Article

Expanding the IDEA: Ongoing- and Evolving-Evaluation of an Art Therapy in Prisons Program

International Journal of Offender Therapy and Comparative Criminology
1–14

DOI: 10.1177/0306624X231213313
journals.sagepub.com/home/ijo
Sage

Marissa Hart[1], Evie Soape[1], Casey Barlow[1], Michelle Torrech-Perez[1], David E. Gussak[1], and Anna Schubarth[2]

Abstract

In 2021 an article was published that presented an art therapy in prisons program that emerged through a contractual partnership between a major state university and that state's Department of Corrections, funded by Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). The program was charged to provide art therapy with youthful offenders to alleviate behavioral, emotional, and intellectual impediments to their education. The program began in the summer of 2019 with a 3-year contract for two full-time art therapists for four sites. Responses to the annual reports and subsequent changes and benefits to the targeted population resulted in the contract being revised in the summer of 2021 that expanded it considerably, to four full-time art therapists for nine prisons. This follow-up research article will delineate the successful efficacy of this program and the impactful changes instituted since its inception and expansion. In addition, this article will further examine the evolution in the data gathering process, specifically applying more distinct considerations needed to accurately examine the effectiveness of the program.

Keywords

art therapy, art therapy in prison, correctional education, COVID-19 pandemic, IDEA, Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, youthful offenders

[1]Florida State University, Tallahassee, USA
[2]Florida Department of Corrections, Tallahassee, USA

Corresponding Author:
David E. Gussak, Florida State University, 3029 WJB, 143 Honors Way, Tallahassee, FL 32306-3029, USA.
Email: dgussak@fsu.edu

In 2021 an article, Soape et al. (2022) detailed the genesis and development of an art therapy in prisons program that emerged through a formal, contractual partnership between Florida State university and the Florida Department of Corrections, funded by Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). The program was charged to provide art therapy with youthful offenders to alleviate behavioral, emotional, and intellectual impediments to their education. The program began in the summer of 2019 with a 3-year contract which was to ostensibly end the summer of 2022, with an option to renew. This contract established a substantial budget that allowed, among other things, the hiring of two full-time art therapists to be placed in four prisons throughout Florida. However, responses to the annual reports and subsequent changes and benefits to the targeted population resulted in the contract being revised in the summer of 2021 that expanded it considerably, to four full-time art therapists providing services in nine prisons. This follow-up research article will delineate the overall efficacy of this program, and detail the impactful changes instituted since its inception and expansion. In addition, this article will further examine the evolution in the data gathering process, specifically applying more distinct considerations needed to accurately examine the effectiveness of the program.

Brief Overview

The program's focus was to bring art therapy services to those identified as youthful offenders (14–24 years old) in nine Florida prisons enrolled in special education programing. In particular, the program's mission was to help mitigate obstacles that interfered with their education while incarcerated, ultimately assisting in their ability to successfully earn their General Educational Development certification (GEDs). To do so, the art therapy program was to demonstrably decrease the participants' disciplinary referrals, reduce time in confinement, and improve programing attendance. This was to be accomplished through a combination of individual and group art therapy sessions. Assignment to these sessions were determined in conjunction with Special Education staff/faculty during the Individual Education Plan (IEP) meetings.

In winter 2020 the program was disrupted by COVID-19, forcing it to reevaluate its goals. To prevent *over*-isolation for an already vulnerable and sequestered population, the art therapists proactively developed strategies to continue providing services for the next 10 months. These included art-based workbooks, instructional sheets, and written correspondence with materials for the participants to complete in their dorms and cells (Barlow et al., 2022). After months of these indirect services, the Florida Department of Corrections determined that it was safe to resume in-person sessions on a limited basis, following proper CDC guidelines. Group sizes were limited to nine people with established social distancing and mask protocol. After some unpredictable interruptions to this restart, the art therapists returned to the institutions on a limited basis between July and November 2020 with some intermittent suspensions following the increase of COVID-19 cases in the institutions. The team returned permanently in December 2020 and began the transition to full sessions, addressing the original goals as established.

