

# Community, compassion and integrity: Consideration to ethics within art(s) therapy community projects

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## Abstract

Compassion is at the core of art(s) therapy community work, and passion is the stimulus that excites and ignites such projects. Alongside the incredible drive, engagement, and transformative processes and gains from these noble and responsive efforts, integrity of the profession must be consciously adhered to and abided by. Ethics must consistently guide our profession, and the impact of social media and social interest on community arts therapy practice must be strategically attended to. This presentation will highlight the pragmatics of planning, delivering and documenting large-scale community art(s) projects within ethical frameworks that foreground community, compassion and integrity. Challenges and successes from practice will be discussed.

## Keywords

Art therapy, ethics, community arts projects.

## Introduction

Engaging in artwork, followed by a purposeful reflective process, is an invaluable strategy for art therapists to learn more about themselves, their practice and the work that they are involved with. This reflective process is critical on many levels as it can lead to insight, professional development and to an enhancement of their practice. Ultimately, this level of awareness, when consciously acknowledged, ensures adherence to ethics and best practices. This is especially important when art therapists engage in activities outside of the typical art therapy realm(s) including community art(s) projects. Naturally, ethical dilemmas are anticipated and must be addressed accordingly by the art therapist and art therapy trainee (AATA, 2017; ATAS, 2017; ATCB, 2016; ANZATA, 2015; BAAT, 2014). The artwork included in the art response and conclusion section (Figure 1) served as the impetus and groundwork for the writing of this paper, which focuses on my own struggles and challenges with securing and enforcing ethics within a large-scale project, given my position as credentialed professional art therapist. With this, we now delve into the topics of the discourse.

Within recent years there have been significant natural disasters that have profoundly impacted the lives of millions around the globe. Death, devastation, displacement and disbelief are prevalent, as are chaos, confusion, fear, loss and trauma. Regardless of whether we witness and

experience these disasters first-hand we have intense reactions of our own, and often our response is: how can we help? Art(s) therapists have initiated a range of structured and systematic calls to action, and others are fully committed to responding to the vast immediate and long-term psychosocial needs of those affected by natural disaster whether individually, within group(s) or within the larger community (AATA, 2013; Brolles et al., 2017; Hulsey, 2015; Linton, 2017; Murphy, 2014; Orr, 2007).

Compassion is at the core of art(s) therapy community work, and passion is the stimulus that excites and ignites such projects. Alongside the incredible drive, engagement, and transformative processes and gains from these noble and responsive efforts, integrity of the profession must be consciously adhered to and abided by. Ethics must consistently guide our profession and consideration to the impact of social media and social interest must be strategically attended to (AATA, 2017; ATCB, 2016). This paper highlights the pragmatics of planning, delivering and documenting large scale community art(s) projects within ethical frameworks. Challenges and successes from practice will be discussed.

## Art therapy in Singapore

Art therapy was introduced in Singapore approximately fourteen years ago by Singaporeans who had trained overseas and who returned to pioneer this discipline in their homeland (Lay,

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