



New Jersey Performing Arts Center Arts & Well-Being

Process Evaluation Report



Elevate



AHRL
ARTS IN HEALTH
RESEARCH LAB



The Arts & Well-Being initiatives at the New Jersey Performing Arts Center (NJPAC) launched in the fall of 2023. Partnering with established local health and social care organizations and employing a variety of art forms, the programs aimed to improve health and well-being through arts engagement and creative expression.

To assess the effectiveness of these new processes and programs, NJPAC Arts & Well-Being leveraged its partnership with the Arts in Health Research Lab, bringing in Christina D. Eskridge from Elevate Theatre Company to co-lead the project with Lab Manager Peichi Waite. Together, they reviewed program documentation, surveys and interviews with participants, partners, artists and staff. Program memorandums of understanding (MOUs), timelines, partner agreements and program data and observations were also considered and incorporated. The team identified key findings, successes and areas for growth across implementation and administration of five distinct programs (fall 2023 – fall 2024).

The evaluation team conducted 23 interviews and analyzed nearly 300 feedback surveys. This report summarizes both the qualitative and quantitative findings, including direct quotes from program participants and facilitators and key data from pre- and post-program surveys.

This report includes:



Key Findings

What we learned about program reach, engagement and impact.



Key Successes

What worked well for each program.



Recommendations

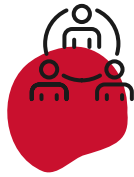
What we learned that could improve programs or expand them in the future.

Christina D. Eskridge

Peichi Waite

NJPAC Arts & Well-Being develops initiatives and programs that amplify the health benefits of the arts and measure the impact of the Arts Center on community health and well-being.

Through five distinct and comprehensive initiatives, NJPAC has established itself as a national leader in integrating the arts with well-being — reimagining the role of a performing arts center as a driver of community health:



Arts in Health Research Lab

Measuring impact through a partnership with Rutgers School of Public Health and Mason Gross School of the Arts.



Arts in Healthcare

Enhancing patient care and staff well-being through the arts at Newark Beth Israel Medical Center.



ArtsRx

Increasing access to the arts through free referrals by health and social care partners to local arts programs.



Health Promotion

Addressing key health issues through events and programs with community health partners.



Training + Education

Ensuring safe and effective practice through accessible and affordable workforce development.

What is a Process Evaluation?

A process evaluation looks at how well a program is carried out. It helps us answer questions such as:

- Did we follow the plan?
- Did activities happen the way we expected?
- Were people attending and engaged?

Instead of focusing on the final results (like changes in health or behavior), a process evaluation focuses on the steps taken to implement the program. It tracks:

- How many people showed up
- Whether we followed the planned schedule and materials
- How satisfied participants were
- What staff noticed about how the program was going

We start planning the process evaluation before the program begins, and we keep collecting information while the program is happening. This helps us see how the program is working in real time.

Why We Undertook a Process Evaluation:

We chose to do a process evaluation to make sure we were delivering the new Arts & Well-Being programs as planned and to identify ways to make them better — both now and in the future. This helps us:

- Track what's working well
- Spot challenges early
- Make adjustments while the program is still running
- Learn what participants and staff think about the experience

Doing a process evaluation also helps us communicate clearly with our funders and stakeholders. It shows we're being thoughtful, organized and accountable. And it gives us important context when we later look at the outcomes of the program. Ultimately, this process helps us deliver stronger programs — and increased impact in our community.

The Arts & Well-Being team was commended as being **highly effective organizers and communicators** by partners, facilitators and participants.

The Arts & Well-Being team created streamlined and **standardized operational procedures**, which were followed by program implementors.

Elements of Success:

These are key findings across all programs that led to partners, facilitators and participants expressing **deep gratitude** for the opportunity to attend and participant in Arts & Well-Being programs.

The Arts & Well-Being team built clear relationships and **trust** with each partner.

The Arts & Well-Being team thoughtfully **provided amenities** including food, transportation, marketing support and other assets when possible.

