

***It opens a whole new world: Older people's perceptions  
of the role of the creative arts as leisure in their lives***

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## **ABSTRACT**

This thesis reports on an original qualitative study of older people's perceptions about how they benefited from participating in a creative arts program. The study brought together the research fields of leisure, arts and ageing well to explore the meaning that 10 older people gave to their creative leisure experiences.

Narrative data from in-depth interviews were analysed using a qualitative approach. The major finding of this study was that creative activities, particularly group arts activities, can be a powerful mode for delivering leisure benefits to enhance ageing well. Many participants attributed a sense of a new lease of life to the stimulating opportunities they now had for self-expression. This new lease of life resulted from the benefits of heightened enjoyment along with a strengthened sense of life purpose and meaning. Sharing a common interest was identified as vital to enjoyable social interactions and a sense of belonging.

The findings of this study indicate that there is certainly scope for the arts, leisure and aged care fields to provide a more stimulating and developmental range of creative programs to benefit older people. Furthermore, this study identified specific facilitating strategies that leisure providers can incorporate into program design to enable older people to reap the potential benefits that creative leisure can bring to their lives.

## **STUDENT DECLARATION**

I, Alison Herron, declare that the Master by Research thesis entitled *It opens a whole new world: Older people's perceptions of the role of the creative arts as leisure in their lives* is no more than 60,000 words in length, exclusive of tables, figures, appendices, references and footnotes. This thesis contains no material that has been submitted previously, in whole or in part, for the award of any other academic degree or diploma. Except where otherwise indicated, this thesis is my own work.

Signature

Date

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## DEFINITIONS

### **Ageing well:**

“Self-initiated promotion of good health, philosophical well-being, and selection of opportunities that support achieving and maintaining a personally satisfying quality of life” (Fontane, 1996, p. 288).

### **Art:**

The expression of thoughts, feelings and senses by “the conscious use of skill . . . and creative imagination” (Arnold, 1976, p. 181). Definitions of the arts typically include visual arts, writing, music, theatre and dance.

### **Creativity:**

A process by which a person “employs both the conscious and the unconscious domains of the mind to combine various existing materials into fresh constructions or configurations” (McLeish, 1983, p. 24).

### **Enjoyment:**

“The feeling of pleasure or satisfaction that comes from doing things” (Kielhofner, 2002, p. 54 ).

### **Interests:**

Activities that bring enjoyment or satisfaction (Kielhofner, 2002, p. 52).

### **Leisure:**

The meaning, experience or state of mind evoked by a freely chosen activity:

“a subjective attitude, an experience that is based on an individual’s own perspective, feelings, values, and past life experiences” (Edginton, Jordan, DeGraaf, & Edginton, 1998, p. 37).

**Leisure benefit**

An improved condition, the prevention of a worse condition or the realization of a specific satisfying psychological experience (Driver & Bruns, 1999, p. 354).

**Leisure facilitating factors**

Conditions that promote the formation of leisure preferences, encourage participation and support satisfying leisure experiences (Mannell & Kleiber, 1997, p. 345; Raymore, 2002, p. 39).

**Social support:**

A generic term for programs whose primary aim is to reduce the social isolation of frail older people, younger people with disabilities and carers. The two social programs in this study are funded as Planned Activity Groups under the Home and Community Care (HACC) Program – see below.

**Home and Community Care (HACC) Program:**

A joint funding program of the Commonwealth, State and Territory governments. “HACC funds services which are targeted to frail older people, people with disabilities, and carers, providing basic support and maintenance to people living at home whose capacity for independent living is at risk, or who are at risk of premature or inappropriate admission to long term residential care” (*Victorian Home and Community Care (HACC) Program Manual*, February 2003, p. 3)

## **1. WHY THIS STUDY?**

With improving opportunities to practice the arts and to pursue lifelong learning, tomorrow's elders could take up the challenge of creativity in the later years in ways unimagined today. The creative old age once reserved for elites could become an opportunity for all. . . . the real debate about age and creativity has barely begun. Gerontologist, Harry Moody (1998, p. 411).

### **The Beginning: Origins of My Interest in this Research**

A turning point in my understanding of ageing well and listening to older people's voices came in 1996 when I attended the annual conference of the Australian Association of Gerontology on the theme of "Successful Ageing." While there were many conference papers that interested me, there was one particular presentation that I found inspiring. In this presentation, "The Tyranny of Superageing: Resisting new stereotypes in the reconstruction of ageing," Dr Susan Feldman and Dr Barbara Kamler spoke about some of their findings from their innovative research with older women. They had worked with older women in a series of writing workshops to offer opportunities for these women to develop new storylines of ageing to replace the stereotypical limited (and limiting) ageist storylines. What was most powerfully moving for me was to hear the voices of these "ordinary" women through Susan and Barbara reading from their stories and to listen to the women's voices on video as they read their own writing. These were powerful stories of strength, resilience, courage, transition and identity evoked through the simplicity of everyday life experiences. The research indicated that self-expression through the creative arts has enormous potential to enhance older people's sense of ageing well and to educate the wider population about the experience of ageing.

At the time of the "Successful Ageing" conference, I was working as a social worker in a community agency. My role was to develop and manage a social support program for socially isolated older people living in the local community. Underpinning the program was my practice model which combined social work, community development and

leisure principles to support people to enhance their quality of life. In consultation with older people in the local area, we decided initially to focus on providing opportunities for socially isolated older people to develop new friendships within small leisure groups. These groups were established in response to people's interests and were supported by trained volunteers. As relationships developed within the interest-based groups and people talked more freely about their lives, their confidence and assertiveness grew. It became evident to me that these older people were looking for more opportunities through the program – opportunities which would offer them more choice, control and intellectual stimulation. Their leisure experience became “a site of resistance” where they could resist the limiting ageist stereotypes and engage more actively in the community. Just as Wearing (1998) explained her rationale for blending leisure and social work, I found that leisure offered “a more holistic, positive and preventative approach to the quality of human living than the problem-oriented approach of social work” (p. xiii) and that a leisure model has more to offer than the traditional aged care model of the major funding bodies and policy makers.

Feldman and Kamler's research provided the seed for my increasing interest in the value of creativity to older people. Our social support program embarked on a range of projects to promote health and well-being through the arts – for older people to be seen and heard. The first project was a series of writing workshops for older women, which Susan Feldman facilitated using the approach she and Barbara Kamler had developed (Kamler & Feldman, 1995). The experience of these workshops was the catalyst for an arts exhibition at the municipal art gallery during 1999 International Year of Older Persons. For this exhibition entitled *Walk in My Shoes*, the artist-curator resourced older people in aged care programs to create the works to be exhibited. Groups participating in the exhibition observed changes in their social interactions. Placing a group of people together in an aged care program where the common factor is their health and mobility problems is not necessarily conducive to connecting socially. There may be no threads of common interest apparent. Contributing to this exhibition offered a chance for people to find out about each other's lives and skills and also opened up channels for greater communication. This in turn provided opportunities to establish links and uncover those

common threads. It gave everyone a chance to talk about themselves and their lives, at the same time focusing more on those around them. We then undertook a major arts project, *Older People's Living Stories: Promoting Health through the Arts*, funded by philanthropic and local government grants, which engaged older people in storytelling, writing and playback theatre performance. I then wanted to learn more about why creative arts-based group programs can have such an impact on older people and why I could see a deeper level of social interactions, a greater sense of vitality and an excitement in their whole being.

At the same time as I was observing the impact of creativity on older people's well-being, I was also frustrated as the manager of a social support program that our evaluation measures for the government funding body were based only on quantitative measures, such as numbers of people attending and numbers of hours of service provided. We were required to measure what was convenient to measure, when it was the impact on people's quality of life that needed to be evaluated. It seemed to me that the starting point was to find out what older people themselves believe is important to them.

Once I commenced this research for my Masters degree, I experienced a number of parallel processes between my personal life and my research. While studying ageing well in my professional life, I felt I was dealing with "ageing unwell" in my family life as the health of my parents and parents-in-law deteriorated dramatically and we had to negotiate the maze of the aged care system. As I was completing my interviews with participants in the first program, I noted in a reflection that I was experiencing similar feelings to what the participants were describing to me. The processes of interviewing, transcription, creative thinking and analysis were totally absorbing and provided an escape from the many problems of family life and work. My research activities lifted my mood and gave me a sense of moving forward. New revelations, new connections and new understandings created a sense of excitement for me.

I just managed to complete the data collection before I decided to leave work and defer my studies so that I could care for my father. In the following few months, what became

most important was that my parents received the services they needed and were treated with dignity and retained their sense of control over decisions affecting their lives. My thinking about ageing well seemed out of step with my experiences during this period and I questioned the reality of what I was hoping to achieve through my research. I started to doubt whether I could get back my perspective or my passion. My whole life was involved in caring and the problems of old age: sickness, dying, aged care facilities and hospitals. It felt like “all downhill,” just what I had been working and researching to dispel! What kept me on track was that I felt I owed it to the people I had interviewed to complete the research. They had participated to make a serious contribution to academic research and to help other older people - I didn't want all this to end up on the scrap heap.

I returned to my research with a heightened awareness about the need for high quality programs and services which are responsive to the diverse needs and interests of older people and which give dignity and meaning to their lives.

## **The Topic**

People have been drawing, painting, singing and dancing since earliest times. These artistic activities provided the earliest forms of human communication and until recent centuries, creative expression through the arts was part of everyday cultural life. In current times, however, many people do not engage in artistic self-expression as an avenue for enhancing important aspects of their mental health such as their sense of identity, community belonging and resilience. With art being elevated to the realm of those artists possessing extraordinary creative talent and skills, most people experience art as spectators, not as participators (Arnold, 1976; Freysinger & Kelly, 2004).

Arnold (1976) asserts that regardless of ability “within each person is some potential for communication through an art form. All individuals should have the opportunity to develop art as a source of communication just as early people did” (p. 127). This idea has been taken up by Susan Perlstein, Director of the National Center for Creative Aging in New York. She advocates the value of artistic creativity as a “process available to all

people to express themselves, to heal, to find meaning, to celebrate and to connect to community” (Perlstein, 2001, p. 377).

Active engagement in artistic activities plays an important role in the lives of many older people. According to most of the older participants in the study conducted by the Australian Pensioners’ and Superannuants’ Federation (1995) for the Australia Council for the Arts, “participating in arts and culture expands the mind and increases quality of life” (p. ii). The key benefits identified by the participants were that participation in the arts keeps the mind active, makes one a more interesting person and thus enhances relationships with others, and provides opportunities for social interaction. Other benefits identified included enjoyment, stress relief, a sense of belonging from having company, and a way of filling in time.

Artistic activities, combined with a group social component, can be particularly important to older people whose health, disabilities and circumstances deprive them of most other leisure activities and social outlets. Lindauer (2003) advocates the benefits of participation in the arts as a leisure activity for older people because artistic activities require “less energy and strength than vigorous forms of leisure” (p. 244) and depending on the art form, can be enjoyed at home as well as in organised settings. Other benefits he identified include sensory stimulation, physical activity, self-efficacy, personal growth and enjoyment.

Vaillant (2002) in his longitudinal studies of ageing highlighted creativity as one of four critical components that make retirement rewarding and promote ageing well. The other components are play, lifelong learning and a social network – all of which are relevant to the role of the arts as leisure. Fisher and Specht (1999) from their interviews with contributors to a senior art exhibition, also concluded that creativity contributes to ageing well “by fostering a sense of competence, purpose and growth” (p. 457). This notion of ageing well, otherwise referred to as successful ageing or positive ageing, has become an important focus of gerontological research.



The arts as a creative and social group activity can be analysed within a leisure framework, as suggested in Russell's (2005) understanding of leisure:

Leisure is an entire way of being – an opportunity for building purpose into life – capable of providing opportunities for self-expression, self-achievement and self-actualization. Leisure is engaging in flights of imagination, developing talents, looking at things in new ways, and being ourselves. (p. 33-34)

Leisure is a word that conjures up different meanings to different people. For some people leisure is about the nature of the time available, in other words, the “free” time left over from work and other obligations. Others consider the meaning of leisure in terms of the type of activity engaged in. In recent years, leisure studies have increasingly defined leisure as the meaning, experience or state of mind evoked by an activity, that is, “a subjective attitude, an experience that is based on an individual's own perspective, feelings, values, and past life experiences” (Edginton, Jordan, DeGraaf, & Edginton, 1998, p. 37). This concept of leisure is grounded in symbolic interaction theory in which individuals attach their own subjective meanings to experiences they define as leisure. It includes the notions of freedom, constraint and self-expression (Samdahl, 1988; Wearing, 1998).

It has been well established that leisure contributes significantly to older people's life satisfaction and promotes ageing well (Binkley & Kurowski, 2003; Edginton, Jordan, DeGraaf, & Edginton, 2006; Kelly, 1993; McGuire, 1985; McGuire, Boyd, & Tedrick, 1996; McPherson, 1991; Roberts, 2006). Leisure involvement is a well recognised avenue for older people to maintain or find meaning in their lives as they lose or change roles in other spheres, such as the paid workforce, family and community. However, many leisure activities are merely time-filling, diversionary and passive instead of providing people with opportunities for enhancing meaning and personal development: “If leisure activity is to be a path to deeper meaning, then it must have some dimension of growth or personal development” (Moody, 1998, p. 439). McGuire (1985) has expressed the same sentiment but used the term “fulfilment” (p. 350) instead of “deeper meaning.” To improve older people's leisure satisfaction and life satisfaction, McGuire has also

highlighted the importance of freedom of choice from a range of options and a sense of control over leisure experiences.

The benefits of leisure have received considerable attention by researchers (Csikszentmihalyi & Kleiber, 1991; Driver, Brown, & Peterson, 1991; Driver & Bruns, 1999; Driver, Tinsley, & Manfreda, 1991; Kelly, 1991; Mannell & Kleiber, 1997; Mannell & Stynes, 1991; R. Russell, 2005). Mannell and Stynes (1991) categorise benefits as physiological (physical health), psychological (self-development, learning, experiential - flow, mood and fun), social (beneficial to social units including communities), economic and environmental. This study focused on the social and psychological benefits of leisure, embracing Mannell and Kleiber's (1997) view that leisure can play a valuable role in enhancing older people's well-being by developing "feelings of competence, self-efficacy and control" (p. 270).

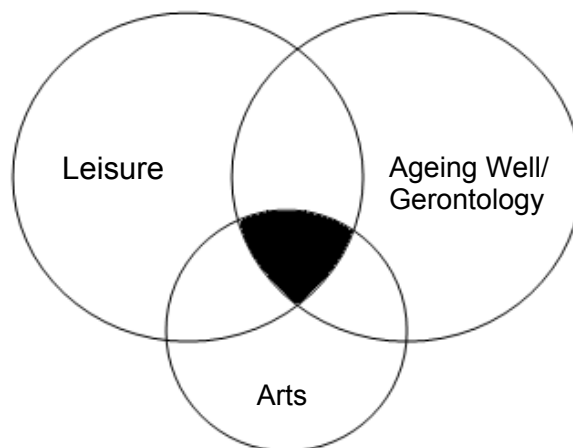
According to other experts (Dattilo & Kleiber, 1993; Iso-Ahola, 1989), enjoyment is the benefit which can be considered to be the essence of leisure and hence is "in and of itself, a major rationale for the provision of leisure services" (Dattilo & Kleiber, 1993, p. 57). Not only is enjoyment a benefit in itself, but it can also be the process for bringing other benefits to people from their leisure experiences. Enjoyment as a benefit of leisure experiences can be explored using Csikszentmihalyi's (1975) concept of *flow*. Flow is the enjoyable experience of total immersion in an activity which occurs when a person's skills are matched by the challenges of that activity. It produces feelings of elation, creative achievement and increased competence. Flow has been one of the most influential and popular concepts in the leisure field for its contribution to understanding the quality of leisure experiences.

In leisure, activities that are most conducive to flow experiences are those that have been described as "serious leisure" (Stebbins, 2001) or "high investment" (Mannell, 1993). These are also the leisure activities that are most likely to promote life satisfaction. This type of leisure demands perseverance, effort and commitment to develop the necessary

knowledge and skills. According to Stebbins (1998), serious leisure “can serve as a central life interest with an appealing identity and lifestyle of its own” (p. 123).

To date, studies have rarely explored the arts as leisure activities where older adults are the creators. Rather, research has traditionally addressed the arts for older people as culture (Australian Pensioners' and Superannuants' Federation, 1995; Costantoura, 2000), a creative pursuit for the few with outstanding talent (Deats & Lenker, 1999; Lindauer, 2003; McLeish, 1992; Wyatt-Brown, 1993), therapy as a medical intervention in health settings (Mosher-Ashley & Barrett, 1997; Warren, 1993), and in the leisure field the arts have typically been studied as public entertainment for the general public (Edginton et al., 2006; Roberts, 2006; R. Russell, 2005). Authors advocating a Ulyssean or adventurous approach to the life journey identify creativity as an important component to ageing well (Friedan, 1994; Kastenbaum, 2000; McGuire et al., 1996; McLeish, 1976; Moody, 1998; Roberts, 2006; Seedsman, 1996; Vaillant, 2002). There are few other references in gerontology and leisure literature even to a broad concept of creativity.

We can thus consider the research concerns of this study as a Venn diagram that integrates three overlapping disciplines of leisure, arts and gerontology, as shown in Figure 1. There is a significant gap in research at the intersection of these three disciplines (as represented by the shaded area), that is, older people participating in artistic pursuits as a group leisure activity.



**Figure 1. The research gap addressed by this study**

By investigating two visual arts programs which combine social and activity-based leisure for older people, this research study was designed to explore the identified gap in research. Even more specifically, the research focused on older people who have difficulty getting out to participate in leisure activities due to health and mobility difficulties (often termed “frail”) – a diverse group of people whose leisure needs have rarely been studied. By exploring the leisure experience from the viewpoint of older people themselves, this study has responded to Mannell and Stynes’ (1991) concern that little research has been conducted on understanding leisure benefits from the participant’s perspective. Through listening to the voices of older people - whether they be positive or negative - and bringing together the three disciplines of leisure, arts and gerontology, this study provided an important opportunity to inform leisure and aged care providers on approaches to program development that can in turn enable older people to benefit from active engagement in the arts as leisure.

### **Aim**

This research study aimed to examine the benefits gained by older people through their participation in a creative arts program that is specifically structured as a group leisure experience.

### **Objectives**

1. To identify the benefits that older people perceive they derive from their involvement in group arts programs;
2. To identify and describe the components of the program that the participants enjoy.

## Significance of the Study

Australia has an ageing population and life expectancy is increasing. Recent demographic data indicate that 12 per cent of the population is now aged 65 years and over and is projected to reach 18 per cent by 2020 (ABS, 2002). This will lead to an increasing demand for a wide range of programs and services – including leisure – to meet the needs of our ageing population. The quality of service provision, along with the quantity of services provided, will have a major impact on the well-being of Australia's older citizens.

Although many older people are ageing well, that is, “with vitality, a sense of mission, and enjoyment substantial enough to compensate for the negatives in their lives” (Perry, 1995, p. 161), others are seriously disadvantaged by the negative impacts of ageism. Ageism has damaging consequences for older people. The stereotypical images can become self-fulfilling prophecies (Johnson, 1995; Wearing, 1995) as older people absorb the inherent meanings and lower their expectations for their quality of life as they age resulting in “under-utilization of mental, emotional and social potential as well as the physical” (Wearing, 1995, p. 265). Older people can also suffer from loss of status, loss of control over their lives and be subject to discrimination (Feldman, 1995). There is concern that ageism results in “ageist practice” (1995, p. 18) which, amongst other consequences, can limit the range and stimulation of social support and leisure opportunities being made available to older people. They are assumed to be a homogeneous group requiring only care and passive, diversionary entertainment to fill in their time:

Stereotyped expectations of what the elderly should be like and what they should want . . . often cut them off from new opportunities and new experiences. It limits their choices . . . often severely limiting the creative potential and the cultural needs of older people. (Williams, 1990).

The effects of these negative attitudes are most damaging and marginalising to those older people whose capacity to continue to pursue their interests and be engaged in their community is significantly restricted by health problems and disabilities. Older people

who require support services to meet their needs are typically labelled frail – a term focusing on their biological decline, dependence and care needs, not on their strengths and capacities. These people may be living in their own homes, with family members, in retirement villages or in residential aged care facilities. Barriers to their continuing participation in the community can lead to social isolation, boredom and depression. As Australia's population ages, there will be an increase in the number of older people living with disabilities and chronic illnesses. It is projected that from 1997 to 2051 the number of people aged 75 years and over will increase by around 3.5 times, and 5.3 times for people aged 85 and over, and it is in these older age groups that the prevalence of disability is highest (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2000). It will be particularly important to consider how services and programs can be offered to these people to support their capacity to age well.

There is a growing awareness of the potential of creativity and the arts to promote ageing well. Leisure programs incorporating artistic expression can play a valuable role in enabling participants to reap a wide range of benefits to their health, well-being and life satisfaction. Movements such as University of the Third Age are responding to the demand from older people for more stimulating leisure and lifelong learning.

Unfortunately, there are few opportunities available to older people who require support to participate in such community activities. In recent years, a small number of creative arts programs have been developed in the community and aged care sectors for older people with support needs and there is a growing interest in their potential to improve people's quality of life. There is anecdotal and observational evidence that these programs have a considerable impact on many older people's lives, however rigorous research has not been undertaken and useful evaluation frameworks have not been developed. This lack was highlighted by the Australian Pensioners' and Superannuants' Federation (1995) in its investigation for the Australia Council for the Arts: "In Australia and internationally, there is very little research which explores older people's participation in the arts, either as practitioners or as consumers" (p. 1).

The Victorian Inquiry into Planning for Positive Ageing (Family and Community Development Committee, 1997) devoted just four pages of its lengthy report to recreation and leisure even though it noted that “social interaction, exercise and intellectual stimulation can be the best preventative and curative tools for age-related illness” (p. 4). It further noted that older Victorians “need the opportunity to access and contribute positively in sport, education, artistic and creative endeavours and community activity” (p. 16). This latter claim is the only reference to creativity or the arts in the report, demonstrating that at the local level this is an under-researched field of leisure studies for older people.

The literature and anecdotal feedback indicate that the benefits people derive from their involvement in arts activities (Arnold, 1976; Australian Pensioners' and Superannuants' Federation, 1995; Fisher & Specht, 1999; Hickson & Housley, 1997; Mosher-Ashley & Barrett, 1997; Osgood, 1993) are similar to the benefits that have been identified for leisure (Driver & Bruns, 1999; Mannell & Kleiber, 1997; Mannell & Stynes, 1991; R. Russell, 2005). This is a significant link, particularly as it has been well established that leisure contributes considerably to older people’s life satisfaction and ageing well (Edginton et al., 2006; Hawkins, Foose, & Binkley, 2004; Kelly, 1993; McGuire et al., 1996; Roberts, 2006). My study is unique in that it links the disciplines of arts, leisure and gerontology to explore the value to older people of the arts as a group leisure activity.

Fundamental to the design of the study was the inclusion of older people as co-researchers, a research strategy that enabled their “voices” to be heard, with the focus on their perspective on their own experiences of the arts as leisure. Giving prominence to the perspectives of the older people themselves counters traditional research that has taken the perspective of researchers and service providers, perpetuating ageist practice of assuming older people to be passive service recipients. A grounded theory approach enabled the themes and meanings of the participants’ experiences to emerge from collaborative discussions between the older people and myself as the researcher.

Through exploring older people's perceptions of the benefits of their participation in creative arts programs - beyond the characteristic leisure attribute of time-filling - this study responds to the call by a number of researchers to increase our understanding of the quality of leisure experiences for older people in order to enhance the opportunities that are made available to them. Twenty years ago, McGuire (1985) asserted that for people in their later years "the need to increase opportunities for choice and control in leisure is important not only to leisure satisfaction but also to life satisfaction" (p. 338). Furthermore, McPherson (1991) advocated that researchers should "consider the quality and meaning of outcomes of leisure in later years, not just the quantity of leisure involvement" (p. 427). Freysinger (1999) has challenged leisure providers to change the way they deliver services as they "can either serve to reproduce or perpetuate outmoded and often oppressive notions of age; or they can assist in educating about, challenging, and transforming these images and notions, as well as people's lived experiences" (p. 265).

Csikszentmihalyi (1975) has also expressed concern about the quality of experiences available to older people, noting that "it is especially important to learn about flow opportunities for the elderly, who in our society are deprived, as adolescents are, of instrumental outlets for their skills" (p. 204). He further claimed that:

If we continue to ignore what makes us happy, what makes our life enjoyable, we shall actively help perpetrate the dehumanizing forces which are gaining momentum day by day . . . Enjoyment is left out of the equations . . . partly because it has remained for so long a vague concept. Something that cannot be defined can safely be ignored. (p. 197)

Although not addressing the needs of older people specifically, Hamilton-Smith (1985) believes there is room for improvement in the nature and quality of arts programs in recreation and has identified the need "to foster the creative and leisure outcomes" (p. 16) of such programs.

At the service delivery level, co-ordinators of creative arts programs are looking for a flexible means of evaluating whether individual participants are enjoying and benefiting from their involvement and how programs could be improved to better meet people's



needs. The findings of this study can contribute to the development of a mechanism to evaluate the quality of leisure programs.

The findings can also contribute to a broader understanding of the leisure needs of older people in general and have relevance to the leisure component of retirement planning. As Henderson and Shaw (1995) advocate: “if research is to make a difference, it must make an impact on those being researched, leisure service providers, policy makers, and people in the society in general” (pp. 129-130). Moreover, if older people are to experience the joy and vitality identified by Vaillant (2002) as core to ageing well, it is vital that leisure and support programs are designed to enable older people to realise potential benefits.

## **2. EXPLORING THE LITERATURE**

This chapter provides a critical review of the key literature relating to the three fields of interest relevant to this study: ageing well, the arts as leisure, and leisure and older people. I highlight those particular researchers and theoretical thinkers who influenced the direction of my research. In the first section, I examine the context of my study within a perspective of ageing well and identify research that challenges the traditional decline and loss theories of ageing. The field of ageing well was the starting point for my reading as this orientation provided the context in which I undertook the study and also the values underpinning its rationale. The second section of the literature review is concerned with the arts as a leisure activity and the role of leisure in older people's lives. This provides the theoretical framework for exploring older people's participation in arts programs. I give attention to research that addresses the benefits of leisure participation and the factors that facilitate participation, with particular emphasis on studies relating to older people.

There were three main phases to my reading. The first phase of reading was to explore, clarify and refine my area of academic interest in order to develop my research proposal and develop interview guides. I read broadly about concepts of ageing well, leisure theories and the benefits of the arts as self-expression. In addition, I referred to literature about qualitative research designs. The second phase occurred after completing the data collection and taking six months leave from the research. Reading was an effective means of reorienting myself to the study and it also enabled me to take a fresh look at what I was aiming to achieve through the research. After coding the transcripts, I returned to further intensive reading in order to broaden my understanding of the meaning of what people had related in the interviews. This constituted the third phase of my reading. Hence, the literature reviewed in this chapter took place at different stages in the life of the study and for different purposes. I used the literature to establish the context and value of undertaking the study, as well as to deepen my understanding of the themes that emerged during the data analysis.

## Ageing Well

The notion of *ageing well*, also referred to as *positive ageing* or *successful ageing*, has become an important focus of gerontological research. Ageing well considers ageing from a perspective that is broader than the dominant problem-oriented approach associated with physical and mental decline. This latter paradigm has contributed to pervasive ageist attitudes and negative stereotyping of older people as a homogeneous group in deteriorating health, unproductive and dependent on others for their care (Angus & Reeve, 2006; Friedan, 1994; Johnson, 1995; Kamler & Feldman, 1995; Wearing, 1995). “Traditional theories of ageing have concentrated on the decline and loss associated with the ageing process, and have tended to minimise or ignore the very important positive aspects of ageing” (Family and Community Development Committee, 1997, p. 24). This section identifies ageing well theories that provide a rationale for exploring the potential of the creative arts for enhancing older people’s zest for life.

Rowe and Kahn (1989; 1998) have been strong proponents of the concept of successful ageing to counter the negative myths and images of ageing. Supported by the findings from their research with the MacArthur Foundation Studies of Aging in America, Rowe and Kahn separated diseased ageing from normal ageing, which in turn they divided into usual and successful ageing. The results of the MacArthur Study highlighted three key components which combine for successful ageing: avoiding disease, maintaining high cognitive and physical function, and active engagement with life. They advocated that older people could proactively employ strategies to promote their own successful ageing in each of these three areas. These interrelated strategies included taking preventative measures to reduce risk of disease and disability, physical exercise and mental stimulation, and engaging in “relationships and activities that provide closeness and meaningfulness” (Rowe & Kahn, 1998, p. 46).

An interesting finding of Rowe and Kahn’s research which is relevant to this thesis was that “the more meaningful the contribution in a given activity, the greater its impact on

health. . . . Active participation does a person more good than mere attendance” (p. 166). Other important socioemotional contributors to successful ageing included productivity and feeling needed, reciprocity in the giving and receiving of support and friendship, and support matched to level of need (providing too much support can create learned helplessness and reduce self-efficacy).

Fisher conducted two studies (Fisher, 1995; Fisher & Specht, 1999) to investigate successful ageing through which he confirmed six features of successful ageing, namely, “a sense of purpose, interactions with others, personal growth, self-acceptance, autonomy, and health” (Fisher, 1995, p. 457). The respondents in these two studies were already actively engaged in purposeful activities in their communities. In the first study, the sample was drawn from a volunteer foster grandparent program and in the second study, the respondents were contributors to an art exhibition.

While many authors and researchers have adopted the term of successful ageing (Adams-Price, 1998; P. B. Baltes & Baltes, 1990; Fisher & Specht, 1999; Riggs, 1997; Rowe & Kahn, 1989), there is a view that this has placed an overemphasis on good health, as well as embodying the opposite concept of “failing ageing” (Family and Community Development Committee, 1997, p. 15; Scheidt & Humpherys, 1999). Scheidt and Humpherys (1999) argue that the inflated importance of health and active independence in the successful ageing concept marginalises older people who are incapacitated or have limited resources and makes them individually responsible for not measuring up to the prescribed standard. Scheidt and Humpherys contend that people can age well in a diversity of ways as they adapt to life in later years.

In this thesis, I have adopted the term *ageing well* which is gaining increasing acceptance as it expresses a positive concept of ageing but with acknowledgement of the diversity of older people’s lives and the many paths to achieving a satisfying quality of life. Fontane (1996) provides a useful definition of ageing well as “self-initiated promotion of good health, philosophical well-being, and selection of opportunities that support achieving and maintaining a personally satisfying quality of life” (p. 288). While acknowledging

the importance of good health in ageing well, he argues that people who are not functioning at high levels of health and fitness can still be considered to be ageing well when making decisions to increase activities that enhance their health and quality of life. The concept has particular relevance for this study as most of the participants had been forced to curb their former activities due to ill health and restricted mobility, but the benefits from joining a group arts program could still potentially contribute to their capacity to age well.

Ignoring the negative aspects of ageing to focus only on the positive aspects is also unrealistic. Baltes & Baltes model, *selective optimisation with compensation*, provides an approach which acknowledges both the losses and gains of the later years of ageing (M. M. Baltes, 1996; P. B. Baltes & Baltes, 1990). This model of successful ageing incorporates three interacting components. As people grow older they can employ the strategy of *selection* to restrict their activities to a chosen few that they deem to be important:

Although selection connotes a reduction in the number of high-efficacy domains, it can also involve new or transformed domains and goals of life. Thus, the process of selection implies that an individual's expectations are adjusted to permit the subjective experience of satisfaction as well as personal control. (P. B. Baltes & Baltes, 1990, p. 22)

The second component, *optimisation*, refers to how people make the most from their available energies, skills and chosen interests. The third component, *compensation*, involves the strategies that people use to compensate for their functional losses so they can engage in their chosen activities. According to this model of successful ageing, people may choose to become less autonomous and more dependent in some areas of their lives so they can conserve their energy for those areas that are important to their subjective well-being, in other words, "pushing older individuals in every level and domain to high performances is likely to be counterproductive by ignoring the behaviour-enhancing effect of reduced efficacy and output" (M. M. Baltes, 1996, p. 162). This theory is particularly useful for understanding how some people seem to adapt and continue to find satisfaction and stimulation even though many skills and capacities have declined.

Seedsman (1990), in his discussion of retirement as a life transition, contended that satisfying retirement requires active engagement in activities and social interaction patterns that hold a meaningful continuity or link to past behaviours. In his view, ageing well (or “productive ageing” as he termed the concept at the time of publication) requires “the ability to promote a creative life outside the world of work” (p. 5) where the aim is “to nurture skills that tap into our inner resources such as autonomy, effort, relaxation, curiosity and our related capacities for contemplation and imagination” (p. 5).

In the field of social gerontology, researchers have identified continuity as another contributor to ageing well. Atchley, one of the major proponents of *continuity theory*, contends that continuity is a vital strategy for adapting to the changes that are part of the ageing experience (Atchley, 1989; 1993, 2004). He defines continuity as “coherence or consistency of patterns over time” (1989, p. 183). A shortcoming of his theory is that it is limited to the concept of *normal ageing*, which assumes that the vast majority of older people are “independent adults with persistent self-concepts and identities . . . [who] lead active, satisfying, and purposeful lives that involve adequate networks of long-standing social relationships” (p. 184). He differentiates this form of ageing from *pathological ageing*, that is, any older person who is experiencing chronic or acute health problems, or is too poor to meet their everyday needs, is excluded from his definition of normal ageing. Atchley considers continuity to be comprised of *internal continuity* and *external continuity*. Internal continuity refers to a person’s subjective perception of a coherent sense of self and identity, while external continuity refers to perceptions of consistency in environments, relationships, activities and skills. He suggests that continuity enables older people to optimise their life satisfaction by choosing to focus on activities and environments attuned to their strengths. He notes, however, that continuity and familiarity do not equate with staying the same, and can embrace stimulating new experiences which build on a person’s ongoing domains of interest.

