

COMMUNITY AND THE ARTS

**A literature review of the multi-dimensional
impact of community-based arts programs**

“[A]rts programming is strongly correlated with demonstrable, positive effects on economic prosperity, educational outcomes, physical and mental health, multiracial social cohesion, civic and civil engagement, and the reinforcement of equity and social justice.”

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B.A. 2019

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June 5, 2018

Executive Summary

Over the past few decades researchers have compiled a body of work seeking to quantitatively and qualitatively measure the impact of arts programming across several dimensions of human and social life. This research literature reports that arts programming is strongly correlated with demonstrable, positive effects on economic prosperity, educational outcomes, physical and mental health, multiracial social cohesion, civic and civil engagement, and the reinforcement of equity and social justice. This report summarizes that literature.

Economic Prosperity

Arts programming, particularly the performing arts and interactive arts, has a positive impact on a community's economic prosperity. A study of 91 communities, 2,988 arts organizations, and a total of 39,518 survey respondents calculated the economic impact of arts organizations. Cohen et al (2003). The study measured the effect on household incomes through employment, local spending, non-local spending, and local and state government revenue. The authors reported that “nationally, we estimate that America’s nonprofit arts industry generates **\$134 billion** in economic activity every year-**\$53.2 billion** in spending by arts organizations and an additional **\$80.8 billion** in event-related spending by arts audiences. This economic activity has a significant impact on the nation’s economy, supporting **4.9 million** jobs and generating **\$24 billion** in total government revenue.”¹ This study prompted the U.S. Conference of Mayors in 2002 to pass a resolution that urged Mayors across the U.S. to invest in the arts as a viable means to spur economic growth. Arts programming is an economic driver that attracts additional commerce and investment.

Educational Outcomes

In a canvas of four national longitudinal studies of children and youth, [James Catterall et al. reported](#) a statistically significant correlation between high engagement with arts programming and academic outcomes. The U.S Department of Education conducted three of the studies. The U.S. Department of Labor sponsored the fourth study. They collectively follow the progress of

¹ Randy Cohen, William Schaffer, and Benjamin Davidson, *Arts and Economic Prosperity: The Economic Impact of Nonprofit Arts Organizations and Their Audiences*, *The Journal of Arts Management, Law, and Society* 33, no. 1 (2003): 30.

children and youth from 1988 to 2008, and organized students in three categories by their engagement with the arts and their socioeconomic status (SES):

- low arts/low SES,
- high arts/low SES and
- overall sample (all SES).

Catterall found that “for many outcome areas, statistically significant differences favoring arts involvement were found exclusively in low-SES groups.”² Academic performance was one of these outcome areas. This study tracked test scores in math, science, and writing, as well as mean GPA. Across all these measures, students of low SES that were highly engaged in arts programming far exceeded their peers of low arts/low SES. In some cases, high arts/low SES students outperformed the overall population representing all SES levels. Some of the most promising data reveal that 71% of high arts/low SES students attended college. In contrast, their peers of the same SES but with low art programming engagement went on to college at a rate of 48%. Additionally, high arts/low SES students were decidedly more involved in extracurricular activities and volunteered in their communities at much higher rates than their peers. These impressive outcomes in educational performance may also indicate an effect on labor market outcomes. Of the high arts/low SES populations, 29.7% enrolled in professional majors, such as accounting, finance, and management. This is more than double the rate of the low art/low SES peers. In-fact, high arts/low SES students out-represented all SES groups in higher education across all areas of study.

Physical and Mental Health

Engaging in physical, emotional and intellectual creative expression has long been understood as a vital element in the health of people across many cultures. The research literature confirms this understanding. For example, it demonstrates that the arts improve quality of life and significantly contribute in many ways to better outcomes for medical patients. Participation in creative self-expression, whether in the form of theater, dance, music, visual arts, or writing, have positive impacts on stress, immune functions, and emotional wellbeing. Health care practitioners and researchers have contributed substantial data showing a correlation between art

² James S Catterall, *The Arts and Achievement in At-Risk Youth: Findings from Four Longitudinal Studies, Research Report #55*, National Endowment for the Arts,, (2012): 11.

therapy and better patient outcomes. Heather L. Stuckey, DEd, and Jeremy Nobel, MD, MPH³ compiled a highlighted overview of studies measuring the impact of music, visual arts, writing, and performance-based arts on patient outcomes.

According to scholars (Guzzetta⁴, White⁵, Burns et al.⁶), music therapy contributes to reductions in heart rate, respiratory rate, myocardial oxygen demand, and anxiety for coronary artery disease patients. Further, Burns et al., found that cancer patients who engaged in music therapy showed distinct improvements in well-being and relaxation, and experienced reductions in tension and serum cortisol levels during music listening experiences. Creative writing also has meaningful impacts on health and well-being regarding patients' ability to cope with trauma, anger, fatigue, and feelings of depression during treatment. Broderick et al. (2005)⁷ Graham et al. (2008)⁸ also demonstrate the relationship between arts engagement and positive patient outcomes in their studies observing patients being treated for Fibromyalgia and chronic pain.

