

Capital Region Community Services

ACT Government
Budget Submission 2024-25
Capital Region Community Services (CRCS)

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Call to Action

We call on the ACT government to prioritise the psychosocial outcomes for people living with a disability that are falling through the gaps of the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS). A total investment of \$505,000 per year will rejuvenate and amplify the award winning and evidence-based *Open Art* Program.

Together, we can create a lasting impact on mental health, resilience, and collective healing.

Open Art

Open Art, one of our most successful and publicly acclaimed programs designed specifically to support people with a psychosocial disability maintain wellness, operated for 20 years. Over time, the program expanded to include anyone who wanted to attend, offering programs within the Belconnen Community Centre and outreach to other sites across Canberra.

Open Art used many art mediums including painting, drawing, sculpture, ceramics, collage, mosaic, and digital mediums. Several factors contributed to the success of Open Art, notably the involvement of Art Facilitators who were:

- experts in the medium being used
- teachers of the art medium, ensuring that the participant could develop skills
- trained in art therapy, therapy and/or had lived experience.

Open Art was available throughout the week. There were times available during the day or evening to cater for people's needs. Another contributing factor was the lack of pressure on participants to be artists, rather to appreciate and enjoy art from their perspective. There was no right or wrong and they had control over the choices they made.

Open Art supported thousands of people during the 20 years that the program operated and would have around 500 participants regularly engage with the program over a 12-month period.

Open Art and the NDIS

It is well documented that the creation of the NDIS has led to significant gaps in services for people with psychosocial disability, who had trouble accessing the scheme, but whose previous support services were either folded into the NDIS or ceased to be funded by governments that expected those programs to be covered by the federal scheme. The Productivity Commission estimated in 2020 that as many as 154,000 people who need psychosocial support are unable to access the services they need under current policy settings.

Open Art ceased to operate in 2016 and was slowly transitioned from 2014 as a result of ACT government funding being redirected to the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS).

Programs such as Open Art were not initially included in NDIS funding and participants who experience mild to moderate psychosocial disability were not eligible and/or did not see themselves as a person with a disability and would not engage with the scheme. Once they were included, the funding model was simply not sustainable.

With the NDIA once again discussing the appropriateness of the NDIS to provide supports to people with psychosocial disability and the diversion of approximately 27,000 people over the next four years to outside supports, it is imperative that governments (of all levels) and communities look to ensure that this vulnerable population does not once again fall between the cracks.

In a submission to the government's NDIS review, Mental Health Australia wrote that it was a priority for the government to clarify the scheme's role for people with psychosocial disability.

"People with psychosocial disability have faced a number of barriers in accessing the scheme and implementing appropriate NDIS supports," the submission reads.

"The transition to the NDIS has also created significant challenges for the psychosocial support workforce and service providers both within and outside of the NDIS."

The peak body has advocated for governments at all levels to ensure there are no gaps in service for people with psychosocial disability, including funding early intervention programs both through and outside the NDIS.

Open Arts History and Basis

For two decades, CRCS ran the highly successful Open Art program. Open Art is based on the undisputable benefits of using art, in all its forms, as a means of maintaining positive mental health, aiding and controlling manifestations correlated with psychosocially challenging behaviours, slowing cognitive decline, and enhancing quality of life. Art therapy can help people express themselves more freely, improve their mental health, and improve interpersonal relationships. The basis of art therapy is established on the idea that people can recover, maintain their wellness and feel better via artistic expression.

Mental health has recently been identified as a serious public health concern. Mental diseases encompass symptoms, from minor anxiety to severe forms like behavioural abnormalities. Art therapy refers to various treatments, such as theatre therapy, dance movement psychotherapy, body psychotherapy, music therapy, and drawing, painting and craft therapy. Art therapy uses artistic means to treat mental illnesses and improve mental health.

Open Art was and will be again a community-based program that supports mental health, resilience and emotional healing through practising art with attention to skill development and mastery, studio art making, individual art making, program supervised and structured art groups, and personal art making with a healing goal.

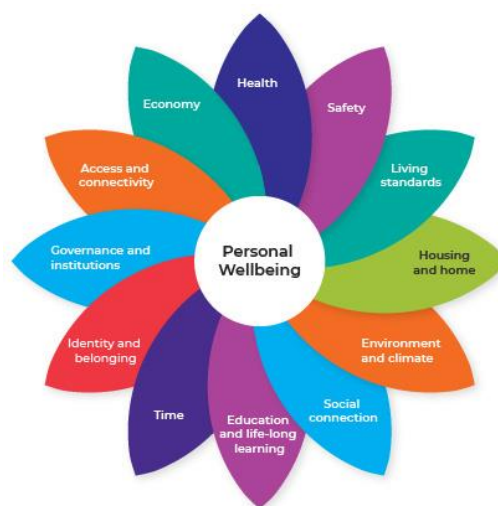
We know that community-based artmaking can enhance mental well-being. Individuals can increase their sense of value and self-esteem by using visual and symbolic expressions in art therapy. This makes it possible for people with mental illnesses to interact with one another and grow their social networks.