Contents

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Lullaby Project

Launched in the spring of 2024, this program pairs an NJPAC teaching artist with new and expecting parents to compose personalized lullabies for their new babies over a series of songwriting workshops. Families perform these lullabies in an annual Celebratory Concert.

12-15

Ritual4Return

Launched in the fall of 2023, this 12-week theater and storytelling program works with formerly incarcerated individuals to devise a rite of passage performance welcoming them back to community.

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Rutgers University-Newark: Student Mental Health Workshops

Launched in the fall of 2023, this workshop series uses arts engagement to support mental health, empathy and connection for college students.

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ArtsRx

Launched in the fall of 2023, this arts-on-prescription program enables health and social care providers to refer participants to six free arts activities over a period of six months to improve health and well-being.

22-23

Music in the Lobby

Launched in the fall of 2023, this twice-monthly concert series features local musicians in public spaces at Newark Beth Israel Medical Center.

Lullaby Project

This program began in the spring of 2024. New parents and families receiving services from the Partnership for Maternal and Child Health of Northern New Jersey were offered six weeks of virtual songwriting sessions led by an NJPAC teaching artist. The pilot period culminated with an in-person concert of original songs performed by the participants in front of their friends and families.

Program Goals: support maternal health, aid in childhood development and strengthen the bonds between parent/caregivers and children

Program Period Evaluated: January – July 2024

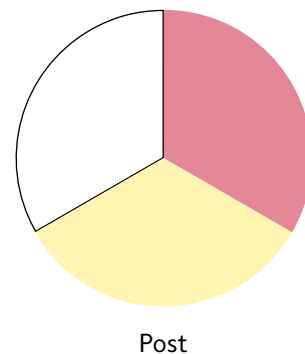
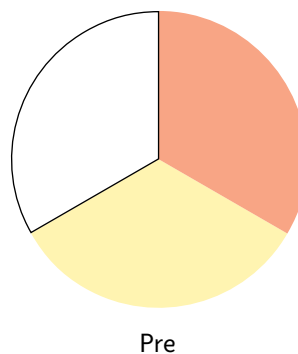
Program Participants: three families (five parents, three children), one NJPAC teaching artist, three local musicians, 63 concert attendees



Key Findings:

- Survey data showed that participants were interested in this program because they wanted to meet and connect with others and to learn about the tools and resources available to them.
- After participating in the *Lullaby Project*, participants reported more frequent arts engagement.

I feel that I have access to community or social support.

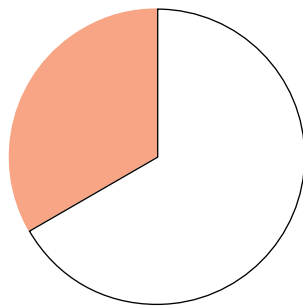




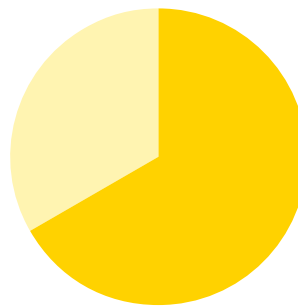
Key Successes:

In the last month, how often have you participated in or attended an arts program or activity?

- Never
- Once a Month
- Once a Week
- A Few Times a Week
- Daily



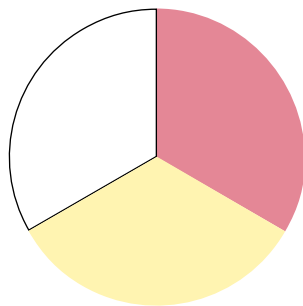
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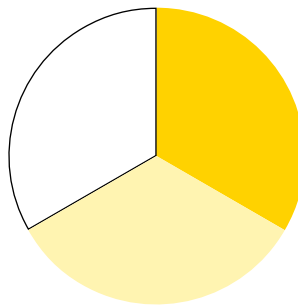
Post

I feel that I have access to local health resources.

