



**SERVICE REPORT: Online Art Therapy Clinic 2022**

A collaboration between art therapy students  
from Western Sydney University and carers  
who access services at Stride



# Acknowledgement of Country

In the spirit of reconciliation Western Sydney University and Stride acknowledge and pay respect to the past, present and future Traditional Custodians and Elders of country, on the lands in which Western Sydney University and Stride are located and, throughout Australia. We honour the continuation of cultural, spiritual, and educational practices of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples today.

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Report written by Sally Grant (WSU) in consultation with Danielle Carson (Stride) and Sheridan Linnell (WSU).

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In 2021 Western Sydney University (WSU) piloted the Online Art Therapy Clinic in partnership with Stride Mental Health Services. In the second half of 2022 the Online Art Therapy Clinic reopened.

Master of Art Therapy students were invited to offer online art therapy to Stride clients who are carers of loved ones with lived experience of major mental health issues. Originally conceived as an accessible approach to provide online art therapy during the pandemic, the usefulness and convenience of online art therapy in the carers' home environment became apparent. This program has provided WSU and Stride with an opportunity to explore this new concept and with remarkable success.

This report shares the success of the online clinic, as an example of the therapeutic potential of art in therapy and how this is possible online, in fact how delivering art therapy online invites new creative connections. You will hear how the benefit of receiving online art therapy supports better self-care practices and opens stories to be explored safely in the comfort of the participants' own homes.

The ground-breaking nature of this project provided an opportunity for WSU researchers to conduct an enquiry with students as research partners. Their findings will be reported on separately.

Meanwhile, we have shared some feedback that carers and students offered for this report, highlighting the success and some unexpected outcomes of the clinic.



# Key participants

Central to the clinic are the carers, supported by the students who are then supported by Stride and the university.

Due to privacy, we have not included the names of the wonderful carers involved in the clinic. However, we do thank them for providing permission to share their words that were included in the WSU-Stride clinic's client feedback forms.

The clinic supported seven carers that self-referred through Stride. Six students provided weekly or fortnightly sessions via Zoom. One carer and one student were unable to continue beyond the first session due to an unforeseeable change in the carer's circumstances. Therefore, five students continued with six carers.

**WSU Students:** Adele Koulouris, Karen Ryder, Yvonne "Von" Minh Tinh Le, Usha Rangaraj, Amanda Birkbeck and Hayley Coghlan.

**Representing Stride:** Danielle Carson, Service Leader.

**Representing WSU:** Associate Professor Sheridan Linnell, Discipline Lead, Art Therapy and Counselling, Suzanne Perry, Clinical Placement Coordinator and Sally Grant, Online Art Therapy Clinic Coordinator.

Clinic Report prepared and written by Sally Grant, in consultation with Danielle Carson and Sheridan Linnell

Stride is an Australian mental health not-for profit community organisation and registered charity that offers mental health services to people of all ages in several states and territories of Australia. Their main services include accommodation, therapeutic support, and support coordination. Seven carers self-referred to the clinic. The clinic was advertised through the Stride carer network by Danielle Carson, Service Leader.

Western Sydney University's Master of Art Therapy program is a clinical training program that teaches students how to use visual art media within a therapeutic relationship to help people who may need additional support in their lives. Students gain theoretical knowledge and practical experience required to work as an art therapist in a wide variety of contexts.

As part of their training students are required to undertake clinical placements. Six students were invited to provide online art therapy to the seven carers on the Stride program. Suzanne Perry, Clinical Placement Coordinator, WSU organised placements with the service.

## A word from Sheridan...

We at Western Sydney University are delighted that this vibrant collaboration with Stride has proved so mutually beneficial to the Stride community of carers and to our trainee art therapists in their final year of the Master of Art Therapy. I first met with Stride Manager Sarah Holmes and our placement coordinator for the Master of Art Therapy, Suzanne Perry, back in mid-2021, and we came up with a way that online art therapy could support carers to access services and provide placement opportunities for some of our students during a long Covid lockdown. It has turned out that the pandemic is not the only reason to provide art therapy online - that offering the option of a service that reaches into carers' homes makes ongoing sense and can significantly increase accessibility and participation. WSU's employment of Sally Grant as coordinator of the student clinic with Stride - working in close collaboration with Stride Team Leader Danielle Carson to ensure best practice and accountability - has been key to the consolidation and blossoming of this partnership in the second half of 2022. My respect and gratitude toward Sarah, Danielle, their colleagues and of course the carers in the Stride community keeps growing ever more strongly. We are currently conducting some research that will further illuminate the mutual benefits to carers and trainee art therapists. Meanwhile I am excited to say that the leadership of the School of Social Sciences is fully supportive of this outstanding initiative, and that we anticipate that the clinic will continue into 2023 and beyond!

