

**The Naropa Community Art Studio (NCAS) 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary**



At this point in the development of the art therapy profession, there are fields within the larger Field. Two areas of study within these layered, transdisciplinary subjects are referred to as the studio model and social justice art therapy. Over the decades, many colleagues have researched and implemented community-based studio projects. These authors have valued the importance of bringing the arts to groups of people in need of communal expression. The Naropa Community Art Studio (NCAS), an innovative 21-year-old project, is prominently situated within this rich history of studio art therapy and social justice art therapy.

The following document tells the remarkable story of the NCAS. This summary reflects over two decades of innovative research, community/social engagement projects, student recruitment, and favorable regard from the national art therapy community.

# CONTEMPLATIVE WISDOM-COMPASSIONATE ACTION

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## The History of the Naropa Community Art Studio (NCAS)

Written by Michael A. Franklin Ph.D., ATR-BC

The NCAS was conceived and implemented by Michael A. Franklin PhD, ATR-BC in 2000 with the following adage as our guiding touchstone: **CONTEMPLATIVE WISDOM-COMPASSIONATE ACTION.**

Franklin arrived at Naropa in 1997, serving as chair for 23 years. His initial vision was to build an innovative, art forward curriculum that offered comprehensive clinical training infused with community focused values. Believing in art and service as spiritual, socially engaged liberation practices, he intentionally merged these convictions into the curricular arc of the program.

In 1999, Franklin met with Professor Richard Loveless from Arizona State University who was a student of Viktor Lowenfeld, Dr. Douglas Blandy from the University of Oregon, and art therapists Pat Allen and Janis Timm-Bottos to discuss his vision for the NCAS. With their enthusiastic endorsement, and as the complex details became clarified, Franklin composed the six founding principles below and then met with Naropa University president John Whitehouse Cobb, to discuss the viability of the project.

President Cobb fervently approved the proposal, clearing the way for launching the project. In 2001, one week after the tragedy of 9-11, the NCAS opened its doors at the Dairy Center for the Arts in Boulder Colorado. The timing of this was striking. As the world experienced the collective trauma of these horrendous events in New York city, the art therapy program confirmed its deep commitment to serve local groups enduring marginalized, collective sorrow.

At this time, Naropa University was renting studio classroom space at the Dairy Center for the Arts. The original idea was to creatively use our studio classroom by inserting NCAS time around our scheduled classes. The result was an innovative, dual use of the space for our required classes and for the NCAS.

### Founding Vision and Principles

1. To create a studio laboratory for researching the role of the socially engaged artist and art therapist working in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Of particular interest was the investigation of the rich territory where art is therapeutic without focusing on clinical treatment. As an inclusive project, students were supported to work with faculty to research, present, and publish findings.
2. To train graduate students in legitimate alternative paradigms for delivering studio-based, art therapy services to communities after graduation.
3. To create an accompanying business focused class (CNSA-665) on how to manifest a community art studio. This course addresses business planning, marketing skills, fundraising strategies, and the fundamentals of grant writing.
4. To build into the curriculum service as a spiritual practice by blending sitting meditation with a karma-yoga perspective of social engagement. In 2000, Naropa University mostly focused on sitting practice. The NCAS was intended to blend sitting meditation with direct, socially engaged action.

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5. To help recruit talented students and successfully compete with other graduate art therapy programs with this pioneering, innovative curricular/contemplative education offering.
6. To make sure that the NCAS was self-sustaining and always free for participants. Additionally, the initial goal was to provide community members access to a thriving art studio on the Naropa University Nalanda campus where visitors would encounter students and university culture. This original intention followed Dr. Wolf Wolfensberger's research on *normalization* and *social role valorization* which strives to make available to marginalized people access to the conditions of everyday life.

**All 6 categories have been realized and continue to thrive.**

### Early Conversations

In 2000, the art therapy faculty participated in discussions as did several students, notably Meryl Rothaus and Amy Brown who helped to set up the original administrative systems. Faculty included Nora Swann-Foster, Bernie Marek, Sue Wallingford, Mimi Farrelly-Hansen, and Marilyn Raye-Osman. Meryl Rothaus, Kendra Schpok, and Michael Franklin went to local high schools to stimulate interest in the project and recruit potential participants.

### 2000

The art therapy faculty published the following article which included a section on the importance of the art studio.

Franklin, M.; Farrelly-Hansen, M.; Marek, B.; Swan-Foster, N.; Wallingford, S. (2000).

Transpersonal art therapy education. *Art Therapy: Journal of the American Art Therapy Association*, 17(2), 101-110.

### 2001

One week after 9/11 the NCAS is launched and guided by the following mission statement:

*The Naropa Community Art Studio (NCAS) provides a safe space for marginalized populations from the Boulder-Naropa community to gather and create art together. Art Therapy faculty/alumni and graduate students manage the studio, organizing and running the many ways this space is used for research and practice. Respect for cultural, ethnic, gender, and spiritual diversity are founding principles. Elevation of artistic expression without pathologizing artwork or behavior is our goal.*

The same year, the national art therapy association conference was held in Albuquerque, New Mexico. The opening plenary session, with an emphasis on service, was presented by Michael Franklin, Cathy Malchiodi and Holly Feen-Calligan.

*"Art Therapy's Borders: Selfless Service, Service Learning, and Service as Social Transformation"*

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In 2001, significant funds were raised. A generous, anonymous donor, helped to launch the following NCAS groups with a \$100,000 gift.

