Healing Through Art Toolkit

HOW TO START AN ARTS PROGRAM FOR SUICIDE SURVIVORS

BY KRISTEL NIELSEN & DIANE HARROP
Healing Through Art Toolkit:
How to Start an Arts Program for Suicide Survivors

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and

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

THANK YOU!

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Healing Through Art Toolkit is a collaboration between Kristel Nielsen, founder and director of Your Art Your Story and Diane Harrop, executive director of the Casper Artists Guild ART 321.

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“Healing Through Art Toolkit” can be accessed online at Yourartyourstory.org and Art321.org
DEDICATION

To Rev. Dee Lundberg, who envisioned the first “Healing Through Art” Program at ART 321
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INTRODUCTION

Over the past year, we have explored healing through art for people affected by suicide, depression, anxiety and related mental illness and observed the power of art to soothe and heal. We also know how hard it can be for people to find support when they are affected by suicide. We created this guide to address a need for peer-led art programs that support family loss survivors, people with lived experience and those who work in the field. After seeing the benefits of art programs for survivors of suicide, we are interested in making this a collaborative movement and helping folks start art programs in their communities.

Art programs are a unique way for people affected by trauma to work through painful emotions. Our programs weave together elements of support group and art therapy, but we are not counselors and this is not art therapy. We have learned this past year that art does not have to be therapy to be therapeutic. Unlike traditional support groups that focus on talking, a creative support group involves hands-on creative activities with peers in a safe space. We believe that peer led creative support groups can provide a great deal of relaxation and enjoyment to the participants, while giving the participants an opportunity to translate difficult feelings into tangible form. No previous art experience is necessary.

Creating art has a calming effect on the brain and helps us to relax and feel better. A recent study at Drexel University showed creating art helps reduce stress hormones, which in turn causes people to relax and feel better. Your Art Your Story (YAYS) participants have told us that while they are creating art, they can talk about suicide without feeling sad and it gives them a moment to breathe. This is the power of creativity in action. Simply making art and sharing our stories has a profound impact, rising to the level of empowerment, while helping others know they are not alone. We offer this booklet for free, so that interested organizers have the tools they need to start their own art group.
While we recognize that each and every community is unique in its own way, we share what we have learned with the hope you will be inspired to start a program that works best for you and your community. Please feel free to share this toolkit with anyone who might benefit. For questions or comments, please feel free to contact us.

Kristel Nielsen, Your Art Your Story  
info@yourartyourstory.org

Diane Harrop, ART 321  
info@art321.org

Anyone can do it! Teachers, counselors, veteran’s groups, local arts groups, hospices or anyone interested in starting a small art group can bring the power of healing through art to their community. A good first step is sharing this toolkit with your community partners.
# GETTING STARTED

Suggestions for a Successful Art Meet-Up

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#1 Identify</th>
<th>#2 Share</th>
<th>#3 Plan</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Identify an organization in the community to be your partner.</td>
<td>Get volunteers to help you.</td>
<td>When will you meet? How often? What kind of projects will you make? Plan it out and get your supplies.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
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<tr>
<th>#4 Promote</th>
<th>#5 Host</th>
<th>#6 Follow Up</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reach out to your audience.</td>
<td>Everyone gets together and creates art.</td>
<td>Give thanks. Share photos with us!</td>
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1. **Identify a Partner**

We recommend that you start small and build gradually. We also recommend finding a community partner that is interested in working with you to start a program. This might be a church, community center, school, library, support group or local art guild. After you identify your partner, a great first step is to share this toolkit with them. Set up dates and times when you can use the space. Find out if there are any group size limitations or age requirements in advance. Communication with your partner is key for a positive relationship!

**Questions to ask your Potential Partner**

- What kind of space is available for art classes?
- Can we get messy?
- Do you have volunteers and artists that can help with classes?
- Will you be on site and provide support?
- Is your building handicap accessible?
- Do you have water, restroom, kitchen? Table and chairs?
- Will you help us promote the event?
- Do you have storage we can use?

2. **Share the Work**

Art events are fun, but there are a lot of details involved. It is great to grab a partner or two to help figure out the logistics and help everyone get started with the art project.

