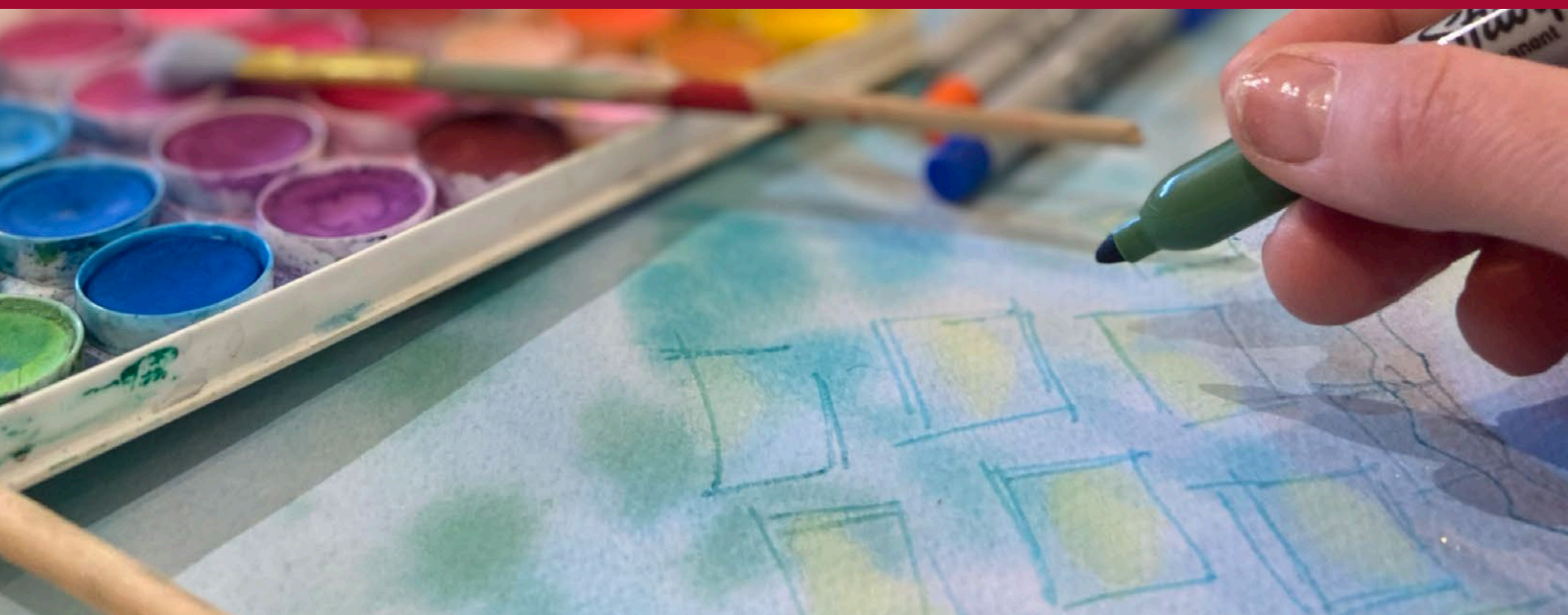




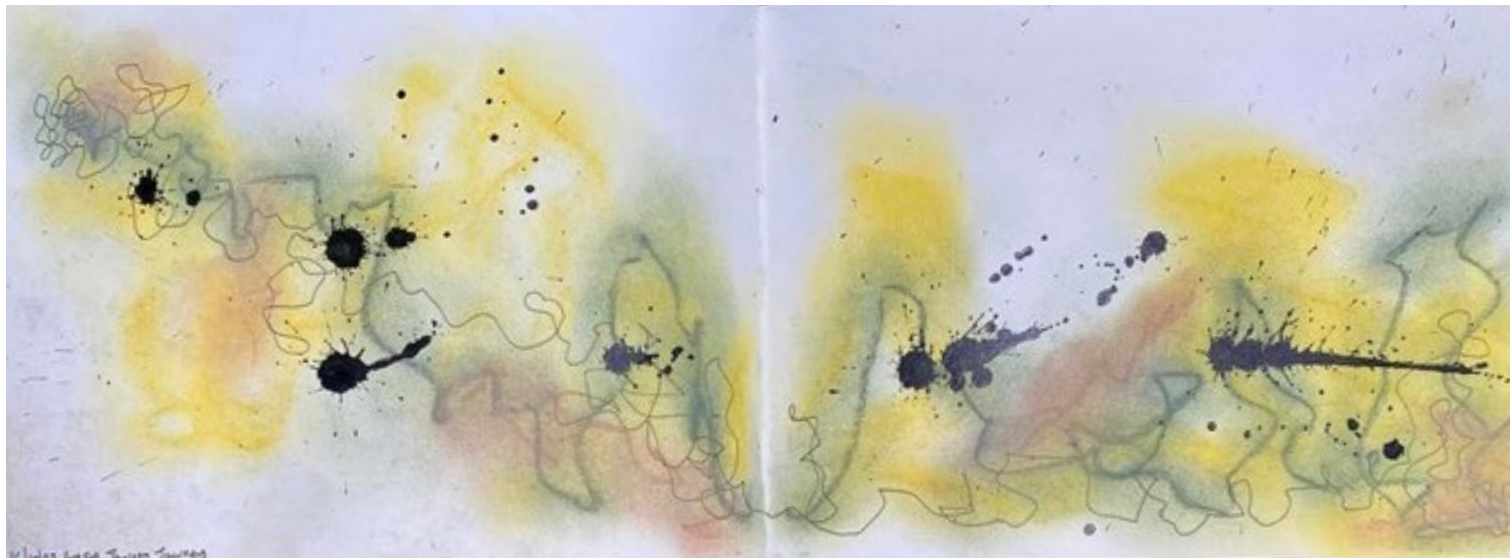
2023 UPDATE | Online Art Therapy Clinic

Continuing 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.



Therapy Journey, Vhairi Todd, 2023

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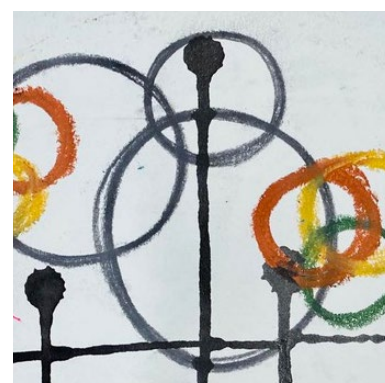
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Report written by Sally Grant (WSU) in consultation with Danielle Carson (Stride) and Sheridan Linnell (WSU).

Published September 2024.

The 2022 report is available on the Stride website www.stride.com.au



This is the second report for the Art Therapy Online Clinic since its inception in 2021. The report highlights the success of the Art Therapy online clinic in its second year since the pilot in 2021.

Due to the Covid pandemic in 2021/2022 many students attending the Western Sydney University Master of Art Therapy Program needed clinical placement experiences hence the clinic began offering online art therapy for students to gain essential skills as Art Therapy practitioners and for the community to be supported. At this time many of us were tentatively navigating a relatively new way of connecting remotely through use of online platforms. Western Sydney University (WSU) and Stride continue their strong partnership to enable the clinic to grow.

This report demonstrates the distance we have travelled in terms of learning and describes the depth of the therapeutic connections that “being with” another online can provide. With of course one of the main benefits for the participants is the opportunity to seek support whilst being able to attend from the comfort of their homes and for students to offer support without the need for travel and to develop new skills to add to their developing practice.

The benefits however, are not merely convenience, we note how both carers and students attest to the highlights of connecting online, personal growth, self care and real life learning and despite a few technical connection issues it seems to be an ideal meeting place for all. Since Covid lockdowns many of us are now more familiar with meeting online whether that be via Zoom or other platforms with family and friends, for doctor appointments, learning spaces, the options for connecting online are endless and have become preferred choice for many particularly when caring for others requires a person to be physically and emotionally available. Therapy sessions from home seems ideal in terms of convenience. The familiarity, accessibility and our confidence in this modal of connection has provided the clinic with a place to go beyond and explore alternative student placements whilst providing community-based access to therapy.