### **Associate Professor Sheridan Linnell**

Discipline Lead for Arts Therapy and Counselling  
WSU Community Clinics Board  
School of Social Sciences  
Western Sydney University



“It has turned out that the pandemic is not the only reason to provide art therapy online - that offering the option of a service that reaches into carers' homes makes ongoing sense and can significantly increase accessibility and participation.”

### **Associate Professor Sheridan Linnell**

## A word from Danielle...

Over the past five to six months, Stride's Family and Carer Mental Health Program had the pleasure to work collaboratively with Western Sydney University. We have been working with their students who were in their last year doing the Master of Art Therapy in the Art Therapy Online Clinic. During this time, myself, and Sally Grant - Clinic Coordinator, carefully worked together for the very best outcomes for the students and Stride Carers.

This program is so enriching for our carers who have very stressful moments in their lives and too often forget about looking after themselves. I worked with the carers, before and throughout the program assisting them with their caring role and after the program finished with seeking their feedback of their experience while part of the Art Therapy Online Clinic.

It was so encouraging to hear about the progress that all the carers got out of their time spent with the students. Carers reported how nice it was that they were able to have some time that was allocated just to themselves, as it was booked in, they committed to this as their self-care time. The Carers and students got creative with the therapy, and the students considered the goals of each carer.

**Danielle Carson**  
Service Leader  
Stride



“This program is so enriching for our carers who have very stressful moments in their lives and too often forget about looking after themselves.”

**Danielle Carson**

## A word from Sally...

Working alongside Danielle from Stride this year has been a wonderful collaboration of ideas and ways to provide best support to the carers at Stride, as well as providing the students with practical and in-depth learning experiences to further support their opportunities to extend their art therapy practices in the future.

One of the benefits of meeting online is making art therapy accessible to those who are isolated, who may need to prioritise the needs of others or who are unable to travel. The online clinic means that both carer and student can be sitting in a private space in the comfort of their own home where the carer can receive, and the student art therapist can offer support.

Many of the students were spending several hours each week travelling to their placements, many of the carers were having to travel between appointments or needed to remain close to those they are caring for. Working online seemed to relieve some of these pressures. Carers could remain within ear shot of those they are caring for and they could continue with their creative practice well after sessions had finished, not only because they had an art pack to explore but because students and Stride ensured carers were supported to do so.

We are very grateful to Stride for partnering with WSU and for seeing the potential of this program to support the Stride carers. I thank Danielle, Jess and Sarah at Stride for their commitment and expertise to make the clinic the success it is.

### **Sally Grant**

Art Therapy Online Clinic Coordinator  
School of Social Sciences  
Western Sydney University



“Carers could remain within ear shot of those they are caring for and they could continue with their creative practice well after sessions had finished...”

### **Sally Grant**



“Everyone only had positive and lovely things to say about their time doing the art therapy, they all seemed to have a perfect fit with the therapists. In saying that, the therapists were all so amazing and skilled that they made it a great fit.”

**Danielle Carson**, Service Leader, Stride

## A partnership to serve various needs in the community

As described above by Sheridan, Danielle and Sally, the online clinic proved to be a welcome and much needed service for the community as well as providing in-depth learning experiences for the students. Despite the limited number of sessions that could be offered due to the time limit, both student and carer described the many benefits of art therapy online.

Stride recognises the need to support those who are caring for others and is keen to collaborate to ensure an accessible and beneficial program that gives back to the carer whilst being able to offer a placement opportunity for students of the Master of Art Therapy program.

The University's aim was to provide quality online art therapy for Stride carers that not only benefited the carers but provided the students with rich learning experiences. By ensuring they were well supported through the process of working online, this provided a learning opportunity beneficial to the future of the students' art therapy practice.

