body and ability to manage panic attacks from PTSD or manage extreme stress from still experiencing unfortunate life circumstances without use of medication or clinical treatment.

I began art therapy in rehab and have continued since leaving, which has helped my continuing transition back into community immensely. Art therapy has helped me build my connection to community and feel involved in community by attending art galleries and having my work shown in local exhibitions and working to host my own exhibition.

Art is one of my personal hobbies, so I naturally feel more relaxed and ability to talk more freely and unmask while creating using materials and mediums and using my hands/body that I have not been able to experience after experimenting with years' worth of other conventional therapies.

Art therapy gives me access to an environment that isn't otherwise accessible and cannot be recreated, to experiment with expensive art materials and help me build skills for my future career in art, while also being a calming safe space with support available. Because of my OCD I cannot yet experiment the same way with art supplies in my own home/space because of consequences of mess and limited supply of / access to materials.

Victoria

'Viper' Child | Major Cities, VIC



Art therapy helps me build my sensory profile and manage my sensory preferences.

Art therapy has helped me reach my goals of creating more artwork that I enjoy, overcome burnout, to explore trauma I have never before been able to open up with anybody else or even go through myself, to unmask and finally feel myself for a moment, to find practices that actually work for me to calm me down and help me out of severe panic attacks or dissociative episodes, to be able to trust others, to be more independent, to be a part of my community, to have a connection to land and culture, to feel worthy and valuable, to build career skills.

Art therapy is invaluable to me, and I have never seen as much progress and had so much capacity in my life. I really fear for how I will manage if art therapy is taken away from me.

Story shared by Viper with consent of Viper's parent.

I love adventure and mystery. I love craft. I am in grade 6.
I have a brother and a small dog.

Before art therapy, it was hard to understand and feel regulated with my brother. Now, I know what to do, when to do it and where.

Before arts therapy it was really hard because I didn't have a place to understand how to communicate and show how I feel. After arts therapy I know what to do and have a better opportunity in life because it helps me regulate. I feel much better because I have support to focus whilst doing something fun.

Before arts therapy, it was hard to be confident, especially when meeting with new people and make friends. Now I know I can ask for help and have people who understand and can help me.

I have learnt to try new things.

My picture is about "trying one thing is hard at first, but if you have someone that can help you who understands art and how you feel, it is easier."

Victoria

H
Child | Major Cities, VIC

Story by H’s parent

Art therapy has been a transformative support for my 6-year-old daughter, H, who struggles with severe anxiety, emotional regulation, and relationship building.

Through the creative process, H has found a safe space to express her feelings, manage overwhelming emotions, and develop coping strategies.

Art therapy has become an essential part of her routine, helping her to communicate more effectively and build confidence in her social interactions.

Removing art therapy from the NDIS would be detrimental to H’s progress. It provides a unique, non-verbal outlet that traditional therapies often cannot match, tailored to her individual needs.

Without this support, H would lose a crucial tool in her development, potentially leading to setbacks in her emotional and social growth. Art therapy is not just a creative activity for H, it is a lifeline that empowers her to navigate her world with greater resilience and hope.

Victoria

A
Child | Major Cities, VIC

Story by A’s parent

When A began his kinder program in 2023, we faced significant challenges with his attendance. He struggled with social interactions, was speech delayed, and found it difficult to express or manage his emotions. He often experienced meltdowns becoming upset for hours, which required us to pick him up early from kinder.

Since starting art therapy sessions, we’ve seen a remarkable change. Art therapy has become something A truly looks forward to and it has played a crucial role in his willingness to attend kinder. A has learned to express his emotions through art, giving him a valuable outlet to communicate his feelings which has been incredibly empowering for him.

The art therapy sessions have contributed to his growth, and he is blossoming into a much happier child. Over the past

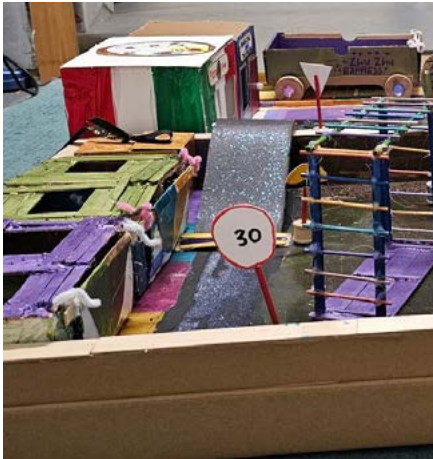
year, we’ve noticed a dramatic decrease in incidents where he refuses to attend kinder, which is a huge improvement.

I am amazed by the strong bond he has developed with his art therapist. This support has extended beyond A to our entire family. The art therapist has provided us with helpful strategies to build his coping mechanisms and art therapy has given him a voice, especially during times when he finds it difficult to express himself verbally. Art has proven to be an incredibly effective therapy for him, enabling him to convey his feelings in a meaningful way.

The positive impact that the art therapist has had on A’s development has been significant, and we would love to see this therapeutic relationship continue. We are excited to keep working with our art therapist to further support A’s growth. I hope that more children like A continue to receive the support they need at such a formative age.

Victoria

M
Child | Inner Regional, VIC



Story by M’s parent

M began seeing his art therapist F when he was still on early childhood funding and has since progressed to the NDIS model. M has been seeing F on average fortnightly for approx. four years.

When we first engaged F, M was a very frustrated, virtually non-verbal child who did not understand his own emotions and motivations, much less those of anyone else around him. Whilst he has always been a bright little boy, this lack of awareness was causing issues that spilt over into all aspects of his life and his meltdowns were severe and draining to both himself, and those around him.

Through art therapy, F was able to use M’s interests to create amazing paintings, various creations, home-made obstacle courses, drawings, woodwork and a variety of other mediums to help M understand emotions and how to interact with other people.



An example of this is F's using of M's obsession around flags of the world to create emotion flag canvas bunting and also painted flags on sticks, colour coding of emotions (eg red = anger; pink = love) and drawing faces showing different feelings using same. F would use her knowledge and expertise to skilfully weave through the conversation how we react in certain situations and the part emotions can play in our decisions, for good or for bad. M also completed an emotion train with F, creating emojis on the carriages and thereby encompassing yet another of his great loves.

M also sees a speech therapist and an OT, and I can confidently say that while he has benefited greatly from both these services, the real groundwork and progress has really been largely due to F and her incredible ability to understand, empathise and clearly love being with her clients. M would be absolutely devastated if he lost F at this stage and as a family this would be a blow to us that would be very significant.

M has an incredible amount of wonderful projects he has completed with F and every single one tells a story and holds a lesson. F has been absolutely crucial to M's self-awareness, self-improvement, self-control, understanding, regulation and more, not to mention an 100% increase in fine motor skill ability.