Movement-based arts used as a part of therapy and wellness programs also have positive physiological outcomes in elderly patients. Greenspan et al. (2007)⁹ and Noice et al. (2004)¹⁰ both studied the effects of movement-based arts engagement with elderly patients and found significant cognitive and physiological improvements compared to a control group of peers.

³ Heather Stuckey and Jeremy Nobel, *The Connection Between Art, Healing, and Public Health: A Review of Current Literature*, American Journal of Public Health 100, no. 2 (2010): 254-63.

⁴ Cathie E Guzzetta, *Effects of Relaxation and Music Therapy on Patients in a Coronary Care Unit with Presumptive Acute Myocardial Infarction*, Heart and Lung 18, no. 6 (1989): 609-16.

⁵ J M White, "Music Therapy: *An Intervention to Reduce Anxiety in the Myocardial Infarction Patient*, Clinical Nurse Specialist CNS 6, no. 2 (1992): 58-63.

⁶ S J Burns, M S Harbuz, F Hucklebridge, and L Bunt, *A Pilot Study into the Therapeutic Effects of Music Therapy at a Cancer Help Center* Alternative Therapies in Health and Medicine 7, no. 1 (2001): 48-56.

⁷ J E Broderick, D U Junghaenel, and J E Schwartz. *Written Emotional Expression Produces Health Benefits In Fibromyalgia Patients*, Psychosom Med. 2005; 67(2): 326-334.

⁸ Graham-Pole J. *Illness and the Art of Creative Self Expression*. Oakland, CA: New Harbinger Publications; 2000.

⁹ Greenspan AI, Wolf SO, Kelley ME, O'Grady M. *Tai Chi And Perceived Health Status In Older Adults Who Are Transitionally Frail: A Randomized Controlled Trial*. Phys Ther. 2007;87(5):525-535.

¹⁰ Noice H, Noice T, Staines G. *A Short-Term Intervention To Enhance Cognitive And Affective Functioning In Older Adults*. J Aging Health. 2004;16(4):562-585.

Some of the most promising studies regarding the impact of art on human health outcomes have demonstrated its influence on mental and emotional health, particularly for at-risk youth, homeless, and elderly populations. In their 3-year study, Robin Wright Ph.D., Lindsay John Ph.D., Ramona Alaggia Ph.D., and Julia Sheel¹¹ observed the effects of arts programming on the behavioral and emotional development among children of low-income communities. Over the course of this study, participants were measured according to participation, social skill development, task completion, and art skills development. The youth that participated in arts programming had a statistically significant rate of improvement across all measures. When measuring for emotional and behavioral outcomes, youth participants in regular arts programs started with higher rates of negative conduct incidents than the control group, and at the end of the longitudinal study had significantly fewer such incidences compared with the very same control group.

Multiracial Social Cohesion

Multicultural arts help people to express, observe and celebrate their own cultures and identities as well as to appreciate the different cultures and identities of others around them. Chavez and Weisinger (2008)¹² report that “the dimensions of representation, participation and access also relate to establishing a relational culture within which people feel proud of their own uniqueness, while becoming socially integrated into a larger group by celebrating the ‘me’ within the ‘we’” (p. 378). Many studies have concluded and reinforced the findings that community arts programming promotes social cohesion and also engages individuals in socializing activities. Interaction with culturally relevant arts programs both gives participants and audiences a chance to express their own culture while providing moments to learn about and admire the culture of others. In their study of community arts programs in 2002, observing and surveying 310

¹¹ Robin Wright Lindsay John Ramona Alaggia Julia Sheel., *Community-based Arts Program for Youth in Low-Income Communities: A Multi-Method Evaluation*. *Child & Adolescent Social Work Journal* 23, no. 5-6 (2006): 635-52.

¹² Chavez CI and Weisinger JY (2008) *Beyond Diversity Training: A Social Infusion For Cultural Inclusion*. *Human Resource Management* 47: 331–350.

individuals across several communities in Chicago, [Wali, Severson and Longoni \(2002\)](#)¹³ conclude, that community arts projects lead to greater social cohesion when they are both accessible and inclusive. These attributes of community arts programs also improve interracial and intergenerational communication and build a stronger sense of community across dispersed individuals. Similarly, [LeRoux & Bernadska \(2014\)](#)¹⁴ studied the impact of art on social behavior and civil society. They “find strong evidence that the arts enhance civil society; individuals who have both direct and indirect exposure to the arts are more engaged in civic activities within their communities, have higher levels of social tolerance on some dimensions of the measure, and demonstrate higher rates other-regarding behavior” (p. 2).

