ART AS A COPING MECHANISM FOR ADULTS WITH DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES WHO ARE BLIND

A THESIS

Submitted by

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ABSTRACT

“Art as a Coping Mechanism for Adults with Developmental Disabilities Who Are Blind”

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The work field is very limited for people with developmental disabilities as are the ways for them to cope with their disabilities as psychotherapy or traditional talk therapy may not be within their capabilities. Art in a vocational setting does not only give this population a chance to work and gain monetary benefit but it provides them with an outlet to cope with their condition or illnesses and physical limitations. By working closely with three artists with developmental disabilities and blindness, I saw coping through their artwork and their artwork helping symptoms of their diagnosis. If art is useful to this population for coping and problem solving, internal or external, it should be used as a major contender for therapy within this population.
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INTRODUCTION

Art Therapy as a means of coping is used by many populations seeking refuge from their trials, tribulations, and hardships occurring in their present life or past experiences. In the realm of the developmentally delayed, these hardships are encountered every day doing the tasks most people take for granted. Not all communities are understanding and not all people are compassionate. This can lead to self-hate, depression, or an overall dissatisfaction of life. By using art as a coping mechanism, adults with developmental disabilities who are blind can find themselves to be coping with the feeling of being different or misunderstood by so much of society which has placed a stigma on mental illness.

The clients discussed in the following paper have developmental disabilities as well as blindness. Their tactile art in particular, give them confidence in the ability to manipulate their materials and chosen medium and in turn give them a way to see without the primary muscles usually used for that task. Their artwork, though used for vocational and monetary benefit can be seen as a way of coping through their inability to be totally independent, but also the display of their persistence through adversity and their ability to overcome their internal blockage to produce even more meaningful and beautiful art.
DESCRIPTION OF SETTING

The art studio which serves as a vocational site to 95 clients, resides in a neighborhood outside of a largely populated Northeastern city. It is a brick faced building that has a gallery and work studio located on the second floor and a store and jewelry studio located next door in a one floor set up.

The gallery and main studios are located on the second floor of the building where the clients do most of their work in their different medium oriented studios. These include, pottery, fabric, paper, art making, and weaving. The pottery studio is located directly in front of the door leading to the main studio, then walking down the gallery, the fabric and paper studio are facing the kitchen which separates them from the Adult Education room, a set of offices and the art making studio. After walking through the kitchen, weaving and the staff lounge and office are located. Each studio specializes in types of products. The paper studio makes cards, postcards and gift bags. Thus, they are equipped with markers, pens, pencils, colored pencils, acrylic paint, and almost any type of paper. The fabric studio does embroidery and bags. Fabric markers, thread, needles, canvas, canvas shoes, t shirts, felt, fleece, and fabric scraps and pillows are utilized to their full potential. Weaving specializes in scarves and placemats as the looms create rhythm that can be heard throughout the whole studio. Jewelry is responsible for making bracelets, necklaces and adorning existing weaving items with adornments. The large clunky beads juxtaposed with the tiniest of beads, wire, and sculpey clay. Art making and folk art focus on mixed media products that encompass wood crafts like boxes, mirrors, clocks, jewelry boxes, even musical instruments and Adirondack chairs adorned with markers, paint, beads, glitter, feathers, jewels, flowers and anything else the client’s artistic eye needs; the artistic equivalent of
a free for all, everything but the kitchen sink. The folk art studio is located in the adjacent studio that is focused towards the more psychological illness population. In the building next to the main studios hold the store and jewelry studio directly behind it.

The agency is a service of a non-profit human services organization that provides services to individuals with needs varying from psychiatric, behavioral and cognitive disabilities. It began in the seventies created by two women. It was originally located in Brighton. During the 1970’s when the state institutions were being closed, the organization found some of its first members. Some of those same clients still call this site their place of employment.

Since it is a vocational facility art therapy is not appropriate or included in the environment. However, the work space would be able to function as an art therapy work area. It is well equipped with a wide variety of art materials and with the small flaw of it being very open, thus not allowing for privacy very easily, it would suffice as an acceptable art therapy location. However the staff would need to be re-trained to focus more on the person and less on the product.

The age ranges for the clients from eighteen to ninety-four. The performance level of clients varies as much as their ages. Some are faster with production making them more frequent art sellers and this can breed a feeling of competition among other artists. The constant stressor of “selling” as opposed to “creating” is often posed and often made the object of most importance.

The role of the staff at the site is to not only instruct the clients in their vocations but also clinical training and serving as case managers and fulfilling the role of therapist, counselor and ultimately a member of their support team. They provide the skills necessary to complete the
projects and anything requiring advanced skill or finishing knowledge, the instructors fill in any
gaps in the production process. The instructors also assist in the arrival and departure of clients
that require assistance due to physical limitations.

The student role in the schematics of the site are to fill in wherever staff cannot due to
prior commitments, appointments or if they are otherwise preoccupied. The students are required
to observe the instructors so as to acquire the knowledge for interacting with clients. There are
also more mundane tasks the students must partake in to ensure that the site is running on a
consistent schedule. In the morning if the student is there early enough preparing coffee in the
morning is expected. During the day shift, the students are assigned to a particular studio where
they assist the instructors and aid the clients in whatever project they’re working on. Break time
may require the students to help make and set up coffee and tea or participate in a one on one
with a client out in the community or within the studio. Lunch can require these same things as
well as adhering to dietary restrictions and specializations of some clients. The afternoon studio
is shorter than the morning studio and calls for the same duties as the morning studio,
attentiveness to clients and help with dismissal.
LITERATURE REVIEW

Applications of Art Therapy

The article *Pictures and the Blind* written by John M. Kennedy discussing the ability of perspective in the blind population serves anyone looking to research artistic ability in the blind community. He argues that overall perspective holds a bearing on the ability to draw in the blind. Depiction and aspects of depiction however are irrelevant but nonetheless understood by this same group.

A group of 17 individuals with blindness were conducted for an experiment on perspective and artistic ability in drawing. Among these 17 individuals, four were totally blind from birth, one totally blind early (meaning this person was blind before the age of two), five are later totally blind (after age two), four can sense light and dark (two early blind and two later blind), three are low vision capable (they can read large print close up). Each person was instructed to draw on a tablet that when a ball point pen runs over it creates a raised line. They were prompted to draw a hand, a glass, a table, and a drawing of their choice. The problems faced by the individuals were ones that would plague even sighted people; for example, a common problem was how to suggest hollowness in a glass or legs under a table. Even though they could not see, their knowledge of perspective allowed them to depict the objects asked of them with little to no clarification captions although most did write them when they felt necessary.

The beginning of the article talked about cinematography and how cameras work and movies work because light is informative, creating an abstract foreshadowing of the explanation
that seeing light and dark makes for more easily explained drawings rather than those that do not have the ability to see light and dark.