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Slightly Agree
- Neutral
- Slightly Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree



Pre



Post



“We’ve been singing the song with her daily, and it’s something that we use as a keepsake ... it grounds us.”

A photograph of a woman with braided hair and a large earring holding a baby in a white onesie. A young girl in an orange button-down shirt stands next to her, looking towards the camera. The background is dark and out of focus, suggesting an indoor setting with other people.

Key Successes:

“I was not connecting with my baby at first. Having a lullaby that I could sing to her really calmed her at night and created a new bonding ritual between us ... she loves music.”

“I had a wonderful time throughout this process ... I’d definitely recommend this program to expecting and new moms ... very expressive and stress free.”



Recommendations:

Leverage Parent Testimonials for Clearer Marketing

- Participants expressed uncertainty in the program’s target audience, mission and the time commitment required. Leveraging program alumni to discuss their experiences could add clarity.

Offer More Flexible Scheduling & In-Person Meet-ups

- Offering virtual songwriting sessions on weekends and a mix of in-person and virtual gatherings could make the program more accessible to working parents — some participants wanted more opportunities to socialize with other parents.

Welcome All Family Members into the Program

- “I wish I had other dads I could relate with ... [my wife] made good friendships with the other moms, and there were no dads to make friends with.”

Provide Additional Teaching Artist Support

- Provide teaching artists with postpartum mental health training, as well as additional supports to continue promoting cultural awareness and humility.
- Provide teaching artist with opportunities for training others and increasing capacity.
- Clearly delineate the role of the teaching artist and the program managers within the program.
- Invite additional band members to join some of the songwriting sessions to help develop the lullabies.



Ritual4Return

Through this 12-week theater and storytelling program for formerly incarcerated individuals, participants explore their experiences of entering, getting through and out of prison and returning to their communities.

Program Goals: help returning citizens overcome the shame and stigma of incarceration

Program Period Evaluated: September 2023 – May 2024

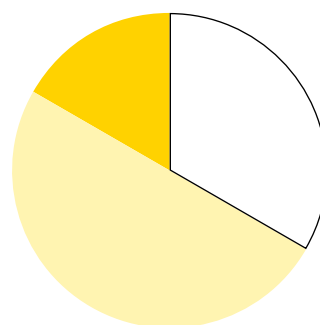
Program Participants: 15 returning citizens (eight in the fall of 2023, seven in the spring of 2024) and 150 community members at two rite of passage workshops and performances



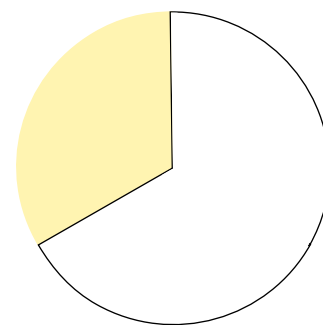
Key Findings:

My social relationships are supportive and rewarding.

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Slightly Agree
- Neutral
- Slightly Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

