Elora Centre for the Arts Supportive Arts Program

YEAR THREE EVALUATION REPORT
JULY 2022 to JUNE 2023

Prepared for:
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Ontario Trillium Foundation

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INTRODUCTION

SUPPORTIVE ARTS (SA) welcomes individuals and their caregivers from Wellington County to a weekly program offering mindfulness, arts-based learning, and compelling artistic experiences at the Elora Centre for the Arts (ECFTA). This unique program aims to enhance the life of participants through creativity and connection.

This year, four times weekly, guided workshops took place at the ECFTA facility in Elora, ON with instruction from three core arts educators and several different guest artist educators. The program is specifically designed to support adults of all abilities, embracing diversity through art-making and mindfulness.

As part of the Ontario Trillium Foundation Grow Grant received in support of SA, Georgia Simms of IMAGEO artworks, was hired by ECFTA to develop a framework and tools for program evaluation that would allow ECFTA to:

- gather feedback to strengthen program delivery
- measure impacts for participants
- understand the degree to which programs are meeting intended outcomes
- gather insights from the community including educators, caregivers and other supporters

This report provides a summary of all evaluation activities that took place during the span of the grant period (2020-2023), with an emphasis on the results from activities conducted in 2023. It also synthesizes the information to provide answers to the original evaluation questions.

ABOUT THE EVALUATION

EVALUATION QUESTIONS

Three overall questions have guided these evaluation activities. The Logic Model framework (see Appendix A), as well as the tools and practices for data collection were developed to answer the following questions:

1. How do participants experience the Supportive Arts programs?

2. To what extent, and in what ways, does the Supportive Arts program bring about intended outcomes? In other words, what is the impact of the experience for participants?

3. How can Supportive Arts strengthen its impacts? Expand its outcomes? In other words, are there recommendations that could be implemented?

The results section of the report answers these questions directly.

METHODS

Several tools and practices have been used during the three-year evaluation period. Some have been consistently used, and others were tried and discontinued or evolved into a more effective strategy. All have provided data for the measurement of anticipated outcomes that are outlined in the Logic Model (Appendix A).

Figure 1: Summary of Evaluation Tools and Practices (2020-2023)

Year 3 Tools and Practices

In this 2022-2023 programming year, representing the final year of the 3-year evaluation plan, there were four main evaluation tools/practices:

1) The integration of simple, optional **exhibition sharing** , incorporated participants' reflections and peer-to-peer feedback at the end of each art-making session, and provided immediate feedback to educators as well as indicators of short term outcomes. This practice was imagined in a planning meeting with core arts educators (January 2022) to develop capacity for participant reflection and appreciation, encourage the application of specific artistic language (e.g. "I like your bold lines and choice of colours"), and create opportunities for peer-to-peer conversations about their artworks.

2) In another planning meeting with arts educators discussing evaluation approaches and results to date (October 2022), it was mentioned that "waiting for the ideal, neurotypical quote", whether in conversations or surveys, is not the most appropriate approach to gather perspectives from program participants. It was decided that **program observation visits**, where Georgia Simms (lead Program Evaluator) attending a handful of remaining sessions, in the capacity of both witness and supporter, would most appropriately satisfy any outstanding needs of data collection and synthesis. It was agreed that detailed note taking was an appropriate

method, using some of the 'short term outcomes' and 'enabling conditions' from the logic model as a framework for systematic note taking.

Four visits took place between November 2022 and March 2023. Georgia's background and training in arts and strengths-based facilitation, as well as her awareness of disability justice principles, provided an appropriate level of sensitivity and skill for this context of observation. The familiarity that participants had with Georgia, having been a presence in the room over the years, was helpful in creating an unobtrusive yet interactive relationship.

3) As was done in 2022, two online **surveys** were shared with 'supporters' (e.g. personal support staff, volunteers/collaborators, guest artist facilitators) and 'caregivers' (e.g. families and/or other caregivers of participants). The purpose of the two online surveys was to gather information from people with a close and meaningful relationship to the program (but who do not participate directly in the activities). Understanding what family members, volunteers and other supporters witness in terms of the impacts of the program has offered valuable insight, especially given limitations of direct conversations with participants. The surveys were designed with a comparative goal so that results from 2022 could be compared to the results in 2023.