Similarly, German philosopher Herder (Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism) had the theory that touch was the truest of the five senses. Like the sighted individual “sees” the color or shape something makes, it is even more difficult for someone who does not have that luxury. After World War I a group of French sculptors decided to test this and blindfold themselves as they made sculptures. As men came back from the trenches with blindness from battle, they were taught how to sculpt as a way for them to earn a living or to have a vocation as they were rendered useless on the battlefield or in other vocations they may have had before conscription. What they discovered was that there were three developmental stages in sculpturing as well as painting. The art of the blind and partially blind in its first diffuse stages almost appears like an obsessed desire for self confrontation. The artist has to confront the fact that his inability to see will impair the likelihood of his piece being realistic. After this initial stage, the second stage is described as an overwhelming discovery and certain parts of the face or body become overemphasized due to how much importance they hold to the artist. It is far more abstract than the previous stage. The final stage moves from a rigid structural style to a more fluid or flexible expression to situations and experiences. As sighted individuals, most see a tree as something whole, then seeing the trunk, branches, leaves, etc, as opposed to the blind artists who would use their tactile sense to start with the details and expand to a whole object. It is how they perceive the tree. They feel the details then “see” the tree as a whole mass of something. The article ends with the thought that this is a perfect marriage of perception, imagery, thinking and feeling. The outcome is healing through sculpture for these blind individuals.
Sculpture is also used in a German institution that employs an art therapist that specializes in working with adolescents who are blind and also have terminal illnesses. One of the subjects, Marianne is an angry adolescent girl of thirteen who is prone to outbursts including throwing objects and even to the point of scaring her as she cannot regain control of herself. She feels her family is responsible for her unhappiness because they compartmentalize her into the same category as that of a child. She is not allowed the same privileges as her sighted siblings and this clearly creates animosity towards them. During therapy she makes angry masks and monsters with vicious body parts that when touched produce a very undesirable outcome to the person who disturbs it. However, a turning point in therapy is when she hears the story of Medusa. Being blind, she felt impervious to the fate many people befell when faced with the mythological creature. This shows coping through art as she made the mask that sparked the therapist to discuss Medusa in the first place. For the first time she felt like she was powerful. She found confidence in this small fable. She used art as Aesculapius used Medusa’s blood, to slay and heal. She overcame demons as well as integrated the feelings of anger and passion into healing and creating.

The title of the article (The No-Fail Method of Painting and Drawing for People Who Are Blind or Visually Impaired) makes it very hard to ignore for anyone interested in how people would try to make two dimensional work especially work that is done with very persnickety materials such as paints. This article successfully outlines ideas for making painting an available outlet for individuals who are blind or otherwise visually impaired to utilize during art therapy sessions without condemning them to only use clay for the remainder of their sessions. It makes sense that some people would become bored with the same medium. Sighted people would grow tiresome of painting or drawing so it is no different of those who are not sighted. Benjet (1993)
outlines measures such as labeling things in Braille and having hot glue guns available as well as using masking tape to create “boundaries” for landscapes and other areas of differentiation including foreground, middle ground and background. One client who had a very surly demeanor ended up expressing how she felt like an artist after several months of the no fail system. She had used the program and after a while needed little to no assistance giving her the independence and the confidence she needed to reach her most creative dimensions. By simply giving options in other mediums and taking the time to develop a system for people of any type of physical handicap could do great thing for their coping and over all self esteem in dealing and confronting their limitations, by making sure they have even fewer than they previously thought.

Even though the article is from one hundred years ago, it still resonates with the idea that individuals who are blind can work with materials that otherwise sighted people are normally employed doing. Something found interesting within Artistic Textiles by Blind Weavers was that the ends of these woven rugs were hand finished. It is sometimes difficult for a sighted person to finish the ends of such woven pieces and dexterity is something very much required of weavers. They also have the ability to notice and correct any mistakes within the knotting that can be corrected quickly after their discovery. It is also mentioned that mistakes or errors regarding throwing the shuttle, misplacements of the colored skeins, (they are labeled in Braille and numbered in order) are very uncommon. They take diligent care in the way their work is done and the products show that they are skilled craftsmen and women. It may not have listed psychological benefits of using power looms and gaining monetary benefit, but it nonetheless is very impressive and should be used as a guide to creating more vocational programs for adults with handicaps that would otherwise be unemployed or collecting government checks. This gave these men and women a sense of purpose which can even be therapeutic within itself.
In *The Art of Therapy and the Therapy of Art* Dr. Krayn along with the rest of this book team captivate the reader from the first page when giving a client’s detailed history, diagnosis and art therapy assessments with their stories written in such a way reminiscent of a film. This makes the client notes not only easier to read and get through but the reader becomes concerned and attached and curious about the well being of the client after treatment has been terminated.

Reading the client histories, all of them used art therapy as a coping mechanism. None were blind but had gone through traumatic situations or big experiences such as moving to a new country (this book primarily dealt with hose of Russian descent and immigrants), Nazi occupation, and even a near death experience at the age of six. It covers a wide population and age range and includes both genders. It also includes family and friends’ opinions of therapy as well as their support or disapproval of the therapy or treatment. This was helpful to the reader to better understand where the client is coming from at home. In the research done with client files, I personally have not been privy to such information of whether CBT, talk therapy or psychotherapy is seen with a welcoming or disapproving eye. It would be interesting and helpful because if the client does not feel supported at home or among his or her peers than the treatment could be greatly affected as people have an influence over others when they are people of importance (mother, father, close friends or relatives, etc).

In particular, the client history about the six year old boy who almost died while in the care of his father will be of use to me. Equally as traumatic are the clients who have gone through things such as surviving brain cancer but losing vision, and sexual abuse at a young age. All of these are very different types of trauma and the book does not deal with all of them
individually but the idea of traumatic stress being helped with art is nonetheless useful when discussing the idea of coping through making art.

The book also provides insight into popular theories in art therapy or thinks people have made looking at many different types of art. For example, I did not know that black and yellow were colors often associated with suicide. I can use these things when looking at my clients art work. Of course, never assuming anything but making connections or trying to think of how they’re feeling while making the art. In a separate chapter People Draw Their Moods Dr. Krayn discusses the different orientation and composition of artwork done by people that have mood disorders.

Drawings by people with adjustment disorder often contain a single object or a few objects, one of which is set apart or is different from the rest... some kind of division is present... Drawings by people with anxiety disorder tend to be very crowded... painted using very short active strokes... least popular themes are animals and words... Drawings by people with depression tend to be arranged around a vertical or horizontal axis. They are often minimal and calm. Colors are often watered down and pale... Blues and grays are used a lot, and black is common. Themes of drawings are often inanimate and totally neutral-flowers, nature, landscapes, buildings. Drawings done by people with post traumatic stress disorder are often unsettling. (p.35)

Dr. Krayn acknowledges that these descriptions “are far from complete” but feels it necessary to include the bare bones in order to better explain the visuals shown in the proceeding pages.
Overall this source was helpful in just learning how people cope with art on any age level and how different experiences are translated on to paper for some people.

**Art as Therapy: Collected Papers**

Edith Kramer, author of *Art as Therapy: Collected Papers*, a leading pioneer in art therapy from the time of its inception, discusses the needs and the experiences of the blind clients she has worked with. She starts off by explaining how the blind are usually prone to becoming needy and dependent on the sighted as children. They tend to give up their own perceptions or ideas in favor of what sighted people tell them and tend to put a large amount of trust on the sighted. She then discusses how the blind are limited to three dimensional arts like sculpture (which I disagree with). She goes on to talk about how the fingers and hands are blind people’s way of “seeing”. She says because of this they are very gentle and it takes a while for them to learn to be forceful and direct with the clay.

