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Senator Betsy Johnson

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Betsy Johnson, I recently spoke to you on the phone regarding HB 2432, which would create state licensing for art therapists. I am a recent (June 2016) graduate of Marylhurst University's Art Therapy Counselling Master's program. I have noticed that there are many people who say that they are art therapists that did not attend a University program to be an art therapist. I want licensing for art therapists, to increase public safety. So that when people choose an art therapist, they know they are getting a trained art therapist. I believe this will also increase the professionalism of art therapy.

It took me 3 years to learn the many things I needed to know to be able to practice art therapy professionally. The American Association of Art Therapy has curriculum guidelines that are required for universities to meet for their students to be accepted as art therapists. At Marylhurst I also took classes to meet the state requirements to be accepted by the Licensed Professional Counselors Board as an intern. I believe the educational guidelines prepared me very well to do my job and I can offer quality treatment to clients.

You may wonder why it matters who does art therapy and why do we need licensing? Although art is healing in and of itself, art therapists use the creative process and art media to guide people therapeutically to meet mental health and wellness goals. One example of this is that when working with severely mentally ill people, it is necessary to do art work that is reality based and structured, since people who are mentally ill can decompensate and become psychotic if the art is abstract or too emotionally taxing. A person who isn't trained would not know this.

When working with children it is important to not give them paint if they are dysregulated and worked up, as this can cause them to regress and become more dysregulated. Also, with adults and children who may become emotionally flooded during an art directive (directed art activity given to guide a client toward a specific therapeutic outcome) it is

important to know how to help them become grounded and calm again. Art therapists learn how to manage this and more.

Art therapy is different from other types of counseling, although it is based on the same psychological principles as other types of counseling. One noticeable difference is that I get to know my clients by asking them to do pleasurable art directives. I can learn much about them this way, as I can see some of their struggles, as well as their strengths. This is an excellent way to work with many people, but is especially good for children who are not developmentally capable of verbalizing about trauma and worries like adults do. Next, my treatment plan and goals can be achieved through art directives and free art expression.

One example of a client that I worked with, was a child who experienced domestic violence who came to me for a year. She only spoke to me when I asked her questions and she had many fears and worries. She was very creative and her mastery of the artistic process of working with clay in therapy increased her self-esteem. She also made a worry box where she would put her written worries until she and her mom talked about her worries at a specific time each day. This helped her to contain her worries to a much shorter amount of time each overall. She ended therapy by writing her own story in a book that she made, titled "A Whole New World." She made great strides in therapy even though we didn't talk much. Art therapy was the mode of therapy that worked best for her.

My training has enabled me to know what to do with a variety of clients and to be sure of which strengths to build on to help clients achieve their mental health goals. So, if someone without art therapy training is saying that they are an art therapist, what are they offering their clients? Arts and crafts or color books? These are not individually prescribed art directives intended to meet specific client mental health goals. They are not practicing art therapy like I know how to do, because I am trained. I know I am offering my clients art directives that are designed for them and their specific mix of strengths and challenges. I think that licensing will ensure that clients can count on a standard of art therapy, as the education and licensing standards will regulate this.

Thank you for your time and consideration, Sheryl Redburn ,MA, Art Therapist, Lpc Intern