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## The role of an art hive in creating belongingness and social inclusion for older residents living in transitional housing with supports

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### ABSTRACT

Drawing on qualitative arts-based methodologies within a community development framework, we explore community artmaking as an analytical approach to understanding processes of belonging, inclusion, and community-making in the context of transitional housing with supportive services, including an embedded art hive, in Calgary, Canada. By providing free access to art, art hives act as a site for social change through accessibility and community participation, fostering more robust and inclusive communities through creativity. We conducted a series of photovoice and arts-based elicitation interviews with residents and key informant interviews, co-facilitated by social work research assistants and professional artists to understand the role of the Art Hive in contributing to belonging and social inclusion for residents. Thematic analysis of the interviews revealed three salient benefits: (1) building community within the shelter, (2) cultivating wider community connections, and (3) promoting wellness for residents. Strategies for successfully incorporating and sustaining art hives in transitional housing were proposed by study participants in relation to service delivery.

**Keywords:** Art Hive, Older Adults, homeless, transitional Shelter, Belongingness, Social Inclusion.

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### 1. Introduction

Houselessness among older adults (50+) in Canada is growing due to a rapidly aging population and a lack of affordable housing, among other factors. (Government of Canada, 2024). Older account for 24% of shelter use in Canada (Humphries & Canham, 2021). The intersecting issues faced by older adults experiencing homelessness create complex health, emotional, and social needs (Canham et al., 2022). In addition to the challenge of age-related functional impairment or chronic health conditions, psychosocial factors strongly impact older people experiencing homelessness, diminishing well-being

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and increasing the complexity of required supports (Garibaldi et al., 2005; Om et al., 2023; Stergiopoulos & Herrmann, 2003). Evolving shelter and service practices are therefore critical in supporting older unhoused adults (Sixsmith et al., 2017). Community-based art interventions have been found to improve the psychosocial needs of unhoused persons (Griffith et al., 2015) and enhance the well-being of older adults (Fortune et al., 202; Lepane et al., 2022).

The Aging in Right Place Project (Canham et al., 2022a), examines promising practices in supportive shelters in Vancouver, Calgary and Montreal to support aging in place for older persons experiencing homelessness. James House is a transitional housing with a supportive services model for individuals aged 18+ experiencing homelessness (Canham et al., 2022b). The site was identified through the due to its embedded art hive. We employed arts-based methods to evaluate the James House Art Hive as a support for older adults with experiences of homelessness living in transitional housing. In this paper we first describe the James House Art Hive and then summarize the literature on community-based art hives with specific attention to the role in the lives of older adults with experiences of homelessness. After detailing the arts-based methods and the findings of James House Art Hive and findings we conclude by identifying the challenges and benefits of an embedded art hive to improve belongingness and social connection of older adults with experiences of homelessness.

### 1.1 James House Art Hive

James House, operated by McMan Calgary Housing, provides support and transitional housing for 27 individuals facing homelessness, using a connection and belonging approach (McMan, n.d.). Launched in 2020, it was designed to serve lower-complexity adults experiencing homelessness, and upon opening discovered that most residential referrals were for the 55-plus population (McMann, n.d.).

Located on the ground floor, the James House Art Hive provides a community space for residents to explore creative expression and cultivate social support through art projects, as well as promote community building among residents and the wider community (McMann, n.d.). This community orientation is explicit in both spatial and relational aspects of the Art Hive. The interior walls of the hub are animated with the residents' works; the shelving is filled with art supplies accommodating various media for creative expression and participant-driven programming. Participation is encouraged through weekly scheduled workshops, drop-in times, and residents' ability to facilitate their own projects. Expanding beyond its walls, the art hive conducts community art walks wherein residents travel through their neighborhood discussing public art, operates a booth in the weekly neighbourhood market, and hosts a repair café, where residents bring new life to broken treasures (Figure 1).



Figure 1. Photo collage of the James House Art Hive Space and Activities.

## 2. Literature review

### 2.1 Art Hives

The term 'art hive' describes a specific set of guidelines and principles concerning an international network of community art studios (Timm-Bottos & Reilly, 2015). Art hives draw from a long history of initiatives that used community arts-based methodologies to connect individuals, empower communities, and share cultural traditions through art creation (Timm-Bottos, 1995). Art hives seek to address the growing impact of individualism in society (Timm-Bottos, 2017). Based on U.S. art studios ArtStreet and OFFCenter Arts, the art hive movement migrated to Canada in 2011 (Timm-Bottos, 2016). A community art hive in Montreal, Quebec, aimed to create a space integrating art therapy, art education, critical cultural studies, popular pedagogy, public science, and creative arts.

