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Art Hives

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Wellness Through Radical Hospitality: Sheridan College

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Above and lower right: Outdoor art studio at Blackrock Art Hive

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WELLNESS THROUGH RADICAL HOSPITALITY: SHERIDAN COLLEGE

Susan Beniston with Dianne Shannon

OAKVILLE, ON

How did you find out about Art Hives?

I learned about art hives two years ago during the Canadian Art Therapy Association / Ontario Art Therapy Association conference in Toronto. I explored the concept more at <http://arthives.org/> that describes how community art studios build and transform community through creativity. The website also offers a guide for starting a Hive: <http://arthives.org/resources/art-hives-how-guide>

What is it about Art Hives that caught your interest?

As a faculty member, I frequently see high levels of anxiety and depression in students who need to learn self-regulation and improve their coping skills in order to thrive. To bridge these gaps and challenges, I imagined an Art Hive's potential to integrate my roles as artist, art therapist, and as an educator at Sheridan College. Although

When thinking about the workshops and gatherings that have happened at the Art Hive so far, is there a story or moment that stands out to you?

There are many moments when children and family members realise the significance of working together as an artist collective. The artworks made in the Blackrock Park Art Hive can be taken home and lived with. It generates the beginning of the home studio as an environmental installation. A family displays their artworks within their domestic space as a surrounding that represents each person as a unique maker. Family members are encouraged to generate a home atmosphere where their artworks belong together, as an assemblage of identities and perspectives.

Is there a story or moment in which you found yourself gaining new learning in art therapy through the Art Hive?

I have learned the significance of meeting children, specifically, within a pop-up impromptu outdoor studio located within a forest garden in a community park. There is a children's playground near the outdoor studio, so the studio exists in an area already frequented by children and their families. The forest garden was planted by local children and their teachers/parents/guardians between 2011 and 2017. A forest garden is composed of edible trees, flowers, wild plants

and herbs. It acts as a hideaway, a shelter, and a biodiversity habitat. The area is not exposed, but found. It is a place apart surrounded by the artistry of nature. The forest garden can be foraged for art materials — it is a living studio.

In regards to art therapy, I meet children and adults in the context of their everyday lives. The conversations we have can be related to social issues and family concerns. Often the making within nature addresses a family's current difficulty or loss. Encounters may seem ephemeral, and yet for this reason, they evoke intensity and clarity. The art then takes these conversations home for further elaboration and reflection.

Pamela Whitaker is an art therapist living in Ireland who practices under the name of Groundswell, a social enterprise working in the areas of art therapy, art and participation, and arts and health.



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How is an Art Hive different than an open studio?

My experiences with open studios were psychodynamically informed and psycho-educational; art as therapy frameworks within psychiatric settings that served as the holding environment. An Art Hive is more about community building and contributing to participant resiliency through the benefits of being creative.

How did you start the Sheridan College Art Hive?

Creating an Art Hive on my own seemed a large task but I was encouraged by the resources available on the Art Hive website to help me get started including guidelines and examples. There is also the two decades of the fruit of development and research by Dr. Janis Timm-Bottos that is available on the website for anyone interested in setting up the model. Part of the package is how to get an Art Hive off the ground by writing grants and finding a space. For the Sheridan College Art Hive I had to consider the target audience and needs of the students, faculty, and staff. I also chose to

collaborate with the Trafalgar Campus Library, as they were keen on community-building too. Combining our interests, with a visible location was central to reach across all disciplines while being accessible; to provide an inclusive environment for everyone.

What would I see when I enter the Art Hive?

You would be warmly welcomed by myself or a student and introduced to art stations with activities that engage participants with user-friendly and easily successful activities, such as button making or collage. A table where people can help themselves to tea and snacks contributes to the welcoming, warm atmosphere. Other tables, or stations, have art materials set up for activities such as gratitude scrolls, intention sticks, needle felting, painting, and drawing. We also offer Material Connexion samples such as fabric, wood, metal, and plastic to stimulate the imagination and senses (<https://explore.sheridancollege.ca/hmc/material-connexion-library>). Throughout the Hive you would see people at all stages of engagement and creativity, such as exploring materials, focusing on a project, sharing what they've made, or exchanging ideas.

How do you measure success?

Participants are invited to fill out a form as they leave to provide us with some feedback. The Art

Hive's contribution to the college's community has also been recognized through an invitation by Sheridan Creates — a day-long celebration of Sheridan's successes and innovations — to set up an Art Hive that is also open to the community. There's been some internal press coverage and more invitations to collaborate in initiatives like Sheridan's Kindness Campaign and Take Back the Night.

Why would an art therapist want to consider starting an Art Hive?

Art Hives are designed to transform communities, to generate positive energy and to increase well-being. The model is helpful for art therapists who seek to build a creative community in clinical context and want to build a sustainable working opportunity collaboratively with others. Art hives also facilitate community connections from which to build and grow a practice.

Susan Beniston is an art therapist, artist, educator and CATA registered member since 1996. Susan is an art therapy innovator who has created opportunities since the mid 1980s to introduce the benefits of art therapy to her work in psychiatry, education, and research in creative aging. As an art educator with Sheridan College's Faculty of Animation, Arts, and Design, Susan recently developed Sheridan's Art Hive Initiative. ●



Above: Art Hive HQ at Concordia University, Montreal, QC.

Right: Montreal's first Art Hive, La Ruche d'Art St-Henri, opened in 2010.

TRANSFORMING COMMUNITIES: ART HIVE NETWORK

The model and practice of Art Hives have evolved through two decades of sustained practice research led by Dr. Janis Timm-Bottos. The Art Hive network is coordinated by art therapist Rachel Chainey, located at Concordia University, with 135 Art Hives (and counting!) across Canada and beyond. For more information about finding or starting an Art Hive, please visit <http://arthives.org/>

