

Proponent Testimony, provided by Ret. Sgt. Jimmy Glenn, USMC
Senate Bill 238
7 February 2020

Dear Chairman McColley and the members of the Transportation, Commerce, and Workforce Committee:

My name is Jimmy Glenn. I am here to give testimony for art therapy value and support licensure for art therapy. I will share a brief history of who I am and then how I became introduced to art therapy.

I served in the Marine Corps from 2004 to 2009. During my time in the service I was deployed to Iraq twice, once in 2005 and again in 2007. During my deployments I dealt with a fall, bouncing head off concrete, multiple blast and vehicular vibrations that contributed to my injuries and resulting in a medical retirement from the service. My injuries consist of PTSD (Post Traumatic Stress Disorder), TBI (Traumatic Brain Injury), GAD (Generalized Anxiety Disorder), depression, headaches, chronic back pain. Since medical retirement in August 2009 I have struggled with my mental and physical health. I have been in both inpatient and outpatient programs – with one acute psychiatric admission. At one point I was on fifteen different types of medications. I have always struggled with the side effects from medicine. I had to find something that would be just as effective without the side effects. The one thing that has consistently saved me through these last 7 years beyond my family, has been art!

I was in a very bad place, struggling at home with my family, fighting my own demons, suicide seemed like the only way out for me. Even with my wife, kids, family, case manager and therapist all there as a positive support in my environment, death was the only thing I could see as the answer. It was my case manager who introduced me to my first art therapist. I have to admit, at first, I thought it was some kind of hippy hocus pocus. “How is this therapy going to help me”. I had no idea regarding the relationship of art and healing. I couldn’t see how doing art would help me with my PTSD and TBI. I figured I would try because nothing else was working. (At this time I would like to invite you all to come closer to take a look at the pieces I have here. Please, take a moment, look at the art and feel free to ask any questions that may come to mind.)

WHY ART THERAPY WORKED FOR ME

After a few months working with an art therapist once a week, I started noticing I was able to express how I was feeling on the inside through the images when I could not find the words to express myself. Doing art therapy was a way for me to unload, drop the pack, and feel like me again. It is really difficult to express how I feel at times –the intensity of anger is scary. My sessions with art therapy provided a safe way to connect to the emotions, to feel the emotions without expressing them outside session.

THE ART DOES THE TALKING –

In art therapy, the art does most of the talking. An art therapist tells you to draw your emotions, thoughts, whatever comes to mind. I would find myself caught up in the art, too busy focusing on how to draw something or do something, that’s when my unconscious goes into overdrive and everything comes out. I lose the ability to filter what I say, to say the “right” thing or what I think someone wants to hear. The art drew me out, in ways you don’t even see yourself. There were

key elements that came out in my art – the real me, my subconscious – no matter how hard I tried to hide. We would talk about what I was drawing, talk in general and that's when things really clicked for me. PTSD behaviors and symptoms made sense – the risk taking, sexuality, gambling – when I drew –the symbolic representation finally clicked.

It felt like a weight had been lifted from my shoulders. I had new knowledge. The art therapist had the right balance of confrontation/exposure/directness/awareness – pushing me to confront those demons in a safe environment through an activity that was safe and distracting at the same time pushing me to do better, to understand the consequence of those actions in my life and my relationships. He helped me realize there was more to life than my injuries. My injuries didn't have to define me..

To take a step back, I did not understand the level of having a family met. I got married, had my first child fairly early. I had not really adjusted to marriage and family life. I was beginning to realize how hard parenting life and marriage were. I had a predisposition that life/marriage was going to be a roll in the hay all the time. Art therapy helped awaken me to the truth.

Through the art therapy process – the art and the counseling interconnected, I found that I couldn't hide everything the way I could with traditional therapy. I found my voice and my healing through art therapy. In a traditional “talk” therapy setting I can filter what I am saying, whereas in art therapy my mind is occupied with doing art and I don't have the mental energy to filter my words. With art therapy, I eventually was able to access my words, to open up pathways to sit down with a marriage counselor to express my thoughts and emotions verbally in a productive way to work on my marriage along with myself.

I am here to testify to the value and power of art therapy as a clinical therapeutic tool, a very valuable tool for healing the mind and spirit. I know the education required to become an art therapist as I started to go down that road. The VA (Veteran Affairs) has struggled to recognize art therapy as a form of treatment. They do not reimburse art therapy as a clinical service. I have learned, from experience with different art therapists, this is not just arts and crafts but a highly skilled, purposeful and evidenced based therapeutic process. Art is simply the tool vs talking. Licensure would provide validity to an evidence based practice and while ensuring art therapy is legally practiced. A license provides credence to the provider and legally defines those practicing art therapy meet standard criteria. A license protects the therapist as well as the client, so that what is being billed as art therapy is art therapy.

The benefits of having art therapy licensure also provide increased job opportunities, stability for the therapist, exclusive rights, confidence for the clients, support from our own local government, it's a win/win.

Art therapy truly saved my life and put me on the right path to recovery. It may not be for everyone but should be available as a potential therapeutic and clinical tool as other therapeutic interventions.

I have been involved with art therapy for the last seven years and I tell anyone that I know that is struggling with anything to think about art therapy. Research has shown art therapy has proven beneficial for trauma victims, combat veterans, first responders, elderly and children struggling

with developmental issues, autism and ADHD, to name a few. Art therapy is also good for those struggling with pain. With art therapy it can be tailored to fit anyone.

Thank you for allowing me to testify in support of Senate Bill 238. I would be happy to answer any questions the committee may have.

Sincerely,
Ret. Sgt. Jimmy Glenn, USMC