Accessibility is central to art hives. Located in easy-to-access spaces (i.e., storefronts of museums, libraries, schools, universities, religious facilities, and subsidized housing within low-income neighborhoods), art hives offer low financial barriers to participants (Fortune et al., 2021), welcoming people from diverse cultures, ages, abilities, and educational backgrounds (Timm-Bottos & Chainey, 2015; Timm-Bottos, 2016, 2017). Inclusion of individuals from disparate socio-economic levels, particularly those who have been largely excluded from social dialogue and community citizenship (Legari, 2021), enhances participation and fosters dialogue among those who would rarely interact outside the hive, ultimately contributing to social change-making. Timm-Bottos (2017) argues that privileging the participation of socially marginalized individuals to radically disrupt discrimination through emphasis on equality and mutuality is foundational to art hives.

Equity and mutuality through art hives rely on several key principles. Participants hold flexible participation in the projects; drop-in attendance maintains a dynamic flow of entry (Art Hives, n.d.). Non-hierarchical feminist facilitation methods ensure shared responsibility, authority, and ownership for the work and space. By intentionally disrupting the idea of authority figures within an art hive (Timm-Bottos, 2017), every member of the community is a potential facilitator for the studio's work (Legari, 2021). Varied voices are democratically heard and valued in the dialogue and exchange, which facilitates learning beyond technical skills, ultimately contributing to the development of empathy and self-worth (Timm-Bottos & Reilly, 2015). Through non-directive approaches to facilitation, art hives are conceived as open spaces promoting individuals' own voices and strengths, respecting participants' autonomy (Timm-Bottos, 2017), and moving away from the medical paradigm of art therapy (Legari, 2021).

Community art hives' orientation toward democratic participation encourages community-making for marginalized individuals, typically condemned to social isolation, and serves as an "antidote through community-driven creative activity and connection" (Legari, 2021, p. 157). Art therapy has been reported to reinforce a sense of agency and self-advocacy among people experiencing homelessness (Feen-Calligan, 2008). Moreover, literature supports the benefits of art interventions to improve the psychosocial needs of unhoused persons by increasing self-esteem, heightening resiliency and problem-solving skills, promoting a stronger sense of agency and self-efficacy, contributing to the development of social and financial support networks, and enhancing awareness and empathy about homelessness in the larger community (Griffith et al., 2015).

Art hives' potential for enhancing social connections for vulnerable populations is documented. Community art studios have been shown to protect older adults from the detrimental effects of isolation and loneliness (Lepane et al., 2022), hence improving their overall physical and mental well-being (Fortune et al., 2021). The relational nature of the hives in combination with their facilitation of heightened autonomy and sense of ownership for participants is central to increasing the sense of belonging for older adults (Fortune et al., 2021). For unsheltered individuals, the drastic reduction of their social circle, spatial displacement, financial restrictions, and loss of former identity relentlessly diminishes their sense of belongingness (Griffith et al., 2015). Community art studio participation for people experiencing homelessness, as proposed by Griffith and colleagues (2015), fosters new social acquaintances, and enhances a sense of contributing to the broader society, thereby addressing some of the profound psychosocial needs of unhoused persons.

The, albeit limited, extant body of literature supports the role of community art hives in contributing to the well-being of older adults and those with members of the homeless community.

However, the impact of art interventions on the intersection of these two identities has not been examined. Given the increasing rate of older homelessness and the need for shelter and services tailored to their unique requirements, evaluation of art hives in shelter services for older homeless adults represents an important research gap. To address this knowledge deficit this study examines the James House Art Hive in contributing to belongingness and connection for older adults living in transitional housing with supports.

### **3. Methodology**

As part of a five-year three-city inquiry investigating promising practices in supportive housing service and design for older adults with experiences of homelessness, we sought to evaluate the role of an art hive within a transitional housing environment. Following ethics approval from the University of Calgary Conjoint Faculties Research Ethics Board (CFREB) we recruited shelter residents (n=10), service provider key informants (n=5), and Art Hive key informants (n=6), all of whom provided informed written consent to participate in the study.

