

ENHANCING REINTEGRATION OF JUVENILE DELINQUENTS THROUGH CREATIVITY IN ART THERAPY

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Abstract. For juvenile offenders, engaging in creative activities supports adaptation to their particular life situation by diverting attention from existing difficulties, contributing to a gradual stabilisation of the emotional system and making less salient feelings of isolation. In this study, we will look at the possibilities of art therapy for juvenile offenders and its positive effects, focusing on visual arts. We explore the conceptual background of the topic, examine the positive effects of these activities, and present important practical initiatives. Based on the findings of the literature and the initiatives studied, the positive outcomes of art therapy are wide-ranging, not only contributing to the development of specific skills, but also facilitating emotional expression and increasing self-esteem. For individuals who have lower communication skills, lower self-esteem, and poorer academic performance, art therapy programmes can be particularly beneficial and provide opportunities for learning and development. The literatures confirm that it is an excellent tool for preventing secondary desistance, so it is not only in the interest of the young people concerned, but also of society as a whole to support these programmes.

Keywords: art therapy, imprisonment, juveniles, reintegration, skills, youth delinquents.

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1. Introduction

The threefold purpose of imprisonment (to enforce the legal deprivation of liberty, to promote social integration, and to prevent re-offending) is essential to prevent re-offending and thus to protect society (Vókó, 2010). During imprisonment, the offender spends his sentence in an isolated space, where the element of punishment is the lack of contact with the family and the forced coexistence in a unique, separated, and stigmatised situation with other prisoners. While this is the case for all prisoners, it particularly difficult for juveniles (under 18 years), who are deprived of family and friends during their sentence (Gajewski, 2020). For juveniles, adolescence is a crucial developmental stage in life, and prison life is a barrier to their socialisation (Little, 2006). Prison life is monotonous, with little opportunity for stimulation. In this situation, inner life, spiritual questions, and experiences come to the fore, often leading to overwhelming emotions (Gajewski, 2020). However, Fallon (2015, p. 161) note that these circumstances can also unleash creativity: "silence is that openness of mind, a blank slate ready for whatever comes next".

Engaging in creative activity supports the prisoner's adaptation to their changed, unique circumstances by diverting his attention from existing difficulties and possible health problems

and contributing to the gradual stabilisation of the emotional system. It also has the positive effect of reducing the focus on isolation, helping to restore balance, and, to some extent, counteracting the chaos that develops in these institutions by altering their lifestyle and daily routine (Gajewski, 2020). The promotion of creative activities, be it painting or drawing if we stick to the field of visual art, provides new opportunities to the individual; figuratively opening up their world and imagination, despite their physical confinement. Drawing tools have even become a means of creating a safe world. These tools allow them to express their thoughts and feelings, especially ones which might be difficult to articulate out loud (Pąchalska et al., 2020).

In this unique environment, the promotion of creative activities is of paramount importance. The highly structured system of juvenile correctional institutions, while necessary, can inadvertently limit choice and restrict freedom. In this context, young people often grapple with feelings of anxiety, insecurity, fear, and demotivation. However, the introduction of artistic activities can serve as a powerful catalyst for change. Beyond providing a constructive way to spend leisure time and develop skills, arts programmes can also serve as a platform for promoting decision-making skills. They empower participants to take ownership of an activity and responsibility for their actions. As Gussak (1997) discusses, creative arts offer incarcerated young people a socially acceptable outlet for their negative feelings, a means of releasing tension, and a source of inspiration for a brighter future.

In our paper, we will discuss the possibilities of art therapy for juvenile detainees and its positive effects, focusing on visual arts. Our research questions are:

1. What is art therapy, and what are its conceptual characteristics?
2. What are the positive effects of art therapy for juvenile detainees?
3. How do art therapy initiatives manifest themselves in practice?

Our study focuses on these questions, drawing on international research and literature.

