

Monkey Brain Art

2021 Annual Report



Our Mission is to use art creation, meditation and mindfulness to calm the unsettled minds of Warriors who have PTSD.

Monkey Brain Art | 303 E. 115th St. | Kansas City, MO 64114 | www.monkeybrainart.org

Monkey Brain Art Board Members:

Lesa Brazeale, Brooke Brown, Michael Minor, Pam Flick, Sean Flick



A Word from our Co-Founders

Twenty-two veterans commit suicide every day, for a total of 8,030 per year. There is a subset of this group with a special problem - they have Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). They understand all too well how it affects the mind. Without Monkey Brain Art and other veteran-focused programs, the tragic loss of veterans will not slow.

Our country sent an entire generation off to the Middle East during the last twenty years, and because of these warriors' experiences during deployment(s), we now have citizens with moral injury, PTSD, Traumatic Brain Injury, drug dependencies, and numerous chronic illnesses. Someone needs to step up and fill the gap; help a hurting group of warriors with more mental health issues than ever before.

Approximately 37% of current and past first responders have contemplated suicide at some point in their lives.

This is nearly ten times the rate of all American adults. Even more worrisome is that 31 per day actually commit suicide, for an annual total of 11,315. There is also a select group of first responders who suffer from PTSD.

Veterans with PTSD who participate in Monkey Brain Arts classes have found that creating art, combined with practicing meditation and mindfulness, has helped calm their unsettled minds and better deal with the ravages of PTSD. First responder participants in Monkey Brain Art classes, they, too, have found that creating art and practicing meditation and mindfulness helps them find their calm and better deal with their condition.

As the co-founders of Monkey Brain Art, we ourselves have traveled down the path of darkness, depression and despair, yet we learned to manage "the Monkey" and settle our minds. It is now our goal to welcome our brothers and sisters back home, welcome first responders into our classes and be there to listen and help them all heal.

Gary Walker

Executive Director

Trish Walker

Director of Meditation & Mindfulness/Yogi

Monkey Brain Art's Vision and Mission

Monkey Brain Art's Vision is for all Warriors who have PTSD to be able to find their calm and better deal with their condition.

Its Mission is to use art creation, meditation and mindfulness to calm the unsettled minds of Warriors who have PTSD.



How We Chose Our Name

People sometimes wonder how Monkey Brain Art got such a colorful name. Monkey Brain (sometimes called “Monkey Mind”) is a Buddhist term meaning a mind that is unsettled, restless, confused, indecisive and/or uncontrollable. Some veterans and first responders with PTSD often feel they have a monkey brain, so we chose Monkey Brain Art as the name for our organization.



Meet Our Board of Directors

Five highly successful professionals serve on our Board:

- Board Chair, Lesa Brazeale (Retired from FAA)
- Vice Chair, Brooke Brown, (Veterans of Foreign Wars Foundation)
- Pam Flick, a board member for Folds of Honor (Terracon)
- Secretary/Treasurer, Michael Minor, an Air Force veteran (Garmin)
- Director of Development, Shawn Flick, a board member for Folds of Honor (American Steel)

We are currently recruiting additional Board members and we're working to diversify the Board.



Lesa Brazeale



Brooke Brown



Pam Flick



Michael Minor



Shawn Flick

Our Visionary Co-Founders, Gary and Trish

Gary and Trish Walker have both experienced the benefits of the healing practices of art, meditation and mindfulness to combat the trauma of their own PTSD. Gary, a disabled Air Force veteran and artist, practices art to deal with the crushing anxiety and depression caused by this PTSD. Trish, a licensed yoga instructor and recent breast cancer survivor, draws upon her experience and expertise to present the meditation and mindfulness portions of the classes.

Our Valuable Partners

We have developed solid working relationships with several Kansas City organizations: the Kansas City Veterans Affairs Medical Center, St. Michael's Veterans Center, KC Warrior Mental Health Coalition, Veterans Community Project (which builds and operates "tiny homes"), Spencer C. Duncan "Make It Count" Foundation, Footprints/Heroes Home Gate, Johnson County Arts and Heritage Center, Arts Kansas City, Country Club Bank and Buttonwood Art Space. We also have relationships with the National World War I Museum, the National Veterans 9/11 Museum, Smithville American Legion Post #58 and KMBC TV.

Monkey Brain Art and these partners share a passion for helping veterans and first responders. The Battle Within presents a program for veterans with PTSD. Our Executive Director, Gary Walker, participated in that program to help heal his own PTSD. Some of the partners have funded us; others refer students to our courses. Still others offer free space for courses, and some have introduced us to potential funders. Finally, Rob Hughes at KMBC TV is a media partner who arranged for us to be showcased on one of the station's evening newscasts.



