



Art therapy 22 Sessions Report

Introduction

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Mental health is fundamental to general health and wellbeing; mental health affects physical health and physical health affects mental health. The two are inseparable in overall wellness.

Art therapy is a technique rooted in the idea that creative expression can foster healing and mental well-being. Art, either creating it or viewing others' art, is used to help people explore emotions, develop self-awareness, cope with stress, boost self-esteem, and work on social skills.

Art therapy is considered as an approach to mental health that utilizes the process of creating art to improve mental, physical, and emotional wellness.

Aims

The goal of art therapy in this particular situation is to utilize the creative process to help migrant teenagers explore self-expression and, in doing so, find new ways to gain personal insight and develop new coping skills.

During our 22 group sessions Art Therapy program we tackled the following topics in order to help our clients to improve their mental, physical and emotional wellness:

1. Mindfulness (session 1 to session 5)

2. Self-awareness (session 6 to session 11)
3. Self-esteem (session 12 to session 16)
4. Stress and anxiety (session 17 to session 21)
5. Last session - Feedback session (session 22)

Mindfulness helps people experience peace and serenity.

When an individual is mindful he is fully aware of his senses and experiences. The client is encouraged to accept his thoughts, feelings and behaviors and not to judge them. He doesn't dwell on the past or on feelings of guilt. Individuals are encouraged to focus their full attention on what they are currently experiencing and to let their incoming thoughts gently flow away. Attention, or awareness, is the central feature of mindfulness.

Mindfulness is a skill that allows us to be less reactive to what is happening in the moment. It is a way of relating to all experiences—positive, negative and neutral—such that our overall suffering is reduced and our sense of well-being increases.

Mindfulness improves both mental and physical health. It reduces anxiety and helps individuals find pleasure in life. It lessens worries and regrets, and helps people enjoy relationships and activities. Self-esteem increases as worry and concern about what others think diminishes and control over one's life increases. Pain and obsessive thoughts often seem to decrease. Focusing on the moment generates energy, clear-headedness and might help individuals develop new habits that help to weaken negative patterns of thinking and behavior.

Over time, mindfulness brings about long-term changes in mood and levels of happiness and well-being.

Art therapy works well with mindfulness because being engaged in creative endeavors helps the individual focus on the artwork, which becomes his center of consciousness. He is in the moment, aware only of color, line, image and design. He is not judging his work, but allowing his art to flow from within.

Self-awareness is important for many reasons. It can improve one's judgment and help identify opportunities for personal growth and professional development. Self-awareness builds self-esteem and confidence. It helps individuals decide which direction their life should be following and what their needs and desires are.

Being self-aware includes acknowledging and understanding:

- Wishes and desires
- Strengths
- Weaknesses
- Motivation or health and happiness
- Challenges
- Relationships with others
- Barriers to achieving wishes
- Beliefs and values
- Self-esteem

The exercises we have chosen help clients broaden their outlook and examine their identity, lifestyle, goals, relationships, purpose, and overall life satisfaction. In order for a person to change negative thought patterns, unhealthy behaviors and low self-esteem, he must first become aware of any barriers to happiness and success. Transformation entails self-awareness. An individual needs to be aware of his desires, fears, dreams, and goals. If a person is unhappy or indecisive, it is important to have a plan and understand what has to be completed in order to head in the right direction. Until an individual recognizes his purpose, thinking patterns, and life path, he will have difficulty forging ahead and overcoming obstacles. Participation in self-awareness activities helps create a pathway for further exploration and reflection.

Self-esteem develops from many sources including one's self-appraisal, achievements, parental support and approval, acceptance by friends and significant people in one's life, as well as handling challenges faced throughout the years. "Self-esteem is how we value ourselves; it is how we perceive our value to the world and how valuable we think we are to others."

In psychology, the term self-esteem is used to describe a person's overall sense of self-worth or personal value. According to Nathaniel Branden, PhD: "Self-esteem is the experience of being competent to cope with the basic challenges of life and of being worthy of happiness."

As adults, we are the judges of who we are and we decide our self-worth. For instance, someone who is nearly penniless and has a job he/she dislikes can have high self-esteem and someone who is financially secure with a loving family can have low self-esteem. It depends on how we view our environment, others, and ourselves. We decide if our lives are meaningful, if we want to change our life, and most importantly, if we are worthy individuals.

Our "core beliefs" often help determine our self-esteem. Awareness of these beliefs will enable us to increase our self-esteem while becoming more aware of our emotions, patterns of thinking and behavior.