2. Conceptual basis and theoretical background

The emergence of art therapy methods is not a new phenomenon, dating back to past centuries. There are numerous historical examples, both generally¹ and specific to persons deprived of their liberty² (Rubin, 2010). The term *art therapy* is attributed to Adrian Hill, a British artist who coined the term in the 1940s to describe a form of psychotherapy that uses art practices and interventions as a central treatment method in combination with conversation (Hogan, 2001). Hill experienced the healing power of art during his recovery from tuberculosis. In the sanatorium, he became aware of the positive effects of drawing and painting and how creative energies can help us face our situations and fight illness (Major, 2020).

At about the same time as the British, the first pioneers of art therapy appeared in America and Europe in the 1940s and 1950s. This period can be considered the classical era of

¹ Examples include prehistoric artists carving fertility symbols or African carvers of ritual masks (Rubin, 2010).

² Artistic expression in confinement has a long-standing tradition, with the earliest documented case dating back to antiquity. In Pompeii, Italy, we can still see the graffiti that gladiators drew on the walls of their cells in anticipation of their battles (Kornfeld, 1997). One of the oldest works of art created specifically by prisoners dates from Napoleon's time and may have survived against all odds because prisoners sold them to their wardens for food and extra warm clothing (Kornfeld, 1997).

art therapy, boasting many professionals who began to work in this field, either in practice, by launching art therapy initiatives and programmes, or on a theoretical level in the field of research. The pioneers of art therapy, Margaret Naumburg and Edith Kramer, also began to practice and research art therapy during this period (Daceus, 2015; Donovan, 2022).

Naumburg is considered the "mother" of art therapy, drawing her work from the teachings of Sigmund Freud and Carl Jung (Malchiodi, 2003). She was the first to use art therapy elements in combination with free psychoanalytic methods, which she termed *dynamically oriented art therapy* (Naumburg, 1966). At the core of this method is free and non-judgmental expression, which fosters positive behavioural change and personal development. Naumburg believed that as patients produce art, they are able to express unconscious thoughts without self-censorship, unveiling and solving difficulties in the individual's life by reaching the unconscious layer and getting to the root of the problem (Malchiodi, 2003).

Another great pioneer of art therapy is the painter Kramer, who was born in Vienna, Austria, but emigrated to New York, United States, during the World War II. Her job involved teaching art to boys aged 8–13 with behavioural disorders and mental health problems. A follower of Freud, she was familiar with his sublimation theory and began to apply it in her classes, adapting the concepts of his personality theory to explain the art therapy process (Borowsky Junge & Wadeson, 2006). Kramer aimed to transform the boys' negative, destructive emotions and tendencies into positive, creative energies, which materialized in a work of art. She emphasised the therapeutic potential of supporting artistic creation and highlighted the central role of the defence mechanism in the client's treatment process (Daceus, 2015; Borowsky Junge & Wadeson, 2006).

Art therapy as a therapeutic discipline in the field of psychology is in a state of continuous development, in contrast to more advanced disciplines such as psychoanalysis (Rubin, 2010). The American Art Therapy Association (2022) was founded in 1969 and is dedicated to the growth and development of this professional field. It defines art therapy as an integrative mental health and human services profession that enriches the lives of individuals through creative processes and artistic creation within a psychotherapeutic relationship (American Art Therapy Association, 2022). Art therapy improves cognitive and sensory-motor functions, supports self-awareness processes, and reduces anxiety (American Art Therapy Association, 2022). It is a complementary therapeutic method that uses creative processes to help individuals express their thoughts and feelings, primarily through non-verbal communication.

