Wellness Through Radical Hospitality: Sheridan College

Susan Beniston  
*Sheridan College*, susan.beniston@sheridancollege.ca

Dianne Shannon

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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.

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 Sheridan offers undergraduate Social Service Worker, as well as Child and Youth Worker Programs, there are no mental health related degree programs offered, such as social work, psychology, or art therapy.

What qualities of Art Hives do you appreciate?

The Art Hive model is designed to be adapted, it’s flexible to the needs of specific communities. That need may vary and be more suitable for an Art Hive that is open to any participants or closed for a specific group or audience. Art Hives are non-hierarchical — knowledge is shared among all participants — which shifts the dynamic of an educational institution and is empowering for everyone who takes part. Art Hive’s approach of ‘radical hospitality’ encourages warmth and human attachment to facilitate the connection of people with their creativity within a community of creative engagement. >>>

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How is an Art Hive different than an open studio?

My experiences with open studios were psychologically 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.