Anxiety and Stress

Stress reduction techniques help individuals relax, reduce anxiety, lessen the degree and frequency of anxiety attacks and learn how to be mindful. People learn skills to cope with illness, fear, frustration, loss and relationship problems. They discover the importance of positive thinking, self-processing, and healthy self-talk.

Individuals become skilled in identifying and changing erroneous thinking such as catastrophizing, over-generalizing, and labeling. They learn methods to stop worrying such as thought-stopping, positive self-talk and identifying realistic and unrealistic fears.

Additionally, stress reduction techniques help individuals become increasingly aware of harmful roles they may take on. They identify negative relationship and life patterns, and try to change and/or improve them. People learn coping techniques such as choosing one's battles and focusing on the positive aspects of their life instead of the negative. They discover how to be patient by taking one day at a time, taking tiny steps forward, and not allowing themselves to be overwhelmed by

adversity. Clients learn how to identify and avoid anxiety triggers. They focus on support systems and asking for help when needed. Individuals come to understand the importance that attitude and motivation play in reducing stress, and they learn self-soothing techniques such as taking long walks, celebrating achievements and exercising. Individuals learn to take care of themselves physically and psychologically, and to focus on their strengths and attributes.

Target group: Young Refugees, asylum seekers and EU migrants.

Refugees, asylum seekers and EU migrants are at heightened risk for certain mental health disorders, including post-traumatic stress, depression and psychosis.

Numbers continue to increase as people flee their homelands due to human rights violations, persecution, poverty and conflict, searching for better life conditions. Once in host countries, they are often met with substandard conditions, uncertainty and instability. The combined result is a growing trend of mental health disorders and attempted suicides among the very populations hoping to escape their challenging situations.

In addition to being exposed to various risk factors for mental disorders, migrants often encounter barriers to accessing appropriate health care to address these problems. Some of the greatest challenges for migrant populations within host countries include: lack of knowledge regarding health care entitlements and health care systems; poor command of the language; differing belief systems and cultural expectations for health care; and a general lack of trust in professionals and authorities.

Rates of depression and anxiety disorders tend to increase with time, and poor mental health is associated with deprived socioeconomic conditions – in particular social isolation and unemployment.

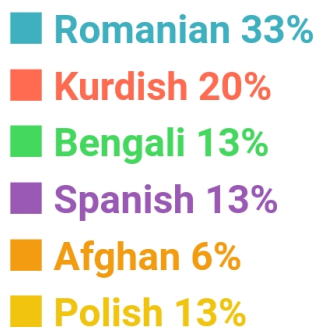
Child refugees and migrants, especially those unaccompanied by a parent or guardian, face intense psychological trauma as a result of fleeing their homelands and entering into states of uncertainty, physical danger and distress.

By using different Art Therapy techniques such as mindfulness exercises, Self-awareness and self-esteem exercises and many exercises intended to develop anxiety and stress management skills, we aim to help individuals experiencing emotional and psychological challenges, achieve personal well-being and improved levels of function.

Group Particularities:

At the beginning of the sessions we started with a smaller number of participants (8 people on the first session) from countries like: Romania, Afghanistan, Syria, Bangladesh, Spain. All aged between 14 and 16 years old. The number of participants grew from a session to another until at the end of the program we had 15 participants.

Group nationalities



Group issues:

- Low confidence and self-esteem
- Low self-awareness
- Poor coping skills
- Poor communication skills
- Anxiety
- Stress

All those difficulties due the lack of communication skills and socialising problems, loneliness, difficulties to adapt to the environment, missing the family and friends from their home country and a wide range of traumatic events.

Methodes:

ART THERAPY 22 SESSIONS PLAN:

- **Session 1: (mindfulness)**
 - Body relaxation
 - Imagery exercises (Garden of self - imagery exercise)
 - Explore your senses 1
- ★ *Benefits:* learning relaxation techniques, boost imagination, grounding techniques used in anxiety and stress relieving.

Group structure: 7 participants (2 Spanish, 2 Kurdish, 1 Romanian, 1 Bengali, 1 Afghan)

- **Session 2: (mindfulness)**
 - Feel the beat (book 1, p.8)

Procedure:

1. Draw as you listen to one song (soft or upbeat).
 - Mini Mandadoodle (book 1, p.7)

Procedure:

1. Provide the outline of a small circle (about 3 -4 inches in diameter).
2. Participants color it in with a doodle design, allowing the shapes and lines to interconnect in any way they desire, preferably using black markers or colors if desired.
3. A Mandaloodle is a mandala doodle. The circle is filled in with doodles of all sorts.

- ★ Benefits: mindfulness, relaxation, identifying emotions and creative expression.

