

# ART THERAPY

## FOR AFTER-CARE

By GERALD E. JOLIN

As a green young lawyer, age 29, I was elected judge in a populous county in Wisconsin. I had the awesome duty to hear petitions for commitment of drug and alcohol abusers to state institutions. The institutions were, at that time, barely separate from the insane asylums, using the same professional staff. They were somewhat, but not too much, more than warehouses, and there was no after-care worthy of the name. Art therapy was not a common term. Nor was music therapy "invented" in the '40s and '50s.

I struggled with these cases as best I could. The Menninger clinic was the leading light in psychotherapy and psychiatry at that time, but the total light was really dim on substance abuse treatment and after-care was mostly hope and pray.

After nine years I resigned my post, suffering from that dread disease of parents-with-children-in-college, "mal-tuition." I was haunted by the inadequacy of the institutions to which I had seen substance abusers, and the clear lack of after-care. Then in late '79, I had a call from the director of a sheltered workshop facility for the mentally retarded, Mr. Ted Hull, then of Caro (Michigan) Services for the Handicapped.

He had been given an exaggerated opinion of my expertise as a wood-expert and teacher of wood-carving. He flattered me into agreeing to develop a program to

teach his adult clients sufficient manual skills to make saleable simple benches from recycled wood.

Over the next few years I travelled to Michigan monthly and the project was dubbed a great success by the American Rehab Magazine. We taught sufficient skills to 100 clients to produce

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15,000 benches with a retail value of \$500,000. It was there I first encountered the art therapy concept. It was presented to me in theory and practice, that manual skill exercises, properly taught, could so involve the person that they could forget time and space, and enjoy a "high" that was a reasonable alternative to using drugs or alcohol.

The staff psychologist jokingly complained that I was ruining his business. The hysterical incidents in the workplace went down to near zero. Likewise the epileptic seizures. (And the people developed obvious pride in their finished product.) They asked permission to take their tools home at night, for fear they might be dulled. They complained that the sandpaper was not fine enough to put a good finish on the wood.

University of Houston children's program. At a fine arts school in Austin I taught children's classes. Always I have observed the calming influence in the classroom as the students begin to exercise their manual skills.

Presently I serve as design director for Oyster Creek Industries at Missouri City, near Houston, where we serve 147 mentally retarded in a sheltered workshop. We are beginning to duplicate and enlarge on my Michigan experience, again making simple benches from recycled lumber.

I realize that my person experience is really anecdotal evidence of an effect of manual skill experience. But in addition to my observation, there are the fantastic results of Teresa Ramirez'

experience with juvenile offenders in the Harris County Juvenile probation department, using various art forms.

Then there are the very important studies and teachings of Dr. Irene Corbit, at the Jung Center in Houston, more on the theoretical side. Unfortunately, it seems that no responsible organization is collecting hard data upon which public or private funding sources could rely to magnify and accelerate programs in art therapy. Great numbers of humans are being touched in a beneficial way by art programs, such as Creative Alternatives, a non-profit group in Houston ably managed by April Gauss.

Creative Alternatives has over 50 art teachers that go out to grade schools after regular hours and give instruction. This semester they are touching the lives of over 1100 children! And no one is collecting data, to support extension of this great program.

I have had experience lobbying legislative bodies, and they need data to warrant spending public money. I have been involved in grant programs. Again, support data is vital.

I believe art therapy is one important wave of the future in our educational system in a tumultuous society and for after-care it could be a great tool to salvage many lives.

I have written Donna Shalala, former chancellor of my alma mater, University of Wisconsin, referring her to the subject and to Dr. Corbit and Ms. Ramirez.

I suggest to the readers of Recovery Journal that they utilize art therapy for themselves, promote its use for their loved ones, and promote its spread by writing to their public officials including Mr. and Mrs. Clinton, Mr. and Mrs. Gore, cabinet officers, Senators, and Congressmen. Your letter will make your life more significant. They really count.