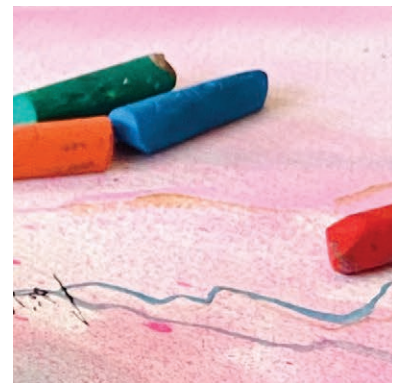
# How it worked

WSU's experienced and dedicated Master of Art Therapy students facilitated one-on-one online art therapy sessions for individual Stride carers each week as part of their clinical placement, using a strengths-based approach to support and guide self-care practices.

The students introduced the carers to the processes of art therapy with the intention that the carers would be able to continue a creative self-care practice beyond the sessions using the art packs provided and through a new or rediscovered connection to self.

## Art Therapy Online Clinic Sept–Dec 2022

- Who:** Seven carers and six students
- Where:** Carer's home or other suitable private location
- How:** Via Zoom using laptops or other suitable devices that allowed for student and carer to share the work easily and communicate clearly.
- Frequency:** Weekly or Fortnightly
- Quantity:** 6 x 1 – 1.5hr sessions
- Art packs:** Delivered from the University to Stride then delivered to the carers' homes.



# Going online.

## An overview of the clinic:

All clinic participants were familiar with using online services. During the pandemic, many people found themselves feeling isolated from communities, their families, and friends. People needed to safely access health care and therefore several health providers began offering Telehealth services, such as hospital care, doctor's appointments, and mobile health.

Families, friends, and work colleagues started to communicate through online platforms such as Zoom, either on laptops at home or through their mobile devices such as smart phones. Both Stride and Western Sydney University responded and adapted quickly to ensure accessible support and learning.

From this foundation and the need to provide accessible mental health support to the community as well as valuable learning experiences for the students, the online art therapy clinic pilot was formed in 2021, a mutually beneficial partnership between Stride and WSU. The pilot was a success for all involved.

## 2022

In 2022, the clinic was re-established, and Sally Grant was employed by the University as the clinic coordinator. Sally began to work closely with Danielle Carson at Stride as well as other members of each team supporting the clinic in various ways that are described within this report.

Sally and Danielle connected carers in the Stride community with trainee art therapists in their final year of study in the Master of Art Therapy course at WSU. The Clinical Placement Coordinator at WSU, Suzanne Perry, invited students to participate in the clinic.

## How to attend

To attend the clinic, all a carer needs is access to reliable internet, use of a laptop or similar device, a private space in which to meet with the student and commitment to attend weekly or fortnightly for six sessions. No art experience or art materials were necessary as each carer was provided with a comprehensive art pack to utilise as they chose in the sessions.

Danielle Carson and Jessica Harris-Ward from Stride supported the carers and students in the initial online meeting to ensure a smooth transition and alleviate any anxiety that may arise in the initial stages. All carers said they felt very comfortable and were looking forward to using the art packs.

## Funding

Funding received through the university allowed the clinic to purchase art materials for the art packs that included a variety of materials to use. It was important that the packs contained quality yet affordable materials that allowed freedom of creativity, enabled carers to feel they had choice of materials, and would be long-lasting so that the carers could continue with their self-care well into the future. Stride emphasised the need to ensure that the materials are affordable and could be sourced locally so that the carers would be able to replace items.

## Art materials

Art packs were delivered to Stride, from where Danielle hand delivered the art packs to each carer ready for their first session with the student. Carers could also take some time to familiarise themselves with the packs prior to beginning.

All the carers were very satisfied with the art packs, some preferring the pencils, pastels, paints and watercolours, others enjoying the clay. One carer particularly liked the collage materials as they felt it reminded them of other craft methods they enjoy.

Students then continued the weekly or fortnightly sessions communicating via email with the carers between sessions times if necessary.

“The carer has continued to use the clay and even bought some more to continue her new passion and self-care”.

**Danielle Carson** after talking with Carer



# Why online art therapy

Carers of loved ones with mental health issues are often isolated and obliged to prioritise the needs of those they care for. This means that they cannot easily leave their homes to attend conventional onsite services to receive care for themselves.

