

**California Lawyers for the Arts
National Arts in Corrections Initiative**

**New York Arts in Corrections Demonstration Project
Summary of Ulster Project Results
May 20, 2020**

Project Background

Under the auspices of the New York State Council on the Arts, California Lawyers for the Arts engaged the Woodstock School of Art to provide a drawing and watercolor class for a self-selected group of men at the Ulster Correctional Facility. Funding for this demonstration project was provided by the Art for Justice Fund and the National Endowment for the Arts as well as the New York Department of Corrections and Community Supervision (DOCCS). This was the first course that was completed as part of a two-year national project expanding arts in corrections in five states, including New York, Louisiana, Michigan, Ohio and Texas. We look forward to adding more cases as we continue project implementation.

The impact on the students, who were recruited from a unit of older residents who are being prepared for release, was measured through written surveys that they completed during their first and last classes. The research protocol and surveys were reviewed and approved in advance by the DOCCS Department of Program Planning, Research and Evaluation.

The 12-session class was taught by Keith Gunderson, an experienced art teacher who was selected by the Woodstock School of Art.. The results, described below, provide striking evidence about the value of the arts in changing the participants' attitudes, emotional management and intellectual flexibility.

Partial Summary of Pre and Post Program Evaluation Results

This is a preliminary report highlighting some of the key findings from the Ulster study. Participants anonymously completed pre and post-program evaluations at the beginning and end of the 12-week drawing and watercolor course that started December 6, 2019. We received 14 completed pre-program surveys and 12 completed post-program surveys; two students did not finish the course. A comparison of the pre and post-program responses shows that participants reported more positive attitudes and behaviors after taking the art program.

The responses suggest that the art class had a positive effect on the participants' productivity and time management skills. On the pre-program survey, 69% of respondents (9 out of 13) strongly agreed with the statement "I plan and use my time efficiently (Question #12)" and 92% (11 out of 12) strongly agreed on the post-survey

In response to the statement, “I like to be an active, get into it person (#31),” 43% of respondents (6 out of 14) strongly agreed on the pre-survey and 75% (9 out of 12) strongly agreed on the post-survey. Additionally, 46% of respondents (6 out of 13) strongly agreed on the pre-survey that “art will help me improve my concentration (#39)” while 75% (9 out of 12) strongly agreed on the post-survey.

Participants reported having better emotional control and mental flexibility after completing the arts course. On the pre-program survey, 46% of participants (6 out of 13) strongly agreed, “I change my thinking or opinions easily if there is a better idea (#14)” which increased to 75% (9 out of 12) who strongly agreed on the post-survey. When given the statement, “I stay calm and overcome anxiety in new or changing situations (#22),” 23% of respondents (3 out of 13) strongly agreed on the pre-survey and 58% (7 out of 12) strongly agreed on the post-survey.

The results demonstrate that the arts program had a positive effect on participants’ relationships and social interactions. On the pre-program survey, 25% of respondents (3 out of 12) strongly agreed that “art helps me and my family share our thoughts and feelings with each other (#40)” which increased to 42% (5 out of 12) who strongly agreed on the post-survey. There was a 25% increase in those who strongly agreed with the statement, “art is a way for me to connect with other inmates (#41),” with 25% (3 out of 12) who strongly agreed on the pre-survey and 50% (6 out of 12) who strongly agreed on the post-survey.

The post-program survey included the question, “did you enjoy the course you just completed? (#8)”, to which 100% of respondents (11 out of 11) replied “Yes”. There was a 33% increase in those who strongly agreed with the statement, “this program will give me hope for a better future (# 43)”, with 42% who strongly agreed (5 out of 12) on the pre-survey and 75% (9 out of 12) who strongly agreed on the post-survey. When asked whether, “this course will have a positive effect on me (#42),” 42% of respondents (5 out of 12) strongly agreed on the pre-survey, and on the post-survey, 100% of respondents (12 out of 12) strongly agreed, “this course had a positive effect on me. (#43).”

These findings demonstrate that the students' engagement with art had an overall positive impact on their attitudes and behaviors, and several students expressed a desire to take more art classes in the future.

Additional comments from participants include:

- “I truly do appreciate your sincere efforts towards a productive experience. It's certainly a measure for improvement and I definitely hope and pray you're able to extend more of your concern/ability in the future -- perhaps on the same Friday afternoons. which is best for creative energies (at the end of the prison week). God bless!”

- “This has been an amazing experience! The instructor is very well informed and is an excellent teacher, we all have learned so much from this course. Learning and experiencing watercolor painting was not only fun but also rewarding. I am very much looking forward to more sessions and working on my own. Thank you!”
- “This is a very good program. Very good teachings. I truly enjoyed this class. I hope to take part 2.”

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For More Information, Please Contact:

Alma Robinson, Executive Director and Principal Researcher, California Lawyers for the Arts
alma.robinson@calawyersforthearts.org
(415) 796-7692