In one particular instance Kramer discusses her work with a blind adolescent boy. He was born out of wedlock and given up by his mother at the hospital while his father disappeared before he was born. He had tunnel vision that led his vision to diminish by age seven. After being in a foster care home and suffering at the hands of his older foster brothers, he developed a chip on his shoulder which led to him having behavioral problems so much so he was expelled from every educational institution he ever attended. This was unique in that the blind population tend to be cooperative and at the worst, passive aggressive. His behavior had landed him in a delicate situation where he was going to be sent to an institution depending on whether his behavior improved or not. He was sent to the facility Dr. Kramer worked at and from there he flourished in sculpture and eventually his behavior calmed down.
The boy's sculptures had the enlarged features that many sources outlined as unique to this population. The features of the faces or animals the sculptor works on are very exaggerated and tend to be larger to show the detail and for that detail to be tactile. Although my subjects are not children or adolescents one has been through a pretty dramatic childhood like this boy and she does do sculpture even if it is bowls and functional table ware, the lips of cups and handles are overdramatic and tend to be larger.

With other art mediums like painting or drawing those who are visually impaired tend to somewhat practice the same overdramatized features with their drawing style. The use their whole arm and body when they draw or paint so as either not to leave any space uncovered or they use it as a way to “feel” what they are trying to transpose on paper.

Taken from *The Art Therapy Sourcebook*, “... It is difficult or impossible to express feeling with words. Emotions, particularly those that result from trauma, crisis, or loss are hard to articulate, and often words do not seem to completely convey their meaning.” (Malchiodi, 1998 p. 27) Within the seventh chapter of her book Malchiodi discusses the anguish great artists have felt and turned it into some of the greatest art of all time. She cites Picasso’s *Guernica*, and *Starry Night* by Van Gogh. Picasso’s war torn hometown and Van Gogh’s struggle of his inner self are seen by thousands of people every day and are portrayed as some of the best art the artist has ever produced. This art came with very strong emotional background. Most art does. With strong feelings come strong actions and reactions. If people with strong emotional problems or have emotional instability can create something fantastical and vibrant, macabre or beautiful, there is a sense of accomplishment and reward felt by the artist and the journey of healing can begin.
In the event of children who have been sexually or physically abused, art is a relatively safe way to express emotions. For example, a boy and his mother who had been abused by his father were staying in a safe house for battered women and children would often draw and talk about a monster he could control and how a little boy could overwhelm and bring the monster to his defeat. The boy never physically said that his father was abusive and that he wished he could stop him but the artwork spoke for itself in this case. The therapist was then able to speak to him about his anxiety, anger, and fears the child held toward his father. Art serves as a buffer in acknowledging and expressing powerful feelings and emotions like anger, depression, or fear.

Materials often play a big role in the child exerting control over their aesthetic quality of their picture. For example, one child wanted a ruler to make sure all of the lines were completely perfect and straight. This child had lived through the 1994 Los Angeles earthquake and his house had to be rebuilt. His fixation on perfection and “fixing” was a result of this natural disaster.

Artist Jane Orleman who experienced sexual abuse as a child felt that painting her feelings about the subject was a type of internal dialogue she was having with herself and working through the issue. Later in the chapter Malchiodi talks about visual journaling and how it can be helpful like writing in a diary. If people with psychological impairments were more apt to draw or use art medium in a journaling format, they could keep their emotions or selves on an even keel and keep themselves in balance. In the same section, there is a chart depicting common color associations. With this chart, I will be able to make inferences and guesses about my clients art and the emotions they may be experiencing as a result of their color choice.
Typical Psychological Development

Witzelsucht is a German word for when a person who has experienced memory defects due to brain tumors or lesions uses puns and jokes accompanied with childish behavior as a defense mechanism to deflect attention from memory defects. This is exhibited by one of my clients and it is not within the realm of normal psychological development for an adult. Its ramifications include being prone to taking part in humor in inappropriate times and perhaps showing inappropriate affect. An example would be laughing at a funeral.

Psychological development within the guidelines of stages, Erik Erikson has seven he developed, where the individual is faced with conflicts. Erikson’s seventh stage, middle to late adulthood (Ego Development Outcome: Generativity vs. Self-absorption or Stagnation; Basic Strengths: Production and Care) (Harder, 2002) The clients discussed are not developing normally according to Erikson because if they were, they would be experiencing being in charge in the work place. They are very reliant on other people. Some are more independent than others but the overall population is reliant on others for their safety and well being to an extent.

Along with psychological development, Viktor Lowenfeld made stages that coincide with the proper artistic development children should show. The first is the scribble which has three different stages within itself, the disordered scribble, the circular and the naming. All of these are common in people with lower IQ as most of the time naming occurs in the form of telling stories corresponding to the pictures. In the pre-schematic stage the use of colour is more emotional than logical which can be very useful when conducting a therapy session and most of the clients in the site use colour in this way with clothing and style as well as their artwork. In the schematic stage the issue of space is first addressed as well as exaggerated sizes of the subjects in the pictures.
Drawing realism which occurs between the ages of 9 to 11 is during the gang stage where group friendships of the same sex are most common. Drawings become less spontaneous. The final stage, the pseudo realism stage is where the product rather than the process is more important to the artist. *Creative and Mental Growth* from Lowenfeld gives a look into the normal artistic growth of a child into an adolescent, when the artistic tendency happens to drop off significantly unless fostered.

Unexpected illnesses or hereditary illness can cause abnormal psychological development as well. According to the National institute of Health, the ailment that strikes one client, O.S., is a condition that affects both hearing and vision. The major components of the disorder are hearing loss and an eye disorder called Retinitis Pigmentosa, otherwise abbreviated as RP. RP causes night blindness and loss of peripheral vision and eventually the field of vision narrows creating what is called “tunnel vision” and only central vision (vision when looking straight ahead) remains. Among the types of Usher’s Syndrome, types 1 and 2 account for ninety to ninety five percent of all the cases in the United States. Type 1 Usher’s Syndrome is characterized by children who are profoundly deaf at birth and have bad balance. Hearing aids do nothing for the child and sign language or a written language should be introduced early to prevent frustration while trying to learn how to communicate later. Type 2 children are born with moderate to severe hearing loss as well as normal balance. The vision problems progress more slowly. They can also communicate orally as opposed to type 1 children. Type 3 children have normal hearing at birth and balance problems may happen later. Night blindness occurs in adulthood while hearing loss occurs in the late teens. By mid to late adulthood they are completely blind.
Since Usher’s Syndrome is inherited it is passed down to child from the parents. It is contained in an autosomal cell, meaning it is not a cell that determines a person’s biological sex. There is no known cure. Carriers are not aware that they are carriers of this rare recessive gene.