The concept of using the tool of arts to reach at-risk juveniles is a familiar one, dating back to the work of Kramer. These groups do not have a standard name, often being referred to as art education, art workshops, art programmes, community art, or creative arts therapy groups (Ezell & Levy, 2003). However, it should be noted that the programmes themselves are as varied as the names used to describe them. Some initiatives use a specific artistic medium, others encompass a broad concept of art (including dance, visual arts, and drama) (Ezell & Levy, 2003). When considering art therapy, a distinction can be made between active therapy, in which the patient participates in the creative process to produce a product, and passive (receptive) therapy, where the patient does not create a product but simply receives (for example, by looking at a painting and then analysing the feelings elicited by the experience). We can generally distinguish between visual arts therapy, music therapy, literature therapy,

and movement or dance therapy (Rubin, 2011). The different types of art therapy can hold different outcomes. Some artistic activities, e.g., performing arts, offer more opportunities for cooperation and team building, and participants in these programmes are required to compromise and accept others during rehearsals and the performance. During the staging of a performance, different interpersonal skills are emphasised than in the process of individual creation, the ability to listen to each other is brought to the fore, problem-solving skills are developed, and they are required to work together towards a common goal (Ezell & Levy, 2003). Other activities, such as art therapy and active bibliotherapy (creative writing), are more solitary activities and focus on individual creation, regardless of the aesthetic quality of the resulting work. It is not the quality of a painting or the rhyme of a poem that is important, but the meaning of the work, and after the artistic activity, there is a more extended discussion of the symbols used and the feelings expressed.

Art therapy, a part of psychotherapy, is distinguished by the presence of a professionally trained therapist during the sessions. Their role is crucial as they guide the unique expression of a specific inner psychic experience, either in the patient's own work or in a finished work. This allows the patient's feelings or thoughts to be expressed both directly or indirectly. The therapist's professional responsibility involves supporting participants in obtaining a diagnosis or a form of treatment through their creative activities (Aulich, 1998). On the other hand, while they may be "therapeutic" in nature, art programmes are usually not run by therapists but by professional artists. These artists often lack the training that would prepare them to work with vulnerable target groups (Riches, 1998). These initiatives focus on both the product and the creative process, while "therapeutic" is widely defined as any artistic activity promoting positive change (Riches, 1998).

When it comes to fostering positive change, the strength-based practices approach in art therapy stands out. This approach, which underscores self-determination and interprets juvenile correctional work primarily from the standpoint of strengths (Oesterreich & McNie Flores, 2009), is a unique and effective way to engage young people. It operates on the belief that even those in juvenile detention possess strengths that can be nurtured. It advocates for supporting these individuals in leveraging their strengths and competencies to understand how they can apply them in their lives to bring about positive change and development (Oesterreich & McNie Flores, 2009). For art therapy programmes to be truly effective, they need to be involved in decisions about how they spend this "free" time.

When considering the concept of art therapy, it is worth considering neuropsychological research on brain function. As Bessel van der Kolk (2014) points out, traumatic experiences leave a mark on our minds, our emotions, our capacity for pleasure and intimacy, and even our biology. Because childhood is such a vulnerable period of neurodevelopment, children are particularly exposed to the long-term effects of traumatic life experiences in childhood (Siegel, 1999). Advances in neuroscience over the past decades have greatly expanded our knowledge of how childhood trauma can damage the organization, development, and functioning of the brain (Perry et al., 1995; van der Kolk, 2014). The neuropsychological model suggests that traumatic memories may be stored in the non-verbal part of the brain, which means that young people may have difficulty when attempting to verbalize their problems in therapy. This approach implies that non-verbal, expressive therapies (e.g., art therapies) may be more

successful than verbal therapies for children with a history of traumatic abuse (Kloer, 2005). Art therapy and creative activities can stimulate different brain areas, promoting neuroplasticity, *i.e.*, the brain's ability to adapt and change in response to experiences (Antalfai, 2007).