4) A **focus group** conversation with three core SA arts educators reflecting on how the bricolage of evaluation tools and practices have answered questions and satisfied initial goals for program evaluation. This was the second semi-formalized focus group conversation during the evaluation period held on June 14, 2023 (this time without leaders from the partner organizations). The purpose of this conversation was to have the core arts educators reflect on all aspects of the evaluation activities to date, and approach the idea of recommendations in the context of an uncertain future for the program, together.

ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Evaluation activities have been designed and delivered with the privacy and wellbeing of Supportive Arts participants at the forefront of our consideration. The following are some of the practices that have guided our implementation:

- *Informed consent:* We clearly communicate the purpose of the surveys, how privacy of data will be respected, how evaluation results will be used, that participation is voluntary and that participants do not have to answer any question that they do not want to.

- *Minimize risks:* We design tools and processes in a way that reduces any risks to the participant. We do not ask for names or other identifying information. Results have been aggregated and only shared if it doesn't identify particular individuals.

- *Reduce barriers:* We reduce barriers to participation (e.g., use plain language; ensure anonymity; ensure participants can realistically engage in conversations).

- *Report back:* Where possible, we suggest that Supportive Arts report back to respondents in an accessible manner with a summary of evaluation results and how those results were used to strengthen programming.

EVALUATION RESULTS

This section details the results from the Year 3 evaluation activities and also draws from previous years' results to answer the Evaluation Questions.

Question #1: How do participants experience the Supportive Arts program?

From Program Observation Visits

There are several conditions of program delivery that enable positive experiences for participants who engage in the arts activities. In other words, not all arts programming is equal, and the way in which the program is delivered matters, especially in the context of working effectively with a wide spectrum of abilities and needs. These enabling conditions were included in the earliest version of the Logic Model (categorized into 'facilitator skills and practices' and 'physical space') after an initial observation visit by Georgia in December 2020.

During the 2023 visits, all enabling conditions were present with the addition of two conditions (*) regarding physical space that were less available during COVID-19 adaptations of the program.

Enabling Conditions	
Facilitator skills and practices ● consent-based support ● playfulness and humor ● celebrations of creativity and effort ● patience, care ● responsiveness and adaptability ● personal interaction	*Physical space* ● connecting communities across Guelph-Wellington ● ease of access to materials and supplies for art-making* ● inspirational surroundings*

From Exhibition Sharing

Reflecting the care that is fundamentally infused into the program, the exhibition sharing resulted in positive, consent-based opportunities for artwork appreciation (as both makers and observers) with educators and volunteers modelling specific technical language and questions about artistic choices, as well as heartfelt reflection about the uniqueness of each interpretation. Participants regularly expressed support for each other, discussed their favourite part of the art activity, and found their own language to admire the work of others as well as their own. The exchanges of praise, gratitude, and affirmation were very encouraging for all.

From Online Surveys for Caregivers

Caregivers indicated how much they disagreed or agreed with statements about their experience with the Supportive Arts Program. The statements were generated from the 2022 survey questions that asked respondents (in a short answer format) to comment on what they appreciated most about the program.

Overall, 100% of survey respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the program:

- Has caring staff
- Is inclusive and accessible
- Offers opportunities for participants to create high quality artwork
- Offers individualized support to participants

On a scale from 1 to 10, with 1 being completely unlikely and 10 being completely likely, caregivers shared how likely they would be to recommend this program to another family or potential participant. The average score was 9.9. This score was identical to the 2022 survey.

Caregivers were asked if they or the person they cared for experienced any issues or challenges while participating in the program and were invited to share any details and suggestions to help improve the program going forward. 10 respondents said they did not experience any challenges.

One suggestion made by a caregiver was to give advance notice about what activities will take place before each session so that the caregiver can help prepare the person they care for to take part in the activity. Suggestions from the 2022 survey, including the addition of new art mediums (e.g. music, pottery) as well as work on accessible washrooms, were acted upon by educators and administrators.