**Treatment**

Since the site is not an art therapy site, it is a vocational site, it is not necessarily ideal for them to be expressive for their own mental state as opposed to making art for sale in the corresponding store. Modifications are made for the deaf and blind clients at the site for safety issues and making sure there is no animosity among the clients. For example, at the monthly meetings, issues brought up are making sure the other clients do not leave bags or things on the ground where the blind clients could trip. Another issue is to be aware of them as they cannot usually do the same due to their lack of vision. They also are reminded that talking to the blind-deaf clients in a regular tone they will not hear you so it is imperative to speak loudly and clearly in order to communicate to them.

The studios are also equipped for seeing and non-seeing individuals. The non-seeing clients have tactile clues as to where things are located. For example, there are railings on staircases and Braille is readily available as signs on the bathroom. The drawing studio for non-seeing clients also accommodates to them by taping paper down so when the use a full bodied stroke, the paper does not rip and it stays on the table. In the pottery studio one client is allowed to do throwing on the wheel when she is supervised by the instructor. Assistance is also given to those clients who may struggle with arriving and leaving the building. As a result the interns are learned how to guide and assist the non-seeing clients. In addition to the administration knowing American Sign Language, for interaction with the deaf-blind clients, the American Sign
Language alphabet is posted around the studio. In the instance of a fire drill the clients must be able to exit the building within two and a half minutes. To accommodate the non-seeing clients they are assisted one on one while exiting as the elevator is “out of service” for the drill.
Client: Iris*  

Iris is a small middle aged woman, born in a quaint town located in the northeast. Her primary language is American Sign Language and understands written English. She was diagnosed with Usher’s Syndrome and Retinitis Pigmentosa (RP) at the age of 10. She has an IQ less than 90 which is considered borderline low IQ.

Usher’s Syndrome is a genetic condition that affects both hearing and vision. It is the most common condition that affects these two senses. The major symptoms associated with Usher’s Syndrome are hearing loss and an eye disorder called Retinitis Pigmentosa, sometimes abbreviated RP. RP causes night blindness and a loss of peripheral vision (side vision) through the progressive degeneration of the retina. The retina is located in the back of the eye and is extremely important to sight. As it progresses, the sight becomes more like tunnel vision and the person affected can then only see directly in front of them. Those affected by Usher’s Syndrome and RP are known to have balance issues. (National Institute of Health, 2011) Iris exhibits all of these symptoms as she was diagnosed at ten years old, she has been living with this for approximately 43 years. Her vision has deteriorated to the point where she relies on something called tactile sign language, which involves the person signing into the other’s hand. She can sign normally to those who can see but she requires the other person in the conversation to sign into her hand. Even though she displays profound sensori-neural, bilateral hearing loss, her artwork is reflective of her physical issues and shows the beauty that can rise from such a troublesome diagnoses.

1 * denotes pseudonym
Iris was born to her two parents in a small northeastern town. Her mother was killed in a car accident when she was very young and it was reported that her father was an insufficient caretaker. According to records at age 14, she is teased at school by boys and was “sexually used”. No other information is available on her file pertaining to this. She had nightmares about these boys and was fearful that she was pregnant for some time. However later in the file, it says in her adolescence she enjoyed physical relationships with boys and had conversations with trusted adults about the consequences of physical relationships with boys. Perhaps she became fixated on the idea of a less than desirable outcome. Her father according to the file struggled with alcohol abuse, leading to her placement with a friend of the family. She was taken care of here and supported emotionally as well as placed in special programs to facilitate her progress with schooling given her circumstances. At the time she lived with nine other children, six of whom had developmental disabilities. Despite her differences to other children her age, she was given responsibilities similar to those of any household. These included setting the table, making her bed, cleaning, and baby-sitting. She was moved from her grammar school in her hometown and sent to a school in the Midwestern part of the United States that specialized in children who were deaf-blind and their education. After her initial diagnosis it was imperative that she learn American Sign Language as it was to become her only means of communication after her vision and hearing fully deteriorated. She did not use it all the time and had trouble comprehending what sentences were but developed her language and can now communicate and writes things down for those who cannot comprehend ASL. She stayed at the Midwestern school until her graduation. After her graduation, she did some work at a plant back in Maine where the population was mostly adults with developmental disabilities. She then relocated to another
suburb of Boston where she currently resides and travels independently and works at the adult day program where I observed her.

The challenges Iris faces on a daily basis usually pertains to movement and making her way from place to place within the studio. Most of the clients, given their limited cognitive abilities, bump into her figuring that because her eyes are physically open she can see or because she does not have a seeing stick. They believe she can perceive them when in reality she is not aware of others around her and they are equally as unaware of her needs. She often gets frustrated with people constantly jostling her and bumping into her but usually brushes it off. In one situation when I accompanied her to the train station, the train driver did not wait for her to board and pulled away before she could get to the platform. The people on the train were yelling in protest but he did not seem to find her to be worth waiting for. Another instance I heard from her was that the bus she was on was ordered to empty and no one told her. She sat on the bus alone while everyone else got off. She sat there for ten minutes before she came to the conclusion the bus was empty. The worst part about that anecdote was that she said she had her sight cane with her that day. She thought someone would have made a connection and made her aware of what was going on. Other challenges are reading food labels and depending on others to go with her to the grocery store or tell her the amount owed when she pays at the cash register for items. For apartment upkeep she has a cleaning lady who is also deaf and can communicate with her. Other than those few details, she leads a fairly independent life.

It is because of these small annoyances that she also leads a very regimented life. If things were to go awry or stray away from her schedule she tends to come under stress and get very upset. A month or so ago, I was instructed to meet her at a designated location. I waited for
her for approximately fifteen minutes and finally saw her walking across the street. I approached her and she immediately began asking me where I was and why was I so late and why I didn’t meet her at the other place she was waiting. That day, the woman who usually accompanies her was out sick and she never let the administration know they had planned a different meeting spot. I suffered the consequences of not being informed. She was very frustrated and upset. She tends to require alone time in order to calm down and eventually begin work when these situations arise.

Her strengths come out in her art work and her humor. She has been described within her file as “more visually clever than she could ever express verbally.” She makes up for her lack of ability to communicate verbally with a more physical and tactile language. Since she has limited vision, a lot of her work has color fields. Color field painting is a tendency within Abstract Expressionism, distinct from gestural abstraction, or action painting. The artists responsible for the color field movement exploited the expressive power of color by deploying it in large fields which might envelope the viewer when seen at close quarters. (Wolf, 2011) She does not paint but applies this to her tactile pieces of art, weaving, jewelry, art making, fabric, and pottery. Color fields are best described as blocks of color. In her pieces, there is often a light, medium, and dark value next to each other. It is easy for her to distinguish the values this way than if she were to try and paint or color something that was close in value. (See figure 1) Her other strength comes from her sense of humor. Very little fazes Iris. She is bumped and jostled on a daily basis and often has people interacting with her that she either doesn’t know or if she interrupts someone or needs clarification on a direction she always does so with a smile. She very rarely is in a sour mood when encountered and our conversations had always left on a good note. If she gets frustrated or exasperated she will ask for an interpreter and do her best to help the person
with whom she is talking. She is also very talkative and is willing to give direction to interns or other volunteers that work with her. She takes into consideration not everyone knows sign language and if she wants to go out for a walk or coffee she will write her order down on a piece of paper and either have the volunteer recite the order to the barista or she will hand the paper over to the cashier. Either way she requires someone to sign how much money she owes. She or an administrator teaches the volunteers the necessary signs.