Visual art therapy is a branch of art therapy that uses the visual arts to allow clients to express their inner experiences and feelings. The process focuses not only on the creation of the artwork but also on its psychological impact (Vargancsik-Thörik, 2020). It is an effective tool for reaching at-risk youth, aids in the personal development of individuals, provides opportunities for self-expression and exploration of the inner world, and has a therapeutic effect (Kiss, 2010). Due to its non-verbal nature, art therapy is beneficial in cases where verbal therapies are not helpful; using images and symbols as a means of non-verbal communication in therapy helps clients to express feelings that they would find difficult to express in words (Liebmann, 2005).

Art therapy, as a beneficial way to spend leisure time, offers a number of advantages for juvenile offenders, as will be discussed in more detail in the next section.

3. Positive effects of art therapy sessions

The literature confirms the value of art therapy in penal institutions, with its use inducing positive changes in many areas (Gussak & Cohen-Liebman, 2001; Liebmann, 1998).

Art therapy is one of several complex therapeutic tools that provide space for personal development (Sautter, 1994), promote cognitive change, and offer young people the opportunity to acquire new skills while keeping themselves physically and mentally engaged (Ezell & Levy, 2003). Art therapy sessions stimulate young people's motivation, support their willingness to cooperate and collaborate, and positively impact their behaviour (Oesterreich & McNie Flores, 2009). Art therapy tools support participants in working through unresolved conflicts in a creative and supportive therapeutic space, thus contributing to their eventual resolution. It also helps young people to develop their self-awareness and self-esteem, provides them with tools to understand themselves, and contributes to healthy self-expression (Donovan, 2022; Gussak, 1997; Liebmann, 1998).

Art therapy is particularly suited to young people who find it difficult to express their inner conflicts and deep emotions verbally (Kramer, 2001). Art-making facilitates communication by providing a means to express thoughts and feelings and, furthermore, access to a visual language that gives a mental escape from physical isolation and confinement (Venable, 2005). An important benefit is the support and facilitation of non-verbal communication in a specific context where open, honest verbal disclosure can easily make one vulnerable to others (Gussak, 1997).

Interdisciplinary research emphasizes a strong link between right brain development and arts education and practice. A more developed right brain contributes to spontaneity, stronger emotional reactions, focused attention, a better understanding of different perceptions, higher-order thinking skills, inspiration in artistic activity, more patience and greater self-discipline in dealing with their peers (Brewster, 2014; E. Feder & B. Feder, 1981; Sautter, 1994).

Art serves as a powerful means of self-expression, offering a channel through which individuals in therapy can convey their feelings non-verbally. Engaging with art and the creation

process provides young people with a release of tension that is independent of the verbal communication of their feelings. This process allows anyone to experience the joy of escaping from rationality and the everyday (Ezell & Levy, 2003). In a juvenile detention center, art offers young people a temporary escape from their current circumstances and the constraints of the institution (E. Feder & B. Feder, 1981).

Additionally, the artistic process can be used to address emotional and psychological problems, help reduce negative emotions, anger, and aggression, deal with destructive feelings, and express repressed feelings. All these effects contribute to the positive impact that prison arts programmes have been shown to have on prisoners' behaviour by helping them process emotions (Blacker et al., 2008).

The arts contribute to the development of self-efficacy. This effect is most beneficial for young people with more limited opportunities for academic engagement, who are more likely to have poor academic outcomes, drop out of school, and engage in deviant behaviour (Quillen, 2020).

Art therapy programmes offer another significant benefit: the opportunity for young people to establish a professional relationship with the artists guiding them. This additional attention from an adult figure, who can serve as a role model in their lives, is a crucial aspect of the programme. The relationship is primarily built on mutual artistic respect and authority, but the artists, as community professionals, provide an additional connection to society and the outside world (Venable, 2005). Through the prison art programme, juvenile offenders can reconnect with society through their art, even directly, for example in the form of auctions, exhibitions, fairs or community beautification projects supporting local initiatives (Brewster, 1983). Art exhibitions provide an opportunity for youth to express their thoughts, give voice to their insights, and exchange ideas with the audience, while also giving the community an opportunity to better understand the life situations and difficulties of young people (Ezell & Levy, 2003; Johnson, 2007).

