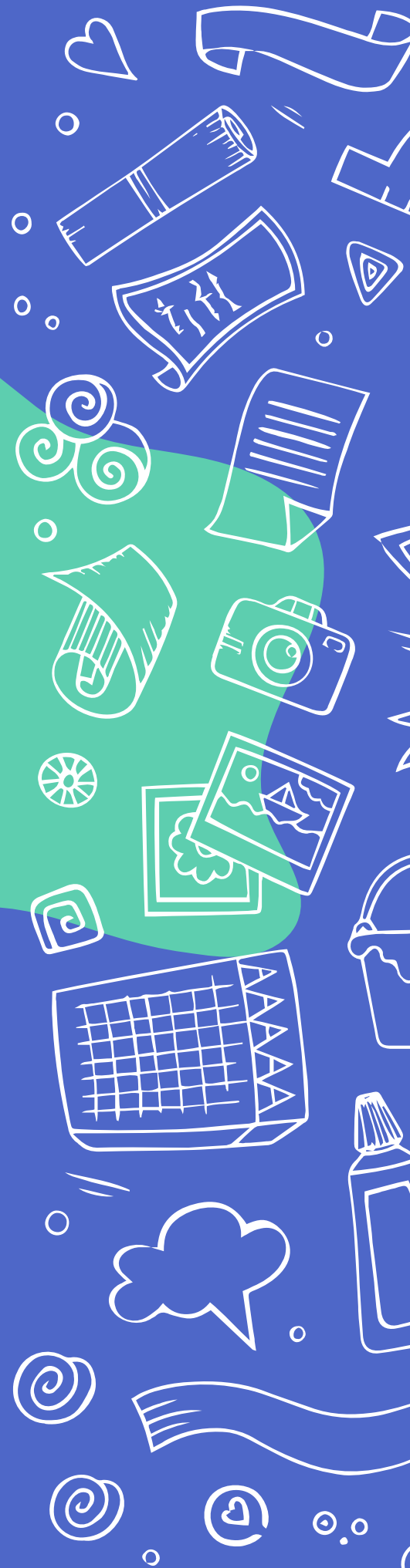




Creative Wellbeing Evaluation Report

May 2024



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Creative Wellbeing is a strategic collaboration between the Los Angeles County Department of Arts and Culture, Office of Child Protection, Department of Mental Health, Department of Children and Family Services, and the Arts for Healing and Justice Network as part of the LA County Arts Education Collective to advance the goals of Arts for All Children, Youth, & Families: Los Angeles County’s New Regional Blueprint for Arts Education. Creative Wellbeing received support from the LA County Juvenile Justice Coordinating Council via funding from California’s Juvenile Justice Crime Prevention Act and the LA County Department of Mental Health via the State of California’s Mental Health Services Act. The Creative Wellbeing Evaluation Report received dedicated support from the Conrad N. Hilton Foundation.



Introduction

Since 2014, the Los Angeles County Department of Arts and Culture (Arts and Culture) has partnered with a growing number of County government agencies to collectively advance healing-centered, arts-based efforts to support young people impacted by County systems. The work also builds the capacity of the adults who support those young people. This includes teachers, school district staff, administrators, mental health clinicians, social workers, caregivers, and others. Starting in 2018, Arts and Culture partnered with the Office of Child Protection (OCP), Department of Mental Health (DMH), and Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS), and member organizations of the Arts for Healing and Justice Network (AHJN) to implement healing-centered arts education activities within select public schools known to have a high number of foster, probation, and at-promise youth.¹ This joint initiative, Creative Wellbeing, was designed as a starting point to establish cultures of healing-centered care through arts-based student instruction, professional development, and community-building activities.

Creative Wellbeing has since evolved into an approach for building communities of wellness, especially for systems-impacted² young people, those at risk of becoming systems-impacted, and the adults who support them. The model offers non-traditional strategies for promoting mental health and wellness that include culturally relevant, healing-centered, arts-based workshops for young people, as well as professional development, coaching, and emotional support for the adults who work with them.

By incorporating healing informed arts into K-12 curricula and Short Term Residential Therapeutic Programs (STRTP), young people are learning how to use art to regulate their emotions, build resiliency and self-confidence, connect with others, learn new skills, and identify potential career pathways. During professional development sessions, educators and adults working with young people are learning to utilize arts-based strategies and interventions to build social supports, understand the significance of positive interactions and attachment, offer young people support, resources and referrals, and develop healing environments for the young people in their care. The sessions also increase adults' understanding of cultural equity, and how culturally relevant and engaging arts activities are an effective modality for engaging young people and nurturing individual and collective

Definition ►

Healing-Centered Approach

While “trauma-informed” frameworks are widely used to promote a culture of safety, empowerment, and healing, Arts and Culture is embracing a “healing-centered” lens.

[Healing-centered](#) approaches are aimed at the holistic restoration of an individual’s well-being, recognizing the profound impact of trauma on individuals. This approach advances strengths-based care and moves away from deficit-based mental health models. It seeks to promote resilience and healing from traumatic experiences and environments, in culturally grounded contexts that view healing as the restoration of identity, shared experience, community and a sense of belonging.

*Source: Shawn Ginwright
<https://medium.com/@ginwright/the-future-of-healing-shifting-from-trauma-informed-care-to-healing-centered-engagement-634f557ce69c>

¹ In 2020, California Governor Gavin Newsom signed a legislation, Assembly Bill No. 413, to replace the term “at-risk” youth with “at-promise” youth in the state’s penal and education codes. This new term is less stigmatizing to refer to youth who face or are living through challenging circumstances.

² As defined in [Los Angeles County’s New Regional Blueprint for Arts Education](#): Specific groups of people who, over many years in the past which may extend into the present, have been denied or prevented from accessing resources or opportunities by institutions, systems, and/or dominant power structures. This may include Black, Indigenous and other youth of color, current or former foster youth, as well as youth who are currently or formerly homeless, impacted by the justice system, LGBTQ+, migrants, English language learners, living in poverty, in rural areas, and/or with disabilities.

wellbeing. Taken together, this holistic, systemic approach works to destigmatize mental health symptoms, strengthen mental health protective factors for young people impacted by trauma, and positively shift how young people are encouraged to heal, grow, and thrive.

Evaluation

Following a pilot evaluation that took place in 2019 (see callout box) Arts and Culture partnered with Harder+Company Community Research (Harder+Company) to conduct the current Creative Wellbeing Evaluation. The goals of the evaluation were to measure the impact of the Creative Wellbeing approach; capture best practices and lessons learned from the 2022-23 implementation to inform future phases of programming; identify opportunities for long-term systemic change; and develop recommendations to improve programming of the Creative Wellbeing approach. The following are the learning areas and research questions that guided the evaluation:

Impact

- What has been the impact of participating in Creative Wellbeing on students and youth?
- What has been the impact of participating in Creative Wellbeing on adults (e.g., educators, school staff, county staff, other adults providing youth services)?