As with the concept of successful ageing, it can be argued that Atchley’s dichotomous concepts of normal ageing versus pathological ageing unnecessarily marginalise a

considerable proportion of the older population who are experiencing illness, disability or have low incomes. Becker (1993) is one researcher who objects to chronic illness being excluded from normal ageing in Atchley's continuity theory. She asserts that chronic illness is a common experience in later years and that people living with such conditions still have "the ability to participate in society or in personally or socially meaningful activities" (p. 149). From participant observation of hospital rehabilitation wards and patient-practitioner interactions, along with her interviews with 100 people who had survived a stroke, Becker found that people who were able to regain some sense of continuity with their past lives demonstrated a greater determination to persevere in adapting to life after their stroke – and this was not related to their post-stroke level of functional deficits. These people "viewed the ability to identify signs of continuity in the face of overwhelming discontinuity as a testament to the ability to persevere in the face of difficult, seemingly impossible odds" (p. 155). This idea links with Vaillant's (2002) comment that people who are ageing well "make lemonade from lemons" (p. 61).

On the basis of her research findings, Becker (1993) recommended that continuity theory should be broadened to include "discontinuous events" and that the artificial dichotomy between normal and pathological ageing should be eliminated. Furthermore, she suggested that continuity be interpreted as a symbolic process, reflecting her findings that "symbols that keep a sense of continuity alive may stay the same, but their expression may change as people age or experience the onset of severe illness" (p. 156). Substituting new activities which can provide the same symbolic meaning as former activities, even if on a much reduced scale, can assist a person to regain their sense of continuity and adapt to the demands of their new situation.

In addition to the linkage between ageing well and continuity, some gerontologists and leisure researchers have investigated connections between ageing well and creativity, including artistic creativity (Fisher & Specht, 1999; Friedan, 1994; Kastenbaum, 2000; Marsiske & Willis, 1998; McGuire et al., 1996; McLeish, 1976; Moody, 1998; Osgood, 1993; Roberts, 2006; Seedsman, 1996; Vaillant, 2002). Vaillant (2002) and Kastenbaum (2000), for example, both argue that creativity is vital to ageing well over the lifespan.

Kastenbaum has recommended investigating the impact of creativity on mental health as he believes that:

People who do not have the opportunity to develop and express their sparks of creativity are apt to become deeply frustrated. This is a more stressful situation than is commonly realized, contributing to impaired relationships and deteriorated health. Viewed in this light, creativity is a central rather than a peripheral element in living a meaningful life through a great many years. (pp. 398-399)

Other researchers such as Marsiske and Willis (1998) and Russell (2005) have proposed that the stimulation and problem-solving dimensions of creativity assist older people to adapt effectively to the transitions and problems that they confront as they age.

Similarly, Fisher and Specht (1999) found that:

Creative people are more practiced and less afraid of challenges and the associated frustration, and this attitudinal approach gives them a solid basis for coping in later life as well. This generates a feeling of competence based on the ability to handle challenges and to be innovative at arriving at solutions. (p. 469)

Fisher and Specht further described the “successful agers” in their study as being active and having “a sense of purpose, accomplishment, and something to look forward to” (p. 469). It has also been found that programs can be specifically developed to enhance older adults’ creativity and quality of life (Goff, 1992). Goff postulated that enhancing older adults’ creativity and thinking skills improves their health.

A few authors in the fields of gerontology and leisure have addressed creativity within a Ulyssean approach to developmental ageing (McGuire et al., 1996; McLeish, 1976, 1983; Osgood, 1993; Seedsman, 1996). The concept of the *Ulyssean adult* was developed by McLeish to describe people who embark on adventures and journeys in their later years, in the spirit of Ulysses, the Greek mythical hero and adventurer. These adventures and journeys are not necessarily literal, but may be metaphorical, in the sense that people are curious, willing to take risks, be open to new ideas and explore their creativity. As McLeish (1983) explains, creativity is a process that includes:

the strategies of search, of stretching of mind and spirit, of maintaining wonder and fantasy, of risking and even enjoying the absurd, and of not only entertaining



unusual approaches in problem-solving but actively going outside the shelter of long-familiar concepts to find them. (p. 36)

However, he asserts that many older adults are blocked from engaging their creativity by a misguided self-concept that they do not have, or no longer have, creative abilities.

Another theory of lifespan development which can be applied to ageing well is the psychological theory of self-efficacy. Bandura (1997) has defined self-efficacy as “beliefs in one’s capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to produce given attainments” (p. 3). With self-efficacy, people have confidence that they can control the direction of their lives and they are more persistent and resilient to change and adverse events that cause discontinuities in their activities and functioning. Bandura made an interesting distinction between self-efficacy and the better known concept of self-esteem. Self-efficacy is related to, but not the same as self-esteem. Self-esteem relates to people’s sense of self-worth, whereas self-efficacy refers to a person’s belief in their abilities to carry out required actions. “Personal competencies that provide the means for achieving valued accomplishments afford a genuine basis of self-esteem” (p. 12), so building self-efficacy can also build self-esteem.

A sense of self-efficacy is another major contributor to ageing well that can be enhanced by well-designed programs. Bandura claimed that self-efficacy is an important concept for understanding how people can adapt well to changes in later life, that is, “how the elderly maintain a sense of personal agency and exercise it in ways that give meaning and purpose to their lives” (p. 205). Bandura identified Baltes and Baltes’ model of selective optimisation and compensation as a highly effective strategy for promoting older people’s sense of self-efficacy by focusing on their strengths and major interests which bring positive and satisfying experiences in their lives. From his review of research studies, Bandura concluded that a sense of self-efficacy promotes better health, more effective cognitive functioning, decreased vulnerability to stress and depression, and improves post-operative recovery. Hence, programs that can instil or promote self-efficacy in older people, have a valuable role to play in improving their health and well-being.

It is not only people's internal beliefs about their capacities, but also societal structures that affect how older people can lead their lives. As well as promoting a stronger sense of self-efficacy at an individual level, changes also need to be made to the social context in which older people live: "Structural changes that expand the roles and opportunities available for older people would make it easier for them to pursue fulfilling, productive activities over their entire lifetime" (p. 208).

According to Bandura, there are a number of strategies that can be employed to enhance people's self-efficacy, although the studies he examined did not investigate older people specifically. He used the terms "skilled efficacy builders" and "mentors" (p. 106) to describe program workers who are delivering programs to improve people's sense of self-efficacy. Strategies they use include:

presenting the pursuit as relying on acquirable skills, raising performers' beliefs in their abilities to acquire the skills, modelling the requisite skills, structuring activities in masterable steps that ensure a high level of initial success, and providing explicit feedback of continued progress. (p. 105)

Bandura also asserted that skilled efficacy builders "must be good diagnosticians of strengths and weaknesses and knowledgeable about how to tailor activities to turn potentiality into actuality" (p. 106). They "encourage people to measure their successes in terms of self-improvement" but do not foster unrealistic beliefs or praise people "excessively for mediocre performances" or "repeatedly [offer] unsolicited help" (p. 102). Increasing our knowledge about how programs can effectively facilitate older people's sense of self-efficacy would contribute valuable knowledge to the leisure and aged care fields and provide more opportunities for older people to age well.

Another researcher who has linked self-efficacy to ageing well is Blazer (2002). He has identified the value of self-efficacy to improving mental health and reducing the risk of depression in older people. Blazer argues that self-efficacy is central to successful ageing and advocates developing intervention programs for the older population in order to enhance their self-efficacy and thereby reduce the impact of sadness and loneliness which are recognised risk factors for depression.

## Arts, Leisure and Older People

### *Arts as Leisure*

Expression is part of human nature. Children draw, act, sing, and dance their way through the day. The problem is that somehow growing up seems to involve outgrowing such creative spontaneity . . . The issue is not why some try to create in the arts and elsewhere, but how have we stifled the playfulness we knew as children.” (Freysinger & Kelly, 2004, pp. 300-301)

While the leisure field typically positions the arts as an avenue for public consumption or entertainment, a small number of leisure authors and researchers have given prominence to the value of the participatory arts as leisure where “ordinary” people are the creators or artists (Arnold, 1976; Freysinger & Kelly, 2004; Hamilton-Smith, 1985; Haywood et al., 1995; Kelly, 1996, 1993; Lindauer, 2003; Osgood, 1993). This means that the arts as creative and social group activities can be usefully examined for their benefits as leisure activities.

Freysinger and Kelly promote the concept that there is an artist in all of us and that art does not have to be “exclusive and excluding” (p. 301), nor dependent on age. We all have the capacity to play and express ourselves uniquely, to use our abilities “to play and create and [weld] them to particular skills and challenges” (p. 301). Haywood et al. (1995) note the gathering strength of the community arts movement in encouraging the participation of ordinary people in artistic pursuits. In other words, the arts are not the restricted province of those with advanced skills or of any particular age group. An important distinction needs to be made between the participatory arts where people are directly involved in the creation or production of art, and appreciation or consumption of art where people are spectators in some way.

Authors such as Arnold (1976), Fisher & Specht (1999), Mosher-Ashley and Barrett (1997), Osgood (1993), Lindauer (2003), Freysinger and Kelly (2004) and Russell (2005) are proponents of people in general, or older people in particular, being involved in arts

activities and describe the benefits that they can derive. The benefits identified can enhance both physical and mental health. It is important, however to differentiate between creative arts and those that are “replicative, spectatorist, and essentially mediocre” (Hamilton-Smith, 1985, p. 16) in exploring the potential benefits of the arts to enhance older people’s quality of life.

Osgood (1993) is a strong advocate of older people participating in creative arts activities for the multitude of potential benefits that they can experience. According to Osgood, through their art people can have enjoyment and fun, develop and express their identity, relax, forget their problems, stimulate their imagination and re-energise. The arts can fulfil our “need for freedom, joy, pleasure, beauty, aesthetics, and passion” (pp. 175-176). She believes that involvement in artistic creativity can enhance health and well-being for older adults. Through exercise of choice they can develop “pride, confidence, self-esteem, and a sense of control” (p. 177), all of which are beneficial to coping with the challenges and problems they face in their lives.

In asserting that creating art has the potential to be more satisfying and enjoyable than being a spectator, Freysinger and Kelly (2004) are enthusiastic about the role of the arts as serious leisure. They highlight the development of a dynamic identity as one of the major potential benefits for people when they become artists. The same authors argue that as creators people can be considered to have an identity as amateur artists, but as spectators or consumers such a constructive and developmental identity is lacking:

There seems to be something special about arts production. Doing and creating in the arts primarily for the experience, as leisure, is different from even the most informed appreciation. There is an investment of the self and an identification with what is created that is missing in appreciating the work of others. (p. 300)

Kelly (1996) has also highlighted self-expression, mastery, skill development, personal growth and the end creative product as the benefits of artistic expression that then contribute to the additional benefit of feelings of satisfaction.

While Kelly's description of the benefits that can be derived from creating art indicates that both the creative process and the finished work can bring enjoyment and satisfaction to the artist, some authors have noted that the process may be the more valued dimension. For example, when explaining the origins of his interest in the connection between the concept of flow and the experience of enjoyment, Csikszentmihalyi (1975) observed that the creative process appeared more important to the artists than the finished painting:

As I watched and photographed painters at their easels, one of the things that struck me most vividly was the almost trancelike state they entered when the work was going well. Once the painting started to take shape, the artist became completely enthralled. The motivation to go on painting was so intense that fatigue, hunger, or discomfort ceased to matter. . . . [but they] almost immediately lost interest in the canvas they had just painted. (p. xiv)

The potential for the process of artistic expression to be totally absorbing and mood-elevating is further illustrated in this story from renowned Australian artist, Lloyd Rees:

Physical tiredness [due to major health problems] was still affecting me and one day I tired early and was faced with a long wait for a Parramatta bus. I took a book of drawing paper from my satchel . . . Almost thoughtlessly, I began working, content in my tired state to merely outline the contour of hills and fences and trees of several varieties, with houses and sheds nestling among them or standing clear. The tiredness soon vanished as the drawing took shape in my excitement at experiencing a new sense of the pencil. (Kolenberg, 1995, p. 10)

Social benefits are another outcome of engagement in the creative arts. Through their participation in an arts group, older people have opportunities to interact socially and develop friendships, and thereby “reduce feelings of loneliness, isolation, and depression” (Osgood, 1993, p. 185). Participants can experience “a sense of community with others who accept the same challenges and engage in the same efforts. There are also the satisfactions associated with the product that in some way is offered to the world” (Freysinger & Kelly, 2004, p. 306). Indeed for some people, the social relationships around the activity may be more important than the art itself (Kelly, 1996).

The Victorian Health Promotion Foundation (VicHealth) developed its Arts for Health program from research that indicated that “participation in arts and cultural programs has

a role in breaking down social isolation, increasing people's feelings of belonging and improving physical and mental health" (VicHealth, 2002-2003). VicHealth (2005) has identified social inclusion as one of the three major social determinants of mental health. An evaluation of projects funded through VicHealth's Community Arts Participation Program (VicHealth, 2003) revealed that participation in community arts enhances social inclusion by bringing people together around a common project and sense of purpose, promoting positive interactions and friendships. The evaluation report also highlighted the benefits to personal development and identity as people became recognised for their artistic skills instead of by their deficits. Skill development, increased self-esteem and self-confidence were reported, along with people gaining a sense of pride from public recognition of their talents. However, these programs were mostly targeted at young people experiencing disadvantage, with few programs involving older people.

The benefits of sharing a stimulating interest with a group of like-minded people is described vividly by the great French impressionist painter, Claude Monet in reference to the bohemian life and the café as a meeting place for artists:

During the course of a single evening, questions relating to art theory or practical questions about the craft of painting might lead to heated debates . . . "Nothing was more interesting than these battles of words," recalled Monet later. "They sharpened our intellect, filled us with enthusiasm, which lasted for weeks, until an idea finally took shape. We left the café with our will strengthened, our heads clearer, and our spirits lifted." (Gärtner, 2001, p. 213)

The artistic process also involves new situations, uncertainty and risk-taking. Russell (2005) advocates that people should not be totally protected from risk as it can "give a sense of freedom, control over self and the environment, and escape from the ordinary routines of life" (p. 67) as well as strengthening social bonds with co-participants.

Authors such as Hart (1993) and Richardson (1991) have written about fine art programs they conducted with older people in long-term care and in other residential and community settings. Their reports on the range of observed benefits of the programs to the participants included enriching their lives, providing a positive identity, rebuilding

self-confidence and self-worth, along with providing mental stimulation and a productive purposeful activity.

Lindauer (2003) conducted a comprehensive review of studies and texts that contribute to an understanding of the benefits that older people can experience through involvement in the arts, and concluded that “the elderly’s involvement in the arts . . . affects physical, sensory, and psychological abilities, fosters self-improvement and personal growth, and transfers to other areas of everyday life” (p. 277). Interestingly, Lindauer placed these findings within the context of there being little evidence of rigorous research studies into the benefits that were described.

A current qualitative study being conducted by the Center on Aging, Health & Humanities at George Washington University, compares the health outcomes of participation in creative arts programs (taught by professional artists) of people aged 65 years and over with the health outcomes of older people who did not participate in such programs. Early findings indicate that participants’ health has improved since joining a program. In one group, “participants reported that they fell less often, needed fewer medications, felt less depressed and less lonely, and became more active than a comparison group of 75 seniors in similar health and living circumstances” (Kornblum, 2004, p. 4).

One particularly relevant study to my research was conducted by Fisher and Specht (1999) and was briefly mentioned in the previous section on ageing well. Fisher and Specht conducted a qualitative study of the relationship between successful ageing and creativity from the perspective of older people themselves. Using a survey questionnaire with closed and open-ended questions, they interviewed 36 individual contributors (aged 60 to 93 years) to a senior art exhibition. Their findings linked the benefits to older people of participation in creative artistic activities and their experience of ageing well. The older people interviewed were experiencing the usual range of problems for this era of life, such as loss of their spouse, declining health and limited finances. The benefits that their respondents identified included: “satisfaction derived from being involved in

something one enjoys . . . getting outside oneself, a sense of accomplishment, and connecting to others” (p. 465). *Getting outside oneself* covered responses about escape from everyday life and problems, losing track of time and being absorbed. *A sense of accomplishment* involved having a sense of purpose, contributing, having something to look forward to, or leaving something of themselves behind. *Connecting to others* included interactions around a common interest, bringing joy to others through their artwork, companionship, and social support to continue with their art. Fisher and Specht said of the older artists in their study:

[They] do not see their lives as over and their hours to be spent in quiet rumination of past accomplishments. Their lives are still vibrant with the hopes of tomorrow. Their artwork draws them onward, does not permit disengagement, and demands active involvement in both the cognitive realm of their inner being and the physical world of manipulating resources into unique expressions of self. (p. 469)

The researchers viewed these older amateur artists as displaying the essence of successful aging: “It is this optimism, this excitement about what is yet to come, this eagerness to embrace life, which is at the heart of successful aging” (p. 470) and to which their artistic creativity had contributed significantly. The older people interviewed in Fisher and Specht’s study were engaged in art on an individual basis, not as members of an art group, so the role of the environment for their art was not part of the area of investigation.

In Australia, there has been little research, qualitative or quantitative, into the benefits to older people of participating in the arts. One of the few studies was conducted for the Australia Council (for the Arts) by the Australian Pensioners’ and Superannuants’ Federation (1995) to better understand the needs of older Australians as art “consumers” with a view to increasing their attendance at arts events. Quantitative data were gathered from surveys of 175 older people aged 55 years and over, focus groups involving 98 older people, as well as from surveys of 34 service providers. Participants identified a range of psychosocial benefits that they believed enhanced their quality of life. While its focus was not on older people as “practitioners” or “arts creators,” the study did find that 55% of the participants were currently engaged in an artistic activity and 41% would like to become involved in or increase their involvement in an artistic activity. Additional



qualitative comments from the respondents indicated a desire to be creatively engaged in the artistic process itself – a desire which was often constrained. For example, one frustrated participant stated: “I have a burning desire to paint but my wife tells me not to bother” (p. 49). The data gathered in this study indicate that the participatory arts play a significant role in the lives of a large number of older people and are worthy of far greater attention in research and in program delivery.

A more recent report to the Australia Council (Costantoura, 2000), although not specifically targeted at older people, provided further evidence that the arts are a mainstream activity in Australia. Costantoura conducted quantitative and qualitative research, including a major telephone survey, to provide information about how Australians value the arts with a view to developing strategies to engage the public more fully in the arts. The findings indicated that many Australians “get a lot of enjoyment out of being artists themselves, either just for their own enjoyment (34%) and/or for others to enjoy (24%)” (p. 11), 66% of people agree that “the arts are good for my inner self” (p. 12), and most people would like more involvement in creative and artistic activities. Furthermore, 67% believe that “the arts should be as much about doing these things yourself as being part of an audience” (p. 88). While there was a significant interest in becoming more involved in artistic expression, the study also identified constraints to people’s participation, for instance, many people believed that when they were growing up artistic achievement was not valued. Little attention was given specifically to older people. While it was acknowledged that “the arts could play a role in providing a social fabric for older people feeling disconnected from society” (p. 91), the major focus was on the financial constraints they face, not the potential benefits they could experience. The report suggested that white Australians could learn from Indigenous Australians about “how the arts can be a family and community-based activity which sees people supported in their efforts regardless of their level of skill” (p. 25).

Researchers in a small scale qualitative study conducted in Melbourne by RMIT University (1998) have specifically advocated the arts as a beneficial leisure activity for

older people. They investigated a range of leisure activities in which older people participated, including a community theatre group for older people and concluded that:

Active participation in the arts provides an avenue for self-expression and the display of skills and capabilities. The arts can provide a voice for older people to articulate their ideas and concerns . . . Workers need to recognise that participation in the arts can empower older people and enable them to create new ways of seeing. (p. 35)

Osgood (1993) has also called for more leisure programs to be developed to promote older people's creativity and belonging. In her view, arts programs have a special role in stimulating the Ulyssean spirit as "the arts are inspirational, infusing the older adult with a spirit or zest" (p. 177). She considers an Ulyssean approach to leisure through creative arts activities to be a powerful way of enhancing people's capacities to age well, particularly when their self-esteem is threatened by losses in functioning and independence. Osgood is concerned, however, that "creativity may be arrested in older individuals by their inhibitions, habits, and expectations or by the lack of opportunities provided by the social and environmental conditions in which they live" (p. 176).

Looking more broadly at creativity, McGuire, Boyd and Tedrick (1996) advocate that leisure providers understand the value of a Ulyssean approach to leisure for older people, in order to avoid falling into the trap of limiting their potential for growth and development by delivering only stereotypical and so-called "age-appropriate" activities. They metaphorically describe the potential of leisure activities to be "ships upon which individuals embark on Ulyssean journeys" (p. 5). In their model, leisure providers become the crew whose role shifts from "activity provider to enabler, guide, facilitator" (p. 5), while the older person controls the ship. In a similar vein, Kelly (1996) has noted the importance of artists as workers in the leisure field: "the artist may be as central to community recreation programs as the coach and program leader" (p. 244).

### *Leisure Benefits*

Participating in leisure has long been recognised as an avenue for bringing benefits to individuals' health and well-being at any age (Csikszentmihalyi & Kleiber, 1991; Driver, Brown et al., 1991; Driver & Bruns, 1999; Driver, Tinsley et al., 1991; Kelly, 1991; Mannell & Kleiber, 1997; Mannell & Stynes, 1991; R. Russell, 2005). Driver and his associates have been at the forefront of developing a comprehensive understanding of the beneficial consequences of leisure, including a conceptual framework entitled *Benefits Approach to Leisure* (Driver & Bruns, 1999). Driver and Bruns define a leisure benefit as an improved condition, the prevention of a worse condition or the realization of a specific satisfying psychological experience. Their definition has particular relevance to older people as it allows that leisure benefits can be experienced by people whose health is deteriorating. They classified benefits into personal (psychological and psychophysiological), social and cultural, economic and environmental.

A number of other authors have also proposed classifications of benefits. Kelly (1991), for example, used a sociological perspective to divide leisure benefits into social and personal. From this perspective, leisure takes place in a social context throughout the life course with personal growth and development occurring through opportunities for continuity and change.

Mannell and Stynes (1991) developed a systems model of leisure benefits which contributes a perspective of how leisure providers can influence people's experiences and outcomes. In this model, leisure inputs (environment, activity, time and state of mind) are transformed through a production process (the leisure experience) into outputs or consequences (physiological, economic, environmental, social and psychological). The final stage involves a value judgement as to whether or not the outcomes are experienced as benefits. Using this model, leisure experiences can be investigated to identify the factors which influence the quality of the outcomes, such as, the components of an activity, a participant's attributes and attitudes, as well as the interaction between the activity and the person. This knowledge would add to our understanding of which leisure

activities are more conducive to producing desired benefits for particular people or groups.

The social benefits of leisure are well recognised. Csikszentmihalyi (1975) is one researcher who has explored the importance of the social dimension of leisure to optimal enjoyment. In studying groups such as dancers, chess players and rock climbers, he has identified spending time with friends, camaraderie and conversation around a common interest and the bonds developed through a demanding shared experience as highly valued benefits of engaging in a common leisure interest. Stebbins (1998) has described the social rewards of leisure in similar terms:

Meeting people and making friends is about camaraderie, the appeal of shop talk, the exhilaration of being part of the local scene, the sense of being immersed in the social world of a leisure pursuit (p. 85).

Freysinger and Kelly (2004) also reinforced the social benefits of leisure in their discussion of the importance to people of the small social worlds that develop around shared leisure interests. They described these small worlds as providing valued social interaction, relationships and friendships. By linking people with friends and community programs, leisure can support people to retain their sense of belonging to their community.

Because of these social benefits, leisure can provide an effective means of supporting older people to build and maintain friendships. As part of RMIT University's (1998) investigation of older people's leisure, the researchers developed case studies from their interviews with older people and leisure providers in a variety of leisure settings, namely, an athletics club, a theatre group, an advocacy group, a community social support program and residential facilities. Their findings confirmed that "making friends is one of the primary reasons for getting involved in leisure activities . . . people often choose friends on the basis of their leisure interests" (p. 6). Analysis of the case studies identified developing and sharing interests with friends as "a key factor in maintaining people's sense of happiness and well-being. Friends provide a sense of meaning and

purpose in our lives, affirms [*sic*] a sense of who we are and provides [*sic*] support and connection to life interests” (p. 6).

Psychological benefits are another important dimension of leisure. Mannell and Stynes (1991) grouped psychological benefits into three broad categories: self-development - including self-actualisation and identity affirmation; learning - skill and knowledge acquisition; and experiential - flow experiences, mood and fun. On the basis of their review of research studies into leisure benefits, Driver and Bruns (1999) clustered psychological benefits into three interlinked categories: better mental health and health maintenance (a sense of well-being, reduced depression and anger, and positive moods); personal development and growth (feelings of positive self-esteem, confidence, competence and mastery, independence and autonomy, control, self-efficacy and identity affirmation); and personal appreciation and satisfaction (a sense of freedom, self-actualisation, flow and absorption, optimal experience, exhilaration, stimulation, adventure, challenge, quality of life, life satisfaction, creative expression, positive mood or emotion, and anticipation).

An important historical contribution to the research on the vital role of leisure for older adults' health and well-being was made by Kelly, Steinkamp and Kelly (1986) . They aimed to explore how leisure contributes to older people's adaptation to the changes that accompany the later years of the life course, beyond the function of filling in the time and space left by losses of former work and family roles. Their quantitative data indicated a strong association between life satisfaction and leisure participation and that “no other factor contributed as much to life satisfaction and social integration as leisure participation” (p. 533). Similarly, the findings of a large quantitative cross cultural study of ageing well (Hawkins et al., 2004) suggest that leisure satisfaction contributes to life satisfaction for older people. Furthermore, the researchers found that “leisure satisfaction is significantly associated with perceptions of ageing well” (Binkley & Kurowski, 2003).

While Kelly et al. (1986) found that leisure activity levels decline with age, most notably in those activities requiring physical exertion, they also discovered significant continuity

across the life course in other types of leisure activities. The meanings that the respondents attributed to their leisure were investigated. Nearly all respondents specified enjoyment as an important meaning. The other commonly attributed meanings were “companionship in the activity, strengthening primary relationships, competence and skill-development, expression and personal development, health and exercise” (p. 535). The findings indicated that leisure for older adults provides a context for “stimulating interaction with family and friends as well as opportunities to be and become selves of ability and worth” (p. 534) and contributes to adapting to life changes. Kelly et al. noted that “most people prefer to be with their peers – those whom they find congenial and supportive – in contexts that foster interaction” (p. 537) and proposed that it is important to identify the facilitating factors that create such environments to incorporate them into social policy and programs.

Other researchers have also investigated how leisure patterns change as people age (Freysinger, 1999; McPherson, 1991). Although the tendency is for people to continue their familiar leisure activities, many people take the opportunity to change and adopt new activities. Like the research of Kelly et al., these studies indicate that it is always important to find out the meaning that people attribute to their leisure choices and their purpose for engaging in a specific activity. To date, most leisure research has been quantitative and the focus is typically on the type, amount and frequency of leisure activities. Yet it has also been observed for older adults that “satisfaction with leisure appears to be more important than the actual leisure activity participation level” (Hawkins et al., 2004, p. 11). Indeed, McPherson (1991) advocates that we need to “consider the quality and meaning of outcomes of leisure in later years, not just the quantity of leisure involvement” (p. 427).

Unfortunately, much of the historical research - and even recent studies - perpetuate an ageist view of leisure options for older adults, where they are not considered to be active participants and contributors to mainstream community life. Strain, Grabusic, Searle, and Dunn (2002), for instance, conducted a longitudinal quantitative study into leisure patterns of older adults. Their selection of leisure activities to determine people’s

changes in leisure participation was predetermined, limited and stereotypical, with no activities specifically reflecting creativity, lifelong learning, active sports or volunteering in the community, in other words, serious leisure.

Another psychological benefit of leisure is identity affirmation. There is substantial evidence in the literature that people use leisure to affirm their identity. Identity is a multi-dimensional concept which is defined and redefined through the life course in response to continuities and changes (Atchley, 1993; Haggard & Williams, 1992; Kelly, 1999; Moody, 1998). While Atchley (1993) focused on the normal transitions of the life course, Kelly (1999) acknowledged older people's experiences of "disrupting trauma" (p. 60) and the diversity of paths that their lives take. Leisure influences our identity or our composite sense of self because it entails "meanings, resources, and relationships that change through the journey of life" (p. 60).

In the therapeutic recreation field, a model of *Optimizing Lifelong Health through Therapeutic Recreation* has been proposed (Wilhite, Keller, & Caldwell, 1999). It supports the use of leisure as a strategy for enabling people to adapt positively to major "disruptive traumas" such as illness and disability. This model suggests that leisure has the potential to support the expression and ongoing development of identity in later life even when people contend with discontinuities in their lives. It is particularly significant in considering older people's sense of self that age itself may not be a dominant dimension of their identity. Kaufman (1986) developed a concept of "the ageless self" from her analysis of interviews in a qualitative study of 60 people aged over 70 years who lived in a range of settings. From the interviews, it emerged that "being old per se is not a central feature of the self, nor is it a source of meaning" (p. 7). Rather, it is the continuous process of redefining their identity that provides a sense of coherence, continuity and meaning in older people's lives: "the self draws meaning from the past, interpreting and recreating it as a resource for being in the present." (p. 14).

Older people can be disadvantaged and marginalised by stereotyped expectations of their roles and identity. Some older adults use their leisure interests to resist this limiting social

pressure to conform. Freysinger (1999) cites an example of an older woman who “wanted an identity, a name, a life separate from family . . . while social norms may still suggest that older women should look to grandmotherhood for meaning and identity in old age, individuals are creating other options for themselves” (p. 264 citing Aviad, M., Director, 1987, *Acting our age* [video]). Similarly, in her interviews with 39 older adults, Wearing (1995) found significant examples of people “carving out a space” (p. 276) for themselves and strengthening their identity and well-being through their leisure choices. These choices challenged the constraints of ageist attitudes and expectations as to how they should be living out this period of their lives.

A small number of studies have explored how leisure can contribute to well-being during the retirement transition (Chiriboga & Pierce, 1993; Long, 1989; RMIT University, 1998). The findings suggest that older people use leisure to replace the meanings and benefits they derived through their work, such as a positive identity, meaningful activity, social contact, mental stimulation and learning, creativity, productivity and meeting challenges.

Enjoyment is a critical or core element of leisure (Dattilo & Kleiber, 1993; Iso-Ahola, 1989). Enjoyment is both a psychological benefit in itself as well as the experience through which other leisure benefits are produced. Csikszentmihalyi (1975; 1997; Csikszentmihalyi & Kleiber, 1991) has made a particularly significant contribution to the understanding of enjoyment, not only in the field of leisure, but also in other domains of life such as education and work. His research has extensively explored enjoyment as an optimal or *flow* experience which in turn can impact positively on people’s quality of life.

From his initial studies of chess players, rock climbers, rock dancers and surgeons, Csikszentmihalyi (1975) developed a model of *flow* to enhance our understanding of the meaning of enjoyment. He defined a flow experience as an intrinsically rewarding experience. The psychological state of flow can also be described as optimal or peak enjoyment. Csikszentmihalyi (2002) identified several common features of flow experiences: a challenging activity that requires skills, the merging of action and



awareness, clear goals and feedback, absorption in the task, a sense of control, loss of self-consciousness, and the transformation of time.

If the skills and challenges required for an activity are out of balance, people may experience anxiety (challenges too high), boredom (challenges too low) or apathy (challenges and skills too low). Although clear goals and feedback are integral to flow activities, goals are there to give direction to the activity but are not the ultimate purpose of the activity. With flow experiences, people can benefit from a sense of escape or release from the anxieties and stresses in their lives, as Csikszentmihalyi and Kleiber (1991) describe in this passage:

When a person finds a goal which presents a certain range of opportunities for action that matches his or her skills, attention becomes so concentrated on the activity that all irrelevant concerns tend to be excluded from awareness. The past and the future fade away, elbowed out by the urgency of the present. The usual hobgoblins of the mind, the anxieties of everyday life – insecurity, guilt, jealousy, financial worries – disappear . . . Consciousness cannot process more than a limited range of information at the same time . . . when all the attention is absorbed by the challenges of the activity, there is simply not enough left to notice anything else (p. 95)

Csikszentmihalyi's research into flow was influenced by Maslow's interrelated concepts of the hierarchy of needs or motivation, self-actualisation and peak experiences (Csikszentmihalyi, 1975; Lowry, 1999; Maslow, 1999). Self-actualisation, according to Maslow (Maslow, 1999, p. 106), refers to those episodes when a person becomes "more truly himself, more perfectly actualising his potentialities, closer to the core of his Being, more fully human" (p.106). It is a dynamic process that can be lifelong. In these terms, self-actualisation can be considered the highest order psychological benefit of personal growth. It involves satisfaction, self-expression and a sense of fulfilment. Csikszentmihalyi and Kleiber (1991) assert that "whereas the self disappears during a flow experience, it reappears afterwards stronger than it had been before . . . this is what self-actualization implies" (p. 96).

Csikszentmihalyi's concept of flow has been influential in the leisure field and it is consistent with research that shows that people derive maximum benefits and enjoyment from leisure activities that require effort and skill development. Such leisure activities have been termed "serious" or "high investment" leisure. Csikszentmihalyi and Kleiber (Csikszentmihalyi & Kleiber, 1991) have expressed concern that "the activities in which people choose to invest their free time usually do little to expand their sense of well-being, or to cultivate a sense of self" (p. 94). Kelly et al. (1986) expressed a similar point when they noted that people typically spend more of their leisure time watching television but their identity or sense of self is derived through their serious leisure which "involves interaction with significant others or is expressive activity in which they have invested considerable effort in gained competence" (p. 532). To realise the benefits of flow or self-actualisation, people need to invest effort in using their skills to meet challenges that are intrinsically interesting or meaningful to them. Or, as Mannell and Kleiber (1997) assert, if leisure is to fulfil its potential of enhancing psychological well-being it must be "more than simply a pleasant, diversionary, escape-oriented experience" (p. 290).

According to Stebbins, who extensively studied the experiences of amateurs across a range of interests, serious leisure has great advantages over casual, mass or popular leisure (Stebbins, 1992; 1999, 2001). Serious leisure refers to "amateur, hobbyist, and career volunteer activities" (1992, p. 126). It is characterised by perseverance, a career in the activity which requires continuing effort from acquiring knowledge and developing skills over an extended period of time, personal and social benefits including "self-actualization, self-enrichment, self-expression, regeneration or renewal of self, feelings of accomplishment, enhancement of self-image, social interaction and belongingness, and lasting physical products of the activity" (1999, p. 71), identity and identification with the pursuit, and a shared ethos with other participants. Stebbins rated "pure fun" as a benefit of only minor significance. He also linked the experience of serious leisure with Csikszentmihalyi's concept of flow as the features of serious leisure make these activities conducive to flow experiences.