M needs F.

Story by M's father.

F is an art therapist who has been working for some time with my son M. M has autism and has been greatly helped by F's therapy. One of the things I've noticed with F's therapy is that she works on his linear thinking which works on getting him to think things through from start to finish instead of all jumbled up.

M has become less overwhelmed by activities because he is able to see the structure behind it and can apply it to other activities. He still has a way to go, but it really is making a noticeable difference.

F has a deep understanding of disabilities [and] is able to use her training to get good results. She is very enthusiastic, and M always looks forward to working with her. M is able to work toward and fulfill his goals on his plan and F is a massive part of his achievements.

Victoria

JS

Child | Major Cities, Victoria

Story by JS's grandmother/carer

My grandson, JS, lives with autism, which significantly impacts his communication, emotional regulation, and sensory processing. Traditional therapies have not worked for him, but art psychotherapy has been transformative.

Through this therapy, JS has found a safe, non-verbal way to express his emotions, build resilience, and develop practical strategies for managing daily challenges.

Art psychotherapy has directly helped JS achieve his NDIS goals by improving his functional capacity and participation in school and community life.

I urge the NDIS to recognise art psychotherapy as an essential, evidence-based therapy and ensure it remains part of JS's plan.

Victoria

E

Child | Major Cities, Victoria

Story by E's father D

E has ASD and ADHD. Arts therapy has helped my son improve his ability to express himself and communicate his wants and needs. For example, he has progressed from using one- or two-word responses to engaging in longer, more detailed conversations.

It has also increased his confidence in expressing emotions, which has strengthened his relationships with family members. Additionally, art therapy has improved his ability to focus and sit through tasks, which has been beneficial both at home and at school.

We also have the utmost appreciation for our therapist, B. Her warm, cheerful, and welcoming nature, combined with her professionalism and expertise as an art therapist, creates an environment where E feels comfortable and truly enjoys his sessions.

Below is a quote from him using his own words:

"Art therapy keeps me calm and I can be myself. I also love B."

Victoria

A
Child | Major Cities, VIC

Story by A's parent

I am writing to share the profound positive impact art therapy has had on my 12-year-old daughter, A, who has been navigating several challenges, including anxiety, ADHD, autism, suicidal ideation, and social exclusion.

A's journey has not been easy, but over the past several months, her participation in art therapy has significantly helped her process and manage her emotions, develop coping skills, and build greater self-awareness. Art therapy has provided A with a safe space to express herself in ways words often fail to capture, offering a much-needed outlet for her complex feelings.

One of the most remarkable changes I've observed is in A's ability to express and regulate her emotions. Before starting art therapy, she struggled to articulate her feelings, often becoming overwhelmed by the intensity of her emotions. Through her art, A has found a way to visualize and process these emotions, which has made it easier for her to communicate with us and her support team. This non-verbal form of expression has been a lifeline, especially when she experiences moments of anxiety or frustration.

Art therapy has also helped A improve her ability to manage anxiety and hyperactivity, both of which are closely tied to her ADHD. The structured yet flexible nature of the art sessions allows her to focus her attention in a way that feels natural and engaging. This has led to greater calmness and an improved ability to focus on tasks outside of therapy. Her artwork often mirrors her progress, with early works displaying frustration and confusion, while later pieces reveal a newfound sense of peace and resilience.

Another significant area of growth is in A's social interactions. Due to her autism and previous experiences of social exclusion, A found it difficult to connect with peers. Through art therapy, she has had opportunities to engage in collaborative projects, providing her with a structured environment to practice social skills and make connections with others. While A still finds social situations challenging at times, she has developed increased confidence and a sense of belonging, thanks to these creative interactions.

Perhaps most importantly, art therapy has been instrumental in alleviating the suicidal ideation A previously struggled with. The therapeutic process has not only helped her build resilience but also fostered a sense of hope. By creating art, A has found a way to express the darkness she sometimes feels, transforming it into something tangible that she can confront and process. This, in turn, has played a critical role in reducing the intensity of her suicidal thoughts and fostering a more positive outlook on her future.

A's growth and progress through art therapy have been nothing short of transformative. It has provided her with the tools to better understand herself, manage her emotions, and connect with others in meaningful ways. I am incredibly grateful for the dedicated art therapist who has worked with A and supported her through this journey.

Victoria

N
Parent of child participant |
Major Cities, VIC

A lot of therapies do not work for autistic children. I've had my daughter pull me by my arms out of a counselling session because there was too much talking. We've tried lots of different people - psychologists, equine therapists, counsellors - but it was once we started art therapy that we saw a difference.

With the focus on something else (the art), my daughter gradually felt comfortable talking and began making noticeable progress for the first time. Her relationship with [her arts therapist] L has grown into one of trust and couldn't be replaced by a session in a group setting (which isn't a setting of emotional safety.)"

Victoria

S
Parent of child participants |
Major Cities, VIC

As a parent I was always nervous about stating Art Therapy as a support because NDIS can be picky about therapies.

Many children cannot manage traditional ‘talk’ therapies or any work in these areas that seems to tell them what do. Autistic children with a PDA/ODD profile need ‘out of the box’ therapy styles to enable them to engage with and benefit from them.

Art Therapy has been remarkable in its effectiveness with my PDA children. Their natural love of materials along with the sensory benefit of art, have helped them to regulate enough in a therapeutic environment to be able to absorb the ‘lessons’ therapies also offer.

Two of my three PDA kids have really struggled to manage being [in] traditional therapy environments as their fight/flight sets in with talk and perceived demands. These kids can’t access traditional therapies as they need other ways to reach them. We have found that Art Therapy covers both speech and psychology, as we need them too, so we are now billing less to the NDIS.

Art Therapy wasn’t available to my older child. She couldn’t manage traditional therapies, and we are seeing the detrimental effects of that. The govt ends up paying more for people who haven’t been able to access suitable therapies.

Victoria

HA
Parent of child participants |
Major Cities, VIC

My daughters see an Art Therapist, and I can easily say it is by far the most effective therapy that either of them has.

Both girls struggle to regulate their emotions and understand the social world around them. Art therapy has given them a platform to explore their feelings and help to understand the feelings of others around them in a fun and creative space that they are willing to partake in.

My eldest daughter especially has struggled in the past to engage with speech therapists, psychologists and psychiatrists and has been unwilling to speak about her feelings and struggled to get anything out of these sessions.

Victoria

PB
Parent of child participant |
Major Cities, VIC

However, in art therapy she is willing to discuss her feelings and actually work through some of the social issues she has been dealing with at school, because it is presented to her in a way this is engaging and physical.

If art therapy is taken away from us, it will have a significantly negative impact on the development of my children and their long-term goals.

