

Service, Support and Success

The Direct Support Workers Newsletter

The Art of Summer



By: Amanda Gee, multi-modal therapist, Vita Cls

Summer is such a fun time of year but it can also be a difficult time to come up with activities. When the weather is nice, you just want to get out of the house or program and DO SOMETHING... but what? You can go on vacation without travelling – ‘stay-cations’ can be a lot of fun too. And you don’t need to spend a lot of money to have a great time. Here are some simple and fun ideas of things to do that can get the creativity flowing and reveal the inner artist in everyone! Through art, you can turn your community and your own backyard into your inspiration and your art studio.

Some basic directions for these activities – wear old clothes or an apron and put down some newspaper or a plastic tablecloth when painting so people don’t need to worry about getting dirty – that can take away from the creative flow. Let people wear gloves if they are concerned about getting their hands dirty – remember though, paint will wash off skin, but often it won’t wash out of clothes. Art is for everyone, you certainly don’t need to be able to do lifelike drawings to make art. All the supplies can be adapted for use with people who have different abilities – try thicker pastels and brushes, and non-toxic supplies are best. And Staff... staff can get caught up in, well, being staff... get involved in the activities... try something new... have some fun!

1. Art Out, Art In

Supplies: mini easels, canvases, paint, brushes, water container, paper towels for wiping brushes and cleaning up spills.

There are so many galleries that you can go visit. There are big provincial galleries, smaller galleries of local artists, galleries that are specifically for ceramics or textiles or photography. So there are many neat art experiences to be had! You can check online for special exhibits or just go visit the regular collection.

Visiting an art gallery is a great experience on its own, but another creative thing to do is to go to an art gallery and look at the art, talk about what you are seeing, what you like and don’t like, what are your favourites. For those who don’t communicate traditionally, pay attention to reactions to the art work. Watch and listen for favourite

kinds of art, favourite colours, favourite experiences. Then go home and make art about or in response to what you saw in the gallery. Try landscapes, portraits, abstracts, and help the individuals you are supporting to remember what they saw, what they responded to, what they expressed interest in. If you think you will need inspiration once you get home, bring home postcards or pamphlets from the gallery, or take pictures to look at later.

2. Fresh Air Artists

Supplies: heavy-weight paper such as watercolour paper or card stock, markers, pastels, pencil crayons, masking tape, a surface to put the paper on such as some heavy cardboard.

Next time you go out to the park, the beach, or to the waterfront, bring along some art supplies. First explore the area, maybe have a picnic, spend time taking in the scenery, and don't forget to relax before, during, and after the art making. Encourage people to draw or paint what they see. If you are in the park, draw the people, the trees, the squirrels. If you are on the waterfront, draw the water, the sky. This could even happen in the backyard; draw the flowers, and plants you have in your yard. Encourage looking at the colours and shapes. Don't forget to let people be creative in their art. If they would rather draw something else or just explore colours, go with it.

3. Nature Collage

Supplies: found objects (such as rocks, shells, sticks, dried leaves, etc.), cardboard, strong glue or a glue gun, art materials

When you go for a nature walk, to the park, or to the beach, collect objects to make a collage from later. Or walk to your neighborhood park for this specific reason. When you get home, get everyone to lay out their found objects on their piece of cardboard in an arrangement that they like. Once placement has been decided, glue the objects onto the cardboard. Art materials can be incorporated into the collage as well – the objects could be added to a drawing or painting, or, once the stuff is attached to the cardboard, colours can be added.

Fresh flowers and leaves can be used but they won't last long in a collage – they will wilt and die. Perhaps the flowers could be drawn in instead of glued on. If someone really wants to collect flowers and leaves, encourage them to make a bouquet to put in their room or in a shared space instead.

4. Sun catchers

Supplies: string, ribbon or plastic cord, beads (shiny, transparent, sparkly, etc.),

wooden dowel, scissors.

This is a nice rainy day activity that can bring the sun indoors. It could also be done sitting on a patio in the nice weather. String the beads onto pieces of cord or string of different lengths making sure to knot the ends well. The amount of strands of beads will depend on the length of your piece of dowel and how full you want it to be. Tie the strands onto the dowel and add a piece of string to hang the finished piece with. Hang the sun catcher in the window and enjoy the warmth it brings inside.

5. Go on a trip – to the Library!

No supplies needed!

The library is full of so many books that many people never explore. We tend to go to the topics and genres that we like and forget that there is so much more to see and read. Plan a visit to the library and spend some time exploring the art books. There are so many beautiful books full of paintings, sculpture, photography and big beautiful images to look at. There are also lots of 'how to' books in the arts and crafts section to inspire other creative projects.

The library also contains beautiful picture books of places all over the world. In an afternoon you could sightsee in India, Australia, and Newfoundland. Or you could learn all about different plants and flowers growing in different parts of the world. Or learn about the different cats and dogs that exist. Explore!

Israel, Jordan, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates. His expertise is in preparing staff to work with various populations of people with developmental disabilities.

6. Art on display

Don't forget that art is meant to be seen! When working on art work with the people you support, talk about where that art should end up when it is finished. It can be hung on a wall in a bedroom or living room. It could be given as a gift to a family member, boyfriend, or girlfriend. Smaller art can go in a tabletop frame or glued to the front of a card. With permission from the artists, take pictures of the artwork created to share in an agency wide email or newsletter to inspire others.

These are just some ideas to stimulate your creativity this summer, and to inspire the inner artist in everyone! Art making doesn't have to be expensive; there are a lot of free things that you can do and the dollar stores are full of affordable art supplies to explore. Be creative, get out there and explore the arts in your community, try new things. Don't forget your sunscreen and stay hydrated!

About the Author:

Amanda Gee works for Vita Community Living Services. In her role as multi-modal therapist, she provides a variety of therapy options for people with disabilities including art therapy.

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