The online Art Therapy sessions provide the carers with a creative outlet, with a way to solve problems, consider a different perspective and to give a voice to experiences and feelings not easily expressed in words. Some of the carers commented on their previous experience of attending the pilot online art therapy clinic and were keen to continue this year. They found working online beneficial due to the restrictions they faced with limited time to travel to attend appointments. It also meant they could remain at home with those they are caring for.

“The benefit was that I (the carer) could work in my own space and not leave home.”

**Stride Carer**



Art Therapy incorporates creative methods of expression through visual art media to improve physical, mental, and emotional well-being.

“Art Therapy methods are innovative, participatory, and practical: it provides a supportive space for participants to ‘try on’ and practice new behaviours, and this can be more effective than merely talking about change.” ANZACATA 2022, [anzacata.org.au](http://anzacata.org.au)

“I appreciated the guidance by the art therapist to help me express myself through art.”

**Stride Carer**

Student Usha Rangaraj, work in progress, 2022



One of the hopes of the clinic is that carers gain confidence and feel inspired to continue their creative practice upon completion of the sessions. The students supported the carers through the creative process, many of the carers using materials they may not have ordinarily chosen. Everyone found a private space to work in, had a table space to set up their materials and were able to connect via Zoom each week with their student art therapist. Both carer and student demonstrated dedication to their learning by turning up for one another each week—a therapeutic relationship and partnership was blossoming.

Using art during online art therapy sessions opens up possibilities of continued experiences; it provides a way to safely explore stories that maybe difficult to put into words and for some of the carers it helped them to ‘tap’ back into creative pursuits that they may not have so easily found time for without the support and structure of weekly sessions. The structure of regular sessions that fitted into their tight schedule meant they could look forward to “me time”. The carers’ families also became used to their carer taking time for themselves, mostly undisturbed. The possibility of taking care of oneself to then be able to take care of others was forming and above all being enjoyed.

Student Karen Ryder, 2022



# Technology

To be able to work online the carers and students needed access to a laptop or suitable device, reliable internet, and a private space in which to have the session.

No carers or students reported problems using the technology, although one carer did not have access to a laptop and used a smaller device, such as a mobile phone or tablet. The student and carer found ways to adjust to using the smaller screen and found this offered opportunities to be mobile within the home, meaning a more personalised experience where the carer could experience a client-centred therapeutic response to their needs and desires. All carers and students had good internet service and no issues with connectivity were identified.

Some carers were able to direct their laptops screens downwards to their table while making art so the student could witness the art making, at other times the student and carer could remain viewing one another during the art making time and the carer would reveal their artwork upon completion. There is no wrong or right approach, together the student and carer were able to easily find the most comfortable approach for the carer.





# Carer hopes and outcomes

Stride provides ongoing quality support services for carers and their families. The individual online art therapy offered a new opportunity for carers to manage and be empowered to focus on self-care within their home, the main place where they are usually caring for others.

Prior to commencing the clinic, the carers completed a short initial meeting and survey that helped the students to gather some details about the lives of the carers, their prior experience and hopes for the sessions. This provided them with an opportunity to voice any concerns and thoughts in the beginning process. At the end of the six sessions carers were given the opportunity to offer confidential feedback to their Stride worker.

Many of the carers are supporting a family member(s) with daily care, leaving little time for themselves. Their hopes for the online art therapy clinic were:

“Self-care and some time for myself”

“Calm and support”

“Escapism mostly, and looking forward to creating some nice art”

“Improve some art skills”

“Hoping for some benefit”

All the carers stated that they enjoyed the experience of the online clinic. They enjoyed the conversations, doing meditations for relaxation, felt comfortable in their own home, felt their needs were responded to and that they looked forward to each week.

All the carers found the sessions very helpful and supportive, they found it provided opportunities to bounce ideas, share a connection, felt supported and encouraged, got to make great art, appreciated the range of resources provided. They found the sessions were calming, they felt comforted and pleased and were able to make time for themselves.

Most carers were surprised at how much the sessions helped them beyond self-care, opening stories untold that could now be explored.

