



Painting with Tessa at our Art Therapy Session.

Off to a Strong Start in 2018

Hi, and welcome to Issue 14 of our newsletter. This is Mindstretch Preschool's fifth year serving our children, and we are committed to making it another winning one.

Thanks go to Tessa for the colourful **Community Art Therapy Session** we recently held with her assistance, and also for her article *Art Therapy Making a Difference*, featured overleaf.

Please mark your calendars for our next Community Lecture: Sat May 26, Pinelands Public Library, 9.00–11.30am. Mindstretch Consultant OTs Zoë and Faatima will discuss **Occupational Therapy for Sensory Integration** and **Controlling Screen Time**. Email colleen@mindstretch.co.za for more details and to register.

As we move towards autumn and colder days, it seems also a good time to review the **Power of the Natural Environment** for grounding our children, and us all. Even as the weather closes in — and I really hope for good rains countrywide! — let us still head outside whenever we can. On page 4 you can read more about the benefits of *Natural Enhancement*.

Finally, the photo below marks 2017's end and the successful transition of our many children to the next level of their learning. Compliments to all our Grade R Remedial and Enhancement scholars who achieved school placements of their choice. Our Team strives for the same level of success, and more, in 2018.

Onwards and upwards! And, I thank you for your support.

With gratitude, Jennifer

Mindstretch Founder and Preschool Principal

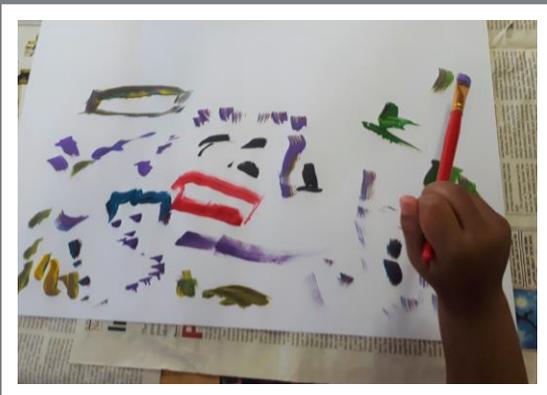


Chilling in nature at the recent Mindstretch Family Picnic.



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Artistic expressions from a few of my sessions.

Art Therapy Making a Difference

By Tessa Whyatt, MA Art Therapy

Art therapy is the use of art to help access difficult thoughts and feelings. A unique feature of the approach is its emphasis on communicating without need of the spoken word. My clients use various art materials and techniques in their personal exploration. **Our sessions focus on healing and reflection.**

Art Therapists work in many settings, with individuals, couples, siblings, families or groups. Art Therapy has proven benefit for helping children with learning challenges and/or other behavioural and emotional issues — and this is where I focus my article.

Art and play are natural forms of communication. Art making is also spontaneous, which helps make the therapy less threatening in the first place. It can transcend cultural and language barriers, thus broadening its use in our diverse, multilingual country.

Making art is therapeutic. It is innately calming. However, making art under the guidance of a qualified Art Therapist takes this to a higher level. An extraordinary relationship and understanding develops when a child shares the process of art making with a therapist, who then helps the child interpret its meaning in the context of their personal situation.

What Does an Art Therapy Session Look Like?

The length of a session depends on the age and characteristics of the child. Beginning with 30 minutes is typical. **Experimentation is key.** Using different materials and tools can help free a child from blocks that may be holding them back. It can get to the root cause by accessing the right hemisphere of the brain and the unconscious. **The goal of Art Therapy is the process of creating.** It is not the finished product.

During their journey, a child may make collages, draw pictures, paint, or experiment with clay. However, Art Therapy is not about teaching art itself. Rather, it focuses on helping the child express their feelings.

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In addition to diagnosis and healing, other life skills are incidentally improved through Art Therapy. Making art builds patience and resilience.

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Confidence and self-esteem improve. My young clients develop their independence and heighten their creativity. They find mindfulness and relaxation in the process of making art and this, in turn, delivers improved concentration.

The case studies below describe some of these benefits (names are changed to protect identity).

Building Independence: 'Justin', a mostly non-verbal child, had been misbehaving at school and with his family. During our sessions, he used the materials in a messy, playful way. It was clear that he was working through some messy feelings and needed an outlet for his frustrations. His mother reported that Art Therapy noticeably calmed him down. His confidence and independence improved as a result, and he became toilet trained for the first time at age four.

Improving Concentration: When I first started working with 'Candice' she was very restless and struggled to sit still and focus on one activity for more than a few minutes. Through art making, we increased her concentration timespan. Soon she was painting for up to 25 minutes at a time! This translated into improved concentration during her other activities, both at home and at school.

Growing Imagination and Communication: 'Peter', a high-functioning child on the autism spectrum, only drew trains; specifically, trains like Thomas the Tank Engine with a smiling face. During our sessions, I encouraged him to add carriages, details and background — to think about where the train was going, where it came from, and who and what was inside it. We stayed within his area of interest but used it to explore new areas of his imagination, and to talk about it. By the time of our final session, Peter's train included many interesting features, including an on-board sweet shop!

Tessa took Mindstretch scholars on an artistic journey at our recent Family Picnic:



Art Therapy with Tessa will be offered as an extramural through Mindstretch from Term 2.

In the meantime, you can find Tessa at www.tessa.co.za.

Natural Enhancement

The natural environment plays an important role in grounding us all. Studies show that people improve in memory tasks after walking through natural environments — or even after looking at pictures of nature. Other studies show that school students with a view of nature from their school rooms get better results.

We too have observed the importance of time outside, in our garden, at Mindstretch.

Our flexible drop-off time lets us start each day with outside play and exploration while we wait for all to arrive. Different children find different ways to ground themselves. Some head to our equipment, be it the bicycles or trampoline, as they seek proprioceptive input. Others turn to nature. Two boys always visit the sandpit. They like the sensation of sand filtering through their fingers. Other children choose quiet time among the flowers and foliage and branches of the trees. We see them explore the various shapes and textures and enjoy simple pleasures such as finding a pretty pine cone or an interesting piece of bark.

The obvious benefits have led us to seek other opportunities for being in nature, even outside of the usual playtime. This year, we designated a new area as *Open Space*. The older children receive some of their lessons here, and they eat their snacks in the garden when the weather allows. Meanwhile, our sensory seeking children use the area when they receive a 'skin brushing', or other proprioceptive therapy. Sometimes, during breaks, the children use the space to run and roll and be free in the fresh air.

Apex Soccer Club use the *Open Space* for the extramural soccer lessons that Mindstretch offers.

We occasionally garden together at Mindstretch. The children get to feel the soil and watch a plant grow. In autumn, they love the fallen leaves, helping to clear them or simply stomping in them, hearing the crunch.

Animals in nature have always played a prominent part in human life. Mindstretch scholars are taught to listen for the birds, and to treat even the smallest snails and beetles with respect. We take time to familiarise our children with animals such as dogs and ponies, when they visit our school under supervision.



We Welcome Your Feedback

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