Western Sydney University (WSU) is very proud to continue to work in partnership with Stride’s carer program to provide quality art therapy sessions for the wider community allowing WSU students to experience a highly supported clinical placement with Stride whilst also gaining expertise in other aspects of working within an organisation including working online and with individuals. Other areas of learning for the students covered ethical practice, record keeping, strength-based approaches to therapy, supervision, reflective practice and preparation for future practice.

Carer feedback alongside student reflections are weaved throughout the report.



Key participants

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

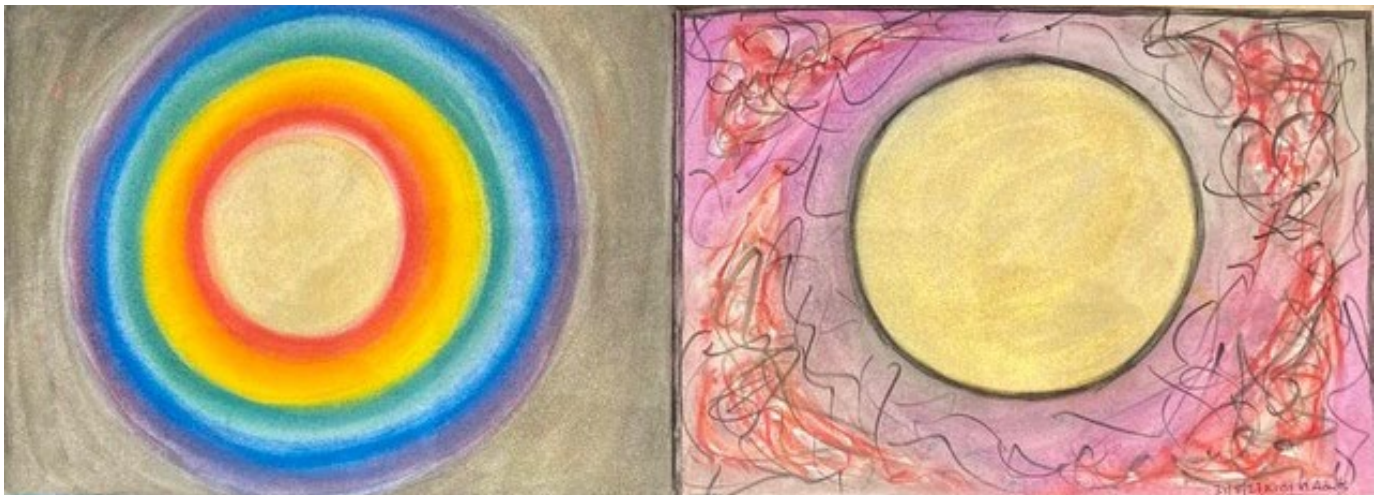
Due to privacy, we have not included the names of the wonderful carers involved in the clinic. However, we do thank them for providing permission to share their words that were included in the WSU-Stride clinic's client feedback forms.

The clinic supported # carers that self-referred through Stride. # students provided weekly or fortnightly sessions via Zoom.

WSU Students: Rachel Besser, Amanda Bruhn, Paola Lauretti, Marion Lee, Allyda Nithasha, Marlayna Richardson, Subashri Sankarasubramanian, Vhairi Todd and Stella Yu.

Representing Stride: Sarah Holmes, Manager Stride, Danielle Carson, Service Leader and Jessica Harris-Ward, Support Worker.

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



Adults vs kids reflection, Vhairi Todd, 2023

A partnership

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.

Online art therapy provides an alternative support to members of the community who may otherwise not be able to attend therapy, it also provides the art therapy students with increased work opportunities and a set of new skills that not only benefit their online work but also in person work.