#### **3.1 Data collection**

##### **3.1.1 James house resident interviews**

A series of three individual arts-based sessions (utilizing photovoice, graphic elicitation, and arts-based inquiry) were conducted with shelter residents between January and December 2022. Photovoice facilitates the recording and contemplation of individuals' experiences through photography, serving as a participatory action research approach that encourages critical dialogue concerning the photographers' perspectives (Hergenrather et al., 2009; Sanon et al., 2013). Graphic elicitation and arts-based inquiry were also employed (Bagnoli, 2009; Leavy, 2018) to prompt participants to create mind maps and art depicting their feelings of belongingness and community inclusion.

The interviews with shelter residents were individually conducted in private on-site spaces within the shelter, ranging from 25 minutes to two hours, with an average duration of one hour. The initial interview, guided by a field guide, explored the participants' experiences of their current supportive housing and services. At the end of the interview, participants were requested to take pictures throughout the following week related to their experiences of AIRP. Most participants used their smartphones for photography, while those without smartphones were provided with a tablet or digital camera.

The second interview, typically held a week later, involved participants discussing the photographs in relation to the study's questions. For the third and final interview, the researcher and the resident used art kits to first develop a mind map (Buzan, 2011) and then create art, guided by questions such as: What does your art piece convey about your experience of community and your aspirations for community? How do you perceive the feeling of community? What aspects of the Art Hive contribute to or detract from a sense of community? Some participants opted out of creating the mind map. Each participant received a cash honorarium of \$25 (CAD) at the conclusion of each interview and retained ownership of the art they produced.

The 10 participants were males aged between 50 and 65 years, residing at the shelter for durations ranging from four months to one year at the time of the interviews. Participants identified as European (n=4), of mixed European and Cree heritage (n=2), Chinese (n=1), and Indigenous (n=1), while 2 participants chose not to disclose their ethnic identities. All participants reported having physical and/or mental health disabilities.

##### **3.1.2 Key informant interviews**

Five individuals who were service providers at James House and six individuals with connections to the Art Hive were interviewed for approximately one hour via Zoom© technology concerning service provision related to the Art Hive in contributing to belongingness and inclusion among shelter residents.

### 3.13 Data analysis

Interviews were recorded, transcribed, and imported into NVivo 12 software (QSR International, 2022). The combined dataset, consisting of photos, art, and accompanying captions and interview transcripts, was organized on Miro (Miro, 2024), a collaborative digital whiteboard, and thematically analyzed following Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step process, which involves data familiarity, initial coding, exploring themes, theme review, theme definition, and creating an analytical narrative.

## 4. Findings

The data analysis produced three themes that depicted ways in which the Art Hive impacted shelter residents: (1) building community within the shelter, (2) cultivating wider community connections, and (3) promoting wellness for shelter residents. In addition to underscoring the benefits of art hives for older shelter residents, as described in the first three themes, participants articulated several strategies for successfully incorporating art hives in transitional housing with support services. The following describes each of these themes with illustrative quotes drawn from the transcripts and participant created art.

### 4.1 Building community within the shelter

Overwhelmingly, participants expressed the importance of a sense of community belonging in a shelter. Resident 1 identified being accepted within transitional housing as an essential aspect of community belongingness, although his artwork alludes to the difficulty of this while experiencing housing insecurity (Figure 1).



Figure 2. It's a feeling of being accepted

Having a community...It's like trying to describe God, what God is. It's a feeling of being accepted...It's the feeling of being able to go out for an evening, whether it's going to a movie or going out for supper. Being able to stand back and to be able to take a deep breath. A lot of people kind of take that for granted, but it's hard to do that when you're in a shelter. You feel constricted all the time. I relish the idea of just going out...I just see [community] as just something relaxing. It's like taking a long walk along the riverbank or going through a park ... love that feeling of freedom. You don't see it very much when you're staying in the James House.

Some respondents linked community belongingness within James House to the community building fostered by the art hive, as key informant 6 explicates:

I really see the art as addressing the gap of connection; That, and community building. So... what I have found throughout the years of working within the homeless sector is that everyone's kind of all for themselves. You have to survive. And when they come to this space, they're all supportive of one another, able to help each other build that community and the connection in a positive sense or in a positive environment.