St. Michael's Veterans Center



Johnson County Arts & Heritage Center



Country Club Bank



Smithville American Legion Post #58



KCVA-Whole Health



National WW1 Museum



Veteran's Community Project (VCP)

Accomplishments Since Founding

- Grown to 13 staff members
- Expanded from one weekly class to three
- Finished five art courses and currently signing up students for four more
- Expanded to more locations on the bus line for the best access possible for our students
- Added a new photography course and currently signing up students for two more courses
- Joined the KC Warrior Coalition, which refers students to us for 90 days of follow-up after they have finished their treatment at the Revenant Journey through The Battle Within

- Earned a Silver Seal on GuideStar
- Designed the T-Shirt for the Spencer C. Duncan Make It Count Foundation's 5K Walk/Run for 2022
- Received funding from the VA, Veteran's United and Terracon to purchase art supplies
- Made arrangement with the Veterans Community Project (developer of Tiny Homes) to add homeless veterans to our courses
- Recruited a fifth Board member, Lesa Brazeale
- Presented the first annual KC United Art Festival, featuring the work of our students.
- Monkey Brain Art was invited to lay a wreath at the annual National World War I Museum's "Taps at the Tower" ceremony
- Gary Walker was featured three times in the magazine, *Veterans Voices*
- Monkey Brain Art was invited to attend and exhibit students' art at the 2022 "Place of Peace" reception at the Johnson County Arts & Heritage Center
- Monkey Brain Art was exclusively chosen to partner with Corey Taylor and The Taylor Foundation as his Charity of Choice for The Knotfest Roadshow



Exciting Goals for the Future

- Raise sufficient funds to pay all our marvelous instructors
 - Purchase enough art supplies for students to take some home
 - Add a new music course
 - Increase the number of veterans and first responders who enroll in our courses
 - Enroll homeless veterans in our courses
 - Increase the number of Board members
 - Diversify our Board
 - Earn a Platinum Seal on GuideStar
 - Increase our amount of annual grant funding
 - Obtain our own dedicated space
 - Create a podcast course to increase our reach across the country
 - Purchase a van for transporting art supplies to and from our numerous course locations
-

Thank You Volunteers!

We have an impressive cadre of 35 community volunteers and could not function without them. They perform several tasks, including helping with special events, where they assist with planning, working on setup and breakdown, manning registration desks; recruiting other veterans and first responders with PTSD to our courses; and assisting with graduations. We are deeply grateful to these volunteers who are deeply committed to our mission, and we deeply thank every single one of them!





Here's What Our Students Think

Here are a few comments from students who have completed our art courses, attesting to their high quality and helpfulness. (Comments are anonymous to protect the students' privacy.)

"You guys are the best! So grateful for your willingness to meet us where we are, save space for us, and teach us awesome things! I'm very glad I signed up. It has been exactly what I needed."

"You are saving my life! I have been in my apartment for several months and I didn't know where to turn to help with my thoughts. I even bought art supplies but was frozen with fear, panic, and thoughts of suicide. You gave me a place to start and showed me that someone still cares about me and what I am going through."

"I am no longer suicidal because I have something to live for. Art saved my life."

"From entering the door, the first moment until leaving at the end of the course it was nothing short of amazing. Even though this is an introductory course to multiple modalities of art, the instruction was solid, and I was able to repeat the projects at home with no problems. This made it nice since I was able to pay it forward by teaching my kids and creating something new with the kids was a huge hit. The environment that is created by the team makes you feel safe and included which was perfect since some of my issues include PTSD, Anxiety, and depression. That is not something that I normally get to feel whenever I am outside of my own home. Monkey Brain Art's mission is amazing and the people who make it all happen are even better."

"I absolutely loved the experience at Monkey Brain Art. Even though it is not art therapy since the instructors are not therapists, the art itself brought me great calm and peace that I haven't had the luxury of having in many years since I am the mother of two and the caregiver to a disabled veteran. Learning new ways to create art helped me so much I can't explain. Art is a fantastic and helpful coping mechanism, and I can't wait to see where the squad takes the program in the future."

"One day after leaving a funeral, I was driving and saw a VA Stand down location event near 90th and Troost Ave. I wanted a field jacket, so I stopped in. On my way in to get the products, I saw

the most beautiful piece of art I'd seen in a long time. I stopped and inquired about the piece. There was a man painting currently and a woman signing up people to attend an art class thru the VA. I thought, "If they can teach me to do this, I'm in!" So I signed up.

