

# Focus on... Art Therapy

On this afternoon, art therapist Joseph Jaworek asks 10 patients in the **Behavioral Health Unit** at Morristown Memorial to pick a pastel color and draw a large circle, the first step in creating a personal mandala, a circular design filled with geometric shapes.

"We need help establishing decent boundaries, and this circle is our space," he says. "You can think about how you structure your life and of the symbols and colors that are at the core of you. How do you divide up your time and energy and what makes it to the inside of your circle?" Patients in this 16-bed unit are receiving treatment for a variety of mental illnesses, such as depression and bipolar disorder, and attend weekly art therapy sessions.



One woman colors angry red blotches to signify her job, while another creates yellow, green and red circles to represent her family, work and animals. Another patient

abruptly turns over

her paper. Mr. Jaworek gently

draws her out. "Part of me is a bit broken and I'm here to get fixed," she says, looking at her mandala. "These three branches are my children, this is my job and this is my ex-husband. I'm sorry for the way some things went down with him." She stops. "If I shared all my feelings, it would be very scary." Mr. Jaworek, who has already built a strong therapeutic relationship with the woman through past sessions, points to her paper. "I'd rather you share on there than have those feelings stuck inside you." With that, she continues.

That is the essence of the art therapy process – to provide patients with a therapeutic vehicle through which to express their feelings. Mr. Jaworek, along with music and movement therapists, is supported by a two-year grant from the Willits Foundation. He also helps elderly patients on the unit deal with dementia, depression and grief through a grant from the Wallerstein Foundation for Geriatric Life Improvement.

As the patients finish their mandalas, Mr. Jaworek seeks permission to hang their creations and invites them to share what their art represents. The group, clearly engaged, asks to continue after the session is finished.

Art therapy, first used in 1906 by the German psychiatrist Fritz Mohr, is a mental health profession that uses the artistic creative process to enhance the physical,

mental and emotional well-being of individuals.

Throughout Morristown Memorial, art is used as a healing tool. Maria Lupo, healing arts coordinator for Atlantic Health, works primarily with patients at **Carol G. Simon Cancer Center**, presenting them with materials, such as crayons, markers or art kits, to create jewel boxes and sun catchers.

"Art therapy offers patients choice," says Ms. Lupo. "In the hospital, choice is often robbed from you; you're told what test to take and when and where to take it. Patients choose their projects because I never want to present them with materials they don't know how to use. I don't want failure. Art is a metaphor for healing."

Through art, patients reveal their struggles. "One woman was missing her children, and she opened up her feelings of being separated through a simple teddy bear kit and got at what was troubling her," says Ms. Lupo. "Art is a way to get inside a person and have their story revealed in a gentle manner."

At **Atlantic Rehabilitation Institute**, art therapist Marissa Householder leads monthly group sessions. She encourages patients to play with color and leads them in open-ended, free expression exercises. In one, she instructs patients to create abstract collages from construction paper, in the tradition of an elderly Henri Matisse, who, like many ARI patients, was in a wheelchair. At the end of each session, the group talks about their creations and gives feedback.

"Often patients share their stories, like what led them here, whether it's a traumatic experience, a car accident or a fall," says Ms. Householder. "They open up in this supportive atmosphere. I shut the door, play calming music and give them a space to take their minds off their pain."

Throughout the hallways of **Goryeb Children's Hospital**, the framed artwork of patients – from bold finger paints to bejeweled collages – enliven the unit. These were created through ArtWork's Intensive Creative Artists in Residence program, funded by Francine and John Downing, which bring artists to the hospital to engage pediatric patients and their siblings. Last year, two artists led weekly workshops for over 300 children to create puppets, cartoons, caricatures, collages, mosaics and Picasso-inspired art.

ArtWorks also provides and stocks a custom-made mobile art cart, "Surprise Supplies," which is funded this year by the Maria LoFrumento Child Life Fund and is bursting with crayons and kits for crafting jewelry, making race cars and painting rocks.

"The art projects serve as distraction for kids and help decrease stress and anxiety," says Daniela Mendelsohn, executive director and founder of ArtWorks. "They empower kids by giving them a little control and serve as an emotional outlet to help them cope with their hospital stay." Perhaps most important, art gives children the chance to forget their illness for a moment. "It gives them an opportunity to play again," she says.