Though the interactions with Iris have been few and far between, most of the time the conversations were about her plans for the day and what she had done last week. She had talked to me about her shoulder surgery from 2008. She had mentioned it was giving her some issues but it didn’t seem to bother her for the rest of the day. She had also talked about being on a public bus and the driver not telling her to evacuate the bus, and going to visit her brother. She talked about having many siblings. She’s mentioned her brother most. She visits her hometown often and in her most recent trip she made plans for her future in way of buying her cemetery plot. She proudly showed me a picture of her father and mother’s plots near her. She speaks about Maine very often. She made a trip to the L.L. Bean outlet and they had interpreters there to describe the products she was looking at. Her file holds a newspaper clipping describing her trip there with other people in the deaf blind community. She also told me about how the neighborhood was doing renovations and they took the bus signs down so she was showing me where to drop her off in the afternoon. She wrote a letter to the city where the site is located with a list of improvements that should be made to accommodate those who are blind like redoing the sidewalks and getting newer and brighter crosswalk signs. She had rarely mentioned her art of her process but I was fortunate enough to be able to find some of her pieces and examine them for the purpose of this study.
In a pot she made in pottery studio, the values are close to each other but they are defined clearly and separated and do not blend at all. (Figure 1) This is a prime example of her color field style. All of her pieces in the pottery studio exhibit this blocked pattern of color. She also experiments with a wide variety of colors, sometimes they are so close in value or hue it’s ironic to think someone who has such limited vision can tell the difference between the two colors. On top of doing a professional glazing job on her pottery projects, she throws all of her projects on the wheel. The pottery instructor and she spend time once a month throwing on the wheel and she paints them after they've been fired. She thoroughly enjoys this activity and recently requested a session with him so they could make more.

Color fields are common in almost all of her artwork. In the store located downstairs, she had a necklace and bracelet (Figures 4 and 5) on display. Even in the necklace there are clear color blocks in the deep red, yellow ochre and clear crystal beads. She has developed a new interest in jewelry and the work she produces is wearable and saleable as well as the bracelet. Those colors, blue, black and white are often worn together and a person can easily accessorize with it. At this particular day program, making saleable art is a very important task for all of the artists. They receive a percentage of the sale price and the rest goes back to the day program for supplies. Iris specifically gets 50% of the sale price. Her work is in the style of color fields, opposed to something that is very busy or has a lot going on, and it appeals to a certain consumer. Her pots, bowls, and weavings (Figures 2a and 2b) allow a person to accent their home in her art and in turn she is given the fruits of her labor. These fruits reward her with financial freedom and allow her to live a full and normal life. Her physical limitations have made it difficult for her to navigate some aspects of life but they have also allowed her to make more saleable art as opposed to those who may make art that is too cluttered or busy for whatever
reason. It has made her a better artist for this program. The only product she has that isn't made with color fields is an apron she designed to tie-dye but even that has colors that mesh well together and will most likely be sold soon.

The neighborhood that this program is in has a big population that has a large disposable income. There are also other blind people that frequent the neighborhood. It would be interesting to see if they would gravitate toward her art specifically or they would prefer art done by those with sight. In a situation where partially blind judges looked at art work, they were more likely to make spontaneous comments than their fully sighted counterparts. They also tended to like works of art done by artists with their same vision ability. The blind judges significantly disliked sculptures done by those artists that possessed sight. (Rubin, 1981) It’s a thought that perhaps because Iris has done color blocks on her art work it may be easier for others that are blind to see them and express their opinion on them rather than those who do have sight and can focus on more minute details and tiny delicate features.

While I observed her working, I noticed she is extremely independent and requires little to no assistance except when a piece of machinery isn’t working properly or she needs more art medium to work with. Most of the time she can even acquire her own materials without assistance. She displays a stoic, concentrated and quiet demeanor. Communication during art making is not possible as she communicates through sign language which would interrupt the art making process. I simply observe her and her problem solving while she works. She seldom becomes frustrated and never really asks for help regarding execution of a project. If anything she appears to be calmer while at her work station than being among the other clients. The work stations offer some sort of rhythm and allow her to be there with her thoughts as she methodically raises and drops the loom creating a beat the rest of the studio seems to work to.
Her behavior outside of working in the studios doesn’t change often. She may either be talkative like she normally is or she is more reserved. Her interactions with other people at the day program are somewhat limited to the administration staff because only a couple of them know sign language. One in particular “Kathy” interacts with her the most and serves as an interpreter to others who do not communicate well with sign language. As far as interacting with other clients she does not often unless to apologize for bumping into them or giving them an exasperated look when they bump into her and throw her off balance. She realizes none of them would be able to communicate with her on as advanced a level where she is although some do try to initiate conversation with finger-spelling, (finger-spelling is when a person spells out a word, like in English someone would say, “c-a-t” the person signs the individual letters instead of a motion that could be substituted for the word spelled out) but it usually ends with “hi” or the person signing their name.

By observing her color blocking technique and slight blending of the colors she uses, one could infer the possibility of trying to fit in with the seeing and hearing world. The deaf community is known for being exclusive and even harsh on people who acquire hearing aids. The slight overlap of color could possibly allude to having known what it is to see and hear and then have it taken away from her. The progression from a light to medium hue to dark hue could also symbolize her deteriorating vision; going from light into complete darkness. Allowing her to demonstratively express herself allows her to process her thoughts in a safe environment and even make a profit to gain independence through it, allows her to cope from an unfavorable situation.
Client: ROCKY*2

Rocky is a young, tall, and stocky built 26 year old male that works as an artist at the site two days a week. He is a very kind and amiable man. He was originally planned to work in the studio catered to people seeking an alternative artist training program. It is designed for individuals with disabilities seeking career training in the arts resulting in small business skills as artists or artisans. He is thoughtful, kind, and very humorous. His primary language is English which he understands and from his paperwork, he can somewhat write (for example, when signing paperwork he uses his initials). His medical history states he has a disseminated primitive neuroectodermal tumor, legal blindness, severe sensorial hearing loss, depression and obstructive sleep apnea. As of now, he is very independent living on his own in a house in a town outside of the city. He has two roommates and there is a 1:3 staff to resident ratio in the group home where he resides.

Primitive neuroectodermal tumors otherwise referred to as PNETs, are a group of highly malignant tumors composed of small round cells that affect soft tissue and bone. They are accountable for 4-17% of soft tissue tumors found in children and adolescents. Those most affected are of Caucasian and Hispanic descent. (emedicine, 2012) Rocky was diagnosed with this brain cancer at the age of ten. Up until that point he had experienced normal development.