Unexpected Outcomes

The 2021 annual report provided to the Florida Department of Corrections, and as reflected in subsequent publications (Barlow et al., 2022; Soape et al., 2022, 2023) empirically revealed the benefits of this program, meeting the expected deliverables despite these unintended pivots. As a result, rather than waiting for the established agreement to end in the summer of 2022, the Florida Department of Corrections' educational program chose to develop a new contract to begin by the start of the fiscal year, July 2021. This new one included hiring two new art therapists and expanding the number of institutions to nine prisons in which services would be provided. The program also expanded the parameters of who the participants could be; it would not be limited to just include participants enrolled in Special Education classes—although they would still be prioritized—and it widened the age span for those in attendance. As the data reveals below, while the majority of those in attendance were designated youthful offenders, the program also provided services to those older than 24 years old, who were also pursuing their GED and other educational goals. This went into effect beginning September 2021.

Another unexpected positive outcome emerged from the strategies employed during the period of "over-isolation" caused by the pandemic to address the resultant increase in mental illness and other vulnerabilities (Burton et al., 2021; Carvalho et al., 2020). Recognizing the measured effectiveness of the program when offering the art-based services for individuals segregated from the general population, the program was allowed to continue offering services for those in confinement by the state and institutional administrations. Prior to this agreement, if sessions were canceled or a participant did not attend therapy sessions due to restricted movement, that participant simply did not receive services. Accepting that some participants are placed in isolation for administrative reasons—such as health reasons or for their own safety—the program received permission to continue offering security-approved materials and remote activities via workbooks and drawing prompts for those "locked down" (Barlow et al., 2022). In the instances where participants were placed in isolation and seclusion for reasons other than medical, the therapists would visit with the participants in their dorms or speak with them at their cell doors through holes and cracks in the door. To record these accurately, our monthly attendance reports separated cell-door visits and remote services from group and individual sessions provided. These nuanced recordings were just one evolving method of data gathering that informed the overall results.

Data Gathering and Results

Per approval obtained through the Florida State University Institutional Review Board (IRB), a detailed method for obtaining data and ascertaining results was accepted early 2020. It was later edited and resubmitted to the IRB to comply with COVID-19 restrictions, initially altering the program's structure and intention in Spring 2021. This was further edited and adjusted to account for the expansion of the personnel and site

locations in fall 2021, and then again renewed in Spring 2022. Thus, our evolving data gathering methods continued to be reviewed by the IRB.

The research design has been primarily a combination of empirical, descriptive, and qualitative inquiries. This included observation of the inmates' participation, review of ongoing art therapy progress notes, and semi-structured discussions with institutional personnel. In addition, semi-structured discussions were held with the participants' at least once every quarter or until anticipated discharge from the program/institution/system.

All data had been and remains secured according to HIPAA regulations and expectations. Accordingly, part of the contract includes a courtesy appointment through the Florida State University's College of Medicine, which maintains the HIPAA compliance. Each participant was provided an identity code associated with their name secured by the art therapists within each of their institutions. This has assured that identifying information, even Florida Departmetn of Corrections ID numbers, do not leave the institution. All identifying data was removed from all artwork kept by the team, and when the artwork was photographically recorded, any identifying information was covered. If the artwork was too revealing about the inmate participant, the particular art piece was not photographed.

Each participant signed a consent form that explained this study and that was to grant permission to use their artwork, assuring their anonymity outside of the Department of Corrections. This form was approved by the university's IRB and has been reviewed by the state's department of corrections. The source records included any and all disciplinary reports instituted by the facility, demographic questionnaires, and clinical progress notes, with all identifying data redacted. This data collection is ongoing until the removal of the inmates' participation in the educational programing and/or participation in the art therapy program, the transfer of the inmate or their discharge from the system, and/or the end of the contract.