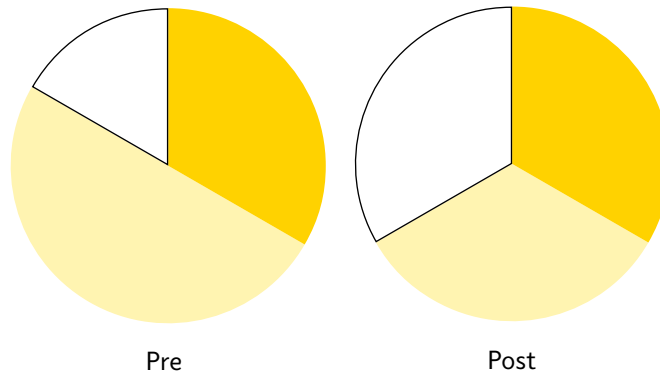


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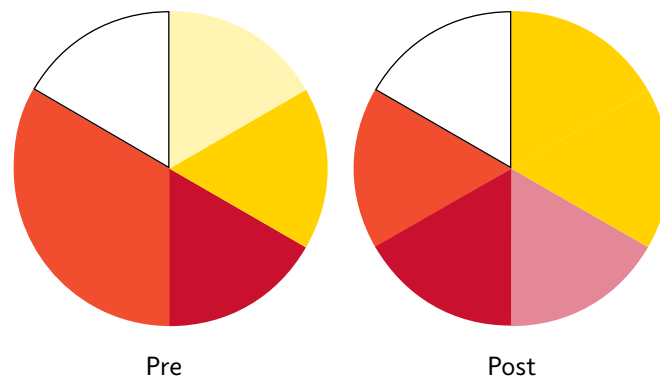


Post

I have the tools to cope with the trauma that I’ve experienced.



I often have feelings of being stigmatized by others.

