



2018 ABOUTFACE REPORT

Bringing Art to the Veteran Community

FY16-17 VETERANS INITIATIVE IN THE ARTS

CA Arts Council Grant – VIA-16-00004

Grant Period: 7-1-2017 to 6-30-2018

Grant Award

\$8,000 CA Arts Council

\$4,000 Contra Costa County

\$4,000 match

\$16,000 = Total

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ABOUTFACE Program

LaMar Anderson, AC5 Commissioner & Project Director

Nathan D. Johnson, County Veterans Service Officer

Chris Verdugo, Director of Office of Communications and Media

Brooke Converse, Public Information Officer, Contra Costa County Library

Ryan Berg, Workshop Coordinator & Community Outreach

Felisa Gaffney, PsyD. Workshop facilitator

Victoria Bianco, Artist, Instructor

Roger Renn, AC5 Managing Director, Arta & Culture Commission of Contra Costa County, 651 Pine Street, 10th Floor, Martinez, CA 94553 (925) 646-2278, STAFF@AC5.cccounty.us

The Grant:



The California Arts Council's Veterans Initiative in the Arts program is rooted in the desire to address the needs and improve the lives of California's veterans through quality arts programming that is sensitive and responsive to veterans' unique experiences. Contra Costa County is offering ABOUT FACE to

encourage arts learning and the artistic expression of veterans and to contribute to public understanding of, and appreciation for, the diverse range of veterans' experiences.

Community Description

The veteran community is wide spread throughout Contra Costa County. Veterans Services has offices in Martinez, San Pablo, Danville and Brentwood to serve over 49,000 veterans.

ABOUTFACE has reached out to groups such as the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, Concord Vet Center, the John F. Kennedy University VALOR Center, US Department of Veterans Affairs Northern CA Health Care System, Student Veterans Resource Center at Diablo Valley College, Returning Veterans of Diablo Valley, the Delta Veterans Group and Vietnam Veterans of Diablo Valley.

Goals:

ABOUTFACE offers visual art activities that motivate Veterans and their families to explore self-understanding. Our painting activities help Veterans to think creatively, be innovative and improve their quality of life. ABOUTFACE strategies include allowing for mistakes, acting on the positive, being non-judgmental and leaving room for growth. The workshops promote using creative process to enable veterans to identify self-understanding, try new solutions to express this understanding and validate those that are effective through self-portrait paintings. ABOUTFACE incorporates activities such as self-portraits that motivate veterans to explore self-understanding. These visual art activities help develop problem-solving veterans who are able to think creatively and be innovative. Veterans who participate in these ABOUTFACE workshops develop skills that allow them to communicate effectively and deal with ambiguity. The activities in this workshop create opportunities for Veterans to think visually and critique their work. The three critical issues addressed in this workshop are

- 1.) Developing visual abilities
- 2.) Incorporating metacognitive reflection
- 3.) Encouraging experimentation

ABOUTFACE: Self-understanding through Self-portraits – 2018

AC5 collaborated with the Veterans Service Department, the County Library and the Office of Communications and Media. The goal of this effort was to engage veterans in artistic endeavors

so Veterans could gain confidence and enhance their creativity. AC5 continued for a third year to offer ***ABOUTFACE: Self-understanding through Self-portraits***. The program was offered six times throughout the county. Each two-day workshops taught Veterans how to paint their portraits on an 18' x 24" canvas. Each day offered a three-hour session. An experienced teaching artist working with a Veteran facilitator presented workshops throughout the county at Veteran facilities and other public spaces. Workshops addressed the goal of encouraging veterans to express themselves by painting self-portraits. Each participant learned painting technics allowing them to express their feelings.

Our team recognizes the importance of choice and engagement as key to positive outcomes. Our Veteran facilitator used an approach that encouraged expression in non-verbal, non-threatening ways which helped the painters understand their issues. Their paintings allowed for a depiction of what they are really struggling with in ways that are not just visual but truly visceral.

Our teaching team consisted of a workshop coordinator, Ryan Berg, a facilitator, Felisa Gaffney, PsyD. (both are Veterans) and Victoria Bianco, an artist. The primary role of Dr. Gaffney was to engage the participating Veterans in meaningful self-reflection. Ms. Bianco has experience working with the Veteran population as well as a solid foundation of drawing concepts and visual composition. She provided instruction in painting to document life experiences for enjoyment, relaxation and inspiration.