[My daughter is diagnosed with] Autism, ADHD, PDA profile, MDD [and] Anxiety.

I’m confused. What Autistic people and their families were put at the centre of this decision? We’re now left with therapy interventions for our children that, at best, offer them low to moderate success. Therapy that depends on eye contact as confirmation that she is listening, and that relies on words to communicate feelings and thoughts. Been there, done that - It doesn’t work. My daughter became over loaded and quiet. Sometimes she tried desperately to comply and made herself stay but always became distressed. It was excruciating and uncomfortable. Often, I could not get her to return.

This scenario is not unique to my daughter. So disappointing - Another decision, demonstrating a general ignorance of autism and creating another barrier for autistic people.

On advice from my daughter’s psychiatrist, I sought out a Creative Arts therapist, and we have not looked back. It has increased her willingness to engage, and it doesn’t rely primarily on words to communicate feelings and thoughts. Art therapy for her, has very little to do with creating a piece of artwork. It is about being heard on a level of communication that has the capacity to reach her neuro divergent brain. My daughter, and the disability community she belongs to need to continue to access this therapy as they currently are.

Whilst I welcome reviews into the scheme and its spending in some areas, please, please, do not make the changes proposed that would limit access to this therapy. There is no alternative for our children.

Victoria

S
Parent of child participants |
Major Cities, VIC

The creative (Art Therapy individual 1:1) appointments been transformative for our family, offering a space where self-expression thrives in ways traditional therapies haven't been able to achieve.

It has not only enhanced emotional resilience but also fostered meaningful connections, which have brought lasting positive changes to our lives.

Victoria

Z
Child | Major Cities, VIC

Story shared by Z with consent of Z's parent

I am 14 years old and have gone to Art Therapy since 2021, every single fortnight on Tuesdays. Art Therapy has helped me so much by using the in-person (craft/materials) and being hands on. Making this a (new) rule is not fair. The next generations will be mine. Why are we doing this?

Art therapy is one of the best things that have happened to me and so many others. Please don't do this. You may think that art therapy and music therapy is nothing but it's not. Having somewhere where I can be myself and using art (craft/materials) to put my emotions on the paper. There is not any good reason for this. You are putting everyone in danger. Please take this [into] consideration.

Victoria

D
Child | Major Cities, VIC

Story by D's parent

I am a parent of D, a 12-year-old with Level 2 Autism, Generalised anxiety disorder and ADHD.

D has been attending art therapy sessions with S [arts therapist] for the last 2 years, and we have witnessed firsthand the impact of art therapy on his emotional well-being and development.

Victoria

L
Adult | Regional VIC



“Belonging”

S's sessions have been a stable and reliable space, providing D with a safe and expressive outlet to process his emotions and be heard without judgement.

Through comic strips and doodles he can give form to emotions that he struggles to verbalise.

These sessions have helped D develop a growth mindset, particularly through his work with clay. By learning to embrace mistakes and imperfections, he is building resilience and confidence that extends beyond the therapy room.

One of the most remarkable aspects of D's progress has been his ability to imagine, create, make, break, remake, and even find workarounds when things don't go to plan. For an anxious autistic child, this level of flexibility and adaptability does not come naturally. It is a testament to the effectiveness of art therapy and S's expertise. My son feels safer in this world and has one more adult to hold his hand in the dark.

I have psychosocial disability of schizo-affective disorder with depression and anxiety. I experience extreme highs and lows, as I live with inner turmoil which often paralyses and prevents me from taking steps to function well. Some days I hardly get out of bed or leave the house. I'm surviving but not thriving.

My headspace is like a crowded room of many people, where there's no room to walk around. Art Therapy provides a flow around me to find a way through.

When I express my emotions and experiences through art making, my overwhelm goes away and I feel calm and relaxed. My therapist reminds me of that small light inside me that keeps me alive in dark times.

If Art Therapy is taken off the NDIS therapeutic support list, I will no longer be able to breathe or grow. It will increase my isolation and anxiety even more.

Victoria

C
Adult | Inner Regional, VIC



Initially my psycho-social disability of BPD, depression and social anxiety were unmanageable and stopped me from leaving home. My self-esteem was low, and I constantly needed a support worker with me. From 2023 onwards, I am now able to independently interact in the community and trust my judgement and decision making.

From 2019-2025 Art therapy has helped me with many different areas in my life:

- Communicating my needs more confidently
- Regulating my body and emotions
- Exploring healthy and safe relationships
- Investigating study and work options
- Managing personal care
- Support to move into my new home in 2024

Art therapy was like opening a can of worms, layers starting to open, finding the puzzle pieces.

When I'm in the creative flow of making art, exploring and expressing myself, I am more able to self-reflect and figure out my life.

Victoria

C
Adult | Major Cities, VIC

Why Art Therapy works for me:

It is a safe accessible and non-confronting way of exploring and expressing issues and emotions that impact on my ability to function and build my skills.

Art therapy is a visual and sensory experience that helps me to understand myself and my challenges that I have in coping with and engaging in life.

Art therapy has reduced my anxiety, increased my confidence and helped me with emotional regulation also improved my ability to focus on activities.

This has led me to be able to engage in activities in the community, make friends, study at tertiary level and achieve goals. Take better care of myself and manage difficult emotions.

Victoria

P
Adult | Major Cities, VIC



Overall, art therapy sessions have improved my functional capacity and improved the quality of my life.

I need art therapy to continue to grow and build my capacity to engage in life and manage the responsibilities and continue to regulate my emotions so I can function to the best of my ability and achieve my NDIS goals.

Art therapy connects me to myself in a way that allows me to connect to other people and take part in life.

Story by P's mother, images by P

[P is diagnosed with] Acquired Brain Injury (ABI) inclusive of physical and neurological impairments (Mobility, Cognitive functioning, Emotional Regulation, Impaired Verbal Communication skills, Ataxia/Intention tremors) and Anxiety Disorder.

P had a serious accident on a trail bike at the age of 8. His life and our life was forever impacted. He was diagnosed with significant brain injury, described as non-reversible physical and neurological impairments. He has experienced ataxia and intention tremors at times, the effects of having also experienced a stroke. P also experiences anxiety. His ability to formulate and participate in meaningful, mutually satisfying relationships was forever changed. His ability to communicate emotions and express his thoughts verbally has been extremely difficult for him. He is unable to have friends outside of the family and therefore relies on his carers/support workers.

Art therapy in a one-to-one therapeutic relationship, has significantly and importantly changed much in P's life. With the commitment of his art therapist, over time, P is better able to share his feelings and emotions via non-verbal forms of communication.

