

LOS ANGELES COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF MENTAL
HEALTH ARDI DIVISION
UNDERSERVED CULTURAL COMMUNITIES (UsCC)
UNIT

Hearts For Sight Foundation
2025-2026 and Expanding Mental Wellness for the Blind and Visually Impaired Through Art
Expressing

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

The *Expanding Mental Wellness for the Blind and Visually Impaired through Art Expression* project was developed through a collaborative planning process between Hearts for Sight Foundation and the Los Angeles County Department of Mental Health (LACDMH) Access for All Subcommittee. The project was designed in response to longstanding barriers faced by blind and visually impaired individuals in accessing culturally responsive and disability-inclusive mental health services.

The project was implemented over an approximately five-month period from January 2026 through May 2026 and was completed in multiple phases.

Phase 1: Planning and Recruitment (January 2026)

During this phase, Hearts for Sight Foundation worked with LACDMH and the Access for All Subcommittee to finalize project goals, outreach strategies, accessibility accommodations, curriculum development, and participant recruitment. Feedback from subcommittee members helped ensure the program addressed the unique mental health needs of blind and visually impaired community members while remaining accessible to both English-speaking and Spanish-speaking participants.

Phase 2: Program Implementation (January–May 2026)

The project consisted of eight art-based mental wellness workshops delivered separately to English-speaking and Spanish-speaking cohorts. Sessions incorporated psychoeducation, peer support, guided discussion, and tactile art activities designed to promote emotional expression, resilience, self-awareness, and community connection. Throughout implementation, participant feedback was reviewed and incorporated to enhance accessibility and engagement.

Phase 3: Evaluation and Reflection (May 2026)

Following completion of the workshops, participants completed retrospective pre-post evaluations measuring changes in mental health awareness, confidence, social connectedness, and coping skills. Project staff analyzed participant outcomes and gathered qualitative feedback regarding the overall impact of the program.

Phase 4: Community Showcase and Project Closeout (May 2026)

The final phase included a community art exhibition and celebration where participants displayed their artwork, shared personal reflections, and engaged with family members, community stakeholders, and DMH representatives. This culminating event highlighted participant achievements while demonstrating the value of accessible, disability-centered mental health programming.

PROJECT RESULTS

The *Expanding Mental Wellness for the Blind and Visually Impaired through Art Expression* project successfully demonstrated the value of accessible, culturally responsive, and disability-centered mental health programming. Through a series of interactive art-based workshops, participants were provided with a safe and supportive environment to explore their emotions, build social connections, and develop new coping strategies through creative expression.

The project enrolled 30 blind and visually impaired participants representing diverse ages, backgrounds, and communities across Los Angeles County. Twenty-eight participants successfully completed the program, including both English-speaking and Spanish-speaking cohorts. Throughout the project, participants engaged in structured activities focused on emotional awareness, resilience, identity, empowerment, grief and loss, self-expression, and community building. Workshops incorporated tactile art materials and adaptive facilitation strategies to ensure meaningful participation regardless of visual ability.

Project evaluation results demonstrated significant improvements across multiple areas of mental wellness. Participants reported increased confidence in discussing mental health concerns, greater awareness of coping skills and emotional regulation strategies, and stronger feelings of social connectedness. Many participants shared that the program reduced feelings of isolation and provided a rare opportunity to engage with peers who shared similar experiences related to vision loss and disability. Participants also reported feeling more comfortable seeking support and discussing emotional challenges with others.

The culminating community art exhibition showcased participant artwork and personal reflections developed throughout the program. The event provided participants with an opportunity to celebrate their accomplishments, share their stories, and educate family members, community stakeholders, and service providers about the importance of accessible mental health services. The exhibition highlighted the creativity, resilience, and strengths of participants while demonstrating the therapeutic value of art as a tool for healing and self-expression.

One of the most significant outcomes of the project was the creation of a welcoming mental health space facilitated by professionals with lived experience of vision loss. Participants frequently identified representation, accessibility, and peer connection as key factors contributing to their positive experience. The project reinforced the importance of disability-informed mental health programming and demonstrated that when services are intentionally designed to address accessibility barriers, individuals with disabilities can actively engage in healing, personal growth, and community connection.

OUTCOMES

Outcome data collected through the retrospective post-then-pre evaluation demonstrated meaningful improvements across all targeted areas identified in the Statement of Work. Participants reported increased confidence in expressing emotions, greater comfort discussing mental health concerns, improved understanding of mental health and wellness, and a stronger sense of empowerment related to their personal and cultural identities. Participants also reported increased awareness of available mental health resources and reduced stigma associated with seeking support. The retrospective post-then-pre methodology was intentionally selected to reduce response-shift bias and provide a more accurate reflection of participant growth over the course of the project.

Beyond individual outcomes, the project significantly increased community capacity by creating an accessible, disability-centered mental health space where blind and visually impaired individuals could connect, learn, and support one another. The program successfully engaged participants from diverse backgrounds, including English-speaking and Spanish-speaking cohorts, and fostered new peer relationships that extended beyond the workshop setting. Participants reported feeling less isolated, more connected to their community, and more confident advocating for their mental health needs. The project also increased awareness of disability-informed mental health practices among participants, families, volunteers, and community partners.

The project further demonstrated the effectiveness of integrating accessible art expression, psychoeducation, and peer support into mental health programming for blind and visually impaired individuals. As a result, the project established a replicable model that can be expanded to other disability communities and geographic regions throughout Los Angeles County. The strong participation, high completion rate, positive participant feedback, and measurable improvements in mental wellness outcomes indicate that the project successfully contributed to building sustainable community capacity while advancing the goals of the Access for All Subcommittee to reduce disparities and increase access to culturally responsive mental health services.

LEASONS LEARNED

Several factors contributed to the success of the project. Most importantly, the program was intentionally designed by and for blind and visually impaired individuals, ensuring that accessibility, representation, and lived experience were embedded throughout the project. The combination of art expression, psychoeducation, peer support, and culturally responsive facilitation created a safe and welcoming environment where participants felt comfortable engaging in meaningful conversations about mental health. The bilingual structure of the program also helped expand access to Spanish-speaking participants who may otherwise have limited opportunities to participate in disability-focused mental health services.

One challenge encountered during implementation was coordinating transportation and attendance across participants residing throughout Los Angeles County. Some participants faced barriers related to transportation, health concerns, work schedules, and family obligations, which

occasionally impacted attendance. Additionally, because the program served individuals with varying levels of vision loss and accessibility needs, facilitators were required to continually adapt activities and materials to ensure meaningful participation for all participants. These challenges were addressed through ongoing communication, individualized support, flexible accommodations, transportation assistance when possible, and modifications to activities based on participant feedback.

Another challenge involved the amount of time and resources required to prepare accessible materials, facilitate bilingual programming, and coordinate project logistics. While these efforts were essential to the project's success, they highlighted the importance of adequate staffing and planning when implementing disability-focused programs.

A key lesson learned was the significant value of creating opportunities for peer connection and community building. Participants consistently reported that connecting with others who shared similar lived experiences was one of the most meaningful aspects of the project. Future programs would benefit from expanding opportunities for peer mentorship, alumni engagement, and ongoing support groups beyond the duration of the project.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To improve efficiency and effectiveness in future iterations, additional funding could be allocated to transportation support, accessibility accommodations, and dedicated administrative assistance. Extending the duration of the program or incorporating follow-up sessions could also help reinforce skills learned during the workshops and support long-term participant engagement. Overall, the project demonstrated that accessible, culturally responsive, and disability-informed mental health programming can successfully engage underserved communities and produce meaningful outcomes.