

The LifeSpan Center provides mental health benefits of painting

Keeping your mind and body sharp is important throughout our entire lives, but it becomes even more important as you age. While staying physically fit is important for your health, finding a creative outlet keeps your mind strong while also expanding your horizons. Painting provides a fun, new hobby that sharpens your mind and delivers numerous health benefits. Here are six great benefits of painting that promote mental health and improve overall quality of life.

1. Painting Fosters Creative Growth

Many people put themselves in either the right-brain or left-brain boxes when they're younger, and then decide that is who they are for the rest of their lives. Painting comes easiest to artistic, right-brain people. But this doesn't necessarily mean left-brainers won't benefit from painting.

Taking up a hobby like painting isn't just for the cre-

ative types. The more analytical left-brainers can stimulate and nurture their creative growth by painting as well. Practice and focus, two skills inherent in left-brain individuals, allow these people to learn creative skills at their own pace.

2. Painting Strengthens Memory

Painting boosts memory recollection skills and works to sharpen the mind through conceptual visualization and implementation. People who frequently use creative outlets such as writing, painting, and drawing have less chance of developing memory loss illnesses as they age.

Painting also allows individuals a chance to express their feelings and emotions without words. It can be tough opening up sometimes, so painting is a great way to release inner thoughts. Individuals that paint use art to overcome shyness and convey their personality. Using artwork to tell a story lets someone who is shy let go of

normal social reservations.

3. Builds Problem-Solving and Motor Skills

A lot of people think that painting only improves creative skills, but many would be surprised to know that it promotes critical thinking, too. An artist must think conceptually to bring multiple solutions to life while painting. What the artist imagines when beginning a painting often changes drastically during the painting process, due to color limitations or unexpected outcomes that occur during artistic implementation. The artistic vision evolves during the painting process, building important problem-solving skills. Thinking outside the box becomes second nature to a painter.

Motor skills also improve when a person picks up painting as a hobby. Dexterously handling a paintbrush increases mobility in the hands and fingers. The fine motor skills that a painter develops eventually become

mental shortcuts that the brain implements in everyday life.

4. Painting Provides Stress Relief

Stress is a problem everyone deals with to some degree during all stages of life. High levels of stress and anxiety contribute to mental health issues. Painting and other artistic pursuits offer an emotional release or outlet for people that struggle with stress or are having a stressful moment in their lives. Focusing on painting allows a person's mind to relax and let go of all the problems and demands that may have led to stress.

When people create something beautiful through painting, they stimulate the creative mind while also relieving mental strain. Releasing anxiety in the form of painting helps a person unwind and let go of all the pressures that plague the mind. It's no surprise that low-stress levels lead to a happier, healthier lifestyle

and helps improve overall mental health.

5. Promotes an Optimistic Attitude

Did you know that creating beautiful work through painting encourages a more optimistic approach to life? A painter starts by setting goals to advance their painting skills and become a more experienced artist. When a person reaches the next skill level, their achievement inspires a positive emotional reaction. Over time, a painter's progress and skills deter negative emotions and provide pleasure and happiness for the individual. Painting boosts self-esteem and inspires people to reach new levels of skill.

Painting also produces a relaxing, open environment where artists feel safe to explore their own creativity. The reward of growing and expanding artistic skills creates a sense of accomplishment. Creating visually appealing artwork that others admire gives the painter a

sense of pride and happiness in the work.

6. Painting Nurtures Emotional Growth

Artists pour out their emotions through the process of painting. This practice encourages individuals to look at their own emotional state and take stock of emotions they may not even realize they have. Releasing emotions through artwork is a cathartic experience for many people, at all ages. In fact, many therapists suggest painting or drawing as a treatment for patients who have suffered psychologically painful encounters. Letting out emotions by painting promotes healing through abstract emotional expression.

Those who paint experience an increase in their emotional intelligence level. Allowing your emotions to come out in painting helps you understand your own emotional state and realize what contributes to your varying moods and stress levels.

Pritzker calls for \$15K loan program to assist record-high gas prices

Officials urge further federal relief for affected communities

By Grace Barbic
Capitol News Illinois

Gov. JB Pritzker announced a low-interest loan program Tuesday to help alleviate the unprecedented financial burden from soaring utility costs for certain Illinois municipalities and their residents.

The extreme weather that devastated Texas' electrical grid last week has resulted in skyrocketing natural gas prices in Illinois directly linked to frozen natural gas wells in Texas and Oklahoma.

