The Effect of an Artist in Residence Program on Self-Reported Loneliness in Senior Citizens

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When artists give form to revelation, their art can advance, deepen and potentially transform the consciousness of their community.” ~ Alex Grey
Funding for the project was supported through the Pennsylvania Department of Aging, the Pennsylvania Council on the Arts and The University of Scranton. The concept of the project was developed through the Pennsylvania Department of Aging and the Pennsylvania Council on the Arts.
“The surprising finding is that our relationships and how happy we are in our relationships has a powerful influence on our health,” said Robert Waldinger, director of the study, a psychiatrist at Massachusetts General Hospital and a professor of psychiatry at Harvard Medical School. “Taking care of your body is important, but tending to your relationships is a form of self-care too. That, I think, is the revelation.”
Background

The Pennsylvania Department of Aging and The Pennsylvania Council on the Arts collaborated in funding and implementing an artist in residence program in 14 senior centers throughout the Commonwealth. These centers were located within the geographic boundaries of the Pennsylvania Council on the Arts, Arts Education Partnership sites.
Terminology

- **Artist in Residence Program**: A ten week program conducted by professional and vetted teaching artists who represent various arts disciplines such as dance, music, theatre, visual art and creative writing.

- **Institutional Review Board**: The IRB is a committee established to review and approve applications for research projects involving human subjects. The primary purpose of the IRB is to protect the rights and welfare of the human subjects.

- **The Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI)**: The IRB required that the lead investigator ensure that all partners who would be administering the instrument or have any contact with data complete the CITI training and attain verified certification before the study was begun.
Research Question

Is there a decrease in self-reported loneliness as measured by the UCLA Loneliness Scale following participation in a ten week artist in residence program?
Population and Sample

The population is defined as men and women, 60 years of age or older, who are clients of the state-funded senior centers throughout Pennsylvania.

- **Original Sample:** 280 participants
  - Participants who enrolled in the program and who planned on continuing to participate throughout all ten sessions. For various reasons they did not complete the post-test as they were not present for the session, or they did not continue to matriculate the in program.

- **Final Sample:** 71 participants: men, women, transgender, multiracial
  - Participants who enrolled in the program and were administered the pre and post tests. Data was collected from this sample.
Instrument: The UCLA Loneliness Scale
Dan Russel, University of Iowa

- The UCLA Loneliness Scale Version III was used as the research study instrument to gather data.
  - A 20-item scale designed to measure one’s subjective feelings of loneliness as well as feelings of social isolation. Participants rate each item on a scale from 1 (Never) to 4 (Often).
  - The measure has high internal consistency (coefficient alpha = .96) and a test-retest correlation over a two-month period of .73.

- The researcher gained permission from the author to use his instrument and is obligated to share the findings with him.
Length of the Study

The study was conducted from January 2017 through and including June 2017.

Each artist in residence worked with participants for a 10 week program. Each session was approximately 2 hours in duration.
Limitations of the Study

- Senior citizens may suffer from more frequent illnesses and may not be consistent with attending a 10 week program.
- Senior citizens may rely on transportation to and from the center that may not be consistent therefore restricting their participation.
- Senior citizens may be confused by the questions in the research instrument.
- Senior citizens may not want to report on a sensitive issue like loneliness.
- Ten weeks may not be long enough to measure change in loneliness.
- The analysis did not measure attributes such as differences in gender, age, economic status, education level, etc.
Quantitative Findings
As the researcher was comparing the self-reported loneliness of the same individuals pre-test and post-test, a dependent paired-samples t-test was utilized to compare the mean self-reported loneliness scale between the two administrations of the instrument.
Alpha Level

Since the entire population of seniors across the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania could not be included in the research, due to financial constraints, time limitations, and the voluntary nature of the study, a sample was selected to represent that population. As such, the research findings could not be without error. The researcher therefore had to identify an acceptable level of error/chance, which is the alpha level. The researcher selected an alpha level of .05, as this is the most commonly selected level of error/chance in the field of education. This means that the researcher was willing to accept up to and including 5% error/chance in the findings.
Significance Level

The level of significance, also known as the p value, indicates the probability of chance or error that were present in the findings. The level of significance was found to be .034 for a two-tailed test. As this test was one-tailed with a directional alternative hypothesis in favor of a decrease in self-reported loneliness among the participants, the level of significance was divided by 2. Therefore, the level of significance was found to be .017, or 1.7%. This means that the researcher can be 98.3% confident that the findings are real and due to the study rather than due to extraneous or confounding variables or chance.
Discussion
Reduced Levels of Loneliness

The implementation of the program was found to reduce levels of loneliness in the sample population.
The Pennsylvania Council on the Arts administered a survey to all participants in the program. A statistical analysis of the data was conducted, although this data is not associated with the approved research project. The data has revealed more information related to the artist in residence program.
Survey Items

• Learned more about myself through sharing my stories in an art form.
• My mood improved.
• I made new friends.
• I participate now in more social activities.
• I feel more connected to the community and to the center.
• I feel more creative.
• My physical health improved.
• I plan to participate in more programs at the center/site.
Survey Results

Two Chi Square Analyses were conducted:

1. Measured the relationship between age brackets the items on the survey.
2. Measured the relationship between gender and items on the survey.

Age Brackets: There is no difference in the varied age brackets in terms of results indicating that there is no need in the future to exclude any participant from participation regardless of age. NO special is necessary for different age brackets

Gender: Results of this analysis showed that females are 98% likely to return to the center after participating in the program. Males are 89% likely to return to the center after participating in the program.
Qualitative

• It is fun to meet new people and have fun.
• It brightens my day.
• I am excited to share my artwork.
• A newfound ability for me.
• This was truly a delightful learning experience. I saw growth in other participants too.
• I lost a few pounds.
• I feel more connected to folks.
• I recognize the importance of sharing life stories with family and friends.
Qualitative (cont.)

• The residency should be longer.
• I discovered I have more talent than I thought for art which made me more happy about myself.
• I enjoyed sharing their artwork.
• I felt more relaxed.
• I usually do not like to be around a lot of people but this class helped me interact better.
• My mood improved.
• I loved being with others who shared my interest.
Recommendations

It is recommended that further studies are conducted to gather data on the effect that artists in residence programs have on senior populations. Although many studies reveal changes in physical, mental or emotional health no study to date measures changes in creativity.

It is hypothesized that a qualitative and quantitative analysis of creativity development in senior citizens may reveal increases in cognitive ability.
Friendship is unnecessary, like philosophy, like art... It has no survival value; rather it is one of those things that give value to survival. C. S. Lewis