

New Programs Responding to Community Needs during the COVID-19 Pandemic

Art Connect

Creativity lights up lives during lockdown



In March 2020 in response to the pandemic, SPCC initiated two new programs: *Art Connect for Adults*, and *Art Connect for Families*. Both workshops, occurring once a week via Zoom and run by professional artist, graphic designer and illustrator Amanda Neville, successfully provided people with meaningful creative activities and support during the lockdown period, and increased people's awareness of SouthPort Community Centre and the range of programs it offers.

Art Connect for Adults ran throughout Term 2 and 3 2020 and attracted a wide range of people, including Port Phillip residents and those from other parts of Melbourne. Each week the group discussed artists of interest, watched a video and then produced a small artwork. A consistent group of people attended, which meant they had a say in choosing artists and subjects, enabling the group to respond to the needs and interests of participants. During the artwork production, people were able to talk to others, form friendships and support each other through the challenges of life in lockdown. Participant feedback was overwhelmingly positive, with people saying that they loved being in a 'creative space' with others, found the group very supportive, and that it helped them to cope with the isolation and uncertainty of the lockdown.

Art Connect for Families catered for young children and their carers. Begun in April 2020, the program ran throughout Terms 2 and 3 and is continuing into Term 4. With so many children learning from home during lockdown, demand has been high, requiring weekly numbers to be capped at 16 participants and a waiting list each week. Participants come from the local Port Phillip community, wider Melbourne and even some from overseas. Each week, *Art Connect for Families* provided creative activities for children and their carers - it was terrific to see children and carers collaborating, and the artworks produced were exceptional. Participants were also able to chat with one another, and so many interesting conversations occurred during the workshops. Access to art materials was a challenge with many shops closed, but we made do with what we had, running activities with pencils, texta colours and recycled materials.

Art Connect – Testimonials from Students

“What Art Connect provided for me was a nice, creative space with artful conversation with an attentive instructor/artist. Sometimes everyday folks aren’t able to provide the support that an artist needs, or even the dialogue that an artist seeks. This space allows for that. It was a very supportive environment. I’m so grateful to have been drawn to the event through Eventbrite. I’ve been using Eventbrite to find online events that align with my interests/needs and it’s really helped me manage my sanity during this pandemic.”

“I love the Art Connect classes! I feel more connected to people while also having art lessons - it all helps me to cope during the pandemic and I really appreciate what all of you are doing! See you at next week’s class!”

“I thoroughly enjoyed it – it allowed me to be part of an expressive group and to meet others, including from overseas, during a time of lockdown. It was so important to relieve isolation and be able to connect with others. In each class, Amanda introduced new and interesting art skills to try and always ensure everyone was included and their artwork celebrated.”