

## Featured Member

AATA

April 27, 2017



Maia Wheeler, ATR, LCPC has been working at Easterseals Academy, Chicago since she graduated from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago in 2007. She works alongside children and young adults, primarily diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder (ASD), towards achieving greater levels of communication and social-functioning. Maia has previously served as Programs Co-Chair for the Illinois Art Therapy Association and continues to support the efforts of the AATA Multicultural Committee. She has benefitted from many resources and opportunities provided by the AATA, especially the Art Therapy Career Center, the Institute for

Continuing Education (ICE/AT), the Toolkit on ASD, and the AATA Annual conference. She enjoys learning about how she may incorporate new awareness, skills, and tools into her practice.

Maia integrates cognitive behavioral therapy with a humanistic approach, highlighting developmental art therapy techniques both in group-practice and with individuals working through ASD, anxiety, depression, or chronic stress. She believes that language can be easily misinterpreted and that the use of images and the discovery-process of self-expression is invaluable.

Maia is passionate about self-awareness as a counselor and educating others on accessibility and diversity. She regularly draws from her own challenges in mental health in an effort to empower others as unique individuals who are not exclusively their diagnosis. She spends time unpacking her experiences as a woman of color, including the exploration of internalized-oppression, and self-identity within non-target groups. Maia recognizes that “we as art therapists have work to do around diversity.” She advocates alignment with Historically Black Colleges and Universities as a way to reach out to minorities about the potential for art therapy as a career avenue. Maia is currently working on the Black Art Therapy Collective through the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, creating and participating in a space for professionals who identify as Black to explore issues of cultural significance. To learn more about Maia and her work, check out [her website](#).



*“Untitled” by Maia Wheeler. 2003. Colored pencil and marker.*