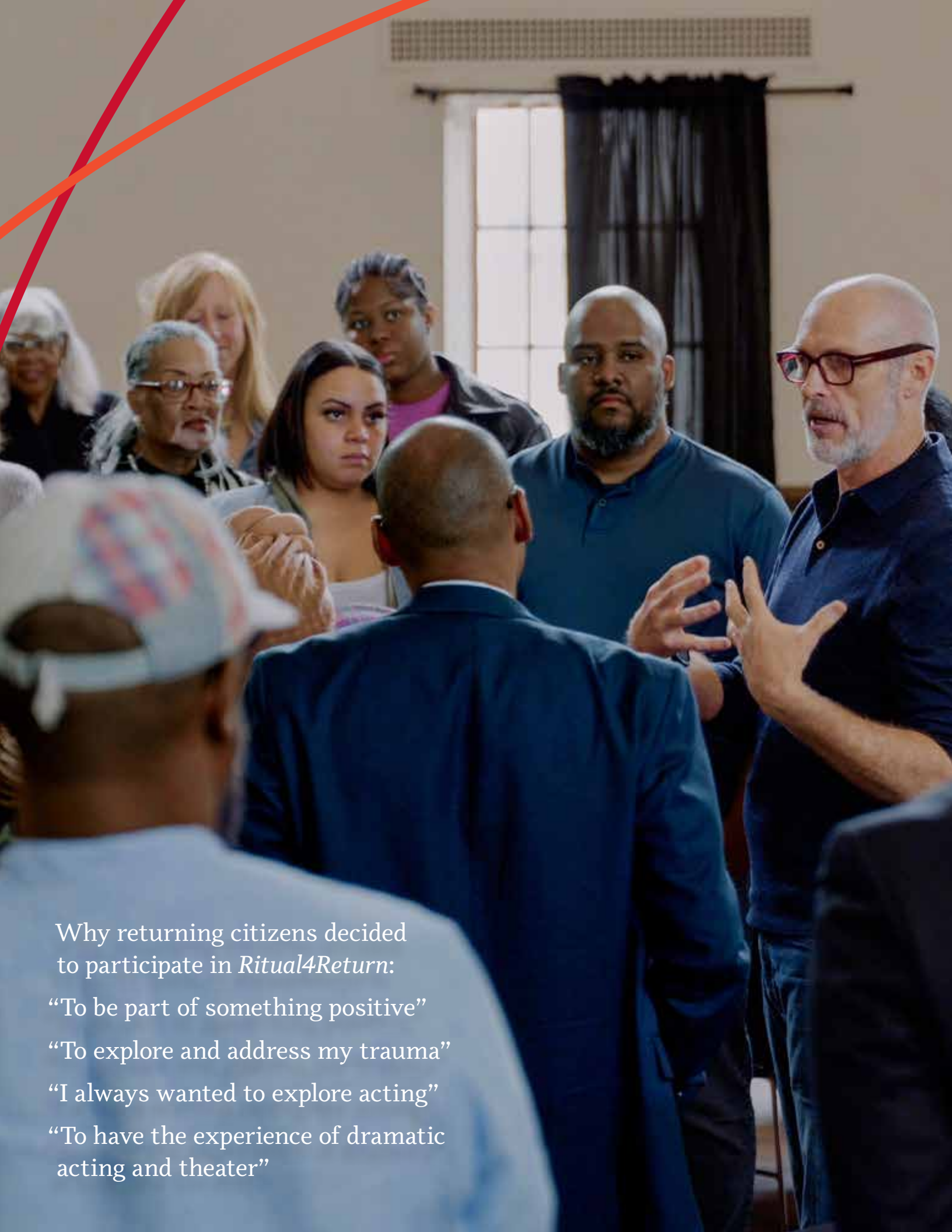


*Data only reflects fall 2023 male cohort. Spring 2024 female cohort lacked enough analyzable data.



Key Successes:

- All participants sought to explore their emotions and experiences before the program, and after the program, all participants felt this aim was achieved.
- The program helps formerly incarcerated persons heal: “I describe the program as therapeutic theater. It’s definitely a program of the arts that allows you artistic expression about sharing your story with the judicial systems and trauma.”
- The program helps returning citizens reconnect to society: “Once you get that stigma and that label ‘convict,’ ‘inmate’ it’s hard to shed that ... And society looks at you as less than. This ritual ... makes for those that don’t feel like, that you’re more than, not less than. So I love it.”



Why returning citizens decided to participate in *Ritual4Return*:

“To be part of something positive”

“To explore and address my trauma”

“I always wanted to explore acting”

“To have the experience of dramatic acting and theater”



Recommendations:

Examine Data Collection Methods

- Consider recording oral or video testimonials for more authentic and detailed expression. It could increase participants' willingness to report, as opposed to repetitive written surveys.

Assess & Promote Longterm Impact

- Consider implementing three- and six- month check-ins after program completion to understand if the power of the ritual is sustained for participants and their families.
- Foster intentional post-program bonding through group chats and alumni events.

Explore Opportunities for New Partnerships

- Cultivate additional funding partners.
- Advise on efficient and effective ways to keep the momentum going when participant absences/drop-offs occur.
- Assist in creating a more structured volunteer training and expansion plan that volunteer leaders can undergo, then use to train others.

Improve Documentation

- A videography team could record the entire *Ritual4Return* process and create a documentary film to use for awareness and fundraising.
- To capture testimonials, a video booth could be set up to capture authentic, candid moments during rehearsals and after the final rite of passage performance.

Rutgers University– Newark: Student Mental Health Workshops

A series of arts-based workshops designed to increase student access to the mental health benefits of arts engagements.

Program Goals: reduce stress, build coping skills for student mental health

Program Period Evaluated: September 2023 – June 2024

Program Participants: approximately 100 students and six NJPAC teaching artists



Key Findings:

**Average Enrollment
Process Rating:**

8.64/10
(n=128)

**Average Program
Satisfaction Rating:**

9.54/10
(n=102)



Key Successes:

Workshops Offered Opportunities for Social Connection and Health Promotion

- “It was nice for [the students] to just take the time to breathe and not feel the pressures they usually feel. They found it to be a place where they could be mindful in a fun and creative way. I feel like being able to provide that space was valuable. We had students from the master’s program, our law school, undergraduates and health promotion students. It was a diverse group ... who were able to connect with each other, even though they didn’t know each other before.”
- “I am not a big fan of poetry but through this screening, I learned more about the process and art form. I have learned to appreciate it and I am now more open to reading/hearing poetry work.”

- “I don’t really paint/color other than with my sisters but tonight I had the opportunity to do so in this event. I feel like I was able to share my artwork in this space because of the welcoming atmosphere and I enjoyed it all very much!”
- “I truly had a positive experience attending this event as it inspired me to explore more ways to better connect with the arts ... as well as having the opportunity to learn more about the artist of tonight’s focus.”