Mannell (1993) argues that high investment leisure activities are valuable for promoting life satisfaction or enhancing a person's quality of life – a benefit which embraces many of the other positive outcomes of leisure. He has identified three concepts critical to these high investment activities: *commitment* to long term gain over short-term costs; *serious leisure* which demands perseverance and effort to develop knowledge and skills, and *flow*. From a study of 92 retired older men and women using the experience sampling method and personal interviews, Mannell concluded that “those older adults who are more satisfied with their lives invest greater effort (indicated by the experience of flow) in more of their daily activities than those who report less satisfaction with their lives” (p. 141).

Like Mannell, Stebbins (1992) advocates serious leisure to enhance the lives of older people who have retired because of its potential to provide benefits such as work-like activity, social connections around shared interests, responsibility and a valued role. Freysinger and Kelly (2004) also note the importance of serious leisure experiences to older adults. Activities such as skill-based activities or community volunteering promote life satisfaction because they require challenging use of their abilities beyond mere entertainment. By providing purposeful activity, involvement in serious leisure can assist older people to cope with life transitions and disruptive events. However, Freysinger and Kelly do also make the cautionary comment that people need a balance in their lives between serious leisure and more relaxing forms of leisure.

### ***Leisure Facilitating Factors***

In recent years, researchers have begun to explore factors that positively influence people's leisure participation. These factors have been described as *facilitators* in that they “promote the formation of leisure preferences and encourage participation” (Raymore, 2002, p. 39). The term *facilitating factors* is used in this thesis rather than *facilitators* to make a clear differentiation from the activity leaders or program co-ordinators. Facilitating factors take into account “individual differences in leisure

orientations, interests, and life patterns” (p. 38) which influence the meaning that people give to their leisure choices.

Another expression that has been used in the leisure literature is *affordance*, which Mannell and Kleiber (1997) describe as:

conditions that will promote and support satisfying leisure styles . . . these factors involve influencing and managing both person and social situational factors. Just as there are personality characteristics and psychological dispositions that facilitate leisure behaviour and experience, so there are social and physical environmental conditions that are conducive to leisure behaviour. (p. 345)

This means that as well as facilitating strategies that older people themselves can use, there are also “external” strategies that leisure providers, program co-ordinators, service organisations and policy makers can employ to enhance older people’s participation in leisure activities.

An example of a facilitating strategy that many older people use to optimise the leisure experience and retain a sense of continuity is “recreation substitutability.” By substituting “those activities that provide similar psychological experiences, satisfactions, and benefits as the original activity” (Mannell & Kleiber, 1997, p. 344), people can remain active in their leisure. This strategy enables older people to retain a continuity of meaning and is a form of “selective optimisation with compensation” (P. B. Baltes & Baltes, 1990).

Although there is no guarantee that leisure providers will deliver beneficial leisure experiences to individual participants, they “can foster, encourage, and facilitate meaningful leisure experiences . . . through the management of the recreation environment and setting, and the provision of concrete opportunities” (Mannell, 1999, p. 247). Mannell and Kleiber (1997) have proposed a number of facilitating strategies for leisure providers to manage the setting and activity in order to optimise people’s participation and satisfaction. In addition, they identified strategies that enhance people’s attitudes to their leisure experience. These strategies include providing challenging opportunities matched to people’s skill levels and promoting flow experiences. The

selection of fellow members in leisure activities can also be a vital facilitating strategy for enjoyable leisure experiences because:

being with friends, or at least with peers, is generally the most positive experience for both young people and old. . . . Therefore, any program that tries to enhance the benefits of leisure must keep in mind the fact that companionship is in itself one of the most rewarding dimensions of experience. (Csikszentmihalyi & Kleiber, 1991, p. 99)

From studying the role that leisure plays in helping older people build and maintain friendships, RMIT University (1998) identified five themes that highlight how leisure programs can support older people's friendships and facilitate beneficial leisure experiences. These themes were: firstly, provide opportunities for sharing interests with friends; secondly, recognise people as unique individuals whose identities are not defined by their age and may be influenced by their leisure interests; thirdly, listen to older people to understand what is important to them; fourthly, enable older people to contribute to shaping and controlling their leisure activities; and lastly:

Environments where people experience fun and enjoyment; where they can express themselves and develop new skills; where there is trust, understanding and appreciation; and where people are kind and accepting will be environments that go some way to fostering friendships. The challenge is to create and nurture such environments. (p. 7)

Similarly, Csikszentmihalyi and Kleiber (1991) have recognised the importance of the environment for facilitating flow or optimal experiences of enjoyment. They have suggested creating environments where people feel free to make mistakes and where they have opportunities for new challenges so that enjoyment does not turn to boredom. They also recommend further investigation into how to promote leisure that is conducive to growth or self-actualisation.

Facilitators interact with leisure constraints to influence the extent to which people can benefit from their leisure experiences. Leisure constraints are those factors that prevent people from engaging in a leisure activity or inhibit an optimal experience. The

constraints approach to leisure is the flipside of the facilitators approach. Older people, in particular, can be confronted by a variety of leisure constraints which prevent or interfere with their participation.

The constraints approach is an area of leisure research that has received considerable attention (Alexandris, Tsorbatzoudis, & Grouios, 2002; Crawford & Godbey, 1987; Crawford, Jackson, & Godbey, 1991; Henderson & Bialeschki, 1991; Jackson & Rucks, 1993). Constraints are typically classified as structural, intrapersonal, and interpersonal (Crawford & Godbey, 1987). Structural constraints include external factors such as finances, weather, availability and knowledge of opportunities. Intrapersonal constraints refer to internal factors such as depression, anxiety, perceived lack of competence in required skills, and subjective judgements as to appropriateness of activity. Interpersonal constraints include not having a suitable partner or companion for participating in a leisure activity, and other people's attitudes.

Although some researchers have treated constraints as insurmountable barriers, other researchers, like Riggs and Mott (1992), have found that constraints do not necessarily prevent older people commencing or continuing their participation in an activity. Instead, they may respond to constraints by modifying their participation in some way. In their quantitative study of the social interactions of older people, Riggs and Mott identified three categories of barriers to starting a new activity: health, motivation and social. Common reasons for lack of motivation included "lack of time", "couldn't be bothered", "felt too old", and negative past experiences or fear. There was a correlation between loneliness and lower motivation as a reason for not starting a new activity. Social constraints included cost, lack of transport and lack of company or support. Although health was a barrier to commencing new activities, Riggs and Mott found that "frail health was not a barrier to existing activities [suggesting] that people are more likely to adapt activities they enjoy rather than seek out a new interest" (p. 33).

Crawford, Jackson and Godbey (1991) proposed a sequential effect of constraints which influence leisure preferences, participation and level of participation. Intrapersonal

constraints affect the initial motivation to participate in a particular activity, interpersonal constraints then determine the social capacity to participate, and finally the structural constraints affect access to an activity. They also proposed that this same sequence applies to a person's commitment and efforts to improve their skills once they have commenced an activity. In a further development of their leisure constraints model, Jackson, Crawford and Godbey (1993) considered that people develop strategies to negotiate their way through the variety of constraints that may confront them. In other words, people's choice of facilitating strategies is influenced by the nature of the constraints that they face.

McGuire (1985) advocated creating constraint-free environments for older people and that leisure providers should address people's needs as individuals rather than maximising numbers attending programs. He identified a number of facilitating strategies that leisure providers can employ to enable older people to overcome the constraints that confront them. McGuire captured the essence of the interrelationship between constraints and facilitating factors in the following passage:

If leisure is to be a path to fulfillment, growth and development in later life . . . people must have options to pursue during their free time, access to those options, and resources to take advantage of them. . . . The focus is not on activities and getting as many people as possible into an organized program but rather on identifying individual leisure needs and interests and helping individuals remove whatever obstacles exist that prevent them from realizing their leisure preferences. (pp. 350-351).

## **Summary**

My review of the literature across the domains of ageing well, the arts and leisure has confirmed that participating in arts activities as serious leisure has the potential to contribute significantly to older people's capacity to age well. From my reading, I have also concluded that older people have received little attention from researchers regarding their interests and needs in the area of serious leisure - particularly in investigating the benefits of engaging in the creative arts as a group leisure activity. A significantly

neglected group are those older people who have difficulty participating in mainstream activities because their capacity for physical activity has been curtailed by deteriorating health. On the Australian scene, research has shown that a large number of older Australians are either pursuing interests in the arts or have expressed a desire to do so, yet little is being done to actively encourage and support these interests.

In addition, the majority of studies into older people's leisure have been conducted using quantitative methods, typically surveys and questionnaires with predetermined categories. It is evident that there is a pressing need for research that explores stimulating and creative leisure interests from the perspective of older people themselves. Hence, taking a qualitative approach and asking older people themselves to talk about their perceptions of the benefits that stem from direct involvement in an arts-focused leisure group, addresses an important gap in our understanding of how older people can enhance their sense of well-being.



### **3. MY APPROACH TO THE STUDY: RESEARCH DESIGN**

In this chapter, I explain my rationale for selecting the particular qualitative research design and discuss the significance of “giving voice” to older people. I outline the theoretical framework and my data collection methods, including sampling and recruitment, in-depth interviews and participant observation. The final section in this chapter describes the methods of data analysis which incorporated grounded theory principles.

#### **Introduction**

To date, there has been little research that tells about the benefits that older people themselves say they derive from leisure programs. It was important to me that the perspectives of the older people themselves be central to this research and that my methods would reflect their opinions and experiences. Fundamental to this study is the belief that by providing older people with the time and space to express their ideas and experiences, they can be active contributors to the research process – instead of passive service recipients. Through this process, researchers and practitioners can gain a better understanding of how to meet the diverse leisure needs of older people.

Qualitative research is particularly appropriate for the study of older people as it can “detect, represent, and explicate the meaning of something from the viewpoint of the actors involved” (Sankar & Gubrium, 1994, p. x), which was the primary concern of my study. Indeed, qualitative research is recognised in gerontology as conducive to older people contributing as *co-researchers*, where the researcher and participants collaborate to develop understandings of the issues connected with the topic being investigated (Kamler & Feldman, 1995; Kaufman, 1994; Randall & Kenyon, 2001; Ray, 1998; Rowles & Reinharz, 1988). Such a collaborative approach acknowledges the idea that older people be actively involved in research concerning their own lives (McPherson,

1991; C. Russell & Schofield, 1995). Gubrium and Holstein (2002) distinguish between the image of *passive subjects* in quantitative research who are “conceived as passive vessels of answers for questions” (p. 155) and the image of the *active subject* in qualitative research who is engaged in a “dynamic meaning-making process” (p. 159) as a co-researcher. The collaborative approach in this study also addresses Keith’s (1994) concern that “most lacking in research on old age and aging are the points of view of the diverse individuals who are aging or old” (p. 105).

The stereotyping of older people as a homogeneous group has been an underlying assumption of many research studies into leisure and ageing, with policies and programs also reflecting this one dimensional view (McPherson, 1991). In my choice of methods, I aimed to avoid pre-determining response categories, so that I would not run the risk of perpetuating a narrow understanding about leisure experiences and activities deemed by other researchers, practitioners and policy makers as appropriate or preferred by older people. Qualitative research is well suited to addressing the heterogeneous nature of the older population by exploring individual people’s experiences and the meanings they give to these experiences. Moreover, “such understanding is essential for explaining human behaviour and for considering why a particular service intervention may work or not” (C. Russell, 1999b, p. 365).

I incorporated grounded theory into my qualitative approach to data collection and data analysis in this study. Grounded theory as a qualitative research approach was developed by Glaser and Strauss (1967) and as Strauss & Corbin (1990) explain: “One does not begin with a theory, then prove it. Rather, one begins with an area of study and what is relevant to that area is allowed to emerge” (p. 23). Grounded theory is inductively derived from data “staying close to the emic (insider’s) view of the world” (Kellehear, 1993, p. 39). As there had been little prior research into the arts as leisure, it was important for the study to be open to the full range of possible themes and meanings that the participants themselves could identify. In addition, using a grounded theory approach allows new questions to continually arise during the data collection phase to

further clarify and explore interpretations and understandings. Hence, grounded theory presented as an appropriate tool in my study.

As I developed my research design and theoretical framework, I kept in mind Glaser's (1978) advice that qualitative researchers delay extensive literature review until the themes or theories start to emerge from the data. This reduces the risk of forcing the data to fit preconceived concepts, instead of allowing the theories to emerge - a fundamental principle of grounded theory. In grounded theory, the processes of data collection, data analysis and reviewing the literature are interwoven. Reading broadly - and not just in the immediate academic field - assisted me to generate new ideas and perspectives about creativity and the experience of ageing.

### **Theoretical Framework**

In this study, I investigated the visual arts as an activity offered to "ordinary" people who wish to pursue their interest in a social setting within a supported program structure. This study assumed that the programs in which the participants were involved could be classified as leisure activities because they were consistent with accepted definitions of leisure (Edginton et al., 2006; Kelly, 1996; R. Russell, 2005). The focus of the research was on identifying the benefits of the activities and the components of the activities that the participants enjoyed.

To explore how engaging in a creative arts program could enhance ageing well, I chose a blended theoretical framework of theories from the domains of ageing well and leisure. This blending of theories enabled me to explore group arts programs as leisure activities and then consider their contribution to older people's capacities to age well. Alasuutari (1995) referred to the concept of *bricolage* where the researcher chooses a combination of different theories and methods "in order to gain insights about the phenomena" (p. 2) under investigation and "additional viewpoints on reality" (p. 2). I found bricolage to be a useful approach for my research design, incorporating both a blend of theories and a blend of methods.

As my study developed, this bricolage of theories became significant in building a comprehensive understanding of the older participants' enjoyment of creative, leisure activities and the benefits to them. Theories such as Csikszentmihalyi's (1975) flow and Bandura's (1997) self-efficacy, with their origins in psychology, have been usefully applied to the fields of leisure and ageing well. From ageing well, I utilised Rowe and Kahn's (1998) components of successful ageing, Baltes and Baltes' (1990) theory of selective optimisation with compensation, Becker's (1993) adaptation of continuity theory, and Kelly's (1996; 1993) thinking regarding the potential contribution of leisure to older people's sense of self and continuing identity. As outlined in the literature review, the underpinning theoretical framework was a blend of leisure theories about benefits (Driver & Bruns, 1999; Mannell & Stynes, 1991) and facilitating factors (Mannell & Kleiber, 1997; Raymore, 2002).

### **Ethical Considerations**

This research was undertaken against a background of older people being stereotyped as frail, vulnerable and child-like, and an assumption that participating in research would pose serious risks to their well-being. Such protective attitudes further marginalise older people as they prevent older people from providing significant input into issues that affect them. Russell (1999b) found that older people who were perceived as vulnerable because of their age, frailty and social isolation were in no way disempowered by the research process – in fact, they used the interviews to meet their own needs. She asserted that if we exclude “vulnerable” people from research “we run the risk not only of paralyzing our own research efforts but of excluding from the public domain those very voices that otherwise remain muted” (p. 415). Similarly Rojiani (1994) claims that “neither paternalistic good intentions nor benign neglect substitute for having a voice in determining the form and content of our lives. The frail elderly are capable of telling us many things. We need to listen.” (p. 150)

Ethics approval from Victoria University was obtained to conduct this study. This approval required that I provide the participants with a plain language explanation of the study (see Appendix A) and that they sign a consent form (see Appendix B) prior to being interviewed. To protect their anonymity each participant was given a pseudonym, although some would have preferred to have their actual name used. The co-ordinators were not given a pseudonym as their identity is already public due to the programs and community centres being identified as part of the study.

## **Data Collection Methods**

### ***Sampling and Recruitment***

#### ***Programs***

For this study, I investigated two creative arts programs funded by the Victorian State Department of Human Services as social support programs (Planned Activity Groups) for “frail older people” within the Home and Community Care (HACC) program and recognised by this department as best practice and innovative. Artbeat is a visual arts program run by Sandybeach Community Centre, while the Men’s Shed is a program of the Manningham Community Health Service and offers older men the opportunity to engage in woodwork projects on an individual or group basis.

The co-ordinators of both Artbeat and the Men’s Shed developed their programs to address the social support aims of the Home and Community Care Program. They understood that these aims were to reduce older people’s social isolation and improve their health and well-being. The founding co-ordinators of Artbeat and the Men’s Shed considered their programs to have a creative arts orientation. However, their approaches to the creative activities differed not only in the nature of the activities themselves, but also in how they met the needs and interests of their participants. I chose these two groups, not to conduct a comparative study, but to gain a broader understanding of what the older participants found enjoyable and the benefits they derived from their involvement. By using two sites, I hoped that the data would show the similarities and differences between the environments. The diversity of these two programs reminded me

that older people differ in their needs and interests and also that it would be unlikely that I would find that one style of program suited everyone.

As a practitioner in the field of social support, I was familiar with these two programs and had discussed my early research ideas with the founding co-ordinators - both were professional artists and were keen to be involved in the research. These particular programs offered a high quality of social support through creative leisure and each program had been enthusiastically embraced by the participants, family carers and referring service providers. The co-ordinators were very supportive and looked to my research to enhance their own learning and provide more information to the field.

When formally approached, the Chief Executive Officers of Sandybeach Community Centre and Manningham Community Health Service responded positively. Both co-ordinators then discussed the proposed research with their groups who expressed their willingness to be involved.

***Program Description: Artbeat***

Artbeat shares its activities room at Sandybeach Community Centre with the child care program. On an Artbeat day, large tables are set up in a U-shape or square in the centre of the room. People sit around the outside of this space, sometimes with an arrangement for the day's theme set up in the centre. The classes provide a variety of creative experiences through the use of assorted materials and a range of techniques and themes. The paints, pencils, pastels, chalks, scissors – whatever medium people have chosen, are set up in front of each person. On the walls are displays of their artwork and the children's artwork. High up around the walls is the *Licorice Allsorts* installation which Artbeat created for the children, including a brightly coloured alphabet with an illustration for each letter.

At the time of my research, Artbeat was in its fifth year. The group who participated in this study had been established in 2001, nearly two years before my first visit. Although the group had a membership of 14, the numbers attending varied between 8 and 13 on the

days of my participant observation visits. The program is held on a weekly basis from 1.00 to 4.00 pm, with community transport provided by the Centre's bus and taxis for those who do not have their own transport. The program is run by a paid co-ordinator with support from a paid assistant/bus driver (also a practising artist) and one or two volunteers.

***Program Description: Men's Shed***

The Men's Shed is a purpose-built over-sized version of a typical suburban backyard shed constructed of Colorbond. There are workbenches, shelving full of timber, jars of nails and screws, hand tools, power tools and saws that make a lot of noise. At one end are a kitchen table and chairs and a kitchen sink. In the corner is the co-ordinator's office space – a desk and filing cabinet. Outside is a small vegetable patch. The main activity is woodwork. The men may be engaged in their own individual project (such as making bird boxes) or else as part of a group project (such as making wooden toys for a local kindergarten or wooden wheelbarrows to be sold at a market as pot plant holders). Others might get involved in jobs such as repairing a broken toy or fixing a broken gate at the next door community centre.

The Shed program was completing its fourth year when I visited. The group I studied met on a weekly basis from 10.30 am to 3.15 pm. The group was comprised of about 12 members and volunteers (the boundary between volunteer and participant was not clear). The volunteers either worked with participants or engaged on projects usually requiring the use of power tools. Participants travelled in the Centre's community bus (driven by the co-ordinator), arrived independently in their own car, or were driven by a family member.

***Participants: Older people and program co-ordinators***

A purposive sampling procedure assisted me to recruit 10 older people for in-depth interviews from Artbeat and the Men's Shed programs and 3 program co-ordinators.

### ***Older people.***

I interviewed each of the 10 older participants twice - a total of 20 interviews. The participants were chosen on the basis of meeting the eligibility criteria - aged 60 years or over, not having a significant memory loss, being able to converse in English, and having expressed an interest to the program co-ordinator in being interviewed for this research. The small sample size was not intended to be representative but to be “richly informative” and allow older people to reflect on their experiences and express their ideas. I considered this sample to be large enough to provide a rich range of responses and small enough to be manageable in terms of the time and resources available.

### **Group profile: Artbeat participants**

Six older people (four women and two men) from Artbeat participated in this study. Their ages ranged between 70 and 90 years. One person was married, two were single, and three were widowed (between 18 months and 30 years). At the time of the interviews, one participant lived with his wife, one lived with family, and the remaining four lived alone. All the participants were from English-speaking backgrounds, four were Australian-born and two had migrated from the United Kingdom.

Their health difficulties included asthma, epilepsy, arthritis, limited mobility, heart problems, mental health conditions (including depression), hearing impairment, osteoporosis and high blood pressure. One participant was still able to drive his own car.

All the participants had an interest in visual art (drawing and painting) before joining Artbeat. The participant who had most recently taken up an interest in art had commenced 4 years prior to joining Artbeat. The other participants all had a long term interest in drawing and painting from their schooldays, but most of them had only painted or drawn sporadically since then. The participants had been attending Artbeat between 18 months and 2 years, although one had attended the other Artbeat group for 2 years prior to joining this group.



**Group profile: Men's Shed participants**

Four men from the Men's Shed participated in the interviews and their ages ranged between 62 and 82 years. Three men were married and living with their wives and one man was widowed and living with family. All the participants were from English-speaking backgrounds, three were Australian-born and one had migrated from the United Kingdom.

Their health problems included stroke, mental health conditions (including depression), cancer, hearing impairment, limited mobility and osteoarthritis. Two men were still driving. One man had a part-time job.

Two of the participants had worked in trades (but not carpentry) and were active handymen at home. The other two participants had worked as high level professional managers with handyman interests in their home life. They all had had some sort of shed or workshop at home. They had started attending the program at the Men's Shed between 8 months and 3½ years prior to this study.

Individual profiles of the participants are in Appendix C, with some of the demographic and health details presented in a table in Appendix D.

***Program co-ordinators.***

The program co-ordinators performed two roles in this research. They were "gatekeepers" for recruiting my sample of older people, as well as being interviewed as participants in their role of service providers.

In my preliminary discussions with the co-ordinators, I had explained the importance of their "gatekeeper" role as it was not appropriate for me to interview people who were needing to talk about other significant issues in their lives. I emphasised that my role was not as a therapist or even a "friendly listening ear." Prior to my first visit to each of the groups, the program co-ordinators discussed the project with the group members and provided them all with a copy of the plain language explanation of the study. Program

co-ordinators also approached participants whom they considered would be suited to the interview process in order to determine their interest.

While the co-ordinators' gatekeeping role was critical to this study, it was also potentially a methodological limitation. I was concerned that they might screen out people whom they deemed as less satisfied with the program, even though the study was not designed to evaluate people's satisfaction with specific programs. Rather, its aim was to contribute to a better understanding of the potential benefits that people could gain from creative leisure programs.

Conducting an interview with each of the program co-ordinators was also central to my research design. This ultimately involved three program co-ordinators, all of whom agreed to be interviewed. The co-ordinator of Artbeat, Virginia Mort, had been involved in developing the concept for the program and obtaining funding. She is a professional artist and qualified teacher. The founding co-ordinator of the Men's Shed, John Heritage, is also a professional artist (sculptor and painter) as well as being an experienced handyman. Prior to establishing the program at the Shed, he had worked in leisure programs for adults with disabilities. Likewise, his successor, Ric Blackburn, has a background in vocational and rehabilitation work with adults with disabilities and is a highly skilled handyman.

I elected in the research design to interview the co-ordinators after completing the two rounds of interviews with the participants in their programs. This was to ensure I remained open to the perspectives of the older people themselves. Consequently, it created a dilemma for me when the co-ordinator of the Men's Shed resigned prior to me commencing data collection. Should I refrain from interviewing him at all or modify the design to include an early interview with him? To avoid losing the valuable information that the founding co-ordinator was likely to provide, I decided to interview him a few months after his resignation from the Shed while the experience was still relatively fresh in his memory. This interview took place five months prior to my first visit to the Shed.

After transcribing this interview, I set it aside without any analysis so as not to influence my openness to the older participants' perspectives.

### ***In-depth Interviews***

In-depth interviews were my prime method of data collection because:

The in-depth interview takes seriously the notion that people are experts on their own experience and so best able to report how they experienced a particular event or phenomenon. If we interview different people about the same event or phenomenon, we will inevitably get a range of perspectives. (Darlington & Scott, 2002, p. 48)

The interviews were semi-structured and based on the principle of active subjects (Gubrium & Holstein, 2002). As a social worker, I had many years of experience interviewing people and felt confident and comfortable with my skills to develop rapport, facilitate expression of their ideas, and collaboratively develop meanings and themes.

### ***Older people***

My study was a very labour intensive process, but true to the spirit of grounded theory (in particular the process of generating new questions through the data provided by the participants). I interviewed the 10 older participants twice, with up to two months between the two interviews. The first interview was relatively unstructured and provided them with the opportunity to consider the benefits and enjoyment they derived from their involvement in their arts group. The second interview entailed a further set of questions, the purpose of which was to probe and explore in more detail issues pertaining to the study's aim and objectives.

I elected to interview the older participants twice on the basis that people's initial responses may not be the final version of their ideas. On further reflection, they may have different ideas – people's opinions are not static. I initially proposed to conduct a set of two interviews with each of the participants a week or two apart, before interviewing the next person. However, at the end of the very first interview, the Artbeat participant recommended that I should speak to the others in the group before I

interviewed him again. He thought it would be interesting and useful if I gave him feedback on what others had said and then he could consider their ideas and add his opinions. I assessed this suggestion as likely to be more productive than my proposed format.

My choices of research strategies aimed to minimise my intrusion into the older participants' time when they were attending their program. While I offered interviews at the program venue as an alternative to a home visit, all the older participants chose to be interviewed at home. This coincided with my preferred option as it meant that these older people were in a familiar environment where they were likely to be more comfortable and feel a greater sense of control. Talking to the older participants in their homes was also intended to reduce my power in the role of researcher as the participants were giving me hospitality on their terms. It created a more social experience for them, did not add to the length of their day at the program venue, or necessitate organising transport. The interviews usually lasted between 1 and 1½ hours with some additional time afterwards for more social conversation, often over a cup of tea. I recorded and transcribed every interview.

I developed the questions in the interview guide for the first interview on the basis of my reading, my professional experience in the field and my observations during the initial visits to the programs (see Appendix E for sample first interview guide). Following the principles of grounded theory, I continually reviewed and refined the questions according to how responsive participants were to the questions, what themes were emerging through analysis of the data after each interview, and what improvements could be made to the flow of the interview. I prepared the interview guide for each participant's follow-up interview based on what matters from the first interview needed clarification and what ideas needed further probing. In the follow-up interview, I also provided some feedback from others' comments for their reflection (see Appendix F for sample second interview guide).

I decided to approach the first round of interviews with the Men's Shed participants as I had at Artbeat – with an open mind. I did not assume these men's experiences would be similar to the experiences I had heard about at Artbeat. Hence, the interview guide I used for the round of first interviews was similar to the first interview guide for Artbeat (see sample Men's Shed interview guides in Appendix G and Appendix H).

The older participants, who were the focus of this study, took the research process seriously. They were stimulated by our discussions and keen to contribute their opinions and ideas to help me. They also talked amongst themselves about the interviews. For example, when I arrived to interview one of the Artbeat participants, she told me that the previous participant (whom I had interviewed a week earlier) had asked her to pass on a message to me. The message was that he had forgotten to tell me that coming to Artbeat “has given him a purpose in life and motivation.” He had obviously been reflecting on our discussion in the two days between my visit and the next Artbeat session.

### ***Program co-ordinators***

My interviews with the program co-ordinators focused on their perceptions of the benefits and enjoyment that the older people in their groups experienced from engaging in the artistic and social activities offered. I also asked them questions to elicit information about how they structured their programs to achieve these outcomes for the participants. I was particularly interested to find out how, as leisure providers, they facilitated beneficial experiences for the older people participating in their programs.

The interview guides for the co-ordinators (see Appendix I and Appendix J) were developed in a similar grounded theory process to those for the older participants. The questions were based on the literature, my professional experience, participant observation at the programs, as well as the interviews with the program participants.

### ***Recording and Transcription of Interviews***

I had some concern about the intimidating presence of the tape recorder, however, only two of the older participants showed any nervousness or self-consciousness. Most people took no notice of the recorder, sometimes even asking me to check that the tape was still running. I needed to turn the tape only once during each interview and people would stop talking (unasked) until I had it running again. On the only occasion that I forgot to turn the tape, the participant was quite happy to repeat what he had said during the couple of minutes the tape had stopped.

On occasions, turning off the tape at the end of an interview seemed to be a signal for people to summarise what was most important about their experience in the program – very rich data indeed! Whenever this happened, I would comment that I would like to make sure I remembered what they were telling me. I would then resume recording or make notes on my interview guide, which I subsequently added to the transcripts.

I transcribed the tapes verbatim, which was a time-consuming task. The major advantage of doing this myself was that I quickly became familiar with the data and with the tone and emotional expression that people conveyed. This experience was important as the meaning in the interviews extended beyond the set of words conveyed in the transcript text.

### ***Participant Observation***

To counteract the retrospective nature of interviewing people about their leisure experiences, I also undertook participant observation as a more limited and complementary strategy. As Schwandt (1997) has described, participant observation involves “entering the world of those one studies, gaining their trust, developing empathy, and understanding their ways of talking about and acting in their world” (p. 111). Participant observation is a particularly useful method of data collection as it

“has the potential to reveal processes, structures, interactions, and outcomes” (Corbin, 2002, p. 101).

Participant observation gave me the opportunity to gain an understanding of the environment and context of Artbeat and the Men’s Shed. I was also able to observe first hand the participants’ interactions and responses to their experiences of the activity and the group. Equally important was the opportunity that my preliminary visits to the program gave the participants to get to know me, become more familiar with the purpose and methods of this research study, and decide whether they wished to become involved in the interview process.

I did not participate in the program activities (other than afternoon tea or lunch) but engaged with the participants while observing them in their environment. My observations included the physical setting, activities, session structure, social interactions between the participants, as well as their interactions with the program staff. I recorded most of my field notes away from the group to reduce the intrusiveness of the research process on the group.

A further advantage of this method of data collection was that it took the focus off verbal communication and gave me the opportunity to look for other forms of meaningful non-verbal expression and behaviour. This methodological approach of combining participant observation with interviews addresses “the gap between beliefs and action and between what people say and what they do” (Silverman, 2000, p. 292). As Csikszentmihalyi (1975) noted in his study of dancers, reflecting on the dance is different from experiencing it.

I planned to make two participant observation visits to each program prior to commencing interviews and a third visit once the interviews were completed. I followed this plan for Artbeat but condensed the preliminary visits into one session for the Men’s Shed. Prior to my first visit to the Shed, the co-ordinator had already alerted me that the men would not be keen on being observed for research. It was also my experience that I

did not feel as welcome in the observer role as I had been at Artbeat. During this initial visit, 3 participants agreed to be interviewed. A fourth group member, who was not there that day, had told the co-ordinator he was willing to participate. Having already decided that four participants would meet the sampling requirements, I decided that the one visit was sufficient.

My final visit to Artbeat and the Men's Shed took place after I had completed interviewing the participants. This visit enabled me to observe how the people I had interviewed interacted with other people at the program and the nature of their experience of the day's activities. I was also able to thank the whole group and say my farewells which provided a closure to my involvement in their program.

### ***Field Notes***

I developed a field observation guide for use as a prompt during the participant observation visits (see Appendix K). This guide was based on the work of Darlington and Scott (2002), Rice and Ezzy (1999), Minichiello, Aroni, Timewell, & Alexander (1995) and Kellehear (1993). I made brief notes on the field guide during the observation visits and completed these in more detail after the sessions. I had to do this on the same day to ensure I remembered as much as possible. Over the next couple of days I typed these field notes into a journal-like record. It proved important to record as much as I could remember as it helped me to recall images, the atmosphere and details when I was later analysing the data.

### ***Reflexivity***

One of my methodological considerations for research rigour was to ensure I recognised that as a qualitative researcher I was “inextricably immersed in the research” (Darlington & Scott, 2002, p. 18) and to reflect on my role in the research process. “Reflexive research acknowledges that the researcher is part and parcel of the setting, context and culture they are trying to understand and analyse” (Rice & Ezzy, 1999, p. 41) or, as Scott



(1990) described, the process of reflexivity aims “to look at the lens at the same time one is looking through it” (p. 566).

Choosing to investigate the role of creativity in older people’s lives was evidence of two areas of personal interest from the outset of this research study. My values, my prior (as well as parallel) life experience, and my professional “practice wisdom” (Scott, 1990, p. 564) all impacted on my choice of research design. They influenced how I conducted the interviews and participant observation visits, and also how I approached the data analysis. During data analysis I had to be particularly careful to recognise the meaning given by the participants and not interpret their reflections through the lens of my personal and professional tacit knowledge. This was particularly challenging for me coming from a professional background as a social worker because “social workers often think in an interpretive mode, especially when working with individuals and attempting to construct the world as the individuals perceive it” (Scott, 1990, p. 566).

### **Data Collection Process**

Table 1 summarises the data collection process which involved interviews with the older participants and program co-ordinators, along with participant observation visits at Artbeat and the Men’s Shed. This representation also illustrates how data collection and data analysis were interwoven during the research.