Participants

There were 308 individual men and women who received these services in the nine institutions during the 2021 to 2022 fiscal year. These included individuals engaged in consistent art therapy services for at least 1 month. This was an increase of 59% over the previous year, notable as during this period it took the two new art therapists 2 to 3 months before they were able to begin offering services in their respective settings. The participants' current age or age of their release or termination of their educational program was also recorded.

Twenty-five (8.1%) of the participants were 18 years old or younger, 138 (44.8%) were between 19 and 21 years old, 99 (32.2%) were between 22 and 29 years old, 30 (9.7%) were between 30 and 39 years old, and 16 (5.2%) were between 40 and 49 years old. The designation for race and gender has been provided in the manner in which the institutions record this information. Their records do not account for those with variations within their racial, gender, and cultural identity. As such, 254 (82.5%) were identified as men and 54 (17.5%) were women; 198 (64.3%) were Black, 79 (25.6%) White, 30 (9.7%) were Hispanic, and 1 person (0.3%) was designated unknown.

Criminal charges leading to their incarceration included, but were not limited to: first degree murder; second degree murder; aggravated assault with deadly weapon; burglary of unoccupied dwelling; burglary of occupied dwelling; robbery; robbery with a deadly weapon; carjacking (inc. with deadly weapon); grand theft of motorized vehicle; battery; aggravated battery; sexual battery with weapon; aggravated assault; child abuse; DUI manslaughter; prison escape; fraud; molestation attempt; assault of a law enforcement officer; trafficking stolen property; manufacturing and possession of controlled and illicit substances; and criminal mischief.

Attendance

Attendance and participation varied for each clinician due to systemic differences, variations in how and when services could be provided given the schedules of the four art therapists in their respective institutions, availability of meeting spaces, and materials available and allowed. As well, while the results indicated that the art therapists met with 308 individual participants, many of these were seen on multiple occasions—in groups, individual sessions, and dorm and cell-door visits. A number of factors amongst and within each of the settings influenced their respective attendance rates inconsistently throughout the year. These included isolation and quarantine due to pandemic resurgence, the therapists' illness, and systemic events that limited movement such as training and not having enough security and staff. In addition, certain participants were placed in administrative isolation for reasons other than disciplinary actions. These participants, seen at their cell door or in their dorms, were included into the attendance data as well.

A total of 4,716 total hours/sessions were offered/scheduled for the 308 participants; 3,374 were held, indicating an attendance rate of 71.5%. However, while absences were recorded for individual participants, an absence did not exclude a group session from occurring with the remaining members. Thus, there was an overlap of attendance hours provided and absences recorded. In other words, although 1,342 hours/sessions were recorded as not occurring, this does not indicate that there were that many hours in which the team members were not providing services—rather the amount of sessions held exceeded this percentage in comparison to the percentage of canceled sessions due to absence.

The team provided 927 hours of individual sessions. For the 523 group sessions held (ranging from 1 to 2 hours each) a total of 1,998 contact hours/sessions were recorded. In addition, 449 individual services were offered at the cell doors. As expected, there was a decrease in the number of remote services provided compared to the previous year.

The team soon realized the importance of delineating specific attendance and absence criteria. Originally, one of the deliverable goals—increasing program attendance—was based on an assumption that if someone did *not* attend it was because of behavioral reasons or that they simply refused; in other words, that the participants were in control of their attendance. This was not the case. To gather more accurate data, the art therapy team developed more specific coding categories:

- ***Administration***: Security Reason, Compound Lockdown, Movement, Staff Accountability; Dorm Lockdown; Conflicting Call-out; Educational Testing; Transfer; Medical, Quarantine; Unenrolled or Unassigned from Education, Out to Court, End of Sentence
- ***Staff***: Scheduling Issues; Staff Shortages; Staff Factors; Clinician Factors
- ***Participants***: Disciplinary Confinement; Administrative Confinement; Refused; Health; Unknown

Overall, 45.4% of all of the absences were attributed to administrative reasons, 19.3% for staff reasons, and 34.3% were because of the participants. This revealed that almost 65% of the absences were due to circumstances beyond the participants' control. Broken down further, these absences included 18% that were due to security reasons and 18.3% due to conflicting schedules or "call outs." While 8.1% of all absences were because of staff shortages, 6.8% were due to the clinicians' absences, either because of illness or training.