He finds calm and regulation in his trust of the creative and therapeutic process, including new and helpful regulative strategies. Art Therapy has allowed P a 'voice' to share, and this is so restorative in his day-to-day life.



P CANNOT participate in group settings, this experience only significantly elevates his performance anxiety, and inability to tolerate others who are disruptive or do not behave appropriately according to P's frame of mind. He is easily distressed and frustrated by others who treat him differently, particularly females. P's neuropsychologist has also noted and confirms that his engagement in therapeutic arts practice has had direct positive impact on his motor neuron skills, including now being able to colour within lines and patterns.

He has demonstrated improved problems solving skills. Art Therapy has opened pathways to verbal and non-verbal communication and therefore improved relational experiencing.

He enjoys playful, creative storytelling, superheroes, music, rhythm and breathing strategies and creating collaboratively alongside his art therapist.

He has greatly improved in his ability to give representations of his thoughts and creative concepts. P can now write slowly, but quite well. He can now hold and manipulate art making tools and he can identify and moderate moods much better. P relaxes and shares more openly.

Victoria

V
Adult | Major Cities, VIC

[After experiencing a violent trauma] I started hallucinating and hearing voices. I was admitted to hospital and was eventually diagnosed with Schizophrenia and Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. My life was severely impacted by Trauma!

I continue to experience complications in my life, navigating medications, self-perception, identity beyond 'clinical labels', and maintaining meaningful connections and achieving aspirations whilst combating difficulty with irregularities in my perceptions, emotional regulation and self-worth. I am studying again and so my Art Therapist is also a wonderful mentor and tutor.

Arts therapy has helped me through the pain of the past and find new ways to experience myself through artmaking, visual narratives and dialogue, helping me to find new solutions to self-regulate my emotional states and stay resilient, positive and true to myself.

Victoria

W
Adult | Major Cities, VIC

Art Therapy is restorative. I am a being of restoration, renewal and resolve! My engagement in Art therapy has helped me to find hope in the here and now and move forward with my goals for the future. Arts therapy has also helped me to express myself non-verbally without rehashing the past and has helped me to heal. We use many creative visual arts modalities as well as drums and rhythm, music and dance, breathing strategies and sound making.

I have had a long and challenging past with my health and abilities on all fronts. Physical, cognitive, emotional, interpersonal, you name it. There have been so many occasions where I nearly haven't survived, through medical neglect or by my own hand, just wanting the pain and suffering to end.

By harnessing my passion for creation, turning something mundane and without purpose into something beautiful, provocative, expressive, I have been able to build on the skills that I need to support myself and create a life worth living. I can say with certainty that without the intervention of art therapy, creating a sense of safety, joy and creation with my body and brain, I would not be here today.

I have physical, and neurodevelopmental disabilities, along with long term mental health and chronic health conditions Autism (L2), Hypermobility Ehlers-Danlos Syndrome, PTSD, POTS and ADHD.

Developing the judgement free expression of my body, thoughts and emotions, I have been able to do my day-to-day activities in a safe way. eg. allowing myself to stim freely and create without the judgement of what others will think.

I have struggled all my life with self-harm as a way to seek sensation and manage sensory stimuli. Since engaging in art therapy, I have been able to grow my toolkit of skills to include effective options that I use regularly. I have not required medical attention for self-harm since engaging in art therapy.

Being able to express my emotions has been the biggest learning. Coming from a background where theory and evidence is king, valuing my emotions has been extremely hard and painful. Having the skills to create and hold myself in those hard and painful emotions with love and care, has given me tools to do that with others and let them into my world. This extends even to working with my medical professionals, allowing us to have more productive communication, and better outcomes.

Practicing expression in all forms in art therapy, especially group settings, has made it possible for me to engage with others. I am proud to say I have since made new friends, and we have bonded over the shared love of art, creation and expression.



Victoria

A Adult | Major Cities, VIC

[I have been diagnosed with] physical Impairments/disability, Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), Adjustment Disorder / Anxiety Disorder.

I have been attending art therapy for 2 years due to mental health illness caused from debilitating workplace injuries and trauma. I have had several operations in an effort to address injuries and chronic pain and am now unable to work. My life changed significantly.

I have found art therapy is the most beneficial way to express my feelings and emotions, especially the really big and difficult ones. It is not what I thought it would be. It is so much more! Sometimes, I find it extremely difficult to express myself verbally, and with the various art therapy techniques, it is able to give 'voice' to what I am trying to work through.

It gives me the confidence and necessary psychotherapeutic tools to assist me daily with any triggers or changes that I may experience in my daily living.

Art therapy has allowed me to be creative and artistic and certainly is beneficial with helping me relax and feel calmer. Creating art and exploring my experience through personal expression is my 'safe place' and also brings joy to my life and gives me a sense of accomplishment.

Healing trauma is an open process, it is a continuum and continuous journey of recovery and restoration. I am more courageous and hopeful due to my engagement in Art Therapy. Talk therapy with a psychologist did not engage me. I felt cornered and dumb. My Art Therapist has enabled me to express myself in my way. To discover myself beyond what I thought knew. Beyond pain!

‘Lez’
Adult | Major Cities, VIC

Story told by Lez’s father

As a parent of a daughter with Down syndrome, I have witnessed first-hand the transformative impact that art therapy has had on Lez’s life.

Art Therapy provides my daughter with more than just a creative outlet. It is a medium through which she can express herself, develop her fine motor skills, improve her focus, and build her confidence. Her regular sessions with her art therapist are not only enjoyable but also crucial for her overall development and mental well-being.

The benefits of art therapy for individuals with disabilities are well-documented. These activities foster social inclusion, emotional expression, and cognitive development. They also provide a sense of accomplishment and joy that can be difficult to achieve through other means.

For my daughter, the fortnightly art therapy sessions are a highlight of her routine. They give her a sense of purpose and an opportunity to connect with others in a way that is meaningful to her.

Removing this therapy would not only diminish her quality of life but also undermine the broader goal of the NDIS: to enable individuals with disabilities to lead fulfilling and inclusive lives.

These activities are not luxuries; they are essential components of a holistic approach to disability support.

I urge us to acknowledge the profound impact that art therapy has on the lives of individuals with disabilities & their families. These are vital programs to support people like my daughter to continue to thrive.

D
Adult | Major Cities, VIC

I was involved in a car accident when I was a child, and it changed my life forever.

D says: I get “tender loving care” from my art therapist. To think that I might not continue to have art therapy is flaming horrible. I especially like painting - when I paint I feel not bad at all, excellent. I am just about to have my third solo exhibition and have had several paintings in joint shows. Having exhibitions is rip-snorter and I’m proud as punch. The changes in my life if I didn’t have art therapy - well, how would you be? Flaming horrible. I think it’s a bit mean on the part of the NDIS.