"I am very proud of my achievements this placement year and now feel ready to embrace working professionally qualified and believe my experience with Stride clinic has significantly contributed to this."

Vhairi Todd, trainee Art Therapist, 2023

"I felt very grateful. I resolved some personal conflicts I had."

Carer, 2023

A word from Sheridan...

Since the pilot project in 2021, the collaboration between Stride and Western Sydney University has gone from strength to strength. Our evaluation of the online art therapy clinic shows that Stride's community of carers benefits from access to online art therapy with an emphasis on 'caring for the carers' and enjoy the dedicated time and space it allows for creativity, reflection and support. Our research illustrates how trainee art therapists in the Master of Art Therapy, and the staff assessing their progress, report a growth in students' capacity and confidence from being part of the program with Stride. Stride Manager, Sarah Holmes, and the leadership of the School of Social Sciences at Western Sydney University have continued to invest time and resources in this sparkling partnership. With ongoing stewardship from the wonderfully talented and committed team of Danielle Carson (Stride) and Sally Grant (Western), and the contribution of acting clinic coordinator Emma Gentle in the second half of 2023, we are delighted to report here on the successes of 2023. We are looking forward to a rich and growing clinic collaboration in 2024.

Associate Professor Sheridan Linnell

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



"Our research illustrates how trainee art therapists in the Master of Art Therapy, and the staff assessing their progress, report a growth in students' capacity and confidence from being part of the program with Stride."

Associate Professor Sheridan Linnell

A word from Danielle...

It has been a pleasure to be able to continue working collaboratively with the Western Sydney University, with the Online Art Therapy Clinic throughout 2023.

We have had many of our Carers benefit from the clinic's work, these consisted of new carers to the clinic and carers that have returned to work with new Art Therapy student.

The year has run so smoothly with the support and care of the WSU supervisors, Sally Grant and Emma Gentle and all those behind the scenes.

Most of all the benefits that Stride's carers expressed was outstanding with carers stating things such as;

'I never expected that this type of therapy could bring out so much in me'

'The student that I worked with was so caring and skilled, I worked on many things from the past'

'I feel so blessed that I could continue to be involved with this program with another talented student'

'Being involved with the clinic online, meant that I did not have to spend time traveling and made it more achievable for me'

At the end of 2023 we also held a few group art therapy sessions held in-person with one of the students. Carers had the opportunity to connect together and participate getting in touch with their creative side, being free to create art with many mediums and express themselves in ways that they didn't know they could.

The Clinic is a wonderful collaboration that Stride Family and carer Mental health Program and myself are very grateful to be a part of with the Western Sydney University.

Both the students and the carers learn so much from each other and best of all the carers come away with being open to more life experiences and different skills for self care.

Danielle Carson

Service Leader
Stride



"Most of all the benefits that Stride's carers expressed was outstanding."

Danielle Carson, Service Leader, Stride

A word from Sally...

I write this report with a sense of gratification toward the students and carers as well as the vibrant partnership that has developed and continues between WSU and Stride. Throughout this report we bear witness to the positive, deep learning experienced by all who participated in the clinic as student and as carer.

For students one of the main takeaways from the clinic was the accessibility to reaching others through art therapy offered online, students expressed their desire to join the clinic and improve their opportunities for future employment by expanding their skills in the delivery of art therapy. The online platform is a familiar space for students as they attend university lectures and meetings but were not yet facilitating art therapy sessions online one-to-one. Student experience of placement is typically meeting in person within studios or clinical settings.

The online clinic opened up a new learning experience where students and carers navigated the nuances of working online and forming strong therapeutic relationships in order to provide beneficial sessions for all. Students move forward with confidence in their options for their future working career as Art Therapists. Carers with a new found sense of self and how to incorporate therapeutic self care creative practices in their daily lives while they continue to take care of others.