Culture Shift

- How has Creative Wellbeing begun to shift site (school, STRTP, open cohorts) culture to be more healing-informed?
- How has Creative Wellbeing begun to shift site (school, STRTP, open cohorts) culture to address issues of equity and structural/systemic racism within schools, STRTPs and communities?

Implementation

- What works well, what could be improved, and what can be learned and applied to other County efforts with the current Creative Wellbeing approach?
 - In-person
 - Virtual
- What works well, what could be improved, and what can be learned and applied to other County efforts with the Creative Wellbeing cross-sector partnerships?

2019 Pilot Evaluation

During the 2019-20 school year, Arts and Culture and Harder+Company partnered to conduct the Creative Wellbeing Pilot Evaluation. During this initial evaluation the teams explored what was working well with the approach, where there were opportunities for improvement, and what implications COVID had on the initiative. The final report and toolkits that emerged from this evaluation can be found at the link below.

<https://www.lacountyartsedcollective.org/research-evaluation/reports/creative-wellbeing-evaluation>

Expansion and Sustainability

- What would facilitate the Creative Wellbeing approach's expansion and long-term sustainability?

The Creative Wellbeing evaluation utilized a mixed-methods approach to data collection and captured data from a variety of sources and points of view to ensure recommendations and findings were based on a range of perspectives. Descriptions of each data collection activity implemented as part of the evaluation are outlined below:

Student & Youth Voice. The evaluation team conducted four focus groups with students from Whittier City School District and Pasadena Unified School District who participated in Creative Wellbeing classroom programming. The grade level of student participants ranged from 1st grade to high school level.³ Student focus groups were critical for collecting stories and learnings directly from youth about their experience in the program and its impact on them and their school experience. To note, multiple efforts were made to conduct a focus group with youth at STRTP sites, however, due to the short-term nature of these placements, youth do not stay at sites long which proved a challenge in scheduling and gathering the perspective of these youth.

Professional Development Survey. A retrospective pre/post survey was administered to educators, County staff, and other adults providing youth services who participated in the Creative Wellbeing arts-based trainings and professional development sessions. The survey contained closed- and open-ended questions and explored changes in knowledge, attitude, and behaviors surrounding youth mental health, attitudes towards arts programming, application of learnings, impact on youth, and overall experience. The survey also gathered perspectives on how the program could be improved and what additional resources or support would be helpful for ongoing implementation. In total, 90 adults completed the professional development survey.

Adult Interviews. A total of 11 virtual interviews were conducted with adults (e.g., educators, school staff, county staff, STRTP staff, other adults providing youth services) participating in Creative Wellbeing activities to capture deeper insights on their understanding of risk and protective factors; their ability to incorporate arts as a healing strategy into their interactions with young people; support young people's

³ The agreement between Arts and Culture and sites partners to implement Creative Wellbeing includes permission to engage participants in data collection. Additionally, all data collection with young people was confidential and no findings were linked to identifying information. Lastly, young people and parents of young people had the option to elect *not* to participate in the data collection activity and young people could also end their participation in data collection at any time. Having implemented these protections, Institutional Review Board certification was not pursued.

social emotional learning through art; and discuss changes to their site's culture due to participating in the program. The interviews also explored how the program can be implemented more equitably across students and schools and provided adults the opportunity to flag any cultural considerations that should be prioritized as implementation evolves.

Ripple Effects Mapping. Ripple Effects Mapping (REM) is an interactive evaluation method that engaged 20 Creative Wellbeing partners, teaching artists, and educators in exploring program-derived impacts. This participatory qualitative method helped identify and provide contextual information related to expected and unexpected outcomes and impacts of Creative Wellbeing. During this virtual, four-hour REM session the evaluation team engaged the group in guided reflection and collaborative identification of the impacts and ripple effects of Creative Wellbeing at multiple levels (e.g., individual, family, school, system). Following the REM session, the content was refined and further synthesized to identify the larger ripples (or impacts) of Creative Wellbeing. This final map was shared with Creative Wellbeing collaborators for reflection during the final reflection session (Exhibit 1).

Reflection Session. At the conclusion of the evaluation, Harder+Company facilitated a reflection session with 29 Creative Wellbeing partners to present the findings of the evaluation and have a discussion around the recommendations and implications for future iterations of the program. The reflection session provided an opportunity for stakeholders to discuss the extent to which the findings of the evaluation aligned with their experiences and how they can use the findings of the evaluation to inform their work moving forward.