"To put the severity of this crisis in perspective, the egregious level of natural gas prices would be similar to a gallon of gasoline rising from the current \$2.89 per gallon to \$289 per gallon," Heather Viele, General Manager of the Interstate Municipal Gas Agency said.

The energy pricing surges have specifically impacted central and southern Illinois communities, including Pawnee and Roodhouse, which rely on the Panhandle Pipeline for natural gas for everyday energy use.

This particular pipeline, which originates in Texas and Oklahoma, runs through



Kansas and Missouri across central Illinois to parts of Indiana, Ohio and Michigan.

The average cost of natural gas in the winter months is between \$2-\$3 per dekatherm, but impacted municipalities saw utility bills up to \$225 per dekatherm from Feb. 13 to Feb. 16 when Texas was facing extreme weather conditions, according to the governor's office.

At Pritzker's request, the Illinois Finance Authority has developed a low-interest \$15 million loan program for communities impacted by record-high utility costs. The money would go directly to the municipalities, but the specifics of interest rates and terms are set to be discussed Thursday in a special meet-

ing with the IFA board. Viele said she expects the interest rate to be low with a timeframe of a couple years for repayment.

Pritzker's Deputy Press Secretary Jose Sanchez Molina said an estimated 40 to 50 municipalities who have been affected by the pipeline will be included in the loan program.

The record-high utility bills come at a time when many are already strapped for money as a result of the ongoing pandemic.

Pawnee Mayor Jeff Clark said that neither the village of Pawnee nor the individual residents, a population of about 2,700 people, can afford to absorb the gas price increases.

"With the assistance from the state, Pawnee will be able to pay these gas bills to stay current with our suppliers and avoid penalties and late fees that could be assessed," Clark said. "We will be able to spread the pain to our residents over a longer period of time. And that is really huge."

Pritzker said that's the purpose of the loan program - to avoid an overwhelming financial burden in the hopes that further federal assistance will be on the way.

Rep. Sue Scherer, D-Decatur, said she thinks there also needs to be accountability for the Electric Reliability Council of Texas, which operates the independent grid for much of Texas.

"I am not so naive to believe that this loan is going to solve everybody's problems because the problem still exists," Scherer said. "The way I feel that we're going to solve the problem is to put a lot of pressure on the government, so that they put pressure on ERCOT (Electric Reliability Council of Texas) to correct this mistake."

Viele agreed that "while this desperately needed aid

is providing a lifeline to our small towns, there is still a lot more financial need that needs to be covered."

She said she is also looking to federal officials, including Illinois' U.S. Senators Dick Durbin and Tammy Duckworth, for additional emergency disaster relief.

Pritzker agreed, noting that the loan program only provides temporary relief and prolongs the bill payment.

"I join our senators Durbin and Duckworth and governors across the country in calling on the federal government to provide direct relief to these communities and the individuals there who

were most directly impacted," he said.

Pritzker said accountability could come from a recently launched federal investigation of the gas price spikes. U.S. Sen. Tina Smith, D-Minnesota, has called for such an investigation at the federal level.

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Upcoming vaccine clinic information from the Douglas County Health Department

Upcoming vaccine clinics information:

Please note the following changes in scheduled vaccine clinics for Douglas County residents for the upcoming weeks. Because of anticipated smaller dose allotments, only one clinic will be held per week, rather than two. There will be both a second-dose portion and a first-dose portion within each weekly clinic.

Wednesday, March 3 at Arcola Masonic Center (111 S. Locust):

1:30-3:30 p.m.—Second-dose clinic

3:30-5:30 p.m.—First-dose clinic (ages 65 and older)

The process to sign up for these clinics remains the same. Check the DCHD website (dchealthdept.org) for registration links on Friday afternoon at 4:30 p.m. If signing up for a second dose, be sure the date of clinic is on or after the date written on the back of your vaccine record card. Registration links will be clearly marked as first dose or second dose. There is also a video tutorial on the website showing how to successfully register for an appointment.

When you arrive for your appointment, please bring with you a printed copy of your appoint-

ment ticket with QR code (or have it on your smartphone), driver's license or other ID showing residence, filled out copy of pre-vaccination checklist and vaccine consent form. The last two forms can be found on the DCHD website by clicking the FORMS tab on the

right. We will also have those forms available at the clinic, but it will streamline your experience if you have them already completed. If you are getting a second dose, be sure to bring your vaccine record card with you to the appointment.

All vaccine recipients

should wear something that allows for easy access to your upper arm, which is where the vaccine is administered. There will also be a 15-minute observation period after you receive the vaccine.

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