This sentiment was echoed by shelter residents. Resident 4 noted how the collaborative process of creating a mosaic, *Love* (Figure 2), exemplified this connection:

Every person in this building, every staff member, every person that came through this room in a month and a half or two months put a piece in there. It became a way that you could have something in common with somebody you have nothing in common with. A way to invite something friendly in an unfriendly place ... through the activity of this art experience. You'd catch them in the hall and say, you know, there's a mosaic going on in there and everybody would like to have somebody put a piece in you. So, you have this idea, "Oh, I'll just go put a piece in," but when you got here, the table was set up and so you almost had to sit down, take a break because you had 10 trays of different kinds of glass, you know, and you had this. So, then you had a choice of picking a letter and you had choice of what style you were. 'Cuz each one is a little bit different. So, everybody could kind of choose.



Figure 3. *Love*.

Key informant 3 reiterated how collaborative art-making fostered community relationships among residents:

I think through the collaborative work too, that helps them to have healthy relationships and helps them to learn that they can be treated with respect and that other people can be too. And that if they come together, they can actually make something bigger than they could do on their own.

Building relationships among shelter residents, a function of the Art Hive, also provided opportunities for residents to connect with their respective cultures and learn about other cultures. Key informant 3 described how the Art Hive facilitated James House residents' reconnection with their cultural identity and heritage and the sharing of these emerging understandings through their art:

Like the room is full of like a lot of really cool beadwork and like, cool Teepee and lots of medicine wheels, and lots of things that help to connect [Indigenous] people back to their culture, help to remind them where they come from and what really matters...It's just great to see them, like, so many of them haven't had the opportunity to do these things in a long time. They do leather work and that kind of thing. Cause they haven't had the money or the access, and it's like, they get to rediscover themselves and their culture.

## 4.2 Cultivating wider community connections

In terms of belonging within the wider community, participants noted that having a physical space within the supportive housing environment devoted to creating art was unique in promoting a sense of identity for them within the surrounding community. Referencing his painting (Figure 3), Resident 3 elaborated:

I didn't really realize how big the art community is and how much people love it. Like when we have the old ladies that are coming or walking by here, and they do come in once in a while, and it's not just that... there are more people that just walk by and are curious. When people go, "Hey, so what's going on?" So, it draws people in. It draws interest... So, it definitely pulls people in. It adds to the community in a lot of ways.



Figure 4. Community and the Art Hive.

Referring specifically to the Art Hives' role as an open space kindling intermingling with the surrounding community, key informant 4 commented:

So, we've got seniors living [close by], we've got youth getting brought in, but the other one we have is community. So, [the art hive facilitator] has done an amazing job of creating art walks that bring community, so there's a gamut of ages and lifestyles.

Key informant 1 also noted the intergenerational connections fostered between shelter residents and visiting youth through the Art Hive:

What I really liked about that was to have some of these youth in the room at the same time as the folks from the James House, it was lovely to have the younger people and the other residents together.

Creating these community connections through the Art Hive also has the potential to counter discrimination, as key informant 1 proposed:

Learning about each other, breaking down barriers and stereotypes, you know, [about] the people that live in the James House. There are some pretty affluent people that live in this area. So, imagine having them work alongside each other. The tenant from the James House would begin to have some understanding of this, you know, lawyer who lives on the street next one over kind of thing, and vice versa.

## 4.3 Promoting wellness among shelter residents

Resident participants reported that engaging with the art hive bolstered their personal wellness in multiple ways. Resident 3 captured the wholistic health impact of the Art Hive: "Socially, and for your

mental wellbeing, your physical wellbeing and everything, kinda', it helps. It contributes to everything." Resident 4 noted his involvement in the Art Hive as enhancing his mental wellness, "all styles and the activities that we do together, creates a positive and a good pathway for me to use this elasticity part of my brain to grow and learn and change." Several residents in the study commented on the calming and reduction of stress they experienced as a result of engaging in the Art Hive. In his art piece entitled Daily Survival (Figure 4), resident 8 expresses this calming effect:

It settles me and calms me down. And that's kind of good. Whether you're really good at [art or not] and also [it] can help take your mind off other matters in the community. Whether within or without, that just your mind's focused on something else. It's helpful sometimes. It's like a sense of therapy.

Similarly, resident 6 shared:

Well, let's just say it puts a kick on the stress for a bit. That's about it. Getting rid of that hidden stress. Cause that's one thing I've learned, there's a lot of hidden stress there. If you don't deal with certain things properly, ohhh, [it] gets outta' hand.