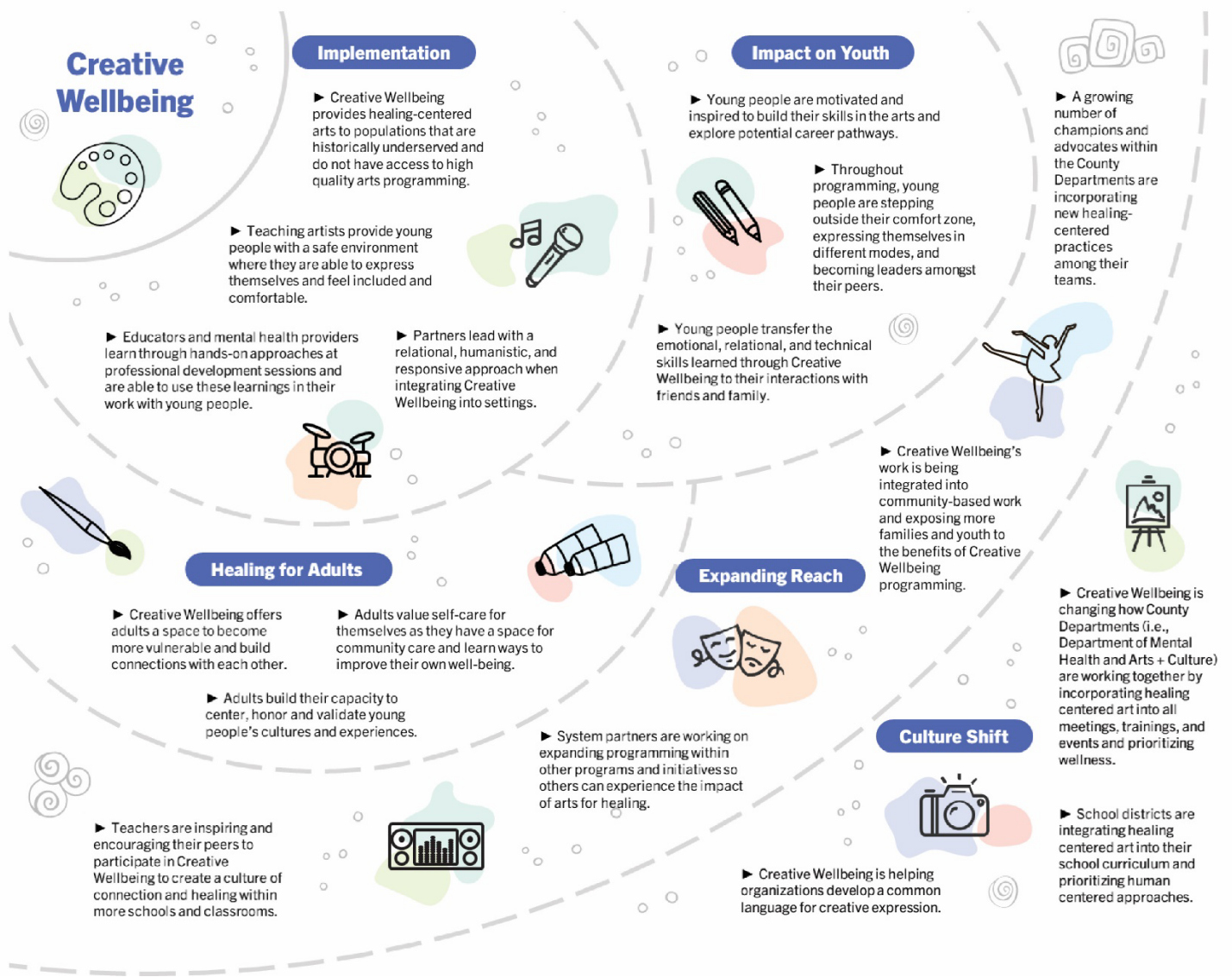
I have been so excited to participate in the Creative Wellbeing workshops. I have a background in Art Therapy and feel passionate about learning more about collaborating with Department of Children & Family Services/DMH to integrate using the Arts with caregivers, children and to help social workers. It is gratifying to find in the art world ways to refresh and connect our community as a whole!

- Adult Survey Respondent

Evaluation Findings

Creative Wellbeing brings together a diverse group of people to engage in healing-centered arts activities with the ultimate goal of building healing-centered communities of wellness and supporting the mental wellbeing of all. Findings from the evaluation suggest Creative Wellbeing provides a space for youth and for the adults who support young people to heal. Through this healing, adults are able to integrate healing-centered strategies into their work with young people, which has a tremendously positive impact on young people. Creative Wellbeing has also begun to shift culture at a variety of levels, which has facilitated the expansion and diffusion of healing-centered practices into new spaces (Exhibit 1).

Exhibit 1. The Ripple Effects of Creative Wellbeing



The sections that follow provide additional detail for each of the findings areas highlighted in “The Ripple Effects of Creative Wellbeing” map.

Impact on Young People



▶ Young people are motivated and inspired to build their skills in the arts and explore potential career pathways.

▶ Throughout programming, young people are stepping outside their comfort zone, expressing themselves in different modes, and becoming leaders amongst their peers.

▶ Young people transfer the emotional, relational, and technical skills learned through Creative Wellbeing to their interactions with friends and family.

A key principle for positive youth development and education is to build on the interests and cultural relevance of youth.⁴ Creative Wellbeing supports this principle by providing tailored arts programming to young people that come from lower income backgrounds, the child welfare or juvenile justice system, and other underserved areas within the community. Additionally, research suggests that communities with greater cultural resources have better physical and mental health outcomes.⁵ By promoting an arts-rich education through Creative Wellbeing, young people have access to cultural resources that increase their wellbeing, engagement, and quality of life, which in turn positively impacts their social determinants of health and fosters greater equity.

Through the focus groups with young people, professional development survey, REM session, and adult interviews, there was general agreement that a healing-centered arts approach to education benefitted students’ development in multiple ways. About two-thirds of educators who attended the professional development sessions (66%) agreed that students see the value of integrating arts programming into their curriculum. Additionally, on a scale from 1 (not at all impactful) to 10 (extremely impactful), on average educators rated Creative Wellbeing’s impact on young people as an 8.1, indicating the program had a high level of impact.

Creative Wellbeing allows young people to explore their interests, build skills, and increase their access to the arts. During the evaluation period, the Creative Wellbeing program offered young people a wide range of programming in the arts, such as dance, drawing, photography and music producing. Prior to programming, young people had different experiences with art. Some young people were not interested in art while others wanted to participate but did not have opportunities to do so. “I’ve always wanted to try it. Before the art program, I was super into it, but I



The most significant impact I observed in my classroom is the attitude of my students. They were excited and happy to participate and to be able to do dance and art! Even the students who don’t normally participate in class were participating in this program. It was beautiful!”

– Adult Survey Respondent

⁴ Shek, D. T., Dou, D., Zhu, X., & Chai, W. (2019). Positive youth development: Current perspectives. *Adolescent health, medicine and therapeutics*, 131-141.

⁵ Gorny-Wegrzyn, E., & Perry, B. (2022). Creative art: Connection to health and well-being. *Open Journal of Social Sciences*, 10(12), 290-303.

never really got the chance to do it as much,” one young person said. Creative Wellbeing gave young people from different backgrounds more access to the arts. Regardless of their level of background in the arts, most young people appreciated the new experiences they gained from the programming. “What I liked most about the program is that it was a new experience, exploring new activities, and it opened a lot of us to a new world,” one young person said.

Creative Wellbeing inspired young people to further explore their interests in the arts and arts-based career pathways. Many young people from the focus groups expressed interest in participating in other arts programs or more advanced arts programs to continue their learning. For example, those in middle school were looking forward to high school and having a wider selection of arts programming available to them. Creative Wellbeing introduced young people to the arts which sparked their interest to continue exploring the arts.

Additionally, programming allowed young people to learn about other cultures through arts-based activities. For example, the drum circle activity offered to some of the classrooms educated young people on African culture, including the African diaspora. According to one teacher, prior to this activity, some young people in their class did not know much about Africa, but through the Creative Wellbeing activity, students became enthralled with the drum circle lessons and expressed interest in learning more about African culture and the influence of African diaspora across the world during the sessions. Through this activity, young people were able to see how music along with cultural practices can deepen community cohesion, teamwork and connections between humans and nature. One teacher shared, “At least 90% of my students really embraced it, especially the hand drumming classes because it’s something new for them – they are really learning.”