**Table 1. Data Collection Process: The weaving of data collection and analysis**

<b>Timelines</b>	<b>Participant observation visits</b>	<b>Interviews</b>	<b>Preliminary data analysis</b>
2003 February – March	2 visits to Artbeat	Interview with founding co-ordinator of Men’s Shed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Field notes</li> </ul>
March - May		1st round of interviews with Artbeat participants	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Transcripts</li> <li>• Individual summaries of first interviews</li> <li>• Overview of Artbeat: Enjoyment &amp; Benefits</li> </ul>
May - July		2nd round of interviews with Artbeat participants	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sent out summaries to participants prior to follow-up interview</li> <li>• Transcripts</li> </ul>
July	Final visit to Artbeat	Interview with Artbeat co-ordinator	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Field notes</li> <li>• Transcript</li> </ul>
July – September			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Updated summaries</li> <li>• Updated overview of Enjoyment &amp; Benefits</li> <li>• Report to Sandybeach Community Centre</li> <li>• Sent updated summary and copy of report to each participant</li> </ul>
August	1st visit to Men’s Shed		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Field notes</li> </ul>
August - October		1st round of interviews with Shed participants	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Transcripts</li> <li>• Individual summaries of first interviews</li> <li>• Overview of Men’s Shed: Enjoyment &amp; Benefits</li> </ul>
October -November		2nd round of interviews with Shed participants	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Transcripts</li> </ul>
December	Final visit to Men’s Shed	Interview with Shed co-ordinator	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Field notes</li> <li>• Transcripts</li> </ul>
2004 Leave Of Absence			
July – September			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Updated summaries</li> <li>• Updated overview of Enjoyment &amp; Benefits</li> <li>• Report to Manningham Community Health Service</li> <li>• Sent updated summary and copy of report to each participant</li> </ul>
September - December			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Coding of transcripts on Excel spreadsheet</li> </ul>

## **Data Analysis**

There were a number of processes that I incorporated to analyse my data. I based my approach on grounded theory, but did not rigidly follow the methods developed by Glaser and Strauss (1967). For example, in contrast to traditional grounded theory, I did not use the data analysis to refine the interview questions from one interview to the next during the first round of interviews with the older participants. Instead, I aimed to give each participant an equal opportunity to express their opinions and ideas without narrowing the focus. Consistent with the grounded theory approach, my data analysis continually alternated with data collection and also I searched for both similarities and differences in the themes that were emerging from the data.

Prior to visiting each of the older participants for their follow-up interview, I used the transcription to prepare a summary of my understanding of what the participant had already told me. I updated each person's summary after their second interview. The summaries proved to be a valuable methodological tool. They described the participants' understanding of their experience at a moment in time and they could request amendments. The summaries also provided a way of giving coherence to all that we had talked about during the interviews.

These summaries were valued by the participants and reflected their role as co-researchers and active subjects. In the case of Artbeat, as I started to write the summary of the first participant's interview, it seemed appropriate to write in the second person as a form of giving his story back to him and something to keep from the experience. Further into writing this first summary, I found that it was reading like an episode of "This is Your Life" so I entitled each Artbeat participant's summary "This is Your Art Life." Although I used a similar format for the summaries and wrote in the second person for the Men's Shed participants, their more down-to-earth attitudes to their program did not encourage me to include such a fancy title!

To heighten my awareness and further my understanding of possible meanings of what people were telling me, I continued to read not only academic literature but also other literature about art and creativity. During the year I was conducting the interviews, I attended two art exhibitions which led me to reading about the French impressionist painter, Monet, and Australian artist, Lloyd Rees. They both described experiences of flow, which struck me as being similar to what the Artbeat participants were telling me about their experiences at Artbeat and with art in general.

Table 2 presents an overview of my strategies for analysing the interview data from the older participants and the purpose for using each of these strategies.

**Table 2. Data Analysis Strategies – Interviews with older participants**

<b>Data analysis strategy</b>	<b>Purpose</b>
<p><b>Initial reading of transcripts</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Highlighting significant comments</li> <li>• Writing notes in margins about program activities, meanings, feelings and benefits</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identify possible themes and sub-themes</li> <li>• Identify areas to probe further in follow-up interview</li> <li>• Preliminary coding</li> <li>• Contribute to summary</li> </ul>
<p><b>Interview summaries</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Synthesis of interview content for each participant</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide feedback to participants</li> <li>• Prepare questions for follow-up interview</li> <li>• Refresh participant’s memory of content of initial interview</li> <li>• Building block for future data analysis</li> <li>• Honour contribution by participants</li> </ul>
<p><b>“Enjoyment &amp; Benefits” - Preliminary classification</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Version 1– at end of first round of interviews with participants in each program</li> <li>• Version 2 – update at completion of interviews with participants in each program</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Synthesise interview summaries</li> <li>• Identify emergent themes and sub-themes</li> <li>• Provide preliminary analysis of findings to participants, co-ordinators and agencies</li> </ul>
<p><b>Coding of text</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Preliminary coding – traditional pencil and paper technique</li> <li>• All transcripts coded by units of meaning into Microsoft Excel spreadsheet (excerpt of coded text in Appendix L)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Close examination of text for meaning and to explore question of “What is going on here?”</li> <li>• Identify emergent themes and sub-themes</li> </ul>
<p><b>Constant comparison and emergent themes</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Final coding – returned to traditional paper and pencil and coloured highlighters to recode significant excerpts of spreadsheets relevant to the theoretical framework (including enjoyment, benefits, facilitating factors)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Explore similarities and differences between participants</li> <li>• Identify major emergent themes and sub-themes</li> </ul>
<p><b>Diagrams</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 1st version – Flowchart of benefits developed at conclusion of interview phase (Figure 2)</li> <li>• 2nd version – Matrix of emergent theory (Figure 3)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Visual representation of emergent themes and sub-themes identified as data analysis progressed</li> </ul>

## *Coding*

By the end of the data collection phase, I had transcribed 23 interviews – 20 interviews with the older participants and 3 interviews with the program co-ordinators. This created a mountain of over 600 pages of transcripts. In my research design, I had already decided to use the traditional paper and pencil technique for manually coding and retrieving the narrative data. I chose this technique - in preference to a quality data analysis software program - as narrative research is about “listening to the voices” and involves intensive reading and familiarity with the narratives in context. As an addition to paper and pencil techniques, I used a method for coding using Microsoft Excel spreadsheet (excerpt of coded text in Appendix L). This coding method proved to be a complementary and productive strategy for closely examining what the older people were saying, as well as for managing the amount of data.

The coding process involved chunking the text into units of meaning. These units of meaning could be a single sentence, several sentences or a paragraph. The same designated unit of meaning could be allocated multiple codes – for particularly rich text there were instances of more than ten codes. I developed an ever-increasing list of codes which, at the first pass, were a combination of my intuitive and professional interpretations of meaning, words that the participants themselves used, and terms from leisure theories. As Coffey and Atkinson (1996) explain, codes are “tools to think with” (p. 32) and initial coding “should help us to identify themes, patterns, events, and actions that are of interest to the researcher and that provide a means of organizing data sets” (p. 32). After I had coded the text for each participant, I produced a table of codes and their frequency. Frequency of a code was only an indication of significance and not a valid measure in itself. It was possible that some codes could be extremely significant although occurring only occasionally. For each full set of Artbeat transcripts and Men’s Shed transcripts, I produced a table of the codes used and the frequencies of usage (see Appendix M and Appendix N).

At all stages of the data analysis, I recorded memos about potential meanings and themes that were emerging from the interviews and participation observation visits. When coding on Excel spreadsheets, I recorded memos about new codes, significant codes and codes that needed replacement at the next pass. Through the tables of codes, the Excel program itself provided a record of codes used and for which participant a new code had been introduced.

After I had completed analysis of the participants' narratives, I turned my attention to the transcripts of my interviews with the co-ordinators. For this stage of the analysis, I again used the pencil and paper technique to examine the text for the already emergent theme of *facilitating factors*.

### ***Constant Comparison and Emergent Themes***

The Excel coding process had been a very laborious but useful tool for closely examining every sentence of the data and reflecting on the question of “what is going on here.” I had planned to recode the spreadsheets into a smaller number of broader axial codes (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Once I was ready to do this, however, I found that it seemed more important to closely read these coded spreadsheets in context in order to fully understand the meanings. I was concerned that examining coded text away from the context was a fragmented approach that carried an inherent risk of misinterpreting the meaning. Immersing myself in the texts and “playing” or brainstorming with the meanings and coding in this way helped me become more alert to the emerging themes.

The constant comparison method of grounded theory provided a valuable strategy for exploring similarities and differences between the participants (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Starting with the coded narratives of the first Artbeat participant and the category of *enjoyment*, I colour-coded the text with highlighters and made detailed notes on the spreadsheet. I looked at the emerging subcategories that this participant perceived as contributing to his enjoyment, noting the relevant quotes and jotting notes about

meanings. This resulted in three initial subcategories: *nature of activities*, *role of coordinator* and *social connection*.

I then proceeded to the transcripts of the second Artbeat participant's interviews and repeated the colour-coding of the text and jotted notes in the margins. Then I looked for similarities and differences in the category of enjoyment and the same three subcategories emerged. As I repeated the process for each of the Artbeat participants and continued with the constant comparison of the texts, I found that these three subcategories were constant across all the participants.

I subsequently repeated a similar process for the other categories informed by my theoretical framework, that is, *benefits* and *facilitating factors*. Throughout this phase of the analysis I wrote copious memos. I reflected on possible meanings, emergent themes and links between themes, as well as noting divergent cases. Once I had identified the four major themes that had emerged from my analysis of the data for the Artbeat program, I returned to the coded transcripts of the Men's Shed participants. I conducted the same analytical process that I had for Artbeat data and then used the constant comparison method to determine whether the emergent themes from Artbeat were useful for understanding the data from the Men's Shed participants. Finally, I developed a matrix (Figure 3, p.151) to illustrate in a simple format the interrelationships between the major emergent themes.

In the next chapter I present the major themes and associated subthemes that emerged from this analysis of the data.



## **4. THE THEMES: WHAT THE PARTICIPANTS SAID**

This chapter sets out thematically what the older participants said about the role of Artbeat and the Men's Shed in their lives. I focus on how they made sense of their experiences, in particular, what they said they enjoyed and how they perceived they were benefiting. Learning from older people in two diverse creative arts programs has provided opportunities to gain a broader understanding of how such leisure programs can enhance older people's lives.

Four key themes emerged from my analysis of the data that these participants provided to the study:

- Enjoyment,
- Life purpose and meaning,
- Heightened well-being: a new lease of life, and
- Factors facilitating beneficial group leisure experiences

This chapter is organised around these four themes. The themes were highly interwoven and interdependent which often made it difficult to categorise people's comments into a particular theme. A section of text, for example, could reflect multiple themes. Indeed, many of the "rich" excerpts were coded in several categories during the initial coding process. In essence, this interweaving of themes could be described as an intricate web, with no theme able to exist without the others.

### **Theme 1: Enjoyment**

All the participants I interviewed said that they enjoyed their involvement in their creative arts program. The feeling of enjoyment permeated every aspect of the way the participants talked about their experience at Artbeat or the Men's Shed. In particular, the Artbeat participants' responses indicated that they all derived immense enjoyment from a

combination of their art and their time at Artbeat. Artbeat was the “highlight of the week” for five of the six participants, one of whom said:

*I just enjoy it. I love, I enjoy painting and I enjoy the company of ‘em all . . . That’s the only place I go. I don’t go anywhere else. (Patrick, Artbeat)*

Another participant illustrated how much she enjoyed Artbeat when she commented that she had not missed a session since joining:

*I got in there [Artbeat] and I haven’t missed a class, not one, in 18 months. I can’t wait to get there actually on a Monday. (Kathleen, Artbeat)*

The most striking feature of enjoyment to emerge from the data was how fully absorbed most of the participants became as they worked at the activity. They were using their skills to respond to a stimulating task, were fully absorbed in their own world and unaware of the passage of time, felt free from their usual worries and they were involved in an activity that they loved doing. Interestingly, these are all characteristics of flow. Some participants struggled to find the words to describe the experience while others provided descriptions that were very rich indeed.

Not only were the Artbeat participants all able to relate stories about flow experiences when they are painting or drawing, but I observed in my sessions at Artbeat the silence and sense of stillness in the room as they settled into the day’s activity and became absorbed. People’s involvement in art was frequently experienced at an optimal level and they expressed their passion for painting – “I just love to paint” was a typical expression. This heightened sense of enjoyment was closely related to the creativity of the participants expressing themselves through their art making.

The Artbeat participants described several typical aspects of the experience of flow. They all, in some way, described becoming immersed or absorbed when they were creating their art works. One participant, who said “I can’t explain it, I just paint. I just like painting,” proceeded to describe how, in his studio space at home, he becomes absorbed and can focus without distraction on his painting.

Some of the participants also spoke of their changed perception of the passage of time. Nancy, for example, said that when she painted at home “hours and days disappear.” For Kathleen, time seemed to stop when she was painting. Her experience of the sensual dimension to painting and the absorption in this feeling took her away from the present, as she described here:

*Well when you paint you can forget everything. And the colour grips you, you know, and you just sort of get carried away. I think that's the main thing. It's just the feel of it. You know, the paint going onto the page . . . time stands still.*  
(Kathleen, Artbeat)

Elsie echoed Kathleen's sensation of being “carried away” and talked of the added benefit of being relieved of her usual worrying thoughts:

*Well, you get carried away with what you're doing. You can sit here and worry about things, you do worry about things. I have often said “What's going to become of me?” I worry like that. You worry about things. Painting, you don't think another thing.* (Elsie, Artbeat)

Another characteristic element of flow is achieving a balance between the challenge of a task and the skills required. This dimension can be identified in Donald's description of his experience of painting. During the period that he felt challenged by what he wished to achieve, he needed all his concentration and so preferred not to be distracted by social interaction. He also conveyed the sheer enjoyment of the artistic experience:

*Oh it's lovely. I love to get a picture down. Sometimes it's easy and sometimes it's very hard. And until you know exactly where you're going, I prefer not to talk, I prefer not, see everybody is very friendly here, but I have found that it's much better to get it down. And yes, I like to be given a task. And the art is always an easy task for me, always an easy task. I just do it and love it.* (Donald, Artbeat)

At the Shed, there was only one participant who described the experience of flow. He acknowledged with humour how absorbed and focused he became on a task:

*Single-minded . . . perhaps my brain's not big enough to handle more than one thing at a time! (Phillip, Shed)*

Many of the Artbeat participants described their time there as being “fun,” which was not an expression used by any of the men in the Shed program, perhaps because they perceived their environment and activities as more work-like and serious. Although the Shed participants did not describe their enjoyment in such enthusiastic and excited terms as the Artbeat participants - this cannot be interpreted to necessarily mean that they enjoyed themselves less as it may have been a reflection of less exuberant temperaments. They certainly all expressed enjoyment of their time at the Shed, with a typical view being expressed in the words of one participant as:

*a good place to meet people and to do a bit of work (Gordon, Shed)*

This quote also reflects in simple terms that participants in both programs appeared to derive their enjoyment from two major interconnected dimensions, namely, the nature of the activities and the social interactions.

The participants in both Artbeat and the Men’s Shed were richly informative in their ideas about what aspects or components of their respective program contributed to the beneficial experience of enjoyment. Enjoyment was described by them as both a means and an end for leisure experiences. The experience or feeling of enjoyment is a vehicle for delivering potential benefits as well as being a benefit in itself. These older people identified a diverse range of aspects of their participation that they enjoyed. These enjoyable aspects have been grouped into five sub-themes: *affinity and meaning, purposeful activity and a final product, choice and control, challenge, and company around a common interest.*

Just as with the major themes of this study, these five subthemes were very much interconnected and participants’ observations were often difficult to allocate to a single category. Every participant mentioned each of these five sub-themes, but the importance they gave to each one varied.

### *Affinity and Meaning*

All the participants at both Artbeat and the Men's Shed expressed an affinity with the activity of the program and described a prior interest in these creative activities. One participant, who had taken up painting as part of a rehabilitation program four years prior to joining Artbeat, described his affinity with art simply as:

*I just paint and paint and paint and paint and paint. I just love it. (Patrick, Artbeat)*

Likewise, another participant commented on his enjoyment and affinity with art, adding that for him art had been a lifelong interest:

*I enjoy the art, I enjoy drawing . . . But I do like, I do like drawing, you know, and nearly always have. (Donald, Artbeat)*

Similar to Donald, the affinity with art for most Artbeat participants dated back to their schooldays when they had shown an aptitude for drawing and painting. Since those times, however, the demands of employment, the intervention of World War II, as well as family responsibilities, had relegated their artistic talent to little more than a sporadic interest. The opportunity to re-engage with and explore their artistic skills was a major inducement to these older people to join the Artbeat program.

The Men's Shed participants also talked about their long-term connection with shed-type activities. They had all been active handymen, with two of the men having trade skills. They had all had a shed or workshop at their home but health reasons and moving from the family home had brought a halt to continuing this lifelong interest for three of the four participants. It was particularly significant to the Shed participants that they were continuing to work with their hands and to use tools, as they had for most of their lives. One example of this affinity was conveyed by Phillip, who also highlighted the familiarity and ease of pursuing a lifelong interest:

*Working with my hands has always been something that I've been capable of. And so for some people at my age to pick up a plane or something might have been very difficult, but I've had one in my hands all my life. (Phillip, Shed)*

Self-expression and creativity emerged as one of the key sources of meaning and contributed to the high level of enjoyment, even a sensation of “thrill,” that the participants experienced at Artbeat and through their art generally. People varied in the meaning they gave to their creativity and this was reflected in their preferred mode of self-expression. One participant only wished to copy from another picture, while another participant gave expression to her vivid visual memories. Others talked of letting their inner feelings express themselves or of interpreting an initial idea to fit with their own cultural interests and preferred style. The opportunity to be creative was core to many participants' enjoyment of Artbeat, which one participant conveyed in this observation:

*I wouldn't go if there wasn't a creativity formula in the whole idea of it. And that's what I enjoy. (Donald, Artbeat)*

Donald also illustrated the immense enjoyment he derived from being creative in the description of how he was interpreting a theme in a painting he had underway. In the story that follows, he connected his own particular artistic interests with the session's theme of summer, which added meaning to what he was doing:

*But when she [the co-ordinator] did say the summer one, I had remembered, oh many, having looked at all the Impressionists, of the turn of the century stuff, they all took their ladies down to the south of France and had them sit up in the corner, so they'd be sitting there and there'd be a window as well. And you could look out. And I thought of that straight away. I loved that . . . and see you've got two pictures in one. And that's good. Oh that's really good. And that's really being creative. But I got the idea from the Impressionists, and then said I'd love to do that. (Donald, Artbeat)*

For some members of the group, the quality of what they drew and painted was measured in terms of the closeness of the likeness they achieved. In contrast, for others such as

Faye, interpretation or freedom of expression gave them satisfaction. Faye compared these two approaches in the following story:

*I don't know what I'm doing until I put it up there and look at it, and I'd say "Oh goodness, look at that." But other people, they look at their work, and that's got to be a cup and saucer, and it doesn't look like a cup and saucer, and the paint has to be like a cup, and it, it's all so sort of mechanical. A lot of people do that. But I don't know what I've done until it's dry. (Faye, Artbeat)*

The men at the Shed also found a creative meaning in their activities but there was not the same sense of freedom of expression that was conveyed by the Artbeat participants. Creativity and self-expression were expressed through the concepts of making items, the value of a handcrafted article, implementing ideas, and problem-solving. For example, Brian spoke of the importance of working with his hands:

*I like doing things with my hands, I like to have that object right there and be able to do things with it (Brian, Shed)*

Furthermore, Brian's most enjoyable time at the Shed occurred over several weeks when he crafted a table out of old timber from the farmhouse where he grew up, a project which had significant meaning for him. In connection with this project, he identified a particular element of creativity that he saw as core to craftsmanship, namely, using skills and resourcefulness to transform old materials into another form which has quality and is useful:

*Well I think it's probably getting back to the meaning of what a craftsman is and creating something out of, something that is completely different at its end. (Brian, Shed)*

Another participant for whom creativity was important to enjoyment highlighted the value of creating a unique handcrafted item:

*They're not the things that you walk into a shop and buy etcetera. So there's satisfaction of being able to do it. (Phillip, Shed)*

## ***Purposeful Activity and a Final Product***

### ***Art making is active – not passive***

It was important to people that they were engaged in an active program where they were making or producing something. Being active was contrasted with being a passive spectator or merely being entertained, or where there was too much talking and not enough “doing.” The word “doing” was used to make favourable comparisons with other leisure or social support programs which they did not find as satisfying or enjoyable. In the words of one participant:

*I wouldn't go if I was just going there to talk, I wouldn't go. It's the doing that's important as far as I'm concerned. (Phillip, Shed)*

### ***Being productive: The importance of a final product***

Purposeful activity was identified as an important component of enjoyment. While everyone acknowledged in some way that it was important to be occupied, they were not interested in activity just as a diversion to fill in time. The purpose of the activity and the final product had to hold meaning for a person to enjoy what they were doing and this meaning depended on the individual person.

When participants at Artbeat were asked about what they enjoyed more, the process of artmaking or the final product, their responses usually reflected a combination of the two. For one participant it was his satisfaction with the finished item that made painting so enjoyable:

*Well I think it's the finished article. Painting something and seeing it finished. And I have one thing in my own mind, if I like it, it's alright. I don't care what anyone else thinks. The main thing is I like it. (Patrick, Artbeat)*

Similarly, Kathleen also described how enjoyment required satisfaction with the finished painting. She explained how she experienced the process of painting as retrospective enjoyment once she was satisfied with the result:

*Well I think doing it is wonderful, do you know what I mean, if you have a successful outcome (Kathleen, Artbeat)*



While she was decisive that it was the final product that was critical to her enjoyment, Kathleen further observed how this feeling of satisfaction was short-lived and how she would quickly move on to the next project.

*It's the final product. I'll look at it and it'll please me for a little while . . . But when I do them, for a little while they'll give me great pleasure, and then they don't mean anything to me, to be honest. I mean, I could give them away, any of them, with no trouble. (Kathleen, Artbeat)*

Many of the participants related experiences of heightened enjoyment and satisfaction from being involved in larger projects. For instance, most of the Artbeat participants described their enjoyment of working over several weeks on the *Licorice Allsorts* installation. This project resulted in a public exhibition (including an official opening) with the installation being presented as a permanent gift to the children at the Centre to brighten up the walls of the activities room. One participant described how working on this project was enjoyable in both the process and the final result:

*Look at that job they done putting all that up on the wall. That's magnificent that. The kids love that. And we got a lot of fun doing it too. A lot of fun out of it. Spent our afternoons working on that stuff, I'd do it at home, Virginia would ring me and say "Can you bring me so and so down." "Yeah, alright I'll bring it down and show you what I've done." (Patrick, Artbeat)*

It was the Shed participants, however, who placed greatest emphasis on the activities being directed toward a useful end product that functioned as required, whether it was making an item or repairing something. Core to their enjoyment of what they were doing was that the task had to serve a useful purpose. As one of the participants said about a task he enjoyed:

*I could see some use in that. (Gordon, Shed)*

Similarly, Phillip described the importance of being involved in activities that have a useful end product:

*The fact that you're doing something worthwhile is certainly important. I'd hate to be doing something just for the heck of it. (Phillip, Shed)*

Some participants at the Shed highlighted how they enjoyed working on projects that were for someone else's benefit. Phillip, for example, spoke about deriving satisfaction from creating a handcrafted item that gave others pleasure:

*I am creating something that's giving somebody satisfaction as well as myself.*

An essential feature of the final product was that it met an acceptable standard of quality in the opinion of the individual who had created it. Following the process through to a final product of high quality was identified as important aspect of enjoyment by many participants, such as Donald who said:

*The important thing is the idea, put it down, and then finish it. And finish it correctly, you know, to the standard I want it to be. (Donald, Artbeat)*

Moreover, what the participants finally produced or created could bring satisfaction and enhance self-esteem, as Phillip conveyed in this statement when he pointed out one of his creations:

*That's my pride and joy (Phillip, Shed)*

There was only one participant from the Shed who specifically acknowledged that he had gained more satisfaction from the process rather than the final product:

*I think it's probably the process that's bigger for me, the process that you have knowledge and skill that you can do that. Because once it's made it sort of tends just to become another bit of bric-a-brac or whatever, another piece of furniture. (Brian, Shed)*

### ***Work-like activity***

The set tasks in both Artbeat and the Men's Shed program were seen as work by some participants which provided them with continuity of a familiar and valued sense of purpose. This sense of purpose enhanced their enjoyment. In both programs, but particularly in the Men's Shed, participants frequently used the expression "work" to

refer to what they were doing. As an example, most participants at the Shed spoke of the importance of “working with your hands,” as reflected in Gordon’s observation:

*You come to the Shed, you do a bit of work. (Gordon, Shed)*

Other participants also talked about how they valued the concentration and challenge that their tasks demanded. For instance, Phillip enjoyed the work-like environment of the Shed:

*When you’re working it’s all work. It’s sort of head down and tail up while you’re there. (Phillip, Shed)*

Seeing art as work contributed to a strong sense of purpose and motivation for some Artbeat participants such as Donald, who said he was “keen to do that work.” For Donald at Artbeat, like Phillip at the Men’s Shed, work demanded full mental concentration and taking care to meet high standards which brought him satisfaction and replaced what he realised he was missing from his working life:

*When I used to go to work, you know, it wasn’t, it wasn’t sort of, work wasn’t a walkover. It wasn’t easy. You know, you had to do it, and you had to do it carefully. And, you had to work. And I got used to that work . . . And then, when I went to Virginia, oh! that filled a space, you know, because I used to, I’d been used to working. (Donald, Artbeat)*

### ***Choice and Control***

In considering what they enjoyed about their involvement in these creative arts programs, the participants often referred to elements of choice and control over decision-making in their activities. The participants talked of choices such as whether or not to participate in activities set up by the co-ordinator, as well as how they would participate in an activity or project.

In the case of Artbeat, the participants valued the fact that the co-ordinator always gave them the choice of the medium to use for the particular day’s activity, such as acrylic

paints, watercolour paints, chalk pastels, oil pastels, or pencils. Choosing mediums and materials optimised their pleasure in creating their artwork.

Most participants at the Men's Shed talked about the importance of being free to choose what project to work on - whether they brought in their own ideas for individual projects or became involved in a project or task organised by the co-ordinator. Opportunities were available to work on their own, with a buddy or to contribute to a group project. The purpose of the task was also relevant to the participants as some liked to contribute to projects of benefit to the community, while others preferred to make items for themselves or friends and relatives. Jim was one of the participants for whom choice and control over decision-making was essential, which he related humorously in this story of how project choices are made:

*Well you sit on your bum until Ric says "Oh I want this and I want that" and if something suits you, you put your hand up. If it doesn't suit you, you go the other way, you go to the toilet, so as he doesn't catch you. (Jim, Shed)*

For some participants in both programs it was important to their enjoyment and satisfaction that they had the opportunity to make suggestions to the co-ordinator and to have these considered seriously and implemented. Jim highlighted this aspect of the Shed program:

*I mean if I struck on an idea of something, and it's mainly for the little kids and that, you know, I'd go down there and say "Ric, why don't we make so and so." "Eh alright." And we make it. (Jim, Shed)*

To get started on a creative path, it was recognised by many of the older people in this study that they benefited from the co-ordinator providing ideas to inspire their imagination. As one example, Phillip remarked that he needed to be offered a range of ideas for projects from which to make his choice. He further noted that this approach required further attention from the Shed co-ordinator:

*Just something to stir one's imagination a bit more, might be, would be helpful without a doubt. If you've got nothing to do, Ric will usually find you something to*

*do. Um, but it's not sort of a choice, it's a "Will you do this, or will you do that," whereas with the bird feeder and the bird boxes, that was something I could see and say "Yes, I'll do that." Rather than say "well here's this, you can paint this," that becomes a bit like filling in time to me. So something to inspire one's creativity would be helpful. (Phillip, Shed)*

Artbeat participants also expressed approval of the co-ordinator providing input for their creativity. They appreciated that she selected a theme for the day and structured an activity, but they saw this only as a starting off point for them to develop their own ideas and as a way of introducing new concepts and skills. Like the other participants, Donald valued being given an initial idea from which he could then choose his own interpretation using his creativity:

*I allow her to, see I like the idea, she selects an idea. And it's so much better for her to select an idea and for us to work on it, than for us to go there with a bland "Oh now what'll I do today?" (Donald, Artbeat)*

For Artbeat participants it was also important to their self-expression and enjoyment that the Artbeat co-ordinator encouraged them to have their own individual style and make their own decisions about their interpretation. Donald expressed how this enhanced his enjoyment of the art activities in this reflection:

*When she realises that that's how you want it, you want the picture, that's me wanting the picture, she says "Don't, that's it." So she doesn't say "Look alright I think we need a large slice of red across here," never does that, never does that. And so that's why she's, she's very easy to get on with. And I'm happy. (Donald, Artbeat)*

While most participants identified choice as an important element of their enjoyment, there was one participant for whom this was not an issue. Gordon spoke of being happy to be allocated a task for the day, just as long as he had his favourite volunteer as his partner and the outcome was useful. In other words, choice in the type or purpose of the task was not relevant to him:

*Well I'm guided by what Ric wants or what John wanted. But I'm quite happy with what we're doing. (Gordon, Shed)*

### ***Challenge and Learning***

It was important to these older people's level of enjoyment that they had opportunities to be mentally stimulated and to have challenges. They spoke of using their mind, being stimulated and having their imagination stretched. Phillip was one of the participants in the study who emphasised the importance to him of undertaking challenging tasks that required a range of skills. Without the stimulation of a mental challenge, the activity would be boring for him:

*It's not just nailing two pieces of wood together and that's it. If you look at the dove coot out there, it's fairly complicated to fit it all together. Oh and even the simple things hanging in the trees, the nesting boxes, oh no, there's sufficient mental stimulation that it's not boring. (Phillip, Shed)*

While Phillip's observations illustrate the value of stimulating activities, Kathleen talked about how successfully completing a challenging task can enhance people's enjoyment and satisfaction. She described how the Artbeat group felt apprehensive about undertaking the *Licorice Allsorts* installation, their willingness to attempt the project and how their perseverance finally reaped the benefit of satisfaction:

*You know, when she brought the boards out and said "we're going to do the alphabet." I mean people were really nervous, you know, and we all did it. We had this great big brain session and how we would do it, and we chose letters. And I mean we came up with it, we're really proud with what we'd done, in the end. I thought they looked quite nice at the back, don't they? (Kathleen, Artbeat)*

Sometimes taking on a challenge entailed participants engaging in a task or process that they did not enjoy, but they recognised that they found enjoyment in the final result. Kathleen reflected on this phenomenon and also contrasted such stimulation with being left to their own devices without input from the co-ordinator:

*I find if I do what Virginia suggests, I get a lot of enjoyment in the end . . . Sometimes they don't like, the sort of cutting out or that sort of thing. But we all do it and they're very pleased with the result. And I think she's stretching us. Which you wouldn't have to do. I mean you could just give people the paintings*

*like you do in kindergarten. But I think in her case she carries us all forward.  
(Kathleen, Artbeat)*

Learning new skills was another way that the participants in this study enjoyed being challenged and mentally stimulated. Most of the Artbeat participants referred to the Artbeat program as a “class,” a term which carries a meaning of a place where people come together to learn, usually from a teacher or tutor. The direction that comes with this structure was important to Donald as he described here:

*Oh I prefer, I call it “art class,” I like to call it art class because we just come along and we get a bit of blank paper, and Virginia suggests what we’ll do, she suggests what we’ll do. (Donald, Artbeat)*

Not only did the Artbeat participants enjoy learning but their desire to learn contributed to a heightened sense of purpose in life, and this component of their experience is addressed in the following theme of *life purpose and meaning*.

Many of the Shed participants also talked of enjoying learning new skills and gaining knowledge. As an example, one participant described how he enjoyed consulting with fellow participants about how he should proceed with his work. He had a range of skills across a number of trades but did not have all the skills and knowledge he needed for his project of making an outdoor table from old timber:

*I like going around and asking people and saying “What do you think? Is this a good way?” and you say “Now what are my choices if I want to achieve this in the next step? How do you think, or what choices do you think I’ve got?” (Brian, Shed)*

While some participants enjoyed learning new skills, Gordon was more interested in gaining knowledge. His curiosity to learn is illustrated in this quote:

*Well I’m interested also in some of the machines that we’ve got. I mean I’ve never used a grouting machine, not that I have down there but I’ve seen how it works. And you know, when they’re cutting timber, I didn’t know they had a graduated*

*measuring thing on here, so they just put it on and cut, perfectly. Oh no, I've learnt a lot down there. (Gordon, Shed)*

### ***Company around a Common Interest***

Most of the participants in this study acknowledged that they had joined these groups to have some form of companionship. Prior to joining Artbeat or the Shed, their lives had been relatively isolated, without as much company as they would have liked. Some had led very social lives in earlier days, but their current poor health and mobility difficulties, spouses' and friends' ill health or death, migration or moving home had reduced their opportunities for close relationships and socialising through work and leisure.

“Company,” “companionship” and “camaraderie” were all expressions used by the participants when identifying the social value to them of joining Artbeat or the Men's Shed. The quality of their social interactions provided enjoyable experiences which complemented and enhanced their enjoyment of the art or woodwork activities.

