

Art and the Aging Brain



“Art has the power to transform, to illuminate, to educate, inspire, and motivate.”

—Tony Award-winning actor Harvey Fierstein

Of all the therapies and activities that can benefit the aging brain, one of the most effective is the creation of art. A study funded by the National Institute on Aging and published in *Neurology* journal reports that “the risk of mild cognitive impairment [can be] reduced with engagement in artistic, craft, and social activities in both midlife and late life.”

Art improves brain functioning by producing new neural pathways and thicker, stronger dendrites. In these ways, art enhances cognitive reserve, helping the brain actively compensate for pathology by using

more efficient brain networks or alternative brain strategies. Both viewing and making art can make positive impacts on the aging brain.

This impact is so powerful that researchers liken creating art with exercise for the brain. Such activities can help to keep the mind sharp and lucid well into old age as well as help individuals cope with stressful and difficult situations encountered in everyday life. Participating in arts activities may be linked to improving cognitive function and memory and improving self-esteem and well-being.

Art at Hebrew SeniorLife

Hebrew SeniorLife has a long tradition of integrating art throughout our campuses to enhance the lives of those we serve. We strive to create a healing environment while providing positive visual and intellectual stimulation. This practice is a cornerstone of our person-centered approach to patient care. We seek to provide as many ways as possible to engage each patient and bring joy to their lives.

Our Roslindale campus has a dedicated space for the display of art, the Daniels Art Gallery, which features rotating art exhibits for patients and visitors to enjoy. We have recently enhanced this programming with an evidence-based program that incorporates technology and art as a means of providing long term care patients at different cognitive levels with improved quality of life.

We also offer art therapy and a wide range of art classes at our senior living campuses, including painting, art therapy, and open art studios, and host resident art shows throughout the year. These offerings facilitate an increased sense of independence, mastery, attention to detail, planning, reasoning, and communication.

The Power to Redefine Aging.



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Opportunities for partnership

Despite the effectiveness and importance of these services, art therapy sessions and activities are not reimbursable by Medicare or Medicaid. We rely on the generosity of our donors to enable us to provide expressive therapy for seniors within our long term chronic care communities at Hebrew Rehabilitation Center in Boston and Dedham.

Your generous support can make a difference in the following areas:

Art therapy groups: Art therapy groups offer art projects tailored for specific patient needs to enhance focus and attention and stimulate interpersonal communication within the group format. *A gift of \$15,000 will allow us to increase art therapy groups at our long-term chronic care campuses.*

Individual art therapy sessions: Patients who are unable to attend groups due to various physical, cognitive, and behavioral can participate in individually active art making sessions. *A gift of \$10,000 will support individual art therapy sessions for patients who are unable to attend groups.*

Patient and resident art exhibits: Patient and resident artwork is frequently displayed in the public areas of our senior living sites to create a gallery experience that brings joy to both the artists and viewers and supports their emotional, social and cognitive function. *A gift of \$7,000 will support the organization of multiple art shows across Hebrew SeniorLife's residential and long-term chronic care campuses.*

eArt appreciation programming: In response to the challenges of COVID-19, our art therapist created several PowerPoint presentations of famous art works with commentary. These presentations stimulate patients' cognitive processes, facilitate positive feelings, and trigger memories of past experiences with art. The programs are broadcast via local TV

channel directly to patients' rooms. *A gift of \$5,000 will underwrite the cost of additional hours for the art therapist to research and prepare a variety of presentations.*

Art and music therapy internship: The Expressive Therapy department has been training interns for almost 30 years, complementing our staff-led programming with student-led activities. The program was put on hold during the COVID-19 pandemic, but residents and staff have expressed interest in reviving the internship program to increase group and individual music and art sessions and provide support with our Music and Memory program. In the meantime, other facilities in the area have begun to offer paid internships in this area, making it difficult to recruit participants. Your support of a paid internship program will re-establish Hebrew SeniorLife's standing as a leader in expressive therapy and greatly expand the availability of art and music activities to our residents. *A gift of \$25,000 will support one student in a nine-month internship.*

Voice-activated technology in private patients rooms: Hebrew SeniorLife would like to purchase voice-activated technology such as Amazon Alexa to provide on-demand music and cultural content for patients and residents in their rooms. This type of technology can give patients a sense of control and independence and provide hours of entertainment—especially when infection control measures are necessary such as in a pandemic or at times of illness. *A gift of \$10,000 will cover the purchase and set-up of the devices and memberships and cover four hours of staff time each week to administer the program and assist patients with training and technical support on an ongoing basis.*

Thank you

Thank you for your interest in healing and enhancing the lives of older adults through art and other expressive therapies.