## In conversations with Danielle, Stride Carers reported that:

- They had been able to reflect of some parts of their childhood that they had not thought about in so long that brought up joyful and happy memories and at the same time let them understand [how to] deal with past negative relationships.
- The students were so flexible and understanding when times had to be changed due to their caring role. It was reported also that they had a great willingness to respond to the carer's needs and wishes at the time.
- Carers noted that they felt nervous about the process at first but felt surprisingly calm and relaxed, due to the student's 'lovely manner'.
- All Carers noted that it is fantastic to have the session Online, as they did not have to travel, which equalled less expense and time out of their busy days.
- Carers reported that they were so impressed with the student's level of compassion, professionalism and understanding.
- Carers stated that they are now making it a plan to continue with their 'Art time' for Self-care, as they felt the benefits.

Students demonstrated care for the well-being of the carers and recognised the importance of their work as well as the importance of self-care to be better equipped to care for others. Stride continues to provide support for the carers and believes that the individual focused sessions gave back to the carer community.

"I could not have been happier with the results for the carers involved and the students who were part of this clinic. Best of all there are now qualified Art Therapists working in the community that will now have family and carers in mind.

"It would be my hope to be working in collaboration with Western Sydney University again with the Art Therapy Online Clinic in 2023."

**Danielle Carson**, Service Leader, Stride.

# Sally Grant describes the collaboration of sharing and learning through the clinic...

The clinic seemed to go beyond its initial hopes, students described huge learning curves whilst carers expressed their gratitude for receiving quality and a professional level therapeutic service. Receiving support in your own home, where a carer would usually be the provider of care is a unique experience. Receiving a “gift” of art materials to creatively discover your story, needs and wants, brings new meaning to the word “care”. The qualities of a carer are special, the WSU students got to experience these qualities and return the gesture. A wonderful collaboration of sharing and learning.

The positive response from the carers demonstrates the benefit of the online clinic for both carer and student. The clinic went beyond our initial hopes of self-care, the carer feedback tells us that they felt very comfortable with the online format and with their student art therapist, whom they felt were experienced and professional, providing a safe place to further explore past traumatic experiences, work with the present and consider their future through creative and conversational methods of connection.

Student Karen Ryder, 2022



# Support for student learning

The university recognises and responds to the need to provide the best possible supports for the students. For in the same way that carers need to care for themselves in order to care for others, the students need to be supported to be able to provide beneficial therapeutic support to others. During the clinic, the students received weekly individual supervision and group sessions with the clinic coordinator, Sally Grant.

As well supporting the carers, Danielle offered direction to the students and responded to placement requirements during the clinic.

Danielle shares her thoughts on the level of expertise of the art therapy students:

*“I’m blown away with how professional the students were, it didn’t feel like they were students...I was so surprised by what was pulled from the carers.”*

## Usha, one of the Art Therapy students reflects on her experience...

*“Working on the online project with Stride has been a great learning experience. The online platform has helped reach out to people who are struggling to take steps towards their self-care.*

*“As a trainee Art therapist, it has opened a whole new window of opportunities in how and where art therapy can be held to support people with mental health issues.*

*“Stride has been very supportive in this project. I appreciated and felt reassured that they took the responsibility of supporting the carers after the art therapy sessions ensuring a continuity in between the therapy sessions.”*