Donald was the only participant who was not looking for companionship when he joined. The attraction of Artbeat for him was solely the opportunity to pursue his interest in art. Although living an isolated life, he did not feel lonely or in need of company. However, on finding the social side of Artbeat so enjoyable he recognised that he did indeed have social needs and benefited from having these met. In the following story Donald related why he joined Artbeat and the surprising revelation of enjoying the company:

*It was doing the art. Absolutely. Because as I've said to several people, I don't need other people around, don't need, don't need them. But I do need them and I was so happy I went there. I've met all these ladies, they're very nice and I enjoy being with them. And see, I didn't know I'd enjoy being with them. See that's something you don't know. (Donald, Artbeat)*

All of the Artbeat participants who were already pursuing their interest in art prior to joining Artbeat, acknowledged on the one hand that painting brought them satisfaction, but on the other hand that this activity on its own was not sufficient to make them



satisfied with their quality of life – they recognised their need for social contact. For example, Nancy, already an avid painter, described her life at home as “desolate” and how she sought company through Artbeat:

*I go for the company more than anything, just to meet people, because here it's so desolate. (Nancy, Artbeat)*

Another participant also recognised the importance of company to her well-being. Staying at home to paint would not have met her needs. She related a conversation with her daughter who had advised her to resume her hobby of painting:

*I need the company. If I get my paints out I'm still here with my thoughts, sitting there in the same house, the same room . . . And I said “No, I really need to get out.” (Elsie, Artbeat)*

Many of the people interviewed said that being in a group was a motivating factor to be active. At home they were likely to procrastinate because of the organisational effort that painting or woodwork required. Donald, for instance, talked appreciatively of feeling motivated by being with other people and a sense of being obligated to actively engage in creating art:

*I rather like that, you have to do the task. See it's no good saying “I'll think about it, I'll do it tomorrow.” And that's what I do here “Oh I'll do it tomorrow.” But with her you have to do it, and it's the same with all of us. Some of us just don't want to do it today. (Donald, Artbeat)*

Similarly, Phillip recognised that he no longer had the motivation to get started on projects at home, although he could make the same items at home as at the Shed. In the following comment he also identified the value of having company in the work environment of the Men's Shed:

*I think it would be a pretty lonely experience. I mean I may as well stop here and do it in my own garage, I've got all the tools.... I've got three little bird boxes in the garage ready for painting and I've been going to do it each morning, but I haven't. Whereas if it was, when it's the Men's Shed, it's a commitment and you*

*do it. And I think that's the difference, it's the commitment that is fairly important. (Phillip, Shed)*

Another contributing factor to enjoyment was that people liked their fellow group members. This was particularly noted by all the Artbeat participants. “Lovely,” “friendly” and “nice people” were typical expressions they used to describe each other. Nancy encapsulated this aspect of enjoyment of attending Artbeat in her comment:

*The people are all so friendly and welcoming, that it's a pleasure to go. (Nancy, Artbeat)*

Moreover, for both Artbeat and Shed participants it was not just the company of fellow participants that was important, but also the social contact with the volunteers and the coordinator. One participant particularly enjoyed being with his volunteer partner and the two had worked together since the early days of the Shed. He summarised the value of the relationship and the focus of their interaction:

*I enjoy his company. He talks to you, explains things to me. (Gordon, Shed)*

Another participant, Jim, expressed the most enthusiasm about the social value of attending the Shed. At one point he described his most enjoyable times at the Shed as being purely social, noting that this was not necessarily the case for other men there:

*When I'm sitting around a table stuffing my mouth with food and talking with my mouth full and they're all swapping stories . . . Oh, some of them don't seem too happy, but I enjoy it. (Jim, Shed)*

Interestingly, the other Shed participants asserted that the work was more important to them than socialising, yet they seemed to enjoy the social side more than they acknowledged. My field notes for the final observation visit to the Shed recorded that at the end of morning tea time the men did not hurry to leave the table to start work:

*Ric then started to allocate work – the participants didn't really stop talking amongst themselves to listen to him and didn't seem all that interested in starting work. (Field notes, Shed final observation visit)*

The critical element for promoting enjoyment of each other's company was the common interest in the activity of the program, that is, the art or woodwork. The common interest underpinning the group enabled a diverse group of people to have a positive and enjoyable group experience. People were respected for their range of skills and talents. One example of this was Faye's comment about her appreciation and enjoyment of the varied artistic talents of the Artbeat group:

*We all have different ways of expressing, but the work is beautiful that the others do. (Faye, Artbeat)*

The flexibility of the nature of these art and woodwork programs made it possible for everyone to be included and to belong to the group experience. The level of enjoyment that they all experienced from socialising with each other was closely intertwined with their shared interest which offered a variety of opportunities for conversation. The common interest helped develop the bonds between the participants which in turn led to a sense of group belonging and identity. People were not sitting in an art or woodwork class as individuals. Rather, they identified as a group member and felt a strong sense of belonging. They felt pride in the group, took strength from it, and looked forward to getting together each week.

All the participants talked about the inclusiveness of their group and how no-one was left out. The men at the Shed spoke proudly of the fact that everybody had useful work to do, irrespective of their skill level. This inclusiveness promoted a sense of belonging. Group projects were one means of including people of differing abilities and giving the opportunity to feel part of the process and final product, as one participant described:

*And here again there's different people, like cutting out you've got to have a certain calibre and skill, whereas the person who usually paints them would never be able to do that, they wouldn't be able to complete it from go to whoa because*

*they haven't got the wherewithal to be able to handle the bandsaw to cut the pieces out. So here again it's a group effort. You know, they like to play their part in it, and say that they've gone along and done part of it. (Brian, Shed)*

In response to questions about what made the group experience so enjoyable, the Artbeat participants all highlighted having their art interest in common. One participant emphasised that leisure groups are more enjoyable if there is an active shared interest to attract people to join:

*If she didn't have the art, I don't think they'd, well what would they come for? You can't say "just come and have a chat." Or "come and have a cup of tea and a social." No, you've got to have something to draw people, an interest. (Nancy, Artbeat)*

Through their shared interest, the participants related as fellow artists or co-workers instead of relating as older people with health problems. Indeed, according to one participant, they did not discuss their health problems which she saw as beneficial to her well-being:

*We never discuss our illnesses. It's art and our work. Which is healthy. Because it takes you out of yourself and away from your immediate um, what you call it, difficulties. (Faye, Artbeat)*

In the case of the Men's Shed, not only did participants refrain from discussing their health, but they also avoided discussing their personal lives. While the men were not comfortable discussing more personal matters, the structure of the work environment and their shared interest in the nature of the activities gave diverse opportunities for social interaction and conversations. The focus of such conversations was sharing knowledge and expertise, learning skills or problem-solving, which highlights the importance of a common interest to making conversation. They found these interactions enjoyable but did not define such work-related conversations as social experiences. From the men's point of view, the only socialising occurred when they gathered around the kitchen table during structured breaks from work, as Gordon explained:

*Well the only social part is having morning and afternoon tea, and lunch. That's when a lot of talk goes on. (Gordon, Shed)*

The following example further illustrates how these men did not view work-based conversations as being social interactions. After explaining that these breaks from work were the only time the men socialised at the Shed, Gordon proceeded to describe his social interactions with Danny, his regular volunteer partner:

*I've learnt a lot from Danny. He tells you things. He'll work something out. He says "How would you do it Gordon?" And if I say the wrong thing, he'll say "Well do it again." . . . I like Danny. (Gordon, Shed)*

He had in fact found an enjoyable way of interacting socially with others by holding purposeful conversations focused around learning skills and gaining knowledge.

The only areas of people's personal lives that the men at the Shed felt comfortable discussing were their occupational background and their manual skills for the work at the Shed. Otherwise, talking about personal lives was seen as an invasion of privacy and as being "none of your business." The disadvantage of this attitude was that it affected people's capacity to interact socially as getting to know a person carried the negative meaning of being a "stickybeak":

*I haven't made the effort [to get to know people], not being a stickybeak sort of business. (Phillip, Shed)*

Shared interests not only promote conversations that are stimulating but also feelings of being understood. In the case of Artbeat, the participants were not just sharing an interest, they were sharing a passion. Their shared passion for art and beauty was a binding element between them and the source of stimulating conversations. This feature was illustrated in the following experience of Elsie's where her partner on an Artbeat excursion not only understood why she was in raptures about the beauty of clouds, but also optimised her enjoyment by further expanding the experience for her:

*I was sitting with Mavis in the bus. And I said "Look at that sky there. Look at those clouds coming across there." She said "Yes, but look over the other side." And we were looking at things happening in the sky. (Elsie, Artbeat)*

The dual program structure of social and task-oriented activities provided people in both Artbeat and the Men's Shed with opportunities to derive their enjoyment from varying combinations of these activities to suit their needs. Another participant reflected that the balance of socialising and work varied according to people's moods on that particular day:

*I find that some days I don't feel like socialising in the sense that you sit around talking, because you want to get on with what you're there for, or get on with your project. Other times you're just happy to sit around and it appears that some other people are the same, because instead of just sitting around for half an hour, it goes on for an hour or more and you're still there talking. (Brian, Shed)*

A graphic description of the benefit of interweaving social and task-oriented activities was highlighted by the Shed participant who expressed most enjoyment of socialising. He used the work time to not only do his own work but to indulge his curiosity about what other people were doing:

*I've got one ear on what I'm doing, and the other one listening to see what somebody else is up to. (Jim, Shed)*

### ***Summary***

All the older people in this study expressed enjoyment of their involvement at Artbeat or the Men's Shed. Furthermore, most participants described experiences of heightened enjoyment which were consistent with the Csikszentmihalyi's concept of flow. The participants in both programs derived their enjoyment from the intertwining of two dimensions - the nature of the activity itself and the social interaction with others sharing this common interest. All the participants had been relatively isolated socially prior to joining Artbeat or the Men's Shed and the desire for companionship was a major reason for joining the group. They identified that sharing a common interest was a significant factor which contributed to their enjoyment of social interactions. The shared interest provided the cement or glue which developed the social bonds and created a sense of group identity and belonging.

It was important to these older people to be active, but not just activity for the sake of passing time. There had to be a meaningful purpose to their activity and a final product which satisfied them in terms of quality. Moreover, both the creative process and the final product contributed to their experience of enjoyment and satisfaction. The older participants' reflections highlighted that it was essential for optimal enjoyment of the leisure activity that they felt an affinity with the activity and that it held significant meaning for them. For all the participants, this affinity entailed skills and an aptitude that they had acquired at some period, either intermittently or continuously, during their lives. A strong thread of continuity in terms of interests, skills and meaningful activity was found to contribute significantly to people's enjoyment. The meaning of work was attributed by many participants to these leisure activities. This heightened their enjoyment in terms of continuity and the value of what they were doing.

Key to many participants' enjoyment was the need to express their creativity. For some people, exploring different modes of artistic self-expression was core to their creativity. For others, creativity meant crafting old materials into a new useful article or using problem-solving skills to implement an idea. Choice, control and challenge also contributed to these older people's enjoyment of their involvement in Artbeat or the Men's Shed. Challenge provided mental stimulation and opportunities for learning which were highly valued by the participants in both programs.

## **Theme 2: Life Purpose and Meaning**

The theme of *life purpose and meaning* emerged as central to the participants' experience of being engaged in a creative arts program. In many instances, this theme was also closely intertwined with a sense of heightened enjoyment. By understanding the importance of the two themes of *life purpose and meaning* and *enjoyment* in the lives of older people, we may begin to discover the potential of leisure to enhance older people's capacity for ageing well.

### ***Loss of Purpose***

A way of understanding the importance of purpose and meaning to life is to examine what it means to people when they lose their sense of purpose. Many of the people in the study talked about a time prior to joining Artbeat or the Men's Shed when they had lost their sense of purpose or felt at risk of losing their motivation to be active. They expressed this loss in terms of feeling "defeated," "desolate," "depressed," or that they were "drifting away". Some talked of even losing the will to live.

Severe health problems and disability were identified by participants at both Artbeat and the Men's Shed as having a serious impact on their sense of life purpose and meaning. For Kathleen, the pain and loss of mobility when she broke her hip made her feel "old" and "defeated":

*When you feel old, you feel defeated. I definitely felt old for a while when I broke my hip. (Kathleen, Artbeat)*

Similarly, another participant who had also experienced health problems that had impacted dramatically on his quality of life indicated that he had experienced the onset of depression at that time. He recounted that:



*Oh health-wise got me and I just, just didn't want to live. Just didn't want to live. I said "that's it" . . . depression set in. I threw the towel in. (Patrick, Artbeat)*

Donald also made the connection between loss of purpose in older age and having little to live for. He said that this phenomenon was a process of “drifting away,” conveying a sense of lacking direction or being marginalised from the mainstream of life:

*There's no doubt about it, you get to this age, and [pause] you can just drift away. (Donald, Artbeat)*

The transition to retirement for some older people can result in a loss of structure and purpose. As an example, one participant said that before he retired he had many ideas about how he would spend his time, but then became discouraged when he found he lacked the sense of purpose and motivation to carry them out:

*I found that over the years I've been saying to myself "When I retire I'm going to do this" or "I'm going to go somewhere and do this when I retire" and I finally thought in my own mind that I'd retired but I wasn't still able to do these. I wasn't getting anywhere. (Brian, Shed)*

The potential negative impact of retirement on a sense of life purpose was noted by other participants such as Patrick. He said that it was his view that many men spend their retirement years pursuing aimless and passive leisure pursuits, which to his mind was unsatisfying:

*I think their attitude to retirement was counter lunches and nothing, you know. And that's not it, that's not retirement. Retirement is getting your bum up off the seat and doing something. (Patrick, Artbeat)*

Another participant described how socialising with older people who have a negative outlook can have a dispiriting impact on others. He was critical of such groups who spend their time together discussing their health problems ad infinitum:

*You join the Elderly Cits and you're up here [indicates high up in air with hand] when you join them and they're all sitting there talking about their complaints,*

*and a couple of weeks later you're joining in too and you go down the hill, see?*  
(Jim, Shed)

### ***Finding Life Purpose and Meaning***

Many of the participants spoke of the importance of older people being involved in an interest which keeps them active and engaged in life. As one participant commented:

*You've got to be into something, you've got to be doing something.* (Jim, Shed)

Kathleen also believed in keeping active. According to her, this positive outlook was passed on to her by the example set by her own mother, who lived an active life as an older woman:

*I think it is terribly important as you get old to keep active. She [her mother] always felt that, you know. It is when you start sitting around and staying in bed till 10 o'clock. To get up and get on, that's what my mother always said.*  
(Kathleen, Artbeat)

Life purpose and meaning emerged during the Artbeat participants' discussions as a core benefit of their involvement in this art program. During the course of talking to me, most participants spontaneously summarised why Artbeat was so important to them. It was in these spontaneous summaries offered by the participants that the central themes of meaning and purpose were often generated. This is well illustrated in Donald's reflection:

*The important thing is that it has given my life a purpose - it's given all our lives a purpose. It's not just about talking, it's about going and doing something.*  
(Donald, Artbeat)

Faye took Donald's ideas one step further when she reflected on the important role of Artbeat in her life. Again, the theme of meaning and purpose was identified by participants as a reason to be more active and to take more control of their lives:

*Since I've come to Artbeat life has more meaning and I want to do more. (Faye, Artbeat)*

Kathleen had also found more meaning through creating art and through the social relationships she had developed with other participants at Artbeat. She reflected that her life had become more satisfying and that she now had something to look forward to every week:

*For me Artbeat provides company and enrichment – it makes my life a lot richer. Something to look forward to every week. (Kathleen, Artbeat)*

Compared with those people who participated in the activities offered by Artbeat, the participants at the Men's Shed were more restrained in making the connections between the quality of their lives and participating in specific Shed activities. There was one participant, however, who credited the Shed with providing him with a much needed incentive to get out of bed in the morning, in the face of energy-sapping health difficulties:

*Certainly the Shed is a carrot to get me to do something, and that's becoming increasingly important and increasingly difficult to get a carrot that's attractive enough to get me to do anything. And so that's obviously terribly important, very very important. Probably the number one issue. Because increasingly it would be very easy just to turn over and go to sleep. It would be very easy to turn over and say "I won't go today." (Phillip, Shed)*

In contrast to the Artbeat participants, a core purpose for their attendance at the Shed was to improve their health and functioning. They understood that they were being provided with a rehabilitation program by the Community Health Service. For Gordon, the physical aspects of rehabilitation featured as being particularly important. He discussed how he had wanted to be more active than he was at home, so that he might begin to regain functioning in his stroke-affected hand. It was important, he said, to his sense of well-being and emphasised that there had been a noticeable improvement in his ability to use his hand since he started attending the Shed:

*Well I couldn't hold the nail like that [demonstrates]. Since I've been down there I can hold it without hitting my finger. That as far as I'm concerned is good.  
(Gordon, Shed)*

Other participants pointed out that it was unlikely that people would participate in physical rehabilitation for its own sake. According to Brian, it was essential that there was some meaning in what they were doing and a tangible product that reflected the effort put in:

*But people need simple things, or to have a purpose. They don't like just trying to put beads on wires or cotton reels on pointy things to develop a hand to eye co-ordination sort of thing as like they used to have. They like the idea of being able to use their hands. (Brian, Shed)*

Like Gordon, Phillip perceived that he had joined the Shed program for rehabilitation. He saw its real value not just in improving his physical well-being (“if you’re planing or sawing, you get a reasonable amount of exercise”) but also valued its contribution to his mental well-being. He used the expression “therapy” to describe its value to him and attributed the combination of physical and mental activity as providing the boost to his mental health:

*Nothing like doing something with your hands to relieve the mind a bit. (Phillip, Shed)*

Phillip continued by describing how immersion in an activity can have a twofold effect on both the mind and body:

*Blocking out, if you like, things that might worry you, concern you. [pause] Oh I'm sure that's its purpose. It's always twofold. It's to help the mind, but I think working with your hands is always creative and must be positive benefits. (Phillip, Shed)*

Similarly, a number of participants at Artbeat talked about the benefits of being absorbed in their art. In their view, this provided a release from anxieties in their lives, as Kathleen observed:

*taking your mind away from miserable things. (Kathleen, Artbeat)*

Getting out of the house was commonly identified as an important benefit by participants. Kathleen encapsulated this point when she asserted that:

*It's terribly important to get out of the house into another surrounding where things are happening. (Kathleen, Artbeat)*

Another participant, Jim, added another dimension to the importance of getting out and being in an active environment. In his view, the positive activity at the Shed kept people “up the hill,” in contrast with other groups who just sit around and discuss their health problems:

*Well this one keeps you up the hill. But they don't spend all morning talking about their illnesses, they're doing something. (Jim, Shed)*

Even changes in participants' physical and mental demeanour were observed and attributed to their involvement in these programs. For instance, Kathleen, who had described herself as feeling “flat,” “limited” and “defeated” prior to joining Artbeat, commented about her increased confidence:

*But now I feel quite young when I stride in with my stick into Art. (Kathleen, Artbeat)*

Such physical changes were also noticed by a volunteer at the Shed who told me that:

*The Shed was “bringing people out” - men would arrive on the first day with their head down and hunched over and after a few weeks at the Shed they would be holding their head up and standing taller. (Shed, first observation visit)*

### ***Identity and Continuity***

Participation in creative and work-like activities at Artbeat or the Shed provided the older people in this study with opportunities to embrace a new identity or continue with former

valued identities. Such identities were associated with abilities, talents, competence, purposeful activities and a valued social role.

These identities were not defined by their age or family role and gave the participants a renewed sense of self-worth. It carried important meaning for them that they considered themselves as individuals with identities focused on their skills and interests rather than their age attributes. This also gave them a sense of worthwhile purpose to their lives, which Kathleen's comment here illustrates well:

*You're no longer "old grandmother", you know, you're a person again, you're going to school, you're going to a group, do you know what I mean, learning.*  
(Kathleen, Artbeat)

During the interviews, as the participants at Artbeat talked about the impact on their lives of their involvement in creative art activities, it emerged that they had come to see themselves as artists. For those participants who were already pursuing their interest in art before joining Artbeat, their artistic identity was being reinforced through their involvement in the program. For others, they were developing an exciting new identity with new potential directions for their lives. In Nancy's case, she was able to resume the identity of having artistic talent which she displayed as a school student. Through art, she was able to reconnect with her past interests and talents, and exploring her creativity had given her a purpose and a future to look forward to:

*But I was always interested in art . . . Well, maybe it's just a talent that has to come out. Some people have got a talent and others haven't.* (Nancy, Artbeat)

The importance of this continuing sense of self was also highlighted in Nancy's poignant reflection at the conclusion of the second interview:

*Well I still feel the same as I did when I was young. You're still the same person.*  
(Nancy, Artbeat)

Another Artbeat participant, Patrick, also reflected on the importance of a continuing sense of self. Interestingly, the group environment of Artbeat offered him opportunities to continue roles he enjoyed in his earlier years and for which he felt valued. Patrick saw himself as a “helper” and a social organiser, as well as a peer model or elder, in the group. He gained recognition from the co-ordinator and the other group members for his contribution. These roles provided him with an identity that, in turn, gave him a sense of worth and a sense of purpose to his life. The importance of his continuing identity is illustrated in this comment:

*Well they rely on me for anything social . . . all my life I've run social things.  
(Patrick, Artbeat)*

Like Artbeat, the Men’s Shed also provided its participants with a sense of self worth and a positive identity. There were, however, some major differences which are interesting to note. Unlike the Artbeat participants, these men were not seeking to expand their identity. What was important to them was to regain or reinforce their lifelong sense of self which they derived through working and using their hands. Involvement in the Shed provided the participants with many opportunities to have a continued sense of self through a sense of familiarity with the environment of the Shed, the work they were doing there, and the skills they were using. A significant source of their sense of continuity in their lives was derived from the affinity that they felt about working with their hands. Even though they had suffered many setbacks in recent years, they were still able to work with their hands to produce worthwhile items and to still find enjoyment and satisfaction from the activities that used their skills. One participant talked about the importance to some of the participants at the Shed of continuing with familiar tasks which use their well honed skills and gave them a continuing sense of self:

*But other people would like to continue doing what they were doing, so that, because that's their training, they've always loved doing it, and they don't want to learn something new, they just want to continue on being what they were. (Brian, Shed)*

A sense of continuity and identity were closely linked for the Shed participants. The one piece of information they knew about each other was their work backgrounds, that is, their occupational identity. Their lifelong occupation provided a source of continued valued identity and was respected by the group. Brian had also noticed that newcomers to the Shed were quick to explain their worth by way of their work history:

*I think it's something where, you find it when somebody new arrives. They spend quite a lot of time explaining to people who they are, in the sense that I've done this and I've done that, and I've been one of those, and that sort of thing, yes. And of course they're quite proud of it, and it's a way of explaining to everyone else how they've become who they are, what they've done and what they have been, you know, in the sense of what they've worked at. (Brian, Shed)*

The continuing valued identity of being good at working with their hands provided important meaning to these older men. One participant who defined himself in terms of this identity explained that "I'm a person who works with my hands." This same participant later commented how he had adapted his manual skills to the work at the Shed which had given him some new skills and was impacting on his usual identity as a mechanic and metalworker:

*I'm not a woodworker. Although I'm becoming one these days. (Jim, Shed)*

Gaining recognition for the work that the men did at the Shed strengthened their self-worth through reinforcing their occupational identity or sense of being a craftsman. For instance, Jim, while being self-effacing, also expressed pride from the recognition he gained from making sticks which were so useful and appreciated by his boules group:

*One woman down there, she's written her name and everything all down the side. You'd think it was gold or something. It was only old junk out of the Shed . . . it's handmade, all my own work. (Jim, Shed)*

Jim further expressed a proud sense of self-worth from this recognition when he said "I've made my mark."



Another important aspect of identity is the sense of belonging that can be obtained from feeling part of a group. Artbeat and the Men's Shed not only offered opportunities for participants to take pride in their individual identity but also in the sense of a group identity. Belonging to these groups and sharing in the group identity further validated participants' sense of worth. Patrick, for example, expressed pride in the recognition given by visitors to the Artbeat group for the quality of the participants' artwork:

*And I think everybody we've had there, I've spoken to them personally and they seem to be very impressed with the group, with the work that's being done, and the talent that's there. (Patrick, Artbeat)*

This benefit of feeling a sense of group belonging was greatly valued by the older participants. As social isolation was an issue for many of them, feeling a sense of belonging through these leisure groups was particularly meaningful. Belonging was connected with the meaning of "family" by one participant, for whom Artbeat provided a valued place to go:

*We're like one happy family . . . It's just like going home. (Faye, Artbeat)*

Another participant was amazed at her reaction to the group on her first day at Artbeat, which she expressed simply and powerfully in this comment:

*It's just this sense of belonging, it's absolutely unreal. (Elsie, Artbeat)*

Some participants talked about the importance of feeling a sense of belonging at the broader societal level. Attending Artbeat classes at the local community centre or mixing with the other participants and volunteers at the Shed represented inclusion in everyday community life. It was significant for one participant that she once again belonged to the wider community and no longer considered herself to be marginalised from the vigour of living in the "mainstream" of normal life:

*Well it makes you feel sort of part of life again, do you see? . . . you become part of the mainstream. (Kathleen, Artbeat)*

### ***Spillover Effect to Time at Home: Anticipation***

It is well recognised in leisure that anticipation is part of the enjoyment of the leisure experience. Looking forward to an event provides enjoyment as people contemplate or talk to others about the upcoming event, which can have the beneficial effect of lifting moods and heightening enthusiasm. This was the case for the participants in this study. Having their creative arts program to look forward to each week contributed to their sense of purpose in life.

Some participants described how attending Artbeat or the Men's Shed provided a structure to their week as well as something to look forward to every week. For example, in his account of how he counts down the days until he next goes to the Shed, Brian made the interesting observation that the feeling of anticipation can be almost more enjoyable than the actual experience:

*You count down the days and say, anticipation has got a lot to do with it, saying "alright, only two more days to go and I'll be able to go." I find anticipation to some things is nearly as good as in being involved. (Brian, Shed)*

Furthermore, the following reflection from Brian illustrates the connection between anticipation and the need for purposeful and meaningful activity after retirement. Brian related how, after his retirement, he had recognised his need for regular activity that gave a sense of purpose to his week:

*I needed something that I wanted to look forward to each week. Something that I went off and did on my own, and I was responsible for. (Brian, Shed)*

We can also see the powerful impact of pleasurable anticipation on people's well-being in the following quotes which describe participants' elevated moods as they anticipate going to the program that day. Kathleen expressed the excitement of anticipation evocatively and humorously in this narrative:

*Oh yes, we all look forward to that [Artbeat], we look forward. If we know it's the art day we all jump out of bed with alacrity. Don't jump out of bed with anybody else these days, just with alacrity. (Kathleen, Artbeat)*

When another participant was asked whether he looked forward to his day at the Shed, his wife, who had overheard the question from another room, could not contain herself. She called out a response which conveyed a similar level of enthusiasm to that of Kathleen:

*Yes! He's a changed man. He's as happy as a lark . . . You're as happy as a lark when you know you're going off to the Shed. (Gordon's wife, Shed)*

### ***Spillover Effect to Time at Home: Art as a Hobby***

The Artbeat participants talked about how Artbeat had affected the rest of their lives through their artwork at home. Home had become a central place for them to create their art. They recognised that the co-ordinator actively encouraged people to complete work at home, sent them home with left-over paints, and gave advance notice of upcoming themes to stimulate their ideas. She also allocated particular “homework” tasks in group projects to people which promoted their involvement and sense of self-worth, and acknowledged their skills. The effect of this was that people not only enjoyed their three hours at Artbeat but with art as homework, they also derived more enjoyment and meaning from their time at home. This had benefits of developing their identity as an artist and further developing art as a hobby or pastime. Three hours spent at Artbeat had the effect for some participants of bringing seven days of enjoyment and purposeful activity at home, as illustrated in Donald's description:

*Sometimes you take your work home and you do a little bit at home and so you see in many ways, it can take up the whole week. So I'm happy with that once a week. I don't want to go on say, let's say Thursday, there is apparently a class on Thursday. So I'm very happy to go on the Monday. And then I've got homework to do. See, but, see I don't want to go on the Thursday because I'm still engrossed in the work from the Monday. (Donald, Artbeat)*

One participant made an interesting and powerful comparison between Artbeat and community outings on a bus, a stereotypical leisure activity for older people. Her comments illustrate that looking forward to an event does not have as great an impact on

a person's quality of life as returning home with the purpose of continuing an enjoyable and worthwhile activity over the days to come:

*A lot of them just live for the bus trips, they live for the day outings, they live for that. Then they come home to their four walls. Now we bring home work that's not finished and we do it at home. And Virginia does like us to do a bit, what she calls homework, if you brought any homework. She likes us to do something to take back. (Elsie, Artbeat)*

This benefit to the quality of their time at home was an unexpected bonus for many participants. Donald, for example, expressed surprise at the much valued impact of art on his life. He related this benefit to having a meaningful activity to which he could devote his time at home:

*I really had no idea of what the art would do for me. I had no idea that it would be so engrossing and that I'd take it home and work on it during the week. (Donald, Artbeat)*

The benefit of sharing a common interest in art spread over to the participants' lives at home. Many of the participants were motivated by the opportunity to share the excitement of their artistic development with others who understood the significance of their achievements. This sense of purpose heightened their enjoyment of working at home as they looked forward to showing the co-ordinator and the other group members what they had done during the week, as Elsie related in this story:

*Now I'm doing a bit of work at home, I'm dying to get there and see what they think. And when we get there, they say "Did you do anything? What have you got?" Oh, you know, and you look at one another's work, and we all work absolutely different, absolutely. (Elsie, Artbeat)*

Most participants spontaneously described their interest in art as a hobby or pastime. In fact, three of the participants had already developed art as an absorbing hobby before they joined Artbeat. For the others, their attendance at Artbeat had stimulated their interest to the point they considered art to be a hobby for their life away from Artbeat, which gave them a sense of purpose and brought them enjoyment. This was especially important to

Donald who was the least physically mobile at home and the most isolated socially. Art provided a convenient avenue for him to use his time at home in a satisfying way. He explained to me how watercolour painting and drawing are forms of art that can be adapted to confined spaces and create little mess. He had been able to set himself up on his couch in his living room with all the materials he needed for painting within his reach.

*See I can do watercolours here, sitting here. Um, a glass here, see there it is, look. My palette . . . Pastels are very good, so that's the other way. So we've got line drawing, pastels, watercolours. (Donald, Artbeat)*

There was no such spillover effect from the Shed to home for the participants in this study. In earlier times, these men had all done similar work in their occupation or as a handyman at home, but had ceased due to changes in their health, mobility and living arrangements. Some no longer had access to tools or a suitable work space. Even though Phillip had taken bird boxes home to paint, he could not find sufficient motivation to work on them in that environment.

### ***Purposeful Use of Time***

A significant benefit identified by all the participants in one way or another was the purposeful use of time. They spoke unequivocally that their time was valuable to them and that they wished to spend their time constructively. They talked of creating, producing, learning, achieving, helping others, mastering new skills, extending their minds and sharing their interest with like-minded people. They wanted to be active, even though they were restricted physically.

Some participants contrasted their use of time as active participants at Artbeat or the Shed with “filling in time” or doing something just for the sake of helping the time to pass. This passive concept included attending programs where older people are the spectators and are there only to be entertained rather than being actively engaged. One participant captured this contrast between the purposeful activity at the Shed with passing time:

*I'm not just filling in time until it's time to go home. (Phillip, Shed)*

The same participant linked the purposeful use of time with the concept of an activity or final product being worthwhile. For him, and for others in these creative programs, it was important that what they did with their time had real worth either to themselves or to others:

*Being able to make something that is worthwhile is terribly important, rather than just filling in time between meals (Phillip, Shed)*

Expectations as to how they used their time could also change as new avenues opened up to them. For example, Brian talked about his new outlook since the early days of his retirement. He began retirement thinking he needed only to fill in time. Through his involvement at the Shed, however, he had come to realise that he had some control over time and could derive value from it:

*It's my attitude towards it that's changed. In the beginning I think I was looking for somewhere to go to fill in the time and with very kind of superficial if you like, but now I find now that I can use it for my own benefit. (Brian, Shed)*

Another aspect of changing expectations regarding the use of time was related to gender. The older women in the study talked about now having time free of their earlier family duties. For most of their lives they had been expected to devote their time to their homes and families. By being freed of such time-consuming duties, they now had time available to indulge their passion for painting, as Kathleen described in this comment:

*For the first time we've got time to make a mess and have fun, you know, whereas when you're bringing up families, and especially women, you just don't, do you? (Kathleen, Artbeat)*

For some Artbeat participants, their perception of their unobligated time was that it had become a resource to them to pursue their interest in art. For instance, weekends provided Elsie with the opportunity to devote an extended period of time to master a new technique which she had struggled to learn. Her time and effort were rewarded by achieving a satisfying final result:

*It took me a long time to learn [a new technique]. I couldn't really get it. And I brought it home and worked the whole weekend on it, and I thought it was terrific. (Elsie, Artbeat)*

### ***Self-expression and Creativity***

While self-expression and creativity have already been discussed under the theme of *enjoyment*, self-expression and creativity are also important to the theme of *life purpose and meaning*. Exploring and extending their creative talent was particularly important to all the Artbeat participants and held a core life meaning and purpose for each of them. This is yet another aspect in which enjoyment and life purpose and meaning are inextricably entwined. The significance of self-expression and creativity in the lives of these participants provided a highly motivating purpose for their regular attendance at Artbeat, and for pursuing art as a leisure activity at home. The urge to explore their creativity also motivated these older people to take “risks” associated with experimenting with new ideas.

As noted earlier in the literature review, there is a widely held belief that the desire and ability to paint is innate and core to humans’ sense of self or identity. As a way of explaining her urge to paint, Kathleen gave voice to this concept:

*You see if people are presented with the colours and with the brush, because children in kindergarten all paint, do you know what I mean, they'll all paint. There must be something you've lost on the way. Has to be, I mean it's, you know, the ancient tribes, people always painted each other and themselves if they've got nothing else. (Kathleen, Artbeat)*

More specifically, painting enabled Kathleen to connect with and creatively express the vivid visual memories of her childhood. She described this strong drive to express her inner being through art and her urge to paint from the feelings that accompanied her childhood memories:

*I paint from memory, whatever I paint. With these it was the flowers in the garden when I was a child, do you know what I mean? And the blue was the sky. And I'm actually painting inside out . . . You're feeling it from the inside. (Kathleen, Artbeat)*

Nancy and Donald also had a sense of this innate urge to paint. They both made reference to having a creative instinct. Donald talked about the purpose of “extending my creative instinct,” while Nancy described the creative instinct as being “something you have to do” and a “talent that’s coming out, being drawn out.” Donald developed this idea further when he related the benefit of artistic self-expression not only to his own well-being, but to the well-being of other older people as well:

*I do think that older people, like myself, do need, do need to express themselves in those artistic ways. (Donald, Artbeat)*

### ***Learning***

Learning was important to life purpose and meaning for participants at both the Shed and Artbeat. It was the Artbeat participants, however, who expressed this connection most strongly. The Artbeat participants were keen to continue to learn, to be mentally stimulated and to continue to progress with their art. Nobody considered that they were too old to learn. Learning was a prime purpose for attending Artbeat and for their enthusiastic attitude to their participation. One participant, Elsie, spoke at length about the value of learning to her. She was keen not only to advance her skills but to also learn new skills, as she expressed in this succinct comment:

*You’re there to learn and I think the idea is to learn something different. (Elsie, Artbeat)*

She also spoke about being “willing to try,” indicating that learning can involve an element of risk-taking:

*So you learn all these new, different new things and, I’m willing to try. (Elsie, Artbeat)*

Moreover, for the sake of learning Elsie was willing to engage in art exercises that she did not enjoy because she recognised their value to her skill development:



*It's to get your brain working, and it's an exercise . . . But the weeks we've got to do left handed, I go to water, I really go to water. But um, any rate, I'm learning. (Elsie, Artbeat)*

Learning at Artbeat increased the sense of life meaning for some of the participants. Again it was Elsie, for whom this aspect of learning had the most significant impact. With guidance from the co-ordinator, Elsie had changed her concept of art from creating the best possible likeness to using her imagination to create her own interpretation. This conceptual change opened up exciting opportunities to her:

*But as I say, since going to Artbeat this is what I've learnt. You don't, don't paint it exactly as it is. You don't do it exactly, you've got to see more into than what's there. Really. (Elsie, Artbeat)*

### ***Summary***

Engaging in enjoyable and purposeful activities led to the benefit of an enhanced sense of life purpose and meaning. These older participants had become more motivated to be active and to gain greater satisfaction from their lives.