### After School Project

The first NCAS group served high school students from Boulder Preparatory School, Boulder High School, Fairview High School, September School, Attention Homes Youth Shelter, New Vista, SOAR, and the Addictions Recovery Center. This after school studio, first facilitated by Michael Franklin and then by Merryl Rothaus, provided a constructive and enjoyable alternative to unsupervised time, when teens often engage in risky behaviors. The launch of this program served approximately 35-45 youth per week each semester between 2001 and 2004. Art Therapy faculty along with graduate students supervised the studio, serving as art mentors rather than “therapists.”

Criminal justice statistics show that many crimes committed by youth occur weekdays between 3 p.m. and 6 p.m., when kids are out of school and before parents come home from work. This is the time when youth are more likely to engage in risky behaviors such as gang activity, drug use and sexual activity. The first NCAS offerings were designed to address this community need.

Following a similar model instituted by his mentor Richard Loveless, Franklin instituted the position of “elder in residence” for the teens. Originally a member of the aphasia group which began in 2002, Grace served as an intergenerational bridge for three years, offering the youth her accumulated wisdom and infectious enthusiasm.

### Grace, Elder in Residence (see additional details on residencies in the appendices section)



### 2002-2003

#### Thursday Adult Group

This group was initially constituted by Merryl Rothaus in the Fall of 2002. The intention for this studio was to serve adults from the community living independently with manageable mental

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health challenges. This particular NCAS group is still running today with several of the original members.

Michael Franklin, Merryl Rothaus, and Kendra Schpok presented the following paper at the 2002 American Art Therapy Association conference:

*“Unity In Diversity: Communal Pluralism In The Art Studio and The Classroom”*

Eventually this research was published as a book chapter:

Franklin, M., Rothaus, M., & Schpok, K. (2007). Unity in diversity: Communal pluralism in the art studio and the classroom. In Kaplan, F. (Ed.), *Art therapy and social action: Treating the world's wounds*. London, England: Jessica Kingsley.

In the Summer of 2002, the NCAS launched a summer art camp program for teens at the Dairy Center for the Arts. Michael Franklin, Kendra Schpok, and Jessica Whitesel facilitated the camp.

### **Grants Received:**

Community Foundation serving Boulder County, 2002, awarded the Naropa Community Art Studio a grant for working with adjudicated youth. Total amount funded, \$6,000.

University of Colorado Federal Credit Union in conjunction with the Community Foundation, 2002, awarded the Naropa Community Art Studio a grant for working with adjudicated youth. Total amount funded \$2,000. These funds were distributed to Naropa art therapy graduate students.

### **The Aphasia and Head-Injury Group**

The Aphasia and Head-Injury group was launched in July, 2002. NCAS began collaborating with professor Bette Hadler from the University of Colorado's Speech, Language, and Hearing Sciences Center. Ten post-stroke participants and their caregivers were invited to the NCAS. Graduate students and faculty from Naropa's Art Therapy program and CU's Speech-Hearing-Language program worked side by side to serve these participants.

When asked by the CU faculty why the NCAS was a worthy practicum site for their students, Franklin responded. . . “if you provide people with aphasia a meaningful experience, they will find a way to communicate” and engage in “artful conversations of silence” within the context of their cognitive challenges. Since the participants were dealing with the significant post-stroke speech deficits, and since art is a visual language, the value of artistic communication was embraced by the CU faculty.

Although the NCAS no longer collaborates with CU, this same group continues today for people struggling with cognitive deficits associated with head injuries, strokes, and other neuro-cognitive challenges.

After Professor Hadler retired, this group was facilitated by lead mentors Leah Friedman, Jessica Whitesel, Nancy Franke, then Nina Hausfeld, and then Michael Putzel.

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In 2003, Jessica Whitesel, Jennifer Trinkle, and Michael Franklin presented the following research at the American Art Therapy Association National Conference, Chicago, IL.

*“Conversations of Silence: Community Based Art Therapy for People with Aphasia”*.

This same year Franklin and Whitesel made the film:

*“Conversations of Silence”* based on a week-long summer collaborative project with Colorado University professor Bette Hadler.

### **Excerpt Photo from *Conversations of Silence* Summer NCAS Project**



### **2004**

#### **Grant Received:**

Sheila Fortune Foundation awards the Naropa Community Art Studio a grant for art supplies and studio staff. Total amount funded, \$2,500.

At this time the NCAS launched an on-site partnership with the Boulder Shelter for the Homeless and their *“Transitions Group”*. This particular studio was first facilitated by art therapist Lisa Schaewe, a graduate of our program and lasted for 2 years.

In 2018 we began a new 2-year group with the shelter facilitated by Chelsey Langlinais, a graduate of our program, as lead mentor.

#### **Project Bird Homes**

In 2004, Kendra Schpok began discussing a youth entrepreneurial arts program with current graduate students and teen participants in our after-school program. From these conversations, Project Bird Homes emerged. With a generous gift of \$1,000 from a private donor, Kendra Schpok and graduate student Kelly Hill ran a pilot program during the summer of 2005 mentoring youth in an art-based entrepreneurial endeavor. The goal was to design, produce, market and sell ceramic birdhouses. Sessions were held that addressed entrepreneurial business skills, the needs of the native bird populations, ceramic production

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techniques, and bringing a product to market. This four-month program consisted of weekly planning meetings, a summer production schedule, and sales activities.

In 2006, the full four-month program was offered. Kendra Schpok, Kelly Hill, Kim Rohrs, and Leah Friedman served as staff support. The program was grant funded by Sheila Fortune Foundation for \$2,500 and the City of Boulder Youth Opportunity Program administered by the City of Boulder Youth Opportunity Advisory Board for \$2,000.