From Online Surveys for Support Team Members

Support team members shared what they appreciate the most about the Supportive Arts program. Common points of appreciation were:

- The inclusive and supportive environment
- The sense of community the program helps to establish
- The creativity and diversity of the art activities
- The creative outlet it provides to participants

These responses were very similar to the results from the 2022 survey noting inclusivity, an outlet for creativity, and beneficial social connections.

Program meaningfulness

Survey respondents shared why they chose to support the Supportive Arts program and why it is meaningful to them. Common themes, which were almost identical to the 2022 survey, highlighted that the program:

- Offers an accessible and inclusive environment to explore art/creativity
- Fosters a sense of community
- Helps people express themselves through art
- Provides an opportunity for their child to enjoy a community program and make art

Comparison to other programs

Support team members shared how they believe the Supportive Arts program compares to other programs that they have experienced for a similar participant group. Compared to other programs, support team members shared that the program:

- Fosters a joyful and inclusive environment
- Conducts well-organized, thoughtful and creative activities
- Creates a strong sense of community

The emphasis in both the 2022 and 2023 surveys about the high quality of art activities is notable.

Likelihood to recommend

On a scale from 1 to 10, with 1 being completely unlikely and 10 being completely likely, the support team shared how likely they would be to recommend this program to potential participants. All respondents provided a score of 10. This increased from 9.9 in the 2022 survey.

Suggestions for improvement

Support team members were asked to provide one suggestion to improve the Supportive Arts program. Common suggestions made by respondents included:

- Continue to offer the program
- Expand the program to other locations
- Provide participants with the opportunity to work with a variety of adaptive materials

From other Data Collection

Other applicable information from previous evaluation activities that can help answer this question include the conversations with participants (although most of this data is more appropriately reported in the next section regarding impacts) and the focus groups conversations with arts educators and partner organizations.

Aspects of program delivery that influence participants' experience of the program from these sources would also include:
- the integration of participants' program ideas, suggestions and feedback
- meaningful personal exchanges with one-to-one volunteers
- participants feeling not only supported but celebrated
- unexpected and beautiful surprises as part of being responsive to the moment

Conclusion for Question #1

From the data collected, it is consistently clear that participants experience the program as intended: as an inclusive, supportive outlet for creativity and connection. As per the title, support is the foundational aspect of the program, characterized further by responsiveness, respect and joyful relating.

Question #2: What is the impact of the experience for participants? To what extent, and in what ways, does the Supportive Arts program bring about intended outcomes?

From Program Observation Visits

Of the list of short term outcomes from the Logic Model (see Appendix A), the ones that could be reasonably witnessed by an observer, and were present during each of the four visits, included:

- communication of emotions, sensations, imagination
- friendships
- connection to community
- joy/happiness
- celebration/affirmation of individual worth
- pride in accomplishments (especially during Exhibition Sharing)
- independence/self-sufficiency
- empowered as creators
- exposure to thoughts, ideas, questions, expressions of peers and community members

From Exhibition Sharing

This inclusive practice will continue to be a part of the program for the positive impact it has had on participants in terms of promoting pride, confidence and expression, and for the value it provides educators in terms of capturing information about the outcomes of their programming choices directly from participants. Further structure or revision to this component of the program is possible (e.g. does everyone share each time? is there such a thing as too much exhibition during an experience of art-making?).