**Usha Rangaraj**, Master of Art Therapy, WSU, 2022



## Online support in the home

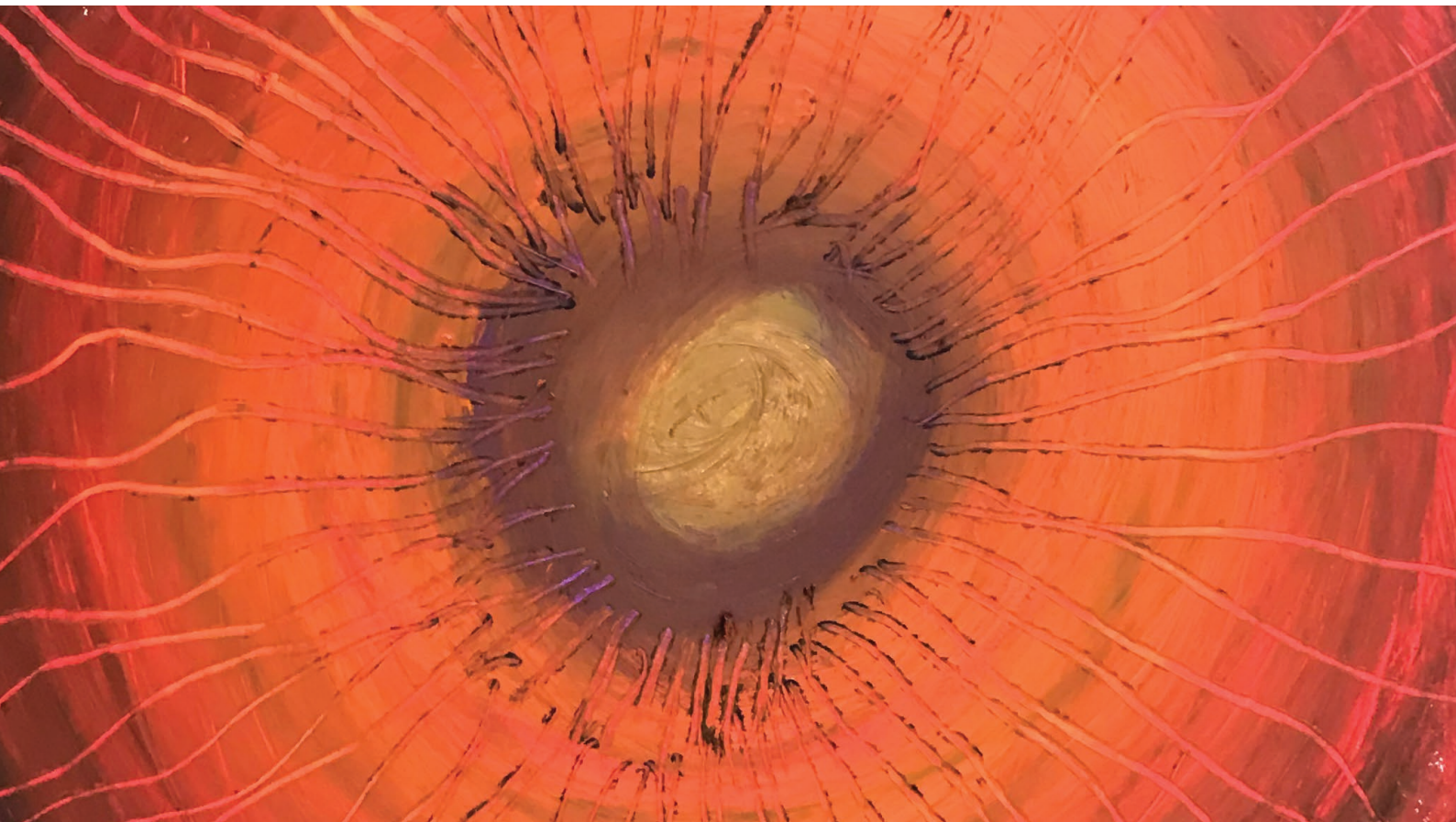
During discussions, all the students stated they would consider working online in the future, making art therapy accessible to those in remote areas, or who have difficulty attending in-person sessions.

“The students demonstrated such compassion and care for the Carers they were supporting. Much of the university training was held online during the pandemic therefore the students were adept at connecting online with others.

“They described the ease of working online as it was familiar and comfortable for them. I believe the comfort the students described reflected positively in the way they were able to connect with and support the carers to feel at ease receiving art therapy online. The carers, of course, may have also previously experienced using Zoom or similar to connect with friends and family during the pandemic. The skills that the students have developed during their art therapy training can be consolidated and enriched through the experience of the online clinic. The carers can find new ways of reaching out for support in the comfort and privacy of their own home”.

**Sally Grant**, Online Art Therapy Clinic Coordinator, WSU

Student Usha Rangaraj, 2022



# Research

The partnership of Stride, the students and the WSU team provided an opportunity for research that has brought a richness to the work, taking it beyond a short-term experience. The research considers the students' individual and shared learning experience within the clinic. In the future we hope to be able to include the voices of the carers.

## **Toril Pursell, Senior Research Assistant, WSU shares details about the Stride/WSU partnership research project...**

“Over the past three months a team from Western Sydney University have been researching aspects of the Online Art Therapy Clinic offered through Stride. In consultation with Stride, the team was successful in being granted Badugulang funding which falls under the University's Centre for Teaching and Learning Excellence.