Resident 4 made a further connection between art-making, community connections, and experiencing joy:

The community want to see what we make and what we do here and want because it's genuinely good and they're excited about it. So, that reverberates back to us that we need to make more stuff, and that makes us happy because that puts us all in this room and we cackle like hens in the yard.

Key informants also opined that Art Hive attendees experienced improvement toward their well-being, noted as "pride" and "purpose" by key informant 2:

Especially for the population that we serve, they've gone in their lowest lows and probably for some of them [having] purpose, that's not even something that they probably even dreamed of again. So, when you see that come out in their eyes and the pride that they have, there's nothing better than to see that, it's purpose.

In addition to contributing to residents' wellness, respondents spoke about enhanced empowerment attributed to Art Hive engagement. Key informants explicated how being able to practice their artistic skills and display their work and share with the wider community builds their self-

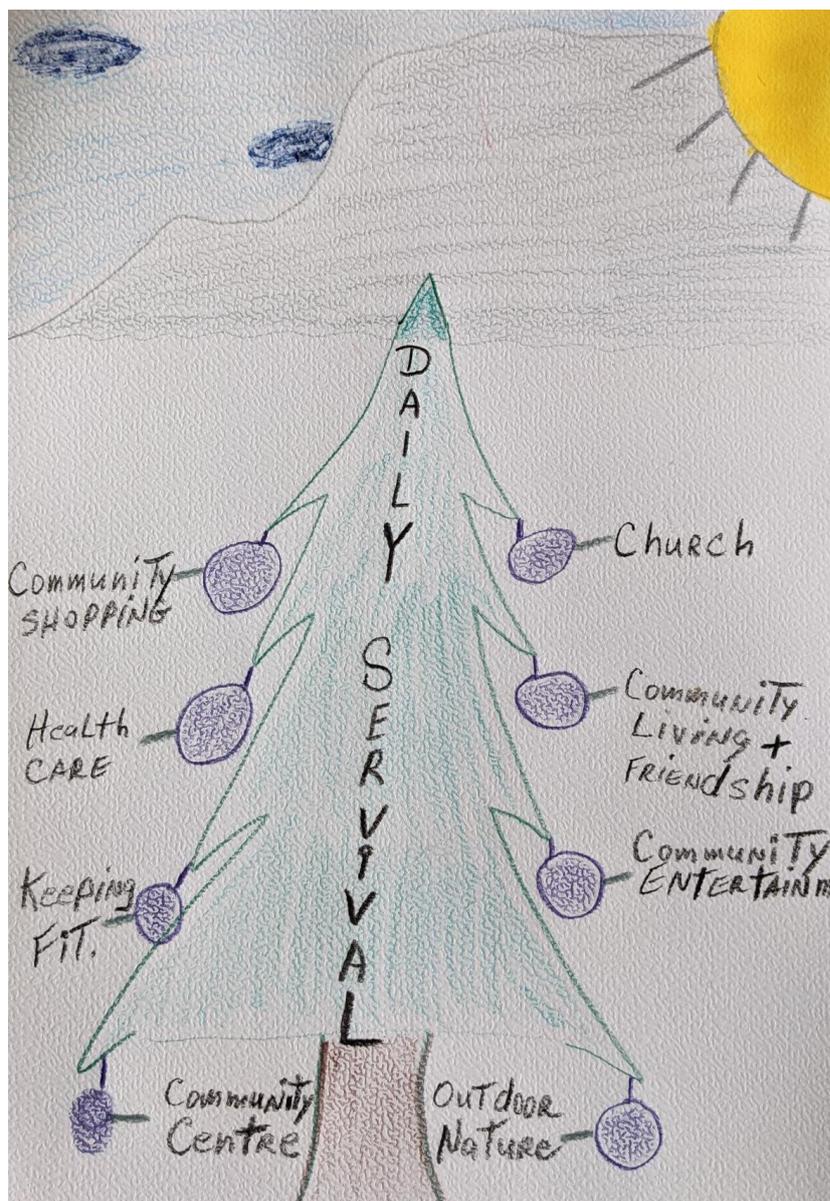


Figure 5. Daily Survival.

worth. Key informant 3 remarked on the interconnection between art-making and opportunities to share art as building residents' self-confidence:

Self-confidence in that, like, when the [Art Hive facilitator] is supporting them, but then having them actually create things and be proud of them and having a space to display them and share them and talk about them. And that gives them the ability to talk about their personal history and their cultural history.