From Online Surveys for Caregivers

Caregivers indicated how much they disagreed or agreed with the following statements about what they have observed during the Supportive Arts Program. These statements were generated based on the short term outcomes in the Logic Model. Overall:

- 100% observed the program participant taking pride in what they created
- 100% noticed the person they care for expressing joy or happiness during the program
- 94% noticed the person they care for expressing excitement about attending the program
- 72% had observed the program participant expressing their ideas or feelings in their art

Caregivers were invited to share any anecdotes or stories about impacts that they have noticed for the person they care for because of their participation in Supportive Arts. Commonly mentioned impacts included:

- Participants taking pride in their creations
- Increased creativity and interest in the arts
- Increased self-confidence
- Participants established friendships and community

From Online Surveys for Support Team Members

Support team members shared what was most memorable to them about how participants responded to their time in the Supportive Arts program. Memorable moments included:

- Participants supporting one another
- Eagerness to learn and create
- Participants taking pride in their creations
- Gaining confidence in their skills

A key difference here was the emphasis on how participants were actively supporting one another (in comparison to the 2022 survey when the memorable moments focused on the way participants were beginning to "open up" to each other).

From Participant and Focus Group Conversations

Notable impacts for participants (as reported in 2021) included enjoying their time in the program, learning new things, and looking forward to attending each week. It was a common theme that the program was a good place to express their feelings and participants often indicated that they felt better and more creative than when they arrived. When asked how doing art with others in the program made them feel, the most common responses were happy, good and relaxed. Most participants said that they made new friends in the program. This was repeated as a notable impact mentioned by arts educators during focus groups conversations in terms of seeing community and relationships growing outside the program (e.g. luncheons, social media exchanges), all contributing to positive mental health outcomes.

In our final conversation, (2023), the core arts educators reflected on changes they witnessed in individual artists that were meaningful. One participant shifted their usual habits of making toward different levels of engagement with choices, tools, and materials that demonstrated new dimensions of listening and understanding creative invitations. One emotional reflection involved recalling a participant choosing to change the usual wrap-up affirmation of "I am an artist" to "We are artists" flagging a change of perception with respect to identity and belonging. Educators also agreed that the common language of art-making transcends other language and typical communication, allowing learning and feedback to take place in unexpected, but entirely appropriate, ways. Another notable reflection was the leveling that takes place among the groups of participants, volunteers, paid staff and facilitators, where a blurring of social distinctions and categories of ability takes place regularly.

It should be noted that arts educators expressed grief and concern about the end of the grant, lack of other available funds, questions of financial access for participants, and the overall sustainability of the program moving forward.

A Journal Entry

While not a typical expression of evaluation, this journal entry was written by Georgia Simms after witnessing the SOAR Exhibition, in which family and friends were welcomed into the ECFTA Gallery to experience the artwork of the SA participant. It is an offering of another expressive perspective that supports other information sources.

From March 25, 2023

    all ages, families
    joyful sharing gathering abilities together

    friendships

    experiences and identities shaped by artful consideration practice guidance

    curious community, neighbours and conversations

    colour-filled care-filled skilled facilitators of art

    individual interpretation, characters surround
    difference not as lack

    pride belonging celebration

    on the warble wall "my heart grew wings. thank you"

    despite the driving rain, a full house

    smiles kindness hugs
    recognition
    rolling applause
    thunderous gratitude

    space hard to move big big love in

    by community for community
    serving love, health, growth, thriving, interaction, connection

    Rare. Can't replicate it. Nurture it. Don't exhaust it.

It is apparent from the evaluation results that the Supportive Arts program consistently succeeds in bringing about the intended short term outcomes. And from this conclusion and the framework of the Logic Model, it is very reasonable to say that the extent to which the program achieves the anticipated long term impacts is high. The long term impacts for participants are articulated as:

- ☑ increased wellbeing
- ☑ elevated sense of belonging
- ☑ increased quality of life
- ☑ enhanced appreciation of art and culture

OVERALL CONCLUSIONS

The evaluation process for the Supportive Arts program has been valuable and affirming. It began in 2020 with the development of the Logic Model which aimed to summarize what is intended and anticipated with respect to participants' experiences in the program, and what happens as a result of those experiences.

We gathered data using multiple tools and practices, in appropriate and responsive ways, to validate the Logic Model through open responses in Year 1 and 2, and further validated and confirmed those findings through closed questions in Year 2 and 3 of the evaluation period.

The results and synthesis of the evaluation activities demonstrate that the Supportive Arts program excels in bringing about the anticipated short term outcomes and long term impacts for participants. The "Grow" grant allowed the program to expand its offerings from one session a week to four sessions a week and succeeded in expanding and deepening the positive impacts for the community of participant-artists.

