



Happy while healing: Can we impact children's wellbeing through art while they heal in hospital?

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Introduction

From May to September 2013, the Creative Health & Education Partnership - Artist in Residence (AIR) Grants Program was implemented by Hospital School Services (HSS) & the Child and Adolescent Health Service (CAHS) at Princess Margaret Hospital (PMH), Bentley Adolescent Unit and the Pathways Outreach Program, Shenton Park. The aim of the program was to positively impact the learning, health and wellbeing of sick children via the arts. The theme of the program was "Future World". As part of its commitment to providing a high quality program, HSS and CAHS commissioned The University of Western Australia to evaluate the program via feedback from children, parents and staff.

Method

Program: The resident artist worked collaboratively with the CAHS Arts Curator and HSS staff to facilitate the project. The artist conducted bedside visits and art workshops in the ward (one-off and multiple attendance). Mobile patients at PMH were also encouraged to visit the artist's studio to see how an artist develops an artwork, to make art alongside the artist and to collect more art materials for their own artworks.

Evaluation: The evaluation was cross-sectional in design. Surveys were paper based and self-administered. Children (8+ yrs) complete a pre- and post-program survey (Figure 1). The child survey contained demographic, affect, enjoyment and learning questions. A pictorial measure of mental health was also used before and after the workshop/bedside visit to assess changes in affect by asking patients how they felt on a 'faces-scale' that ranged from sad to happy. Staff and parents present at the workshop/bedside visit were also asked to evaluate the program. The staff/parent survey was post-program and contained outcome and attitude questions. Prior to conducting the evaluation, surveys were pilot tested. A descriptive analysis of the data was conducted using SPSS for Windows.

Figure 1: 2013 AIR Grants Program Child Survey

Results

- 280 children participated in the program.
- 78 children, 34 parents and 18 staff completed an evaluation survey.

Program Effectiveness:

- The majority of children enjoyed taking part in the program (99%).
- Staff/parents agreed the program provided children with a positive distraction (100%) and enhanced the hospital environment (96%).

Health and Wellbeing:

- The children indicated the program made them feel happy (84%), more relaxed (75%) and less bored (88%).
- Significantly more children felt happy after participating in the program than before the program (Figure 2, $p < 0.01$).
- Staff/parents agreed the program had a positive impact on the health and wellbeing of participants (98%) and was a positive social experience (98%).

Learning:

- The program gave participants the opportunity to interact with an artist, which was a new experience for 43% of children.
- Staff/parents agreed the program was an opportunity for children to be creative (100%), learn art skills (80%) and express ideas (94%).

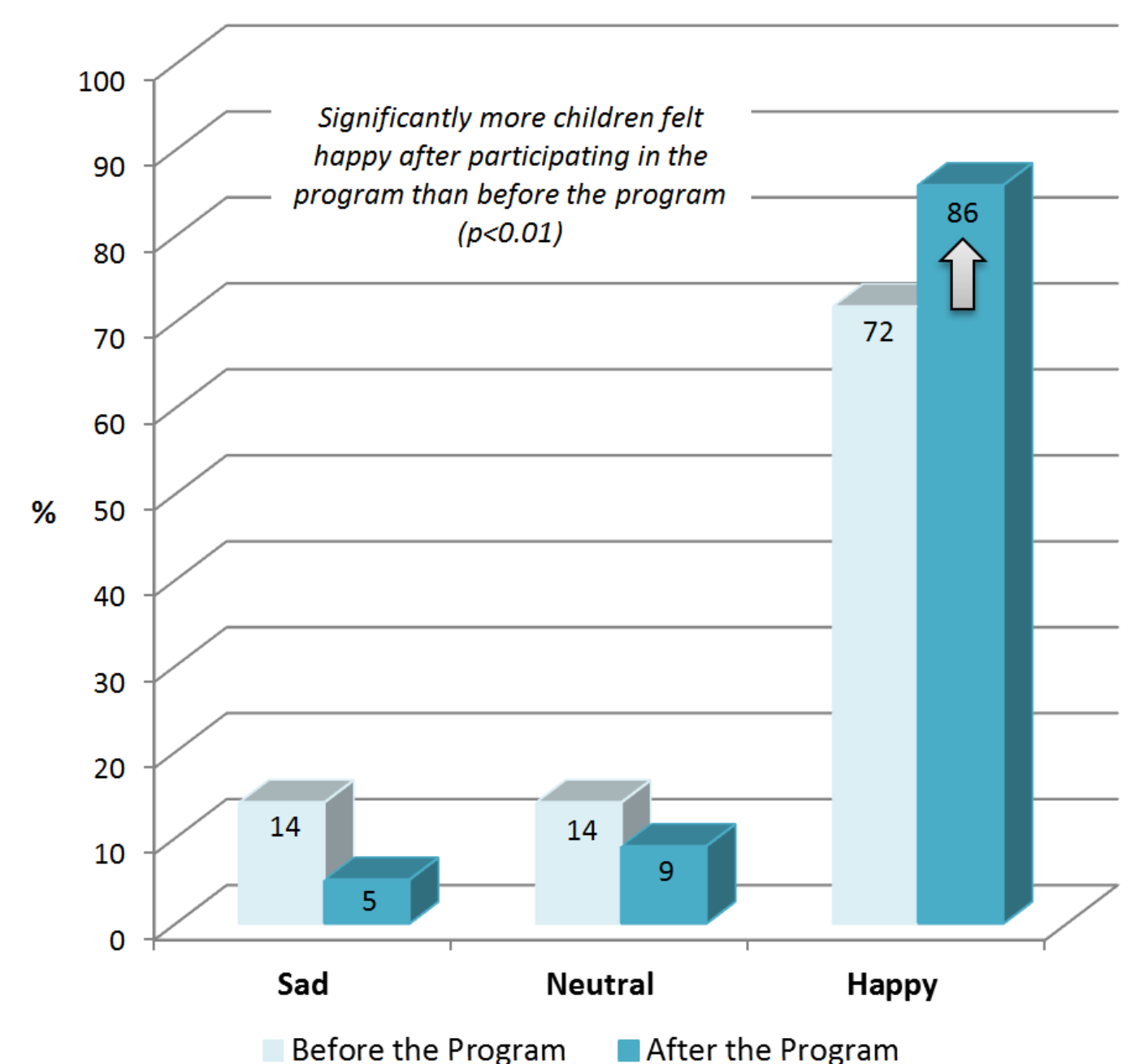


Figure 2: How do you feel right now? (n=78 patients)

Conclusion

HSS, CAHS and the resident artist were successful at distracting children from the hospital environment while having a beneficial impact on learning, health and wellbeing. Based on evaluation outcomes, it is recommended that funding be sought to continue this program so as to engage the creativity and imagination of patients through the arts.