The many positive effects and successes of art therapy sessions, as described above, are possible because youth do not just pretend to be engaged in art or are required to explicitly focus on changing their behaviour, but simply to engage in the creative process (Oesterreich & McNie Flores, 2009). This experiential learning process is more effective than traditional classroom teaching, as it is based on concrete action and often triggers mental and emotional changes that cognitive-based programmes and school-based teaching cannot (Oesterreich & McNie Flores, 2009; Clements, 2004).

The actions and change processes linked to art therapy sessions also play a crucial role in desistance, *i.e.*, the abandonment of criminal behaviour (Farrington, 2007). Maruna and Farrall (2003, p. 174) introduced the concepts of primary and secondary desistance. Primary desistance describes abstinence from committing a crime and refers to any crime-free gap in the course of a criminal career (Farrall, 2021). In secondary desistance (in which art therapy plays a prominent role), crime not only stops but "existing roles become disrupted and a reorganization based upon a new role or roles will occur" as it involves deep behavioural and identity changes (Farrall, 2021, p. 4). Art therapy sessions develop self-awareness, positively impact a range of skills, and can act as a promoter of psychological and social well-being (Cheliotis, 2014). Secondary desistance, in addition to self-awareness, is seen in developing

social skills that contribute to the person's avoidance of re-offending (Cheliotis, 2014). Among the positive effects associated with disaffection, the most notable are increased self-confidence, exploration of emotions, increased sense of control, relief of anxiety, development of social skills, reduced anger and aggression, and changes in attitude, which changes support reintegration as long-term behavioural outcomes (Cheliotis, 2014). Furthermore, the new skills, self-efficacy and motivation developed through participation in constructive activities can contribute to vocational preparedness. Young people develop professional relationships with the educators who work with them, thus helping them to reconnect with society in a new way, which supports social reconnection, an important element of reintegration and recidivism prevention.

4. Art therapy-based initiatives

In this section, we present some of the previous essential research and art therapy-based initiatives that have highlighted in practice the wide range of positive effects that can impact young offenders.

The *Emanuel Project* (2026), which began in 2011, was implemented as an incentive programme for juvenile offenders to improve self-confidence and self-esteem. Within the framework of the project, the project's artistic director, Emanuel Martinez, visited juvenile detention centers to create "murals of hope" in collaboration with the youth. The institutions selected young people based on their behaviour, academic achievements, and special needs (Murphy et al., 2013). The project aimed to improve the self-esteem of young people to help them avoid re-offending and stay out of prison as adults. Before and after the project began, participants' self-esteem and attitudes toward art were measured using the Rosenberg self-esteem scale (10-item scale) (Murphy et al., 2013). The study had positive results, with all participating youth reporting an improvement, with youth in the pre-test normal range showing a 1.6-point increase. In contrast, youth in the low self-esteem group showed a fourfold change, with a 7.4-point increase (Murphy et al., 2013). These findings suggest that art may be one way to improve the self-esteem of adolescents currently in juvenile detention facilities, with a significant change, particularly among youth with low self-esteem (Murphy et al., 2013).

One of Gussak's (2020) projects (Art Therapy in Prisons Program) aimed to help students who have been removed from school through the arts. The group comprised 60 students aged 12–18, primarily African American. Although these young people had not yet been in correctional institutions, some of them were awaiting punishment for severe charges such as assault and drug-related offenses (Gussak, 2020). The young people involved in the project were impulsive, had poor emotion regulation, and sometimes behaved uncontrollably. The participants were divided into small groups, and the teams themselves decided on the mural's theme. Upon completing the project, the sense of pride in their accomplishment showed an increase their self-acceptance and self-esteem, and they showed a developed sense of identity through the creation process (Gussak, 2020).

