

February 2022

## Art Therapy at Four Winds: How a Commitment to Creativity in Treatment Can Heal

The art therapy program at Four Winds provides a creative and helpful way to engage patients in treatment. Ker Beckley, MS, LCAT (licensed creative arts therapist); Director of Art Therapy has been at the helm of this important therapeutic alternative for more than 25 years. Beckley and her graduate art therapy interns provide group therapy sessions several times a week for all patients in the hospital. They also provide one-on-one and small group sessions to some of the patients. Beckley works with each unit's treatment team to identify individuals that could benefit from this creative therapeutic approach. "It's not 'free art'" she explains. "The purpose of art therapy is essentially one of healing." The theory is that the art-making process is therapeutic in itself.



Beckley is Dialectical Behavior Therapy trained and has integrated DBT into the art therapy program. She possesses a rich educational background, which in addition to her formal training as an Art Therapist includes training in substance abuse counseling through the Maxwell Institute and psychodynamic therapy education through the Psychoanalytic Institute. She is a certified yoga instructor and has become an ordained interfaith minister in 2019 from All Faith Seminary International, created by Rabbi Gelberman; focusing on eastern religions, which hold the components of DBT. When reflecting on her educational training and professional experiences Beckley notes that she pulls different aspects of each to create a mindful therapeutic process for each patient. "Mindfulness," she explains, "plays a key role in encouraging the creative therapeutic process." Through art therapy patients develop and hone their abilities to regulate

emotion, improve interpersonal effectiveness and tolerate distress.

The use of different mediums, including drawing and painting materials, clay, chalk, oil pastels, or fusion beads, enables patients to use the creative process to increase insight, cope with stress, work through traumatic experiences and achieve greater self-confidence.

Group sessions allow patients to practice using DBT concepts in a safe environment. Through the creative process they can practice frustration tolerance, being in the moment, and being non-judgmental. Patients who are judgmental of their own art are encouraged to try "opposite action," a skill used to decrease painful emotions by engaging in action opposite to the emotion the patient is feeling. Beckley believes that art helps heal both the creator and the observer. It is with this

thinking in mind that Beckley began the tradition of hosting an annual Art Show for the hospital community including staff and patients. Beckley is also a former art gallery director. Her expertise in this area translates into a transformation of the hospital's conference center, which she designs to look like a gallery. Every patient currently in the hospital is encouraged to create an artwork and exhibit it. The young artists act like museum guides leading staff and other patients through the "gallery" and explaining the art work. Many child and adolescent patients have never been to a museum and they love the experience.

The art therapy program at Four Winds offers patients a creative treatment alternative. Beckley's myriad of training experiences and her strong commitment toward encouraging healing through the creative process, provide patients with a safe and creative approach to treatment.