While 34.3% of all absences were specifically participant-related, the overall reasons and specific details are more distinct. Four percent of all absences were due to a participant's refusal to attend a session without a stated reason. Additionally, a small percentage were placed in disciplinary (8.3%) or administrative (4.3%) confinement, often exercised when there is concern for the individual's safety and thus under protective custody. Alternatively, individuals who are near incidences of violence, riots, or "gang related activity" and are affiliated or suspected gang members may be placed in administrative confinement pending an investigation. Fifteen percent of the absences were unaccountable or for unknown reasons, which, although included under the category of participant-based reason, could conceivably have been for *any* of the reasons stated above.

The nuanced parsing for non-attendance proved valuable in demonstrating—and, in turn, addressing, confronting, and overcoming—some of the systemic obstacles present. Prior, it was believed that absences reflected poor investment in the clinical program by the participant, thus flattening its recorded effectiveness. However, by recognizing and clarifying the absences that were unavoidable because of such obstacles, it allowed the team to focus on what *did* work, *why* it worked, and what could be changed—if need be—in the future. For example, such results gave truth to the team's need to continue offering services for those isolated, ultimately providing them to those that were, arguably, most at risk for digression and regression. With such data, the institutional administration allowed this strategy to continue.

Disciplinary Reports

As the above section reflects, increasing attendance in art therapy could facilitate an increase in *all* programing—such presence will more likely result in educational success, particularly when compared to *not* being in attendance. In turn, behavioral problems and disciplinary action must decrease as this typically results in time in confinement and removal from the academic setting. Thus, our goals were not to only

increase attendance, but to *decrease* actions that may result in such removal. To record this, the team documented the behavioral interventions known as disciplinary reports (DRs) received by participants at their respective institutions.

However, what confounds these results is that disciplinary reports are given for a *range* of infractions: from non-violent, such as insufficient work or unexcused absence, to violent, such as battery and assault. As a result, the team created a coding method to differentiate the type of DRs obtained. Thus, the team systematically examined the *types* of infractions earned, how often, and, if it resulted in disciplinary confinement, how many days they were sentenced

Four categories were distinguished:

- ***Non-Violent***—Telephone/Mail Violations, Tablet Regulations, Illegal Financial; Tattooing; Unauthorized Area; Unauthorized Absence, Refusal to Work, Insufficient Work; Possession of Contraband, Bartering, Unauthorized Transaction; Unauthorized Use of Technology; Sex Acts, Unauthorized Physical Contact, Lewd or Lascivious Exhibition; Attempting to Establish a Relationship with Staff; Theft, Robbery; Refusing Substance Abuse Test, Unauthorized Use of Drugs; Manufacture of Drugs/Beverages; Failing Housing/Hygiene
- ***Disrespect***—Disrespect to Official, Disobeying Orders and Regulations, Disorderly Conduct, Lying to Staff, Obscene Profane, Failure to Comply
- ***Disturbance/Riot***—Attempt to Incite Riot, Participating in a Disturbance, Inciting Riots, Attempt to Conspire; Tampering with Security Device/Ability to do their job; Gang Related Activity; Arson
- ***Violent***—Battery, Assault, Fighting; Spoken Threats; Possession of Weapons; Breaking and Entering

Yet, while the team members are able to indicate the total number of DRs the participants received, the results were incomplete unless the clinicians were able to compare the number of reports the participants earned. In response, the team intended on collecting comparative data from the previous fiscal year to the current one; that is, demonstrating effective change between the 2 years. However, as the team collected and examined this data, it became clear that not all of the program participants were incarcerated for the full 2 years, thus no full data for all participants was available for the fiscal year 2020 to 2021. As a result, the team decided to alter what was being examined, and they began collecting data on those who were in the program but not incarcerated for a full 2 years. With them, the art therapy team compared any reports received when the participants were enrolled in the program compared to when they were not. As a result, the team recorded two sets of data as represented in Tables 1 and 2.