How has arts therapy has helped me meet my goals?
Heaps! One of my NDIS goals is to improve my quality of life - art therapy increases my mood heaps more. Another goal is to have a steady routine - art therapy is an important part of my week - my oath!

D’s mother says: I support fully your concerns, and your efforts involved in bringing this very valuable therapy to the attention of the NDIA decision makers. I don’t think I can add any more to the case apart from reiterating the positive outcomes for D that art therapy has brought about over the years he has been participating, both in his confidence in achieving something positive when everything around him was a challenge and developing communication and social skills. Not to mention his absolute pride and feelings of importance & self-worth when he exhibited his work, displayed some...and actually sold some. It’s also been a valuable tool in helping him to communicate with extended family when he had difficulty verbalising his feelings.

Victoria

N
Adult | Major Cities, VIC



As a child sexual abuse victim with a neurodevelopmental disorder, I grew up with severely debilitating mental illness diagnoses that led to multiple inpatient admissions, suicide attempts, and physical health consequences. From my teen years I was always in therapy and group therapy, trialling every medication, supplement, and psychological intervention.

I studied day and night and achieved academic excellence in an attempt to turn my life around and create a ‘better future’ for myself. However, in my twenties I fell severely ill with multiple successive conditions that caused debilitating physical impairment, losing my ability to work, socialise, maintain relationships, study, and leave the house. The ‘better future’ that I had worked so hard for was taken from me, and I continue to suffer financially, emotionally, mentally, physically, socially, and relationally every single day.

Art therapy is the only therapy that allows me to express and process difficult past emotions whilst simultaneously enhancing my mental wellbeing in the present. Art therapy allows me to work through past traumatic experiences that cause depression, anxiety, psychosis and more, without having to talk about the terrible things that happened to me.

Regular weekly art therapy has helped me meet my goal of taking care of my mental health by providing anxiety relief, emotional resilience, improved and stabilised mood, increased stress tolerance, enhanced self-awareness, and decreased post-traumatic flashbacks. These psychosocial benefits are immediate during the session and ongoing with a cumulative effect.

Art therapy has also helped me to meet my goal of making new friendships as I attend group art therapy sessions and meet new people every 4-5 weeks. It has also helped me to meet the goal of getting out and about in community, as I walk through beautiful markets filled with people and their pets to get to my classes.

Art therapy also improves my ability to communicate with others, as after each session I have new words and expressions for my emotions and experiences that I didn’t have before.

This has led to a marked improvement in maintaining close relationships both in and out of the home.

Overall, my life has more meaning and far less daily suffering due to weekly art therapy sessions.

[Above is] an Art Therapy drawing describing my emotional state. Through the Art Therapy sessions, it unfolded that this was in fact how I felt as a child. Once I had this realisation in therapy, I was able to get some distance from the emotions & they no longer consumed me. My ability to function in society improved as a result of increased confidence and self-esteem.

Victoria

C
Adult | Inner Regional, VIC

I am 50 years old and since a teenager my life has been moulded by Anorexia Nervosa and Major Depression. In the last three years I have engaged in regular Art Therapy, enabled by NDIS.

It is during Art Therapy that my thoughts and feelings can be expressed most clearly.

While creating with my hands, I begin to find clarity of thought, enabling me to separate the illness from the true person I am. I can also begin to understand my past, accept the events that have occurred and begin to move forward.

Two of my goals for Art Therapy this year include exploring who I am right now, both in the physical body and emotionally, and how I would like to feel in the future.

Alone, my Art Therapy is not a cure for my illness, but combined with other therapies, it rewards me with an improved quality of life, and a future I look forward to.

Victoria

K
Adult | Major Cities, VIC

I suffer from chronic pain, trigeminal neuralgia, back and neck injuries from [a] MVA [motor vehicle accident]. Also, PTSD and depression, as well as old age, stroke and coronary artery disease.

Art therapy is a beneficial and effective way to manage my pain in a safe and relaxed time which I always anticipate with my therapist.

I hope to achieve confidence in myself by exploring with paint and paper. I am able to share and express myself with paint and paper and through this I hope to trust medical situations better, due to past trauma.

The time I spend with my therapist is very valuable to learn to relax and learn to better manage my pain and very beneficial for my overall wellbeing.

Victoria

‘Private Misery’
Older Adult | Major Cities, VIC

I have experienced years of trauma including childhood and sexual abuse, family violence and an abusive marriage. I also experienced intense trauma during my time in the military which led me to my first suicide attempt.

This was followed by further attempts, psychiatric hospitalisation on 3 occasions and many visits from the CAT Team. Talking therapy never helped. I was in a dark tunnel in which my traumas ruled supreme. Darkness, despair and absolute isolation and aloneness.

It was 4 years ago when I was introduced to art therapy, first in a group and then 1:1 that things began to change. It has been an awakening, and finally, acceptance that I’m not alone and that when words fail, my art expresses my despair and leads to the emergence of hope and light at the end of a grim tunnel.

Art therapy has changed my life and is important to continue to support me so I can engage in life in a more meaningful and connected way.

“Viva the power of the pen. Not to write but to draw.”

Victoria

A
Adult | Major Cities, VIC

I have been doing art therapy monthly for approx. 3 years. My art therapist is a member of ANZACATA and therefore a professional, registered, qualified practitioner. This is very important to me as it means I am totally, emotionally safe with her.

Among other things art therapy helps me with emotional regulation. I have a psychosocial disability which means that I experience both anxiety and psychosis. Art therapy can help to prevent these symptoms through hands on expression which can halt the progression of these symptoms.

In turn that helps me with my daily life including supporting me to attend my social and community activities and reaching my goals of community interaction and making friends. Thereby helping to remove barriers to my social inclusion.



J
Adult | Major Cities, VIC



My self-portraits done in art therapy

Speaking words are like moving boulders, but it’s actually marbles and a game you don’t know the rules to. That’s what talk therapy feels like.

In art therapy, I can see my insides. they become real, have properties that I can see, hold and change because it is real. My art therapist is my emotional translator. She sees and reads what I feel inside when I don’t know the words myself. All the while helping me unknot and unstick the feelings inside. I don’t need to pluck the string with a specific word, tone or cadence. I just feel my feelings and show them with colour and shape, so my art therapist reads what my subconscious shows her, not my words or tone. Art therapists are magicians that pull understanding and peace out of a baffled, overwhelmed and desperate top hat.

I am a late diagnosed asd lvl2 Cis F. Going through my life having no idea what was wrong about me gave me a lot of mental health issues including anxiety, depression PTSD, suicidality, self-harm and a plethora of shame. Never being understood and going through my whole life never being able to be “good enough” or do the things everyone else did. The last time I “worked” full time would have been my job as a student when I was in year 9. I have always struggled so so much, and no one ever understood because I don’t have the right words to explain it.

