



# ARTS PROGRAMMING FOR YOUTH EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS

## *Benefits of Art-Making for Youth Who are Homeless*

### **1. Stress Reduction & Relaxation:**

Art-making can assist youth who are homeless to manage stress and feel more relaxed, calm, and focused.

### **2. Mental Health Recovery:**

Art-making can assist in recovery from mental health challenges and promote mental wellness. Some youth experiencing homelessness feel that art-making is absolutely necessary for their mental wellness, and enables them to re-engage in employment and/or education.

### **3. Healing Trauma:**

Art programs that foster a safe, non-judgemental space can assist in healing past traumas, including experiences of rejection, abuse, and neglect.

### **4. Self-Expression & Self-Discovery:**

Art-making can provide an important therapeutic form of self-expression, while also providing a space for reflection and exploration. For some youth, art-making may provide an opportunity to express and release difficult emotions, while others may discover they want a career in the arts.

### **5. Self-Confidence:**

Art-making can promote self-confidence, which in turn can assist marginalized youth in building relationships with others, recovering from mental health challenges, and re-engaging with employment and/or education.

## *Tips for Creating an Impactful Arts Program*

- **Foster a safe, non-judgmental space** in which youth can express themselves on their own terms
- **Work with community organizations** and artists to offer diverse artistic training for youth
- **Provide space for youth to engage** in the types of art that matters to them, ranging from sketching quietly alone to dynamic, group-based artwork
- **Provide flexible programming** so youth can engage at their own pace and in their own way
- **Foster youth leadership** and peer education in the arts
- **Create opportunities** for staff and other youth to appreciate youth's talents and skills through their artworks (e.g., talent shows, art nights, art auctions)
- **Eliminate barriers** or requirements for accessing the program
- **Ensure program hours** provide opportunities for all youth to participate
- **Provide staff with education** and training on the value of the arts for youth
- **Continuously assess and revise** program to best meet the needs of all youth, based on youth feedback

*"[Art] is the one thing that actually helps out a lot . . . I kind of break down on the weekends because I don't have that."  
– Art Program Participant*

*"The arts program helped me just stabilize enough to be able to even consider being able to go back out into the world."  
– Art Program Participant*

# 10 WAYS

## THE ARTS CAN BE USED TO ADDRESS THE CAUSES AND EFFECTS OF YOUTH HOMELESSNESS



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### 1. Advocacy:

Youth experiencing homelessness and their allies can use the arts as a tool to amplify their voices in order to help decision-makers understand their experiences and invest in solutions.

### 2. Healing & Recovery from Trauma:

Given that many youth experiencing homelessness have histories of trauma, and that homelessness itself is traumatizing, arts-based programming can foster healing and recovery for youth who have experienced trauma.

### 3. Public Education:

The arts are one of the many tools we can use to shift public discourse around youth homelessness, and thus foster improved public understanding.

### 4. Building Social Supports and Connections:

Given the social isolation many youth experience while homeless, arts programs can provide an important opportunity to connect with others, build friendships, and establish support systems.

### 5. Skill-Building for the New Economy:

In an increasingly globalized economy, many Canadian youth are employing entrepreneurial means to generate income, including through creative enterprises. In this context, arts-based programs can foster both artistic and entrepreneurial skills that can help prepare young people who are homeless for this changing economy.

### 6. Community Integration:

As a group, youth experiencing homelessness often face systemic discrimination and marginalization because of their housing status. Art-making and arts programs which foster community integration and community building can provide important avenues for youth to see themselves as valued members of their society, and for society to benefit from their talents.

### 7. Cultural Connection for Indigenous Youth:

Arts-based programs for Indigenous youth experiencing homelessness, focused on Indigenous art forms and cultural practices, may foster community connections and healing that can support Indigenous youth to transition out of homelessness. Culturally appropriate, safe, and relevant programming for Indigenous youth is particularly important given the overrepresentation of Indigenous youth in homeless populations across Canada.

### 8. Supports for Youth Transitioning from Homelessness:

Research has shown that transitions from homelessness can be difficult for youth, and that without the proper supports youth may experience poor outcomes in health, housing, and wellbeing. In the midst of these challenges, art programs can “foster valued identities, skill building, social interaction, and healthy entertainment and stress relief.”

### 9. Research Mobilization:

As part of our efforts to use research to prevent and end youth homelessness, the arts can be used to effectively communicate research findings to decision makers, who in turn can invest in solutions and develop effective policies.

### 10. Career Development:

Providing youth experiencing homelessness with training in artistic skills can help prepare them for future careers in the arts.

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#### READ FULL ARTICLE:

<http://homelesshub.ca/blog/can-art-make-difference-mobilizing-arts-prevent-and-end-youth-homelessness>

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