“The research project is taking a close look at what MA Art Therapy trainees' experiences of offering online art therapy contribute to their learning and professional development. The team is conducting a literature review, facilitating and participating in focus groups, and making artwork in response to the focus groups. The research will go towards a final report in March of next year. The aim is also to make a case for online art therapy that can both be accessible to benefit the wider community and continue to be a valuable part of art therapy trainee experiences.

“The clinic is not only important in that it provides valuable opportunities for carers and students to come together and learn from one another, but it is also part of an initiative to further the literature and understanding of the many benefits of the online art therapy clinic for future students and an accessible therapy for those in the community.”

**Toril Pursell**, Senior Research Assistant, WSU

# Challenges and looking forward

While the clinic received outstanding feedback from the carers and Stride and benefited both carer and student learning, we also recognised and responded to some of the challenges during the clinic. These were due to the following:

Carers and students said they would have liked a longer time to work together. Beginning the clinic earlier in the year will resolve this issue. The clinic hopes to offer blocks of sessions, so the carer has choice around extending their time in the clinic if desired.

The carer role sometimes interrupts the weekly sessions, for example needing to attend other appointments or unable to attend for other reasons. In a longer period of service, being absent from one or two sessions does not have much impact on the overall benefits. However, in short-term therapy this may have some impact on the continuity, flow, and access. During the clinic, any interruptions were managed successfully, and students were able to offer alternative times for some carers, meaning they did not have to miss sessions.

Sometimes personal circumstances change, meaning a carer may not be able to continue with the sessions. This situation affected one carer in the clinic and was managed through support of Danielle. The carer will be invited to attend online art therapy in the future at the clinic if they so wish.

## Looking forward

Both the pilot clinic in 2021 and this year's online art therapy clinic have proven to be a successful partnership between Stride and WSU. In 2021 and 2022, the carers had individual sessions with students; however, in the feedback most of the carers agreed they would be interested in the option of online group art therapy as well.

The university and Stride are currently seeking ways to source philanthropic funding to support the purchasing of art materials for 2023 and beyond. We would like to be able to ensure all participants have ongoing access to the same comprehensive art packs, as they are an important aspect of the work and the accessibility/affordability for carers attending the clinic. The art packs also inspire and encourage the continuation of self-care on completion of the six sessions.

Ideally, in the future we would like to consider funding opportunities to provide an additional camera (webcam) for carers to use during clinic sessions, allowing the student and carer to see one another and the artwork at the same time during art making, thus more closely mimicking the in-person experience.

# Appreciation

Thank you to all the people involved in partnership between Western Sydney University and Stride. We look forward to a bright future for WSU students who have had the privilege of working alongside the incredible carers in NSW. Thank you to the carers for allowing the students to 'enter' into their homes and for being open to new experiences; and to the students for their dedication and genuine care towards their work with each carer. We look forward to continuing the partnership in 2023.

Behind the scenes are many hands working together to ensure funding, research, and support, without this the clinic could not operate, and of course at the centre are the students and the carers, such a wonderful collaboration.

We would like to acknowledge and thank the following people:

## Students

Adele Koulouris  
Karen Ryder  
Yvonne "Von" Minh Tinh Le  
Usha Rangaraj  
Amanda Birkbeck  
Hayley Coghlan

## Participants

Stride Carers (names excluded to respect their privacy)

## Stride team

Sarah Holmes, Manager  
Danielle Carson, Service Leader  
Jessica Harris-Ward, Service Support

## Western Sydney University Arts Therapy and Counselling team

Associate Professor Sheridan Linnell, Discipline Lead & Principal Researcher, 'Learning with the WSU-Stride Online Art Therapy Clinic'  
Dr Joy Paton, Director of Academic Program  
Patricia Parish, Academic Program Advisor  
Suzanne Perry, Clinical Placement Coordinator  
Sally Grant, Online Art Therapy Clinic Coordinator  
Toril Pursell, Senior Research Assistant  
Dr Jody Thomson, Senior Research Assistant



# Contact

If you would like more information regarding the clinic, please contact Sally Grant, Clinic Coordinator

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Or, if you are a carer and would like to participate in a future clinic, please feel free to contact Danielle Carson at Stride

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