In referencing selling their artwork, key informant 5 noted "that got them really excited, the thought that they could actually sell their artwork." Some resident participants identified their capacity as artists and the potential to generate income through their art as empowering. Resident 1, who although successful in selling his art, underestimated the real value of his work, as he explained:

Again, undersold myself; I think it was [sold for] \$90, when I should have been charging maybe \$300 for them easily. But definitely, I want to get back into that kind of work, because it's something that I taught myself and I don't want to start losing that outlet.

#### 4.4 Art hives in transitional housing: Strategies for success

Creating and sustaining an art hive for older transitional shelter residents requires several key factors within service delivery. Designed as a storefront, an art hive should be community-oriented, accessible, welcoming, and safe. Building and sustaining community for an art hive requires advocacy and outreach. Dedicated and long-term funding, adequate levels of staffing and interdependence are also critical considerations in creating a successful art hive.

##### **Art Hive: Creating a Community-Oriented, Accessible, Welcoming, and Safe Storefront**

Creating an art hive generally needs a champion of arts-based community programming, who engages in advocacy and community outreach. Key informant 1, a social work advocate, elaborated on the approximately 10-year community development she engaged in that ultimately led to the creation of the Art Hive. Because of this groundwork she described, she was able to leverage her community connections for donations of art supplies, etc., which accelerated the development and reach of the James House Art Hive in its first year.

Key informants noted the importance of dedicated and flexible outreach to engage resident and the broader community. Residents' engagement with the Art Hive was facilitated by word of mouth from residents and staff, using posters and flyers, and sharing food to attract people. Key informant 1 stressed the importance of using multiple approaches to promote engagement, "Some people will come, but most people won't, you have to have a bunch of different touch points to let them know that they're welcome to come."

The spatial location and built environment of the James House Art Hive was noted as contributing to its success. Located on the ground floor of the residential building, the Art Hive has floor-to-ceiling glazing and a separate direct entrance on the wall adjacent to the sidewalk. The visual porosity between the interior space of the Art Hive and the public sidewalk was identified as critical for successful community engagement and disseminating art, as key informant 4 articulated:

The Art Hive's location on the main level is brilliant. If it was on another floor, I don't think it'd work as well. It's on the main level where you come in the front door and as you're going into the residential area. There it is!

Occupying a space between the public realm and the private residential space meant that the art hive could operate as a gathering space wherein people could congregate, and community connections could be cultivated. Even if not directly engaged in the art-making, residents expressed a sense of belongingness, as resident 7 noted, he "could always come down here...sit down, have a coffee or whatnot." Similarly, resident 3 shared, "[I'd] be here all the time" if there was "a bigger coffee pot with cream in the little fridge."

The physical space contributed to residents' positive feelings about the Art Hive and willingness to engage, as resident 10 shared: "it's a good environment. It's clean. Yeah. You know, like, and sunny." Additionally, the space was large enough to facilitate group or independent work. As shelter residents often lack freedom in their physical space, resident 1 explained the importance of having this increased personal space within the art hive:

I like the fact that I got a table that I can work at and there's nobody crowding around. I've tried that in a school that I went to, in the art room, and you have maybe 12, 15 other people there and then it just feels, like I said, claustrophobic.

Another component of making the Art Hive feel safe was it being a separate, controllable space. Key informant 2 identified that:

Having the dedicated space is lovely because we have a closable door. I have my calendar of timing so that people know when I'm here. I mean it, because it's a segregated space, there is the ability to open up a little bit more on that deeper level, but the staff are still able to come in.

Accessibility is also an important spatial element for an art hive. The James House Art Hive is located within one of the most accessible-on-foot neighbourhood contexts within the municipality (City of Calgary, 2011), served by affordable public transportation (a bus stop directly in front of the shelter and it is a 12-minute walk to light rail transportation).