Civic and Civil Engagement

In the study mentioned earlier, Catterall reported statistically significant observations over the course of the four longitudinal studies regarding levels of civic engagement by low SES students who were highly engaged in arts programming. The measures of engagement were extracurricular activity, volunteering, reading news articles at least once a week, registering to vote, voting in local elections, voting in national elections, and participating in a campaign. Low SES students with high arts engagement significantly outperformed their peers of the same SES level in every area of measure. As observed by Galston, (2001)¹⁵ civic engagement and participation have been declining among American youth for many years. This trend is most severe among communities of color. Kuttner (2016)¹⁶ found a positive correlation between youth participation in arts programs and increased levels of activism and civic engagement. Kuttner (2016) states, “youth are encouraged to see themselves as cultural leaders, as individuals who

¹³ Wali A, Severson R, Langoni M. *Finding Cohesion, Capacity and Other Cultural Benefits in Unexpected Place*. Chicago Center for Ars Policy. Chicago, IL (2002).

¹⁴ Leroux, Kelly, and Anna Bernadska. *Impact of the Arts on Individual Contributions to US Civil Society*, Journal of Civil Society, 2014, 1-21.

¹⁵ Galston, William A. A. *Political Knowledge, Political Engagement, and Civic Education*, Annual Review of Political Science 4, no. 1 (2001): 217-34.

¹⁶ Kuttner, Paul J. "Hip-Hop Citizens: Arts-Based, Culturally Sustaining Civic Engagement Pedagogy, Harvard Educational Review 86, no. 4 (2016): 527-55.

through storytelling, the arts, and other forms of cultural expression protect and guard the cultural life of their communities” (p. 543). It is the empowering nature of exploration, discovery and self-expression that builds efficacy.

Equity and Social Justice

Art is a natural and widely-used social technology for achieving social justice. Mary Stone Hanley (2013)¹⁷ argues, “imagination and creativity are the source of social justice and the arts. A just society and an art form must first be imagined, then media, whether paint, words, or culture, must be transformed. Imagination is the capacity to think of possibilities beyond what exists” (p. 2). The creative process is the essential genius of what defines our humanity. It is the force of our own agency. Agency is at the core of artistic expression. Agency is also the core of equity and social justice. Hanley (2013) explains::

“One of the social justice aspects of this work lies in the empowerment that comes with the clarification of internal voice and the creative agency that then can be used to transform the world through works of expression. Through the arts, we can study the known and the ubiquitous unknown on conscious and unconscious, intellectual, intuitive, and emotional levels; we can inform, empathize, envision possibilities and raise critical consciousness. No matter how deep the oppressive conditions, artists can reclaim humanity for themselves and their communities through their creative agency, and they model possibility for others who search for meaning and a way to empowerment” (p. 5).

Conclusion

An extensive research literature examines how and why arts programming affects the health and well-being of individuals and communities. That literature confirms the common intuition, evident in all cultures, about the value of art. Art can bind people together while celebrating their different identities. Artistic expression strengthens efficacy and agency and fosters shared experiences. Art helps people learn and prosper. In these ways, art can promote individual and community well-being.

¹⁷ Mary Stone Hanley, Gilda L Sheppard, George W. Noblit, and Thomas Barone. *Culturally Relevant Arts Education for Social Justice: A Way Out of No Way*. Taylor and Francis, 2013

Why the Tacoma Housing Authority is interested in art

These research conclusions about the value of art interest the Tacoma Housing Authority (THA) for three main reasons. **First**, THA houses children and adults who come from trauma, from disadvantage or from the community's margins. They need help to stabilize and heal and then to find a safe and nurturing part in their community's life. THA also houses a large number of elderly residents. They struggle with isolation and loneliness. The research literature describes how community arts can help in all these cases. **Second**, THA's mission is also to help people succeed, not just as tenants but also as "parents, students, wage earners and builders of assets" and to help its communities be "safe, vibrant, prosperous, attractive, and just." The research literature reports that community arts can help do this. **Third**, THA's portfolio of properties and communities are the region's most diverse according to factors that in other parts of the real estate market are segregating factors. At THA's communities they are integrating factors: homeowner-renter, income, race, language, national origin, age, and ability and disability. The challenge, and the charm, for THA – and for the nation – is to help people live and learn across these lines. The research literature reports that community arts can help them do this as well.

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SUGGESTED READINGS:

The Arts and Achievement in At-Risk Youth: Findings from Four Longitudinal Studies
<https://www.arts.gov/publications/arts-and-achievement-risk-youth-findings-four-longitudinal-studies>

The Arts and Civic Engagement: A Field Guide for Practice, Research, and Policy
https://repository.upenn.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?referer=https://www.google.com/&httpsredir=1&article=1001&context=siap_civic_engagement

Impact of the Arts on Individual Contributions to U.S. Civil Society
<https://www.arts.gov/sites/default/files/Research-Art-Works-Chicago.pdf>

Arts & trauma informed care within homelessness services: the development of arts-based cooperatives as a route into employment
<http://www.iimhl.com/files/docs/20170908.pdf>