



Solutions

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Above: Sculpture from MOCA/Job Corps art opening; below left: collage from opening; below right: students and staff view artwork

The Healing Power of Art

Elizabeth O., along with over 100 other female students at Homestead and Miami JCCs, have learned valuable life skills through art. After taking part in the center’s art therapy program, Elizabeth said, “The best part of the program is the ability to be yourself and [to] express yourself the way you want to without anyone judging you.” Valerie M., another participant, found happiness through the program. Valerie said, “Being in the art therapy group each week put smiles on our faces; turned frowns upside down.” Young women like Elizabeth and Valerie have learned to express themselves, gained an appreciation for the struggles of female artists, built self-esteem, and learned to communicate with others and resolve conflicts through art therapy. Darrell Mills, the center mental health consultant at both Miami and Homestead JCCs orchestrated this program.

“I don’t know if it’s like this everywhere, but here in Miami it’s difficult to find community-based clinical services for our students. The funding for counseling is really nonexistent,” said Mills. With limited hours and all of the demands of his role in Job

Corps, Dr. Mills wanted a creative way to help students reach their potential. He found his solution in a collaboration with Miami’s Museum of Contemporary Art (MOCA).

MOCA runs *Women on the Rise*, an art education program designed to educate at-risk young women in Miami-Dade County about contemporary female artists. Through this program that emphasizes self-esteem and positive choices, MOCA educators have taught over 1,600 young women in the Miami area about female artists and their struggles with body image, identity, and empowerment. Along with several other community organizations, Miami and Homestead JCCs serve as sites for the *Women on the Rise* program.

An educator from MOCA meets with the young ladies every other week. During this time, students learn some art basics and about female artists such as Shahzia Sikander, Ana Mendieta, Niki de Saint Phalle, Yolanda Lopez, and Remedios Varo.

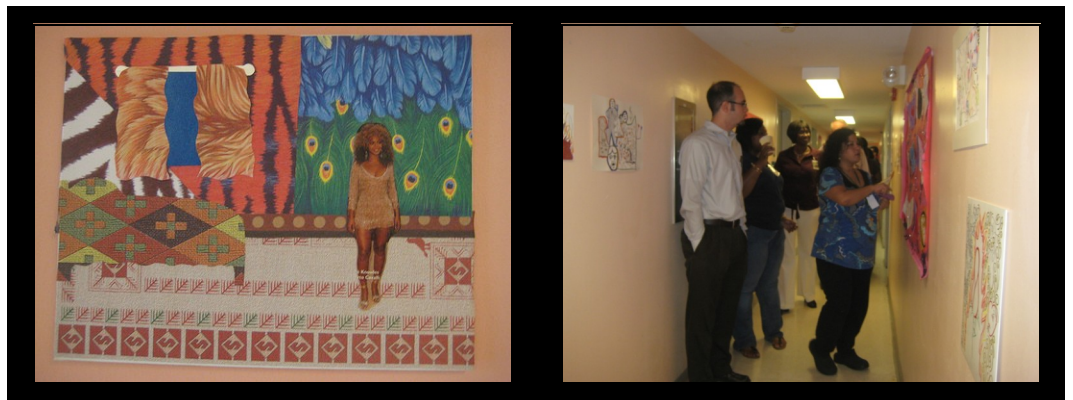
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Creating a Job Corps Garden

Organic community gardens are no longer reserved for hippies. Community organizers, teachers, students, and citizens now grow their bounty on the White House lawn, college campuses, urban rooftops, unused inner city land, and at Job Corps centers. A growing number of centers have started their own gardens to teach students about healthy foods, help students gain a better understanding about where food originates, and to add a new dimension to their recreation program. San Jose, Tongue Point, and Grafton are among the Job Corps centers who have instituted gardens in the past couple of years. All of these gardens share the common purpose of creating a green, healthy, and peaceful space on center.

At San Jose JCC, Victor Castro and his students in the landscape trade are anticipating the warm weather so they can plant tomatoes and peppers. The landscape trade takes a lead on the project, but every department on center has a plot to grow whatever they wish. Somehow, Heather Holland, the health and wellness manager, and her staff have acquired three plots. San Jose's garden does more than produce food; it serves as a gathering spot for students. In addition to the vegetables, they have shrubs, grapevines, a seating area, an arbor, and a misting system to create a smoke-free area for students to enjoy their leisure time.