In addition to participating in 2 local craft fairs, Project Bird Homes held a final exhibition at the Nalanda Campus Gallery in October of 2006 followed by a presentation at the 2006 American Art Therapy association conference in New Orleans titled: "Project Bird Homes: Supporting Adolescent Development through an Art-Based Entrepreneurial Program".

- 50 bird homes were built. Prices ranged from \$20 - \$60. Total sales were \$1,100.00.



### 2005-2006

#### Yay Scale Project

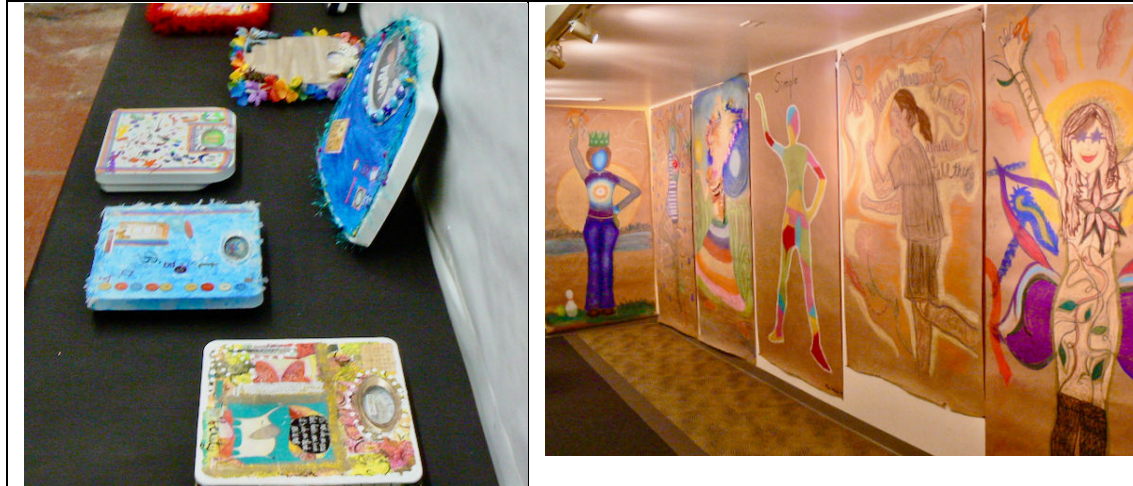
In 2005 and 2006 art therapist Merryl Rothaus and Carmen Cool, both counselors and graduates of Naropa University, created a brilliant twelve week-long project for local teens to address body dissatisfaction through art. They partnered with the NCAS to work with New Vista High School teens from the Boulder Youth Body Alliance (BYBA). BYBA, led by Carmen Cool, was based on the work of The Body Positive organization in California and consisted of a group of teen peer educators who were helping other teens address body dissatisfaction.

This important undertaking, called the "Yay Scale Project," included an art opening at the Art and Soul Gallery in Boulder, Colorado and a collaboration with the Youth Opportunities Advisory Board (YOAB). Using the language of art, and facilitated by Rothaus and Cool, the participants transformed traditional bathroom scales into individual pieces of art with the intention to address and re-author body image challenges.

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The “YAY scales” was originally developed by Marilyn Wann and used with permission. All of the Yay Scales were for sale and all sales went toward funding further programming for BYBA.



### 2007-2009

#### LGBTQIA+ Group

During this time, a group was created and launched by Leah Friedman to support those with LGBTQIA+ identities. This important studio provided outreach to the Naropa community and the larger Boulder community. At all stages of the development and implementation process, a welcoming environment was created to uphold conditions of safety and freedom of expression. Overall, this group served an important purpose for uplifting expressive visibility for the unseen stories of personal and public identity.

### 2010

In 2010 Franklin met with author bell hooks to discuss contemplative approaches to community-based arts. The initial interview and subsequent discussions revealed valuable ideas for expanding the socially engaged arts within communities.

The Fourmile Canyon fire just west of Boulder destroyed 172 structures and was the most destructive Colorado wildfire at the time. Jenn Harkness, a student in our program at the time, created a series of community studio offerings to help provide emotional support to families dealing with the aftermath of the fires.

### 2011

#### The Naropa Community Art Studio-International (NCAS-I) is Launched

As an undergraduate student prior to attending our graduate art therapy program, Meg Hamilton completed an independent study in Nepal that focused on sex trafficking. It was her



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passion for the intersections between social justice art therapy and this painful subject that initiated the first sparks that eventually became the NCAS-I. Professor Sue Wallingford not only agreed with Hamilton's initial commitment to address trafficking, but she also brought her own passionate desire to develop the NCAS-I.

### Professor Sue Wallingford



In the Spring of 2011, art therapy students Meg Hamilton and Katie Hanczaryk, along with Professor Sue Wallingford, independently launched the NCAS-I, a project connected and also distinct from the NCAS. Working groups were established composed of graduate students and graduate research assistants. Their charge was to research a variety of countries for doing social justice art therapy. Sue asked the students, "where are we most needed" in the world. After several meetings, a consensus was reached, and Cambodia was chosen for the project. A mission statement was written to articulate the values of the project:

