



## Introducing the IEATA October 2022 Member Spotlight:

# Miriam Duff



### Biography

Expressive Arts has been a part of my life since early childhood when my favorite place to play was the sandbox in Hearst, Ontario - Treaty 9 Territory, where I was born. When I was a young child, after a short stint in Toronto, we moved to Winnipeg, Manitoba, Treaty 1 Territory: the original lands of the Anishinaabe, Cree, Oji-Cree, Dakota and Dene peoples and the homeland of the Red River Métis. Engaging in creative pursuits, including art making, crafting, dancing, drama, singing and playing in music groups and choirs, was supported and encouraged by my parents as I grew up.

The arts were intrinsic to my first career, as a certified child life specialist (CCLS), serving children and families in healthcare settings over 25 years. I had the opportunity to engage in all kinds of creative play, and to collaborate with a clown therapist, music therapist, and librarian. When I met my first art therapist I felt a huge pull, however, it would be 30 years before I could formally start training.

Complementary to this path was my life raising a family with my husband, and developing an arts-practice, creating with glass. I also attained my Master's degree in Guidance and Counselling, and the designation, Canadian Certified Counsellor. I began work at CancerCare Manitoba as a clinical counsellor, and was offered the opportunity to run an arts-based counselling group for people living with cancer.

Finally, I could focus on professional training, and was fortunate to attend WHEAT Institute in my own city. The training and skills I gained have deeply enriched my work providing individual and group therapy. Now I am also engaged in research with a team in the College of Nursing at the University of Manitoba, and Trinity Western University School of Nursing, and an art exhibit has been created as part of our work, sharing the work of research participants.

To view the Online Art Exhibit: "I am Still Here" and invitation to participate in the knowledge translation study, please visit:  
<https://create.twu.ca/iamstillhere/#Home>

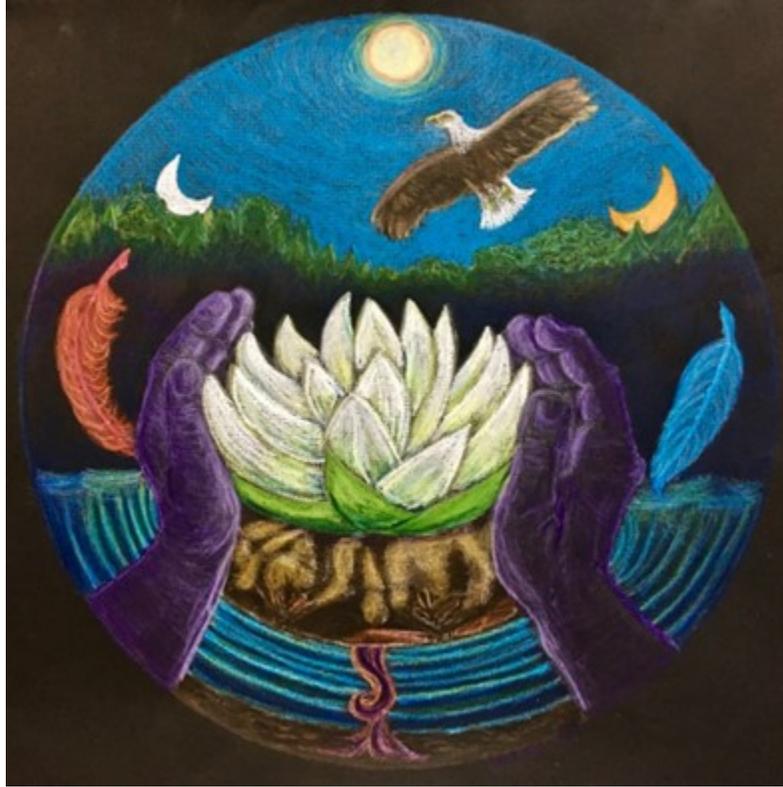
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## What drew you to the field of Expressive Arts?

I felt the call to Expressive Arts through a series of personal encounters, while undertaking training, beginning with Kate Donohue, Darci Adam and Kathleen Horne. Imagery arose that continues to ripple through my experiences. I came to respect and appreciate its power for revealing wisdom and understanding through engaging with my imagination for creative exploration and discovery. While potent, I appreciate its relational and gentle nature. I find that engaging in a mindful way, the expressive arts seems to open a direct and personal channel to connect with a larger consciousness. For me this is a very authentic and sacred path.