RECOMMENDATIONS

As has been recommended and requested in a variety of forms, the Supportive Arts program should be nurtured and sustained so that the leaps forward in impact that have been documented in this process might continue to occur for adults who experience the world with differing abilities, as well as for the people who are connected to them as caregivers, volunteers and facilitators.

Scaling the program to serve more participants at the Elora Centre for the Arts seems possible, in-demand, and efficient given the relationships with participants that have been established, the vast archive of art activities, and the caring, willing and experienced arts educators who are excited to continue riding this wave of positive growth and expand their offerings.

Unfortunately, without predictable funding, the impacts that have been made possible through the 3-year funding program are not likely to continue. Because the model of fee-for-service creates a barrier for most program participants who live with limited incomes, and because of a lack of willingness from partner organizations to make financial contributions, adequate resources are unavailable to the program. Other public funds geared toward equity for people with disabilities are needed. What is the step that comes after "Grow"? Finding longer term funding sources for this one-of-a-kind program is strongly recommended.

APPENDIX A: SUPPORTIVE ARTS LOGIC MODEL

In order to organize thinking and action toward answering the Evaluation Questions, a framework was developed to illustrate the flow of logic connecting daily program activities to longer term impacts.

The Supportive Arts Logic Model is the working framework that was developed collaboratively by the ECFTA core arts educators and executive director with leadership from Georgia Simms, lead Program Evaluator. It has been revised each year to reflect an accurate and refined representation of activities, while the short term outcomes and long term impacts have remained consistent.

It articulates what is intended and anticipated in terms of what participants experience, and what happens for participants as a result of those experiences in the Supportive Arts program.

NOTE: Read left to right, where activities and weekly feedback connect indirectly to stated short term outcomes (e.g. a web of connection to the short term outcomes). Achievement of the short term outcomes has direct connections to achievement of long term impacts.

SUPPORTIVE ARTS LOGIC MODEL (working draft June 2023)				
This column lists the specific components of program delivery	*This column lists ways in which immediate feedback can be gathered to influence program design/delivery and contribute to achievement of (some) short term outcomes*	*indirect*	*This column lists indicators of short term outcomes that are measurable using collected data, and are reasonably expected after multiple months of involvement in the SA program*	*direct*	*This column lists "dream level", harder-to-directly-measure impacts but are reasonable to claim if the short term outcomes can be sufficiently demonstrated*
Program Activities	***Feedback Measures***		***Short Term Outcomes***	**>>>**	***Long Term Impacts***
Visual arts (fine art projects, craft/functional art, art history, informal critiques and discussion of context, didactics)	• Exhibition Sharing with Participants • Observation Visits from Participatory Evaluator • Reflection Meetings with Core Arts Educators		❑ Increased creative confidence/pride in accomplishments ❑ Experience of self expression ❑ Communication of emotions, sensations, imagination	---->	Increased **wellbeing**
Mindfulness and Theatre (worry boxes, movement/dance, meditation, imagery and dramatic play)			❑ Friendships ❑ Experience positive anticipation regarding attendance ❑ Feel welcome, as they are	---->	Elevated sense of **belonging**
Culinary arts (baking, chocolate making)			❑ Joy, happiness ❑ Connection to community ❑ Celebration/affirmation of self worth ❑ Independence, self-sufficiency	---->	Increased **quality of life**
Community Celebration and Sharing (social media, public-facing communications, events, outdoor pathway project, gallery event)			❑ Empowered as creators ❑ Exposure to thoughts, ideas, questions, expressions of peers and community members	---->	Enhanced appreciation of **art and culture**

Enabling Conditions
- Facilitator skills and practices (i.e. consent-based support, playfulness and humor, celebrations of creativity and effort, patience, care, responsiveness, personal interaction)
- Physical space (i.e. ECFTA connecting communities across Guelph-Wellington, ease of access to art-making materials, inspiring surroundings)
- Consistent funding sources