In the second half of the year I needed to take personal leave and we were fortunate to have Emma Gentle join the team as Acting Online Clinic Coordinator for the remainder of the year. Emma describes her observations on the unique learning experience provided to the students through the online clinic, "the students grew in confidence providing weekly sessions with supervision support. The online work was reported as being very helpful to the students in preparation for becoming fully qualified and registered art therapists. The students also said that receiving some one-to-one supervision helped them hone in on what they needed to work on and build up their confidence as therapists." Dr Emma Gentle.

We look forward to 2024 and a continued collaborative approach to learning where the work provides support for community as well as students learning and expertise in the field of art therapy.

Sally Grant

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

Dr Emma Gentle

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



A word from Vhairi, 2023 student...

I have been so incredibly grateful to have had the opportunity to expand my learning potential during placement through a therapy means that was not offered within my onsite placement. This being both online therapy services and the opportunity to work as a student with one-to-one clients.

I thoroughly enjoyed the challenge this presented and all the wonderful experience it provided for me as a trainee art therapist. I do in reflection feel it is a vital skill perhaps for all trainee art therapists to be able to adapt our work to within an online context and feel confident with this as it really is very different, and I am so grateful to have had this learning opportunity.

Working with the stride team was totally seamless, the online forms were straightforward and the process for sending simple. My introduction between myself and client was also significantly aided by the presence of a stride support worker with the previously completed form by my client providing helpful starting direction.

Finally, I have been overwhelmed by the level of support I have received throughout my placement experience, both within my onsite placement but also the additional supervision provided alongside the online clinic. I unquestionably have benefited from having access to 3 supervisors over the course of the year to work through my learning journey, and for this I will be forever grateful.

I am very proud of my achievements this placement year and now feel ready to embrace working professionally qualified and believe my experience with stride clinic has significantly contributed to this.

Vhairi Todd

Master of Art Therapy trainee, 2023
Western Sydney University



Golden Process, Vhairi Todd, 2023

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

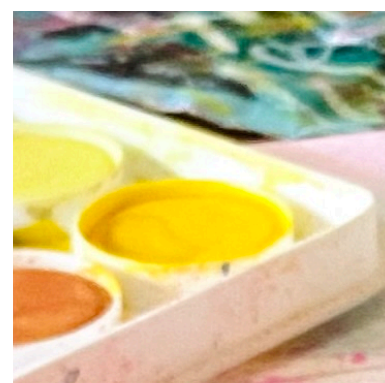
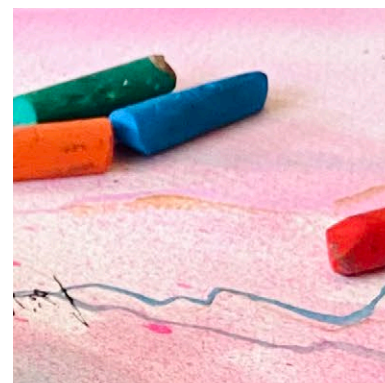
the intention that the carers would be able to continue a creative self-care practice beyond the sessions using the art packs provided and through a new or rediscovered connection to self.

"The online sessions were very helpful—I am not someone who had worked with art products and the [art therapy student] was very supportive in encouraging me to 'let go' without embarrassment."

Carer, 2023

Art Therapy Online Clinic March–Nov 2023

Who:	Seven carers and six students
Where:	Carer's home or other suitable private location
How:	Via Zoom (secure and private) using laptops or other suitable devices that allowed for student and carer to share the work easily and communicate clearly.
Frequency:	Weekly or Fortnightly
Art packs:	Delivered from the University to Stride then delivered to the carers' homes.



Going online:

An overview of the clinic

In 2023 the clinic reopened as a supplementary placement option for WSU students. Students were considered for the clinic by Suzanne Perry, WSU Clinical Placement Coordinator and interviewed by Sally Grant before being connected to Stride. Many of the students were keen to participate in the clinic having received feedback from the previous years students who described positive learning experiences. This allowed for a smoother transition as the clinic is now well established and students understood expectations within the placement.