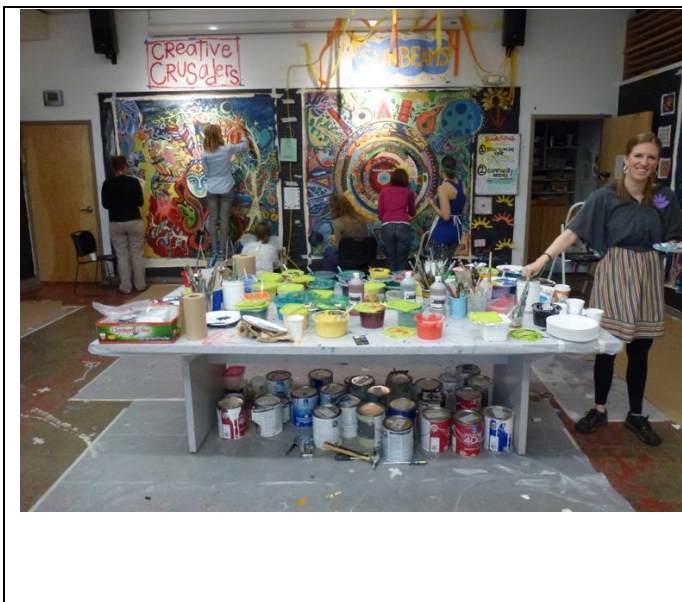
*NCAS-I expands the boundaries of the Naropa University Community Art Studio from local to global. Rooted in the principle of collaboration and a belief in the innate wisdom, creativity, and interdependence of all, we, the art therapy graduate students and faculty, seek active engagement with social justice organizations around the world. We will use art therapy practices to help relieve suffering and maintain a vision of unity, as guests and learners in the communities we serve.*

This student and faculty driven project partnered with Transitions Global in Phnom Penh and Anjali House in Siem Reap. Significant funding support was needed in order to cover student and faculty travel to Cambodia. Guided by Sue Wallingford's entrepreneurial talent for fundraising, like painting marathons and matchbox constructions, NCAS-I raised significant funds totaling \$50,000 and also received a \$25,000 grant from the Jenzabar Foundation. With this financial support and subsequent resources from fundraising, a total of three groups of students traveled to Cambodia in 2012, 2013, and 2014. For more complete information see: <https://ncasi.wordpress.com>

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NCAS-I Painting Marathon Fundraiser



2011

A workshop titled, “Expressive Foundations of Community Based Therapeutic Arts” was presented by Franklin as a community art studio service project in partnership with Fundación Auromira and Libelula Educators, Villa Del Leyva, Colombia, November, 2011.

The goal was to develop a sustainable art studio community in Villa Del Leyva, Colombia.

2012

Nina Hausfeld organized the *Parent Art Group* for new mothers and fathers needing a break from the exhaustive schedule of being a new parent. This group ran for three years.

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In 2012 Kate Schettler-Goodman took over our group collaboration with Imagine, an outstanding local organization that serves young adults with developmental, cognitive, and physical challenges. The group was originally founded by Mariah Loftin, a graduate of our program. After Mariah left her position, Kate assumed the lead mentor for this remarkable group. Our group partnership with Imagine continues to thrive and is still running today.

**2013**

Sue Wallingford, Aimee Palladino, Ariana Tosatto, Tracey Kirschner, and Meg Hamilton present: *“From Local to Global: Expanding the Boundaries of a Community Art Studio”* at the 2013 American Art Therapy Association’s national conference in Seattle, Washington.

Sue Wallingford, Meg Hamilton, Tracy Kirshner, Ariana Tosatto, and Katie Hanczaryk Present: *“Seeds Sown in the Killing Field: Tending to the Lotus Flower”* at the 2013 International Expressive Arts Therapy Association conference in Berkley, California.

**2014**

“Artist in Residence – Resident Artist” program begins.

John Wesley who was a classically trained artist and a member of the Thursday adult group, was the first Artist in Residence. He held this position for several years.

**2015**

“Writer-in-Residence” program begins.

Naropa University is well known for its MFA writing program - The Jack Kerouac School of Disembodied Poetics. Jason Burks, a student in the program, was the first writer in residence.

**2016**

Discussions with Dr. Al Kazniak occurred during his visit to Naropa University, focusing on compassion, empathy, and the mission of the NCAS.

Sue Wallingford published the following book chapter:

Wallingford, S. (2016). A transpersonal approach to service-learning: A call to right action. In F. J. Kaklauskas, C. J. Clements, D. Hocoy, & L. Hoffman (Eds.), *Shadows & Light: Theory, research, and practice in transpersonal psychology* (Vol. II: Talks & Reflections; pp. 143-160). Colorado Springs, CO: University Professors Press.

**2017**

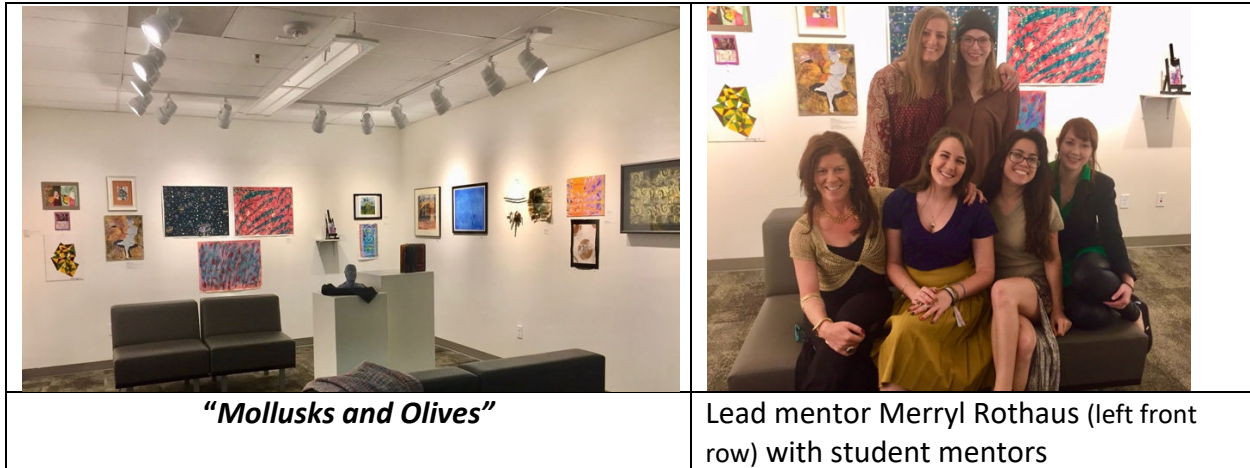
Meg Hamilton was invited to co-author:

