



ARTS ENGAGEMENT PROGRAM

Program Overview & History

The Arts Engagement Program (AEP) is an innovative model program that brings the benefits of the visual arts to adults with mild to moderate stage Alzheimer's disease, various forms of dementia and their care partners. Recent research suggests that involvement in arts and cultural activities contributes to overall quality of life by offering meaningful opportunities for companionship, social engagement, and community participation. Visual arts in the Museum offer a static collection of objects that can help trigger personal stories and experiences for participants, and tap into one's emotional, not visual, memory.

AEP was initiated as a grant-funded pilot program structured around the 2006 Meet Me at MOMA program launched by The Museum of Modern Art in New York City. The initial grant was written and administered by Maricopa Partnership for Arts & Culture and Banner Alzheimer's Institute. The pilot program took place in the 2008 and 2009 calendar years. After the pilot program ended, all involved partners integrated AEP into their regular educational offerings. Since 2010, Phoenix Art Museum has been self-supporting AEP. Currently, AEP is supported In Loving Memory of William A & Lorraine C. O'Brien and the Shawn and Joe Lampe Fund.

Program Goals

The goal of AEP at Phoenix Art Museum is to contribute to the participants' quality of life in the present moment through engagement with original art objects and conversational gallery and studio experiences. AEP tours and studio sessions are interactive, and encourage dyads to share personal observations and stories in a welcoming, safe, and social environment.

Program Format

AEP is offered two times per year (Spring & Fall) every year. At the Museum, each group consists of a predetermined number of patient-care partner dyads. The group meets every other week for 16 weeks (eight meetings) per session. In fall 2013, AEP doubled enrollment, indefinitely adopting a two-group structure, accommodating up to 16 dyads (32 people) per session. This structure was adopted in response to increasing community demand. Currently, the program has 20 dyads (40 people) enrolled. In fall of 2017, the program will expand to accommodate 30 dyads (60 people) to better meet community demand, and due to a generous donation to underwrite the program's growth.

AEP consists of a 45 to 60-minute interactive tour of the Museum's collection (special exhibitions may be considered). As of fall 2015, teaching artist Tessa Windt joined the program as artist in residence, designing two, full-day studio experiences for the dyads per session. Tours and activities are implemented by specially trained Docents, with oversight provided by the Museum's Education Department. Interested Docents are observed giving a one-hour public tour and then 'interviewed' about their interest in the program before being selected to participate. For their general knowledge and understanding, all AEP Docents receive basic medical training on Alzheimer's disease, the various forms of dementia, and communication techniques from an accredited Banner Alzheimer's Institute (BAI) medical practitioner.

The first session includes a 60 to 90-minute luncheon, where Docents meet and greet with dyads over lunch, catered by the Museum's on-site restaurant. The last meeting of each session is followed by a reception, gallery exhibition, and an evaluation questionnaire to elicit feedback to improve AEP. Reservations are required, and space is limited. Contact Debra Schmalz, Education Coordinator, for further information and registration.

Contact Information

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