Legal blindness was one repercussion of his brain cancer. Legal blindness is defined as a level of vision loss that has been legally defined to determine eligibility for benefits. The clinical diagnosis refers to a central visual acuity of 20/200 or less in the better eye with the best possible correction, and/or a visual field of 20 degrees or less. Often, people who are diagnosed with legal

* denotes pseudonym
blindness still have some useable vision. (American foundation for the blind, 2008) Another hardship brought on by the brain cancer was sensorineural hearing loss (SNHL). This is often attributed to illness, drugs toxic to hearing, genetic or hereditary hearing loss, aging, head trauma, malformation of the inner ear, and exposure to loud noise. SNHL occurs when there is damage to the inner ear (cochlea), or to the nerve pathways from the inner ear to the brain. Most of the time, SNHL cannot be medically or surgically corrected. This is the most common type of permanent hearing loss. SNHL reduces the ability to hear faint sounds. Even if speech is loud enough to hear, it may still be unclear or sound muffled to the person with SNHL. Most of the conversations had with Rocky require repetition and a loud volume. (American speech language hearing association, 2012)

Rocky also suffers from what is referred to as secondary depression. Secondary depression is a depression in an individual who has one or more preexisting, non-affective psychiatric disorders or an incapacitating or life-threatening medical illness (in this case brain cancer) which precedes and parallels the symptoms of depression. Secondary depression is commonly seen in patients presenting to psychiatric facilities. For every 5 patients who are seen with a diagnosis of depression, approximately 2 should be classified as secondary. A patient with secondary depression is more likely to be younger, male, and to have a family history of alcoholism. His first diagnosis is most likely to be alcoholism; however, the preceding diagnosis varies depending on the setting in which the patient is seen. Hysteria, sociopathy, drug abuse and anxiety neurosis are also common. The symptom picture of secondary depression is almost indistinguishable from primary depression. One important reason a patient enters psychiatric treatment is that he develops a coexistent depression. (NCBI, 1981) His depression most likely stems from the trauma he experienced of having brain cancer at such a young age and then losing
the abilities he was given only a short time with. Although I have not experienced his depressed state, I do know when he is in a less than great mood he tends to sleep. This may also be due to his sleep apnea.

According to his file, Rocky spent a small amount of time in a hospital for psychiatric evaluation. He was admitted for delirium, psychosis, catatonia, depression and hopelessness. He was self-dialoguing while in a room by himself and often referred to a crush he had even though he was well aware that she had left to study abroad. At the end of his stay he was given the diagnosis of severe Major Depressive Disorder, which is characterized by a combination of symptoms that interfere with a person's ability to work, sleep, study, eat, and enjoy once-pleasurable activities. Major depression is disabling and prevents a person from functioning normally. Some people may experience only a single episode within their lifetime, but more often a person may have multiple episodes. Rocky has Major Depressive Disorder with psychotic features such as self dialoguing and hallucinations.

The daily challenges that Rocky faces usually pertain to moving around the facility, carrying on conversations with people and being able to accomplish what he needs to get done for projects. Moving around the facility can become frustrating for him because his walking stick can be obstructive and he doesn’t like to use it for small distances. The stools and chairs at the site are pretty short so when he does move forward he takes small shuffling steps in order to read the room should he bump into a chair, it does not hurt him or anyone else. The shuffling tends to make him a tad behind with arriving to places on time or before others. For this, he usually asks the intern or instructor he’s working with to alert him when a good five or ten minutes before
anything happens so he may adjust himself to vacate the room or move before others get in his way.

While talking to Rocky, due to his poor hearing, repetition was something we encountered often, and on both sides of the conversation. He tended to soften his consonants to the point where “k’s” would sound like “g’s”. It was a challenge to speak loudly without changing tone. Usually when people raise their voice it is in anger or exasperation or frustration. It took conscious effort to refrain from sounding caustic.

While doing work in his studios, Rocky needs an adequate amount of light and the ability to pull his project toward him. He had originally expressed interest in working with wood and the few occasions I had observed him using wood he was very concerned with making it smooth and wanted to be sure it could be used as a walking stick. He also thought that the stick should have a purpose and be able to use. Originally when he began in the pottery studio, his work was uneven and unsalvageable. He tended to be very hesitant in making dramatic indents and valleys and peaks with the clay almost afraid he would break it. As a blind person, he was taught to see with his hands and be gentle. Since becoming more familiar with the medium he has become more adventurous. He works with his project at a close eye range and his materials tend to be in a certain order so as not to mix them up. For example, while working on the spiral plate (Figure 3 and 4) I separated the colors so that he would only have one in his line of vision at a time to deter him from sticking his brush in the wrong color. It worked out a lot better this way and it forced him to apply more than one coat so this piece would have more of an opaque color than a thin veneer or glaze over it.
According to records accommodations were made in the drawing studio for him so the pencils and other instruments would have special handles on them so he could grip them better and they were kept in stock so the colors were radiant enough for him to see where he made a mark. One of the challenges of the spiral plate was that it was done using a technique called mishima. This is when the artist cuts strips of copier paper, dips them in water and places them on the pottery to be glazed. By glazing over the paper and peeling the paper off, an interesting image appears. The copier paper was the same color as the pottery which was white. It was more of a challenge for him to try and go in the direction of the paper to avoid tearing the wet copier paper. After a while I decided to make dots on either side of the copier paper so he would know where to follow. The spiral plate then became something aesthetically pleasing that he was very proud of. Adapting art mediums for Rocky is nothing out of the ordinary for the site but also taking the time to help him use the materials the same way as other people is in a way almost more rewarding in that he didn’t need anything to be made or done for him. Like Iris, Rocky also throws on the wheel and his vases and cups are the smoothest things in the pottery studio. It seems like he likes throwing on the wheel better than painting or glazing his work after it’s fired. We were talking about art and relaxation during one session.

- Do you find art to be relaxing?

“Yeah, it’s relaxing but it’s so frustrating when you mess up!” He is over concerned with how his products will look and he put insurmountable effort into each piece.

While working with Rocky on the spiral plate I asked him why he had originally left the weaving studio and moved to pottery and art making. He said he got bored with the weaving
studio. This is not surprising as the clients sit at the loom and do a repetitive set of motions for up to two and a half hours at a time.

- It seems like you like pottery a lot better than your other studios…

“I get to do what I want and make what I want”.

More recently, in the Art Making studio, he is being asked to use a lap loom, a miniature loom that is strung with a large plastic needle and yarn. He is very un receptive towards this.

“I hate weaving, why are you making me do this?”

- It was over a year ago when you tried to do weaving, remember? Maybe this time it will be easier for you or to your liking.

“This is stupid. I’m not doing it.”

- I’m sorry that you are unhappy but it is what the teacher is asking of you right now, let’s try to work on it for ten minutes and then we can take a break?

“Fine. Do you have brighter color thread?”

As I looked for more thread and presented him with choices he was unhappy with all of them perhaps making an attempt to be passive aggressive and claim he couldn’t do the project because we did not have what he required.

- What if after you finish this loom we start another and I can get some camouflage colors? Green, brown, tan, and black? Would you like that?

“THAT sounds like something I’d like.”
Well, let’s do this one first, take your time, do it well and we can start that one after, deal?

“Deal.”

The choices and options presented are a freedom granted to him when he is restricted so much already by his own body.

