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FSU Art Therapy research team awarded NEA grant to study mental health

PUBLISHED: JUNE 16, 2020 ([HTTPS://NEWS.FSU.EDU/NEWS/2020/06/16/FSU-ART-THERAPY-RESEARCH-TEAM-AWARDED-NEA-GRANT-TO-STUDY-MENTAL-HEALTH/](https://news.fsu.edu/news/2020/06/16/fsu-art-therapy-research-team-awarded-nea-grant-to-study-mental-health/)) | 1:08 PM |SHARE: [f](https://www.facebook.com/sharer/sharer.php?u=https%3A%2F%2Fnews.fsu.edu%2Fnews%2F2020%2F06%2F16%2FFSU-ART-THERAPY-RESEARCH-TEAM-AWARDED-NEA-GRANT-TO-STUDY-MENTAL-HEALTH%2F) ([HTTPS://WWW.FACEBOOK.COM/SHARER/SHARER.PHP?U=HTTPS%3A%2F%2FNEWS.FSU.EDU%2FNEWS%2F2020%2F06%2F16%2FFSU-ART-THERAPY-RESEARCH-TEAM-AWARDED-NEA-GRANT-TO-STUDY-MENTAL-HEALTH%2F](https://www.facebook.com/sharer/sharer.php?u=https%3A%2F%2Fnews.fsu.edu%2Fnews%2F2020%2F06%2F16%2FFSU-ART-THERAPY-RESEARCH-TEAM-AWARDED-NEA-GRANT-TO-STUDY-MENTAL-HEALTH%2F)) [t](https://twitter.com/intent/tweet?) ([HTTPS://TWITTER.COM/INTENT/TWEET?](https://twitter.com/intent/tweet?)SOURCE=[HTTP%3A%2F%2FH](http%3A%2F%2Fhttps%3A%2F%2Fnews.fsu.edu%2Fnews%2F2020%2F06%2F16%2FFSU-ART-THERAPY-RESEARCH-TEAM-AWARDED-NEA-GRANT-TO-STUDY-MENTAL-HEALTH%2F&TEXT=FSU+ART+THERAPY+RESEARCH+TEAM+AWARDED+NEA+GRANT+TO+STUDY+MENTAL+HEALTH:%20HTTPS%3A%2F%2FNEWS.FSU.EDU%2FNEWS%2F2020%2F06%2F16%2FFSU-ART-THERAPY-RESEARCH-TEAM-AWARDED-NEA-GRANT-TO-STUDY-MENTAL-HEALTH%2F)[TTPS%3A%2F%2FNEWS.FSU.EDU%2FNEWS%2F2020%2F06%2F16%2FFSU-ART-THERAPY-RESEARCH-TEAM-AWARDED-NEA-GRANT-TO-STUDY-MENTAL-](https://news.fsu.edu/news/2020/06/16/fsu-art-therapy-research-team-awarded-nea-grant-to-study-mental-health/)[HEALTH%2F&TEXT=FSU+ART+THERAPY+RESEARCH+TEAM+AWARDED+NEA+GRANT+TO+STUDY+MENTAL+HEALTH:%20HTTPS%3A%2F%2FNEWS.FSU.EDU%2FNEWS%2F2020%2F06%2F16%2FFSU-ART-THERAPY-RESEARCH-TEAM-AWARDED-NEA-GRANT-TO-STUDY-MENTAL-HEALTH%2F](https://news.fsu.edu/news/2020/06/16/fsu-art-therapy-research-team-awarded-nea-grant-to-study-mental-health/))

Theresa Van Lith, an associate professor in art therapy

A research team from Florida State University's Art Therapy Program has received a \$99,000 grant from the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) to study using the arts as a proactive mental health strategy for Generation Z, individuals who were born between 1995 and 2015.

The team, led by Theresa Van Lith, an associate professor in art therapy, will build on their previous research to identify specific factors that help contribute to client change within the mindfulness-based art therapy program.

"We are very excited to begin thoroughly examining how art therapy impacts the biological aspects of stress and anxiety in college students, such as sleep and somatic issues, along with outlook and quality of life," Van Lith said.

Van Lith noted that college student stress and anxiety is at an all-time high, and with the impact of this year's unprecedented events, she expects to see the desire to perform well and live a balanced life even more strained.

Over the past several years, Van Lith and FSU Art Therapy alumna Meg Beerse have developed an online mindfulness-based art therapy program that promotes proactive mental health strategies in an accessible format and has previously demonstrated anxiolytic and stress-reducing capabilities.

"The world urgently needs well-researched, effective means to reducing stress and anxiety."

— Barbara Parker-Bell, director of the FSU Art Therapy Program

"The world urgently needs well-researched, effective means to reducing stress and anxiety," said Barbara Parker-Bell, director of the FSU Art Therapy Program. "Dr. Van Lith and Ms. Beerse's creative approach to accessible art therapy and on-line care is well suited to college students and our current COVID-19 environments."


6/17/2020

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In a recent partnership with FSU's College of Medicine, Van Lith and her team have been able to demonstrate psychological and physiological outcomes associated with art therapy. Their project combines mindfulness practices with art therapy to promote health, wellness and adaptive responses to stress.

National Endowment for the Arts Chairman Mary Anne Carter has approved more than \$84 million in grants as part of the Arts Endowment's second major funding announcement for fiscal year 2020. This is one of 15 grants nationwide that the agency has approved in this category.

"These awards demonstrate the resilience of the arts in America, showcasing not only the creativity of their arts projects, but also the organizations' agility in the face of a national health crisis," said Mary Anne Carter, chair of the National Endowment for the Arts. "We celebrate organizations like Florida State University for providing opportunities for learning and engagement through the arts in these times."

For more information on this National Endowment for the Arts grant announcement, visit [arts.gov/news](https://www.arts.gov/news) (<https://www.arts.gov/news>) .