Potash, J. S., Bardot, H., Moon, C. H., Napoli, M., Lyonsmith, A. & Hamilton, M. (2017). Ethical implications of cross-cultural international art therapy. *The Arts in Psychotherapy*, 56, 74-82. doi: 10.1016/j.aip.2017.08.005

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Several student mentors, along with Merryl Rothaus, lead mentor for the *Thursday group*, worked with the participants to mount an art show of their work at the Nalanda campus gallery. The title of the exhibition was *“Mollusks and Olives”*. Several works were sold, resulting in further elevation of self-esteem for the artist.



**2018**

*“The Arts: A Pillar of Contemplative Education”*

Presented by professors Mark Miller, Liz Acosta, and Michael Franklin, Naropa University, Boulder, Colorado, March, 2018.

**2019**

*“An Art Therapy Approach to Contemplative Pedagogy: Envisioning Essential Values”*

Presented by Jessica Whitesel, Leah Friedman, and Michael Franklin at the American Art Therapy Association Annual Conference, Kansas City, MO, October, 2019.

**2020 - 2021**

The onset of the COVID19 pandemic in March of 2020 saw an abrupt interruption of NCAS offerings. Once university quarantine protocols were instituted, synchronous on-line groups began spring of 2020. Lead mentors Michael Putzel, Kate Schettler-Goodman, Jordan Yates, Merryl Rothaus and Liz Maher creatively problem solved how to keep the NCAS remotely running during quarantine. Their dedication to the NCAS resulted in a continuation of group cohesion throughout quarantine. To their credit, these groups are still running today.

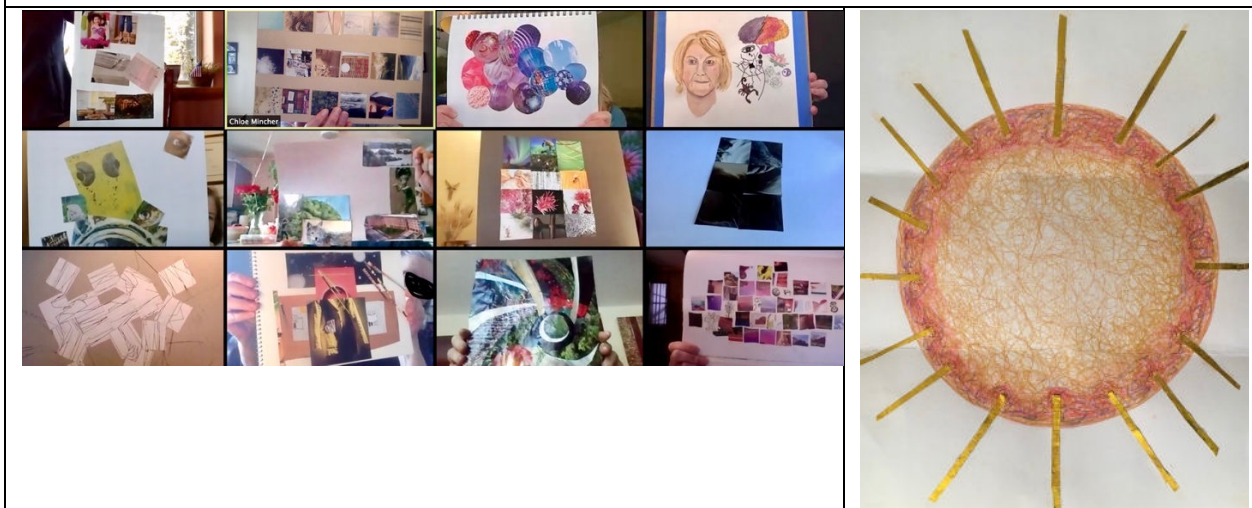
According to lead mentor Michael Putzel, virtual community art studio experiments allowed for the NCAS to continue its mission. For example, several NCAS members participated in the artist pen-pal project, which was an inter-group mail art exchange. Members also joined the Boulder-based social action group Creative Catalyzers’ *“Dare to Care”* Community Food Share project to raise awareness for nutritional insecurity related to the pandemic.

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**Zoom Tile Art Piece and Artist Pen-pal Project**

Lead mentor Michael Putzel



**2022**

In the spring of 2022, the NCAS signed a memorandum of understanding (MOU) with Boulder Community Health’s Pathways Program to offer studio-based wellness art experiences for the Partial Hospitalization Program (PHP) and the Intensive Outpatient Program (IOP).

Additionally, in the spring of 2022 the NCAS responded to the aftermath of the Marshal Fire by partnering with Moxie’s Bread Company (Louisville) and Sister Carmen Community Center (Lafayette) to offer supportive programming.

Michael Franklin still serves as primary supervisor of the NCAS.

**Conclusion**

The NCAS is a highly successful, self-sustaining part of the graduate art therapy program at Naropa University. This project has not only yielded valuable research, advancing the studio-model literature, it has also served as an oasis for many needing accessible, free arts programming. Many local mental health agencies in the area have acknowledged the project

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for providing a valuable resource to those needing a safe, reliable studio environment for creating art in community.

