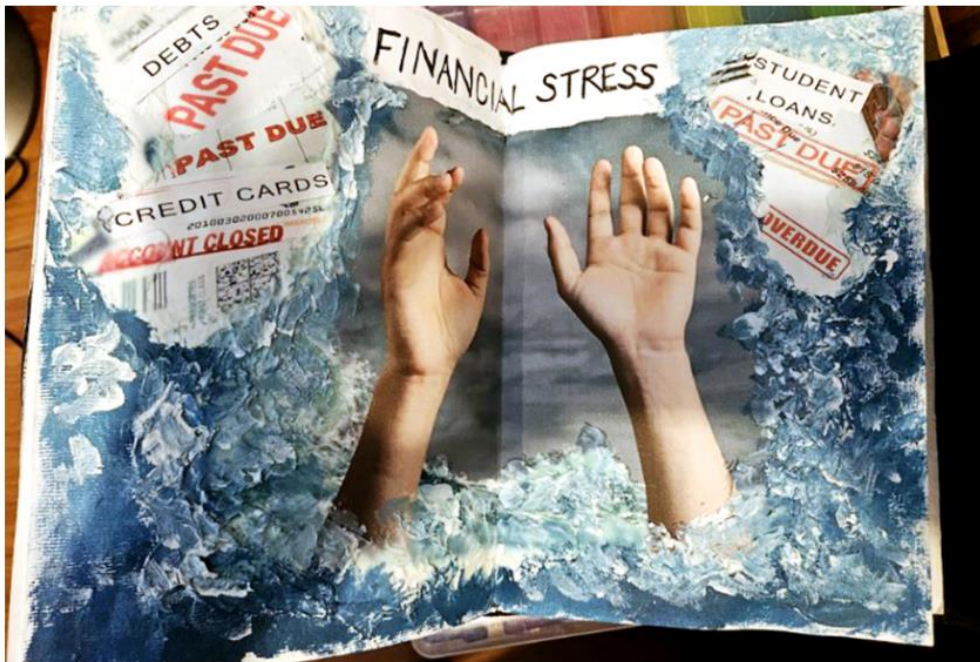


Tackling trauma through clinical art therapy

Connecticut Public Radio | By [Brandon Cortés](#)
Published November 7, 2024 at 12:23 PM EST



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Bevin Rainwater / Art And Soul Art Therapy

Art created by Bevin Rainwater during her time with Art and Soul Art Therapy.

The number of individuals experiencing mental health disorders in the U.S. has significantly increased since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, according to the [National Institute of Mental Health](#).

As a result, depression and anxiety are among the most common conditions people suffer. And many are turning to clinical art therapy for treatment, according to Connecticut clinical art therapist Briana Benn-Mirandi.

“Art provides a secondary outlet, and there will be a lot of stuff that comes out in the art making and the process that an art therapist can observe and engage in dialog with about the art that the client might not even be actually aware of, because it’s sort of like a back door,” Benn-Mirandi said.

Benn-Mirandi explains that art therapy can be used to treat a wide range of mental health conditions and has been practiced in the United States since the 1940s and got formal recognition after the American Art Therapy Association was founded in 1969.

It wasn't until 2019, however, that Connecticut established an official license for practicing clinical art therapy, becoming one of the first states in the country to do so.

Having an official license is beneficial since in the past, some individuals without formal training attempted to use art therapy to treat victims of traumatic events, such as the Sandy Hook school shooting, according to Benn-Mirandi.

"A lot of art therapists were like, 'No, no, no, no, no, they are gonna go away.' Why are you making all these kids and adults draw what happened that day? That can actually re-traumatize them," Benn-Mirandi said.

Benn-Mirandi is the owner of Art and Soul Art Therapy in Madison, and treats individuals with various mental health conditions.



CREDIT: Bevin Rainwater / Art And Soul Art Therapy

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At the clinic, Benn-Mirandi utilizes virtual reality treatment to help those suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) by rewriting traumatic memories and creating a safe space for them.

“In virtual reality, we actually can utilize and create these worlds. And in some cases, I've even had young clients bring in a favorite toy, and there are apps that allow us to scan the toy from different angles, and then bring a representation of the toy into their safe space,” Benn-Mirandi said.

Benn-Mirandi says that she is developing a concept called "Fireweeds" to help empower neurodivergent youth, including those with attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), autism and other conditions.

She's noticed that many of her young clients are navigating challenging preteen and teen years, and she hopes her treatment may help prevent the development of trauma, anxiety and depression.

Drawing on research about the trauma neurodivergent individuals face living in a neurotypical world, she explains that these challenges can have roots in intergenerational trauma.

The "Fireweeds" concept is inspired by a resilient plant that flourishes after a forest fire, symbolizing how neurodivergent individuals can thrive despite adversity.

Benn-Mirandi and her clients are rebranding neurodivergence as “Fireweeds” to move away from labels like “trauma brain,” which she says can feel stigmatizing.

“It's a very empowering exercise where they're getting a chance to help design the website, and they're getting a chance to help create YouTube videos,” Benn-Mirandi said.

“And then, with their parents' permission, we'll kind of begin to put some of those videos out so that they can speak openly about their lived experience and help other people that are in the same boat.”

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