Pursuing their interest in art or woodwork had provided the participants with a positive and valued identity, which contributed to a greater sense of self-worth. An identity as an artist, artisan, craftsman or worker focused on their skills, interests and social value. This freed them from the “mask” of old age with its negative images of frailty and decline.

Using time rather than filling in time was an important concept identified by the participants that contributed to them feeling a sense of purpose in their lives. Their time was valuable to them and they did not wish to waste it on meaningless activities. Activities had to be “worthwhile,” that is, the outcome had to be worth their time either for their own benefit or to benefit other people. For Artbeat participants, exploring their creativity and learning more about art and developing new skills was worthwhile.

Moreover, they all worked further on their art outside Artbeat sessions, which offered them a constructive way of using their time on the other six days of the week.

### **Theme 3: A Heightened Sense of Well-being: A New Lease of Life**

When the participants in this study talked about their art and their time at Artbeat, they did so with enthusiasm and passion. Their eyes sparkled as they spoke. They conveyed a sense of excitement as they described how exploring their artistic creativity and their enjoyment of Artbeat had impacted on their lives. Their words expressed the excitement, enthusiasm, passion and optimism that their involvement had brought them. For example, they used words such as:

*thrilled, amazing, marvellous, magnificent, terrific, wonderful, delightful, invigorating, enthusiastic, heaven-sent, intriguing, fascinating, unreal, engrossing, absorbing, joy and fun.*

*A new lease of life* emerged as a significant theme during a preliminary analysis of the transcripts at the end of the first round of interviews with the Artbeat participants. When asked in the second round of interviews for their opinion as to whether they were experiencing a new lease of life, they all agreed. The participants attributed this significant improvement in their well-being and quality of life to their involvement in Artbeat. While the participants in the Men's Shed also greatly enjoyed their time at the Shed and found that their involvement in the program added purpose and meaning to their lives, the impact on their sense of wellbeing and positive outlook about their future was seemingly not as profound. They appeared satisfied to maintain or reconnect with their past identities, skills and interests without needing to explore new horizons. Hence, this theme is only discussed in relation to Artbeat.

There was a poignant contrast between the experience of growing old with all its limitations and a sense of “soaring” freely in a world of art and creativity. Participants said that they felt that artistic creativity and involvement in Artbeat had brought about a life changing experience. This sense of a new lease of life developed out of the previous two interrelated benefits –heightened enjoyment of Artbeat and their art, and the strong sense of purpose and meaning they found in these activities.

### *An Expanding World*

The excitement of experiencing a new lease of life was evident when people spoke about their world expanding. One participant described how Artbeat had opened a new world for her where she could continue to grow and develop. She also believed that other people would benefit, as she had, from attending an art group like Artbeat:

*But this is the whole thing about it, Alison, if they can get more groups going like us, it opens, it opens a new world. (Elsie, Artbeat)*

This new world, according to Elsie, was an inspiring world full of artistic opportunities. She had learnt that art could be more imaginative and exciting than she had previously understood or experienced:

*But you can use your imagination. And I know now, and that's what I've learnt from Virginia – art is art, whatever you see is art. So, now I know I can add to it if I don't like it as it is, quite often I do something "oh I don't like that" and you can add to it and make it to what you like . . . Since going to Artbeat this is what I've learnt. You don't paint it exactly as it is. You don't do it exactly. You've got to see more into it than what's there. Really. (Elsie, Artbeat)*

Similarly, Donald had experienced an opening up of his confined world through Artbeat and he said that the co-ordinator has been critical to this experience:

*But now, under Virginia's tutelage, you know, the things open, you know, doors open. (Donald, Artbeat)*

Donald made the further point that, prior to joining Artbeat, he had not been conscious of how limited his world was - not just physically but also mentally:

*Well, my life, I'd arranged my life. I'd marked out what I wanted on television, and I had books to read. I had all the whole thing, and I thought that I had arranged my life happily. I really did think so. And I had no idea of anything further. My mind hadn't expanded, you know, it was just in this little, in this little room. (Donald, Artbeat)*

To further explain his rekindled interest in the artistic world, Donald talked of extending his mind and extending his creative instinct with the ideas that the co-ordinator provided

each week acting as a catalyst. The doors that had opened for Donald had created new opportunities and connected him with his former art interests which brought the added benefit of enhancing the quality of his life at home:

*But it's opened a whole new possibility, you know, new, new realms of possibility, which I didn't dream about. I didn't think I would've, these art materials were away. Actually, see, all that stuff on that chair, that's all from my previous little [pause] having a go at art. And now, and now I've brought it out. (Donald, Artbeat)*

Indeed, Donald attributed an improvement in his health and well-being to joining Artbeat:

*I'm doing all right. And doing much better since I went to Virginia. (Donald, Artbeat)*

Another participant, Kathleen, also talked of her excitement about the new world that had opened up for her through her renewed interest in art:

*Art is terribly important because it's a new discovery I've made. (Kathleen, Artbeat)*

Art had become a “whole life” for her and she expressed a positive outlook for the future because she could continue to develop her interest in art, despite increasing physical limitations:

*And with art, for the first time I'm sort of dabbling in it and thinking I might, you know, take it further and really try to use it as a hobby. Do you know what I mean? A really delightful hobby as I get older. Because as long as you can see and your fingers are alright, even if you're incapacitated physically. (Kathleen, Artbeat)*

### ***Freedom and Release***

The participants used a variety of expressions and metaphors to convey the sense that they had left behind their narrow and restricted worlds, in which they had felt cut off from other people. Once again, through Artbeat, they had become active participants in the wider world. As was noted in the previous theme of *life purpose and meaning*,

participants considered that they had returned to the “mainstream” or no longer felt “clammed up” and in a “rut.” One participant described her earlier confined existence metaphorically:

*With the illness it was like I was living in a shell. (Faye, Artbeat)*

Extending their minds and imaginations and the experiences of flow (discussed in more detail in the first theme of *enjoyment*) were greatly valued by the participants. The sense of freedom and release they gained through their art experiences was in marked contrast to their descriptions of how limited they felt on account of their health and mobility difficulties. They were now able to think beyond their present day worries and what they could not do, to focus instead on what they could do.

When participants were absorbed in expressing themselves through their art they experienced what could be termed flow as well as feelings of freedom. Donald, for instance, was inspired to find that he could use his left hand almost as well as his right hand and that he could draw more boldly:

*I didn't know that. I had no idea. And as you, the tendency just to draw small with your right hand, little lines [indicates motions on piece of paper] but with that you can really go to town . . . It gives you a freedom. It gives you a freedom to do it. (Donald, Artbeat)*

Moreover, participants also reflected on the therapeutic and reinvigorating benefits of art. One participant described art as having a “healing” effect, while another participant linked the benefit of painting with art’s therapeutic benefits of giving a new lease of life - both on the Artbeat day and for the future. In this narrative, the participant also referred to the capacity of art to lift people out of depression:

*You can feel, I can feel very very flat, “Do I want to go to art today?” You get there, it's a new life, and you come home and I want to pick up the brush again. I come home when I bring an unfinished one, I come home and I do a bit more of it. You know? It's really, it really does. I really think if you were in depression, well they do, they do in these hospitals, some of the hospitals, they teach them art. (Elsie, Artbeat)*

### ***Summary***

The themes of *enjoyment* and *life purpose and meaning* were core to both Artbeat and the Men's Shed and contributed to the participants' sense of well-being in both programs. However, it is the third theme of *a new lease of life* which reflected the highest level of benefits and the increased vitality that the older people participating in Artbeat had derived through their involvement in this creative arts program. These participants described how they were continuing to learn and to grow through their artistic expression. They said that their imaginations were stimulated and they felt that their world had expanded. Their flow experiences as they created artworks contributed significantly to a new sense of freedom and release from concerns about the physical limitations of growing older.

## **Theme 4: Factors Facilitating Beneficial Group Leisure Experiences**

The final theme, *factors facilitating beneficial group leisure experiences*, is largely drawn from interviews with the program co-ordinators. It interweaves their perceptions and the perceptions of the older participants about the factors that are important to enhancing enjoyment and other benefits. This theme particularly reflects how group leisure experiences are supported by the role of the co-ordinator along with a range of other practices. There are many components of the program that leisure providers can influence by creating the environment and designing the program to provide opportunities for optimum enjoyment for participants. The facilitating factors identified illustrate how the co-ordinator has a vital role to play in welcoming, encouraging and providing guidance to the participants.

The older people in this study talked about a range of facilitating factors that were important to their experience of enjoyment, with the most significant being the skills and attributes of the co-ordinator. The participants also identified factors that influenced their initial approach to the program. In addition, they recognised that their own positive attitudes to their participation influenced their level of enjoyment and the benefits they gained.

### ***The Role of the Co-ordinator***

Overwhelmingly, the key facilitating influence on these older people's enjoyment of their time in the group was the co-ordinator. Although the co-ordinators could not ensure that participants derived enjoyment and benefits from their attendance at the group program, they could create the environment and structure activities so that opportunities were available for positive experiences. The co-ordinator's skills, attributes and attitudes were critical to the quality of the participants' experiences. Many of these components were referred to in the *enjoyment* theme and are mentioned in this section only briefly.



A further key facilitating factor in the success of Artbeat and the Men's Shed was that the co-ordinators were not delivering the same program to every participant. They put in the time and effort to get to know each person and to understand what was meaningful for them. They were then able to adapt the program to maximise each participant's enjoyment and benefits.

### ***Program design***

The co-ordinators of Artbeat and the Men's Shed recognised that the choice of leisure activity was a critical strategy for ensuring that older people in the program benefited in terms of their health and well-being. They noted that as the focal activity, visual art and woodwork were inherently flexible and could be adapted to the range of different abilities in the group.

The Artbeat co-ordinator believed that artistic self-expression, with its accompanying creativity and stimulation, was a particularly powerful medium for improving well-being. According to her, creating art stimulates both the unconscious and conscious parts of the brain:

*I know as an artist, what art can do for you within yourself, and that you go to another place that is not left brain, that is, it's sort of non-linear in terms of time, and that it's intuitive, and that it can be deeply healing . . . and there's also a side that can be quite conscious, that can be stimulated, and people either continuing to achieve, or achieving something that they've never achieved before. (Artbeat co-ordinator)*

She also recognised that designing Artbeat as a class had significant meaning for the group members. In distinguishing between Artbeat and art therapy, the co-ordinator acknowledged that both focus on self-expression. The purpose of art therapy is to explore feelings and life events in a therapeutic environment. In contrast, Artbeat is “a class which is about developing technique, experiencing new materials, and about challenge.”

Like the Artbeat co-ordinator, the founding co-ordinator of the Men's Shed realised the importance of benefiting older people's well-being through a stimulating program. He gave attention to offering stimulating activities that would enhance their sense of mastery and self-worth:

*I think to keep those brain cells ticking over, not be sitting home watching television or trailing around after a wife. It's very important that a person remains their own person, that they can get some, they get a lot of benefit out of being master of their own universe, even if it is just for that one day. I think it's quite important to keep your sense of worth. (Shed co-ordinator no.1)*

When establishing the program at the Men's Shed, the co-ordinator chose woodwork as the focal activity on the basis that most men have acquired at least some woodwork skills through their lives and would be likely to feel an affinity to such activities:

*Everybody was really quite enthusiastic about it. And I was right in a couple of respects, that most of the men had done some form of woodwork, had made either kids' toys when they were young or built shelves for the house. A number of them had built their own houses in those days. So there was that affinity with the woodwork that just about all of them had, even though they may have been fitters and turners, metal workers, bankers, they all were able to cope with the woodwork . . . It was the most approachable, everybody knew about it and you could actually make something, make an article. (Shed co-ordinator no.1)*

He also found that men enjoy using tools which contributed to their affinity with woodwork:

*A lot of men really like using tools. I think that was another important thing, another really good thing for woodwork. And obviously, a lot of hand tools. And men really like picking up, using a hammer and nails. (Shed co-ordinator no.1)*

According to the Artbeat co-ordinator, it was participants' strong affinity with art that made the group so successful and facilitated the social interaction:

*Sure it's about people getting together and sharing art and socialising, but what gives them, what is the catalyst is their deep interest in art and the creating of art. (Artbeat co-ordinator)*

The Artbeat co-ordinator also observed how a group of people from diverse backgrounds could be brought together around a mutual interest, such as art, for an enjoyable social experience. She reflected that from the foundation of a shared interest in art, social relationships can develop. People engage in conversations about art and then gradually become more interested to converse more about the personal aspects of each other's lives. The co-ordinator observed that:

*Now with art, and sure it's interest-based, but you have people coming from such a wide range of social, professional, whatever experiences. What they have in common is a desire to create art and an interest in art and maybe to learn further about art generally, maybe they have an interest in art history, and then they start sharing their lives and they can then explore the common threads of their lives. (Artbeat co-ordinator)*

In a similar way, the activities at the Shed focused on bringing older men together for social benefits. The Shed was developed on the premise that men are task-focused and need a task to bring them together for social interaction:

*The thought was that men needed an activity to come together rather than women who seemed to be fairly social and can join groups, like the Elderly Citizens. Men tend not to do that and they needed an activity that would bring them together. (Shed co-ordinator no.1)*

### ***Creating the environment***

Creating an environment that was conducive to positive experiences was an essential strategy for facilitating enjoyment and benefits. The Shed co-ordinator was of the opinion that men prefer to be involved in activities that are not clinically based and to be in a comfortable, everyday setting:

*They don't want a clinical environment where people will gravitate towards their health issues . . . Here they are Mr Bloggs who comes down to the Shed, they're just a bloke, and they value that. They're not coming down here for a controlled or managed set of things, they like it in a casual and relaxed way. (Shed co-ordinator no.2)*

The co-ordinator aimed to create an environment where the men felt they had the “opportunity to be myself and to be within myself for a few hours,” which he perceived as a building stone for further positive experiences. He expressed the view that many men “don’t want to be told,” in contrast with their home environment where they feel they are being bossed around by other family members.

The co-ordinators all gave attention to creating a welcoming environment for newcomers. The welcoming process included providing sufficient information about the program that people could decide whether to proceed with their approach, offering an opportunity to visit the program to choose whether to commit to joining, and facilitating an enjoyable first session.

The Shed co-ordinators both commented on the importance of the ambience of the Shed in creating a welcoming and familiar environment. They aimed to create a work space where things were happening and in which the men felt a sense of belonging. Even the noise of the machinery contributed to this ambience of purposeful work. Many of these aspects were described in this account:

*I think once they stepped in the door, the environment was something that was very familiar and I think welcoming, not me particularly, but just that environment, the workshop environment. They were here and they were going to do something practical and worthwhile with their time. I think the personalities in the place, the group dynamic would sort of kick in after a little while, that they became part of this group. (Shed co-ordinator no.1)*

The Artbeat co-ordinator made a special effort with newcomers and involved other members of the group, particularly Patrick, in the welcoming process:

*And I will always say to Patrick “We have somebody new starting. Would you mind keeping an eye out?” Sometimes he’ll sit with them or sometimes he’ll just make a real effort to make sure that, oh keeping an eye out, and there are others in the group who will do that as well. And I obviously spend more time with that person. (Artbeat co-ordinator)*

Patrick himself valued this familiar social role, which he related in this narrative about the co-ordinator approaching him to assist her to set up the second Artbeat group:

*And then Virginia started the Monday group and she said to me, she said "I'm starting a Monday group, Patrick." I said "Oh yeah." I said "Do you want some help?" She said "I'd love the help. I'd love you to come because I think you are just the ideal person to set up this Monday group, and with your forward approach to everything, and the women and that, you get on well with them." I said "Yeah OK," so I've been there ever since. (Patrick, Artbeat)*

At Artbeat, the co-ordinator was also aware of her responsibility to enable newcomers to have a positive experience on their first day. She was concerned that they may already be feeling vulnerable and that a negative experience could further reduce their confidence and self-esteem:

*It's a really big ask to make sure that their first experience is a good one on all sorts of levels because they could go away having this sense of failure. (Artbeat co-ordinator)*

Having a positive experience at the first session was also identified by the older participants as an important factor for them continuing to attend the program. They indicated that people needed to react positively to the activities and believe that they could gain satisfaction from them. They also needed to feel welcomed into the group at a social level. For some, it was the nature of the activity that was critical to their enjoyment, whereas for other participants it was the welcoming atmosphere. As an example, the welcome that Elsie received at her first visit to Artbeat and her immediate sense of belonging were key to her decision to stay. Her observation about the experience highlights the co-ordinator's facilitating role:

*Well I went down and I walked into that room and you could not believe it, they were like old old friends. Virginia first, always gives you a lovely big hug and she made me so welcome. Then she introduced me and everyone gave you a hug. They were, they knew no history about me, I was just a new person came. And it, it was absolutely wonderful. They were all about my age. And I thought "Well, even if I don't learn anything here, it's the company and somewhere to come." (Elsie, Artbeat)*

At the Shed, the older men in this study also observed that it was important for new participants to have the feeling that they would be able to “fit in.” This was not just a matter of belonging socially but also perceiving “how they can be useful.” In other words, the men had to feel a genuine sense of purpose.

Other participants in the study reflected that people need encouragement on their first visit to give them confidence in their skills. For some newcomers, however, the whole experience seemed too daunting and even simple tasks were too difficult for them. According to Donald, one newcomer found the task of drawing a ladder beyond her capacity and did not continue after the first session:

*It took every ounce of her concentration, every ounce of concentration to do that, and it was just too much for her. (Donald, Artbeat)*

Creating an environment for enjoyable social experiences was another aspect of the facilitating role played by the co-ordinators. At Artbeat, the co-ordinator scheduled social time when the participants arrived and at afternoon tea time. Other social interactions occurred around their art, including a segment at the end of most sessions which provided an opportunity for group feedback on the art that participants had been working on at home or during that day’s session.

The co-ordinators at the Shed intentionally created a social environment around meal breaks. This provided opportunities for the men, most of whom were socially isolated, to communicate with each other in a typical social situation in a workplace. Structuring such social activity was particularly important for those who preferred to work in a solitary way on a project - they at least had some time in social interaction, even if they were just listening to others talk. Both Shed co-ordinators were aware that this was an uncomfortable time for a few of the men as was related in this account:

*We’d have half an hour for lunch. And really that half an hour was almost too long for most of them. They were really quite keen to get back to their job after they’d finished their sandwiches. (Shed co-ordinator no.1)*

Many of the social bonds between the men were formed through working together on projects, an aspect which the co-ordinators supported in the way they designed the program. One co-ordinator described how the demands of projects created stimulating conversations amongst the men:

*A number of friendships were formed . . . some really liked working together. And it was fantastic to see people, and some were at varying ages working on the one project, communicating not so much about, you know, their wife or their house, but how they were going to do this particular project. And just the camaraderie and the working together was quite an eye opener. (Shed co-ordinator no.1)*

The current Shed co-ordinator also made an interesting link between social connections and creativity. He related how he consciously used the project activity to promote creative thinking in this group setting and also to stimulate social interaction between the participants:

*Quite often we'll nut ideas out or we'll try all the tricks, quite often that's not about what we're doing, the making the table or the fixing the item, it's about the interpersonal stuff and the working together and connectedness. (Shed co-ordinator no.2)*

### ***The co-ordinator as a guide: Getting to know each participant***

Adapting the program to suit the individual was recognised by the participants as an important component of the co-ordinator's skills. In fact, the Shed participants singled out this skill as the most critical of all the co-ordinator's skills. As one participant in this study observed, it was particularly important that the Shed co-ordinator be "pretty good at summing them up" - not only for linking participants with achievable and enjoyable work tasks, but also to ensure duty of care on safety matters. The participants recognised that the co-ordinator's role included identifying which men needed help or supervision and organising this at the level required, without being overprotective or overly solicitous. The participants approved of the assessment skills of the co-ordinator in determining who needed assistance with a task and who could work independently without his intervention, as Jim described:

*Well if somebody's having a problem, he'll spend time with them. You know what I mean? And people like myself, he'll leave us to our own devices. (Jim, Shed)*

Jim expressed further approval of the way the co-ordinator provided that support and his overall respect for his abilities:

*If they're having trouble with what they're making he'll walk down and help them, you know. He's real good. Hundred percent. I'm backing him one hundred percent. (Jim, Shed)*

It was also recognised by the Shed participants that the co-ordinator had to be able to identify who had the capacity to use which tools and machinery safely, and who needed supervision or someone to perform the required tasks for them. Phillip described his appreciation of the demands of the co-ordinator's role and the fact that he was not overly protected as he was still free to use a suitable range of power tools and hand tools:

*Ric of course is very much a hands on man, he knows what it's all about and so a bloke like me he wouldn't let me use the bandsaw etcetera. If I need timber chopped up, he'd chop it up for me. But I can use the drills and those sort of things for drilling holes or, and the chisels and the hammers and the nails and saws and all that sort of thing. (Phillip, Shed)*

Furthermore, Phillip identified that an important factor contributing to his enjoyment was the unobtrusive and non-patronising manner in which support was provided:

*I'm pretty sure there's a bloke looking over my shoulder who is an assistant, and he just hovers around. And if you look as though you're in trouble, you know "Can I help?" It's not obvious that, you know, someone's got a peaked cap on and he's a boss or a pannikin boss and he's a lieutenant. You're not sure who's the patient and who's the teacher, which is very good. (Phillip, Shed)*

Consistent with the views of the older participants, all the co-ordinators identified that it was essential for them to get to know participants as individuals in order to deliver the programs effectively. By getting to know people's needs and abilities, and finding out what interests held meaning for them, the co-ordinator could then provide opportunities for individuals to gain the potential benefits of participating in the program. Both Shed



co-ordinators talked of taking the process slowly at first to build confidence and trust, as the founding co-ordinator noted in this comment:

*Softly, softly at the start get to know the person and the person gets confident in you. (Shed co-ordinator no.1)*

The current co-ordinator added that:

*So it's about taking it slowly and giving people as many opportunities as possible. (Shed co-ordinator no.2)*

He also observed that the process of getting to understand a person's abilities and what is meaningful to them takes place over a long period of time and can entail revising some earlier assumptions and evaluations:

*What he wants to do is he wants to do something that's familiar, he wants to do something that people respect . . . So there's a whole set of criteria about addressing the service needs of the particular man. Now that's a juggling act that I have to go through. And it takes a long while to get to know people. And sometimes I'm surprised by my assumptions or my observations or my evaluations. (Shed co-ordinator no.2)*

Furthermore, the Shed co-ordinator also observed that structuring a program for an individual needs to be done with sensitivity and in a dignified way that does not draw attention to their deficits:

*Through subtle direction and opportunity, giving them a chance to improve on the areas that they need. People don't like to be overly directed or overly handled, being told that they've got problems and they need to do this and they need to do that. More of it in an experiential mode rather than a directional. (Shed co-ordinator no.2)*

By understanding a person's needs, skills and interests, programs could be structured for people to have successful outcomes. This dimension of achieving successful outcomes was identified by the co-ordinators as crucial to people's enjoyment:

*You don't want to put them off, so I don't give them things that are so difficult that they're going to not succeed. (Artbeat co-ordinator)*

The co-ordinators all spoke of structuring activities so that people could perform tasks with a considerable degree of independence, instead of being overly directed and supported. For people with low self-esteem and whose skills levels were limited due to health problems, the Shed co-ordinator provided opportunities for them to become involved in activities where they could experience a sense of completion, achievement and camaraderie:

*You've got all these blokes, everybody's going to be a little different. And what they get out of it is going to be different. But I think for their low self-esteem, small projects that they were able to complete or be part of were definitely the things that really worked . . . that a person can do something by themselves is really quite important. That, and being part of the group of fellows who were making something. (Shed co-ordinator no.1)*

The current Shed co-ordinator provided a clear description of his role in guiding participants towards achieving a satisfying experience. In the following narrative, he reflected on the complex skills required by the co-ordinator to provide satisfying experiences to older people whose skill levels are declining due to their health difficulties:

*So I suppose part of my role is to present options and to pitch them at the individual's capabilities and skills. A lot of people talk about challenging people and giving them an opportunity to achieve. That's great if you're a young person with a whole lot of learning skills and development scope, but if you're an older person who's losing all of their skills, to whatever degree, you don't want to be reminded and shown that you have deficits. And so the guys want to be successful and they want to contribute and they don't want to be reminded that they can't do anything. So it's about pitching to them. So if I've got a job, I've got to think about the person, you know, and I'll say to someone "What do you feel like doing?" and he'll say "painting," well I've got to then think about the tasks or the painting relative to him so that he has a positive experience doing it. (Shed co-ordinator no.2)*

The Artbeat co-ordinator also gave an account of the difficulties she encountered with people whose skills levels had diminished. She spoke about people who had been accomplished artists but were frustrated and unable to come to terms with no longer having the same level of skills and their inability to "create the same images they used

to.” Although they were matched to Artbeat because of their interest in art, they had been “realist” painters whose satisfaction came from producing close likenesses and “detailed controlled work.” They were not able to adapt their style of self-expression to their current capacities and hence the Artbeat program could not meet their needs for meaningful and satisfying outcomes.

Similarly, the founding co-ordinator of the Shed also struggled with balancing the importance of providing opportunities for challenge and stimulation against former capacities. Assessing a person’s current skills and capacity to improve is difficult when they have health conditions that might be masking the impediments to regaining earlier levels of skill. The co-ordinator described an episode where he increased the complexity of a man’s work because he was concerned that he would become bored. However, the man became daunted by the increased challenge and almost withdrew from the program. The following excerpt outlines some of these issues:

*If you’ve got the skill and it hasn’t been used for a while, I think it’s up to me, or whoever, to have them use their abilities to the full extent. Because I think that’s also an important thing of keeping men, of keeping anyone in good health, is to be challenged. And I think you have to be careful. I think it’s a fine line between challenging someone and someone saying “I just can’t do this. I’m not able to do it.” (Shed co-ordinator no.1)*

Judging the level of challenge from which people could benefit had its inherent difficulties as the co-ordinators have described in the above reflections. Yet it was also clear that they perceived challenge and stimulation to be an important part of people’s enjoyment and structured their programs to incorporate this dimension, as the Artbeat co-ordinator highlighted:

*I feel quite strongly, without leaving people feeling too insecure, lifting people out of their comfort zone. And that’s about challenge, isn’t it, and challenge is what keeps us alive. And that’s all part of learning something new, isn’t it. (Artbeat co-ordinator)*

The Artbeat program design as described by the participants was full of challenge, variety, novelty and some surprises. The co-ordinator offered single session themes, themes that developed over a number of weeks, projects for public display and some sessions that were devoted to familiar and easy tasks. Linked to such ideas was the gentle push or “kick along” that the co-ordinator gave the participants to explore new artistic avenues. They valued how she challenged them to move out of their comfort zone, to experiment and explore, as Nancy acknowledged in this account:

*Yes, she makes you do things you never dream of doing. And you're always surprised how well they turn out. But she's good. She stretches your imagination, makes you do things you thought you'd never do. (Nancy, Artbeat)*

However, the co-ordinator also incorporated an element of ease into the program so that at times the participants could also relax with tasks that did not stretch them:

*There are times you just want them to be comfortable, you just want them to have a very comfortable day. (Artbeat co-ordinator)*

### ***The co-ordinator as a guide: Stimulating ideas***

Providing the ideas for what the participants could create for themselves was an important component of the guiding role of the co-ordinators at both Artbeat and the Men's Shed. We have already heard from the Artbeat participants how the co-ordinator's impetus of stimulating new ideas to kick-start their creativity and self-expression contributed to their enjoyment.

In the case of the Men's Shed, the co-ordinator found in the early days of the program that the older men who joined did not arrive with ideas of what they would like to make. It was up to him to provide the suggestions as to what might interest them. When volunteers joined the program, they brought a more diverse range of ideas and expertise and then there was a decision-making process amongst the group to choose the next project. As they gained confidence the Shed participants brought more ideas of what they

could make as an individual or as a larger project for the group. The co-ordinator described this process:

*Everybody's voice was heard, which was another really quite good thing I think. I might have initiated things at the start, and probably continually all the way through, but they certainly contributed to things as far as what we'd make next or what, or how a thing could be made. (Shed co-ordinator no.1)*

### ***The co-ordinator as a guide: Final product***

The co-ordinators in both programs recognised that the final product was significant to people's enjoyment of the activity and structured their programs to provide meaningful outcomes. The significance that the participants placed on achieving a worthwhile final product came as a surprise to the Artbeat co-ordinator who had intended to focus on the process of art making rather than outcomes:

*When I first set it up, I used to say "this is all about process. There's not going to be an emphasis on outcomes." Well I've learnt, you still don't give huge emphasis on outcomes, but outcomes are really important to participants . . . They measure their success and their level of enjoyment through what their outcomes might be. (Artbeat co-ordinator)*

The first co-ordinator of the Shed commented that men tend to be practical and like making things. With his own background as an artist, he did not anticipate the emphasis that the men placed on functionality of the final product, with minimal attention to the aesthetic appearance of the item. The significant meaning in the activity for the men at the Shed was the usefulness of what they had made.

As the current Shed co-ordinator explained, it was the participant's own assessment of the quality of the final product that was relevant to satisfaction – not the co-ordinator's measure of quality. His role was to provide the opportunity for that person to have an experience that brought enjoyment and satisfaction:

*As long as he's able to do something that he's successful in and get all of the things he's looking for . . . It is of no concern to me, whether it's a mess or it's good quality, it's whether or not he's enjoyed it. (Shed co-ordinator no.2)*

### ***The co-ordinator as a guide: The encourager***

The Artbeat participants valued the co-ordinator's encouragement of their efforts and the feedback provided about their work. In the following excerpt, one participant described the co-ordinator's style of encouragement. She also noted that the co-ordinator respected people's self-determination and that she did not mind if they did not follow the theme for the day:

*She is so enthusiastic. She'll walk round looking and all of a sudden you'll hear her say to somebody "Oh that's beautiful, keep going, that's coming beautifully, keep going" . . . it doesn't matter whether you're doing pencil drawing instead, whether you're not doing what the work she set, you're doing your own thing, quite often people will say "I don't want to do that, I don't like that." (Elsie, Artbeat)*

Providing encouragement and guidance to the participants was perceived by the co-ordinators as a very important part of their role. In both groups, most of the participants arrived with low self-confidence and low self-esteem due to the difficulties they had been through with their health and isolation, or as one of the Shed co-ordinators said, "they feel like they've been left behind somewhere along the line." He related how it was important to respond with sensitivity and encouragement to a participant who was feeling discouraged by the deterioration in their skill levels. Interestingly, the Artbeat co-ordinator also noted the requirement for sensitivity when encouraging the participants and how "tricky" this can be when the quality of the work does not easily lead to positive feedback. While she had to "emphasise the positive because that's what you've got to build esteem," the encouragement and feedback had to be realistic and genuine or people would feel patronised.

Getting to know participants well and gaining their trust contributed to co-ordinators being able to encourage people to tackle new challenges and maintain their confidence in what they were creating. This encouragement assisted the participants to retain their motivation to finish the project, as well as to gain enjoyment from the process and satisfaction from the result. The Artbeat co-ordinator also made the observation that the

reality of artmaking is that not everything that an artist undertakes will yield a successful or satisfying result. Hence she considered that while she did not intentionally plan activities to result in disappointment, it was important that she encourage people to build resilience to work at their art and to cope with disappointments, as she talked about here:

*Art's about a process of developing and continuing to practise and work at it. Miracles are not achieved overnight . . . not everything is going to succeed always, and that's normal, that's life. (Artbeat co-ordinator)*

An aspect of guidance and encouragement which was a feature of the Artbeat program, but not of the Shed program, was the motivation provided to participants to continue their artwork at home. The Artbeat co-ordinator actively encouraged people to continue to work at home so they could make more progress in their skill development and have an enjoyable and meaningful way of spending their time at home, describing the benefits in the following way:

*I just know the benefits from actually doing work outside. I wanted to see them improve and I would say to them "The more you do this, the better you'll get." But the big thing was it's like this other person that keeps you company – that's your artwork at home. Takes you to another place, you're not isolated anymore at home. And there's a kind of self-sufficiency that comes from creating art, you know, that when you're on your own you're not alone, which is lovely stuff, absolutely. And the timelessness . . . And that's the other thing, the non-linear time that comes when you're creating art. That additional benefit of just taking people right out of their bodies into that other space in their head that doesn't feel the pain. It's wonderful. (Artbeat co-ordinator)*

Artbeat participants recognised how the co-ordinator actively promoted the idea of "homework." They also talked about how the co-ordinator encouraged them to bring in work that they had done at home and how she ensured that everyone was set up with sufficient materials, as Elsie described here:

*Now we bring home work that's not finished and we do it at home. And Virginia does like us to do a bit, what she calls homework . . . But she likes us, we've all got now a bit of acrylic at home, or we've got a bit of watercolour, she likes to see, even if it's only a pencil drawing, to bring something that we've done, you know. (Elsie, Artbeat)*

One participant, Kathleen, perceived the value of feedback from the co-ordinator as being an incentive to create artwork at home:

*Virginia will wait till the end of the lesson and then she'll hold it up and show everybody. So you get some feedback, do you see what I mean, if you've done anything at home. (Kathleen, Artbeat)*

### ***The co-ordinators: Skills and attributes***

The co-ordinators were able to identify the multi-skilling that their role required and the Shed co-ordinator described his job as having a number of dimensions:

*So there's a whole lot of levels to it. Now I suppose it's about being multi-skilled and flexible and adaptive, and having a depth of experience that covers both the practical and the social sides of the job . . . Not only do I have to be able to cut a piece of timber on a bandsaw, I also have to be able to teach, to explain to a man with a brain injury why he can't use the bandsaw. (Shed co-ordinator no.2)*

Similarly, the Artbeat co-ordinator also considered her role was multi-dimensional. She explained that she functioned as a teacher, artist and social worker. Her role required her to design and deliver programs, work with carers and case managers, provide informal telephone support and counselling to participants and family members, as well as to organise and support staff and volunteers. There were also practical tasks such as organising transport for the participants and arranging excursions. She talked of blending her personal and professional skills, attributes and experiences in order to relate to people about their art and to facilitate group dynamics:

*If you're going to encourage people to express themselves, you've got to allow yourself to walk in there and be a whole person. (Artbeat co-ordinator)*

Another important role for the co-ordinators was to ensure that participants had access to adequate supplies of materials and, in the case of the Shed, a good range of tools. Participants at the Shed admired the practical skills and resourcefulness of the co-ordinator in accessing materials for them at minimal cost:



*He does all the scrounging round. Yeah, looks on al the nature strips to see what's there. It's amazing what he comes in with sometimes. (Jim, Shed)*

Although both programs required the co-ordinator to provide duty of care to the participants, this was a particularly demanding issue for the co-ordinator of the Shed. The physical risks in the environment due to the machinery created a continuing source of challenge for the co-ordinator:

*So the reality is not only am I here to support and help this man's self-esteem, but at the same time I have to have also parameters and rules to protect his welfare and his safety in the workplace. (Shed co-ordinator no.2)*

While the men at the Shed acknowledged the importance of the skills of the co-ordinator, the Artbeat participants were more effusive in expressing their views about the co-ordinator's impact on the quality of their experiences. The co-ordinator was singled out by all the Artbeat participants as being key to their enjoyment of Artbeat and to the positive dynamics of the group. They identified her social or group facilitation skills, along with her skills as an artist and teacher, as being core to the success of Artbeat. One participant also attributed her influence to making the sessions "fun."