Residents shared that they appreciated that the Art Hive was a welcoming and safe space. Residents noted the importance of strong facilitation skills in creating a welcoming space. Resident 2 commented: "Well, I was just gonna' say, the way [Art Hive facilitator] is running it, she makes everybody feel welcome. She makes everybody feel needed." Key informant 4 also emphasized the facilitation skills required to turn the Art Hive into a safe space:

She opens the door and then she listens, and she listens...She hears them. She doesn't just listen. She hears them. And she hears what that need is or the desire. And then she makes sure by reaching out to community that that can happen for them.

According to resident 9, the art hive provides: "a sense of kind of like belonging, but where you just can go and hopefully not get beat up or have problems with your neighbours." The importance of safety within the Art Hive was contrasted to past experiences of violence, as resident 4 shared:

I'm gonna' be in a place that I don't have to be afraid because in the year that I was homeless prior to coming here... there was lots of bad stuff [that] happened. I'd seen at least four people die; a couple murdered.

Key informant 3 similarly commented "it's a safe and nurturing place" where clients' know "they can be treated with, you know, love and compassion."

#### ***Sustaining an Art Hive: Dedicated Long-term Funding, Adequate Staffing, and Role Clarity***

Financial constraints were a constant stressor for the art hive, limiting the program from accomplishing some goals and creating anxiety over the program's future. To mitigate these concerns, key informant 3, proposed changing the art hive to a social enterprise to "not be completely reliant on government funding because who knows what's gonna' happen politically and it might be something that could be easily overlooked or easily cut." The same key informant worried that funding was a challenge to secure as "it's difficult sometimes to get people to understand the actual value of this program."

At the time of this research, the Art Hive was operated by a part-time facilitator, who was responsible for supporting art-making programming residents and the neighbouring community as well as all administrative responsibilities for the Art Hive. Key informant 6 explained that this staffing situation was unsustainable and prevented the Art Hive from reaching its full potential surrounding community inclusion:

I think in this current state it is sustainable in the sense that we're not being bombarded with clients coming in, but looking long term, if we are to really engage the clients and get them out [into community] I don't see it being sustainable with one person.

Access is an important feature of sustainability. While the level of transportation access was deemed to be generally adequate for the James House Art Hive within the neighbourhood community, meeting the expressed desire to expand the Art Hive's reach with external support agency programs would require dedicated transportation and extensive agency coordination, which one provider noted was probably not feasible financially or logistically.

As art hives are often created organically and are rooted in non-hierarchical principles, there can be tensions between it and more formal institutions. This was true for the James House Art Hive. The high turnover of James House staff was noted by key informants 1 and 3 as frustrating, as key informant

3 indicated the Art Hive facilitator had to consistently “...help new [shelter] staff understand the program and why it matters.”

The overlap of roles was also noted as problematic. Considering residents’ close relationships with the Art Hive facilitator, they often choose to confide in them, instead of service provider staff, raising the salience and complexity of confidentiality, as key informant 6 elaborated:

It's always been a challenge trying to find the space and having other staff understand the confidentiality aspect of groups, even if they are open studio, like having staff just walk through the space or come in and engage suddenly outta’ nowhere. It's, yeah, it becomes a challenge.

## 5. Discussion

The current study provides insights and considerations toward the implementation and sustainability of art hives within shelter settings by evaluating the James House Art Hive. Interviews with residents and key informants (James House service providers and Art Hive key informants) revealed several benefits for the Art Hive, while also explicating considerations concerning its development and sustainability.

Social isolation and loneliness are highly prevalent and significant determinants of well-being for older adults (Fakoya, 2020), older adults living in congregate settings (Lepane et al., 2022), and older homeless adults (Om et al., 2022). A vast body of literature affirms that community participation is a significant “means of enhancing health, wellbeing, and quality of life in later life” (Sixsmith, et al., p. 52). Participants in the study described how involvement in the Art Hive promoted a sense of community and social inclusion for shelter residents, as well as supporting residents’ personal wellness. This finding aligns with some emerging literature suggesting that art hives hold potential by creating opportunities for connection and belonging among older adults, which can buffer the social isolation and loneliness that this population faces (Fortune et al., 2021). To our knowledge no research has evaluated art hives located in transitional housing with supports or specifically serving persons experiencing homelessness. Foundational to facilitating meaningful engagement and collaboration, fostering social inclusion, and promoting access to education art and education for all, as noted by participants in this study and the literature, is creating an accessible, safe, and welcoming environment (Timm-Bottos, 2017).