Group Structure: 6 participants (2 Kurdish, 1 Spanish, 2 Romanian, 1 Bengali, 1 Afghan).

- **Session 3: (mindfulness)**
 - Swaying in the breeze - collage (book 1, p. 12)

Procedure:

1. Create an image that you find relaxing (e.g., clouds floating by, ocean waves, flowers or trees swaying in the breeze).

- ★ Benefits: mindfulness, relaxation.

Group Structure: 6 participants (2 Kurdish, 1 Spanish, 1 Romanian, 1 Bengali, 1 Afghan).

- **Session 4: (mindfulness)**
 - Past / present/ future (book 1, p. 19)

Procedure:

1. Think about this affirmation: “The past is a lesson. The present is a gift. The future is your motivation.”
2. Next, draw a symbol related to a lesson you learned in the past, a gift you have in the present and a goal for the future.

- ★ Benefits: remembering past events, identifying good situations in present goals for future; reflect upon motivation.

Group Structure: 7 participants (1 Kurdish, 1 Spanish, 2 Romanian, 1 Bengali, 1 Afghan 2 Polish).

- **Session 5:(mindfulness)**
 - Affirmation pass (book 1, p.20)

Procedure:

1. Needed materials: printed out affirmations cut out and ready to distribute, glue, scissors, and an 11x17 or larger sheet of drawing paper. The group leader should have about three times as many affirmations as there are group members. Affirmation examples included: “I am the master of my thoughts.” “I am enough.” “I choose to make the rest of my life the best of my life.”

2. Clients are asked to look through the affirmations and choose one that resonates with them. Then the paper is passed around the room and each person takes a turn gluing his affirmation onto the page, anywhere he likes.
3. The one sheet goes around the room until all the chosen affirmations have been glued onto it and an affirmation collage has been created. One group participant is asked to read all of the affirmations or each person reads the affirmation he or she originally selected.

★ Benefits: Helps to set up a positive thinking, to lessen stress and depression, to be more mindful.

Group Structure: 6 participants (1 Kurdish, 1 Spanish, 2 Romanian, 1 Bengali, 1 Afghan, 2 Polish).

- **Session 6: (self awareness)**
 - Enhancing this day (book 1, p.22)

Procedure: Create a quick sketch of what you need “today”.

★ Benefits: identify wishes and desires.

Group Structure: 6 participants (2 Kurdish, 1 Spanish, 1 Romanian, 1 Bengali, 1 Afghan).

- **Session 7: (self awareness)**
 - Mountains and valleys, (book 1, p.44)
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Procedure: Draw a mountain (strengths) and a valley (weaknesses).

- The bridge (book 2)

Procedure:

1. Use a pencil to sketch your bridge on the paper. To the left of the bridge, include imagery of what you're leaving. On the right, identify where you are headed. Under the bridge, draw obstacles you have encountered along the way.
2. Using the paint, color your artwork.
3. Add yourself to the image. Where are you on this bridge and in this journey? You can indicate your location by adding a dot, a stick figure, or any other symbol you choose to represent yourself.

★ Benefits: identifying strengths and weaknesses, values, challenges, goals identifying, wishes and barriers to achieving.

Group Structure: 9 participants (2 Kurdish, 2 Spanish, 2 Romanian, 1 Bengali, 1 Afghan, 1 Polish).

- **Session 8: (self awareness)**

- Hand Drawing / Past and future (book 1, p.40)

Procedure:

1. Outline both hands. In your right hand, draw what you were like (character traits, behavior, etc.), what you experienced, and/or what you achieved in the past. In your left hand, draw goals and hopes for the future. You may add small magazine photos, words, affirmations and phrases.

★ Benefits: identifying beliefs, life experiences, values, goals, hope.

Group Structure: 7 participants (1 Kurdish, 2 Spanish, 2 Romanian, 1 Polish, 1 Afghan)

- **Session 9: (self awareness)**

- Strength Shield (book 2, p.42)

Procedure:

1. Draw a shield on the paper. If you need help, search for a shield shape on the internet and trace it onto your paper.
2. Cut out the shield.
3. Use the pencil to divide your shield into four equal parts.
4. Identify four of your strengths and write each one in a separate part of your shield.
5. Use the colored pencils/markers to add colour to your art.

★ Benefits: identify personal strengths, developing functional coping strategies.

