HF2743
Health Finance and Policy Committee
Position: **Favorable**
Tree of Life Art Therapy
February 22, 2024

Chairwoman Liebling and Committee Members,

As a trauma-informed Board-Certified Registered Art Therapist working in the State of Minnesota for the past 15 years I have had the honor to facilitate art therapy in a variety of settings ranging from working in community-based mental health, in clinics and now with my private practice. I have witnessed first-hand the power of engaging in art therapy. Trained art therapist have the ability to work with all ages of the population to treat a multitude of mental health issues.

I have worked with a 27 year-old woman who came to me after experiencing a traumatic birth. This client also had a history of relational trauma and a sexual assault in her past. This client presented with (PTSD) Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder symptoms including flashbacks and nightmares which were interfering with her ability to bond with her baby. This woman could not stand to be touched and could not resolve her PTSD symptoms on her own. This resulted in post-partum depression and anxiety which further exacerbated her PTSD symptoms. Through my training I was able to establish a strong therapeutic relationship with this client, and eventually she was able to use the art materials to draw out the visual that represented the worst part of her trauma. Trauma is stored often times as visual and internal images so when a person has the opportunity to express what they have experienced through art, it can externalize distressing memories and images that they are living with. In this client case, her art expression led to tremendous relief that she could express and share her traumatic experience within the safety of the therapeutic relationship. My training as an art therapist helped me establish a strong, therapeutic alliance, and my knowledge allowed me to know what direction to take with the art intervention, and how to help this client resolve her flashbacks and mitigate her PTSD symptoms. My training allowed me to help the client integrate her visual experiences and connect with which was most important to her – her baby and family. There was a marked change when I asked her to make a picture of what she would have liked to experience and what she would want in her life. She made an image of a warm light surrounding her with her baby sleeping in her arms.

I've also have had the opportunity to work with adolescents throughout my career. I worked with a young man who I began seeing as a 16-year-old junior in high school. The client came to art therapy by the request of his parents for depression and suicidal ideation. The client was failing out of classes and not on track to graduate. This client had extremely low self-esteem and problems with friendships and socialization. Previous therapies had not worked for the client and he would not talk in sessions. His parents were at a loss to know what direction to take to help their child. I begin therapy with this client by simply being with him and encouraging him to make artwork while listening to his favorite music. It took many months of making artwork before the client would engage with talking to me. In the previous therapies he had he did not have the avenue of art making to express himself non-verbally with a trained art therapist. Through my gentle encouragement for him to keep making his artwork we establishment a strong relationship and he eventually became really engaged and interested in telling me about his intricate drawings. As time went on, he started to talk about what he was experiencing and tell me some of the way he was feeling about himself. Through keeping him focused and engaged on his art he was able to talk through some of his past trauma and fears that were leading to his suicidal ideation and depression symptoms. Within our time of working together, he began to feel better and his grades improved. As I established rapport and continued to focus on his strengths and identity as an artist, he began to see his value as a person. His depression and suicidal ideation subsided, and he graduated from high school.  Now he is completing college applications and although he struggles with depression symptoms occasionally, he resumed doing activities that he used to enjoy. This client is on a path to go to college and is excited about his future and this was impacted greatly through his art therapy sessions.

Being trained as an art therapist is critical, because art therapist can draw the connections in the artwork and expression to the relevance of what the person is going through and can help foster a deeper understanding of what their art expressions mean. Someone who is not trained as an art therapist may not know what language to use to help the client process their art or what direction to go to lead to the integration of the artwork. This can result in the client leaving the session feeling vulnerable and can trigger worsened symptoms. Both guiding the client and knowing what therapeutic art interventions to use, why to use it and how to use it is ultimately extremely important. Each time a client comes to art therapy there is an opportunity for expression, change and growth. Clients can literally see their progress and change. I have had clients hang their pieces of artwork done in art therapy sessions on their walls to remind them of their progress and change and the power of engaging with their creativity in making art with an art therapist. Art therapy is life enhancing and helps contribute to healthier individuals who can have better relationships and contribute more fully to their communities.

Minnesota art therapists and the American Art Therapy Association respectfully ask that you vote to pass this important legislation, helping to guarantee access to best-fit care for all Minnesotans.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I am happy to answer any questions that you may have regarding art therapy or this legislation.

Kristin Kane, MA, LMFT, ATR-BC