

Media Release

31 07 2024 DRAFT

Art Therapy the Colour of Change for the Wellbeing of Children in the Northern Beaches

Over 30 local children recently had their artworks displayed in a unique art exhibition at Manly's Gallery 109 as part of Good Planet Studio's fully funded 10-week art therapy program focusing on supporting children around climate anxiety.

Made possible by funding from Sydney North Health Network, through the Ministry of Health (\$10,000 Extreme Weather Connected Communities Grant) and Be Centre (a children's mental health charity specialising in early intervention for young people), the program provided the opportunity for children on the Northern Beaches to express their unique perspectives on climate change through various artistic mediums.

The exhibition which was on display from 25th-28th July saw parents, guardians, family and friends, as well as Northern Beaches Mayor, Sue Heins, invited to experience the young artists' unique perspectives on climate change through a diverse range of mediums.

Designed for children who may struggle with anxiety, social challenges, or difficulties in self-regulation, the program is led by experienced therapists Emily Legg and Jane Leckie, and co-designed and co-facilitated by Thea Devaris. The program facilitated four groups of eight children meeting weekly to express themselves through art.

Sydney North Health Network CEO, Kevin Barrow says, "Flooding during 2022 created a particularly tumultuous time for the Northern Beaches community. This, combined with the Covid-19 pandemic and lockdown, had a cumulative effect on the mental health of younger people. We are extremely pleased to see how successful this early intervention project has been. It is a fantastic outcome to see firsthand how the program has helped participating children to overcome a range of mental health struggles through creative expression. The Extreme Weather Connected Communities Grants were awarded to initiatives that help the local community to recover from adverse weather events such as flooding and storms. These grants have been made possibly thanks to funding support from the Commonwealth Department of Health and NSW Ministry of Health."

"Exposure to acute trauma during childhood can have a significant impact on development," says Christina Rooney (Fundraising and Marketing Lead at Be Centre).

"We had children present to us who were significantly impacted by the effects of extreme weather and had experienced things like trees falling on a neighbour's car, or garages being submerged under water. Some children reported feeling scared of the sound of the wind. This trauma combined with parental separation, bullying, or abuse has a negative impact on child's mental health. Administering art as a form of early intervention therapy has helped these children to understand and regulate their emotions and equip them with coping mechanisms they can use in adolescence. After the program participants have reported feeling an overall improved sense of well-being and connection to self and others."

Recent studies show that art therapy is a valuable tool for reducing symptoms of depression and anxiety in children and is particularly helpful for those that struggle to express themselves verbally.¹

Emily Legg, one of Be Centre's experienced therapists explains, "It is important to explain that this is not an art class and finished pieces were not the goal. The works are a snapshot of the therapeutic process. All our artists are affected by the repercussions of climate change, this group was a space to explore what our natural world means to us, and we used creativity to access this connection to our lands."

A parent of one of the children enrolled in the program, Sarah, remarks, "The program was so great for building confidence social connection and encouraging creativity. The therapists were so warm and lovely with all the kids. I cannot thank Be Centre and Sydney North Health Network enough for providing this opportunity for our kids. We are very grateful and hope it can be offered to other children and families"

To continue this program, Be Centre are seeking further funding. If you are interested in getting involved, please contact: info@becentre.org.au

https://www.tac.vic.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0016/270232/Art-Therapy-2018-Full-Report.pdf

ABOUT: Sydney North Health Network www.snhn.org.au

The Northern Sydney Primary Health Network, operated by the Sydney North Health Network – a not-for-profit organisation – is one of 31 Primary Health Networks (PHNs) established by the Australian Government to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of medical services for the community. Our focus is on patients who are at risk of poor health outcomes. We work to improve the coordination of their care, so they receive the right care, in the right place, at the right time.

ABOUT: Be Centre www.becentre.org.au

Be Centre Foundation is a local children's mental health charity, established in 2008. We offer play and creative therapy programs for children aged 3-14, including disadvantaged and vulnerable children who might otherwise not have access to such support. Play therapy provides a safe and supportive space for children to express themselves without the pressure of words. Through play, children can work through their emotions. We receive no ongoing government funding and rely on the generous support of our community.

Media Contact

Laura Baldock

Communications Officer

lbaldock@snhn.org.au

Sydney North Health Network

Level 5, Tower 2,
475 Victoria Avenue,
Chatswood NSW 2067
www.snhn.org.au