A few hours north in Astoria, Oregon, Tongue Point JCC's garden reflects the rainier climate and shorter growing season. During the chilly, rainy winter months, staff and students grow root vegetables including carrots, beets, various lettuces, and cabbage. The center's landscaping trade has been rather busy acquiring skills to create both a vegetable garden and what the center has coined its *Diversity Garden*, a space for students to relax. The students have built retaining walls, paved

walkways, and learned the process of constructing both ornamental and food-producing gardens. It takes students about five minutes to walk to the garden, versus a 30 minute walk into town. Kris Saulsbury, the vocational landscaping instructor and head of the garden, says "I want students to enjoy life while they're in Job Corps. They need a place to hang out after school and during lunch." Kris and his landscaping team also plan to install a fire pit this year so the recreation department can host bonfires.

Grafton JCC's garden grows a little different. Peter Vecchiarelli, onetime TEAP specialist, now career development manager, started the center garden in the chilly New England spring by planting pumpkins, squash, and cucumbers indoors. He was motivated to grow vegetables after spending a large sum of money purchasing pumpkins for students for a Halloween event. After the initial indoor crop sprouted, Peter transplanted the vegetables outside and the garden grew from there. Students built a fence to protect the garden from wildlife. After the initial work was completed, the center partnered with the Grafton Community Harvest Project, a local community gardening organization. With the help of this organization, the center was able to expand their garden. Peter hopes to grow enough pumpkins for their annual Halloween extravaganza this year.

These three centers have found creative ways to use the vegetables from the garden. Some fresh vegetables have made their way into the cafeteria so all students can reap the benefits of fresh-from-the-garden produce, and the food service manager can save a little on food purchasing. Staff and non-residential students have been able to take home surplus food. Culinary arts students benefit from tasting fresh vegetables and learning how they grow. At Tongue

Point JCC, the culinary students plan special lunch meals for staff and students. They sell tickets to this special event and showcase the bounty from the garden. Grafton and Tongue Point JCCs donate a lot of their produce to local shelters and food banks as a community service project.

Deer and other wildlife prove to be the biggest problem in protecting the center gardens. All of the gardens are fenced to protect the crops from deer, but gates are unlocked so students can be a part of the garden. None of the centers have experienced any human vandalism. Students on all three centers have embraced the gardens. Any would-be vandals are scared off by positive peer pressure.

Building a center garden can range in price from a few hundred to several thousand dollars, depending on the features. Soil and seeds are dirt cheap (forgive the pun). Retaining walls, fences, and other extras can cost some money; however, our centers have managed to incorporate them into vocational projects. The centers who have created their gardens through trial and error offer the following tips:

- Don't be afraid to experiment
- Consider your soil, sun, wind, and climate. Not everything will grow everywhere
- If deer or other wild life abound, fence in your garden
- Get all materials delivered on site
- Keep it simple

Benefits to students and staff members are as diverse as our center gardens themselves. Center gardens teach healthy eating. They allow students and staff to taste vegetables that they would not normally try. Culinary arts students learn about food and agriculture;

landscaping students learn about creating a garden. Center gardens also support Job Corps' green initiative.

Students learn about the growing process. Kris at Tongue Point JCC often hears amazement from "city kids" about growing food. Students make comments like, "So, this is where food comes from." While it may seem like a small thing to a lot of people, the role of community gardens is especially salient to those who live in impoverished, urban environments. Researchers at the University of Washington wrote: "Lower diet quality, sometimes tied to higher energy intakes, separates low-income Americans from the more affluent groups. Higher-income households are more likely to buy whole grains, seafood, lean meats, low-fat milk, and fresh vegetables and fruit. Lower income households purchase more cereals, pasta, potatoes, legumes, and fatty meats. Vegetables and fruits are often limited to iceberg lettuce, potatoes, canned corn, bananas, and frozen orange juice. Energy-dense sweets and fats are cheap, readily available, and convenient." Drewnowski, & Eichelsdoerfer, P. (2009).