Recommendations:

Improve Visibility

- Identify more events that students can walk to easily from campus, or bring more of the programming to their doorstep.
- Provide translations or captions for international students and those with disabilities.
- Hold activities during times convenient for different types of students (e.g., commuters who may want daytime/weekend programs, students who are parents who may want late afternoon/early evening/weekend programs, etc.)

Increase Student Engagement

- Connect students with engaging highlights/recaps of events as reminders of what happened.
- Encourage students to do other activities offered by NJPAC through an NJPAC Arts & Well-Being team Instagram account and/or flyers posted on campus.
- Provide students with friendly reminders for upcoming programs and events.
- Create a more accessible and accommodating environment (e.g., turning on subtitles for films, including vegetarian and vegan options for food).
- Offer a greater variety of art projects, with more materials and mediums to work with and more time in each session.
- Increase advertising around RU-N campus.

ArtsRx

This program increases access to the arts — supporting holistic health and well-being of the greater Newark community through partnerships with Horizon Blue Cross Blue Shield of New Jersey (Horizon) and Rutgers University–Newark (RU-N).

Program Goals: increase access to the health benefits of arts engagement

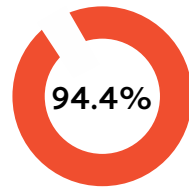
Program Period Evaluated: October 2023 – September 2024

Program Participants: 128 participants, two referral partners, nine arts organization partners



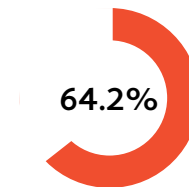
Key Findings:

Average Attendance for Receptive Activity Events:



128 Booked in Total

Average Attendance for Participatory Activity Events:

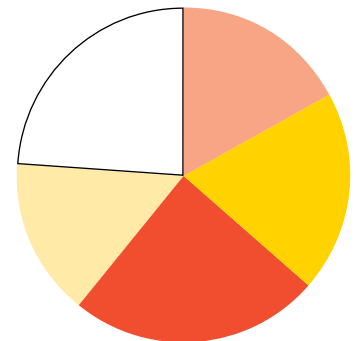


123 Booked in Total

Attendance by Modality:

Attendance across all modalities was nearly even, with theater and performance arts events being the most attended, and dance and movement events being the least.

- Theater & Performance Arts (23.8%)
- Crafts (15.2%)
- Music (19.5%)
- Dance & Movement (17.1%)
- Visual Arts (24.4%)



*Attendance rates of each individual event within each modality was not available. Data shown represents average attendance rate across all events booked within each modality.



Key Successes:

Participant Feedback

- “It keeps you proactive and gives you peace, honestly. So, I think it’s a good thing, and it definitely helps with our mental health.”
- “I got to explore new hobbies I wouldn’t have otherwise. I attended my first stand-up comedy show, worked with glass art twice and visited Prudential Hall at NJPAC. Those small moments of joy made it worth it for me.”

Arts Partner Feedback

- “Our mission is to provide greater access to the Newark residents, in general. [ArtsRx] helps us facilitate our mission by engaging participants that we may normally not have exposure to.”
— Michelle Knox, GlassRoots Program Director



Recommendations:

General Feedback

- Enhance arts partners’ understanding of ArtsRx, including its mission, goals and implementation initiative.
- Collect accessibility statements from arts partners so participants understand available accessibility support (e.g., transit, ADA, translation services, etc).
- Create more administrative support for arts partners, and provide mental health training for staff and referral partners.
- Enhance and standardize data collection processes, including a schedule of quantitative and qualitative assessments and tools to compare program effectiveness across arts organizations.





Recommendations (cont.):

Horizon Feedback

- Develop clear data-sharing agreements that allow for data exchange between Horizon and NJPAC for comprehensive evaluation (e.g., feedback and surveys from participants and program facilitators can be used by NJPAC to improve ArtsRx).
- Implement a system to monitor attendance and engagement levels among members, analyzing trends over time to identify factors that contribute to or hinder participation.