Liesera et al. (2020) used art therapy as an anger management tool. The study involved eight male juvenile detainees (aged 15–18 years) who were serving their sentences in a juvenile prison in Jakarta, Indonesia. The art therapy programme was conducted twice a week

for six weeks. The programme results showed that art therapy reduced anger in six out of the eight participants but that there was no significant change in the expression of anger. The results indicated that providing art opportunities in correctional facilities may facilitate the healthy expression of emotions, specifically anger, for juvenile detainees (Liesera et al., 2020). Another important finding of the research is that one of the sources of prisoners' anger is idleness and a feeling of isolation from the outside world, so it would be worthwhile to provide more opportunities in juvenile prisons that are not explicitly limited to artistic activities and are accessible to all prisoners (e.g., recreational activities, joint sports) (Liesera et al., 2020).

Bennink et al. (2003) provided a combined art therapy programme at a Florida Department of Juvenile Justice, United States, facility for 24 youth, with programme components that included individual and group art therapy, and academic and vocational programmes. Individual sessions provided opportunities for exposure to various symbols, art mediums, and schemas that were useful in expanding visual vocabulary (Bennink et al., 2003). The juveniles used the house-tree-person test (Buck, 1948) to create drawings and family sketches, depicting their life trajectories and drawing what it felt like to be locked up (Bennink et al., 2003). In group therapy, the youth worked with a variety of drawing and painting materials, as well as using papier-mâché, cardboard, collage, glue, and scissors. The art therapists encouraged them to talk about the creative process and show their products at the end of each session so that the young people gained insight into each other's feelings, lives, and situations, in addition to the creative process, thus increasing their empathy (Bennink et al., 2003).

The *Voices from Within Project* (2026) initiative was an art programme for juvenile delinquents, involving community exhibitions and the sale of their work for charity. The programme was a partnership between Franklin University, United States, and the Ohio Department of Youth Services, United States, and supported the implementation of three exhibitions in 2012, 2013, and 2014 (Miner-Romanoff, 2016). All youth who participated in the programme reported a sense of achievement, with the main benefits cited as the opportunity for healthy self-expression, a sense of community restoration, and increased artistic skills. In 2013, results from a survey of youth who exhibited showed that 81% cited collaboration with others, completion of tasks, and increased self-esteem from public recognition and art sales as benefits (Miner-Romanoff, 2016). Of the 2014 youth exhibitor sample, 93% cited positive benefits, including increased self-esteem, reduced stress, pride, or recognition of goal achievement resulting from creating, exhibiting, and selling their artwork to benefit a charity serving at-risk youth (Miner-Romanoff, 2016).

Over a three-year period, *A Changed World* was a programme that facilitated interaction between artists and juvenile offenders, supporting their skills development (Ezell & Levy, 2003). *A Changed World* aims to reduce the reoffending of youth delinquents through their participation in experiential arts activities. Workshops were held by professional artists (including graphic designers, photographers, sculptors, poets, and musicians), with programmes lasting a minimum of two weeks and a maximum of two months. Over three years of evaluative research, the workshop objectives were achieved: the young people acquired concrete professional skills in the specific artistic activity, and participation in the workshops significantly reduced offending and misbehaviour. In addition to improving skills and reducing behavioural

problems, the results also suggest that participation in art workshops has longer-term effects, as evidenced by the relatively lower recidivism rates of participants (Ezell & Levy, 2003).

Collins et al. (2023) research examined the effectiveness of art therapy on the development of hope and resilience levels in Canada. Thirteen young people aged 12–19 received individual art therapy sessions for 12 weeks. Hope, resilience, and goals were measured using the children's hope scale, the resilience scale, and the bridge drawing with path arts-based assessment (Collins et al., 2023). Results showed that 12 weekly art therapy sessions increased hope by 29% and resilience by 16%. Art therapy enabled the juveniles to perceive and communicate their current and future life goals while reflecting on the people, places, and things that give meaning and hope to their lives (Collins et al., 2023). Overall, the youth in the study showed higher levels of hope, resilience, and goal-oriented thinking at the end of the 12 art therapy sessions than at the beginning of the programme (Collins et al., 2023).

