



Advocacy and Action
for Connecticut's
Mental Health

Well-Being and Mental Health

Well-Being and Health

Over the past several decades, holistic practices such as practices of mindfulness, physical activity and engaging in the arts have been studied and found to be effective in enhancing people's health, sense of wellbeing and quality of life.

As mental health is part of overall health, these benefits of holistic practices extend to and include benefits for people's mental health. Holistic practices may include practices of yoga and meditation, engaging in visual and musical arts, and engaging in physical activities.

Mindfulness Practices

Yoga and meditation have been shown to decrease perceived stress and anxiety by apparently regulating people's stress response systems.ⁱ This regulation includes decreasing physiological arousal such as reducing the heart rate, lowering blood pressure and easing respiration. Some studies have indicated reduced symptoms associated with health concerns including depression, anxiety disorders, pain and insomnia after participating in yoga classes. Reduction was seen in average levels of tension, anxiety, depression, hostility, anger and fatigue. Regular practice of meditation has been indicated in long lasting improvements in memory and focus and enhancing one's abilities for compassion, empathy, reaction and problem solving.

Engaging in the Arts

People often find relief from stressful situations, including the ones that contribute to mental health concerns or the fact that someone is dealing with a mental health issue, by engaging in creative activities such as producing and/or using art and music. While using more traditional forms of art therapy requires practitioners with specialized training, process-oriented art, or being involved in creating art in and of itself, can have a positive and long-lasting positive impact on people dealing with health concerns.ⁱⁱ

Physical Activity

Engaging in physical activity has long been known to increase general well-being and have beneficial effects across physical and mental-health outcomes. It has been shown to increase general and health-related quality of life, better functional capacity and better mood states.ⁱⁱⁱ For example, physical activity, exercise and physical-activity related interventions contribute to decreased levels of anxiety and depression, and increase positive mood, regardless of people's socioeconomic status and physical health.^{iv}

Select CT Programs that Support Holistic Wellbeing

Advocacy Unlimited's Toivo initiative (www.toivocenter.org) is an intentional living space to allow, facilitate and encourage personal growth. It is a place where anyone can engage in expert facilitated yoga, drum circles, meditation, painting, creative writing, fitness, & exercise activities.

A lot of the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services' (DMHAS) connected rehabilitative Social Clubs support their members to engage in art-related projects and initiatives. Some have well-developed art programs that include artists showing their pieces within the club and beyond.

For more information, contact Daniela Giordano, Public Policy Director, NAMI Connecticut, publicpolicy@namict.org

ⁱ Harvard Mental Health Letter (Apr 2009). Yoga for anxiety and depression. Retrieved 10/27/14 from http://www.health.harvard.edu/newsletters/Harvard_Mental_Health_Letter/2009/April/Yoga-for-anxiety-and-depression

ⁱⁱ Source: Elaine Argyle, Gillie Bolton, (2005) "Art in the community for potentially vulnerable mental health groups", Health Education, Vol. 105 Iss: 5, pp.340 – 354. Retrieved 10/27/14 from <http://www.emeraldinsight.com/doi/abs/10.1108/09654280510617178>

ⁱⁱⁱ Source: Penedo, F.J.; Dahn, J. R. (Mar 2005). Exercise and well-being: a review of mental and physical health benefits associated with physical activity. Current Opinion in Psychiatry: Volume 18 - Issue 2 - p 189–193. Behavioural medicine. Retrieved 10/27/14 from http://journals.lww.com/co-psychiatry/Abstract/2005/03000/Exercise_and_well_being_a_review_of_mental_and.13.aspx

^{iv} Source: Stephens, T. (Jan 1988). Physical activity and mental health in the United States and Canada: Evidence from four population surveys Preventive Medicine; Volume 17, Issue 1, Pages 35–47. Retrieved 20/27/14 from <http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/0091743588900709>