Young people who participated in Creative Wellbeing programming experienced positive social-emotional benefits. Adults noticed that young people were in better moods after attending a session and would look forward to the next session. Young people and adults working with them noticed changes in young people’s social-emotional well-being as well as increased confidence, less anxiety, and an increased ability to decompress. One classroom teacher who does creative writing with their students noticed that their shy students became more confident in their public speaking skills. “By the end of the year, they feel confident enough to be able to go up there and present on their own, which seeing what happens down the line with all the presentations we have to do later on in life, it’s been huge for some of these kids,” the classroom teacher said. Young people shared that the sessions helped them cope with stress – “It helped me have a clear mind of what was going on because I get stressed out easily.” (Exhibit 3) When participating in Creative Wellbeing activities, young people reported feeling “happy,” “calm”, “excited,” and “creative.”

Creative Wellbeing programming also benefited students’ relational skills. Teaching artists, young people and adults noticed that young people strengthened their relationships with each other and adults. Classroom teachers noticed that their students were interacting with each other more during discussions, asking follow up questions or providing compliments to their peers, and talking with students that

they normally do not talk with. Students were also more willing to share with their classroom teachers how they are feeling and what they did in the programming. One teacher explained, “[My students] basically come in here with me and they show me what they do, and they tell me what it means to them. From there, we just discuss what they're doing and how much more they can do with that project, or how much more they can expand on that.”

Relatedly, young people in the focus groups noted how they enjoyed interacting with each other and the teaching artists during their arts sessions. With help from the teaching artists, young people were able to collaborate with each other. Teaching artists also noticed that the young people made friends with each other, united with each other, and lead activities. Teaching artists noticed that young people would often ask to help with the activities such as passing out materials and exercise their choice and power within the activities. This would sometimes encourage their peers to follow suit as they see their peers stepping up.

Exhibit 2. Drawings of Young People's Favorite Creative Wellbeing Activities



Creative Wellbeing programming has helped young people build new technical art skills. Some technical skills young people reported improving upon included learning about how to use iPads, photography equipment, drawing, and music equipment. Classroom teachers also noticed an increased proficiency in their students' skills using iPads and iMovie – “[The students] know how to use more tools, taking photos, and also talk to each other about it.” In the music producing programs, young people enjoyed making and listening to their own beats. One

“

My favorite thing about the music program was that every note doesn't have to match. Music is all different and you can create your own things that's what I really did like. We even got to make our own beat which I loved because I got to learn what sound and instrument I like in the background.

– Youth Participant

young person mentioned, “What I liked most about the program was how they allowed us to experience new things. For instance, they showed some music [notes] that was cool looking.”

Creative Wellbeing allows young people to express themselves in alternative forms.

Adult interviewees working in mental health spaces noted that the program offers an alternative to regular therapy with young people. One interviewee explained, “[Mental health staff] have a hard time thinking out of the box and ways to support youth in processing outside of talk therapy and these youth don't want to talk. So, finding other creative means to help them process and work through, I think, is vital to helping these youth.” Other adults have noticed that young people have more willingness to share about themselves during art therapy compared to talk therapy. Literature has noted that as young people who participate in arts therapy at their own pace allows young people to develop their own sense of agency with the process and product.⁶ “Arts help access things that are too painful or difficult to talk about. They don't have to talk about the art project when we do it – they could just do it. They have the option to talk if they want, but they can just express themselves,” one mental health professional said. This reflects that young people are able to discover their own uniqueness and create awareness and appreciation of themselves through arts therapy when they work with mental health professionals.⁷

Healing for Adults



- ▶ Creative Wellbeing offers adults a space to become more vulnerable and build connections with each other.
- ▶ Adults value self-care for themselves as they have a space for community care and learn ways to improve their own well-being.
- ▶ Adults build their capacity to center, honor and validate young people's cultures and experiences.

Creative Wellbeing offers a unique humanizing space that allows adults to be more vulnerable and strengthen authentic connections with each other. Teaching artists, educators, County staff, and staff working within STRTP sites experiencing Creative Wellbeing programming all shared how visibly Creative Wellbeing emphasizes and facilitates the strengthening of relationships among adults. For example, a Licensed Clinical Social Worker (LCSW) at an STRTP group home shared that the most significant impact they've witnessed through the program “probably came from the rapport building that [the Creative Wellbeing teaching artists] did with the staff. . . because you work with people, you small talk and things like that, but you don't ever

Risk and Protective Factors

One objective of the Creative Wellbeing professional development trainings is to support adults in understanding what risk and protective factors are, how to identify them in young people, and how to use protective factors to build upon young people's resiliency and wellbeing.

Protective factors can include parental resilience, social connections, concrete support in times of need, knowledge of parenting and child development, as well as social and emotional competence of a young person.

Risk factors can include poverty, systemic racism, learning disability, parental neglect, substance use, bullying or social isolation.

⁶ Berberian, Marygrace. "Creative problem solving in art therapy: An overview of benefits to promote resilience." *Art Therapy Practices for Resilient Youth* (2019): 13-32.

⁷ Hartz, Liz, and Lynette Thicke. "Art therapy strategies to raise self-esteem in female juvenile offenders: A comparison of art psychotherapy and art as therapy approaches." *Art Therapy* 22, no. 2 (2005): 70-80.

really speak with them about what their goals are or what their futures are or things that are important to them...just learning more about the people that you work with, you kind of understand them more and it makes it easier to work with them.” A survey respondent shared that their school was able to offer a dance class for teachers as part of Creative Wellbeing before offering it to their students and felt its impact; “It helped us work as groups, express ourselves in new ways with our bodies, and change our moods positively.” Adults who attended the professional development trainings offered through Creative Wellbeing shared that they felt seen and understood by other participants and enjoyed getting to know others in that space.

During the REM session, teaching artists, County staff, and Creative Wellbeing partners shared how the program has allowed them to feel more liberated to express themselves by modeling how to show up human to human. Several participants in the session emphasized that the most powerful and important part of the program to them has been the deepening of human connection and as a result, the strengthened relationships among teachers, between teachers and teaching artists, and teachers’ relationships with themselves. Through professional development trainings and the values being modeled by teaching artists, Creative Wellbeing has offered space for adult healing which has opened channels for connection and vulnerability. This finding suggests that Creative Wellbeing is effectively strengthening adults’ protective factors (see callout box) and ultimately benefiting their mental health.

When asked on the survey to describe, in one word, their experience at the Creative Wellbeing session, adults used words such as healing, calming, powerful, enjoyable, and inspiring (Exhibit 3).