Table 1 represents what was the original intention; that is, improvement that occurred between the previous and current fiscal year. Ninety-three (30.2%) of all our participants were incarcerated two full consecutive fiscal years, and had been enrolled in art therapy services at some point during that time. This allowed us to compare their DRs received between the two fiscal years (2020–2021 compared to 2021–2022) with the assumption that DRs and time spent in confinement will decrease over time, as will

Table 1. Disciplinary Reports: Participants Incarcerated for the Duration of Previous Fiscal Year (2020–2021) AND Current Fiscal Year (2021–2022).

Number of participants	DR amount	Previous	Current	Days sentenced
N = 93	Increase: 31	42	40	Increase: 34
	Decrease: 33	7	11	Decrease: 37
	Neutral: 29	92	95	Neutral: 23
		69	61	

Note. Sample size (*N*) includes the total number of participants from nine prisons in Florida (*N* = 93). Red = violent; Yellow = disturbance/riot; Blue = disrespect; Green = non-violent.

Table 2. Disciplinary Reports by Institution: Participants Incarcerated for Partial Time of Previous AND/OR Current Fiscal Year With Comparable Data of DRs Received Outside of Art Therapy Services Versus During Services.

Number of participants	DR amount	Outside	During	Days sentenced
N = 140	Increase: 23	59	28	Increase: 34
	Decrease: 64	15	5	Decrease: 60
	Neutral: 54	173	62	Neutral: 46
		77	28	

Note. Sample size (*N*) includes the total number of participants from nine prisons in Florida (*N* = 140). Red = violent; Yellow = disturbance/riot; Blue = disrespect; Green = non-violent.

the severity of the disciplinary infraction. The data was originally collected and presented for each individual institution, and then combined to demonstrate overall change. These tables provide the collective summaries.

As reflected in Table 1, 31 (33%) of the 93 participants had more DRs in the current fiscal year as compared to the previous, 33 (35%) of them received fewer, and 29 (31%) of them received the same amount. The next two columns reflect the number of DRs obtained within the designated incident severity categories during these years. Each was color coded to correspond with the type of incident report received as noted above: red for violent; yellow for disturbance/riot; blue for disrespect; and green for non-violent. Collectively they received two fewer violent DRs than the previous year ($42 > 40$), an increase of four DRs in the category that reflects disturbances ($7 < 11$), three more received DRs for disrespect ($92 < 95$), and eight fewer for non-violent DRs ($69 > 61$). Overall, 34 increased the number of days sentenced in seclusion, 37 decreased the number of days, and 23 received the same amount from the previous year. It appears that these numbers reflect that there seemed to be *greater* DRs earned overall; however, these numbers were somewhat skewed by confounding data. When broken down further, there were some marked improvements in some areas and settings. This is disseminated further in the overall summation below.

Table 2 includes those who were incarcerated for part of the time the previous (2020–2021) and/or current fiscal year (2021–2022), and compares the number of DRs received during the time they were *not* receiving art therapy services to any earned while they *were* receiving services. It is believed that this chart may more

accurately convey any effect the program may have on the number and type of DRs received during their incarceration. In other words, if the program is as effective as intended, DRs would decrease when the participants were enrolled and attending the program compared to when they were not. Still, there are two unaccounted and confounding considerations: The team did not ascertain if the time outside of the services preceded or followed the services they received, and while the time in sessions were comparable to the time outside of sessions, they were not exact. Still, the overall results were impressive.

