



[The fight against mental illness. Arm yourself with a paintbrush.](#)

You could dust off the karaoke microphone and start belting out your best rendition of the Frank Sinatra classic, New York, New York. Or maybe the latest from Taylor Swift is more your go-to and sing-along song.

You could put on your dancing shoes and re-live the glory days of Michael Jackson. Then again, you could arm yourself with that paintbrush and do a Michelangelo on your bedroom ceiling. Or simply doodle on a scribble pad or iPad.

Studies have shown that expressions through art can really help improve one's mental wellbeing – by reducing stress, lowering anxiety and increasing our good moods. And goodness knows, we all need our good moods increased – especially now with the stresses of life such as the rising cost of living.

Dr Christina Davies, Director of the Centre for Arts, Mental Health and Wellbeing WA within the School of Allied Health at the University of Western Australia believes we need, now more than ever, things in our lives that promote mental wellbeing. "Art is a great option," she says.

Her multi-award-winning research focuses on the areas of arts health, health promotion and mental wellbeing. Her current project – Good Arts Good Mental Health – invites you to take part in the arts. Five days of simple artistic activities – from 15 minutes of reading to taking some photos with your phone to listening to a couple of your favourite songs.

She says two hours a week is all you need and feels the GAGMH project “is about empowering people to prioritising their mental wellbeing.”

“And it doesn’t matter how you want to do it,” she explains. You could do it all in one go or do a different activity a day and spread it over the week.

Dr Christina says art is being prescribed as a form of therapy by health professionals in the UK and US and is being looked at by our federal government through the National Cultural Policy.

She also cites the recent six-month programme run by the Mandurah Performing Arts Centre – where some of the participants were referred to it by GP and medical professionals – as a great example of the therapeutic benefits of art.

She praises the free community-led project for improving people’s wellbeing through arts that included pottery, mosaics and painting.

“[But] art doesn’t need to be therapeutic to be good for you,” She goes on to say. “Art which is your hobby, art which you do for enjoyment, art that you do for entertainment.”

“You don’t need a therapist or someone to do it with you. You can do it by yourself,” she says.

In collaboration with multi-sector partners, the GAGMH project aims to create an evidence based, mental-health campaign to positively impact community arts engagement and mental wellbeing. Furthermore, you don’t need to be good at art for arts to be good for you.

You need not be a Leonardo DaVinci, Steven Spielberg or Tay Tay Swift to benefit. Just a simple colouring book from your local shop will work wonders. So too one of their poem books. Or one of their storybooks.

If you prefer something more imaginative, perhaps you could pop over to Herdsman or Bibra lake, film our famous black swans, add in Tchaikovsky’s Song of the Swans and produce the West Australian version of Swan Lake for your Instagram feed.

Any artistic activity will do. And will do wonderfully well.

So as you, together with the Chairman of the Board Mr Sinatra, sing “start spreading the news,” we indeed concur. Let’s start spreading the news about the mental health benefits of art.

And take up the Good Arts Good Mental Health 5-Day Arts Challenge [here](#).