3. **Plan the Event**

Check out the art supplies on hand and design a project around them. There are a couple of ways you can do this. You can freestyle and have paints, paper, pencils, rocks, coloring pages available for people to do their own thing, or you can have a structured art activity for everyone to do together. Find art activities at creative blogs, Pinterest.com and art project books. We provide a few ideas later in this toolkit.
4. **Promote the Event**

- Get the word out. Let people know about your meet-up and what to expect. Use free promotion tools like social media, eventbrite.com, meetup.com, Pennysaver, press releases with local newspaper, TV and radio.

- Set up a system to pre-register participants and collect their name, email and phone number. You will need to know how many people plan to attend so you have art supplies for everyone.

- Start a Facebook page for your group and post event information and photos of your creations. Make beautiful social media posts using free online design services such as Canva.com or Adobe Spark.

- Reach out to local mental health providers, local veterans associations, regional social worker association, regional counselor association, your local National Alliance on Mental Illness chapter, your local American Foundation for Suicide Prevention chapter and local suicide prevention hotlines/taskforce. If they know about your event, they can tell community members who might benefit.

- Invite a local arts & culture or community events reporter to a session. Encourage them to write a story, but make sure that they have permission from participants before quoting them, using their names or taking photos of their art or face.

5. **Host the Event**

*Create a safe, friendly environment where everyone can feel comfortable and enjoy working on art. Your positive participation will enhance the group experience. Here are some tips:*

- Be organized. Have your tables set up and art supplies ready.

- Sign in Sheet. Respecting the confidentiality of participants is crucial. We use a sign in sheet with names, email and request for permission to take photos and post on social media. (Parents or legal guardians must give permission when the participant is a minor.) Sometimes, people don’t want their picture taken, or prefer that you take photos of their hands working on projects instead of their face. Always ask first.
• Introductions. Icebreakers lighten the mood and get strangers talking to each other. If the people in your group don’t already know each other, give folks a chance to introduce themselves. At Your Art Your Story events, participants are invited to introduce themselves and tell why they are there (“I’m a loss survivor” or “I’m an attempt survivor”).

• Take a break midway so everyone can get up, use the restroom, grab a coffee or snack. Socialization and building community is an important part of the experience. Serve light snacks, coffee, water and tea.

• Remember to clean up afterwards and it is fine to ask participants to help, if they are physically able.

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**Crisis Plan**

Create a crisis plan before your first event, just in case someone needs professional support. This can be as simple as having a phone number for a local mental health support team saved on your phone contacts or a social worker on speed dial. If possible, invite a behavioral health professional or support group facilitator to attend the meet-up to provide support if needed. We have never used our crisis plan, but everyone feels better having one in place. Take time to find out what resources are available in your community, in case of crisis.
6. **FOLLOW UP**

Give thanks. Write thank you notes to hosts for location, to arts activity leaders and businesses and people who donate supplies. This will grow and reinforce local support. Share your experience on social media using #yourartyourstory #healingthroughart
Three Models - Three Programs

On the following pages, read about three different art programs for survivors of suicide, how they are structured and sources of funding.

| 1. OPEN STUDIO | 2. MONTH TO MONTH | 3. PIGGY BACK SUPPORT GROUP |
Open Studio Model: ART 321

An open studio model provides access to art opportunities during scheduled hours. The Casper Wyoming Artists’ Guild (ART 321) follows this model with their program “Healing Through Art.” Participants can drop into the studio during open studio hours and work on art projects with all art supplies provided. Artists’ Guild members volunteer for this program and offer their assistance and instruction, if needed. Promotion is through the local newspapers, the Guild newsletter, Instagram and Guild website. In 2017, the Healing through Art Program was featured in an article in USA Today. Suicide rates in Wyoming are among the highest in the U.S. This important program helps raise awareness in the community.

HEALING THROUGH ART
ART 321
321 W Midwest Ave.
Casper, WY 82601
www.casperartguild.org
info@art321.org

FUNDING SOURCES: State arts grants and donated art supplies. The program is planned and facilitated by volunteer artists.
Monthly Class Model: Survivors of Suicide

This model involves scheduled monthly classes throughout the year. Your Art Your Story (YAYS) and Arizona Artists Guild follow this model with their partnership program “Survivors of Suicide.” The goal is to create a safe space where survivors feel welcome, comfortable and enjoy creating art. Monthly classes take place in the Guild’s studio, led by volunteer artists. Regular monthly classes help facilitate community building among the group. We have a side table with brochures for local resources, local support groups, National Alliance on Mental Illness classes and American Foundation for Suicide Prevention. Arizona Artists Guild and Your Art Your Story promote classes on their websites, Facebook and Instagram pages.

