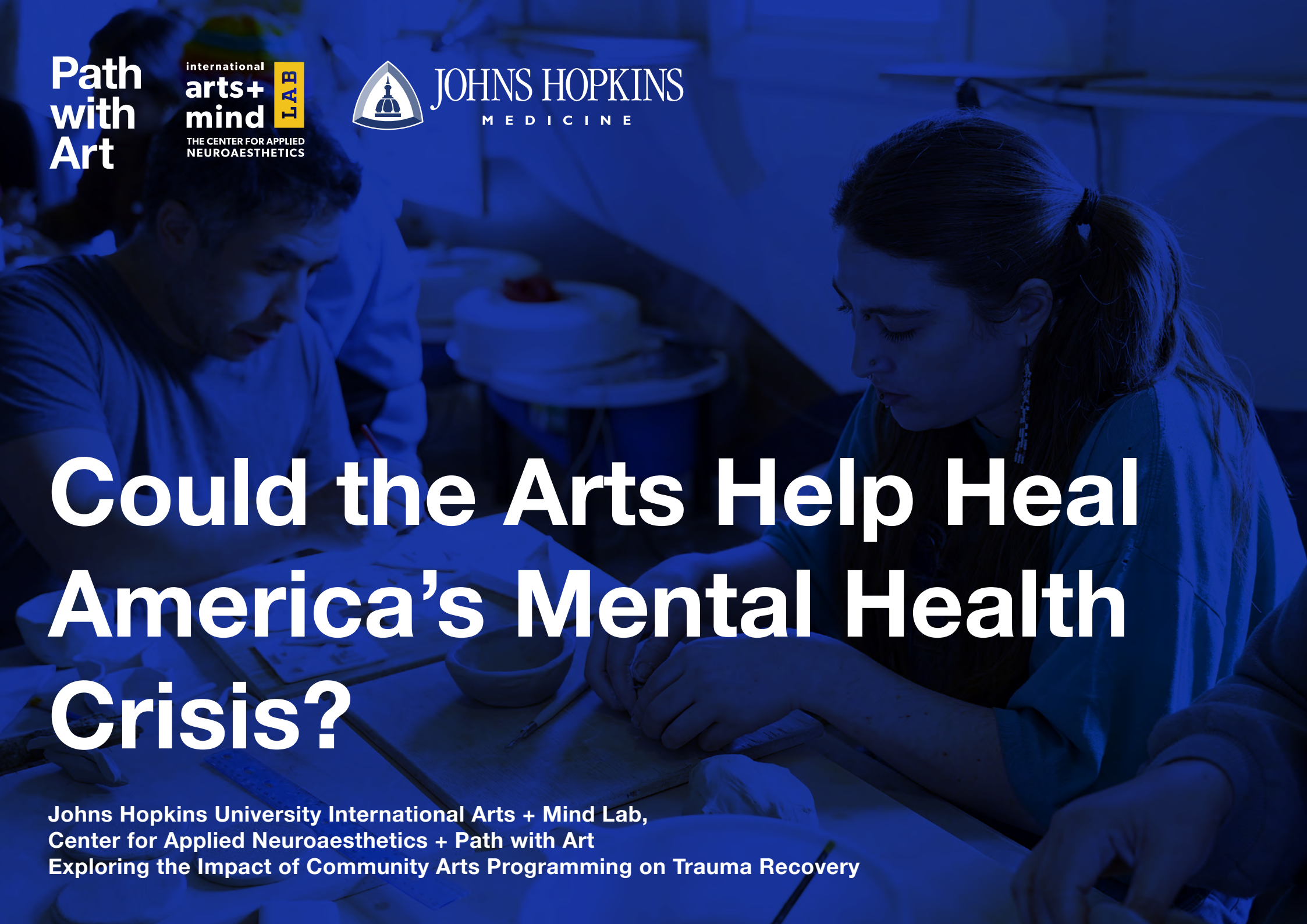


Path with Art

international arts+mind LAB
THE CENTER FOR APPLIED NEUROAESTHETICS

JOHNS HOPKINS MEDICINE

Could the Arts Help Heal America's Mental Health Crisis?

Johns Hopkins University International Arts + Mind Lab,
Center for Applied Neuroaesthetics + Path with Art
Exploring the Impact of Community Arts Programming on Trauma Recovery



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The Study

From 2024-25, the Johns Hopkins University International Arts + Mind Lab (IAM Lab) collaborated with Seattle-based Path with Art (PwA) to study the impact of community-based arts programming on mental health for individuals recovering from trauma.

The participants took part in Path with Art's trauma-informed, strengths-based arts programming, disseminated in online and in-person classes in community settings. The two-month classes met weekly, and each focused on an artistic discipline such as dance, choir, writing, theater, visual arts, podcasting, and more.