### Summary

#### I. Founded, September 2001, one week after 9/11.

#### II. As of May 2022:

- \* Total of 1280 weekly sessions since 2001
- \* 16 to 20 Naropa University mentors trained in the Studio Model each year since 2001
- \* Approximately 30 to 40 visitors per week have been served since September 2001

#### III. Civic Engagement Studio Practicum course (CNSA 665)

The Studio Practicum course focuses on service-learning, karma yoga and social engagement; and the business fundamentals for developing a community art studio (grant writing, fundraising, business planning, and marketing).

#### IV. Populations Served in the NCAS:

(note, some of the groups mentioned below are not included in the written timeline above)

Local NCAS Projects		
1. Teens	6. LGBTQIA+ youth	11. Naropa University Academic Affairs staff group
2. Adults living independently with manageable mental health challenges group	7. Stroke, aphasia, and cognitive challenges group	12. Young adults with developmental and cognitive challenges group
3. New parents group	8. Elders group	13. Boulder shelter for the homeless group
4. Art camps for teens	9. Workshops for the Naropa faculty community (provosts office)	14. Hosted professional meetings (Colorado Art Therapy Association)
5. Naropa faculty support groups	10. Youth body image groups	15. Naropa Faculty Groups
International NCAS-I Projects under the guidance of Sue Wallingford		
NGO's and sex trafficking in Cambodia		

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**Appendices:**

<b>Formula for Creating Community in the NCAS</b> (Franklin, 2016)	
<b>1. Loosening defenses, private explorations of honesty</b>	Art, with its capacity to loosen psychological defenses, invites private inner explorations of honesty to fuse with artistic expression.
<b>2. Personal and public vulnerability</b>	Engaging in personal honesty within a group setting fosters personal and public vulnerability. Inner discernment unfolds for when and how to make the private public.
<b>3. Discerning intimacy: making the private public</b>	Private vulnerability, when shared with others, results in public intimacy.
<b>4. Witnessing</b>	Shared intimacy when collectively witnessed by all group members flattens hierarchy and results in community. (This view, at first assumes a critique-like atmosphere of silence. And if/when conversation emerges, skillful speech becomes an essential shared value.)

<b>STUDIO DHARMA</b> (Franklin, 2017)	
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Treat the art materials the way you would treat good food—taste with curiosity, consume with awareness, and try not to waste. Take what is needed and return for more.</li> <li>2. When walking into the studio consider that you are walking into a sanctuary to practice relationship with process, product, self, and other.</li> </ol>	

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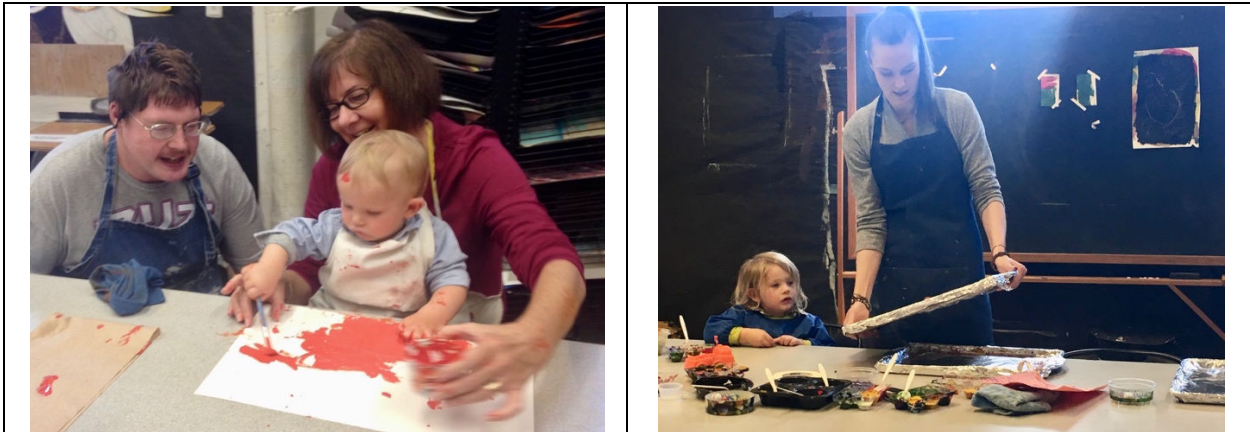
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3. Engage/respond to others and their work with curiosity – practice skillful visual and verbal speech.
4. Own projections when looking and talking about artwork.
5. When finished, clean up and leave the space in a way that welcomes the next visitors.

### Residencies

#### Babies and Toddlers in Residence

We have always invited parents, babies, and toddlers to the studio. Kate Schettler-Goodman mentors the group for young adults with developmental disabilities. Her child Bodhi was a frequent visitor, bringing his creative innocence to the group.



#### Artist in Residence

John Wesley, a revered member of the group for adults dealing with mental health challenges, was a classically trained artist. For over 13 years John was a serious, dedicated member of the NCAS. Therefore, inviting him to be the first artist in residence was a sensible idea. He had a deep love for the NCAS, the participants, and the overall program.



**The History of the Naropa Community Art Studio (NCAS)****Written by Michael A. Franklin Ph.D., ATR-BC****John Wesley**

Of the studio and his public art process, John said:

There are only five more days until Naropa Community Art Studio (NCAS) begins for the Spring 2015 semester. I look forward to this time when I again become my part in the most fun thing I do.... My participation allows me to share my knowledge, experience and skills making art with young future art therapists whose roles are acted out in the NCAS with about a dozen participants who have answered a call offering free studio experiences, as I did over ten years ago...The drone of the inner discussion makes for the best background music to grow as an artist. Touch and let it go, idea, touch and let it go, feeling, touch and let it go, blue, and so forth, and back to the breath, touch is not so much the quality of the paper, but what goes on between, with maybe a brush or pen, let it go, breath, interaction, green... (Franklin, 2016).

