



Jockey Club Expressive Arts Programme for Children: Presentation of Research Findings and Discussion

Hong Kong – In light of mounting evidence of the benefits of a multimodal approach, the use of expressive arts in an educational setting has been gaining attention both locally and globally. Arts should not be considered merely ‘frills’ to the education system, but an integral part of everyday teaching to enhance teaching quality and effectiveness. While other countries have already experienced various levels of success in integrating expressive arts into educational settings, this field is still in its infancy in Hong Kong. Since our city prefers a more didactic, rote-learning approach, arts programmes are uncommon.

In order to improve efficacy of communication among teachers and school children with different educational needs in Hong Kong, many of whom are underprivileged, The Hong Kong Jockey Club Charities Trust funded the ‘Jockey Club Expressive Arts Programme for Children’ between July 2017 and January 2021. The programme was organised by The Sovereign Art Foundation (SAF) in collaboration with the Centre on Behavioral Health, The University of Hong Kong. To conclude the project, a virtual presentation was held on January 30, 2021, to disseminate the results of research on the impact of the programme.

In Hong Kong, some children with special educational needs (SEN) may experience difficulties in school adaptation in mainstream education. For children with language difficulties, the non-verbal nature of the expressive arts-based approach is more suitable than other possible means, as it can serve as a bridge of communication. Not only can children convey their thoughts and emotions positively, but the arts can also help them assimilate knowledge.

The three-year Jockey Club Expressive Arts Programme for Children consisted of two main components: expressive arts-based ‘Make It Better’ (MIB) workshops, to help children with SEN better integrate into the mainstream learning environment and Train-the-Trainer workshops for educators, to equip them with the skills to incorporate arts into the educational setting. In addition, SAF organised over 60 community activities, including seminars, school and community art fun days and exhibitions to raise public awareness of the use of expressive arts. So far, the project has directly benefited over 10,000 people, including parents, children, and professionals, as well as more than 17,000 indirect beneficiaries.

809 children aged 6-12 from 40 schools and community centres participated in the 27-week programme of MIB workshops. Workshops revolved around four main themes: self-awareness, interpersonal skills, community, and the environment. Through a series of individual and group arts activities, children learned how to use love-languages, manage their emotions, respect nature and care for their community. They were encouraged to actively explore, express themselves and enjoy the creative process. Mimi Tung, SAF’s Head of Programme Design and Lead Art Therapist, said of the workshop design:

“The different expressive arts modalities, such as visual arts, body movement, drama and music embrace each student’s unique form of non-verbal expression and allow them to communicate their emotions in a meaningful way. The four major modules nurture a child’s holistic development, contributing positively to their overall wellbeing.”

The Train-The-Trainer programme was designed by the Centre on Behavioral Health, The University of Hong Kong, based on their experience of delivering an experiential training programme to teachers following the 2008 Wenchuan Earthquake. Through the training programme, 278 educators were equipped with the basic principles, skills, experiences and mindset to integrate expressive arts as a tool into their teaching and practice.

Data analysis revealed that the children, especially those with SEN, reported a higher social competency score after their participation in the MIB programme, suggesting that they felt more confident around other children and were more willing to interact with others. Parents observed substantial reductions in emotional symptoms, hyperactivity/inattention problems, peer problems, and overall difficulties of their children. According to their parents and teachers, children may have felt accepted due to inclusivity of the groups, which boosted their self-confidence and social competence.



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Children were also observed to be more expressive and interactive, with improved problem-solving abilities and autonomy. Teachers felt the non-judgmental atmosphere in the groups had a positive impact on children's communication skills and interpersonal relationships. Children were able to use expressive arts to share their thoughts and give others a greater insight into their feelings. Tiffany Pinkstone, Managing Director of SAF, commented:

“Through this programme, we’ve witnessed the enormous benefits that expressive arts can have on the vital relationships between children and their caregivers and teachers. We hope by sharing these results and testimonials, we can help promote wider understanding around the importance of art as a tool for communication and the importance of a holistic education for our children.”

Educators who completed the Train-the-Trainer programme reported significant increases in general self-efficacy, teacher self-efficacy, and perceived relationship with students. Most participants indicated that they had gained a deeper understanding of the expressive arts approach and how it could benefit their students, especially those who lack the verbal skills to express themselves effectively. Through intensive training and continual supervision, educators were able to develop and apply skills to their classroom settings and continue to devise similar activities based on their understanding and experience after the study.

Professor Rainbow Ho, who spearheaded the research team at the Centre on Behavioral Health, believes that the results of this project fully affirm the effectiveness of arts as an intervention method. The activities are easy to follow, highly engaging, and fun, which makes it especially suitable for children in an educational setting. Prof. Ho recommended that more resources can be devoted to further the development of expressive arts-related research and job opportunities, so as to benefit more children in need.

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The **Jockey Club Expressive Arts Programme for Children** brochure will be freely delivered to the public. Please contact Ms. Joan Kwan (The Sovereign Art Foundation; (+852) 3619 0925; joan@sovereignartfoundation.com) to obtain copies.

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Editors Notes

The Sovereign Art Foundation

The Sovereign Art Foundation (SAF) is a charitable organisation that was founded in 2003 with a well-defined twin focus: to recognise the growing wealth of contemporary art talent in Asia and bring the proven benefits of expressive arts to disadvantaged children.

In the same year, SAF launched The Sovereign Asian Art Prize, now recognised as the most established and prestigious annual art award in Asia-Pacific. The Prize increases the international exposure of artists in the region, whilst raising funds by auctioning shortlisted artworks and sharing proceeds equally between the participating artists and SAF. SAF uses these proceeds to fund programmes that support disadvantaged children using expressive arts. This model has so far raised over US\$9 million for artists and charities worldwide.

In 2013, SAF launched Make It Better (MIB), an initiative that supports children from low-income backgrounds and with special educational needs in Hong Kong. MIB works in local schools and community centres to offer children a programme of expressive arts workshops designed to build self-esteem, confidence, self-awareness and interpersonal skills. SAF also supports teachers, social workers and caregivers of these children by introducing them to the therapeutic benefits of art.

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