The Method

Eighty individuals completed surveys before their engagement began and again after the two-month programs ended, which helped assess the outcomes of these classes. Study participants also completed open-response exit surveys at the end of their programs, providing their perceptions of the programs' impact on their mental wellbeing, why they continued coming to classes, and their overall reflections on the classes.

The Population

Many participants represented low-to-no income populations (30% or below of AMI); others were veterans of any income level. **All participants were in active recovery from one or more traumatic experiences or conditions, such as homelessness, domestic abuse, substance use issues, or other mental or behavioral health challenges.**



The Evidence is in: Art Supports Individual & Public Health

The study, using a validated pre- and post-program survey, found that Path with Art programs had measurable and positive impacts on participants' mental wellbeing, social connectedness, and self-efficacy (or the belief in the ability to accomplish your goals).

The results were striking:

90% said that Path with Art's programming increased their self-efficacy.

88% reported positive changes in their mental health.

80% said they felt less lonely since engaging in the 8-week session.

69% said that they made new friends, suggesting improvements in social connection.

The evidence shows the arts help people feel more connected to themselves and to others, factors proven to lead to better mental health.

For individuals living with trauma, these findings matter profoundly. They show that healing is not only about symptom reduction, but about rebuilding the core capacities of recovery itself. Particular areas of improvement include self-efficacy, reconnecting with others, and moving forward with purpose after adversity.

Participants described the arts programming as "life-changing" and "profoundly meaningful." As one participant noted: **"Path with Art gave me my life back. My spark. My love for life."**



The Evidence is in, *continued*

Additional open-ended surveys allowed participants to share their feelings about Path with Art programming, which researchers grouped into five overarching and interconnected themes.

Social Connection and Community

- Participants reported feeling seen, heard, and accepted by both their classmates and instructors, which supported recovery.
- “Through PwA, I get to see familiar and friendly faces on a regular basis around Seattle, which is really helpful in my recovery from Complex PTSD.”

Mental and Emotional Wellbeing

- Many said that engaging in creative classes with others provided a way to manage stress, anxiety, and trauma symptoms.
- “[Path with Art] helps immensely with anxiety and depression. I don’t feel ‘owned’ by my PTSD when I’m in art classes.”

Personal Growth and Empowerment

- Participants talked about the improved confidence that came from stepping out of comfort zones in a supportive environment.
- “Being guided through that process [of making art] has been all-important for learning about myself.”

Motivation and Purpose

- Participants saw Path with Art programs as a way to alleviate isolation and provide structure, dependable routine, and a sense of stability.
- They spoke to finding greater meaning, motivation, dignity, and self-worth through participation.
- “PwA helps give me a reason to go on and gives me hope that maybe my life might get better some day.”

Creative and Educational Engagement

- Participants spoke about learning new skills, having the opportunity to experiment, and build confidence in their artistry, which helped grow their motivation.
- “I attended each week to learn more about watercolor... it keeps me out of my head and gives me skills to fall upon.”

Implications

The study, published in the peer-reviewed medical journal *Health Promotion Practice,* formally confirmed what Path with Art has seen over nearly two decades: **arts participation can be a transformative remedy in the process of healing from trauma.**

Many people living with complex mental health challenges—often rooted in trauma, poverty, violence, displacement, addiction, or adverse life experiences—experience isolation, incarceration, chronic homelessness, over-medication, or other crises.

Health systems in the United States are often disjointed or functioning beyond maximum capacity. As the mental health crises grows, the systems continue to strain. Too many individuals cycle between emergency rooms, shelters, jails, and fragmented care systems. More often than not, they lack access to sustained community and creative expression.

The findings from this study confirm that a different approach is not only possible, but that it is also effective.

The Johns Hopkins University study with Path with Art makes the case for incorporating community-based arts approaches—outside of formal clinical settings—into trauma-informed care to complement and extend the reach of traditional therapies.

This study also adds to the growing body of research showing that arts participation can be an effective component in public health, offering more access to proven care, especially for those who face barriers.

This is more than an arts demonstration. It is a public health opportunity. It is a community safety strategy. And it is a model for how society can move from crisis response toward sustained healing.



Resources

Read the full study

Access the peer-reviewed publication online at *Health Promotion Practice* via Sage Journals.

IAM Lab and PwA Feature in *Psychology Today*

“Arts Engagement in Trauma Recovery Can Benefit Mental Health: Community arts programs can support healing, connection, and mental health.”

Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine’s International Arts & Mind Lab

Learn more about Path with Art’s research partner and IAM Lab’s pioneering work in the field of neuroarts.

Integrate Arts and Health with artREMEDY

Learn from seasoned practitioners to understand the effects of art on physical and mental health and incorporate arts engagement as a health practice.

Explore the Community Neuroarts Coalition

Path with Art is the leading organization for the Puget Sound Community Neuroarts Coalition.



Path with Art is driven by a vision of a world where arts engagement is recognized as transformative—connecting the individual with self, the self with community, and communities with society.

In this world, the power of art is available for all.

Path with Art