After a few weeks I received a notice that I was accepted to the course, at no cost. I had forgotten about signing up, so the notice was a surprise. I thought, "This is God helping me to move in a new direction." My current physical condition prevents me from continuing in my 48-year career field as an auto mechanic. When I attended the first class, I was hooked! Not only would I learn to enhance my skills with several artistic techniques, I would also learn how to create peace thru the many stressful events I was dealing with, by adopting some simple practices of meditation and self-help. IT WAS GREAT!

Monkey Brain Art helps you get to the art and leave the monkey behind. I feel the course didn't last long enough. I so looked forward to the classes each Tue like a child looks for Christmas on Christmas Eve night. Don't you guys, Bobby, Gary, Katy, Casey, and the others, stop doing what you do. You are helping in ways you can't imagine. Keep up the good work Monkey Brain Art! You guys are a blessing! I found new friends."

"I've been cooler than a cucumber these days! Through meditation and mindfulness, I've managed to keep my PTSD at bay! This Air Force Veteran keeps calm and creates!

"Taking the Monkey Brain Art has impacted my life in a very positive way. I was first introduced to meditation and art as healthy coping skills when I was hospitalized for depression and suicidal ideations in 2018. When I was released, I was proud of the fact that I had made some beautiful things. After being released, I bought some coloring books, markers, crayons, and colored pencils. Fast forward a few years, and I hadn't really picked up the coloring books in a while. Taking the Monkey Brain Art class helped me find some other art medias that I really enjoy. Being able to try a different kind of art each week helped me find one kind that really brings me joy. Since graduating the class I have been able to go on to create more beauty, and the piece that was framed and given to me at graduation I now have hanging in my home, and it reminds me to slow down and take time to create. I have also begun practicing meditation and mindfulness much more frequently since taking the class. Very grateful for Monkey Brain Art!"



The Use of Art, Meditation and Mindfulness for PTSD: What the Research Says

Although art therapy has been understudied in its use with veterans and first responders, it shows promise as a means of treating resistant symptoms, such as avoidance and emotional numbing, while also addressing the underlying psychological situation that gives rise to PTSD symptoms.

By their nature, traumatic memories are difficult to express in words alone. Non-verbal expressions, as are used in art therapy, can facilitate both the shift to declarative memory and the creation of a coherent narrative. The narrative can be pictorial rather than verbal. Art therapy shows promise as a treatment for combat-related PTSD that can reduce immediate symptoms and can help people overcome PTSD symptoms in ways that may not be possible with words alone.

Art therapists have reported remarkable results using art creation, and theorists have identified psychological and neurological mechanisms that explain the unique capacities of art therapy to promote recovery from PTSD. Researchers have found art therapy to be more effective than verbal therapy for veterans with PTSD. One study assessed a drawing task for treating nightmares in combat-related PTSD and found that those who did the drawing task had fewer and less intense nightmares than those who did a writing task.

Group treatments, such as those we use, are recommended for PTSD so people can share traumatic material within the safety, cohesion, and empathy provided by other survivors and so they can regain the ability to form trusting relationships.

Group treatment is particularly useful for combat-related PTSD because military training and combat operations are group experiences. Chronic PTSD is especially resistant to treatment, possibly because trauma severe enough to cause PTSD leaves an indelible physiological imprint on the brain. This can lead to “Monkey Brain.”

In group art therapy, troubling or shameful material is expressed openly, witnessed non-judgmentally, and recognized and even appreciated by others. Self-esteem can grow as group members are supportive witnesses to each other’s struggles and growth. The pleasure of creation not only builds self-esteem, it also helps rekindle responsiveness to rewards, reduces emotional numbness, and helps re-establish adaptive social functioning.



Meditation in Conjunction with Art Therapy

Meditation, which we employ in our courses, is a mind-body practice that involves paying close attention to the present moment, combining concentration with awareness of your body, your breathing, your thoughts, and the sensations around you. It helps to focus, [reduce stress](#), and increase calm. Meditation by itself isn't a treatment for PTSD, but when used along with other therapies, or as an ongoing practice to help manage stress once a person has gone through treatment, it can be very helpful.

Mindfulness in Conjunction with Art Therapy

The term, "mindfulness," also used in all of our courses, describes a state of elevated awareness of the present moment in a nonjudgmental and accepting manner. This means being aware of the physical body and its sensations, the mind and its thoughts, the current emotional state, the surrounding sounds, and the material environment of the present moment without judging these things as "good," or "bad." In other words, mindfulness is a heightened awareness of what is occurring within oneself and within the environment on a moment-to-moment basis. Relaxation during art creation directly reduces hyper-arousal. Mindfulness can be a useful approach when combined with art therapy to help veterans and first responders calm their unsettled minds.



