
"At the deepest level, the creative process and the healing process arise from a single source. When you are an artist, you are a healer; a wordless trust of the same mystery is the foundation of your work and its integrity." - Rachel Naomi Remen, MD

Health Benefits in the Creative Process

by Robin McGrath

The importance of Inuit artists to the cultural life and the economy of this country is undisputed. But the Nunatsiavut Health and Social Development office in Happy Valley-Goose Bay sees health benefits in the creative process also. Sharon Edmunds is team leader of the group, whose overall mission is to improve the health and social status of Labrador Inuit through community-based programs and services, advocacy, and collaboration. To achieve this aim, Edmunds recruited two VANL members to run workshops in making greeting cards for two of the Nunatsiavut Health programs—the Women's Wellness Group and the Elder's Sewing Circle.

Mavis Penny and I have been holding regular card-making, painting and mini-print workshops as fundraisers for the Colin McNee Artist's Emergency Fund. Mavis is a long-time VANL member who taught throughout the province prior to returning to the studio. Participants, by hand-carving their own printing stamps, have created Inuit and Labrador cultural icons for their own workshops, which is one of the elements that drew Edmunds' attention to the process. It's fun, it's healthy, and "the activity supports the whole sense of cultural well-being," she explains.

Edmunds' team tries to target all age groups and offers "programs that support the physical, mental, social and spiritual well-being of our clients." This holistic approach to wellness emphasizes the importance of all aspects of health. The card-making workshop we conducted with the Women's Wellness Group was such a success that the team extended it to the Elders' Sewing Circle as a welcome change of activity.

It's a win-win situation. All funds raised from the workshops go directly to VANL to support artists in need, and workshop participants take home the greeting cards they have produced. Some of the participants are so pleased with the results that they insist that the "Handmade in Labrador" stamp go on the front of the card, not the back.

As for us, the workshop presenters, it's a chance to meet new and old friends, share skills, and see what other creative minds can do with the stamps and inks we use ourselves.



Workshop participants created and used iconic Labrador stamps of artifacts and animals to create unique handmade cards. Photo by Mavis Penney.



Inuit Elders are encouraged to be creative as a step towards better mental and physical health and happiness. Photo by Mavis Penney.