Art therapy has helped me understand accept, and work through my emotions. I have been able to understand someone else’s perspective and untangle various emotional reactions to certain situations. Learning the trigger for different feelings and recognising the context around them has helped me name some emotions and be able to better understand them when they occur again. Understand[ing] other people, identifying reasons for emotional responses and helping to develop strategies to calm myself.

‘John’
Adult | Major Cities, VIC



There are 168 hours in a week.
Do you know where you exist?
Do you know where you are safe?
I imagine you may take this for granted and never ask.
Would you like me to tell you where I exist?
Because you see, it seems you cannot see me.
And therefore, may not know that I exist.
Would you like me to tell you where I feel safe?
Because you it seems to me that you do not know and as a result may not care.
It seems our actions speak louder than our words.
Do you know how many hours there are in a week?
Let me help you,
There are 168 hours in a week.
For 3 hours a week I exist and feel safe,
Although I may struggle to get there and to get back.
For 3 hours a week I can share my life and not feel shame or fear.
Even though this may not mean a lot to you,
For me it is an extraordinary feeling.
For 3 hours a week I can see that I have existed for the other 165 hours.
Which is more than I ever have before.
For 3 hours a week I can express myself.
Even though this may not mean a lot to you,
For me it is a meaningful experience and a great relief.

Victoria

'Harley Quinn'
Adult | Inner Regional, VIC



Life Cycle of the Butterfly

[I have] Cerebral Palsy, trauma and anxiety. Initially I was told I should be hidden away due to my disability, but now it's my superpower.

From 2019-2021 I had twenty-six hours of individual Arts therapy sessions, using NDIS therapeutic supports and the understanding of an ANZACATA registered Art therapist.

Art and writing are the only ways I have to express myself and work through difficult emotions. I'm now more articulate and my communication skills of listening, speaking and writing have increased.

The metaphor of the life cycle of the butterfly I represented in 2021, illustrates these transformations [see image].

I have blossomed into a resilient person with a strong voice, making decisions for myself and family and have carved out a future path advocating for those with disabilities.

I don't need to hide away- I'm not scared. I can have a go and show people my work and who I am.

I am overwhelmed that my advocacy work has inspired my peers, who now want to start a disability internship, just like I have completed.

Victoria

P
Adult | Major Cities, Victoria

I have an ABI (Aquired Brain Injury) and physical disability with only use of one hand and limited shoulder movement.

After my car accident at 21 years old, I engaged in art because it was something that I could do so that I didn't get bored. In the beginning, I used to paint abstract art, but then I started drawing plants and scenery. I like painting Australian Icons, like Dame Edna Everage because they have a sense of humour and are always laughing.

If I didn't have art, my life would be boring, and I would feel like I didn't have anything to contribute to society. When I was younger it was easier to get to appropriate groups but over time those groups have ceased to exist and with my physical disability worsening with age it is not so easy to leave the house.

Art therapy has had a profound impact on me as a person with an acquired brain injury and a physical disability, with only limited use of my body. The benefits I've experienced have been truly life changing. My art therapist has a remarkable ability to help me express myself in ways I never thought possible. They intuitively understand the messages I am trying to convey through my artwork and personal expression, even when words fail me.

Because I rarely leave home, having my art therapist visit me has been invaluable. In the comfort of my home, I'm able to achieve far more than I would in a group setting for people with disabilities. Art therapy has given me a vital outlet to express my frustrations and emotions nonverbally, which has been a tremendous help to my mental health and behaviour. This, in turn, has greatly benefited my brother, who is my primary carer, as well as my support workers. The positive ripple effect of this therapy extends beyond me to those who support and care for me daily.

Unfortunately, during my last NDIS review, my funding for art therapy was removed. This decision was made by a planner who had never met me, despite art therapy being clearly outlined as one of my NDIS goals. I still struggle to understand why this happened, as it has left me feeling lost without the therapeutic outlet and emotional support it provided.

Art therapy was not just a goal—it was a cornerstone of my well-being. Losing this essential service has been a significant setback for my mental health, personal growth, and overall quality of life.

If there is any way to revisit this decision or find alternative support for art therapy, it would make an immeasurable difference in my life.

Victoria

S
Young Adult | Major Cities, VIC



My name is S, I receive NDIS funding for my Arts therapy, and wanted to share the impact the service and its funding has had on me.

As an introductory, I'm 20 years old diagnosed with ASD level 1, granted NDIS funding just a year ago in my....home. I love sports, animals, being around my friends, and especially, art. My autism is who i am, but it comes with its struggles, like loud noises or bright lights overwhelming me greatly, the anxiety that formed surrounding my autism, and the trauma that came with it. These have had a significant impact on my life and caused a lot of hurt and [I] am now learning to cope with them.

Arts therapy has helped alleviate the symptoms of all of them.

I set my NDIS goals to be focused around stress management, tackling self-worth issues, and my personal goals, such as finding stability and peace, whilst expanding my toolbox of coping strategies.

With my art therapists help, I have found some of my favourite ways for combatting big emotions such as sensory overwhelm, not feeling good enough, stress, and aided me to feel a sense of stability and peace i never knew i could reach. I feel more at peace with my trauma and like I can cope with it when it comes up. I didn't know this was possible nor knew this was how I was supposed to feel, and I am so incredibly grateful & warm thinking about it.

An aspect we're currently working on is an issue that I didn't see arising, which was my emotional safety. This is incredibly dear to me, as working on safety above all due to her keen eye has allowed for a much more thorough assisting with my mental health, and I can't explain how thankful I am to have art therapy step me through ways I can feel safer in an unsafe home.

My art therapists help has truly made the biggest change on my mental health, through a method that works so incredibly well for me. I'm so fortunate to have a therapy like this free to me through NDIS, and so joyed I can express myself through art and alleviate negative feelings this way. It truly speaks to me and I hope I can continue to experience this one-of-a-kind therapy.

The image [above] are reminders that my art therapist has made for me or with me, during our sessions. They sit on my desk as a reminder to breathe, settle my overthinking thoughts, and find mental stability. I absolutely adore what we created with these circles, and made some of my own.

Thank you for reading, please consider giving NDIS recipients the chance to experience art therapy in the future.

Victoria

L
Young Adult | Major Cities, VIC

Art therapy has improved my life dramatically compared to any other form of therapy. I have gone through traditional talk therapy, psychology, counselling. I have not had success with anything other than art therapy. As someone with autism, anxiety, and other mental health issues, I find therapy very confronting and difficult. Art therapy has allowed me to explore and share my experiences and feelings without that conflict.