Students are required to provide weekly or fortnightly art therapy sessions for individual carers who are caring for someone with additional physical and mental health needs. Students were provided training to work therapeutically online, initially this included online etiquette, privacy and confidentiality, technical support and how to respond, establishing a therapeutic relationship whilst working online, self care practices, supporting clients to make art in an online session, creating a safe and friendly space.

Several of the carers were returning carers to the clinic program, carers felt they gained so much personal growth from attending sessions they were keen to continue and welcomed the opportunity to be placed with a new student. Students were supported in weekly or fortnightly supervision to ensure for gentle transitions for both parties. New carers also came on board, much of the enthusiasm to participate in the clinic was word of mouth from fellow carers, thus highlighting the success of the clinic to date.

The positive and successful partnership between Stride and WSU enabled the clinic to maintain and expand on its program this year. Sally Grant, Clinic Coordinator, WSU and Danielle Carson, Stride, Hurstville continued to support students and carers through out the program. In addition to the 2023 online clinic we also introduced face to face groups led by Paola, one of our students. The feedback was positive and participants enjoyed the face to face work that complimented their existing online sessions. The students also gained valuable insights and experience working with participants both online and in person at Stride.

We also welcomed Dr Emma Gentle in the second half of the year who became acting clinic coordinator, we thank her for her expertise and being able to step into the role so smoothly. Sally Grant plans to return for the 2024 clinic.

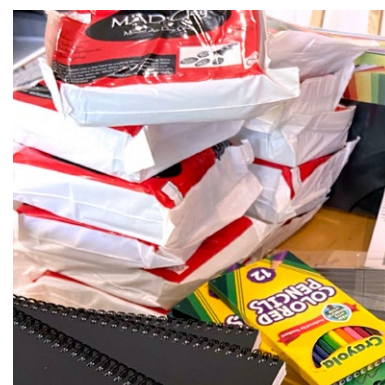


“...the Art Therapist, has introduced me to a world of expression and enjoyment that is beneficial to achieving calm and ‘time out’.”

Carer, 2023

Art packs

The carers received an art pack that was delivered directly to their door ensuring a fuss free beginning to the online sessions and enabling carers to feel prepared. The pack contained quality yet affordable art materials that allowed freedom of creativity through a variety of choice of materials. Ensuring the materials were affordable allows the participants to be able to replace items or continue with their practice beyond the experience with the student. The carers were gently encouraged by the students to explore the sense of the materials and how they could relate to their experiences through art making. One of the aims of the clinic program was for students to support the carers to transition the experience of the sessions and their personal growth into their everyday lives, the art packs they kept in their homes supported this process for many.



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 or more 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.

"Working with the Stride team was totally seamless, the online forms were straightforward and the process for sending simple. My introduction between myself and client was also significantly aided by the presence of a Stride support worker with the previously completed form by my client providing helpful starting direction."

Vhairi Todd, trainee Art Therapist, 2023

"Really good, really useful and easy access."

Carer, 2023

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.

Looking forward

Again we are able to celebrate the successful collaboration between Stride and WSU. Carers last year discussed the possibility of some group sessions alongside the individual sessions which we were fortunate to be able to offer with the support of the Stride team at their location in Hurstville. This was felt to compliment the online sessions and bring the carers together. We hope to expand on this further next year and offer the same either in-person or online. This would provide deeper connections for the carers who can then share their stories with one another whilst also providing further opportunities for the trainee art therapists to expand on their learning experience.

As Vhairi, one of our trainees stated, it would be good to be able to offer the online placement experience to all students. At this time we will continue to partner with Stride and their carers and discuss expanding the opportunity to other locations within their service which may increase the intake of students and carers to the program, therefore benefitting more in the community.

Appreciation

We would like to thank all the carers and students who participated in the 2023 clinic. We are very proud of the commitment and dedication shown by both student and carer. From the feedback we can see that everyone found the sessions valuable and we are so very pleased to be able to offer the clinic again in 2024.



Contact

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

sally.grant@westernsydney.edu.au

e.gentle@westernsydney.edu.au

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

daniellecarrson@stride.com.au