To give an example, during my first Expressive Arts Studio course with Kathleen Horne, in 2017, at the closing of the course I had a moving experience with the hand-drum when I played it in response to the mandala I had created. When I struck the drum I felt the vibrations move through the drum, into and down through my body into the earth, and then rise back up again. From this experience I understood that the drum needed to be part of my personal practice. Darci helped me connect to my drumming Elder, who introduced me to Buffalo Gals Drummers, where I could learn about drumming and Indigenous ways of being. I am grateful for being welcomed into this group, and continue to appreciate being a part of it.

In the Fall of 2017 I attended my first IEATA conference, as it was held in Winnipeg. That experience was like a coming home to my community and I recognized that IEATA offered me a way to connect to this worldwide movement.



Personal Healing Mandala, 2019

Part of the thesis work for Miriam's EXAT final project:  
Playing My Drum: Being the Facilitator in a Mindful-Based Expressive Arts Therapy Group For People Living with Cancer



Miriam (far right) with research team members, Drs. Tom Hack, Kendra Rieger, and Christina West, at launch of art exhibit and knowledge translation study "I'm Still Here", Aug. 29-31st, 2022, IPOS/CAPO World Congress, Toronto, Ontario, Canada.

## How are you implementing multimodal expressive arts in the domains of therapeutic work, artistic practice, consultation, education, and activism?

Applying a Mindful-based Expressive Arts approach to my counselling and group therapy practices has deepened and enriched the harvests that clients and myself gather. The intermodal approach is very useful in both individual and group settings for helping people relax and enter a playful, creative space where they then can make discoveries and experience shifts in perspective through their arts processes. When people reflect upon their experiences, they often come to a felt sense of personal knowing that is empowering and opens/restores a connection to their own inner wisdom. Witnessing this is both humbling and a great privilege for me!

In my own mindful-based expressive arts practice I have observed a "rippling out" dynamic, beginning with the intrapersonal, moving out to the personal, then the interpersonal-facilitative and finally the client/group collective experience. From thence by many clients' reports, the pattern ripples out into their own life. Thus activism is embedded in the origin: being the change you want to see in the world has roots! Professionally, I have appreciated opportunities to facilitate workshops, staff team-building activities, and collaborate with others towards offering support in new settings.

I have had the honor recently of being engaged with a research team led by Dr. Kendra Rieger, conducting a constructivist grounded theory study seeking to understand the experiences of people living with cancer who participate in the Mindful-based Expressive Arts group intervention that I have developed and facilitate.

This work has led to the opportunity to deliver a collaborative workshop sharing research findings, provide a mindful-based expressive arts experience, and sharing an art exhibit and knowledge translation study which launched at the 2022 IPOS/CAPO World Congress in Toronto, Canada (acronyms stand for: International Psychosocial Oncology Society/Canadian Association of Psychosocial Oncology).

Some papers have also been published, with more in the works. This is inspiring, as it extends the reach of academic awareness and builds knowledge in the literature for this relatively recently emerging field.

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## How do you envision your work and artistic practice moving forward?

While working fulltime for a tertiary healthcare organization, I am increasing my focus on supporting children and families living with cancer at the present time, and see a natural role for Expressive Arts there. I am also looking forward to some EMDR training that I can apply in conjunction with Expressive Arts to help alleviate trauma and improve quality of life where necessary.

My volunteer activities are focused on the regulation of counselling therapy in my province (which includes the Expressive Arts Therapies), supporting development of a national professional body, and furthering international collaboration in Expressive Arts through IEATA.

In my arts practice as I step back from some volunteer activities over time, I look forward to dedicating more time to my arts practice, including deepening connections with the natural world, and learning more about Indigenous practices as a part of personal awareness and in the context of reconciliation.