When describing the co-ordinator's role in delivering the Artbeat program, the participants used expressions such as "teacher," "tutor" and "guide." Most of these participants commented that she was an excellent teacher or even "a brilliant teacher." What stood out most in their comments about this role of guide was the interesting ideas that she provided to them to stimulate their self-expression and creativity, as well as to stretch their imaginations and to promote skill acquisition. By providing ideas, the co-ordinator expanded the Artbeat participants' worlds.

In addition, all the participants mentioned that they enjoyed the Artbeat co-ordinator's personality, which was distinct from her skills as an artist, teacher and co-ordinator. They described her as "lovely," "helpful," "kind," "warm," "caring" and "friendly." Through a combination of her personal qualities and teaching skills for art, the Artbeat

co-ordinator created a relationship of trust with the participants. Many participants expressed in a variety of ways how they trusted her to take them on a journey into unfamiliar territory because they believed that they would ultimately enjoy the experience and benefit through acquiring new skills or new understandings. Donald described one such instance:

*I thought “I’ll give it a try.” You know, and it didn’t worry me too much because I thought “well she’s asked for it so I’ll do it.” You know. I’m guided by her and I was pleased, you know, quite, quite pleased. (Donald, Artbeat)*

### ***Additional Facilitating Factors***

The older participants identified additional factors that contributed to the benefits associated with attending the programs and to their level of enjoyment.

#### ***Preliminary process: Assessment, matching and referral***

Some participants described their experience with a professional healthcare worker who had identified their need for increased social interaction. The worker had enquired about their leisure interests as a means of encouraging them to get out and meet other people. To be successfully matched with an activity, it was essential that the person felt a sense of affinity with the leisure activity, as was noted earlier in the theme of *enjoyment*. Moreover, it was vital to people’s decisions to join the program for the first session that they expected to find the experience enjoyable.

In their reflections, some of the Artbeat participants contemplated who would enjoy or benefit from Artbeat. Some participants considered that a person would not necessarily need to have prior experience or to have developed skills in painting and drawing as the important element was to have “just an interest in art.” One participant suggested that a desire to draw and an appreciation of beauty were essential. In other words, the art had to have purpose and meaning for a person to enjoy and benefit from Artbeat:

*You have to want to draw otherwise it wouldn’t mean anything. If you didn’t see the beauty there wouldn’t be any point. (Donald, Artbeat)*

### *An encouraging “push”*

Some of the participants at both Artbeat and the Shed talked about the importance of “a push” or gentle persuasion as a way of encouraging people to take the first difficult step into a new environment. Family members, including wives and daughters, had provided information and encouragement to participants to join these creative arts programs. Some participants also specifically mentioned the critical importance of follow-up telephone calls from the co-ordinator after their initial enquiries. While participants recognised that “a little push” might be useful to get people involved initially, they also emphasised that there is a significant difference between such a push and being “dragged there.”

One participant at Artbeat described the value for him of being given a well supported “push.” In this case, his occupational therapist accompanied and stayed with him to give him confidence as he ventured into the new environment. Her support, combined with a positive program experience made possible by Artbeat’s co-ordinator, resulted in him enjoying his first experience and deciding to continue. He acknowledged he would not have gone without this “push” and also expressed his appreciation:

*I said “I wouldn’t mind,” I think I said I wouldn’t mind going to the art class but I don’t have to, because I don’t need to. And then she [the occupational therapist] said “I’m here. We’ll go.” And so I went. And she stayed with me that whole first art class. And she worked and did it all. And so we did it . . . But see, that lady’s altered my life. I wouldn’t have gone. But she took me, and she actually stayed with me, and I found it, you know, it’s very nice drawing those lilies, very nice. And I did enjoy that, very much. (Donald, Artbeat)*

Some participants emphasised that it was important to have a sense of choice as to whether or not they continued after their first session at the program. They needed an opportunity to have a look and try the activity without feeling obligated to continue. As one participant related:

*I went down and had a look and I’ve been there ever since. (Patrick, Artbeat)*

Although another participant interpreted his wife's suggestion that he join the Shed as "she wanted me to get out of the house," it was his own decision to stay:

*I was just curious to have a look at it. I liked it and I stayed. (Gordon, Shed)*

### ***Positive attitudes***

In this study, people spoke about being willing to adapt their skills and to try unfamiliar activities that were on offer at Artbeat and the Men's Shed. This positive approach to new experiences made it possible for these participants to learn new skills and reap other potential benefits from the programs. One participant who had a particularly adventurous outlook described how she took risks because she trusted the Artbeat co-ordinator's suggestions:

*She says I've got a childlike spirit. I'm willing to do anything she asks. I'm willing to do anything, try anything, I am. I find if I do what Virginia suggests, I get a lot of enjoyment in the end. Even though at first I think "Can I do this?" I never thought "Do I want to do it?" because I think "well I'm very willing to do anything she suggests." (Kathleen, Artbeat)*

Jim demonstrated a different kind of adaptability at the Men's Shed. His main interest was mechanicals, not woodwork. However, as the Shed was not able to cater for this long-term interest, Jim was willing to become interested in what was on offer. He was aware that not everyone is able to make such a shift into unfamiliar territory:

*So I've adapted to what they're playing at, although I don't know anything about it and I'll admit that to anybody. I'll have a go. But you've got to be the right type of person. (Jim, Shed)*

A realistic appraisal of their own capacities and stamina was also important to ongoing enjoyment of these leisure activities. Those participants at Artbeat whose energy levels were problematic gave attention only to those activities in the week that were essential. They paced themselves to maximise their health and energy for the Artbeat session. Donald spoke in most detail about how he arranged his life around Artbeat, usually his only leisure activity for the week:

*Once a week is enough for me. After leaving class, and coming in here, oh I'm exhausted. And so I go to bed . . . It's the mental concentration. I'm just not used to it anymore. (Donald, Artbeat)*

### ***Summary***

The fourth theme that emerged, *facilitating factors for beneficial group leisure experiences*, was critical to the success of these two creative leisure programs and certainly the most important factor was the role of the co-ordinator. The co-ordinators facilitated positive outcomes for the older people in their programs through program design, the environment they created, along with the guidance and encouragement they gave to the participants. It was also vital that the co-ordinators made a point of getting to know each person as an individual so that programs could be tailored to meet their needs.

A small number of other facilitating factors were further identified as promoting positive experiences in these creative arts programs. These additional factors included the appropriateness of the initial referral to the program, effective encouragement to overcome people's initial hesitation about joining, and the older people's own attitudes to their participation.

## 5. BRINGING IT TOGETHER

In this study, I set out to identify the enjoyment that older people experienced and the benefits they derived from engaging in creative arts programs. Four major themes emerged from the participants' narratives - *enjoyment, life purpose and meaning, heightened well-being: a new lease of life, and facilitating factors for beneficial group leisure experiences*. Although enjoyment was highlighted as a benefit in its own right, the level of enjoyment experienced was inextricably linked with the sense of life purpose and meaning. It was exceptionally difficult to separate out the first three themes, because it was the interplay of enjoyment with life purpose and meaning that created the sensation of a new lease of life. Hence, these three themes are interlocking and none can be considered in isolation from the others. The fourth theme of facilitating factors focused in particular on how the co-ordinators deliberately programmed for the participants' enjoyment and other beneficial outcomes.

This chapter identifies and discusses the major findings of my study. These findings are placed in relation to the pertinent literature and theories. The discussion also reflects on the qualitative design which enabled older people themselves to provide their views on what is important to them in their lives and how to deliver creative arts as leisure programs. Finally, I discuss implications of these findings for further research in the field.

### Major Findings

#### *Creative Arts Contribute to Ageing Well*

The major finding of this study is that creative activities, and particularly group artistic activities, can be a powerful mode for delivering leisure benefits to enhance ageing well. As the literature indicates (Freysinger & Kelly, 2004; Kelly, 1996; Osgood, 1993), participation in the creative arts can bring significant social benefits to enhance older

people's wellbeing. Physical activity has traditionally been promoted for its health benefits and has received prominence in research (Mannell & Stynes, 1991) and is a major focus of policies and program delivery for older people. This study indicates, however, that creative activities also provide a valuable avenue for promoting older people's health and well-being. Other programs might meet funding guidelines of providing physical activity and mental stimulation, reducing social isolation and maintaining daily living skills, yet how many of their participants would talk about the impact on their lives in the same way as those attending Artbeat and the Men's Shed? Would they say that through the program they had gained a new meaning and a sense of purpose in life, that they now had something to live for? Would they say that they had enriched their lives, that they remained engrossed in the activity for the whole week or that their spirits were being "kept up the hill"?

Artbeat and the Men's Shed are structured as serious leisure, and both programs were experienced as immensely enjoyable and satisfying by the older people who were interviewed. The benefits to the participants' lives were far-reaching in terms of ageing well. For the Artbeat participants, these benefits extended to the point of them experiencing a new lease of life.

So what was it about Artbeat that promoted this new lease of life? There appeared to be two main factors - flow experiences and the spillover to the rest of the week. The first factor was integral to the nature of the activity itself in that self-expression and exploring creativity through art are conducive to flow experiences. The second factor, spillover, gave a sense of purpose and enjoyment to other days of the week so that the participants were not just experiencing a few hours of enjoyment for one afternoon a week, but the source of enjoyment was available to them at other times during the week. The participants were creating artworks, reflecting on the previous session, thinking up new ideas and planning for the next session, practising new skills and techniques, and enjoying a heightened anticipation of the next session. The vital importance of the impact of this spillover was described evocatively by the Artbeat co-ordinator as: "they take home inside themselves something that's really satisfied their soul. It keeps their

soul warm.” Together these two factors of flow and spillover promoted continuing learning, growth and development, as well as an expanding and valued identity. Furthermore, the Artbeat participants’ passion for their art gave a sense of freedom which carried them away from their limitations and anxieties to a place of creativity and vitality – an amazing benefit of leisure which is Ulyssean in spirit.

### ***Flow as Heightened Enjoyment***

A striking finding of the study in terms of enjoyment was the optimal experience of flow, in line with Csikszentmihalyi’s (1975) theory of enjoyment. It was the Artbeat participants who typically experienced this heightened sensation of enjoyment. They were developing skills to meet the challenges of interesting and meaningful artistic tasks that were structured for successful and satisfying outcomes. In the process, they became fully absorbed, forgot their worries and felt the thrill of learning and expressing themselves creatively. As stated previously, flow was a key contributor to the participants’ feeling of heightened well-being and a new lease of life.

Interestingly, in the Artbeat participants’ search for self-expression, the accumulation of finished paintings was not important to their enjoyment and satisfaction. Just as Csikszentmihalyi had observed that artists were enthralled by the process of painting but not by the completed canvas, the artists in this study found their enjoyment in their creativity rather than in the final result. Although the finished product was significant to them and they savoured it briefly as it represented an achievement or accomplishment, they quickly moved on to the next challenge. Some of the participants had walls full of framed paintings and no longer knew what to do with their finished work.

### ***Meaning and Purpose Heighten Enjoyment***

The participants at both Artbeat and the Men’s Shed derived meaning from their participation that went beyond the activity being a pastime. Each person attributed their own individual meaning and purpose to an activity or to particular aspects of the



program. One of the most crucial findings of this study is the importance of purposeful activity. Working towards a meaningful outcome was important, whether this was a finished item or mastering a new skill. Although the concept of meaningful activity has long been recognised in leisure, this study found that activity needed to be both purposeful and meaningful to deliver the potential benefits of optimal enjoyment and to create a more powerful impact on a person's overall sense of well-being. In other words, the participants as individuals, and the group as a whole, need to experience activities as having a *meaningful purpose*. This finding supports Rowe and Kahn's (1998) conclusion that there is a direct correlation between the level of meaning older people attribute to an activity and the health benefits they derive from engaging in the activity.

Since older people are as diverse in their interests as any other age group, the leisure pursuits that provide enjoyment will also be diverse. By investigating two leisure programs that differed in the nature of their creativity and in the meaning and purpose given to these activities by the participants, I was able to ascertain that both groups were satisfied with their level of enjoyment and the benefits they derived. Just because the Artbeat participants appeared to derive higher levels of benefit than the Shed participants, did not mean that the program is superior or provides a rigid formula for delivering leisure benefits. The men at the Shed did not seem to be looking to explore and express their inner creativity or, to use Maslow's (1999) concept, they were not seeking to self-actualise as were the Artbeat participants. The concept could be described as "horses for courses," that is, there needs to be a diverse range of leisure activities to meet the broad range of interests and needs of older people.

Purposeful use of time was also highlighted by the participants as an important benefit of participating in these leisure programs. So much that happens in older people's lives, and will happen to them in the future, is outside their control. By taking control over how they employ their time and by choosing to use the time left to them for worthwhile purposes, older people can enhance their health and well-being. The importance of people's attitude to time can be further understood through reference to an extract in John Mortimer's (1983) memoirs:

We are stuck with the cards we are dealt and have to act out, as well as we can, the lives which we have been allotted. 'Everything is in other hands, Lucillius', wrote Seneca the Stoic. 'Time alone is ours.' (p.243)

Indeed, for Artbeat participants, time had become a resource to be enjoyed and anticipated with pleasure and excitement. This is a striking contrast to the attitude of those for whom time rests heavily as a burden, requiring diversion and “filling in.”

### ***Sharing a Common Interest Heightens Enjoyment of Social Connections***

Another significant finding of the study is that the quality of social interactions between older people was strongly enhanced by meeting together to share an interest – or a passion in the case of Artbeat. Moreover, there was a task focus to the interests in which they were all actively and purposefully engaged. These shared interests provided a common thread which smoothed the way for enjoyable and stimulating conversations, as well as a feeling of belonging. A common interest enabled the programs to offer diverse opportunities for conversations and discussion over shared tasks in one-to-one, small group and larger group settings. These varied opportunities for socialising and working on the task at hand enabled people to choose their level of participation, which could be affected by their needs and mood on the day.

Many social support and social leisure groups for older people bring them together on the basis of their age, ill health, limited mobility and social isolation - none of which is conducive to finding the meaningful and shared common threads of people's lives or to experiencing stimulating social interaction. At Artbeat and the Men's Shed, however, their interactions did not rely on their social skills for “small talk.” The participants related as fellow artists, artisans or co-workers and not as older people with health problems.

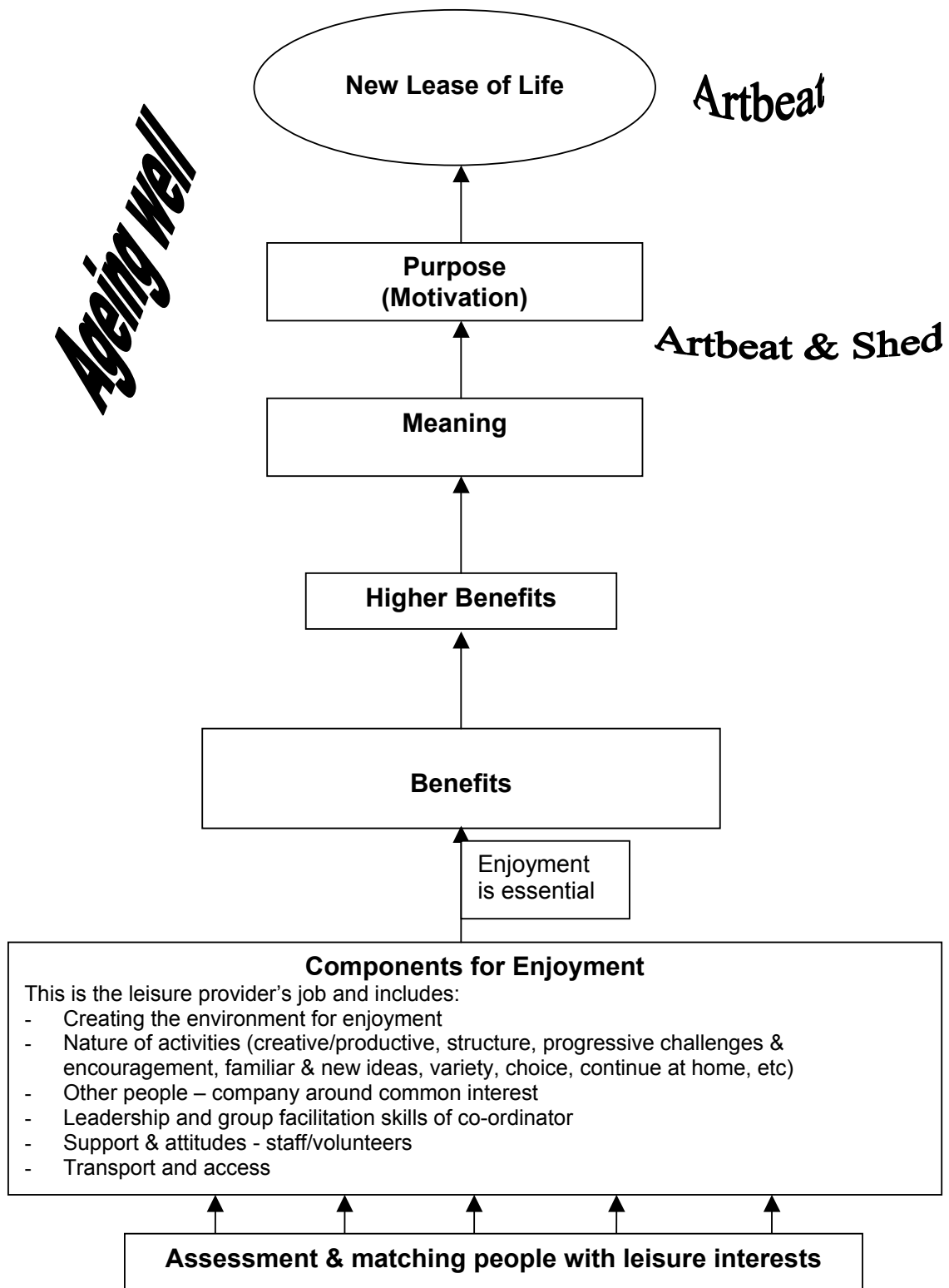
### ***The Role of Leisure Providers as Facilitators***

Leisure providers have a vital role to play in enabling older people to reap the benefits that the creative leisure arts can offer. Matching of older people to interests that they

consider to be a worthwhile way of spending their time is an important factor in the initial assessment and referral process. The potential of serious leisure programs such as Artbeat and the Men's Shed to promote ageing well requires highly skilled leadership. A highly skilled co-ordinator can provide an inspiring vision, create an environment conducive to enjoyment, gain an understanding of the needs and interests of individual participants, structure a meaningful and developmental program which has flexibility to adapt to individual aptitudes, provide appropriate encouragement, and facilitate meaningful social interactions.

### ***Integrating the Findings***

At one point during my analysis of the data, I attempted to clarify my thinking by integrating the emerging themes. The *Flowchart of Benefits* at Figure 2 illustrates my interpretation of the process by which the older people in this study derived the major benefits of their leisure participation in a group program.



**Figure 2. Flowchart of Benefits**

## **A Tapestry of Theories**

The themes that emerged from what people conveyed in the interviews reflected many accepted theories about leisure and ageing well. The findings were multi-faceted and interconnected and could not be explained by one theory alone. A rich understanding of the data can be reached by weaving the most relevant theories of continuity, serious leisure, flow, self-efficacy and selective optimisation with compensation. While researchers have noted interconnections between these theories, little has been done to weave them together to promote more meaningful and satisfying leisure experiences for older people, particularly for those whose physical capacities are limited. Kelly (1993) has made a major contribution to the field in this respect with his collection of articles from the fields of gerontology and leisure in the book, “Activity and Aging: Staying involved in later life.” However, in covering such a broad field, there was only one chapter out of a total of seventeen chapters which addressed the role of creativity and the arts. In the next section, I discuss how the pertinent theories of leisure and ageing well contribute to an enhanced understanding of what the participants said about their leisure experiences in creative arts programs.

### ***Continuity***

Becker’s (1993) adaptation of Atchley’s (1989) continuity theory proved useful for understanding how the older people in this study benefited from their participation in Artbeat or the Men’s Shed. In the period prior to joining the program, each of the participants had found their lives severely disrupted by such events as ill health, migration and death of their spouse. As in Becker’s study, the participants found symbolic meaning in their chosen leisure activity which gave them a sense of continuity and helped them adapt positively to the changes imposed on their lives. The older people in this study had picked up threads of their earlier life, whether it was exploring their schoolday talent for painting and drawing, attributing a meaning of work to their leisure,

or resuming a group social role that was important to their identity. These threads held significant meaning for them and provided a continuing purpose to their lives and a valued identity.

In the case of the Shed, the men were looking to hold on to threads that provided familiarity of past interests and skills and a work-like identity in order to regain and maintain meaning and purpose in their lives. The Artbeat participants, too, had picked up the threads of earlier life. Instead of trying to return to a former point of “normality” in their lives, however, they used these threads to continue to grow and to look to the future with a sense of hope and optimism. In Bateson’s (1989) terms, the Artbeat participants were still composing their lives. Their current art pursuits linked them with their past and provided a valued future to which they could look forward.

### *Serious Leisure*

This study supports the view put forward by Stebbins (1992) that by incorporating serious leisure into their lives, older people can enhance their lives after retirement. Moreover, it is not just fit and physically active older people who can benefit from serious leisure, but also those older people whose health and mobility have restricted their access to many other satisfying activities. Both the Men’s Shed and Artbeat programs can be classified as serious leisure. In line with the qualifiers for serious leisure that have been identified by Stebbins (1999; 2001), these activities required effort and perseverance and use of complex skills, as well as being meaningful to the participants and having a purposeful outcome. By putting in the required effort, participants derived the characteristic benefits of serious leisure - enjoyment, a satisfying sense of accomplishment, a positive identity, a shared ethos and social interaction with others in the group. All these benefits enhanced their sense of well-being. The relevance of sharing a common interest with fellow group members can be understood as integral to serious leisure.

Frankl’s (1985) theory of psychotherapy that “striving to find a meaning in one’s life is the primary motivational force in man” (p.121) can be linked to what the participants said

about serious leisure. His theory was developed from his experience of survival in the extreme conditions of Nazi concentration camps and from his therapeutic work as a psychiatrist. According to both Frankl and Stebbins, once people find a meaning in life they then have a purpose to live and a guiding direction to their lives.

### *Flow*

The theory of flow provides a very useful way of understanding why people in this study experienced heightened enjoyment - particularly those who participated in Artbeat activities. For those with an affinity for the arts, creative activities for artistic expression are particularly conducive to the experience of flow. The Artbeat program provided the older people in this study with continuing opportunities to experience flow, which they described with passion and wonder. The findings confirm the importance of the features of enjoyment identified by Csikszentmihalyi (1975) - matching skills and challenges, having meaningful goals and feedback, the transformation of the passage of time, the experience of absorption and release, as well as a stronger sense of self. This study confirms that older people can derive significant benefits from engaging in activities that bring them experiences of flow, an area of research that has received little attention to date. The theory of flow has particular relevance to ageing well as it is a developmental concept that incorporates learning, continuing growth, self-efficacy and a stronger sense of self, along with opportunities for relief from pain and anxiety. It must also be kept in mind, however, that not everyone is seeking flow experiences from their leisure.

### *Self-efficacy*

This study supports the findings of researchers such as Bandura (1997), Blazer (2002) and Rowe and Kahn (1998) who have linked the importance of self-efficacy to ageing well. Rowe and Kahn referred to self-efficacy as the “can-do factor” (p.134). While the older participants liked having overall guidance in the program from the co-ordinator, it was vital to their enjoyment that they could choose within the framework how they pursued the activity and that they retained a sense of control over decision-making.

The program co-ordinators played a critical role in promoting the participants' sense of self-efficacy. They made a point of getting to know the participants as individuals to enable them to tailor the program to cater for their needs, interests and capacities. By adapting and structuring the program, the co-ordinators ensured that each person could enjoy their involvement and achieve satisfying outcomes. The co-ordinators also promoted self-efficacy through giving appropriate encouragement and feedback, as well as only offering help when required.

### ***Selective Optimisation with Compensation***

Baltes and Baltes' (1990) model of selective optimisation with compensation provided a theory of ageing well which I found to be relevant to this study. It assisted with understanding the success of Artbeat and the Men's Shed in that the respective focal activities of visual art and woodwork could be adapted to a diversity of skill levels and fulfil a range of meanings and purposes for the participants. Many of the participants said that they gained benefits from the program that contributed to their sense of well-being. Indeed, attending the program was the highlight of the week for most participants. Accordingly, they planned the other demands on their time and energy in the week to ensure they were functioning at maximum capacity on the program day. One particular Artbeat participant understood that art and Artbeat had brought him a life-changing sense of purpose and enjoyment. Consequently, he devoted as much of his week as possible to working on his art which brought him flow experiences at home and at Artbeat. The more time he spent on his artwork, the more he optimised his enjoyment and sense of well-being. His strategies, which included choosing art materials that he could manage easily and taking inspiration from the co-ordinator's ideas, allowed him to compensate for his confined living space.

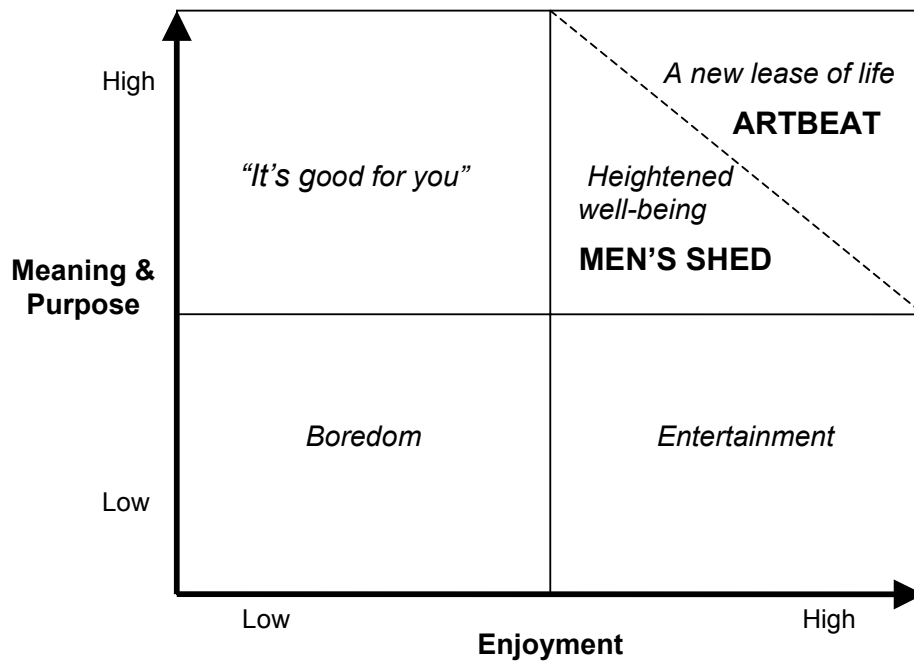


## Critical Dimensions of the Leisure Experience

By developing creative and purposeful leisure programs for older people based on this tapestry of theories, we can provide effective opportunities that support people to age well - with enjoyment, purpose and meaning in their lives. The findings of this study indicate that the aged care, health and leisure fields can offer more enriching opportunities to older people than are currently available by incorporating high quality creative leisure programs. Artbeat and the Men's Shed demonstrate that older people can be actively and constructively engaged in the mainstream of community life. Artbeat, in particular, shows that older people with an interest in the creative arts can continue on a developmental journey and enhance their feeling of well-being - even if aspects of their health are declining. By exploring their inner creativity and continuing their learning, there were still horizons ahead of these participants and new goals to inspire them to keep moving forward. Life was no longer closing in around them. They had gained hope and a purpose for living.

The matrix at Figure 3 is a simple representation of the relationship that emerged from this study between *enjoyment* and *meaning and purpose* and the nature of benefits derived by the participants from their involvement in Artbeat or the Men's Shed. There are two dimensions to this matrix with one being enjoyment and the other being meaning and purpose. Meaning and purpose refers here to the interpretation the leisure participant gives the activity. From this matrix, we can see that with a low level of enjoyment and a low level of meaning and purpose, people experience boredom in their leisure. A high level of enjoyment but low level of meaning and purpose is experienced as entertainment and might be fun. A low level of enjoyment combined with a high level of meaning and purpose could be described as leisure activities which are "good for you." The highest benefits are realised through those leisure activities that combine high levels of enjoyment with a high level of meaning and purpose. The higher both these levels, the more likely are the experiences of flow and a new lease of life. This is where we should be aiming for our programs to operate so that older people are supported to age well. The participants in the Men's Shed and Artbeat both experienced these leisure programs in

this quadrant, with the Artbeat participants experiencing benefits at a higher level than the Shed participants. We have also seen there are skilled interventions that leisure providers can implement to increase the likelihood of greater enjoyment and more meaningful and purposeful experiences.



**Figure 3. Critical dimensions of the leisure experience: A matrix of outcomes**

### **The Study Design: A Reflection**

The qualitative design of this study has enabled older people to reflect on the meaning in their lives of their participation in a creative arts program. By focusing on the perspectives of the older people themselves, I have been able to address a significant gap in the research, namely, what older people think about their experiences and how leisure programs can address their needs. While the participants were asked a number of specific

questions, they were encouraged to express and develop their ideas freely without having to fit their responses to categories predetermined by the researcher as relevant.

The ethics approval process of the research gave emphasis to protecting vulnerable older people from potential psychological distress. Interestingly, the outcomes of this study confirmed the view of researchers such as Russell (1999a) and Rojiani (1994) that older people should not be assumed to be vulnerable and excluded from research in case of risk. Instead, it is essential for older people to have input to issues that affect their lives and they can be empowered by contributing to such research. According to the Artbeat co-ordinator, the experience of being interviewed had been enriching for the Artbeat participants. This is an excerpt from the co-ordinator's narrative:

*[They had] the opportunity too, to actually reflect on what they do. Being able to talk to you and really think back and evaluate really what they're doing, has been enormously productive for them as well. And they have a greater respect for themselves. . . . So it's done great things for their self-esteem, wonderful sense of achievement . . . they were walking taller. And I think to be recognised in an academic study, that they are being taken seriously, so seriously that they are the subject of an academic study and they have been singled out to be part of that, it's enormously flattering. So much is done to people rather than them being active participants, let alone people whose opinion might be sought about what they're doing, and for them to tell their story. (Artbeat co-ordinator)*

### **Implications for Further Research**

The program co-ordinators played a pivotal role in recruiting the older people to participate in this study. It is important, therefore, that researchers recognise the co-ordinators' relevance to the research process and ensure, at all stages of data collection, that the co-ordinators are well informed, understand the value of the research and are supportive.

An obvious limitation of the study was the small sample size. Conducting a larger study across a wider range of creative arts programs would add value to the significance of these findings. Yet even with a small sample size, the responses of the participants were

richly informative. Moreover, by incorporating two programs which focused on different facets of creativity and offered different environments to meet the needs and interests of the older people attending, the study was able to reveal the importance of providing a wide spectrum of programs to reflect the diversity of older people themselves. There is no single formula for successful leisure programs – one size does not fit all.

An aspect of diversity that was not included in this study was cultural diversity. The sample of older people did not reflect the cultural diversity of the Australian population as all the participants were from an Anglo Celtic background. It would be interesting to investigate how people from other cultural backgrounds benefit from participating in creative arts programs. There are also other sectors of the older population with whom the benefits of creative leisure programs could be explored, such as people living in aged care facilities, people with dementia and other specific health conditions, as well as people who are in the transition period of retirement.

The resources and scope of this study did not allow an analysis of the impact of gender on participants' leisure experiences. A study that specifically addressed gender as a variable in the leisure experience would also make a much needed contribution to the fields of leisure and ageing well. Furthermore, a longitudinal study would have shown how involvement in the program impacted on the well-being of the participants over time.

A limitation of the methods was the reliance on the ability of participants to verbally express their thoughts and feelings. On occasions, participants commented that they were having difficulty putting their ideas and feelings into words. A greater emphasis on participant observation methods would have revealed more about the participants' actual experiences of enjoyment during the program sessions and how the co-ordinators facilitated their experiences.

Through this study we have heard the voices of the older people themselves as they have chosen to reveal the meaning of their experiences and the impact on their lives. Another perspective on the impact on their lives could be provided by a close family member or

carer. Moreover, the benefits to carers of participants attending these programs would also provide interesting and useful insights into the value of high quality leisure programs.

## **6. WHERE TO FROM HERE?**

### **Back to the Beginning**

I started on this research journey because I wanted to learn more about why creative arts-based group programs seemed to have such a positive impact on older people, why people appeared to become more vital and confident, and why their social interactions seemed so stimulating and vibrant. I also wanted to gain more understanding about how programs can better evaluate their impact on the quality of life of the older people they are funded to support. My starting point was finding out from older people themselves what was important to them rather than what others considered was important to them. My prime goal was to learn about how older people benefit from participating in a leisure group focused around a creative arts program. Accordingly, I selected two social support programs that had a creative arts focus and that were well recognised as high quality and innovative in their approach.