In all of the institutions, 140 participants fit within this category—those incarcerated in the institution for part of the current or previous fiscal year and had at one point received services. This category accounted for 45.2% of the total number of participants. Twenty-three (16%) demonstrated an increase, 64(46) a decrease, and 54 (38%) remained the same from when they were receiving services as compared to when they were not. The next two columns are color coded similarly to the previous table, and indicate the *types* of DRs they earned when in the program as compared to when not enrolled. Collectively: there were 31 fewer violent DRs than the previous year ($59 > 28$), 10 fewer disturbance DRs ($15 < 5$), 111 fewer disrespect DRs ($173 < 62$), and 49 fewer non-violent DRs ($77 < 28$). Overall, 24 (24%) increased the number of days sentenced in seclusion, 60 (43) decreased the number of days, and 46 (33%) received the same amount from the previous year.

Of the total number of participants, there were 75 not included in either of the previous tables, accounting for 24.4%. These include those who had been enrolled in the art therapy program immediately upon incarceration. As such, there was no available data on their behavior when they were *not* receiving services. Yet, while they were excluded from this set of data, they may be used as a control/special group as the program moves into the next fiscal year.

Selective Summation and Discussion

While Table 1 did not seem to reflect impressive effectiveness over time reflected during the 2 years, the results greatly varied amongst the institutions. Several indicators are noteworthy and should be taken into consideration; while the populations of the original four settings were similar—all designated as special education sites—as the program expanded, so did the types of participants, settings, and institutions. Seeing more participants with widely disparate security designations and placements impacted the frequency of the sessions, the methods of how the services could be provided, and the amount of face to face contact each participant received. This impacted the consistency and overall effectiveness of the services provided. The five new institutions went through an adjustment period during this year to this new type of intervention. In addition, because of their respective custody designations, several of these sites were highly susceptible to restrictions and seclusion due to the severity of the behavior, crimes, and infractions of their designated wards.

Another factor that seemed to impact the results is that the length of time spent in confinement was determined by each institution's security staff and was influenced by

the type of setting and those housed there. In other words, officers in a designated higher security setting may have been more prone to disciplining certain behavioral infractions as opposed to those in specially designated educational settings. Thus, two participants may receive different punishments for the same DR depending on the site and personnel. Lastly, as the program expanded, more sites were added, thus some sites did not have art therapists on staff for the entire fiscal year and/or the previous fiscal year.

To illustrate some of these impactful complications, two of the new sites included Close Management (CM) programs—this refers to those placed in extended confinement due to behavioral and safety concerns. One of these institutes accounted for the second greatest number of participants in Table 1; it was this setting that skewed the overall numbers, increasing greatly in three of the four DR severity categories—violence (+9), disturbance (+3), and disrespect (+1). This setting was not only prone toward more behavioral issues, but it was also a new site during this past fiscal year, requiring different adaptation and strategies for addressing their needs that took time to develop. However, the second CM institution, which had programing the previous year, demonstrated a marked *decrease* in the top two DR severity categories. This potentially revealed more effective, long-term adjustments.

One of the new sites is considered an *Administrative Management Unit* (AMU), a restricted environment used to house potentially aggressive participants that require special programing. This setting, which accounted for the third highest number of participants, also accounted for very little improvement in the number of DRs between the 2 years. Overall, the data from these sites generally skewed and flattened the overall results.

Taking these confounding variables into consideration, the remaining results demonstrated significantly greater improvement in those participants in the current fiscal year as compared to the previous one. As a result, the data in Table 2 becomes even more impressive, demonstrating an overall marked decrease in *all* categories of DRs for those participants receiving services as compared to when they were not. Denzel was just one individual who demonstrated marked change in his behavior and engagement in programing, relying on the artmaking to explore and ultimately understand, and transform the underlying drives that resulted in previously destructive behavior.

Denzel. Denzel (pseudonym) is a 24-year-old black man who was serving a 20 year sentence in an open-population prison for aggravated battery with a deadly weapon, robbery, and home invasion. Denzel was serving his second prison term since 2016, returning only a year after his previous release, and was incarcerated for 6 years before participating in art therapy services. During the prior fiscal year, Denzel received four disciplinary reports for infractions that were deemed "disrespectful" (1) and "nonviolent" (3). The following fiscal year (after participation in art therapy services), Denzel received one disciplinary report for unauthorized possession of a cell phone but was not sentenced to time in confinement, reflecting a marked improvement in behavior and reduction of behavioral intervention.

