

## Expressive arts as therapy in Samoa: Nurturing growth and transformation

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### **Biography**

*Leua has been teaching for over 30 years in Samoa and the USA. Her research interests include arts as therapy which has involved intervening with children traumatised by a tsunami and adults in an alcohol/drug abuse programme. Areas of interest include the arts, counselling and arts as therapy. She is a PhD candidate at the National University of Samoa and teaches in the Faculty of Education. She graduated from the School of the Art Institute, University of Wisconsin and has a Diploma in Counselling.*

*Lex is a registered teacher and psychologist. He has worked in many mental health/education agencies/tertiary contexts in New Zealand, Cook Islands, Wales, and Samoa and currently an Adjunct Research Fellow in the Faculty of Education at Victoria University. Areas of interest include training/professional development, culturally-centred practice and counselling. Lex continues to work alongside National University of Samoa staff and has a busy Christchurch practice, Psychlex Consultancy.*

### **ABSTRACT**

The therapeutic value of expressive arts has been recognised for many centuries. Currently, therapists use expressive arts as an integrative, multimodal approach to heal a range of psychological conditions such as trauma, stress, depression, and anxiety, psychological rehabilitation, substance abuse, emotional turmoil, eating disorders, and age-related disorders. Expressive arts therapy has many values - for example, it promotes a creative emotionally stable self via an alternative means of communication helping to initiate change for a hopeful future. This occurs whilst emphasising personal, social, and cultural identity within a safe environment that promotes mindfulness, reflection, pleasure, and relaxation. Nevertheless, although there is growing evidence of the link between expressive arts therapies and neuroscience, there remains minimal robust research and investigations of the efficacy of impacts and detailed descriptions of programmes are needed. In this presentation, two arts as therapy programmes will be considered. Firstly, the 'Moving on Arts as Therapy' intervention, programme will be outlined. It will detail the activities developed in a Samoan school district (2009-2010) for children and families, to alleviate the trauma of a tsunami that ravaged several villages on the south coast of Upolu. In a second programme, a description will be given of how an expressive arts therapy programme, 'Committed to Rebuilding', which was undertaken with adults who were directed to an addictions rehabilitative substance abuse centre in Apia in 2019. The processes of the programmes will be outlined and outputs from the two groups will be displayed with evaluation outcomes considered. These two programmes are part of a project designed to identify a valid expressive art as therapy model for the Pacifica region. The next project, to glean additional data, will be to provide an expressive arts programme for tertiary students from the National University of Samoa.