RU-N Feedback

- Collect specific feedback on the variety and quality of the activities, such as whether participants found the activities meaningful, fun or therapeutic.
- Compare satisfaction between NJPAC-offered activities and those from Rutgers' Health Promotion Division to understand what external partners bring to the table.
- Gather data on logistical issues, like transportation and event timing, to identify barriers that may prevent participation.
- Develop a blog on the program's website to share participant stories, upcoming events and resources. Use social media strategically to reach different demographics, showcasing testimonials and success stories to attract new participants.



Music in the Lobby

Twice-a-month musical performances in public spaces at Newark Beth Israel Medical Center.

Program Goals: enhance the healthcare environment for patients, visitors and staff

Program Period Evaluated: October 2023 – November 2024

Program Participants: approximately 4291 observers and 15 local musicians

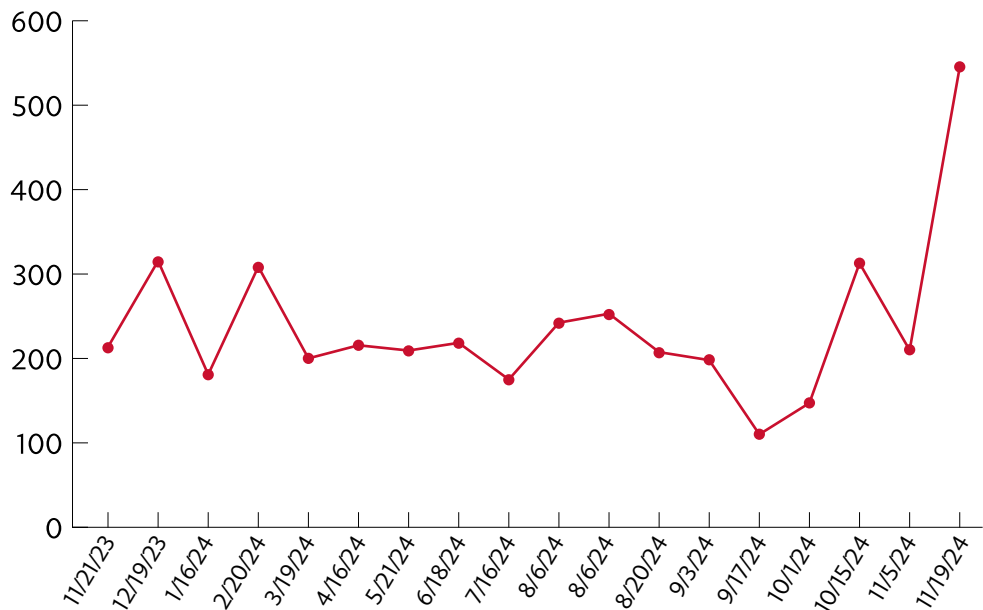


Key Successes:

- “This program creates a healing environment by bringing moments of peace and calm to our patients, staff and visitors.” — Kim Cook, Program Partner, Newark Beth Israel Medical Center
- “I never expected to experience something so beautiful while being here. It was a wonderful surprise.” — Patient

19 events over the span of one year (11/21/2023 – 11/19/2024)

Estimated reach: 4291





Recommendations:

- Establish clear goals with partners and share widely with program administrators.
- Periodically reassess timing of the Music in the Lobby session to ensure maximum impact (e.g., Would lunch time reach more people?).
- Discuss with the hospital team the ideal target audience and tailor the approach accordingly.
- Share the artist schedule with the hospital team one month in advance to ensure no special arrangements are needed for hospital-specific events or cultural celebrations.
- Create additional advertisements for employees to know when Music in the Lobby sessions are taking place.
- Have NJPAC volunteers or production assistants set up tables and chairs to alleviate the burden on hospital staff.
- Develop a strategy for delivering music sessions to patient care units.
- Develop a clear definition of “observers.” Are these individuals simply passers-by or someone stopping, engaging and having an experience?