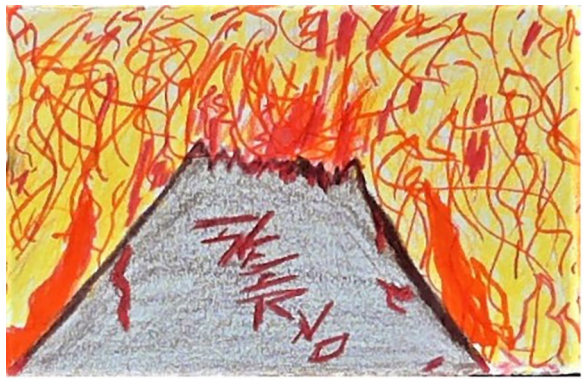

Figure 1. Inferno.

Denzel enrolled in academic programing voluntarily, due to his desire to participate in productive activities while serving his second prison sentence. This afforded him the opportunity to enroll in art therapy which he requested to join with hopes of making positive personal changes and improving overall well-being. He was assigned to an art therapy group.

At the start of art therapy services, Denzel enthusiastically engaged in the art processes and was willing to discuss his artwork and experiences with the other group members. Denzel told the others in the group that he has made efforts to change aspects of himself and his behavior during this prison term because he did not want to "make the same mistakes again" and return to prison a third time. Through art therapy, he could expand his creative practice with access to materials to process internal struggles as well as external pressures experienced while incarcerated.

Denzel explained that he had been called "Flame" since he was a young child because of his reckless behavior and reputation of causing trouble. However, he expressed that he has matured during this current incarceration, altering, he believes, this reputation. Despite this, he kept the nickname, seeing it as a viable self-symbol that would allow him to explore his dueling constructive and destructive attributes through his art. For example, Denzel stressed that while the volcano in Figure 1, "Inferno," represented his anger and past destructive behaviors, it also signified the opportunity for rebirth and renewal.

As he progressed in the program, Denzel began to process challenges and conflicts he experienced with some of his peers. In one session, Denzel admitted that although he left the gang with which he was once affiliated, he often felt pressured to return to gang related activities. He further explained that he simply felt weighed down by negativity that pervaded his institutional existence. Still, he argued, he worked on remaining positive, to "be a source of light and inspiration for others." From a song he composed that underscored these experiences, he created an

Figure 2. Danger XO.

accompanying illustration, "Danger XO" (Figure 2). He explained that it "was made in light of all the hardships in life. (Although surrounded by) all the violence and madness, I'm still able to express love and be in the middle of it all."

Denzel continued to process his evolving identity during group sessions particularly as he reconstructed the meaning of his long-held nickname. With improved self-awareness and intentionality, he focused on constructive aspects of the "Flame," as reflected in Figure 3, completed well into the program.

The figure is born from fire and holds a seemingly resilient and determined stance. Denzel communicated his determination to remain optimistic, continue learning, and "be the light" that inspires others. Through artmaking and the creative process, Denzel was able to redirect once destructive tendencies and reconsolidate his experiences which fueled positive personal transformation. The final product provides a platform in which to communicate visually and verbally his experience with this process.

Recognizing the role of identity in personal transformation, Denzel utilized the art therapy process to explore his identity and the underlying emotions and beliefs that guide his behavior. Over the course of his participation, he became more engaged in art therapy and educational programing which galvanized this change. The reduction of disciplinary reports and time spent in confinement was the resulting by-product of his new intentions. Although this vignette demonstrates positive outcomes, even the most effective interventions do not always result in happy endings. While Denzel's number of disciplinary reports decreased, and he engaged more in programing, an incident occurred shortly before the writing of this manuscript that required, he be placed in protective custody, and then transferred to a site where art therapy is not yet offered.

