

## The Art of Healing

People seldom realize the social adversity present in Hawai'i, especially teen depression and suicide. Hawai'i currently has the highest rate of suicide attempts in the nation. According to the Prevent Suicide Hawai'i Task Force (PSHTF), "Suicide was the most common cause of fatal injuries among Hawai'i residents over the five-year period from 2012 to 2016. . . One person dies by suicide in Hawai'i approximately every two days." Adolescents who have thought seriously about suicide often experience family problems, stress from school, issues with society as a whole, and illnesses such as depression and anxiety. Recent studies have shown that 29% of Hawaii's youth experience depression, depressive episodes, or symptoms of depression. As these problems remain relatively unnoticed, the suicide deaths and attempts in Hawai'i continue to increase. From 2012-2016, 186 people died from suicide each year. According to the National Institute of Mental Health, "suicide accounted for \$50.8 billion (24%) of the fatal injury cost" in 2013, showing that suicide also has an extreme effect on the economy. The number of suicides and the magnitude of its costs could easily double in the next decades if no action is taken. However, a method called art therapy could significantly lessen the number of children and teens experiencing trouble with depression and risk factors leading to suicide and minimize the number of adolescents considering suicide.

Art therapy, according to the American Art Therapy Association, is "an integrative mental health and human services profession that enriches the lives of individuals, families, and communities through active art-making, creative process, applied psychological theory, and human experience within a psychotherapeutic relationship." It is different from an ordinary art class, as art therapy is monitored by a professional art therapist to guide students in improving

their self-esteem, ability to resolve conflicts, social skills, and emotional control. It has been proven that art, whether it be musical or visual, can substantially improve an individual's mental state. Michael B. Friedman, a professor at Columbia University, states that art can help people connect with their emotions by encouraging a person to "reach into largely unconscious parts of the mind and experience dimensions of self otherwise buried and voiceless." In the International Journal of Adolescent Medicine and Health, Timothy R. Rice exclaims that "adolescents wish to discuss depression with their providers," which they are able to do with their art therapist. Art therapists are just as reliable and educated as a typical therapist. A required master's degree in art therapy and a high level of experience in art and social skills ensure that art therapists can be undoubtedly trusted with their patients.

Art therapy can be easily incorporated into a child's life with help from their family and school. Many schools in Hawai'i offer optional art classes for students who wish to show their creative expression. An art therapy session can easily be added to the collection of electives a school provides. Costs of art therapy do not pose as an issue. The average salary of an art therapist is equal to the average salary of a teacher here in Hawai'i, making hiring an art therapist just as easy as hiring a new teacher. Hiring an art therapist could also improve the teacher shortage that Hawaii's schools are currently facing. Additionally, sessions may utilize extra materials given to the previously established art classes to minimize unnecessary costs.

Art therapists decided to pursue their specific profession because they care for children and their future, just as Clarence T.C. Ching did. Ching is known for donating large funds to various schools in Hawai'i to improve students' education. Art therapy also aids students by helping them mentally and emotionally in the present so they can achieve great things in the

future. Children are seen as the main source of innovation and hope in the community. The community is then held with the responsibility to protect and preserve that hope, especially against the overwhelming stress mental illnesses create that leads to suicide. Art therapy gives young adults who unfortunately suffer from stress, anxiety, depression and other risk factors of suicide their best chance for a successful life. If schools and families are able to identify students that experience depression, risk factors of suicide, or signs that may lead to these issues, they can encourage them to join the art therapy sessions to possibly lessen the impact these issues bring on their health.

Depression and suicide have grown exponentially and have become great problems in society nationally, but especially here in Hawai'i. Fortunately, art therapy carries the potential to minimize the effects depression has on adolescents and on costs to the state. When the use of art therapy increases, it is likely that the suicide and depression rates among Hawaii's teens will decrease greatly. As art therapy progresses, it may be thought of as a common prevention against suicide for all adolescents throughout Hawai'i. Art therapy will heal the mental, emotional, and physical wounds burdening Hawaii's children and replace the void of loneliness and neglect with the abundant hope for the future.

## Works Cited

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