Overall Recommendations:

- Create and regularly update an annual Arts & Well-Being programmatic calendar.
- Specify the main goals of each program to all partners for long-term impact.
- Create video/s that feature NJPAC Arts & Well-Being programs to increase visibility of the value of arts for health and well-being.
- Increase opportunities for NJPAC Arts & Well-Being partner organizations to meet and network with each other.
- Establish regular, consistent evaluation processes to be implemented for each program.
- Clearly define the “why” — what is NJPAC’s connection with each program’s target population and how does NJPAC uniquely benefit them.
- Formalize more internship opportunities (e.g., with RU-N) to increase capacity for overall Arts & Well-Being program administration.
- Provide each program with standard onboarding and exit procedures and share the processes with partners in advance.

Conclusion




Best Practices for the Future:

This process evaluation underscores the critical importance of ongoing, structured formal and informal check-ins throughout program implementation.

These check-ins help assess the status of each project in real time, allowing for timely adjustments that enhance operational efficiency and improve participants' experiences. Additionally, our findings affirm that storytelling and artwork created by program participants serve as valuable qualitative data, capturing insights that traditional surveys alone cannot. Collectively, this data provides compelling evidence of participants' evolving well-being and empowerment, offering a nuanced perspective on their engagement over time. Videos and photographs taken at events by participants, instructors and program staff may also be collected to provide the Arts & Well-Being team with insights into program effectiveness and highlight what individuals found meaningful. Furthermore, this data can be leveraged to demonstrate program impact in outcome evaluations.

To maximize these benefits, arts organizations should allocate the resources necessary for comprehensive process and outcome evaluations, which have the potential to strengthen program effectiveness, secure funding and generate ideas for future research.



A photograph of a woman and a man dancing joyfully at an outdoor event. The woman, on the left, has curly hair and is wearing a purple floral halter top, smiling broadly with her arms raised. The man, on the right, is wearing a black t-shirt, a light-colored straw hat, and multiple necklaces and bracelets. He is also smiling and has his arms raised, mirroring the woman's pose. The background is a blurred crowd of people, suggesting a large public gathering. The image is framed by a red diagonal line in the top-left corner and an orange and yellow diagonal line in the bottom-right corner.

The Arts & Well-Being initiatives at NJPAC not only foster accessibility to the arts, but redefine how communities heal, connect and thrive through creative expression. By centering lived experiences and intersecting collaborative partnerships, these programs demonstrate the transformative power of the arts in advancing well-being, equity and belonging throughout New Jersey and beyond.

On behalf of NJPAC Arts & Well-Being, I would like to thank all of the program participants, facilitators and partners whose stories and feedback helped shape this report.

I would also like to thank the Arts in Health Research Lab, the Lab Manager Dr. Peichi Waite, Elevate Theatre Company and Christina D. Eskridge for their thoughtful leadership in stewarding this Process Evaluation. I also want to extend my gratitude to our staff: Program Manager Krystle Shakespeare, ArtsRx Coordinator Erisdania Martinez and Coordinator Marissa Finklestein, who keep all of our programs running smoothly. Arts & Well-Being at NJPAC is made possible through foundational support from RWJBarnabas Health, Horizon Blue Cross Blue Shield of New Jersey, and Women@NJPAC, with additional support provided by Merck Foundation, National Endowment for the Arts, Gilead Sciences, Celia Lipton Farris and Victor W. Farris Foundation Home Community Fund, M&T Bank, JPMorgan Chase, S. Dillard & Adrienne Kirby Family Philanthropic Fund, DoorDash and Lyft.

Sincerely,



Aly Maier Lokuta

Assistant Vice President
Arts & Well-Being
New Jersey Performing Arts Center

The logo for Elevate, featuring the word "Elevate" in a black, cursive script font with a purple underline.The logo for AHRL (Arts in Health Research Lab), featuring a stylized red and yellow circular graphic to the left of the text "AHRL" in a bold, black, sans-serif font, with "ARTS IN HEALTH RESEARCH LAB" in a smaller, black, sans-serif font below it.

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