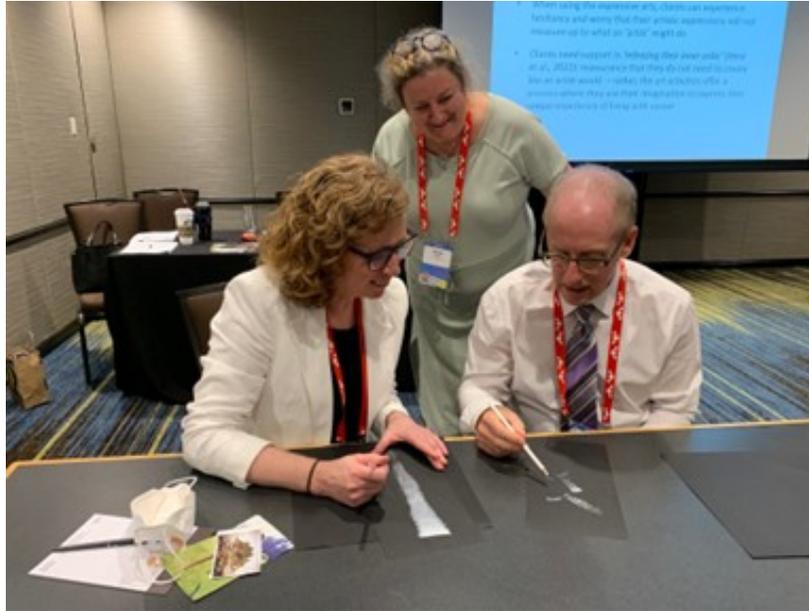
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## How does being a part of IEATA impact your work in expressive arts?

I believe that being a part of IEATA helps me connect to the worldwide Expressive Arts community, and be an active participant in creating change in the world. I would like to express my deep appreciation to its founders. We stand on the shoulders of giants!

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## What are your thoughts on the current role of expressive arts in your region and internationally?



Delivering a workshop at IPOS/CAPO World Congress  
Aug. 29, 2022

Just as I was drawn to the Expressive Arts by personal experiences, I believe the Expressive Arts movement offers a means for connecting the personal to the group collective, and the universal. It is a means to shift consciousness that is becoming increasingly vital in our world. On a local level, it can provide a context for reconciliation, important work for settlers and Indigenous people on the land where I live. On a community-based level locally and also internationally, I believe that we each have a personal role to play in creating change through our work as Expressive Arts therapists, facilitator/educators and activists.

The Arts are a meeting point at which to meet each other, across cultures, nations and other categories in life; to cultivate relationships for healing and foster channels that connect us all to wisdom, hope and love.

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## Training Sites

[WHEAT Institute](#)

[University of Manitoba](#)

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## Publications

- Rieger, K., Lobchuk, L., Duff, M., Chernomas, W., Demczuk, L., Campbell-Enns, H., Zaborniak, A., Nweze, & West, C. Mindfulness-based arts interventions for cancer care: A systematic review of the effects on wellbeing and fatigue. *Psycho-Oncology*, 01 October 2020. <https://doi.org/10.1002/pon.5560>
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- Rieger, K.L., Lobchuk, M.M., Duff, M., Chernomas, W.M, Campbell-Enns, H.J., Demczuk, L., Nicolas, S., & West, C.H. (2018). The effectiveness of mindfulness-based arts interventions on psychological wellbeing and fatigue in adults with a physical illness: A systematic review protocol. *The JBI Database of Systematic Reviews and Implementation Reports*, 2018: 16(0):1-10.
- Duff, Miriam Anne (2019). *Playing My Drum: Being the Facilitator in a Mindful-Based Expressive Arts Therapy Group For People Living with Cancer* (Thesis for Diploma in Expressive Arts Therapy Diploma, WHEAT Institute). Available at Winnipeg Holistic Expressive Arts Therapy Institute, Winnipeg, Manitoba.
- Duff, Miriam Anne (2016). *Harnessing the Power of Expressive Arts for People with Cancer*. Final Paper as part of completion of Certificate in Expressive Arts Therapy. Available at Winnipeg Holistic Expressive Arts Therapy Institute, Winnipeg, Manitoba.
- Duff, Miriam Anne (2012). *The Child and Family Living with Complex Health Needs in the Community: Lived Experiences and Patterns of Coping and Relationship* (Masters Thesis, University of Manitoba). Available electronically at: <http://hdl.handle.net/1993/8605>

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