### **Implications of the Findings**

In addressing the concept of “arts for all” and raising the profile of the benefits to “ordinary” people of actively participating in creating art, in whatever form appeals to their interests, this study makes a significant contribution to the body of leisure research. Knowledge about the benefits and features of creative arts programs and the outcomes valued by older people themselves can be used by those funding, designing and delivering leisure and social support programs to older adults.

Interest-based programs like Artbeat and the Men’s Shed have a lot to tell us about how much we can offer older people through support programs. While service providers might be satisfied if participants in their program say they are enjoying themselves and look forward to coming to the program, the participants at Artbeat and the Men’s Shed

talked about how involvement in a leisure activity can achieve far more beneficial outcomes.

Artbeat and the Men's Shed incorporate many well-recognised principles about serious leisure. These two programs demonstrate that leisure can be a powerful means of enhancing ageing well. Serious leisure can focus on older people's strengths and capacities, provide flow experiences, and contribute to life purpose and meaning. It can also reopen doors to a world that can close in as people's health, mobility and meaningful social roles are under threat. Such a leisure model has far more potential for promoting ageing well than the traditional aged care model on which most services to older people are based. The aged care model is problem-oriented and deficit-based. It focuses on dependency needs, assuming that the level of independence of older people is the most relevant measure of health and well-being.

The findings indicate that there is potential scope for the arts, leisure, and aged care fields to provide a more stimulating and developmental range of creative programs, so that older people can have more opportunities to lead enjoyable lives that provide them with meaning and purpose. Instead of delivering mediocre programs to meet minimum standards, service providers should be supported to be innovative and inspirational in finding ways for older people to age well, no matter what their situation.

This study confirms that it is important that program leaders are well trained in how to facilitate effective arts programs and adapt programs to different abilities and skill levels, as well as how to structure programs for self-efficacy and flow. Mannell and Kleiber (1997) advise that "leisure service providers must be able to manage the setting and activity in such a way as to optimize interest and the experience and benefits participants are seeking" (p. 346) and "[get] into the mind of prospective participants to understand their needs, the constraints they feel and how their leisure orientations differ" (p.349). Bandura's (1997) description of the role of skilled efficacy builders is also useful for understanding the facilitating role of program leaders:

Skilled efficacy builders . . . do more than simply convey positive appraisals or inspirational homilies. In addition to cultivating people's beliefs in their capabilities, they structure activities for them in ways that bring success and avoid placing them prematurely in situations where they are likely to experience repeated failure. To do this effectively, persuasory mentors must be good diagnosticians of strengths and weaknesses and knowledgeable about how to tailor activities to turn potentiality into actuality. Moreover, to ensure progress in personal development, skilled efficacy builders encourage people to measure their successes in terms of self-improvement. (p.106)

It is also significant that some older people may benefit from a "gentle push" to move them out of their comfort zone toward an enjoyable experience that could improve their quality of life. This form of encouragement may be needed initially to enable people to attend a group for the first time or to take on challenges at any stage of their involvement in a program. This presents a dilemma when self-determination or control over decision-making is also an important basic principle when designing programs for older people. It takes considerable skill and judgement to assess whether the potential benefits people are likely to experience justify using persuasive strategies to convince them to undertake the risks of new experiences. Moreover, there is a significant difference between forcing people against their will and offering encouragement with appropriate support.

The literature and the findings of this study support the importance of creative and artistic outlets in the lives of older people. We need to be advocating "arts for all." Everyone can benefit from actively participating in an area of the arts that interests them, not just from being in an audience admiring those with exceptional talent. While it can be argued that such outlets are important for any person regardless of age, the creative arts have particular value for older people as they provide an avenue for them to remain active and stimulated once their capacity for physical activity is restricted. To date, the emphasis in research and program delivery has been on the benefits of physical activity to older people, but we also need to be researching and promoting the benefits of the creative arts for ageing well. Promoting the involvement of artists in leisure and aged care programs would raise the quality of creative experiences available to older people and create more opportunities for the enjoyment of flow experiences.



In addition, this study indicates that providing leisure activities for older people is not enough in itself, no matter how stimulating and interesting the design of the programs. It is important to ensure that people can choose activities that are meaningful to them and that help them to feel a sense of continuity in their lives. These may be new activities that connect people to a part of their identity they would like to develop but have not had the opportunity to do so. Such an approach requires the availability of a diverse range of programs – programs that are based on a comprehensive assessment of people’s interests that have previously given meaning to their lives, and those that would provide a sense of purpose and meaning in the future.

The findings of this study indicated that these older people valued the benefits that they had gained from support programs that were based on their leisure interests. It suggests that community programs, such as social support and respite, could better meet the needs of older people by focusing on their leisure needs and bringing together people on the basis of shared leisure interests rather than shared health problems and care needs. This approach would promote greater enjoyment, greater benefits, more satisfying social interactions and more likelihood of friendships, in other words, optimise opportunities for ageing well.

And finally, the creative arts as serious leisure would appear to have considerable potential to assist people during the transition to retirement as they search for meaning, purpose and satisfying ways of using their time in this new phase of their lives. Not only can creative interests have value at any stage of life, but they can assume particular significance in the transition period to retirement. If, prior to retirement, people develop a range of serious leisure interests, including creative and artistic interests, they may be in a better position to adapt well to changes in their lives which affect their identity and physical capacities.

In considering the participatory arts as serious leisure for older people, the findings of this study are relevant to the government sector, including the Victorian Health Promotion

Foundation, the Department of Human Services, Office of Senior Victorians – Department for Victorian Communities, the Department of Sport Recreation and Racing, Australia Council for the Arts, and local government. The findings will also be of interest to community organisations providing adult leisure and learning programs, as well as those supporting “frail” older people through social support programs. In recent years, the government and community sectors have been giving more attention to enhancing quality of life benefits by linking older people into the creative arts. The findings support the continuing development of productive partnerships across these sectors.

## **Specific Recommendations**

### ***To Policy Makers and Funding Bodies***

1. Promote the value of group creative arts activities as an effective vehicle for ageing well and in turn offer opportunities for creative activities that are available and accessible for older persons.
2. Deliver social support and respite programs as interest-based leisure programs and ensure that the range of interests offered reflects the diversity of the older population.
3. Acknowledge the professional skill levels, skill mix and personal attributes required of co-ordinators for delivery of high quality programs and provide adequate funding levels to enable organisations to employ highly skilled co-ordinators.

### ***To Service Providers and Program Co-ordinators***

1. Implement assessment and referral processes that enable older people to participate in activities that are meaningful, provide a sense of continuity, and promote their well-being.

2. Recruit highly skilled program co-ordinators with a background in the creative arts.
3. Educate program co-ordinators to function as skilled efficacy-builders in order to heighten enjoyment and the sense of meaning and purpose that older people can derive from their participation.
4. Offer individually tailored opportunities for participants to express their creativity through meaningful and purposeful activities.

### **Directions for Future Research**

This study has added to the understanding of the benefits to older people of participating in leisure-based creative arts programs. Drawing upon the perspectives of older people, the study has produced valuable insights into the ways in which quality arts programs can assist older people to adapt positively to the changes in their lives. However, more research is needed to broaden our knowledge of how the creative arts can promote ageing well. Other art forms such as dance, music, sculpture, woodcraft, theatre and writing could be explored, as could older people's experiences of other visual arts and woodwork programs. Further knowledge is required about gender and cultural background as variables that may affect leisure experiences in the creative arts. Another area worthy of further attention that has great potential for benefiting both younger and older people is intergenerational arts programming.

A greater understanding of activities that are conducive to flow experiences for older people and how program leaders can facilitate older people's sense of self-efficacy are another two areas of potential research that could add great value to the quality of leisure programming. There is also a call from program co-ordinators and funding bodies to develop flexible evaluation tools that assess the quality of social support programs in

terms of the impact on the participants' quality of life. This study offers a basis for further research into the development of such a tool.

### **Parting Words**

We have a responsibility to ensure that older people have the opportunity to experience high levels of enjoyment and high levels of meaning and purpose through their leisure activities. Creative arts programs have the potential to deliver higher order benefits. They are likely to be connected with significant personal and social meaning, and they offer opportunities to learn, to explore and to express the sense of self.

Returning to Claude Monet's evocative description of social gatherings with other artists in Paris:

We left the café with our will strengthened, our heads clearer, and our spirits lifted. (Gärtner, 2001)

Isn't this how we would like people to leave our programs at the end of a session - with their will strengthened, their heads clearer, and their spirits lifted? The older people in this study have told us it is not only possible but achievable.

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## APPENDIX A

### Information to Participants (Artbeat)

**Research Study:** *The Role of the Arts as Leisure: Older people's perceptions of the benefits of their participation in creative arts programs*

**Researcher:** Alison Herron

#### About this project

I would like to invite you to participate in a research study to explore the benefits and enjoyment that older people experience through their participation in a creative arts program that is run as a group leisure activity. Your experiences and ideas would be valuable.

*Artbeat* has been selected to be studied because it is funded as a social support program by the Department of Human Services and is recognised as an innovative and creative leisure program for older people.

The study is designed to include you and your fellow participants as 'co-researchers' as it is your perspective and ideas about your experience of the group that is of most importance. By identifying what benefits you gain and what you most enjoy about your involvement in the group, you will help build the body of research knowledge that is needed to increase the range of stimulating, creative and enjoyable leisure programs which involve older people. The findings will also help program co-ordinators of other leisure programs understand what is important to participants and help them to better meet older people's needs.

With your group's consent, I will initially attend *Artbeat* once or twice to observe the group in action and to talk with people while they are engaged in their activities. This will give people the opportunity to get to know me and to find out more about the research study.

If you agree to participate in this project, you will be required to participate in two interviews. During the interviews we will discuss your views on what is important to you about *Artbeat* and what you enjoy. Each interview will take approximately 1½ hours. Interviews can be held in your own home at a mutually convenient time or during program time at the Centre. To ensure that I have an accurate record of our conversations, I would like to record each interview using a small audio tape recorder. You may be assured that only my two supervisors and I will have access to the tape recordings or typed transcriptions. All information gathered during the research process will be confidential and safely stored.



After the interviews have been completed, I will attend the program session again to observe the group in progress and ask you and other participants a few more questions about your activities. I will also interview Virginia Mort about her understanding of the benefits and enjoyment that older people get from being involved in the group.

The findings of this project may appear in academic publications, conference presentations and reports to government departments such as the Department of Human Services and VicHealth. All written records and presentations of this research project will use pseudonyms and codes so that no individual person may be identified.

In the unlikely event that any issues you raise during the interviews cause you distress and you would like further support to deal with them, I will arrange with the co-ordinator to provide you with the appropriate support and ongoing care through SandyBeach Community Centre. You may well find that participating in these interviews is of benefit to you because you have the opportunity to talk and think about aspects of your life which are relevant to your involvement in *Artbeat*. You will also have the satisfaction of contributing to a greater understanding of the needs of older adults and how these needs may be better addressed – which will hopefully lead to greater numbers of older people having the opportunity to be involved in satisfying and enjoyable leisure programs.

**Your participation in the study must be voluntary:**

Your participation in this project is entirely voluntary and you are under no obligation to agree to participate. You may withdraw from active participation at any time, in which case you can choose whether or not to have your contribution removed from taped and written records.

**About the researcher**

I am an experienced social worker and for over 6 years from 1995 to 2001 I co-ordinated a social support program of leisure and learning groups for older people who wished to socialise and share interests. My interest in this area of work has led to the development of this current research project which I am undertaking for a Masters degree in the Faculty of Human Development at Victoria University. My research will be supervised by Dr Anne Binkley, Senior Lecturer in Recreation and Susan Feldman, Director of the Alma Unit for Research on Ageing at Victoria University.

**Please feel welcome to ask for any information you want**

Any questions regarding this project can be directed to me on 9616-7392 (business hours) or to Dr Anne Binkley on 9688-4389 or Susan Feldman on 9688-4868.

If at any stage you have any further queries or complaints that you feel have not been addressed adequately by the research team, please contact the Secretary of the University Human Research Ethics Committee, Victoria University, PO Box 14428 MC, Melbourne, 8001 (telephone no: 9688 4710).

## APPENDIX B

### Consent Form for Participants Involved in Research

You are invited to be a part of a study to explore the benefits and enjoyment that older people experience through their participation in a visual arts program that is run as a group leisure activity.

I, \_\_\_\_\_

of \_\_\_\_\_

certify that I am voluntarily giving my consent to participate in the research study entitled: **The Role of the Arts as Leisure: Older people's perceptions of the benefits of their participation in creative arts programs** being conducted by Alison Herron, Dr Anne Binkley and Susan Feldman of Victoria University.

- I have been provided with a copy of *Information to Participants* explaining the study.
- I certify that the objectives of the study, together with any risks to me associated with participating have been fully explained to me and that I freely consent to participate.
- I certify that I have had the opportunity to have any questions answered and that I understand that I can withdraw from this study at any time and that this withdrawal will not jeopardise me in any way. I can decide if any information already collected may or may not be included in the research project.
- I agree that research data gathered for this study may be published provided my name and other identifying information are not used.
- I have been informed that the information I provide will be kept confidential and secure.

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

*Witness (other than researcher)*

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Any queries about your participation in this project may be directed to the researcher (Alison Herron ph. 9616-7392). If you have any queries or complaints about the way you have been treated, you may contact the Secretary, University Human Research Ethics Committee, Victoria University of Technology, PO Box 14428 MC, Melbourne, 8001 (telephone no: 9688 4710).

## APPENDIX C

### Individual Profiles – Older Participants

#### *Artbeat*

##### *Donald*

At the time of our interviews, Donald was a 70 years old and lived alone. He had retired 10 years earlier due to a sudden onset of major health problems. He walked short distances with the aid of a walking frame and was pleased that he could still drive his car to maintain his independence. He was able to continue living at home with the support of daily Home and Community Care services. He had few social contacts.

Donald had been attending Artbeat for 18 months following a referral from his care team. He had enjoyed art at school where he showed considerable aptitude. He had a broad range of cultural interests across the arts and had occasionally returned to his love of painting but had not been able to sustain his interest until joining Artbeat.

##### *Kathleen*

Kathleen was 77 years old and had been widowed for 18 years. She lived alone but had close relationships with her daughter and grandchildren who lived nearby. Her mobility was restricted following a fall which damaged her hip and left her with residual pain. She walked with the aid of a walking stick.

Kathleen had not missed one session of Artbeat in the 18 months she had been attending. She was self-motivated to join Artbeat after receiving a program of Sandybeach Community Centre courses in her letterbox. Like Donald, she had enjoyed art at school and been recognised for her talent, but had only managed occasional periods of painting since that time.

### *Patrick*

80 year old Patrick was married with a large family of children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren. He and his wife were still living in their family home and were very much a part of the local community. After retirement, Patrick worked as a handyman and gardener, and his assistance enabled many older women in his local community to remain living at home. Several years earlier he was forced to give up this very satisfying work when he seriously injured his shoulders. Although his shoulders and heart problems restricted his activities, he could still walk long distances.

Patrick was one of the earliest members of the first Artbeat group and joined the second group when asked by the co-ordinator to help her establish the new group. He was a talented and prolific artist but had not shown any interest in art until his rehabilitation following surgery on his shoulders eight years ago. He continued to paint at home after finishing his rehabilitation program and described himself as “self-taught”. Patrick was very willing to share his knowledge and help other people develop their artistic skills.

### *Nancy*

At 90 years old, Nancy was the oldest and healthiest member of Artbeat. She had been widowed over 30 years and migrated from England 10 years ago to live with her daughter and family. Her mobility was good and she walked confidently, but she did not like to go out unless accompanied by her daughter because she no longer felt confident socially.

Nancy joined Artbeat 21 months ago. She and her daughter also attended a weekly painting class at the local University of the Third Age. Nancy was a keen and talented art student at school but did not resume painting until a few years ago when she and her daughter joined a small art class as an interest to get out of the house and meet people.

### *Faye*

Faye was a 74 year old single woman who lived alone. She had long-term mental health problems which were well-controlled by medication and management of her lifestyle. Although she experienced pain from osteoporosis, her mobility was good. Through the increased motivation and confidence she gained from Artbeat, Faye ceased her home support services to manage her needs independently.

Faye's introduction to art had been through art therapy and she maintained her interest by attending art classes at various times in her life, particularly in her later years. She was keen to join Artbeat but could not join until two years ago when the new group started as she had to wait for a vacancy. While waiting to join Artbeat she participated in the music therapy group at the community centre, which she enjoyed but not as much as the more stimulating and productive program offered at Artbeat.

### *Elsie*

An 82 year old woman, Elsie had been widowed 6 months before joining Artbeat. She had enjoyable relationships with her children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren. She still lived in the family home, with walls covered in her oil paintings. She derived great pleasure from her garden too. She had to manage a number of physical health problems which caused pain and poor balance.

Elsie had loved art at school and seriously resumed painting many years ago after her mother died and she was looking for something interesting to do with her newly available time. Oil painting was her passion, particularly of Australian landscapes. Elsie had been attending Artbeat for 18 months. Joining Artbeat enabled her to take up her beloved hobby once more (which had been put on hold while she cared for her husband) and to get out of the house to socialise.

## *Men's Shed*

### *Jim*

Jim was an 82 year old man who had been widowed over 13 years. Two years earlier, after suffering a stroke and other health problems, his daughter had encouraged him to move from the community he had lived in for nearly 50 years to come to live in a semi-independent arrangement in her home. He had remained active and outgoing after the move and was thankful that he could still drive his car. He drove every week to meet with friends from where he used to live.

Jim had a small workshop in the garage at his home but since moving to live with his daughter, he no longer had access to a workshop space or to his tools. He had been a motor mechanic and a handyman, and over the past several years his widowed neighbour had relied on him for any handyman tasks that needed attention in her home. Jim had been a participant at the Shed for over a year and enjoyed working on a variety of projects – whatever took his fancy at the time.

### *Gordon*

Gordon was 80 years old and lived with his wife in a townhouse unit, having moved from Sydney a few years ago to be close to a daughter and her children. His sudden onset of poor health in his retirement had taken him by surprise – this was not the way he had pictured his spending his retirement. His mobility was severely limited due to a stroke he had suffered a few years earlier and he continued in rehabilitation in an effort to regain functioning and strength.

As an inaugural member of the Shed, Gordon had been attending over 2½ years before being interviewed for this study. Gordon had a professional career until he retired. He was not as keen a handyman as some of the other participants in the study, but he had built a sleep-out, garage and front fence in the early years of his marriage. At his home in Sydney he had a workbench in the garage.

### ***Brian***

At 62 years old, Brian was the youngest participant in this study. He was married with adult children who had left home and had children of their own. Brian had been retrenched a couple of years earlier, which brought him earlier retirement than he had anticipated. His physical health was good but he had found the transition to retirement very difficult. In recent months he had commenced a part-time job.

Brian had a wide range of skills over a number of trades and approached to join the Shed about 18 months ago to assist as a volunteer. However, he became involved in his own project which had very significant meaning to him and considered that he had really become a participant. Brian had grown up on a farm in northern Victoria and with the sale of the family farm he had acquired some old timber out of which he crafted an outdoor table during his time at the Shed. He had a small workshop set up at the back of his garage at home but did not talk of spending much time there.

### ***Phillip***

Phillip was 75 years old and lived with his wife. He was also in close contact with his children and grandchildren. Like Gordon, Phillip had a professional background prior to retirement, however he had been a highly skilled amateur craftsman as well as a keen handyman. He had severe mobility difficulties due to osteoporosis in both knees and he was struggling with deteriorating memory and motivation, as well as chronic tiredness.

Joining the Shed several months ago had been a godsend to Phillip as it took the focus off his health problems and onto doing something constructive using lifelong skills that gave him great enjoyment. At his previous home and his current home he had a well-appointed workshop, although he no longer spent much time in there. He had a long history of working with his hands. With the help of his father, who was a carpenter, Phillip built his first family home. He also made many items of furniture, which are now distributed amongst the family.

## APPENDIX D

**Table of Individual Profiles – Older Participants**

<b>Profile</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Marital Status</b>	<b>Living Arrangements</b>	<b>Health</b>
<b>Pseudonym</b>					
<b>ARTBEAT</b>					
<b>Donald</b>	70	Male	Single	Alone	Multiple physical health problems, including asthma and epilepsy. Knee replacements. Limited mobility - used a walking frame.
<b>Kathleen</b>	77	Female	Widowed	Alone	Pain and limited mobility due to hip fracture following a fall. Arthritis. Used a walking stick.
<b>Patrick</b>	80	Male	Married	With spouse	Good mobility for walking but shoulder and heart problems restricted other physical activities. Depression.
<b>Nancy</b>	90	Female	Widowed	With family	Good health and mobility. Hearing impairment. Lacked social confidence to go out without daughter.
<b>Faye</b>	74	Female	Single	Alone	Long-term mental health problems controlled by medication and management of her lifestyle. Pain due to osteoporosis. High blood pressure. Good mobility.
<b>Elsie</b>	82	Female	Widowed	Alone	Multiple physical health problems, including arthritis and osteoporosis, causing pain and poor balance.
<b>SHED</b>					
<b>Jim</b>	82	Male	Widowed	With family	Active and in reasonably good physical and mental health following stroke. Hearing impairment.
<b>Gordon</b>	80	Male	Married	With spouse	Limited mobility and strength following stroke. Cancer.
<b>Brian</b>	62	Male	Married	With spouse	Good physical health. Some mental health difficulties.
<b>Phillip</b>	75	Male	Married	With spouse	Severe mobility difficulties due to osteoporosis in knees and chronic tiredness, as well as deteriorating memory and motivation.



## APPENDIX E

### Interview Guide - First Interview (Artbeat)

Participant \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

1. What has been your involvement or interest in artistic activities over the years?  
*Prompt*
  - Tell me about some of the things you have done.
  
2. Thinking back to when you started at *Artbeat*, can you tell me something about why you joined the program?  
*Prompts*
  - What were you hoping you would get from the program?
  
  - How did your experience compare with your expectations?
  
3. Describe a typical day for you at *Artbeat* starting with when you leave home to when you arrive back home.
  
4. What do you enjoy most about your time at *Artbeat*?
  
5. What does being involved in *Artbeat* mean to you?

## APPENDIX F

### Interview Guide - Second Interview (Artbeat - Kathleen)

#### Introduction:

- Is there anything you would like to say about the summary I sent you or will I start by asking my questions that follow on from it?

Our last conversation ranged across a wide range of your experiences and idea relating to art and Artbeat. I would like to find out more about a few of these.

1. You said painting is your favourite activity – what happens for you when you paint?
  - *Prompt:* How does this compare with other art? With writing?
2. What does it mean to you that you are doing your art in a group?
  - *Prompts:* What makes it “fun”?  
Like-minded people  
What is Virginia’s role/contribution?
3. Everyone has talked in some way about getting a new lease of life from Artbeat. You talked about “feeling young again” and “it’s a whole life for me”. What do you think is happening for you and the others?
  - *Prompts:* What does “feeling young again” mean to you?  
“Keeps people well”, “keeps them out of hospital/nursing home”  
“Take it further and really try to use it as hobby”
4. You have all mentioned looking forward to Artbeat every week. What does this sense of anticipation mean for you in the rest of your week?
  - *Prompts:* How much extra work do you do at home?  
“A whole new life for me”
5. Virginia talks about enjoyment of the process of creating and enjoyment of the finished product. What does this mean for your experience of art and Artbeat?
  - *Prompts:* Last time you talked quite a bit about what you did for the children’s alphabet  
Never framed anything
6. Can you tell me more about how Virginia encourages you and the others?
  - *Prompts:* Virginia “stretches” you all  
Suggests ideas

## APPENDIX G

### Interview Guide - First Interview (Men's Shed)

Participant \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

1. Did (do) you have a shed? – what did (does) it mean to you?  
  
What has been your connection with shed-type activities over the years?
  - Tell me about some of the things you have done.  
What sort of work did you do?
  
2. Thinking back to when you started at *The Shed*, can you tell me something about how you came to join the program?  
*Prompts*
  - What were you hoping you would get from the program?
  
  - How did your experience compare with your expectations?
  
3. Describe a typical day for you at *The Shed* (starting with when you leave home to when you arrive back home).
  
4. What do you enjoy most about your time at *The Shed*?
  
5. What do you get out of going to *The Shed*?
  
6. Has the program changed over the time you have been attending?

## APPENDIX H

### Interview Guide - Second Interview (Men's Shed – Jim)

#### Introduction:

- Is there anything you would like to say about the summary I sent you or will I start by asking my questions that follow on from it?

There were many different things you and the others told me about the Shed. There are a few areas I would like to ask you more about.

1. Both the Monday 'pub crawl' and *The Shed* get you out of the house and meeting people and swapping stories. If you could only attend one of them, which would you chose?
  - Why?
2. When you compared *The Shed* with the Elderly Citizens Club, you said *The Shed* keeps you up the hill. How does it do this?
  - Some people described *The Shed* as rehabilitation or therapy. Do you see it as that? For you / for others?
3. You said you've always been good with your hands. Can you describe what you get out of making something with your hands or fixing something?
  - Does it take all your attention or do you think about other things or chat with others at the same time?
  - Some of the others talked of a sense of creativity when making something. Do you feel that?
  - What gives you more satisfaction – the process of doing something or the end product?
4. How do you decide what work you'll do?
5. When do you enjoy your time most at *The Shed*?
  - What is happening?
  - What are you doing?
6. Would you recommend *The Shed* to anyone else?
  - Who would it suit?
  - What would you tell them?

## APPENDIX I

### Interview Guide – Co-ordinator (Artbeat)

1. Can you describe for me what influenced you to develop Artbeat?
  - ◆ Your original aims?
2. How would you compare Artbeat now with what you were aiming for?
  - ◆ What are your aims now?
3. Can you describe your program structure for a session and what is important about each segment?
  - ◆ How do you try to meet individual people's needs?
  - ◆ What factors are important for a new member of the group to settle in and become part of the group?
    - How much of a 'push' do you or others give to get people to join?
4. How do you see your role in the group?
5. (a) What changes have you seen in people over the time they have been attending? – especially the six I interviewed?
  - (b) What do the participants say they get out of coming to Artbeat?
  - (c) What do you think are the most important benefits for the participants?
6. What do you think they enjoy the most?
7. How do you assess whether or not Artbeat is working well for the participants?
8. Have you noticed any differences between the way men experience Artbeat and women experience their time there?
9. What about the people who enquire about the group and don't join or those who attend for a short time but don't continue?
  - ◆ Who doesn't Artbeat suit? – Who benefits the most?
10. How would you describe the sort of art experience you are providing for people?
  - ◆ Do you think of Artbeat as an art class?
  - ◆ How does this differ from art therapy?

## APPENDIX J

### Interview Guide – Co-ordinator (Shed #2)

1. What appealed to you about working as Coordinator of the Shed?
2. Could you describe this Wednesday program as it is running now:
  - Aims?
  - Activities?
  - How do you sort out what activities people do – personal projects, individual, group, jobs for others, etc?
3. What do you think they enjoy the most?
  - Do you think they get more satisfaction from the process of making/ repairing something, or from the final result?
4. Joining the group
  - What factors are important for a new member of the group to settle in and become part of the group?
  - How much of a ‘push’ do you or others give to get people to join?
5. What do the participants say they get out of coming to the Shed?
  - What do you think are the most important benefits for the participants?
  - What changes have you seen in people over the time you have been here? – especially the four I interviewed
  - Does creativity have any importance?
6. How do you assess whether or not the Shed is working well for the participants?
7. How do you see your role in the group?
8. What about the people who enquire about the group and don’t join or those who attend for a short time but don’t continue?
  - ◆ Who doesn’t the Shed suit? – Who benefits the most?
9. As a MEN ONLY group: What do you think makes this program important for men?
10. Do you consider the Shed a leisure activity?

## APPENDIX K

### Fieldnotes Guide

Program \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Time/ duration	Activity	Description of Activity - Social - Health - Art - Other	Equipment & materials	Who / # involved  Participants /Staff/Vols	Use of physical space	Interactions & relationships Interventions Solitary Person-Person Person-staff/vol Purpose: social / help / collaboration	Communication  Expressed emotions  Verbal/ non-verbal	People's comments

## APPENDIX L

### Excerpt of Text for Coding

Line no.	Statement	Code*
1370.1	Well because she'll often say to us, you see I take advantage of that, she'd say "Do what reminds you of summer." You see bright colours, bright colours, so I did this [pointing at painting of flowers].	self-expression/ creativity
1370.2	Well because she'll often say to us, you see I take advantage of that, she'd say "Do what reminds you of summer." You see bright colours, bright colours, so I did this [pointing at painting of flowers].	co-ordinator - guidance
1372	Virginia will wait till the end of the lesson and then she'll hold it up and show everybody. So you get some feedback, do you see what I mean, if you've done anything.	encouragement
1373	So if you wish, you can have the joy of coming home and completing it.	continue at home
1374	I mean some people don't, but Patrick does quite a bit and Donald's painting at home and so is Faye.	group
1375.1	You see she's encouraging us to do some at home as well.	encouragement
1375.2	You see she's encouraging us to do some at home as well.	continue at home
1376	And it comes round so quickly.	anticipation
1377.1	And we're going next month on a bus, we're all going, all the Artbeat, Monday and Thursday, we're all going down the coast and we're going to two or three art galleries and going out for lunch. I mean we've got that to look forward to, do you see?	program activity
1377.2	And we're going next month on a bus, we're all going, all the Artbeat, Monday and Thursday, we're all going down the coast and we're going to two or three art galleries and going out for lunch. I mean we've got that to look forward to, do you see?	anticipation
1378	I mean she, it's like heaven-sent this thing, you know, this Sandybeach. Which I think I'm, somebody's looking after me, I feel I have a guardian angel.	new lease of life

\* *Code: Meaning attributed to a unit of text*



## APPENDIX M

### Table of Frequency of Codes - Artbeat

CODE*	Frequency	CODE	Frequency	CODE	Frequency
<b>Participant 1</b>		Integration	3	Staff/volunteers	13
Absorbed	11	Involved	5	Growth	13
Access/mobility/ limited	58	Isolation	21	Reciprocity	2
Achievement	5	Joining Artbeat	60	Active	10
Anticipation	55	Learning	35	Young	9
Appreciates beauty	10	Like work	16	Mainstream	4
Attendance	19	Mastery	12	<b>Added codes P/t 3</b>	
Benefit	11	Meaning	17	Recognition	50
Challenge	46	Mentally stimulating	30	Belonging	46
Choice	24	Methodology	5	Self-esteem	14
Class	12	Motivation	13	Getting out	16
Common interest	55	New lease of life	33	Art at home	16
Competence - knowledge	8	New skills	14	Resilience	10
Competence - skills	45	Other leisure activities	3	Humour	15
Continue at home	36	Pleasure in materials	33	Expand world	18
Continuity	25	Prior abilities	1	Site of resistance	5
Contribution	44	Prior interest in arts	20	Novelty/variety	13
Control	29	Prior interest in art	56	Competition	2
Co-ordinator - guidance	53	Problem-solving	25	Retirement	2
Co-ordinator - quality	50	Problem-solving/idea	6	Escape	14
Current leisure interests	36	Process	8	Feel special	6
Depression	10	Productive	27	<b>Added codes P/t 4</b>	
Discontinued art	20	Program activity	40	Stretch imagination	6
Discontinuity - health	10	Purpose	37	Art classes	9
Diversity	15	Push	31	Art as leisure	9
Encouragement	56	Quality/standards	24	Innate	3
Enjoyment	129	Satisfaction	68	Discontinuous event	3
Excitement	13	Self-efficacy	99	<b>Added codes P/t 5</b>	
Familiarity	3	Self-expression/ creativity	127	Confidence	1
Final product	39	Social connectedness	167	Entertainment	3
Flow	62	Stimulation	13	<b>Added codes P/t 6</b>	
Freedom	2	Time	15	Ideas	12
Fun	7	Tiring	10	Goals	5
Group	25	Unexpected	11	Boredom	3
Group - art talent	33	Well-being	20	Feedback	7
Guidance	18	Work	8	Therapy	1
Health problems	23	<b>Added codes P/t 2</b>		Highlight	2
Identity	71	Adapt to abilities	12		

\* *Code: Meaning attributed to a unit of text*

## APPENDIX N

### Table of Frequency of Codes – Shed

CODE*	Frequency	CODE	Frequency	CODE	Frequency
<b>Participant 1</b>		Methodology	6	Confidence	1
Absorbed	6	Motivation	16	Idea	2
Access/mobility/ limited	3	New skills	4	Ideas	5
Achievement	3	Problem-solving	8	Boredom	2
Anticipation	14	Process	5	Therapy	12
Attendance	2	Productive	15	Competence	13
Benefit	13	Program activity	20	Prior interest in shed	11
Challenge	10	Purpose	40	Work identity	21
Choice	12	Push	6	Joining Shed	18
Common interest	31	Quality/standards	4	Value	4
Continuity	14	Satisfaction	17	Doing	25
Contribution	24	Self-efficacy	2	Inclusive	5
Control	5	Self-expression/ creativity	24	Project	14
Co-ordinator - guidance	37	Social connectedness	102	Making	11
Co-ordinator - quality	5	Stimulation	1	Working together	9
Current leisure interests	2	Time	8	Good with hands	17
Depression	2	Tiring	3	Spirits up	5
Discontinuity - health	14	Unexpected	1	Useful	12
Diversity	11	Well-being	1	Materials/ equipment	3
Encouragement	4	Adapt to abilities	18	Discontinuity	4
Enjoyment	70	Staff/volunteers	13	Tasks	6
Familiarity	6	Active	3	Have a go	3
Final product	13	Gender	1		
Flow	5	Diversion	2	<b>Added codes P/t 2</b>	
Group	4	Recognition	17	Space	4
Guidance	2	Belonging	12	Constraints	19
Health problems	10	Self-esteem	1	Maintain skills	9
Identity	24	Getting out	8	<b>Added codes P/t 3</b>	
Involved	3	Humour	1	Rehabilitation	5
Isolation	4	Novelty/variety	5	Fitting in	4
Learning	4	Retirement	1	Group project	9
Like work	4	Escape	1	<b>Added codes P/t 4</b>	
Meaning	15	Stretch imagination	2	Release	7
Mentally stimulating	5	Discontinuous event	2	Environment	3

\* *Code: Meaning attributed to a unit of text*