



Community Artmaking;
Creating a Sense of Belonging Among Older Supportive Housing Residents, University
Students, and Community Members

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Image by James House Resident

Agenda

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Purpose

To explore **community artmaking** as an analytical approach towards understanding processes of **belonging and community-making** in the context of a homeless shelter embedded art hive using qualitative arts-based methodologies.

Methodologies

Arts-based methodologies - describes the use of the creative arts to co-produce knowledge through the "excavation" of the participants own experiences by their own means, which then helps researchers outside of their community better understand those experiences (Segal-Engelchin et al., 2020).

Community-based participatory methodologies – describes the dismantling of power between the participants, communities, and research team through continued collaboration on various stages of research. Through this process, communities' unique strengths and experiences are valued and highlighted within the research building capacity and empowerment within the community (Coughlin et al., 2017).

Photovoice Interviews


Photovoice is a participatory action research strategy

- Research participants are asked to take photographs of subject matter that reflects their unique experiences and are then asked to explain their reasoning (Hergenrather et al., 2009; Sutton-Brown, 2014)

Phenomenological photovoice

- A photovoice method which creates space for under-represented voices to "make sense of and interpret their world" finding meaning in personal associations (Plunkett et al., 2013).





What is an Art Hive?

An Art Hive is an open community art studio and free maker space that welcomes everyone.

It's premised on the idea that everyone is an artist and deserves a space to create. (Timm-Bottos & Chainey, 2015)

Informed by:

1. The Liberation Arts: The idea that arts-based methodologies have the ability to increase feelings of freedom and free-thinking while co-creating community (Watkins & Shulman, 2008).

2. Feldenkrais' (1972) Awareness of Movement: defines the role of the facilitator as "witness, sender, and receiver of relational information.

3. Neuroscience: evidence to support the use of studio connections and the creative arts in the healing of the individual and communities (Shore, 2003)



Artwork by James House Resident

"This was the first drawing I did when I moved here. I had this overwhelming feeling that I started to like people. I didn't have that for a long time. It was always clinical. When you go into shelters, you're a client, you're not part of anything. Other than a system, you're there for the food, you're there for a mat you're there for, to get out of the cold. So for some reason I had this desire to draw a picture of myself, which was a kind of a beat up kind of scrappy dog that is like wandering, you know, the streets for so long. But he's pulled a couple of flowers out of the ground and you see the roots are still on it. And he's like saying, thank you. You know? I mean, it's not, it's not that he's weak or anything cuz he's got his captain spar on his ears. He's a captain. Yeah. And he's got a heart in there."

- James House Resident, April 2022

Arts-Based Interviews

- Both the researcher and the resident receive art kits comprised of various art materials and paper.
- The resident and researcher create a mind map that explores their personal experiences of community.
- They use the mind map to inform their art creation (some opted to skip the mind map and jump right into creation).
- During the process, the researcher audio records their discussions which are guided by interview questions based in experiences of community and belonging.



Arts-Based Interviews Debrief

- What does the final piece say about your experience of community?
- What does the final piece say about your dreams of community?
- What would you like to share about the James House Art Hive and your experience of community?
- What does community look or feel like to you?
- What aspects of the James House Art Hive contribute to a sense of community?
- What aspects of the James House Art Hive detract from a sense of community?
- Looking forward, how would you like to be supported in community by the James House Art Hive?





Pop-up Art Show

James House Pop-Up Art Show

In collaboration with the UofC's
SOWK 397 Class
April 19, 2022

Funding provided
by: McMan Youth, Family and
Community Services Association

Discussion

Project is ongoing but initial findings show:

- Residents and art makers expressed that they felt confidence that they hadn't felt in community before.

"That little show they put on gave me the confidence I haven't had in years"
-James House Resident

- Residents and art makers noted how community art spaces draw people in and how these connections affect their mental, social, and physical wellbeing:

"It definitely pulls people in, it adds to the community, socially, for your mental wellbeing, your physical wellbeing and everything kinda, it helps it contributes to everything." - James House Resident

- The opportunity to create art made them discover personal traits about themselves they hadn't had opportunities to explore before:

"This was the first drawing I did when I moved here. I had this overwhelming feeling that I started to like people." - James House Resident

Things that worked:

- Collaborative art creation elicited easy conversation that subverted power dynamics within the researcher-participant relationship.
- Increased confidence in participants and provided opportunity for co-creation of knowledge.
- Provided researcher with better understandings of own concepts of community when relating to participant
- Sharing the art and stories with community resisted NIMBYism around supportive housing

Things that didn't work

- Some participants found the concept of art creation intimidating and chose to opt out of this portion of the interview.
- The structure doesn't work for each participant and needs to be modified to suit the comfort levels of the participant

"Having a community...It's like trying to describe God, what God is. It's a feeling of being accepted...It's the feeling of being able to go out for an evening, whether it's going to a movie or going out for supper. Being able to Stand back and to be able to take a deep breath. A lot of people kind of take that for granted, but, it's hard to do that when you're in a shelter. You feel constricted all the time. I Relish the idea of just going out... I just see [community] as just something relaxing. It's like taking a long walk along the riverbank or going through a park ... love that feeling of freedom. You don't see it very much when you're staying in the DI, the mustard seed."

- James House Resident, April 2022



Questions?

- In what community-contexts can you envision arts-based methodologies as a tool for resisting social stigma?

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