Exhibit 3. What is one word to describe your experience at the Creative Wellbeing training?



It challenged me to heal my inner child. I grew up in foster care and there are some unhealed wounds and I believe this activity can benefit me in healing so that I can then try this activity on my clients living in foster homes or involved within the system in some way.

- Adult Survey Respondent

Adults are recognizing the role of arts for positive change, integrating learnings from Creative Wellbeing, and supporting students differently in their work. As a result of Creative Wellbeing programming, adults are finding more creative strategies in how they plan and deliver their lessons or interventions. For some, it gave them excitement about their work. Across various interviews with educators, several describe integrating arts activities into their curriculum and modifying it for different grade levels. For example, a special education teacher shared how they are integrating arts modalities into other learning areas, like writing. The teacher found that incorporating art allowed students to absorb information in ways that traditional teaching methods did not always induce.

After participating in professional development trainings, more adults were able to use healing-centered arts strategies to support young people in expressing their feelings and needs. A science teacher has integrated arts activities into the curriculum which has "...helped [her] be more aware of the social emotional [support] components [that come up even in a science classroom] and how arts makes that connection." Teachers reported that integrating arts into curriculum has helped the youth with calming strategies, easing anxiety, overcoming shyness, and building confidence. Other educators are also using the art activities in their classrooms for brain breaks and decompression. An STRTP provider finds arts to be therapeutic, a creative outlet for young people to express themselves and give them more of a voice to share things that they may not otherwise know how to or feel comfortable expressing. Over three-fourths (79%) of survey respondents also shared that they are using healing-centered arts activities with young people to increase their self-care and wellbeing.

More adults also used these strategies to create opportunities for young people to experience connection. According to the professional development survey, 82% of adults were able to use culturally relevant healing-centered arts activities in their classrooms and work with youth. Teaching artists are also witnessing this growth in cultural responsiveness within teachers, observing more validating, reflective listening, honoring and centering of youths' cultures and experiences. As a result of Creative Wellbeing, 95% of adults who participated in the professional development survey feel they are able to empathize with youth and their experiences. By providing this trusting and healing space and making young peoples' stories feel validated, some educators are also opening more vulnerable doors for conversations around historical trauma. Since participating in Creative Wellbeing programming, more educators feel they can provide a healing-centered response for young people who are struggling and have more tools to customize their approaches to better address what youth, especially those with acute trauma, need.

Adults are experiencing and embodying Creative Wellbeing values and healing themselves through this work. Creative Wellbeing has shown educators and mental health professionals how much learning and moments of wellbeing are happening within themselves just as much as it is within the young people. According to the professional development survey, 97% of respondents, all of them adults working with youth, would seek out mental health services for themselves after participating in the trainings and 98% want to learn how healing-centered arts can be a non-traditional mental health support.



I've tried to implement a few strategies into my own wellness practice, and noticed that I enter into my time with students much more calmly and I've noticed an impact in the energy with students, much more at ease.

—Adult Survey Respondent



Through interviews and the professional development survey, educators emphasized the need for self-care inside and outside their work. Several shared that they use art to help self-process; for example, one survey respondent said “I have dealt with depression for many years and have used arts as my own coping strategy. Just listening to music can really help. The strategies I have learned have come out [through] new science-art instruction and using more music in [classroom] lessons.” County mental health professionals similarly shared that Creative Wellbeing is allowing them a safe space and the tools to cultivate a culture that isn't traditionally welcomed in their departments, showing them the value in prioritizing their own healing. Teaching artists reiterated this as they shared observations of the value of community care for the adults in the program.

Shifting Cultures Within Organizations and Systems

Recognizing large scale culture shift takes time, especially within complex systems, the evaluation found evidence of early culture shifts at various levels:

- **Youth** are seeing the value of integrating arts programming into their learning. Those who see the value are communicating and connecting with one another more and youth have widened their perspectives on what is art and how to interact with it.
- **Teachers and adults working with youth** are strengthening their capacity for using healing-centered arts activities with young people. Adults are beginning to use healing-centered arts activities to support their own healing and wellbeing and recognize changes within themselves. Adults are also building new tools to help them deepen their rapport building skills and communication with youth to help them open up more. While some youth do feel some of their teachers have not yet incorporated arts activities into their classes, youth generally feel that teachers would be supportive of more arts programming at their schools.
- **Teaching artists** are strengthening their relationships with schools and deepening their own learnings around mental health.
- **Schools and Creative Wellbeing partner organizations** are in the early stages of their culture shifts, showing a willingness to support their staff in integrating healing-centered arts strategies into their work with youth. They are building their awareness of the benefits of healing informed practices and impact on youth and their schools and organizations. While some schools are witnessing small shifts, it is still difficult for some teachers to integrate this type of curriculum. Some schools only have a small number (up to four teachers) participating in the Creative Wellbeing program which makes it difficult to effect a culture shift. Nevertheless, there are visible changes in how partners work with schools and how wellbeing can be integrated with schools.
- **County Departments (DMH, DCFS, Arts and Culture)** are changing how their departments work together and incorporate arts and Creative Wellbeing concepts into their own work. It is also changing how the Department of Arts and Culture team works together internally – deepening their own interpersonal relationships and prioritizing wellness. DMH is incorporating Creative Wellbeing concepts into their meetings/trainings/events and messaging. There are also continuing education credits being offered now for DMH staff through the UCLA Prevention Center of Excellence’s Wellbeing for LA Learning Center sessions. DCFS has also included Creative Wellbeing as part of their training catalog. Lastly, there are now more champions and advocates within County departments with power to shift practices and encourage new practices.
- **Pasadena Unified and Whittier City Elementary School Districts** are committed to the importance and power of healing-centered approaches, in addition to standards-based arts knowledge and skill building, as part of their social-emotional supports for students. Partnering through Creative Wellbeing has illustrated the potential for more human-centered/young person-centered holistic approaches. Lastly, there are art leads who now meet regularly and have recently created an arts website for their district broken down by grade level that includes standards and lessons so that other teachers can use the Creative Wellbeing resources. By regularly meeting and prioritizing this effort and establishing accessible avenues for Creative Wellbeing lesson sharing, art leads are strengthening networks of support and creating learning communities across the school districts.
- **Creative Wellbeing community at large** is shifting how various types of art forms (i.e., hip hop, breakdancing, graphic design, vocal music) are being experienced and perceived by adults and young people. Overall, all individuals participating in Creative Wellbeing programming are developing a common language for creative expression. Additionally, the County government, through the Department of Arts and Culture, is deepening its collaboration efforts and accessing new funding sources that are often not traditionally used for the arts to ensure the community experiences various art forms.