Back in pottery the plate he was working on is extremely large and quite heavy. It is very thick and the hollowed out middle is where the spiral design is located. On the underside of the spiral plate he also wanted to make a spiral design which is what we were working on that day. He used red under glaze for the majority of the plate and the spiral was made in blue, yellow, and orange. Traditionally, some color symbolism behind red can be attributed to passion, love and at the same time, hate or aggression. Orange is associated with energy, excitement and disorder. ("Art therapy blog," 2012) This is what I would have inferred due to Rocky’s tendency to be enthusiastic about a project and his day is very regimented so disorder would be seen as something he’s trying to avoid. Yellow is often known for its association with fear, friendship, and caution. From a yellow traffic light to the familiar “caution tape” yellow was used in this project and it was used sparingly. He was very hesitant and careful not to let it blend with the other colors on the plate. He actually used the edge of the brush to apply this color.

After he had finished the spiral plate he said he had made a mask and wanted to work on that next. (Figure 4) I lifted the mask down off of the shelf and couldn’t help but notice how protruding the nose was well as the lips. I asked him where the eyes were on his mask and he said it was a mask of himself and he figured he could just draw in the eyes. I would infer this since his eyes do not work that well he feels that they are “just for show” in a sense or just a
mere decoration on his face. The other interesting this was, the ears on the mask were virtually non-existent. Only one side really had an ear and it was very thin and looked ready to fell off. I feel the same way about the ears as I do the eyes. They weren’t really a necessity. After all, the mask was of him and he had gotten along without the full use of those body parts for about 16 years. I would infer that this was his way of reconciling what it was to be a young man, under thirty being constricted to the life of someone who cannot think to the level of a 26 year old. He feels incomplete, he’s missing vital parts of himself in the eyes and ears but these could very well be metaphors for independence and seeing his future ahead of him. As an undergraduate I felt guilty for having the world at my feet and all these possibilities before me when he knows what the rest of his life is going to look like, day in and day out the same thing.

While I watched him work I noticed that his movements in the studio very much reflected how he worked. He was very hesitant as if the paintbrush was hurting his art piece by merely touching it. This was reflective in the way he would shuffle from place to place in hopes of not hitting anyone or bumping into anything. He is also very quiet while he works. This is most likely because of his hearing loss he doesn’t know if anyone is talking to him and the fact that his projects require his full concentration for him to do them correctly and make them pleasing to the potential buyer. He is also very slow moving. His actions are slow but deliberate in that he knows exactly what he is going to do or what he needs to do but yet hesitates or goes very slow in case he isn’t doing something right someone else has the time to correct him before he makes a mistake. He was constantly asking for reaffirmation, “Is this good?”, “Did I get all the spots?”, “How does that look? Good, right?” I had offered to help him fill in the blank spots and he actually handed me the brush I did my best to guide him by voice instead of finishing his projects but there were a few places that no matter how much direction I gave the spot could not be
reached very easily. He understood and surrendered his paintbrush to me and was very happy with the outcome.

Rocky’s mask allows him to express his feelings of loss. Loss of hearing, loss of sight and loss of independence are feelings common in adults who are blind-deaf and developmentally delayed in that they surrender almost everything vital and come away with having to depend on others. His self assertion in the mask is a way for him to grow and come to terms with what his second chance at life has granted him.
Client: McCormick\textsuperscript{*3}

McCormick is a slender, 46 year old white male at the site. He is also hearing impaired, totally blind, (double eye prostheses) and has a language disorder. Despite these obstacles he is one of the many talented artists at the site whose art making skills are to a certain extent unbelievable.

According to his file McCormick has moderate mental retardation. Around 10\% of the mentally retarded population is considered moderately mentally retarded. These individuals have IQ scores ranging from 35-55. They can carry out work and self-care tasks with moderate supervision. They typically acquire communication skills in childhood and are able to live and function successfully within the community in a supervised environment such as a group home. (medical dictionary, 2011) He is also said to have retrolental fibroplasias. This is a formation of fibrous tissue behind the lens of the eye resulting in blindness. (Mosby’s medical dictionary, 2009) He is listed as on the spectrum for autism which can be seen in his uncanny ability to list off dates and their corresponding days of the week. He also has moderate to severe bilateral sensory neural hearing loss. This can be caused by malformation of the ear, drugs, head trauma, exposure to loud noise or aging. (American speech language hearing association, 2012) McCormick is also said to be very sensitive to caffeine, sugar, and other additives which have been known to cause jumpiness. He sees a podiatrist, dermatologist, dentist, and opthamologist as well as an audiologist regularly.

The agency made goals for McCormick within the workplace. Outside of the work place, his program manager made suggestions of goals to achieve as well. Within the agency,

\textsuperscript{3} * denotes a pseudonym
McCormick is expected to create 30 pieces of saleable art in the year. By April 2012, McCormick should have at least 21 pieces. His case manager and studio job coach will implement this plan into action. Outside of the site, he is expected to improve his food preparation skills. As a measurable objective, by April 2012, he should be assisting with dinner meal preparations at least three times per week with no more than one verbal cue. Also outside the studio, to increase his amount of exercise is also mentioned. McCormick enjoys walking in the community and this was suggested as a viable suggestion for getting him to want to be and remain active. Although he is not overweight, in fact he is quite slender, it is thought better to improve his activity level through walking.

McCormick takes advantage of using adaptive equipment that allows him to be more independent. He uses hearing aids and is very responsible when it comes to replacing batteries. He also uses a cane for community travel. Unlike the other clients who are deaf-blind, McCormick has much better balance. He can walk at a quicker pace than the others and does not shuffle nor does he walk into other people. He uses the arm of whoever is guiding him but needs very little prompts. At the most he needs prompts when approaching stairs and railings at the most. He also has two ocular prostheses. These prosthetics replace the natural eye and fit over and orbital implant under the eyelid. These however do not provide sight. That would be called a visual prosthetic. (American society of Ocularists, 2002) He also uses a bed shaker at home where in the event of an emergency, the bed would shake to wake him up and then he would be escorted to safety.

McCormick usually expresses himself in 6-8 word phrases most of which pertain to events happening in the studio that day or a holiday that is approaching. For example, “Class.”
Refers to what studio he has that morning or afternoon. “Pottery. Pottery class.” Is something he says while he’s in pottery class, he is aware of his surroundings and the instructor he is with. He knows all of the staff member’s names and uses them while in their respective studios. His sentence structure has improved since his start at the site 20 years ago as has his behavior. He used to exhibit anxiety symptoms when overly stimulated but has become more redirectable. When agitated, his file claims he has kicked, grabbed, pulled hair, bitten, scratched, choked, and thrown things at people. His triggers are around Christmas time in which case an administration member whom he is close to makes extra time to spend with him and overstimulation. However, according to his file, his behavior issues have severely declined as he does art and activities that engage him and that are enjoyable to him when he is anxious and by doing satisfying art, he is calmer and more tranquil. Now, when agitated he might articulate lists of things as a way to work things out for himself. To deter him from using destructive behavior, he meets with a music therapist and he enjoys singing and playing instruments while in the session.