Group Structure: 9 (1 Bengali, 2 Kurdish, 2 Spanish, 1 Afghan, 2 Romanian, 1 Polish)

- **Session 10: (Self Awareness)**

- Animal Guide (book 2, p. 20)

Procedure:

1. Take some time to choose three animals. The first animal should represent you physically (how you look or how you move), the second animal should represent you emotionally (how you feel), and the third animal should represent you cognitively (how you think).
2. Draw the three animals on a sheet of paper. Be creative and draw the animals as you see or feel fit. (you can use the internet for inspiration).

3. Add the environments in which the animals live (mountains, valleys, jungle, house, zoo, ocean, etc.)
4. Use the coloured pencils / markers to colour in the image.

★ Benefits: increases self-awareness, develops emotional resilience, identify personal strengths

Group Structure: 9 (1 Bengali, 2 Kurdish, 2 Spanish, 1 Afghan, 2 Romanian, 1 Polish)

- **Session 11 (self awareness)**

- Who am I ? (book 1, p. 25)

Procedure:

1. Draw one symbol that represent you
2. Use the coloured pencils/markers to add colour to your art.

★ Benefits: identify personality characteristics and behavior.

Group Structure: 9 (1 Bengali, 2 Kurdish, 2 Spanish, 1 Afghan, 2 Romanian, 1 Polish)

- **Session 12 (self esteem)**

- Positive Affirmation (book 2, p. 54)

Procedure:

1. On a paper, write down a challenge you are currently facing.
2. Next to your challenge, write 3 to 5 positive solutions
3. Create / find on internet an affirmation to match the positive solutions
4. Create an artwork inspired by your positive solutions. Your artwork can be a drawing, a painting, a collage on the paper or on your phone.

*If you use your phone you can take / download a photo and add your affirmation using your phone editor.

* Suggestion: Save your artwork as a screensaver on your phone / computer.

★ Benefits: builds self esteem, changes mindset, addresses limited beliefs)

Group Structure: 8 (2 Kurdish, 2 Spanish, 1 Afghan, 2 Romanian, 1 Polish)

- **Session 13 (self esteem)**

- Three Portraits of you (book 2, p.55)

Procedure:

1. Take a photo of how you see yourself.
2. Take a photo of how you think others see you.
3. Take a photo of how you would like to be seen.

★ Benefits: self reflection and creative expression.

Group Structure: 8 (1 Bengali, 2 Kurdish, 2 Spanish, 1 Afghan, 1 Romanian, 1 Polish)

- **Session 14 (self esteem)**

- Being seen (book 2, p 51)

Procedure:

1. Spend 10 minutes thinking about how you want to be seen.
2. Make a list of personal characteristics which you want people to see in you.
3. Create a collage on the paper / on your phone / on your computer using pictures, words, phrases to create a picture of your ideal self.

★ Benefits: improves problem solving, self-esteem, self-regulation.

Group Structure: 6 (1 Kurdish, 2 Spanish, 1 Afghan, 1 Romanian, 1 Polish)

- **Session 15: (self-esteem)**

- Expressing self-worth (book 1, p. 60)

★ Benefits: boosts self esteem, explore personality.

Group Structure: 9 (1 Bengali, 2 Kurdish, 2 Spanish, 1 Afghan, 2 Romanian, 1 Polish)

- **Session 16: (self-esteem)**

- Slice of personality (book 1, p. 64)

Procedure:

1. Create a slice of pizza that best represents your personality.

★ Benefits: identify character traits, boosts self-esteem.

Group Structure: 9 (1 Bengali, 2 Kurdish, 2 Spanish, 1 Afghan, 2 Romanian, 1 Polish)

- **Session 17(stress and anxiety)**

- Levels of anxiety (book 2, p 64)

Procedure:

1. Take a photo of an image that represents mild anxiety.
2. Take a photo of an image that represents moderate anxiety.
3. Take a photo representing severe anxiety.

★ Benefits: relieves stress, regulates emotions, improve coping skills

Group Structure: 10 (1 Bengali, 2 Kurdish, 2 Spanish, 1 Afghan, 3 Romanian, 1 Polish)

- **Session 18 (anxiety and stress)**

- Safe place imagery (book 2, p.71)

Procedure:

1. Use your camera/phone (or search on the internet) and take a photo of places that feel safe for you.
2. Challenge yourself to create several safe place images.
3. Using your images, create an artwork (collage on the paper/ on your phone/on your laptop).

Group Structure: 11 (1 Bengali, 2 Kurdish, 2 Spanish, 1 Afghan, 4 Romanian, 1 Polish)

★ Benefits: relieves anxiety, increases coping and decision-making skills.

- **Session 19 (stress and anxiety)**

- The Scream (book 1,)

Procedure:

1. Look at a photo of Edvard Munch's painting "The Scream".
2. Draw your own image of stress and anxiety.

★ Benefits: identify anxiety and fear.