Expanding Reach



▶ System partners are working on expanding programming within other programs and initiatives so others can experience the impact of arts for healing.

▶ Creative Wellbeing's work is being integrated into community-based work and exposing more families and youth to the benefits of Creative Wellbeing programming.

▶ A growing number of champions and advocates within the County Departments are incorporating new healing-centered practices among their teams.

Across data collection activities, it was evident that Creative Wellbeing's approach and impact diffused into other spaces and systems supporting many of the culture shifts highlighted in the "Shifting Cultures Within Organizations and Systems" callout box. This diffusion is a positive sign that Creative Wellbeing's impact goes beyond individual impact and is facilitating practice and culture shifts within complex systems to be grounded in healing-centered approaches.

Creative Wellbeing is bringing healing-centered arts into new places. Arts activities have historically been accessible only through arts specific classes or workshops. Creative Wellbeing challenges this norm by integrating healing-centered arts activities into non-traditional avenues such as community day classrooms, mental health clinics, foster youth homes, and workplace meetings. Additionally, with the focus on systems-impacted youth, those at risk of becoming systems-impacted, and the adults who support them, Creative Wellbeing provides valuable programming to populations who have not historically had access to a rich arts education. Creative Wellbeing has also allowed teaching artists to share their practices more widely, which supports the integration of healing-centered arts-based practices across systems. Simultaneously, by being in new spaces Creative Wellbeing has brought mental health promotion training into the arts community, which is strengthening teaching artist's knowledge and capacity of how to support young people's mental health. By bringing Creative Wellbeing into new spaces, a larger population of young people and adults are able to access and experience the benefits of healing-centered arts strategies and mental health resources.

Young people are transferring their knowledge and skills learned through Creative Wellbeing activities to other spaces and with other people. Following their participation in Creative Wellbeing activities, young people explained how they enjoyed being able to share what they learned with their friends and family. For instance, first graders in one of the focus groups eagerly shared their Creative Wellbeing drawings with their family while other young people were able to tell their peers about the class and encourage them to join. By sharing their art with others, young people can help inspire others to explore their own art journey and simultaneously encourage and challenge themselves to participate in more healing-centered arts-based activities. Sharing their new knowledge and skills learned through Creative Wellbeing with family members can also support an increased awareness and integration of healing-centered practices within the home.



Creative Wellbeing was a wonderful way to tie arts into the work I do as a mental health professional. It is a great way to prevent burn out for us in the field. Also, it's a great way to use the tools we learned for our clients.

— Adult Survey Respondent

Adults find tremendous value in Creative Wellbeing activities and are encouraging their peers to participate. Following Creative Wellbeing professional development sessions, survey participants indicated a high degree of wanting to learn more about how healing-centered arts can be a non-traditional mental health support. During the REM session, partners shared how Creative Wellbeing’s relational-based approach has connected many teachers together and strengthened their relationships even if they work in different schools or districts. For instance, in Whittier City School District, more and more teachers expressed interest in joining Creative Wellbeing activities after hearing positive feedback about past sessions from colleagues. One teacher explained their experience strengthening relationships through participating in Creative Wellbeing – “It’s always great to be able to hear different experiences from other people and what is going on in their lives... [the Creative Wellbeing sessions] gave people the opportunity to open up, which then, bonded all of us together. As the sessions went on, our bond became more intense even though we’re all pretty [geographically] spread out.”

System partners recognize the impact of Creative Wellbeing and are collaborating on efforts to expand programming. REM participants shared how the transfer of learning from Creative Wellbeing sessions allows adults who work within systems to honor the role that arts play in mental wellbeing and are thinking through ways to embed healing-centered strategies within other programs and initiatives. Additionally, Creative Wellbeing has facilitated relationship building and collaboration across county departments, such that more departments are working together to integrate healing-centered arts-based strategies into existing initiatives ultimately expanding programming and Creative Wellbeing’s reach.

Implementation Learnings

In addition to capturing the impact, outcomes, and reach of the Creative Wellbeing program, the evaluation identified learnings about the successes and challenges of implementing the program from multiple perspectives. The implementation learnings are key findings that can inform ongoing programming, as well as expansion and sustainability of the program. Through the interviews, focus groups, survey, and REM session, adults and youth involved in Creative Wellbeing shared their perspectives on what worked well, what could be improved, and what could be applied to similar efforts.

Implementation Successes

Educators and mental health providers implementing healing-centered arts in their work with young people appreciate the ability to tailor the activities based on the ages/grade levels and cultures of their students as well as what they are hoping to achieve through the activity. One mental health provider described how she switches between the different arts activities she learned through Creative Wellbeing depending on the focus of her session with her young clients, using one for centering or meditation, another for understanding relationships, and another for learning about a client’s values. Similarly, educators described modifying the arts activities they integrate into their curriculum for different ages or grade levels. Most of the survey respondents (84%) reported that they planned to use the



It gives [young people] a way to express themselves and more of a voice to share things they wouldn’t just come out and say.

– STRTP Staff

Creative Wellbeing curriculum guide in their work and mentioned appreciation for the simplicity and transferability of the activities to various settings. Additionally, adults working with young people mentioned using the activities to expose young people to different cultures, understand or relate to their own cultures, and give them more ways to express their voice and choice.

Teaching artists make students feel comfortable, included, and safe to express themselves freely and make mistakes. Overall, students described their teaching artists as welcoming, funny, calm, engaging, and patient. They shared feeling included by the teaching artists who helped them feel comfortable trying new things, being creative, and making mistakes. One young person mentioned, “I liked how they would help us as needed and how they made me feel comfortable around them.” The connection that students developed with their teaching artists appears to be a critical ingredient for students’ positive experience and impact from the program.

Professional development participants appreciated the hands-on learning approaches of the sessions. Professional development participants spoke about the hands-on interactive nature of the sessions and how helpful the modeling and practical aspect of the sessions was for them. They also appreciated the higher level of engagement in the in-person sessions and recommended that, for virtual sessions, facilitators should encourage folks to turn on their cameras to increase connection between participants.

Internal champions and responsiveness to program and school needs have supported the Creative Wellbeing partnerships and their ability to implement the program. Having a common and steadfast goal of centering young people and valuing collaboration has helped Creative Wellbeing partners work together, even when things did not go as planned. The relationship between Arts and Culture and AHJN shifted to be more responsive and adaptive as early implementation challenges made it clear that the original structured approach may not be the most effective way to reach the adults and young people. As the trust between partners continues to build and internal champions are rising up within each partner organization, partners are more willing to try different approaches, be adaptive and work together to find tailored solutions.