With relationships, McCormick is very close to his father. It says in his file, his father is of the greatest importance to him and he remains in close contact with him. He is also close to the deacon and pastor of his church. He enjoys people for the most part although he is closer to the staff than his peers at the site. In a way it seems as though he is on a different level than the other clients. Most clients interact with each other and get caught up in each other’s lives but he keeps to himself and for that he produces and sells more art, thus making him a very successful and contributing asset to the company.

McCormick lives in a handicap accessible house with four other housemates and his own bedroom. He is able to complete some chores like laundry with staff assistance. For example,
they would aid him in separating colors from whites and measuring detergent. If necessary they help with folding the close and putting them in the drawers of his dresser. In order to get to the site every day, he was offered the use of the VHS transportation and declined due to distance he would have to travel to meet the van. The non-profit company the site is under, provides transportation for him to and from the site.

At the site, McCormick has been an employed artist for the past 20 years. His projects require precision and focus and after observing him, it is clear that this discipline he exerts on himself leads to some of his most intricate and complex art work. He prefers 1:1 attention while at the site and enjoys sitting in one of the staff member’s office while he listens to country music or a movie on the computer while he completes his project. The studios McCormick is involved in are the paper studio, the fabric studio, and the jewelry studio.

In paper studio he draws on pieces of paper and runs his hands over the indents the sharp pencils make in the paper as well as the smoothness of an oversaturated area done with markers or crayons. (Figures 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, and 6) Using these different strokes and full bodied motions, he is able to express a wide range of emotion in conjunction with the colors chosen. Since it is unknown whether or not he had picked the colors himself or the staff gave them to him, it is not fair to make any concrete statements as to what he was feeling while he made these works. However, inferences made based on the construction and the colors used would deem that Figure 1 displays a warm and happy feeling. The bright saturated pinks, reds, oranges and yellows are all warm hues blended together to create a sense of playfulness and feeling. The cooler tones exhibited in figure 2 would lead one to believe in a type of peaceful serenity or tranquility. Perhaps even depression or sadness was a thought has the color blue tends to will itself to those
who are feeling less that positive. Figure 4 offers the viewer a look at a much darker piece drawn on rag paper with oil pastels allowing him some control while the ability to blend into each other like oil paints.

In fabric studio, McCormick mostly keeps to his beadwork creating decals and embellishments that can be embroidered or sewn onto bags. In the jewelry studio, McCormick makes necklaces and interesting pieces out of “seed beads”. These beads are extremely small ranging from one to several millimeters. In fact, McCormick uses them so often they are referred to as “K beads” among some of the clients and staff alike. His products with these beads are usually long strands of wire he strings these incredibly small beads on and the staff makes them into frame, necklaces, or embellishments for other projects. (Figures 7 and 8) In the case of his construction of the seed bead strings, he tends to use similar values when making his series of strings. This would relate back to the color blocking technique that Iris used with her weaving work. He decided to use them by grouping like colors together. Anyone would be hard pressed to walk into the store and not see these seed beads on less than three products. During this past Christmas season, McCormick was stringing these beads onto wire when the wire became bunched and as a result he made an orb shape that was very similar to an ornament. There were many of these ornaments on display during the holiday fair and in the store. McCormick was happy with the outcome as he likes to draw or make art to mark a certain holiday or a special event.

Whether it is his two dimensional drawings and free scribbles or his seed bead creations, McCormick uses a lot of texture when creating art. It allows him to connect to his art through touching it and feeling its characteristics rather than seeing them. He tends to use drawing or
painting mediums rather generously and his jewelry is textural, even if seed beads aren’t used throughout the whole piece it is visually intriguing although even more interesting texture wise.

Outside of the studio work, McCormick enjoys to go on walks with the administration leader TL into the community. He very much enjoys these walks and fosters a sense of independence being able to go out while most of the clients are instructed to stay on site in the studio during breaks and lunch periods. He uses a cane while out on these walks and his favorite restaurants are Friendly’s, Chinese food, and pizza. He also enjoys going to parties and barbecues and goes to a place called Belmont Sports. This is a year round program which provides activities for individuals with special needs. He participates in Special Olympics training as well. During the summer he also attends Camp Grotonwood for a week. This camp offers a separate camp for individuals with special needs. The must have high functioning skills and be able to keep up at the day trips the camp plans which includes amusement parks and bowling. Special consideration is given to those with health restrictions and the camp fosters relationships between peers and counselors and leaders. (Grotonwood, 2012)

McCormick creates artwork at the site for the most part is the complete opposite of the descriptions of art I have read about in other sources of art done by adults and children who are blind. He uses the seed beads as his main material and I am thinking maybe he uses these because they feel good to his touch during or after he strings them together. It is interesting how he chooses such small medium to work with as he is totally blind. Opposed to Iris, who chooses beads larger than that with similar colors she can at least still somewhat see in front of her. The seed beads can be used as a way for him to control his anxiety by giving him something to work
on and concentrate on. It allows him to cope with his frustrations with his inability to see or his inability to sometimes control himself and his outbursts.
CONCLUSION

Over the course of the time spent at the site, I have grown and developed as an art therapy student as well as a person coming into the lives of the gifted artists of the company. I have made my fair share of accomplishments as well as mistakes while there and my learning experience with the population has given me a new outlook on the field from the time I started there as an intern.

I began at the site in September and was extremely nervous coming to work with this population for fear of either not using politically correct terms, insulting someone accidentally, or a slew of other things that could go wrong. I have grown in the sense of being able to assess situations better while trying to figure out a solution that benefits the client most of all as well as the company. I also developed a rapport with each client, allowing me to have special relationships with each of them, making my understanding of their situations or diagnoses more and well developed.

My biggest accomplishment while at the site was helping Rocky make his spiral plate as I had to use a skill I learned in my ceramics class. This stenciling technique I used was able to allow him to create a crisp clean line he wanted and he was then able to self affirm that his piece was worthy of being called beautiful or saleable. The other experiences I learned while there were how to handle clients with unique behavioral issues. It takes a lot of patience to answer the same question multiple times just the way the person wants it but, if it calms them then I will gladly answer it as many times as I have to in order for them to feel comfortable. I learned to put the clients first as opposed to the company’s benefit. After all, the clients are the reason the company does so well in the first place.
The biggest mistakes I made were when I assumed things. For example, I assumed a client had asked me for something and then it turned out to be different which led to the client being very frustrated. Or in some cases when accompanying them in the community, if American Sign Language is their primary language, it takes me a while to understand what they are saying and they get exasperated or simply give up; more commonly I assume what a sign means and then it’s wrong rather than ask again or ask for an interpreter.

My ending at the site was bittersweet. I made close relationships with some of the clients and it was hard to turn away without knowing if they were going to progress in their art or if they were going to be okay once I left. It is important to remember that just as they were fine before I got there, they will be fine when I leave. My ending feeling was that for the short time I was there I had made a difference in at least a few peoples’ lives and they had an impact on mine as well. I had my experience in an art vocational site and I am much more comfortable within the developmentally disabled population than I was previously. They have given me useful tools I instead to use in my career in the future.
PICTURES

Iris

Figure 1

Figure 2

Figure 2b

Figure 3

Figure 4

Figure 5
Rocky

Figure 1

Figure 2

Figure 3
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