Study participants identified the opportunities to gather, find expression, and build skills as an aspect of Art Hive involvement enhanced participants’ empowerment and sense of self-worth (Timm-Bottos & Reilly, 2015). Findings from the study highlight that outreach into the community, a fundamental goal of art hives, offered transitional housing residents and the wider community the opportunity for dialogue, ideas exchange, and for residents, the chance to market their art, all of which contribute to social change-making (Timm-Bottos, 2017). This process of art-making in community for social change is particularly important for highly stigmatized and marginalized populations (Warr et al., 2021), such as unhoused, economically disadvantaged, older adults with disabilities, in this case residents of a transitional housing shelter with supports.

The provision of a safe, welcoming, and supportive space through the Art Hive was, according to study participants, a stark contrast between residents’ experiences within the shelter system more generally (Kerman et al., 2023). These qualities are also emphasized in reference to the particular and complex needs of older adult residents of transitional supportive shelters (Henwood et al., 2021). Both residents and service providers described how the Art Hive created opportunities for connection within the shelter for residents and the wider community. The flexible approach to programming with outreach into the community through organized art walks and art markets empowered residents and contributed to their well-being. This is reiterated by Adams (2003), who advances the importance of empowerment towards individuals becoming “able to take control of their circumstances and achieve their own goals, thereby being able to work towards helping themselves and others to maximise the quality of their lives” (p. 8).

Study participants provided specific recommendations to consider when developing and ensuring the sustainability of an art hive. Firstly, an ‘art hive’ champion was noted as critical developing and broadcasting the vision for the Art Hive, aligning with the role of community-champions within community-based interventions for older adults with chronic conditions (Kokorelias et al., 2023). In the case of the James House Art Hive, the spatial location and built environment of the Art Hive were

identified as critical factors in its success, specifically the Art Hive's community-orientation was reinforced by its engaging storefront design, its proximity to the sidewalk, and its accessibility to public transportation. The James House Art Hive's success was also due to human factors; namely, the dedication of the social work community practitioner who implemented the Art Hive, the flexible approach to outreach that allowed residents to engage in whatever way they felt comfortable, and the overall welcoming and safe environment. In contrast, key informants described issues that included a lack of dedicated long-term funding that led to inadequate staffing and tension between the Art Hive facilitator and the operating agency, which may have limited the Art hive from reaching its full potential. Despite challenges, the Art Hive served as an accessible, safe, community-oriented, and supportive environment for residents.

### 5.1 Limitations

This study is limited to the views of a small number of male older shelter residents and shelter service providers and Art Hive key informants, who offered insights into a specific art hive embedded in transitional housing with support services. Thus, the findings may not be applicable across other settings and populations. In addition, the focus of the study was on the impact of the art hive on shelter residents, further research should examine the influence of a community-based art hive, particularly with regards to meeting social justice aims, such as creating awareness and reduction in stigma, in the neighbourhood more broadly. Also, study findings may have been affected by the timing of the research- the study was conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic. The adverse impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on homeless populations (Mejia-Lancheros et al., 2022, n.p.; Rodriguez et al., 2022), older adults living in congregate settings (Lapane et al., 2022), and the arts community and art hives (Moore et al., 2023; Palassio, 2021) have been described. To the best of our knowledge, the nexus of these three parameters have not been examined in the literature. This paper offers insights into the value of an art hive embedded with a transitional shelter with supportive services for older formerly homeless adults. Future research is needed to determine the potential value of art hives from the perspectives of diverse populations housed in a range of shelter typologies and their neighbouring communities.

### 6. Conclusion

Drawing on the perspectives of older residents of a transitional shelter with supports and shelter service providers and Art Hive key informants, this study outlines several benefits accrued to shelter residents and the broader community from an embedded art hive. These benefits include: Increased social connection both within James House and between residents and the wider community, an increased sense of belonging, self-esteem and empowerment among residents, and opportunities for learning. These benefits were accomplished through the provision of a safe, welcoming, and supportive space that was accessible and attractive to residents, the creation and facilitation of Art Hive programming, a variety of outreach efforts, and the dedication of an Art Hive champion. While the James House Art Hive achieved positive results, the sustainability of an art hive requires dedicated long-term funding in order to address issues of staff shortage and turnover. Considering that this is likely the first study to examine the implementation of an art hive within a supportive housing environment serving homeless adults, more research is needed to ascertain the benefits and feasibility of art hives within such a context.

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