

## **Griemens Art in Shelter Life Germany**

Art Therapy is a huge field in psychological theory and practise. I will not be able to report all the accumulated research and experience in this workshop. Expression with colours can be part of our therapeutic work as well as of pedagogical and social group work. I will give you some ideas, how to use it in your work with battered women in a shelter.

Our brain works with imaginative thinking. Psychological experience is that, if people don't have new, different pictures in their mind about what they can do, they can not imagine and change their future. They will always do the same they already know and repeat familiar behaviour.

Creative exercises use both sides of the brain - the creative right side as well as the logical left side. This helps promote development of decision-making using both sides of the brain in the future.

For battered women it is essential to imagine a future without violence. If the only experience in their life is violence (from parents, from partners), they often have no imagination of a non-violent life in reality (except for daily soaps in television) and need training. Following up on such training, it is essential to also take them to the next step of actually implementing their new imagination of a non-violent reality.

We have decided for our shelter that we do not want to provide therapy within the shelter since it is supposed to be the women's living space, not their treatment zone. This is even more relevant because the uncertain duration of their stay makes longer-term projects difficult. For therapy, women should go to a therapist of their choice, outside the shelter.

However, we do use the knowledge of art therapy to support women in their daily life.



**Some objectives** for which art can contribute in a shelter:

- having fun
- relaxation
- developing creativity
- implementing and ensuring compliance with limits (Mandalas)
- building self-awareness and self-confidence
- imagining parts of future life
- giving decision support
- reflecting on the experience of drawing and painting
- revealing and talking about individual feelings

### **Methods and Material**

- Drawing or painting with crayons, paint box or coloured chalk
- Mandala “An integrated structure organized around a unifying center” (Longchempa)
- Collage: cut pictures out of (women's) magazines and put them together to a new picture (possibly mixed with painting)
- Create yourself a “wellness-box” for sad days

## Themes, Subject, Work-Instructions

The work instructions depend on your objectives, the material you can provide as well as the respective situation of the women. I will give you some examples:

Draw yourself

- as a person
- as a flower, an animal or an object
- draw the outline of your body on a big sheet of paper and colour it

Draw something concrete of your future life

- your next flat
- your working place
- your family in the next flat
- the kind of woman you will be

Draw something you dream about (useful also for collages)

- the house you would like to live in
- the school you would like to go to
- holidays you would like to go on
- friends you would like to have
- the woman you would like to be

Colour a Mandala

- sit in a quiet place to colour the Mandala
- the process of focusing your thoughts and energy on colouring or creating a Mandala allows for any stress and tension to be released
- colouring the Mandala creates awareness of the boundaries ( like the lines to colour inside) that need to be placed in our lives
- colouring Mandalas works towards wholeness in personality

“Wellness Box”

- Take any box you can find (e. g. shoe box) and cover it with nice coloured paper
- Collect things that would help you to get over a problematic or depressive situation to exhilarate you
- Put those things, such as soft feathers, perfume, cinnamon or other nice herbs, notes with empowering sentences, a fluffy toy, a mascot, a talisman – whatever you think is good for you – into your Wellness box

Group work: Draw a picture together on a big sheet of paper

- A woman comes from shelter into her new flat and a group of women paint together a picture for her as a memory
- Draw a birthday card together for a woman

Take some time to think about the setting. The women should feel invited to do something creative. Make sure they don't feel assessed. Support their imagination by telling a story, playing ruminant music and create a relaxing atmosphere. Give them the possibility to choose from a varied range of material.

**Potential difficulties:**

My experience is that many women have not ever drawn again since their childhood. When you start working with them, they begin to argue: “I can not draw”; “Already in school, the teachers said that I can not draw”; “This is something for children, not for adults.”

The women are afraid that they and their painting will be appraised by you. Furthermore, they do not want to be educated. Or they start to giggle. You will have to overcome various defence mechanisms.

In these cases, it is not useful to argue. Invite the women to just try it. It might be easier to start with “Mandalas” or “Collages”. Establish a non-intimidating and protected setting. Avoid any communication which sounds like an assessment/ judgement. Calm music in the background promotes concentration and helps against giggling.

The women might not want to talk about their pictures. It is important to take this very serious. Perhaps they like to talk about their experience amongst each other, without the involvement of the staff. Or you can offer to talk about the pictures at another day in a more protected environment. Most important is the process of actually doing the paintings!

A few links to go on:

[www.mandalaproject.org](http://www.mandalaproject.org)

[www.baat.org](http://www.baat.org)

[www.catainfo.ca](http://www.catainfo.ca)

[www.arttherapy.org](http://www.arttherapy.org)

[www.art-therapy.us](http://www.art-therapy.us)

[www.anzata.org](http://www.anzata.org)

[www.arttherapyandalucia.com](http://www.arttherapyandalucia.com)

[www.igkgt-iaact.com](http://www.igkgt-iaact.com)

[www.agkb.de/content/view/32/117/](http://www.agkb.de/content/view/32/117/)

[www.uni-koeln.de/ew-fak/psychologie/personal/schuster.htm](http://www.uni-koeln.de/ew-fak/psychologie/personal/schuster.htm)