Later, Veterans will be offered the opportunity to have their self-portrait become part of a gallery exhibit that will be displayed on a traveling basis in several locations in the County. Contra Costa County Veterans Services, the County Office of Communication and Media, the County Library and the Arts and Culture Commission are all County entities committed to maintaining a strong, ongoing work relation to support a successful VIA project for County veterans.

AC5 was the lead partner, responsible for coordinating all activities and working with the local

artist. The County Veterans Service Department, Office of Communications and Media and Contra Costa County Library were all responsible for talking with veterans about the project and identifying locations to distribute project information, identifying potential participants and communicating with the Veterans community. Ryan Berg, Marine Corp Veteran worked with all parties to ensure good community outreach. The expected impact on the participant will be the discovery by Veterans of a new way of expression, allowing them an artistic outlet for their feelings.

By the Numbers:

2018 ABOUTFACE Participants in the six workshops were from across the county and represented a cross section of military service and age groups. ABOUTFACE was successful if measured by the satisfaction of the veterans who participated.

Registration data indicated an increase in female Veteran participation. We also allowed family members to participate this year, drawing several Veterans and their children into the workshop. Participants represented a cross section of services. The years of service spanned from 1963 to 2016.

Responses included:

“I had a good time doing something new and different and meeting new people. Learning new stuff is such a good feeling. ”

“Most Veterans are critical about professionalism. I think the artist was great but having Dr. G. made it better!”

“This was an eye-opening experience for me. It brought forth the hidden emotions that I apparently have been denying. It was uncomfortable but needed. The facilitators were most helpful during this period because I was fighting the urge to leave and not deal with what I was experiencing. The facilitators talked me through these troubling feelings and I was able to complete the process.”

100% of workshop participants:

- ❖ **Would recommend ABOUTFACE to another Veteran**
- ❖ Said ABOUTFACE brought them together with other Veterans in a good way
- ❖ Responded that they had a better understanding of themselves
- ❖ **Intend to continue painting**

Participants responded 82% that they strongly agreed and 18% that they agreed:

- ❖ **ABOUTFACE gave them the chance to explore their creativity**
- ❖ ABOUTFACE allowed them to relax and enjoy this time for themselves
- ❖ ABOUTFACE taught them techniques to help them paint

Over half responded that they are looking forward to exhibiting their self-portrait for the public to see and understand.

IMPACT:

ABOUTFACE has been successful because of our careful integration of art participation and self-reflection that is sensitive and responsive to Veterans' unique experiences. The workshops were designed to develop visual abilities and let Veterans reflect on what they are doing.

No other arts engagement program like ABOUTFACE exists solely for veterans in Contra Costa County. We feel the program develops the artistic abilities and creative expression of Veterans and provides greater access to the Arts for Veteran communities.

Community support for ABOUTFACE is notable. Participation has increased since linking up with Adult Services provided by Contra Costa County Libraries. Since veterans and their families often use the library, this has proven to be a good avenue for both advertising and conducting the workshops.

Support from the community is demonstrated by the willingness of local merchants to give financial support. Home Depot Stores have donated over \$300 in supplies used to bring the program to a wider range of locations and giving us better outreach to our widely geographically distributed veterans. Community involvement included help from many Veterans Post and Chapters. Their involvement was key to getting full participation from the Veteran groups and individual Veterans within our County.

ABOUTFACE's success will be seeing Veterans' unique stories conveyed to others throughout the County through their painted canvas. Our program is rooted in the desire to improve the lives of Veterans through quality arts programming that is sensitive to Veterans' unique

experiences. ABOUTFACE encourages arts learning and the artistic expression of veterans and contributes to public appreciation for the diverse range of Veterans' experiences.



ABOUTFACE is designed to help Contra Costa Veterans deal with challenges they encounter as they make their transition back into civilian society. Our focus is to give veterans space for mindfulness, social engagement and participation in a leisure activity. Our program provides an artistic outlet that supports our Veterans' self-directed participation in painting, develops their artistic expressions and enhances their creativity.



We continue to offer ABOUTFACE because of the gratitude expressed to us from Veterans who participate in the workshops. It is hard to predict ahead of time the emotional release many Veterans experience upon finishing their self-portraits. These men and women are profoundly changed. We see that individuals have the capacity to heal themselves and improve their ability to function. We see that a mentoring relationship approach with Veterans effectively engages them in the process of painting and encourage artistic expression.

We are confident that this program, rooted in the desire to improve the lives of veterans, does allow them to reduce stress, think positively and increase self-esteem.

