



"Rangoli Landscape" June 2019.
Artists: CROP Members.
Materials: Rice, food colour, glue



Art making in mental health

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INTRODUCTION

Art making and mental health in Fiji is set in a context of recovery oriented practice in mental health services, with St. Giles developing an OT program and the Community Recovery Outreach Program (CROP) since 2011. These programs have been influenced by European and Asian practices, but conceptualised for Fiji communities.

Innovation in psychosocial interventions that are aligned with the systemic and structural realities of Pacific mental health care is driven by workforce engagement, with Fiji the first country to offer multidisciplinary postgraduate diploma tailored for Pacific mental health workers.

The model of art and health as an assets based framework (Fenner et al., in press) is well aligned with this foundation of mental health service delivery in Fiji.

PARTNERSHIPS

Supported by Fiji National University's psychiatry program, the initial partnership with Australian Awards Fellowships created opportunity for two Fiji Alliance for Mental Health (FAMH) representatives to undertake study placement with St. Vincent's Mental Health in Melbourne



Image: Brigid Ryan, Salochana Chetty, Patricia Fenner, Thelma Nabukavou

The program engaged with La Trobe University's Art Therapy Program, with shared interests in cultural understandings of art making and recovery from a mental illness. Partnering with St. Vincent's Foundation has also provided further resources for both the art program, and a research project to begin in June 2019, with Chief Investigators from Fiji National University and La Trobe University.

AIM OF THE STUDY

To investigate the benefits and challenges of developing an art program, using an art and health assets based framework.



"Our Galaxy" March 2019.
Artists: CROP Members and Carers.
Materials: Egg cartons, glue, acrylic paint glitter

METHODS

Qualitative and quantitative questionnaires evaluated the key activities, including tailored training program and follow up training workshop in June 2018. The workshop was evaluated against the stated aims to engage diverse stakeholders and introduce arts as an asset model as a potential framework for art making sessions.

After 12 months of art sessions offered for people at CROP and St. Giles, a review of activities included who was involved and what were the initial responses to the art making using the asset based framework.



Charles Tigerea with his art

RESULTS

The training provided technical skills and practical strategies, which all 25 participants reported applicable to their work supporting people with a mental illness.

In the first 12 months after the training, three participants developed capacity and had dedicated resources to facilitate regular art making sessions, with others being involved on an occasional basis.

Participants in art-making sessions include CROP members, patients, carers, families, staff and volunteers. Feedback received indicates that the group work has been well received, with art making as an opportunity for staff, patients, and families to share their emotions and experiences in a non-judgemental way.

The sessions using Fijian art materials were identified as extremely important, as they created the opportunity to draw on strengths of identity, culture and family that is so crucial to wellbeing.

DISCUSSIONS

The initial art workshops created a ripple effect. Influenced by the lead facilitator, people engaged well in the sessions, as well as continuing to work on projects at home and share reflections on the impacts of art making.

Stigma reduction is an important role for mental health care in Fiji. Difficulties in expressing emotion and mental distress can lead to lack of treatment seeking, lack of support from families and communities, and poorer outcomes for people with a mental illness. This study shows that engaging families, and staff in art making sessions may lead to less stigmatising attitudes and better understanding of the experiences of mental distress.

Long term partnerships have been crucial to the achievements in this project, and to potential sustainability of the activities. Shared interests and experience in other mental health projects over the last 10 years has built up considerable trust in the relationship.

It was central to the project that the leadership and direction of the collaboration was shared between Fiji and Australia.



Doodled Sunburst, January 2019. CROP and Carers
Materials: Voi Voi, Pens

Key Activities and Outcomes		
Australia Awards Fellowships Feb-March 2018	St. Vincent's, FAMH and FNU collaborate for tailored training in Melbourne for FAMH representatives. Includes engagement with La Trobe University's Art Therapy program and attend special exhibitions at the Dax Centre, and the National Gallery Victoria (NGV).	 Group Mural workshop, June 2019
Follow up visit and workshop June 2018	Technical skills and support, as well as developing new strategies with FAMH, St. Giles (CROP and OT program), Psychiatric Survivors Association, Empower Fiji, and Salvation Army. The art making workshops aimed to build capacity for people to work with consumers, carers, health professionals in art making in health settings.	
Art sessions- June 2018- June 2019	From June 2018- December 2018, weekly with CROP members and with carers, increasing to twice weekly from January 2019 to June 2019. St. Giles' Occupational Therapy program engaged people in inpatient settings in art making sessions weekly from November 2018 to June 2019. Facilitators had participated in the initial workshop, and additionally engaged guest artists, who were new to mental health. Materials included Masi design, clay, pastels, local materials like bark, voi voi and coconut	
Research partnership	Fiji National University and La Trobe University build a partnership to undertake research activities. The project received ethics approval from both universities, the Ministry of Health, Ministry of Education, Heritage and Arts, as well as an approved research visa from Ministry of Immigration.	
Research activities and Art Exhibition at YMCA, Suva June 2019	The researchers conducted a qualitative evaluation study using the focus group method of Vei vo saki yaga, (worthwhile discussion about serious topics). Data collection completed, with analysis and write up to follow. The visit included an exhibition of the art at the YMCA in Suva, which was attended by 30 stakeholders. The project was featured in daily news broadcast of Fiji National Broadcasting, as well as in the Fiji Times.	
		 Group Mural workshop, June 2019



Marasia Korotianoa, with "A Mother's Heart"

CONCLUSION

Encouraging indications that this program can value add to healthcare being provided for people with a mental illness.

The data shows a congruence between the art methodology and the cultural context. This is potentially a good fit for people receiving services with the recovery based program and for acute and long term care treatment in inpatient settings.