Group Structure: 12 (2 Bengali, 2 Kurdish, 2 Spanish, 1 Afghan, 4 Romanian, 1 Polish)

- **Session 20 (stress and anxiety)**

- Best next step(book 2, p. 113)

Procedure:

1. Identify a current problem you are experiencing.
2. Write out three solutions to the problem.
3. Write out the pros and cons to each solution.
4. Consider if there are consequences to each solution.
5. Consider how you think you feel in each scenario.
6. Review your solutions and choose the best option.
7. This writing exercise can be done as drawing instead. Be creative and have fun with the process.

★ Benefits: problem solving, decision making.

Group Structure: 11 (2 Bengali, 2 Kurdish, 2 Spanish, 1 Afghan, 3 Romanian, 1 Polish)

- **Session 21 (stress and anxiety)**
 - Less Dominant Hand (book 1)

Procedure:

1. Draw a quick sketch with your less dominant hand.

★ Benefits: facing challenging situations.

Group Structure: 13 (2 Bengali, 3 Kurdish, 2 Spanish, 1 Afghan, 4 Romanian, 1 Polish)

- **Session 22 (last session)**
 - Feedback session.

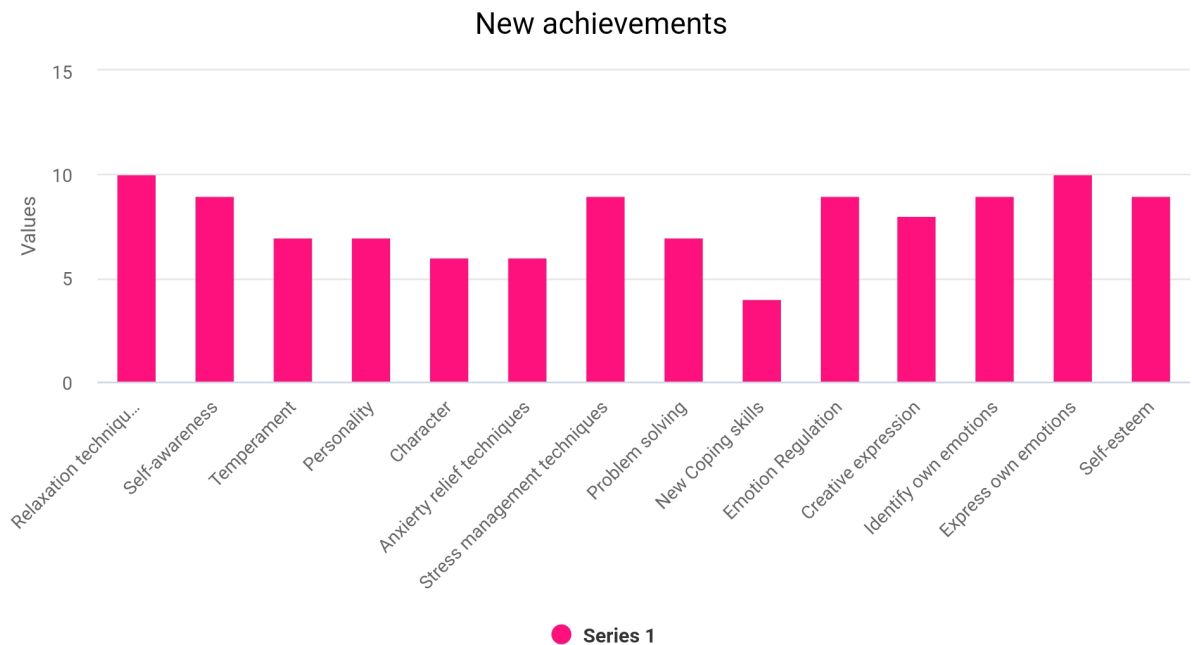
Difficulties and impediments:

Due to the large variety of nationalities, ethnicities, cultures and religions among the group members we had the following difficulties in applying the methods above mentioned:

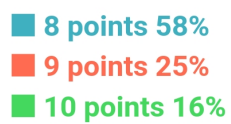
- Language barrier
- Culture believes
- Religious believes
- Core values
- Lack of knowledge about mental and emotional wellbeing
- PTSD

Results

At the end of the program, we asked all participants to feel up the feedback form. The results are the following:



Mental and emotional state improvement 0 to 10 scale



Resources

- *250 Brief, Creative & Practical Art Therapy Techniques*, Susan I. Buchalter. (book 1)
- *Essential Art Therapy Exercises*, Leah Guzman (book 2)