**Writer in Residence**

Naropa University is well known for its MFA writing program. Founded by Allen Ginsberg and Anne Waldman, The Jack Kerouac School of Disembodied Poetics attracts many talented writers. A few years back I invited a gifted student, Jason Burks, to join the NCAS as the first Writer-in-Residence. Jason attended the group for adults with developmental disabilities. Of his time in the NCAS, he said the following:

As a writer, I was interested in non-verbal forms of communication and, by working with art materials, I became immersed in other types of knowing. The NCAS is based on collective meaning-making that arises from experimentation, building an identity that is self-created; a type of origin-story of the body in that moment. Certain materials bring out different qualities in each participant, showing parts of themselves or multiple parts of the same self. This vulnerable space allows for connection that language cannot do or does differently.

The most moving event during my time in the NCAS was during a sharing session at the end of the day. After a prolific drawing session, a usually silent participant decided to

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show us his work. Holding his right hand up at face-level, he spoke to his moving fingers in a kind of linguistic dance. He did not use any words we understood: his language was guttural, yet we felt what he was saying because of his intonation, his passion, and the rising and falling intensity of his voice. He was proud, and although we couldn't cognitively follow his narrative, we sensed it reverberating in that room (Franklin, 2016).

### Student Stories

#### **Margaret Pollack, 2022: "Synchronicity in the Studio"**

Serving in the Naropa Community Art Studio has been a beautiful exploration of the human experience, studio-based art therapy, and art-making as a way to connect with others. My assigned studio has become an inclusive space, not just for undergrads, but also for a diverse community of future and present grad students. The structure of the open art studio created an atmosphere with a loss of hierarchy, allowing for genuine human connection through the power of art. My cohort members and I are always there to help if needed, along with our wise third year mentor available for advice. This studio has taught me the social connection that art can provide and the way in which that is healing in itself. This experience has been very real in that it has been challenging. It's not easy to serve during the late hours of 6-9pm, exhausted after a full day of school. It hasn't been easy accepting disappointment if nobody attends, nor is it easy to develop a new relationship with someone new every session. In these ways, it has become not only a spiritual experience of service, but an insightful learning experience as well.

Art therapy and spiritual practice are both ways in which to explore emotions. One Tuesday I suffered a rough morning filled with anger. After a fight with my partner, I commuted to school in a rage that felt uncontrollable. Anger had been something that I recently explored in a painting through work with my therapist, utilizing art therapy as a cathartic release. When I arrived to campus, the only thing that I could think of was to go to the meditation hall to sit in this difficult emotion. It took 12 minutes for my nervous system to settle. I forced myself to sit for 20, settling my body and feeling the anger dissipate as I sat with it. I witnessed the anger, observing it like a thunderstorm rolling in and blowing over. I listened to the stories in my mind, leaned into the overwhelming stress that was hijacking my behavior, and filled my lungs with loving kindness with each inhale. Afterwards, I not only felt better, but I felt I had experienced something powerful and profound.

That night during NCAS, a meaningful moment of synchronicity took place. A young woman came into the studio claiming that she wanted to explore anger. I told her about my recent painting completed about anger and the process I used, using my fingers to throw and paint with, but offered her the opportunity to work with any material she wanted. She decided on painting and went to work. Two hours later she approached me claiming, "I'm done," wanting

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to share her work with me. We gazed at the work together. I was struck by how oddly similar her anger painting was to mine. Black paper background, red finger paint, yellow paint thrown onto the canvas, along with some blue, green, and white. In the middle, a stag, mouth open, screaming in anger. It was beautiful. We spoke on the work. On her way to the studio, a stag had run across the road in front of her, another moment of synchronicity in this experience. After speaking on the work, she thanked me for being her witness and we secured the painting with a fixative.

Afterwards we talked for a while, speaking on our experiences with school, creative arts, spiritual practice, and emotions. I felt honored to witness her process and noticed the way that it allowed for us to connect. To this day, this felt like a spiritual experience. The young woman never came to NCAS again, and yet it felt meaningful. It was as if the universe was teaching me a lesson. A lesson on the therapeutic influence of creating art. A message about the power of witnessing art-making. A serendipitous moment of human connection. And most importantly, a lesson on anger and the emotions that move through us all, just like the weather.

**Kelsey Geiger, 2022: *"The Magic of Presence"***

"Meeting the day as it presents itself" is the personal intention I set at the beginning of the fall 2021 semester for my year-long service in the Naropa Community Art Studio. Over the course of the year, I have found this intention to be beautifully inherent rather than something I needed to frequently remind myself of.

On one particular Wednesday morning feeling a bit rushed, the Colorado wind blew my car door out of my hand and into the car parked next to me leaving a larger than expected dent. After leaving an apologetic note on this car's windshield, I walked into the studio with a flustered mind and my to-do list amplified by the stress of what had just happened. I came up with a plan of what I wanted to work on to ground myself for the next few hours but the presence of another member shifted those intentions as she walked in ready to create.

This member of our group was set on making a CU-Buffs football out of clay. Noticing she was vocalizing this idea to our lead mentee, and not yet working with anyone, I switched gears and asked if she would like to work together.

