

Person-Centered Art Therapy for People with Dementia Alzheimer Society of Calgary



Opening Minds through Art (OMA) is an innovative, intergenerational art therapy program for people living with dementia. The OMA program promotes social engagement, autonomy and dignity of people with dementia through creative self-expression opportunities. Best Friends is a model of care for people with dementia emphasizing empathy and friendship and was founded by two experts in the field of dementia research, Virginia Bell and David Troxel.

The purpose of this initiative is to expand the reach of OMA and Best Friends training to up to Adult Day Programs, long term care facilities and organizations with dementia programming in the Calgary area, thereby building OMA art therapy capacity within participating Adult Day Programs. OMA and Best Friends training provides staff and volunteers opportunities to build close relationships with people affected by dementia while providing person-centered care through creative expression.

Project Scope

Increase the capacity of the OMA (Opening Minds through Art) art therapy program to benefit a greater number of people living with dementia, by delivering OMA (art therapy) certification training and Best Friends™ Training (person-centered dementia care training) to a number of representatives from Adult Day Programs, long term care facilities and organizations with dementia programming who can then facilitate the program in and around Calgary, as well as central and southern Alberta.

A little bit about OMA (Opening Minds through Art)

OMA was developed in 2007 by Dr. Elizabeth Lokon at Miami University in Ohio, in response to the unmet need for creative self-expression among people with dementia, especially those in the middle to late stages. Dr. Lokon found that programming in various care settings tends to overlook the remaining strengths of people with dementia and often does not recognize their full personhood. “OMA enables people with dementia to assume new roles as artists and teachers and leave a legacy of beautiful artwork” – Elizabeth Lokon.

OMA is a program that aims to bridge the gap between people with dementia (PWD) and younger generations through making art. Grounded in person-centered philosophies and strengths-based approaches, OMA focuses on the skills and abilities that people with dementia still possess. It addresses social isolation, loss of independence, and stereotyping. Participating students/volunteers are trained in OMA principles, communication skills, and strategies to promote social engagement, autonomy, and dignity towards PWD. Students/volunteers are also trained in the “Best Friend Approach”, grounded in the belief that relationships are supremely important in dementia care.

Our journey through this initiative

Our journey began in late fall of 2016 when we were selected to be one of eight organizations to receive the Community Innovation Grants for People Affected by Dementia. The Alzheimer Society of Calgary had the only two trained facilitators in Alberta, limiting the number of people, both PWD and volunteers, who were able to benefit. This funding allowed us to provide training to a number of Adult Day Program and long-term care representatives (trained facilitators) in the Best Friends™ Approach and OMA (Opening Minds through Art). We worked closely with the developer of OMA, Dr. Elizabeth Lokon from the Miami University in Ohio and her colleagues to create a large scale OMA training program. We then created an application form and process with detailed information about the OMA art therapy certification project (to help potential trained facilitators understand the benefits, expectations and outcomes of the project). Through this vetting process we selected 32 individuals from in and around Calgary, as well as central and southern Alberta to receive the training who can now facilitate the program in their Adult Day Programs, long-term care facilities and community-based organizations with programming for dementia.

The OMA facilitator training process first began in March 2017 with a two-day workshop in the Best Friends™ Approach Associate Trainer program that was established as a pre-requisite to receive the OMA facilitator certification. The two day workshop was led by Padmaja Genesh, Learning Specialist and Paul Bartel, Manager of Learning & Support Services from the Alzheimer Society of Calgary.

With gratitude to the Brenda Strafford Foundation, the four-day OMA facilitator training in May 2017 took place at their Bow View Manor facility in Calgary. With support of the staff from Bow View Manor, who are now also OMA trained facilitators, a number of residents from Bow View Manor were selected to participate and assist in one of the activities during the OMA training. Feedback from the 32 individuals being trained was overwhelmingly positive with the excitement they conveyed to start their own OMA sessions at their respective facilities. Once the four-day training session was complete, an intimate graduation ceremony was held on the last day to celebrate everyone's accomplishments.

Opening Minds through Art training in Calgary lead by Dr. Elizabeth Lokon of Miami University Scripps Gerontology department. May 8-11, 2017.



Facilitators in action learning one of the OMA art processes.



Facilitators and residents of Bow View Manor participating in one of the OMA art sessions.



Graduation day May 11, 2017



Testimonials from the OMA training

OMA Trained Facilitator responses:

"I believe this is an incredible program that is very beneficial and I would go so far to say necessary in all senior care facilities".

The most important things you learned in this training:

How to be patient = Elder decisions instead of always trying to motivate and encourage, sometimes silence or waiting is exactly what is needed.

How to incorporate choice into activities for people with dementia. Giving them freedom within structure was important to me.

How start and implement an art program that will produce a wonderful way to reach and "draw out" residents with dementia which includes language.

Person-centered philosophy was reinforced. I learned that everyone regardless of ability, or interest in art, can derive lot of joy from artistic engagement. I also learned that it is equally joyful and rewarding for facilitators/volunteers.

To see the roles of recreation workers (as I am a nurse) was very enlightening. I now understand much more and am very thankful for this experience. Thank you for not limiting this experience.

The strengths of OMA training:

The learning part, the experience, the connection with different people and being able to spend one-on-one time with residents was amazing. Plus the facilitators was really helpful and accommodating.

Very detailed. They give you everything to need to make it work.

I appreciate how prepared this program is - to assist us to be instantaneously successful.

The program allows for anyone, artist/non-artists alike to do meaningful artistic programming.

Content - Very relevant, meaningful, complete. Team - Inspiring, motivating. Art Programs - interesting, engaging. Learning resources.