Fruits and vegetables are not only more expensive, sometimes they are simply not available in lower income communities. In the District of Columbia, only three supermarkets exist in the eastern section of the city, where the poorest neighborhoods are located. Until two years ago, there was not a single grocery store in the Anacostia neighborhood, an impoverished area where few residents own cars (DC Hunger Solutions, 2010). Community gardens and the new urban farmers markets now supply fresh-from-the-garden produce to many inner city neighborhoods, like Anacostia. By teaching a Job Corps student to garden, we are teaching them a skill that they can take back to their community. In turn, we not only educate the student, but help them learn to produce healthy food for their neighborhood.

Students improve both their physical and mental health by gardening. Gardening burns more than 300 calories an hour for a 150 pound person. Victor at San Jose JCC says "This has been best project we've done in the 3.5 years I've been here. It really involves the whole center." He tells about a student who found his niche in the garden. Other students frequently bullied this young

man because of his speech problem and health issues. Job Corps was not shaping up to be an enjoyable experience for him. Then, he joined the landscaping class. Outside of class time, Victor could not keep his student away from the garden. He became an expert in insect control and was referred to as the "keeper of the garden."

Center gardens are environmentally friendly; they include composting, organic growing techniques, and water conservation tools. San Jose operates a 100% organic garden, avoiding all chemicals. As part of the green initiative, Tongue Point JCC is in the process of installing tanks to catch rain to water the garden in the spring and summer months. The tanks will be attached to a low volume pump. Kris Saulsbury hopes to be able to water for the majority of the season before resorting to the county's water.

Finally, center gardens are cost saving. After initial set up, the gardens are inexpensive to maintain and ultimately end up saving money. Produce can be used in the cafeteria, by culinary arts, or for special events like the Halloween celebration at Grafton JCC ■



Clockwise from upper left: Grafton Job Corps' Community Harvest Project; Tongue Point Vegetable Garden; Tongue Point Diversity Garden; Grafton students posing with their tractor

The Healing Power of Art (continued)

Most of the artists have faced adversity in their lives, which often grabs the students' attention. After the group learns about the artist, each student completes a project based on the artist's life and work. After each project, the group mounts all of the projects on the wall for discussion. In this venue, each student talks about her project and students give each other feedback.

In addition to the *Women on the Rise* program, Dr. Mills and Job Corps counselors work together to coordinate weekly art counseling or therapy groups. The groups begin with an assignment to create a mandala. A mandala, one of the world's oldest art forms, is characterized by a drawing or configuration of geometric shapes inside of a circle. In Sanskrit, mandala means "whole world" or "circle." Mandalas are utilized in many religions, especially Buddhism and Hinduism; In Tibetan Buddhism creating a mandala sand painting is a popular form of meditation (Gorman, 2009). Mandalas have transitioned into western thought as well; In Jungian psychology mandalas are thought to reunify the self and to help resolve inner conflict (Fincher, 2009). In Dr. Mills' art therapy group, students may draw, paint, or make a collage of whatever subject matter they wish in their mandala. Dr. Mills stresses that all of the artwork produced throughout the program is non-threatening. This is not an art class that focuses on technique, but rather a therapy group that uses art as a medium of self-expression and conflict resolution. The mandalas are used as tools to reinforce consistency and creativity.

During the first few sessions of a new group, Dr. Mills watches how the

students act in the group, especially during discussion. He does not necessarily look for psychiatric issues, but looks for who has trouble focusing on the task at hand. During the group discussion, he tries to help students find structure in their thoughts.

Unfortunately, this does not work for everyone. About half of the students drop out of the group because they are unable to follow the group's rules. Dr. Mills stresses that it is necessary to allow students leave the group if they are not ready to be a contributing member. He asks students to leave who are not ready to participate, as students who do not want to be involved interfere with the rest of the group's progress.

After students become comfortable in their group, the mandalas and the associated discussion open the door to some serious issues. At some point in every group, Dr. Mills knows that at least one student will disclose a history of abuse. More often than not, other young women in the group follow suit and open up about their abusive pasts. Although Dr. Mills has worked with Job Corps students for 12 years, the stories his students tell and the level of abuse they have suffered still concern him. The life histories brought out during the art therapy group have given him a new insight to his students' thoughts and actions. "We don't quite understand what our students have been through. Listening to these stories makes me understand why our students behave the way they do. A lot of young ladies act out sexually. [The art therapy group] brings past experiences to the surface so they can resolve them."

Throughout the group, as the young women start to open up, the mandalas

change significantly, as do the students. Sometimes group members' appearances will soften; they often seem lighter, as though a weight was lifted from their shoulders. Their relationships and their outlooks on life change. Many come into the group unable to trust anyone and leave with a different perspective. They begin to rely on others and form connections with their peers. The group helps them learn to appreciate consistency and to succeed in a structured environment. Learning about art and creativity helps the students learn to solve problems and visualize a positive future and a different situation. By the end of the group, many of the girls recognize that life is bigger than their immediate surroundings. Most importantly, they leave with skills that pave the way to employability. Many of the students act very defensive during critiques at the beginning of the program. After the first few mandalas and discussions, they learn how to take feedback and handle conflict.

In fact, sometimes the young women who begin the group as the most oppositional students become Dr. Mills' greatest success stories. One young lady who participated in an early art therapy group is now a recruiter for the military. At the beginning of her art therapy group, she argued every point. Dr. Mills decided to try something different and put her in charge of the group one day. After that, she opened up and talked about her life on the streets. Her artwork changed after that; it took on her voice. Her argumentative nature turned into an assertive leadership style. Dr. Mills still has her artwork on the wall as an illustration of student success.

Continued on next page.

“The best part of the program is the ability to be yourself and [to] express yourself the way you want to without anyone judging you.” Valerie M., Art Therapy Participant

At Miami JCC, a mental health intern formed a new group to work solely on trust issues and improve conflict resolution. Students in this group keep a trust journal and use mandalas to work through trust issues. The theoretical foundation for this group comes from the works of Erik Erickson’s psychosocial developmental stage of Trust vs. Mistrust. The group’s objective is to establish a healthy, consistent, structured environment in which to repair the damages done to the student’s ability to trust.

Dr. Mills calls his art therapy group the most rewarding thing he does in Job Corps. To create an art therapy program at your center, Dr. Mills offers the following suggestions:

- Find a nonprofit that is

eligible and willing to apply for a grant. Many museums, like MOCA, are nonprofit. Since they are nonprofit, they qualify for grants which government programs, like Job Corps, are ineligible

- Running an art therapy group is time consuming. Work with a counselor on center who is a “go-getter”
- A mental health professional needs to oversee the group. A lot of issues arise during discussion and it could be dangerous to stir up these issues without a professional. If you partner with a museum or other art organization, you still need to be involved in the group discussions

While this is a unique program for Job Corps, art therapy is not new. This technique, which

includes art, dance, music, and drama therapy, has been utilized since the early 20th century. Art therapy has been shown to be successful in a variety of situations. Koerlin, Nybaek, and Goldberg (2000) found that 88 percent of psychiatric patients who completed a 4-week art therapy program showed significant improvements in their mental health. In this study, trauma patients experienced the best results. Art therapy has been shown to improve self-esteem and self-confidence and gives participants a safe place to express themselves. Additionally, art therapy has shown promise treating eating disorders, depression related to HIV, and has helped health care providers avoid burn out (Rao, et al., .2009; Frisch, et al., 2006; Italia, et al, 2008). ■



Job Corps students and staff and MOCA representatives gathered to celebrate student art work, including the pieces above. Photos courtesy of the Museum of Contemporary Art, North Miami.

Resource Corner

Student Success

Camp Atterbury Job Corps Student Loses Close to 200 Pounds by T.D. Jackson, Camp Atterbury Public Affairs. <http://newsblaze.com/story/20091209060431zml.nb/topstory.html>

Tobacco

Treating Tobacco Use and Dependence. 2008 Update from the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality: <http://www.ahrq.gov/path/tobacco.htm>. Includes guide for clinicians

LGBT Students

Straight for Equality In Healthcare. Guide for healthcare providers to communicate effectively with LGBT patients: <http://www.straightforequality.org/healthcare>

More pictures from the MOCA/Job Corps art opening can be found at:
<http://www.flickr.com/photos/mocamiami/collections/72157623221810650/>



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