

# Men United.

## A gender-specific Art Therapy Initiative in a Hospice Day Care

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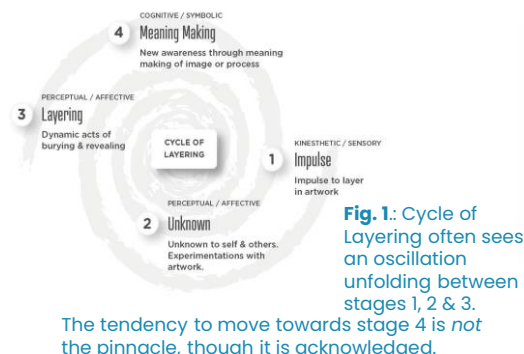
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**Background** Engaging men socially and creatively is an important but challenging task. Within community settings, men have been identified to need a space where they can experience a sense of belonging in the company of other men. Inspired by the Men’s Shed movement<sup>1</sup> which originated in Australia during the 1990s, *Men United* – the name given to the group by one of the members, was a men’s group formed in a hospice day care in Singapore to function as a gender-specific initiative to support such a need.

**Aim** This case example explores how *Men United* provides a gender-specific space to allow men with life-limiting conditions to explore their own capabilities and limitations through interaction with craft materials in the presence of others, with a focus on balancing utility and social needs.

**Method** The program was formulated and applied with theoretical underpinnings from art therapy models such as the Open Studio approach<sup>2</sup>, cycle of layering<sup>3</sup> (Fig. 1) and the Practice Continuum<sup>4</sup> (Fig. 2), alongside literature referencing the international Men’s Shed movement<sup>5,6</sup>. Observations by colleagues on the ground reported the men lounging in the area for longer hours, and oftentimes having meals there after tidying up.

**Results** Inaugurated in 2019, *Men United* has since witnessed a range of self-directed creative expressions (Fig. 3) as well as social engagements which contributed to a better sense of purpose and self, and support from one another. Through it, members have reported to discover a sense of purpose through fundraising opportunities from their handicrafts, a sense of self through their own creations, and mutual support during the recent pandemic and/or when transitioning into inpatient hospice for terminal care.



**Fig. 1:** Cycle of Layering often sees an oscillation unfolding between stages 1, 2 & 3.



**Fig. 2:** The Practice Continuum is developed in a rehabilitation setting in Victoria, Australia. It is adapted as the primary model in the planning of art therapy services in Assisi Hospice, Singapore. Circled section is the area Men United identifies with on the continuum.



**Fig. 3:** (L to R), Model of a traditional Malay house, multi-use containers, sticky pad holder, air plant vase.



**Fig. 4:** Patients and staff working alongside each other with donated off-cuts originating from locally grown wood in addition to wooden pegs.

**Conclusion** The reported results indicate that *Men United* provides a safe environment to support the presenting social and subjective well-being of men with life-limiting conditions in the day care setting. Current progress includes collaboration with local furniture-object makers for a more authentic, creative and social experience (Fig. 4), and plans may extend the shed to the inpatient unit.

### References

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