To summarise the art therapy initiatives presented in this chapter, we can highlight that they fall into the category of active art therapy. Participants create their own artworks mainly through painting and drawing, thus using creative expression to help them express their emotions. Through art therapy sessions, young people can approach their problems from a new perspective by creating and interpreting artworks. Evaluations of prison art programmes show that art teaches inmates how to work with focused discipline in addition to stimulating and facilitating creativity, communication, and reflection. Creating a mural or portrait is challenging, demanding work through which young people learn the value of completing tasks once started and that the creative process often comes with the added satisfaction of knowing that the energy invested has produced something (Brewster, 2014). These therapeutic-based initiatives have improved young people's self-esteem, self-expression, ability to identify and articulate their life goals, reduce their anxiety levels, and provide a valuable way to spend leisure time while developing specific vocational skills. Additionally, the group-based sessions helped young people to gain insight into each other's life situations and feelings, thus increasing their empathy and tolerance. Community and society-based programmes have also helped young people develop a sense of community awareness, improve their social perception, and reduce the rejection and prejudice of the general population.

The programmes presented support long-term behavioural outcomes through various tools, enhancing young people's self-esteem, improving impulse control, making it easier for them to express their emotions and anger, and increasing their empathy. Several initiatives have also helped young people to connect with the community by allowing their artwork to be exhibited outside the institution, thus supporting social reconnection.

5. Conclusions

Visual art therapy aims to bring hidden emotions and experiences from the subconscious to the surface, allowing them to be processed. The therapy does not require artistic talent but focuses on the creative process and its therapeutic effects. During the therapy, the client actively participates in the creative process, which helps to express themselves and reduce internal tensions (Kiss, 2010; Vasarhelyi, 1996).

Juvenile detention facilities can use art therapy tools for various purposes, and the positive impact of such initiatives is wide-ranging, from skill development to emotional expression. Art therapy is particularly useful for juvenile offenders in correctional facilities who have poor communication skills, are unable to express their emotions verbally, and have low self-esteem (Murphy et al., 2013). When organising these activities, it is important to build on the strengths of young people in prison and involve them in decisions about how to spend their time.

Art therapy initiatives increase the chances of social reintegration for young people in and out of prison, as art therapy aims to promote recovery and increase self-esteem through creative expression. Programmes designed around art therapy encourage participants to explore their identities and strengths, and promote a sense of fulfilment through creative expression (Donovan, 2022). Community engagement through art exhibitions or joint projects can help these young people reintegrate into society by connecting them with support networks. Arts therapy programmes for juvenile offenders can serve as a gateway to further learning, and the arts can stimulate a sense of willingness to participate by developing basic skills such as self-expression and communication, strengthening autonomy, social competence and sense of purpose (Brewster, 1983; Cohen, 2009; Silber, 2005; Hughes, 2005). As this is especially relevant for individuals who are from the formal education system due to non-traditional curriculum, learning and teaching methods, it can be an opportunity to promote reintegration into society. Art therapy programmes commonly concentrate on improving outcomes such as problem-solving skills, prosocial behaviour, resilience, self-regulation, academic achievement, and family functioning (Rapp-Paglicci et al., 2011; Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, 2016). Various guidelines have been established to address the unique needs of this population, including Strengths-based practices that focus on the identification and development of individual strengths rather than solely tackling weaknesses (Donovan, 2022).

In the long term, it is in the interest not only of the young people concerned but of society as a whole that youth offenders become desistance-free, do not re-offend, and do not end up in prison when they reach adulthood. To achieve a pathway for these young people, prison professionals need to invest in their future, and a straightforward way to do this is to support their participation in art therapy programmes (Murphy et al., 2013).

6. Note

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