

Art Therapy - Profession specific descriptor for registered professionals

Art Therapists use non-verbal psychological therapy to support people to make changes in their lives, which can improve both mental and physical wellbeing. The person accessing arts therapies can: explore choices through artwork, trial a different version of themselves in role-play, find their voice with musical improvisation and learn to listen to their physical needs through movement. Arts therapists have a range of transferrable skills which can be activated in leadership roles to support the equally complex agenda of public health.



Wider Determinants

Art Therapists work across a range of sectors. This can include work with housing, education, the charity sector, mental health, and various community-based settings. Through working in this diverse range of sectors, Art Therapists work across organisations to improve the lives of people of all ages using their services. For example, Art Therapists have demonstrated that leading parent-infant art therapy targeted at families vulnerable to poor attachment relationships and who may be facing multiple deprivations and mental health difficulties can be highly effective. Through the Art Therapy session, positive parent-infant interactions are observed whilst giving therapeutic support to parental wellbeing, encouraging attuned responsive parenting, and increasing behaviours which build secure attachments.

Art Therapists can also take on the role of social prescribing. Examples of this include supporting individuals with severe mental illness to be discharged from inpatient settings. Working one to one to identify where and how individuals might access wider support following discharge has proved valuable to understanding and meeting the needs of individuals post discharge. Art Therapists can also be key to actively signpost through knowledge of local social groups, using the opportunity if an individual has engaged well in art therapy, to look for further community-based art groups (e.g., creative charity, creative arts, charities) to support the individual further.

On a day-to-day basis, Art Therapists think deeply about what might be going on in a service user's internal world, asking important questions such as "what are they going to do for the rest of the week now? What's their sleep hygiene? What's their routine". This approach considers the wider determinants in routine practice.

Health Improvement

Art Therapists contribute to health improvement, they consider how to make moments with service users meaningful in terms of the long-term effects on their life, by bringing in elements of psychoeducation, but also bringing elements of thinking about their own psychological and physical well-being. For example, Children and Adolescent Mental Health (CAMHs) inpatient services for

children and adolescents, therapeutic placements for children in care adoption, and support services are all very specific services that Art Therapists work indirectly with for health improvement.

Art Therapists work across the life course. This includes maternity and perinatal parent-infant mental health. Art therapists use artmaking to explore emotional difficulties such as anxiety in pregnancy or postnatal depression. Focused on improving relationships between parents and their babies.

Art Therapists also have a wider role in health improvement. Through service user interactions, they can have a diverse range of conversations to support health and wellbeing. Some examples of the role of Art Therapists in health improvement include; educating about sexual health and safety, self-harm, suicide prevention and reduction of infection, offering training on how to clean self-harm wounds properly, dangers of paracetamol overdose and sepsis.

Population Healthcare

Art Therapists play a key role in child and adolescent mental health services working with education provision, including education for fostered and adopted children or children with special guardianship orders. Art therapists have also a role within social care. Working with adult populations who've experienced trauma, with adults with eating disorders and personality disorders, people at high risk of mental health and people with anxiety and depression.

Art Therapists work in schools and can work with children who are adopted and who are struggling with social, emotional, and mental health wellbeing. Art Therapists can work with the schools and their settings around the impact on children and developmental trauma, not necessarily just from an Art Therapy perspective, but more psychoeducation.

Health Protection

During the pandemic, Art Therapists played an extended role in supporting conversations around infection prevention and COVID-19 vaccination. Art Therapists are also involved in ensuring that hospitals follow policies regarding yellow bracelets after treatment, talking to clients about wearing sunscreen, talking about phone use, and thinking about social stories and flu jabs.

Art Therapists have contributed to thinking about vaccine hesitancy, opening those conversations around fears about the vaccine, the pandemic, infection prevention, and vaccination becoming compulsory.

Art Therapists promoted a vaccination program for young gay, bisexual men, and transgender groups, who are 15 and above. Some of the people they collaborate with are working with many young people that are presenting in these populations.

Art Therapy - Wider Reading and Case Study Examples

Health Protection

Wider Determinants

- Using social prescribing within art therapy sessions as part of discharge planning
- Art therapy in a range of gallery-based arts interventions for the wellbeing of parents and infants
- Art Therapy – AHP as Prescriber – Social Prescribing

Population Healthcare

- Arts therapy leadership activates creative resources which promote individual, team, and community growth in mental health settings

Health Improvement

- The added value of art therapy practice within maternity and perinatal parent-infant mental health
- Art Psychotherapy in the community. Addressing health inequalities through Social Prescribing - an Asset Based Community Development (ABCD) approach
- Nourishing the soul: Art therapy with EMDR for the treatment of PTSD and bulimia in an adult mental health service