ARTmail for Alzheimer’s:
A Partnership Project Between

Supported by the National Endowment for the Arts Research: Art Works Grant
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Community Partner: Lia Miller BFA, Executive Director, Creative Aging Network - NC
Research Evaluation: ARTmail for Alzheimer's
Community based participatory research

1. CAN-NC designs and delivers ARTmail
2. Seniors participate in ARTmail
3. UNCG evaluates impact of ARTmail on seniors
What is ARTmail?

• A participatory, creative, visual arts program for seniors of diverse abilities (including memory symptoms and dementia)
• Based on abstract expressionism (no drawing ability needed), focus is on colors, shapes, textures, etc.
• Takes place in senior care communities (residential or day)
• 8 weekly sessions, 1 to 1.5 hours each
• Run by trained artists and volunteers
• Involves students as interns, research assistants, volunteers, etc.
Seniors live and have art sessions in different sites. Each is paired with another senior at a partner site to exchange their creations.
The inside surface of a cardboard box is used as a canvas. Choice in tools and colors is encouraged.
The box ‘work in progress’ is mailed to the partner artist at the partner site, who opens it, adds to the art, and mails it back. The first artist then makes further additions to the piece. A ‘box story’ gives more opportunity for communication between the artists. The boxes make everyone happy!
Collective Public Exhibition

At the end of 8 weeks, there is a public exhibition of the works for friends, family, community.
ARTmail Research: 2016-2017 Study

• Large scale study (N=200) in Guilford Co. January 2016 – mid 2017
  – Do participants with memory symptoms or dementia improve in neuropsychiatric symptoms (apathy, agitation, mood) compared to control group persons who engage in their usual activities for the study period?
  – How to improve program design and delivery?
Announcements through associations, newspaper, personal calls/emails
Adult day care, residential care: serving seniors with memory diagnoses
Face-to-face with staff to provide explanation & package of materials
1 ARTmail group & 1 control group (10 participants in each) at each site
ARTmail group participates in art, control group does their usual activities
Research ethics: gaining informed consent: four complex steps
Student experiential learning and training are key

• Undergraduate and graduate students are closely involved in all stages.

• Gain vital hands-on learning not possible in a conventional classroom in a large University

• Support from UNCG: HHS, URSCO, ORED, OLSL, etc.
• Quantitative methods: survey based;
  • pre- and post- interviews with professional caregivers of seniors
  • Comparison from baseline to endline, and with a control group of seniors who engage in usual activities

• Qualitative methods: conversational interview based;
  • In-depth interviews with selected participants: staff, seniors, family
  • Field observations of art sessions
  • Photographs
Expected findings...

Increase in:
Physical Health, Enjoyment of the Process: “Art High”

Decrease in:
Depressive Symptoms, Apathy, Agitation
What we found...

Survey findings summary

The quantitative evidence suggests that from baseline to endline, ARTmail:

- Has a near-significant beneficial effect on depressive symptoms,
- Does not appear to affect apathy
- May alleviate agitation though the effect is not significant.

Both intervention and control groups decreased in apathy, agitation, and depressive symptoms, but no statistically significant differences between the two groups

The depressive symptoms graph showed a greater decline in the intervention group
Qualitative findings summary
Most participants with MS/CI greatly enjoyed participating in ARTmail and it appeared to improve mood, engagement, social interaction, and reminiscence during the sessions.

We gathered this from interviews with participants, caregivers, community staff, and teaching artists; and photographs and field observations.

Elizabeth speaks of her experience: click here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uFWr71WWbLs&t=1s
Research-Practice Partnership Challenges

**ARTmail design and delivery**
- Sites to participate
- Adequate funding
- Scheduling difficulties
- Research complexities

**Research process**
- Sites and sample size
- Paperwork management
- Scheduling difficulties
- Finding/funding personnel
- Maintaining protocols
Research-Practice Partnership Solutions?

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**Ceaseless outreach**
- Constant fundraising
- Ongoing challenge
- Intensive communication

**Additional sites/back to old sites**
- Intensive communication
- Ongoing challenge
- Volunteers, Interns, Service Learning, Independent Study
- Compromise and document
Onward!

Challenges: Art program and research logistics

Solutions: developed on an emergent basis, incredibly hard work

Results: An evidence-based, well-designed, creative arts program that improves quality of life of participants!
Our goal:
A well-designed, evidence-based participatory arts program that improves quality of life of seniors with memory symptoms or dementia.