For many autistic people including myself, we have trouble speaking to others, we have other ways of expressing ourselves, and art therapy is very helpful at bringing out our inner problems to the therapist and getting help. It has helped me go out and socialise, it has improved my outlook on life, helped me understand and improve myself and none of it would have been possible without it.

Victoria

I
Young Adult | Major Cities, VIC

I went through all sorts of therapy as a kid and because of my autism, I had a very hard time with them all for different reasons. Some therapies were traumatic because it was trying to mold my behaviours to fit in, which feels incredibly invalidating and insulting. Whereas other ones felt very intimidating because I didn't feel comfortable expressing myself due to always being misunderstood and not knowing how or why I should tell people what I'm going through. It really just didn't help me. I gave a last chance to art therapy, and it actually was the only thing to work with me.

Being able to draw my feelings through a guided experience with my therapist led me to not need to use words to portray my feelings. I didn't need to be very social I could focus on my drawing and still participate in a healing process of understanding myself. Because once I look back at the drawing, I made I can see a physical image of something I didn't have the words to explain. And it made everything seem so much more simple. It helped me socialise and work through my anxieties at the time that I don't feel comfortable talking to people about.



L
Parent of participants | Major Cities, VIC

My twins were diagnosed prior to the NDIS making it difficult to navigate and accommodate financially, until they were approved for the plan in the first stages in its development. At the time we were seeing and funding a speech therapist, psychologist, paediatrician, behaviouralist and attending 'social and life skills' style programs and many other 'interventions', as advised by their care team of professionals.

My sons found this period (over several years) incredibly difficult and often asked why they were being 'trained' to change themselves to be like others, and attend exhausting and often ableist appointments, when the bullies who preyed on them, and the teachers, professionals and adults who wanted them to 'fit in' could continue as they were, without change or understanding. This resulted in shame, self-consciousness and heightened avoidance, where I would

often have to cobble together what happened in the sessions for them to depart curled up, become situationally non-speaking or in a 'freeze' response as a protective measure. This created a great sense of distress for us and rarely felt helpful or safe.

There were a few moments of clarity and good connections made along the way, with well-meaning therapists using top-down talk therapies, however this was inconsistent and often deficit based or corrective, which only created more distress and helplessness.

As a mother it has been difficult to navigate our needs & put faith in someone or services to have a positive impact, feel supportive, offer hope, purpose, growth and positive change.

After much research, I discovered Art Therapy, and everything about it felt more nurturing, client centred, hopeful, safely held, heard, seen and authentically valued, without judgement and using creative modalities with a therapeutic result. It sounded so wonderful that I began my own pursuit to become an art therapist so I could help others in the hope they may have a better experience then we had to date. I now hold a Master's in Art Therapy and after much experience in the field have my own private practice so that I can provide my clients with the optimum care they require and deserve.

I found a qualified neurodivergent and neuro-affirming Art Therapist to work with my sons and that is when all the positive change began for our family. Their therapist built a rapport based upon their own lived experience and was able to navigate the sessions using their art of choice, storytelling and animations. This is still having an incredibly positive impact of their mental health and wellbeing as well as their mobility and independence.

As my family are all neurodivergent (myself late dx included) and creative beings, this pathway and modality has been perfect in balancing and supporting our mental and physical health and wellbeing as well as improving self-expression, awareness and confidence. The bottom-up approach works well when words are absolutely not enough and meets our sensory needs as well. I too use my own neurodivergent lived experience to foster a positive relationship with my clients who rely on and flourish from the benefits of Art Therapy.

Never will I allow a client to remain in my presence if this doesn't feel right for them.

Expecting participants to be able to attend group art-based activities as opposed to individual creative therapies, only offers the same difficult circumstances they already experience at school, home, workplaces, team sports or group activities they are already struggling with and often avoiding. Art, music and creative therapies encapsulate many evidence-based frameworks along with the use of the Expressive Therapies Continuum to cater perfectly to neurodivergent individuals.

Autism and other disabilities funded by the NDIS are conditions across the life span of the individual. 'Choice and Control' are the hallmarks of the NDIS and I frequently hear stories about how Art Therapy has changed the life and experience for many participants. Taking any choice and control away from a service that improves efficacy, flexibility, hope, purpose and self-actualisation may only add upon the already heavy load these individuals are carrying and result in dire consequences and strain an already struggling allied health system.



Participant Statements

Western Australia

Western Australia

A
Adult | Major Cities, WA

After my fall onto concrete 14 years ago, I was diagnosed with post-concussion syndrome with possible TBI (mild), anxiety and depression with suicidal ideation.

Then diagnosed with PTSD, chronic depression and anxiety unresolved with medication.

This is my story. After many years of brain confusion, lack of medical assistance or understanding from treating professionals I found a great clinical psychologist.

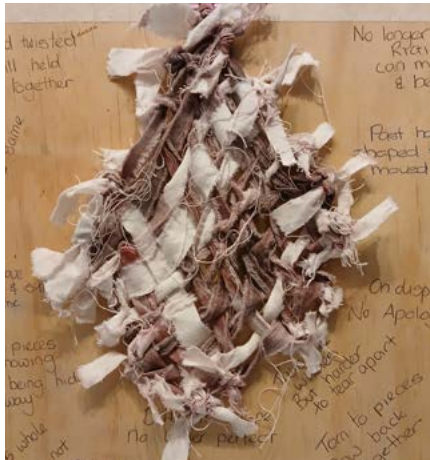
It wasn't until I attended [mental health service] for art therapy that inroads were made into my PTSD.

Art therapy has literally saved my life. Only through doing mark making, and self-expression (non-verbal) did my issues emerge. Through colours or stitch I discovered a different communication style to that which the world expects. No doctor or psychologist understood me as my ANZACATA therapists did.



Western Australia

C
Adult | Outer Regional, WA



I'm an older female living in rural WA, I have suffered from severe depression and anxiety my whole adult life and feel that standard medical practices have failed me. Just being medicated is not a solution. Dealing with physiologists or psychiatrists that even after suicide attempts failed to help me.

I was left on my own to cope with mental disabilities and struggled to find value in my life and left me with low self-esteem, and episodes of self-harm.

[It] has been a long hard battle to find services and support that helps me cope with mental issues.

Art therapy has helped me feel heard and validated as a person. I have learnt grounding exercises ie like breathing and tapping techniques that help me through everyday life when I'm feeling triggered and extremely anxious.

It has increased my self-awareness, my self-esteem and my self-worth.

By being able to release my emotions, pain and traumas in non-verbal expression has given me my life back.

I feel I can talk to people without crying, without feeling ashamed or worthless. I have gained knowledge of harmful and negative traits in others that severely affected my mental health.