Very engaging, interesting and research-based. The resource package was extremely organized, which I really appreciate because it makes it easier to begin to implement OMA.

I loved this training. The most relevant engaging training I have received in my 10 year career.

Next steps

Our next step was to get a sense of which newly certified facilitators were in a position to start their own OMA programs throughout the summer or early fall of 2017 by having each facilitator complete an "OMA Implementation Plan Survey", in which they were asked to outline their plan for implementing the program at their own facility. Much to our delight, facilitators from two facilities (featured below) were able to start implementing their OMA program right away and have also held an art show to show case this exciting initiative.

OMA art session at Carewest Signal Point, August 2017:



Bow Valley College LPN Students, Carewest Signal Point OMA volunteers

Testimonials

As a recently trained OMA facilitator I can't thank the Alzheimer Society and AHS enough for the wonderful opportunity given to those who received the training. OMA not only has a huge impact on the quality of life to clients but it can also help future clients because everyone deserves to be treated with respect and OMA teaches these principles to their volunteers. OMA has brought a heightened level of programming to our clients and I look forward to my next OMA experience! - Jennifer B.

What are the impacts to your client (person with dementia) (share specific details and stories if possible. Change in behavior/attitude – from non-social to social; from anxious to calm and happy; from wandering to engage; etc.):

I think the biggest success story I have in the recent OMA session is a gentleman from Long Term Care who rarely attends anything filled in for one OMA session. This is a man who rarely comes from his room, he can be very demanding and has little respect for others. Knowing he enjoys building model ships I thought I would ask him if he wanted to fill in for the day. It didn't even take convincing he just said yes I would like that. He came and smiled and actively participated the

entire hour. He loved spending time with the volunteer, loved his finished piece at the end and made a point to come see me in my office at the end of the day to tell me how much he enjoyed it and would love to do it again. He even stopped by my office again the next day to chat about the program. I think the reason why I feel this story is so important is because he felt such joy and success with just one OMA session where he is usually complaining, or anxious about his family etc. I only wish I had thought of him as a full time participant from the start. He is definitely on my list for the next time around.

Caregiver Testimonial:

I think what impressed me the most about OMA is the 1:1 interaction with the volunteer. When I met her at the art show you could see how much she cared for my wife. She was patient and always had her best interest in mind. Goldie can be anxious and always asking for me but during the hour she spent with their volunteer her anxiety was reduced and she never mentioned me. This shows me she was engaged even when she was having a hard day and sometime refusing to participate in the activity. Goldie used to enjoy creating pottery and I feel OMA gave her the opportunity to have that creativity she once loved back again. - *Al Finigan*

OMA Volunteer testimonies:

OMA therapy helps to inculcate and nurture in the artist the ability to make decisions, to make the artist feel as being in control and provide the gratification with pride of having produced something that is being appreciated by all. Probably this confidence building measure just when they are written off for life could be helpful to them to feel important and live life once again. - *Shailesh (Shaun) Thakur*

Every meeting was a learning as well as bonding experience for both of us. Seeing how my Artner improves in terms of decision making and perceptive ability was very rewarding for me. .

Although people with dementia may not remember your face or your name, what's important is the feeling of happiness you shared with them. - *Maria Clarissa Muncal*

OMA art session at AHS South Health Campus, August 2017:

South Health Campus volunteers and dementia clients in action



Art Show at AHS South Health Campus

Amazing Art Pieces created by OMA artists who are living with dementia



Testimonials

Volunteer testimonies:

My artner was known to show some aggression at times, however, during the OMA sessions she was extremely happy, showed a great sense of humour and thoroughly enjoyed each week. At the first session, this patient was not too sure if she would be able to do "art." On the last session, she was so engaged and really enjoyed every week. This patient typically packs up all her belongings and try to leave the unit, but during the program she happily stayed for the entire program.

I think it's been a valuable experience in providing companionship, an artistic outlet, and inspiration/stimulation. I saw her confidence grow over the weeks in making her own artistic decisions - less hesitation and more assertiveness in what she does and doesn't want.

Another patient is very impulsive to get up to walk when they are a very high fall risk and are unsafe to walk independently. This patient also spends a lot of time calling out "help me, help me" and screaming, and other times is unresponsive to verbal questions, and sits in the chair with their eyes closed. During the OMA sessions, this patient was engaged in creating the artwork, and forming a social connection with her volunteer. Their feedback forms were always so positive, and the patient would pick names like "happy" for their artwork. The volunteer learned to listen and adapt to the patient's needs.

Impact on the volunteers:

OMA provided a positive learning experience in identifying that patients with dementia are able to express themselves through art... what a beautiful concept. I recognized challenges with my art partner in that she had to be gently persuaded to complete the task and required my assistance. This gave me a sense of accomplishment being able to engage my partner.

This has been wonderful, I look forward to it every week and feel like I am making an important contribution to my artner.

The OMA program has been an amazing experience! I enjoy witnessing the growth in the "artners" and the increased confidence they showed week over week.

It's been invaluable and extremely rewarding to discover an artner in someone I never would've had the chance to work with before.

In the Media

The Alzheimer Society of Calgary has been very fortunate to receive media coverage regarding this OMA art therapy initiative over the last few months. We were featured by two local TV stations during the training in May that created more awareness for the general public. As a result of this exposure we received calls from caregivers, students, and individuals who are interested or want to be part of this amazing and life changing program for people with dementia. We also had caregivers inquiring if the program could be offered in a facility where their loved one with dementia is currently residing or living. We also received calls from students who want to get involve with OMA and learn from it, along with calls from local artists or individuals who are providing art to people with dementia and want to elevate the quality of program they provide.

The Alzheimer Society of Calgary and the OMA art therapy program was also featured in Star Metro this summer: