



Youth arts and mental health: exploring connections in the Top End.

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Mental Health & Adolescents in Australia

Over a quarter (26%) of young people (16-24years) had experienced at least one mental disorder during the preceding 12 months. (ABS, 2007)

The NT has a suicide rate (22.4 per 100,000) that is more than double the national average (ABS, 2008)

Participation in youth arts is good for mental health – most of the time....



What about young people in the NT?



Corrugated Iron Youth Arts



CDU & Corrugated Iron Youth Arts Research Partnership

We explored *if, how* and *why* participating in youth arts was beneficial to young peoples' health and wellbeing.

We noticed that mental health outcomes stood out.....

Method

- In-depth interviews
- Convenience sample
 - inclusion criteria - over 18 and involved in youth arts with CIYA for at least 2 years between the ages of 12 – 26.)
 - Recruited via CIYA newsletter, contact from Jane, word of mouth.
- 17 participants (age range 18 -48)
- Narrative analysis (categorical content approach)

Results – 4 main themes

- Increased confidence (16/17)
- Development of creative self (17/17)
- Emotional development (16/17)
- Sense of Identity & Belonging (16/17)

Increased Confidence

- Being challenged and confronting fear
- Having a purpose
- Feeling valued
- Being treated like an adult

“There’s something about the immediate validation of performing....That immediate ego boost that comes with people saying ‘*well done, that was great, I loved it, you were excellent*’. As a teenager, there aren’t many opportunities to have that kind of validation”
(Participant 3).

Development of Creative Self

- Using Imagination and creativity
- Acquiring skills and knowledge
- Strong role models
- Developing options for the future

“At the time I kind of got involved I was just coming out. It gave me a lot of positive role models. You know, gay people who weren't drug addicts and paedophiles, you know what I mean, all of that stuff that I'd been told”

(Participant 2)

Emotional Development

- A safe place for expressing and sharing
- Having intense experiences
- Feeling happy

“Finding a space to express yourself in and learning to witness other people’s expression is fundamental to healthy emotional development.”

(Participant 7)

Identity & Belonging

- Exposure to difference
- Finding 'my people'

“I think you don't feel quite so much as an outsider, there's a group of people who like doing the same things as you and yeah maybe you feel a little bit less strange.”

(Participant 15)



Challenges

- Feelings of exclusion by other young people (2 participants)
- Body image issues (3 participants)



Discussion

Youth arts makes a positive contribution to:

Self confidence, identity formation, sense of belonging (as noted in the existing literature)

Our study has also highlight 'emotional development' and 'sense of creativity' as important to participants mental health.

It is important to create a safe space for exploration and creativity for young people who might challenge the dominant social norms and narratives.....

Limitations of the study

- Darwin-based only
- Relatively small
- One organisation
- Need to explore more diverse views if possible.

Where to?

- Continue building and sharing the story of youth arts participation– nationally.
- Encourage interest & investment for continuing regional and remote arts activities.

Thanks for listening.