FUNDING SOURCES: Arizona Artists Guild receives funding from member dues, state arts grants and donated art supplies. Your Art Your Story receives funding from grants and crowdfunding.
“Piggy Back” Support Group Model: Painting by the Beach

An art program immediately before or after a loss support group meeting can help you reach a large audience of participants. “Painting by The Beach,” a program sponsored by Susan D. Lyons Foundation for Hope is held in a community center and is followed by a loss support group meeting. Bi-weekly classes are led by volunteer artists and promoted on Eventbrite, Facebook, Twitter and Instagram.

FUNDING SOURCES: Susan D. Lyons Foundation for Hope is funded by grants and donations. Classes are facilitated by volunteer artists.
Art Projects

Some ideas to get you started...
Art Project Ideas

- Painted rock
- Felted soap
- Mask making
- Paint black & white photographs
- Collage
- Sit-Upons
- Air dry clay projects
- Life line drawing
- Alcohol Ink on glass or glazed ceramic
- Paint small terracotta pots and plant seeds
- Greeting cards
- Watercolor painting
- Jewelry making

You can find many more ideas searching online and browsing through art project books.
Basic Supply List

Reach out to your local community to ask for donations of new or gently used art supplies. Be specific about what you need and can use. If you are on a budget, many inexpensive art supplies can be found at discount store.

• Cups
• Paintbrushes
• Acrylic paints or watercolor paints
• Felt tip markers
• Colored pencils & pens
• Pencil sharpeners
• Paper
• Adult coloring books
• Music player and music
• Name tags
• Aprons or old t shirts
• Plastic tablecloths for table and floor
• Clean up - Paper towels, all-purpose spray cleaner, trash

Additional Resources

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline 1-800-273-8255

Crisis Text Hotline - Text HOME to 741-741 for free, 24-hour support from the Crisis Line

American Foundation for Suicide Prevention
Local chapters offer training, walks, support groups and more.

National Alliance of Mental Illness - Local chapters that offer support groups, classes and more.

Trevor Project - Saving young LGBTQ lives.

UCLArts https://uclartsandhealing.org - Expressive Arts Facilitator Training
Your Art Your Story – Healing after suicide loss with art and community. YAYS provides a platform for survivors to share their art.

Outside of the U.S. please visit the International Association for Suicide Prevention for a database of resources.

Books

Managing Traumatic Stress Through Art by Barry M. Cohen, 1995

Memories Matter: Activities for Grieving Children and Teens by The Dougy Center, 2012
Mask Template
May we have permission to take photos of you and your art to post on social media?
About the Authors

Kristel Nielsen founded Your Art Your Story after her son’s suicide death in 2015 to support suicide loss survivors and attempt survivors with creative art programs for healing emotional trauma and community building. By sharing her story, Kristel hopes to have an impact on the larger community by shedding light on the devastating effect of suicide on families and communities and raise awareness of the cause. She enjoys painting, drawing and making ceramic bells at her home in Phoenix, Arizona. For more information about Your Art Your Story, please visit www.yourartyourstory.org.

Diane Harrop, a watercolor and jewelry artist living in Douglas, Wyoming, has been the executive director of Art 321 – The Casper Artists Guild in Casper since January of 2017. Diane’s career path reflects a lifelong passion for the arts and a wide range of experience in both business and nonprofit organizational management. Serving as the director of ART 321, a group dedicated to nurturing, educating and promoting artists, gives her the opportunity to meet and interact with artists at all levels of proficiency who understand that art has the power to improve individual lives and enhance entire communities. For more information about ART 321, please visit www.art321.org.
Call for Art

Your Art Your Story’s online gallery features art by community members who use art to transform and heal. The gallery features all forms of visual art (painting, sculpture, photography, digital, illustration) and works from young artists. You are invited to add your art and your story to the gallery at this link: https://yourartyourstory.org/community-gallery.