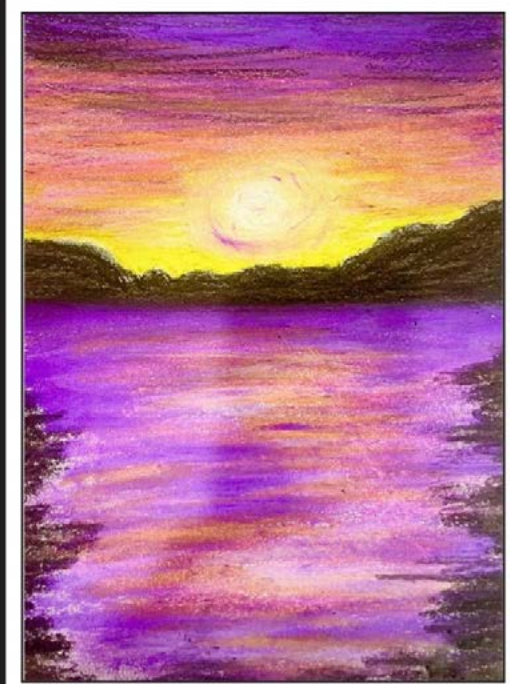
It has improved my relationship with my [family].

Participant
Gallery





25th June, 2024



10th December, 2024



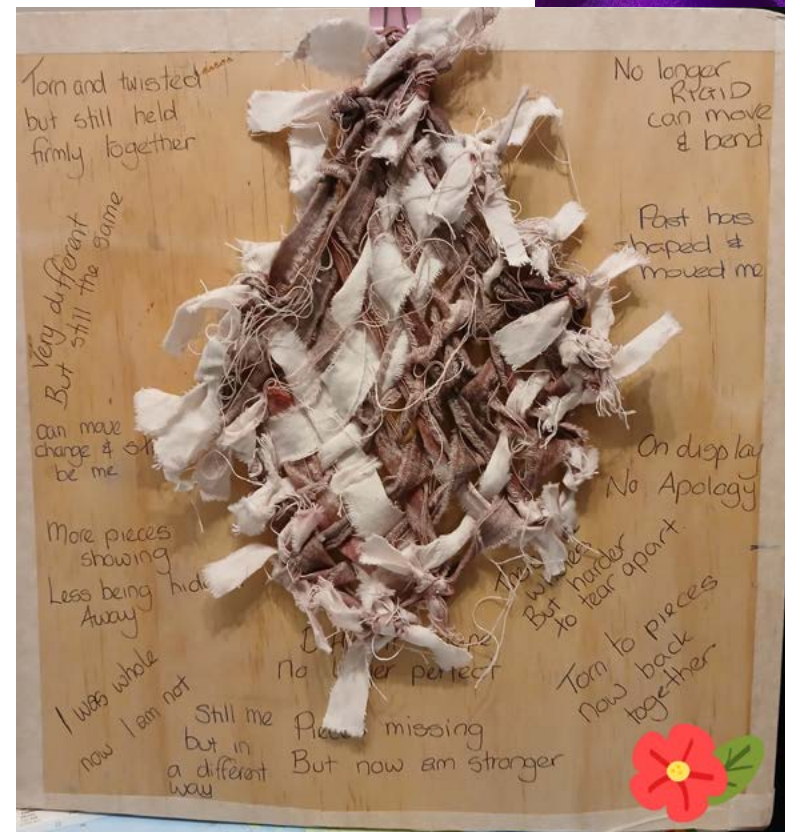




- SOILED, BROKEN, STAINED, DAMAGED
- USELESS, WORN-OUT, USED-UP
- WORTHLESS, NO VALUE, NO PURPOSE
- GROSS, DISGUSTING
- CRUMPLED UP, STUCK TOGETHER
- UN-FIXABLE

DIRTY OLD RAG





Appendix One

This guide was made available to all participants, parents and guardians before they contributed their story.

Storytelling guide for NDIS art therapy participants and carers

This guide is designed to help NDIS participants, and their carers/representatives share meaningful stories about arts therapy experiences with the media while keeping ethical considerations, and personal safety in mind.

Key Principles of Safe Storytelling

Privacy and confidentiality

- It is a good idea to use a pseudonym or nickname if you are concerned about sharing your name publicly. This is helpful as we often feel differently about going public in the future.
- It's important to protect the privacy of other NDIS participants, and workers/therapists who may be a part of your story.
- Aim to avoid mentioning specific names, locations, or identifying details of others, instead focussing on your own personal experiences.

Strategies to support your wellbeing

- Only share experiences you feel comfortable discussing publicly.
- You may want to practice some of the stories you would like to share with a trusted person to gain their perspective and support.
- Remember you can pause or stop the conversation at any time during an interview.
- You can also have a support person present during an interview if you would like.

Practical Storytelling Guidelines

What to Share

- Your personal experience engaging with art therapy and the NDIS.
- Any benefits you have experienced as a result of participating in art therapy e.g positive impacts, learning experiences, or things which were helpful to you.

Things to keep in mind

- You have the right to withdraw consent and stop at any stage in this process.
- You can request to review draft stories before they are published or ask to see potential

interview questions from journalists or producers to help you prepare.

- It could be helpful to organise a debrief with a trusted person.
- We would always encourage you to prioritise your mental health throughout the process.

Support Resources

- Your Arts Therapist
- Lifeline – 13 11 14. Text line: 0477 13 11 14 | www.lifeline.org.au/crisis-chat/
- Disability Advocacy Network Australia – Free call: 1800 643 787 | www.dana.org.au
- People With a Disability Australia – Free call: 1800 422 015 | pwd.org.au
- 13YARN – 24-hour crisis support line for Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander mob: 13 92 76 | www.13yarn.org.au
- In an emergency, please call 000

Remember:
Your story matters, but your safety and privacy matter more.



Appendix Two

All participants and/or their parent/guardian agreed to all of the following consents before being included in this compilation. Contact details were provided for the compiler of the report so more information could be provided during the process.

Participant Consent

(please write Yes or No next to each statement):

I understand the safer ways of telling my story and have discussed this with my arts therapist and/or read the safe story telling guide.

I give permission for my story to be used in the ANZACATA report to the NDIA commissioned independent review (due February 2025).

I give permission for my story to be used by ANZACATA in a report that will be shared in print and online.

I understand I can remain anonymous in these processes.

If I have any concerns, I will discuss them with my arts therapist or contact Su Hanfling [the compiler of the stories].



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The Australian, New Zealand and Asian Creative Arts Therapies Association (ANZACATA) is the peak professional body and self-regulating authority representing creative arts therapists in Australia, New Zealand and the Asia/Pacific region. It is a member-run, non-profit company limited by guarantee.

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