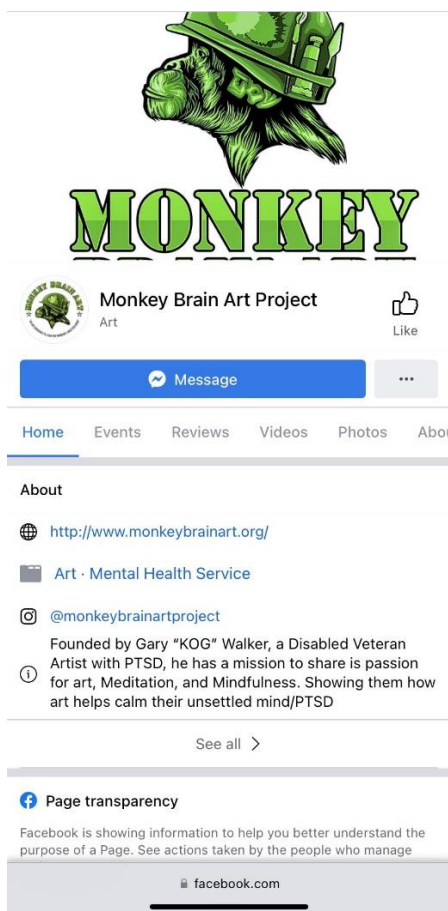
Our Warrior Art Instructors

The instructors who teach our courses are Warriors themselves who deal with their own form of trauma from their time of serving. In addition to teaching, they also work within their artistic specialty creating art to keep calm. They each have large hearts and a passion to share their love of art and to walk alongside their brothers and sisters as they find a continued path of healing.

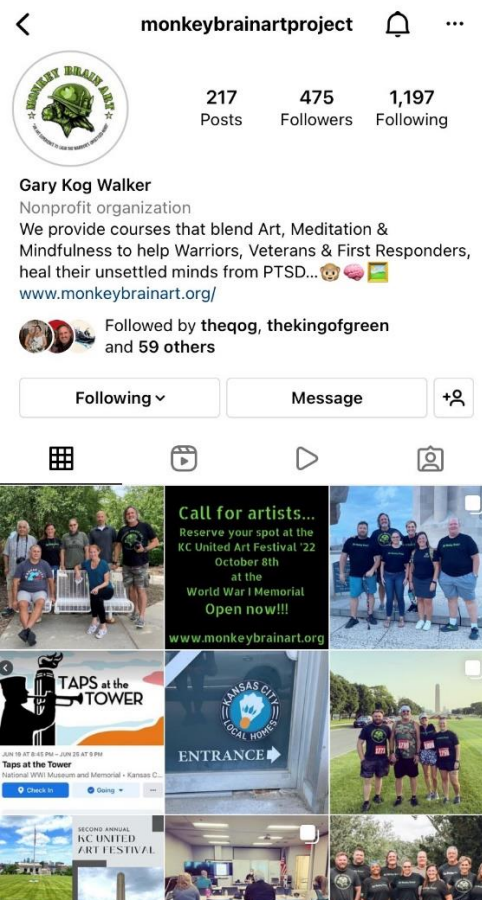


Social Media Reach

Reaching our Veterans and First Responders and connecting them to our art community is essential to building our program. Monkey Brain Art reaches all demographics of Warriors by posting content on popular platforms.



Facebook: 1,733 followers
Age: 69% are 25-54 years old
Gender: 49% Women / 51% Men



Instagram: 475 followers
Age: 67% are 25-54 years old
Gender: 56% Women / 44% Men

Monkey Brain Art – Donors

Government and Foundation Grants

• Kansas City Veterans Affairs Administration	\$37,000
• Terracon Foundation	\$ 2,500
• Veterans United Foundation	\$ 7,500
• Spencer C. Duncan Foundation	\$ 1,500

Corporate Gifts

• Black & Veatch	\$ 1,500
• Success Food Management Group	\$ 45
• Community America Credit Union	\$ 1,000
• A. L. Huber	\$ 2,500
• WinPro Solutions	\$ 1,200
• IBC	\$ 1,200
• Vertical Cannabis	\$ 5,000
• American Metals	\$ 500
• Network for Good	\$ 160
• Impact Painting	\$ 500
• One Hope	\$ 25

