

Achieving Recovery through Creativity

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When you couple the already difficult time of adolescence with substance use and related behavioral and emotional issues, the results can be tragic. Youths who come to Preferred Family Healthcare have often been labeled as delinquent troublemakers. They frequently lack coping skills, the ability to express themselves effectively, and a belief in their own worth. The staff at PFH recognized the unique needs of adolescent substance users and have developed a program to serve them, Achieving Recovery through Creativity. ARTC is a creative arts program designed to provide these youth with unconventional means of self-expression, increase their feelings of self-efficacy and self-worth, improve their ability to collaborate with others, and provide them alternatives to substance use.

PFH is a comprehensive mental health agency serving consumers across the state of Missouri and in Texas. PFH historically has sought to provide services that step outside the realm of "treatment as usual." This is evidenced by the development of ARTC. Since its inception in 2006, Achieving Recovery Through Creativity has been recognized by First Lady Laura Bush as part of her Helping America's Youth Initiative and recently was awarded an exemplary rating by the Commission on Accreditation of Rehabilitation Facilities surveyors during PFH's CARF accreditation process.

ARTC is being incorporated into virtually every aspect of PFH's adolescent treatment programming. All youths participating in treatment are offered weekly groups focused on the arts, including visual arts, music, and writing. Projects' objectives focus on specific issues youth may be facing such as relapse, co-occurring disorders, grief and loss, and anger management. The process entails a pre group exercise followed by project completion, and it concludes with a post-group discussion that gives youths are given the opportunity to share their creations and the thoughts and feelings that inspired their creativity. In addition to ARTC groups, the arts are used in individual therapy sessions to foster therapeutic interaction. Youths are also provided information on potential community resources and educational and vocational pathways they can access

to pursue their interest in the arts as they transition from treatment into their respective communities.

ARTC emphasizes community involvement. Our staff and consumers organize, implement, and showcase their talents in community art exhibits and musical performances through collaboration with local arts and community agencies. These exhibitions are often the first time young consumers have experienced affirmation and appreciation.

The arts provide a less threatening means of expression that is essential to address the multi-faceted needs of adolescent substance users. Issues such as trauma, family dysfunction, and grief and loss often accompany substance use.

In addition, cessation of substance use leaves youth with a void, that if left unfilled will inevitably lead them back to more comfortable but maladaptive behaviors. The arts provide our consumers with activities and skills to fill this void, hence increasing their chances of remaining substance-free over the long term.

Through consumer surveys, PFH has gathered qualitative evidence that indicate Achieving Recovery Through Creativity has had a positive impact on our young consumers. Of more than 1,100 clients surveyed over the past two years, 86 percent indicated that Achieving Recovery Through Creativity gave them an opportunity to learn activities that they can do rather than use alcohol or drugs, 79 percent indicated that their participation in ARTC helped them to better express their thoughts and feelings, 75 percent reported Achieving Recovery Through Creativity helped them improve their ability to work with others, and 78 percent reported feeling better about themselves as a result of participation in Achieving Recovery Through Creativity.

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My name is Chad T., I am 17 years old and a recovering addict with 53 days clean. During my time at PFH, I have come to realize that my addiction's strength goes hand in hand with the strength that I give my anger and sorrow. I have also come to realize that the longer I hold these emotions in, the stronger they become. In the past I've tried talking about my emotions as a way to take it off my chest, but I have trouble trusting people enough to show them how I really feel. For me, writing lyrics and recording songs is an essential part of my recovery because it's the only way for me to express my true feelings to people. Being able to record [my music] at PFH [through ARTC] has given me a way to vent and release my emotions in a positive, productive manner."