Open Arts and the ACT Wellbeing Framework

The Open Arts project, integrates with the ACT Wellbeing Framework, actively enhancing individual wellbeing beyond mere physical and mental health.

Fostering mental resilience by providing a supportive environment to face various life challenges, including trauma and the pandemic's effects, the project enhances emotional well-being through creative expression, reducing stress and fostering emotional healing.

By offering art classes and diverse activities, Open Arts encourages skill development and ensures accessibility and affordability, promoting a sense of accomplishment and self-efficacy. The program strengthens community connections, combating social isolation by creating spaces for sharing and support. It serves vulnerable populations and provides a holistic approach to mental health recovery, integrating art therapy with community support.



Open Arts also acts as a gateway to further mental health services, demonstrating the therapeutic potential of art in facilitating personal growth and recovery, including a direct link to our Therapeutic Services, available in the same building.

The objectives of Open Arts aligns with domains:

Community: Fostering community connections supports the community domain by enhancing social cohesion and belonging.

Health: Promoting mental resilience and enhancing emotional well-being directly contribute to the health domain by improving mental health outcomes.

Education and Skills: Encouraging skill development aligns with the education and skill development domain, promoting lifelong learning and personal development.

Economic Participation: Making art activities affordable and accessible supports economic participation by ensuring all community members can engage in cultural and artistic activities, regardless of their financial situation.

Environment: Enabling access to diverse activities in natural and built environments contributes to the enjoyment and appreciation of the ACT's environments.

Each objective directly supports the overarching aim of the Wellbeing Framework by contributing to holistic well-being, incorporating physical, mental, social, and environmental well-being aspects.

The Investment:

The total investment required to rebuild and operate Open Art for 12 months is \$505,000.

This investment includes:

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| • Employment Costs | \$328,301 |
| • Therapeutic Support | \$60,000 |
| • Activity Expenses | \$44,752 |
| • Venue Hire and office space | \$7,083 |
| • Administration costs | \$64,864 |

Testimonials, Awards and Case Studies:

Open Art has been the recipient of numerous awards for years.

It was nominated for the inaugural 2012 Mental Health Week Awards in October and won in the category of "Service Delivery and Innovation". The program had been successfully running for over a decade supporting people in the ACT with severe and enduring mental health issues through art therapy. In the same year Open Art was also nominated and were finalists with other CRCS arts'-based programs for the Chief Minister's Inclusion Awards. The Awards were held at the National Gallery of Australia on the 4 December 2012.

Over the years the Belconnen Community Centre Art Gallery has hosted individual's exhibitions, supporting artists to commence a career / employment pathway through their art.

One such recipient wrote, "Thank you for your encouragement and your belief in my abilities, it means so much to me. You made it possible for me to have my first solo exhibition which led to Canberra Poets writing poems about magpies. This all gave me the courage to apply for a stall at the Old Bus Depot Markets which was approved. So, because of your belief in me, 2013 is looking like a very exciting year." Name withheld for the purposes of this document.

Background:

Capital Region Community Services (CRCS) purpose is to empower people to live their best life through building and connecting communities, delivering and connecting communities and providing choice and opportunity. We have been doing this for nearly 50 years.

We do this through the provision of person-centred programs and services that support individuals and families across the lifespan. At CRCS we have a long history of providing, early education and care, outside school hours care, youth engagement, families support and early intervention, aged care, disability services, transport, therapeutic services and community development and recreation programs.

For nearly 30 years, CRCS provided resilience building and positive mental health and wellbeing programs such as Good Beginnings, Bridges, U-Turn, Homebase, Day to Day Living and Open Art. These programs were based on a community recovery model and positively maintained and provided a community for many people with a disability and mental ill health.

References

Role of Art Therapy in the Promotion of Mental Health: A Critical Review

[Role of Art Therapy in the Promotion of Mental Health: A Critical Review - PMC \(nih.gov\)](#)

People with psychosocial disability may be diverted from NDIS in future, as government forecasts 27,000 reduction in participant growth

[People with psychosocial disability may be diverted from NDIS in future, as government forecasts 27,000 reduction in participant growth - ABC News](#)

ACT Wellbeing Framework

ACT Government, 2020

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