Implementation Challenges

Though students described the program as organized, site staff and teaching artists felt the program would benefit from better communication and coordination. Educators shared vastly different experiences between working with teaching artists who were planful and communicative versus teaching artists who did not share their plans or were inconsistent in their attendance and seemed to have other higher priorities. Educators appreciated when teaching artists sent materials ahead of time, let the teachers know what to expect and how to prepare their students, and stayed in communication outside of the sessions. On the other side, teaching artists appreciated when educators establish a safe space with classroom norms to step into and found it challenging when those norms had not already been established. Teaching artists also noted that the program implementation is more successful in schools and STRTPs with supportive staff who have buy-in and are internal



The persona poem exercise was a great experiential exercise to learn ways to express feelings and thoughts that are often difficult to express.

– Adult Survey Respondent

champions for the program, acknowledging this often depends on trust-building and may take time to develop.

The virtual learning experience during the COVID-19 pandemic impacted students' ability and willingness to make in-person connections. A large impact of the virtual learning mode that young people have been in for the past few years, confined to their laptops and deprived of in-person social interactions, is that young people have become accustomed to being behind a screen and it can be challenging and awkward for them connect with others face-to-face. Teaching artists found it challenging to re-engage youth who were more comfortable with virtual connections to be present and had to find strategies to help students connect with them and with each other.

Engaging in art activities requires vulnerability and trust. Teaching artists expressed that both adults and students may find it challenging to engage in arts activities for fear of putting themselves out there or looking “silly.” Needing to overcome the self-consciousness and self-imposed judgement of being artistic or not requires trust, support, and strategies to take pressure off and to re-frame art as something everyone can do to tell their story and connect with others. Some teaching artists described strategies such as blind drawings, scribble drawings, and stick figure drawings to reduce the fear or anxiety that art may bring to some participants. REM participants noted that teaching artists need to understand how to tailor activities based on each individual youth, for example a group of STRTP youth may enjoy an activity but the next group might not and the teaching artists need to be able to respond and pivot with those nuances.

It is difficult to change a rigid long-standing system like education or County departments. REM participants discussed the challenge of introducing new ideas or ways of doing things into a siloed or bureaucratic system. However, teaching artists shared that they have been pleasantly surprised at the willingness of County staff to be engaged in the creative processes and activities they have invited them into. Partnerships, exposure, and working collaboratively are essential factors to transfer learning, shift attitudes of decision makers, and take a holistic approach. Additionally, evaluation and data, both quantitative and qualitative, can help to support ongoing sustainability and expansion.



We come in with creative energy but very often the school and prison system [creates] a sense of apathy and doldrums in adult culture. So people appreciate the energy that creatives bring into space, unlocking the inner child, the lost dreams, the freedom to stand up and be loud.

– REM participant

Closing & Recommendations

Looking Back

At the conclusion of the 2019-20 pilot evaluation of Creative Wellbeing (see introduction), a variety of recommendations surfaced to help inform programming adjustments. During the period that followed the pilot evaluation, Arts and Culture worked with partners to make adjustments to the pilot programming and continue expanding Creative Wellbeing into new spaces. Examples of adjustments informed by findings of the pilot evaluation include:

- Co-designing a Creative Wellbeing curriculum guide with artists, mental health professionals, and paid youth content advisors;
- Expanding partnership with DCFS sites to include STRTPs, temporary shelter and care facilities (TSCFs), and Foster Family Agencies (FFAs);
- Introducing year-round programming on the wellbeing4LA Learning Community, including quarterly learning community gatherings; professional development retreats with continued education credits, and monthly self- and community-care sessions; and
- Prioritizing a strengths-based planning and implementation model that allows for customization of services.

Evidence from the current evaluation suggests progress has been made across some of the initial recommendation areas and surfaced new or similar recommendations to be considered as Creative Wellbeing continues to incorporate their learnings (Exhibit 4).

Exhibit 4. Summary of Progress Made on Pilot Evaluation Recommendations

Pilot Evaluation Recommendation	Evidence of Progress
Include students, families, educators, and those with lived experience when designing and implementing healing-centered arts education activities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Creative Wellbeing partners engage paid youth content creators to help inform the curriculum.• Teaching artists share lived experiences with the young people they are engaging with.• Teaching artists build relationships and connect with young people.

Ensure arts activities implemented with youth are healing-centered and culturally responsive.

- Four of five adults surveyed use culturally relevant healing-centered arts activities in their classrooms and work with youth.
- Teachers validate, engage in reflective listening, and honor and center their youths' cultures and experiences.
- Young people learn about other cultures through arts-based activities like the drum circle activity.
- Adults implement healing-centered arts in their work with young people and appreciate the ability to tailor the activities based on the ages/grade levels and cultures of their students.

Engage educators and staff who may not be as interested in the arts, and those who may not be as familiar with a healing-centered approach.

- Healing-centered arts are being brought into new spaces like workplace meetings, community day classrooms, mental health clinics, and foster youth homes.

Clarify key concepts, roles, and what is expected of partners from the start.

- Creative Wellbeing partners have been responsive and adaptable during the early implementation phase.
- Partners are open to try different approaches and work together to find solutions.

Continue to support teachers and build their capacity to implement healing-centered arts activities to support youth wellbeing.

- Adults are able to support young people differently in their work such as supporting young people in expressing their feelings and needs, along with building connection.

Create a community of practice for the subset of educators who participated in Creative Wellbeing.

- Some spaces have been created to allow ongoing connection among adults participating in Creative Wellbeing including implementing a cohort model with teachers in Whittier City School District or implementing the monthly Wellbeing 4 LA sessions.

Provide trainings to school leadership on how healing-centered approaches will support their students, teachers, and school culture.

- Creative Wellbeing hosted professional development sessions that focused on culturally relevant strategies and activities for nurturing the wellbeing of adults and their students. These sessions focused on raising awareness of protective factors and how arts-based activities can amplify them, how stigma can impact adults' abilities to "read" the behaviors of children and youth with high levels of trauma

exposure and how one's own unprocessed trauma can impact their capacity to provide a healing-centered response.

- These sessions are ongoing and upcoming sessions include Empowering Identity Through Style Writing (Graffiti Art), Centering Equity and Belonging for Healing and Justice, and Steps to Empowerment: 5 Step Method to Build Trust, Confidence, and Creative Expression Using Social Emotional Learning and Movement.

