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Abstract

Various emotional well-being issues often arise in college students. Participation in creative activities, regardless of previous art experience, contributes to a significant decrease in cortisol levels, resulting in less stress. However, it is better understood the impact of art therapy related activities on well-being; it is important to examine what specific areas of emotional well-being may be applied to specific art activities. The Make and Take Mondays Program was implemented through the East Tennessee State University Counseling Center and provided students with the opportunity to participate in seven different art therapy related activities. Students were then given informational handouts on research to each specific activity, information about the counseling resources available on campus and the opportunity to complete a quick survey and optional additional survey. As a result of implementing the Make and Take Mondays program and compiling survey results, it was determined that the majority of students found the program to be helpful and reported feeling calm and positive while participating in the activities.

Introduction

The Make and Take Mondays program aimed to promote mental well-being for ETSU students through creativity and expression, while also promoting mental health awareness, to eliminate stigma. The goal was to positively impact ETSU students’ mental well-being through implementing art therapy related activities addressing the following:

1. Life Balance, Stress Relief, Self-Awareness, Gratitude, Mental Health Awareness, Mindfulness and Self-Expression

Activities

1. Balance
   - Students were provided stones to represent each value in their life to balance. The goal of this activity was to encourage students to examine their personal values and apply such to the wellness wheel.

2. Stress Relief
   - Materials were provided to create hemp bracelets. The goal of this activity was for students to focus on their hands to promote stress relief.

3. Gratitude
   - Templates of gratitude journals were provided for students to assemble and decorate. This activity encouraged students to list one aspect daily to ultimately implement gratitude into their daily lives.

4. Self-Awareness
   - Canvases of people were provided for students to creatively decorate into a magnet of themselves to promote self-awareness.

5. Mental Health Awareness
   - During this activity, students painted stones that were to be placed across campus. Informational cards were placed on the back to direct other students to the ETSU Counseling Center.

6. Mindfulness
   - Students were encouraged to create a painting, reflecting what they see, hear, feel, taste and smell in the present moment. A “Peace Meditation” handout was also provided. The goal of this activity was to promote students to apply mindfulness skills into their daily lives.

7. Self-Expression
   - Students were provided with the opportunity to create prayer flags, in order to promote a visual voice to express hopes, dreams, concerns, prayers, and wishes.

Results

Demographic Information

Survey Results:

Conclusions

In applying the survey results, supportive research and my experiences with participants, the Make & Take Mondays art therapy program ultimately had a positive impact on students at ETSU. There was a total of 65 participants across all events, although a few of the participants attended multiple events.

Research

1. Art therapy allows individuals to visually express emotions; in a nonverbal manner, resulting in a positive impact on the participant’s mood and anxiety levels. Smith, T. 2019
2. A significant decrease in cortisol levels, or stress hormones, were found after individuals participated in art making. Ultimately, this supports the concept that participation in art activities can decrease an individual’s stress levels regardless of one's artistic experience. Cole, A., Janoff-Biul, N., Ben-David, S. & Mannor, M. B. (2018).
3. The study conducted by Watkins, P., Emmots, R. A., Graves, M. R. & Bell, J. (2018) provides a stronger understanding of the positive emotion; joy, as well as how gratitude has been shown to enhance an individual’s joy and well-being overall.
4. Psychotherapeutic treatments, such as art therapy, can improve an individual’s well-being and promote personal growth through ego-strength, existential modes, emotional insight and improved self- awareness. Holmqvist, G., Rosberg, A., Larsson, I., & Ekberg-Persson, C. (2017).
5. Stigma associated with mental illness has been shown to contribute to a negative impact on individuals, which often results in self-stigmatization. Vingilis, E., & Saini, S. A. (2013).
6. Individuals participating in mindfulness, experienced body awareness as well as changes in their structure of the region of the brain that is associated with body awareness. Holch, T., Lezak, S. W., Gurev, T., Schuman-Olivier, Z., Nops, D. R. & On, U. (2011).
7. During the process of art therapy, individuals often experience cognitive control and reflection and emotional levels are often explored in a less conscious manner. Hayven, S., Hooen, S., Veld, W. M., & Houterkouk, G. (2017).

Literature Cited