

Letter of Intent

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To Whom it May Concern,

I am writing to express my sincere interest in the MA in Creative Arts Therapies, Art Therapy Option, at Concordia University. I am graduating with a Bachelor of Arts at Brandon University in May 2016 in Creative Arts and Psychology. Concordia is a unique Creative Therapy program that impresses me in its rigor and scope. In my view, the greatest feature of the program is the sizable practicum, which ensures graduates leave with real life experience applying the skills and knowledge obtained throughout the program. This MA degree is the key to my achieving my goal of pursuing art therapy professionally and to take part in this exciting, growing field.

Early in my undergrad I entertained the idea of pursuing Art Therapy. My choice to pursue a B.A. allowed me to study music, visual art, and psychology, and to identify connections between these fields. While I was passionate and dedicated to excelling in each subject area, on my own time I began to investigate psychological models of art making, study artists and musicians interested in sense and perception, and reflect my multiple-subject interests in my art practice. In my view, each of these fields had valuable, even essential, insight into the other. However, the abstract nature of academia and art exhibition often left me dissatisfied.

In the summers of 2014 and 2015, I was privileged with the opportunity to design and direct a two-month children's summer Art Camp for four small, rural communities, close to where I grew up. After watching the children learn, express, build, paint, draw, problem-solve, and think critically and imaginatively, I began thinking about the role of intuition and multi-sensory experience in art making. I also witnessed the calming effect art activity had on my two students with special needs, namely autism and Down Syndrome. Both restless children became absorbed in their art production and participated in group interaction during my lessons. It was here I saw first-hand the therapeutic potential of art making, especially on young people with disabilities.

This past semester, I enrolled in a counseling course, which outlined all major systems of psychotherapy. Near the end of the course, I wrote a paper which reviewed the body of empirical (Eaton, Doherty & Widrick, 2007) and non-empirical (Metzl, 2015) studies on the clinical use of art therapy, as well as investigated possible causes of positive outcomes of art therapy in clinical trials. I discovered nonverbal forms of expression offer a means of communication, cathartic relief and coping skills, having particular benefit to treatment populations who experience difficulty in verbal communication. Lastly, I proposed a framework in which the techniques of art therapy could be combined with the structure of Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) as a wellness program designed for preschool-aged children with developmental challenges and emotional disturbances.

Art therapy is the ideal combination of my artistic and research passions while fulfilling my goal to help people and give back to communities, by providing a specialized therapy option for emotionally and developmentally challenged persons. I believe creative therapy techniques have much to offer to preventative medicine and clinical treatment, in particular mindfulness and acceptance based strategies, and I predict it will become a more prominent therapy option in the future. Concordia's MA in Art Therapy will ground my theoretical understanding of a wide range of methodologies, afford me the chance to learn from recognized practitioners, and provide the hands-on practical skill training that is essential to becoming a successful and effective therapist.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Sarah Usick