Looking Ahead

In 2022-2023, Creative Wellbeing continued to grow and make a positive impact on young people, adults, teaching artists, and systems. Overall, adults and young people participating in Creative Wellbeing saw great value in the healing-centered arts programming. Adults improved their ability to incorporate a healing-centered approach into their work with young people along with using a healing-centered approach to strengthen their relationships with themselves and each other. Young people strengthened their emotional, relational, and technical skills and expressed interest in continuing to explore the arts. The program's success was due to the flexibility and customization of the approach along with the relational, hands-on nature of the professional development and in-classroom art sessions.

Creative Wellbeing's approach and impact goes beyond the individual and continues to expand and grow in different spaces. It brings healing-centered arts education to non-traditional spaces like clinics, STRTPs, and the workplace and increases accessibility of arts education for LA County youth, families, and communities disproportionately impacted by the justice system, child welfare system, and other systemic inequities. By expanding its reach, more people can access and experience the benefits of healing-centered approaches and build their capacity to support their own, and young people's, mental health.

Opportunities to address challenges and promote the sustainability of Creative Wellbeing include expanding programming for students, designing programs that are more youth-centered, offering adults more peer support, providing additional training and coaching for adults on implementation, and improving the coordination and communication between site leaders, classroom teachers, and teaching artists. Informed by data collected through the evaluation, below are proposed recommendations to consider as Creative Wellbeing enters its next year of implementation:

- **Consider offering longer sessions and more art forms to young people to align with their interest and promote engagement.** Adults, teaching artists, and young people all noticed that young people participating in the program benefited in multiple ways (i.e., developed new technical skills, strengthened socioemotional skills, etc.) Young people in the focus group

expressed interest in the idea of having additional arts programming available, such as painting, drawing, photography, cooking, dancing, and performing arts. They also shared that having longer sessions or a longer period of time would be beneficial, along with daily art activities incorporated into their classroom lessons to sustain their learnings. Additionally, not all students participated in the arts programming because they were not clear on what the programs entailed or were not interested in the specific art form being offered. To expand the reach of the arts to young people, Creative Wellbeing can provide various options of art forms for programming along with clarity of what the program entails so that young people have a chance to sample different types of art and have a clear understanding of the curriculum.

- **Design programs that are youth-centered and align with youth's interests.** Young people from the focus groups expressed interest in expanding their arts education. For some, the program did not match their expectations as the program shifted its focus and equipment throughout the sessions. This happened specifically in one program where the young people thought they were going to use cameras and other musical equipment rather than just iPads – “What I liked the least about the program was how we only got to use our iPads, not the equipment.” The shift in equipment left some young people disappointed in the curriculum. To have the programs be more youth-centered, Creative Wellbeing can ask young people for their input on program design along with which art forms they would like to participate in. During programming, teaching artists may consider having “pause points” for young people to reflect on their learnings and provide real-time feedback. If possible, teaching artists can course correct to ensure young people’s expectations are met or even exceeded.
- **Offer a peer learning model or train the trainer model to help build the capacity of teachers attending Creative Wellbeing to bring back learnings to other teachers at their school or site.** To expand Creative Wellbeing, teachers from each school participating in Creative Wellbeing can work together to support each other’s learning and spread awareness within their school site. In some cases, a subset of teachers from a school attends the professional development sessions together which strengthens their relationship through being vulnerable together and building trust. To continue and expand this bond with participating educators, schools can hold space outside the professional development sessions to reflect with each other on the successes and challenges of using a healing-centered approach in the classroom. This space can also be extended to others who have not participated in professional development sessions to spread awareness of Creative Wellbeing and healing-centered approaches.
- **Provide more training and coaching on applying and integrating healing-centered arts strategies into classrooms and therapeutic spaces.** Although adults may have tools readily available, they expressed interest in continuing to learn about healing-centered arts-based approaches. For some, they would like a centralized place where curriculum or packets of resources and tools are available or a place to reference the professional

development activities that they engaged in. Having materials readily available after professional development sessions can increase session engagement by alleviating the pressure to write everything down in the moment. Other opportunities to support ongoing learning for adults can include having coaches or peer support readily available to support adults with implementation along with having explicit conversations about the role of healing-centered approaches supporting youth mental health.

- **Extend opportunities for teachings artists to meet to share resources, troubleshoot and build connections and support.** Similar to bringing adults together, teaching artists can work together to share learnings, share lessons, provide support to each other, and share resources. Teaching artists can do these through group texts, centralized hubs, monthly meetings, or pairings. Pairings can also occur to pair those with lived experiences to support each other as they address challenges and traumas experienced by the young people served. Supporting the healing, skill building, and feeding the souls of teaching artists is an important component of sustaining and expanding this work.
- **Improve communication and coordination between site staff and teaching artists.** Site staff and teaching artists had mixed experiences working with each other. Some site staff noted that the teaching artists were planful and communicative while others experienced teaching artists that did not share their plans or were inconsistent in their attendance. In addition, some teaching artists felt that there was not enough planning time with site staff and did not feel confident to speak up. To ensure that both site staff and teaching artists have a positive experience, there can be more planful coordination, especially with scheduling, assistance with integrating learnings into curricula, and tools for supporting classroom management. This can include incorporating requirements into the implementation process for teaching artists to send materials to site staff in advance or implementing monthly meetings for teaching artists and site staff to discuss learnings, successes, and challenges along with build relationships with each other.
- **Continue to lead with a relational, humanistic, and responsive approach when integrating Creative Wellbeing into new settings.** At the partnership level, Creative Wellbeing’s ability to be human-centered and responsive to site needs is a huge driver of the program’s success. This approach enables each site to receive the programming in a way that aligns with their needs and priorities. This relational approach is also helpful for establishing trust and leveling power within the partnership.
- **Continue to seek input from DCFS sites on how adults and young people experience Creative Wellbeing to inform programming adjustments and future evaluation efforts.** In the current evaluation, most data were collected from adults working in school settings, mental health spaces, or DCFS sites and young people participating in Creative Wellbeing at school. Young people from DCFS sites were unable to participate in focus groups due to scheduling conflicts or little exposure to Creative Wellbeing

activities. DCFS sites tend to experience high amounts of turnover amongst staff and young people which can make it challenging to engage participants in data collection. Additionally, the trauma experienced by young people can make it difficult to engage in a way that feels emotionally safe. As such, for future evaluations, staff and the evaluation team should think creatively about how to capture young people's voices during the brief time they are at a DCFS site and in a way that allows them to feel safe. One example of a way to do this could be to integrate a small data collection activity such as a reflective question or survey into the end of *each* Creative Wellbeing session where young people have the opportunity to share their experience at the session. This type of approach to data collection would ensure the diverse voices from young people at DCFS sites are being heard and informing the evaluation and potential programming adjustments.