Summary. The Florida State University/Florida Department of Corrections Art Therapy in Prisons program began with simple goals—to effectively increase program

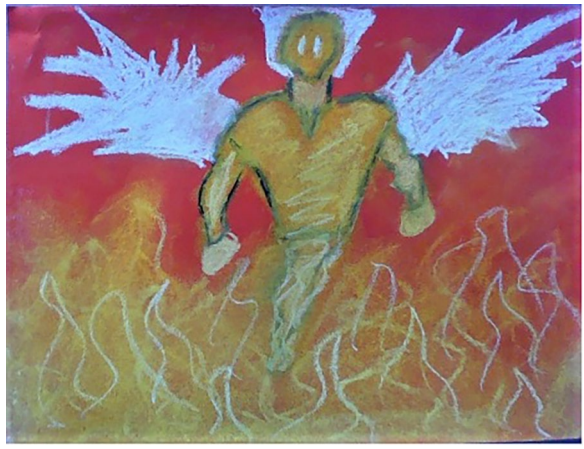

Figure 3. Untitled.

participation and decrease incident and disciplinary reports, removing the impediments that make obtaining an education inside the institution challenging. However, as this article reflects, over time, many institutional, environmental, and systemic obstacles needed to be categorically considered in order to effect, and accurately gauge, change. The program expanded and the number and type of settings, clinicians and participants increased, and, as a result, differences in expectations and security level occurred. The criteria on what necessitated discipline and seclusion varied. It became rapidly clear that the originally simple data criteria were no longer sufficient. Thus, this paper serves two different but overlapping functions—to explain the transitional and ever-evolving methods and means necessary to ascertain change within such severe and sometimes unyielding yet diverse institutions *and* to ultimately demonstrate the overall change that did occur.

On the surface, the 3,374 hours of art therapy services provided were marginally effective in improving attendance and decreasing disciplinary reports and incidents for the 308 participants in the nine settings. However, when specifics were considered and details were deconstructed, the results were much more striking; Denzel was just one example. This further informed the team and the institutions—and the reader—of *how* the program was effective, and the specific systemic nuances to consider to maintain and continue change. Still, while there have been instrumental changes in what data was collected and how it was evaluated, the program continues to evolve. This next year will see further alterations in how and what data is gathered, which, in turn, will continue to inform the team on how and where it is most effective while paving the way for even further expansion.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Funding

The author(s) received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

ORCID iDs

Evie Soape https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7283-9495

Casey Barlow https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9704-1236

Michelle Torrech-Perez https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5046-3041

David E. Gussak https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2836-6608

References

Barlow, C., Soape, E., Gussak, D. E., & Schubarth, A. (2022). Mitigating *over*-isolation: Art therapy in prisons program during COVID-19. *Art Therapy: Journal of the American Art Therapy Association*, *39*(2), 71–80. https://doi.org/10.1080/07421656.2021.2003679

Burton, P. R. S., Morris, N. P., & Hirschtritt, M. E. (2021). Mental health services in a U.S. Prison during the COVID-19 pandemic. *Psychiatric Services*, *72*, 458–460. https://doi.org/10.1176/appi.ps.202000476

Carvalho, S. G., Santos, A. B. S., & Santos, I. M. (2020). The pandemic in prison: Interventions and over-isolation [English trans.]. *Ciência & Saúde Coletiva*, *25*(9), 3493–3502. https://doi.org/10.1590/1413-81232020259.15682020

Soape, E., Barlow, C., Gussak, D. E., Brown, J., & Schubarth, A. (2022). Creative IDEA: Introducing a statewide art therapy in prison program. *International Journal of Offender Therapy and Comparative Criminology*, *66*(12), 1285–1302. https://doi.org/10.1177/0306624X211013731

Soape, E., Barlow, C., Torrech Pérez, M., Hart, M., Gussak, D. E., Schubarth, A., & Sumner, C. (2023). Art therapy in prisons program exhibition: Implementation and benefits. *Art Therapy: Journal of the American Art Therapy Association*. Advance online publication. https://doi.org/10.1080/07421656.2023.2202286