We started by asking ourselves if the football was flat? If it was three-dimensional? How big was it? This member decided she wanted the football to be fully alive, three-dimensional, and to fit in the palm of her hand. I had never before created a hollow clay form so we worked together to find the best way to do so. With these inquiries and working side by side, giving and taking ideas from one another, this member's face lit up with joy. We began the process by each rolling a ball of clay, then shaping our ball to have pointy ends that resembled a football, and eventually hollowing out the form scoop by scoop. While slipping and scoring the two

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halves back together, this member spent time smoothing out the surface in complete silence and with such intrigue. This was a new side of the member I had not often witnessed, as she is typically full of stories and shares while making her art. After several minutes she shared that it felt “so good” to smooth out the clay with a big smile on her face and eyes that would not partway from the piece. As the session completed, we shared our projects in the larger group, and with tears in her eyes, she shared that her dear friend recently passed away. I found this to be incredible. The movement of emotion seemed to be mirrored by the movement that came with rolling, forming, and smoothing her clay. Working in relationship on a one-on-one basis for a full hour created a container of safety for this member to feel and express her deepest present emotions.

After the mentees left, I found myself in a state of awe. I realized that although I had not thought about my original intention that day, I did not need to. This member's engagement in creating art, the joy on her face, and her presence are what allowed me to so easily switch from my flustered state of mind and into the present moment that day. Meeting the day just as it is, is such a natural part of being in a community-based art studio and making art in service of another. That in itself feels a whole lot like magic.

**Carly Lovejoy, 2022: “The Music Maker”**

The adults in the Thursday group are incredibly inspiring individuals, full of hilarious insights on life and full of love. I have always tried to think of neurodivergence (my own, my friends', my family's, or the stranger's on the street) as a kind of flavor-enhancer of life instead of pathologizing divergences as purely detractive from life. Of course, there are many mental illnesses that make daily functioning incredibly difficult. But in the space where we can function together, in the NCAS art studio for example, neurodivergence allows us to see the world from unique perspectives. It grants us special goggles so we can add empathetic observations and exceptional creations to the world.

One particular member of the Thursday group always comes with so much to talk about. She is a composer and loves to talk about music, stories, and life. I am always so grateful for her social engagement and ability to put us all at ease with conversation, as sometimes I come to NCAS less ready to socialize. At times over the past year, I wondered if I were gaining too much from the NCAS group, acting more like a participant than a mentor. Was there a problem in this? Interacting with this participant made me realize the concept of the wounded healer as a therapist. It is okay to benefit from time shared with another artist. Interacting with this individual drew me out of myself into contact with her, and in our shared making we were on the same level, healing each other by making art side by side. In one of our last sessions the other week, this individual shared that she is actually agoraphobic and has a hard time leaving her house. This stunned me, as she can seem to really facilitate the group at times with her jokes and inclusivity. It made me realize just how motivated she was to show up for this social time, and just how important that time was to her. While I may have gained just as much healing from my time in NCAS as this participant, that did not detract in any way from her

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healing. In fact, it probably added to it. Our shared commonality of needing this artmaking and social time contributed to the therapeutic relationship. Perhaps a better term than wounded healer is healing healer, as we were both in the process of healing ourselves in relation to healing each other.

**Katharine Jones, 2022: *“Curiosity in the Connection”***

There were many moments of meaningful engagement during my time in the NCAS. One thing that stands out is that in my art teach in. With this group in particular the participants are quite art savvy so, when contemplating what I would teach I found myself becoming intimidated and questioning what I could offer that they did not already know. I chose to do a repurposed book journal with collaging, written journaling, painting, drawing, etcetera to encompass all types of mediums and levels of difficulty. I did not know until after the class that this was a project this group was accustomed to in past NCAS semesters and had become somewhat of a tradition with the previous lead mentor.

What truly shifted for me was the process and interaction with the participants rather than the actual final product. One participant has been coming to this group for years and in the beginning arrived quiet and timid. I was unsure if she would choose to participate in the teach in at all. Not only did she participate but she continued to bring her repurposed book to the group every week thereafter throughout the rest of the first semester and into the second semester. It became a spiritual practice for her incorporating collages of inspiration, life events, and meaningful moments for herself. For myself I learned so much from this participant and what art as therapy can really bring out in an individual and shift their presence and self-awareness inwards.

Transformation was abundant in the ongoing process with all the participants during my teach-in and I have to say collaging is not an art process or material I tended to gravitate towards prior to my teach-in. However, as we embarked on this project and continued afterwards, I found it therapeutic for myself searching and finding imagery that provided expressiveness where words could not. I found myself learning this from this participant, mirroring what she was doing and teaching me how her process was something I could do for myself. Art as therapy does not need nor should it be about an aesthetically pleasing artwork but what inner depths can be brought forth and getting curious about how they show up through imagery. I watched this member come out of her shell through the connection of art with others and with herself. Studio-art-therapy provides a space to do this not only for members but for the mentors as well. I was unsure what to expect at the start of NCAS and how it would be different than a typical art studio. I began to see that the dialogue with members and mentors sharing their process in the art is where the difference and beauty lie and changed the way I see art as a spiritual practice collectively and individually.

**Selected Publications Generated from the NCAS:**

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Written by Michael A. Franklin Ph.D., ATR-BC

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- Franklin M. A. (2016). Imaginal mindfulness-imaginal intelligence: Musings on the languages of shadow and light in art, meditation, and clinical practice. In F. J. Kaklauskas, C. J. Clements, D. Hocoy, & L. Hoffman (Eds.), *Shadows & Light: Theory, research, and practice in transpersonal psychology (Vol. 1: Principles & Practices; pp. 101-121)*. Colorado Springs, CO: University Professors Press.
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# CONTEMPLATIVE WISDOM-COMPASSIONATE ACTION

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Deep appreciation to the many dedicated students, faculty colleagues, lead mentors, and community participants who helped create, for 20+ years, our thriving NCAS community!