



## National Recognition for Art Therapy through AATA's Partnership with Americans for the Arts

*Donna Betts, PhD, ATR-BC, AATA President  
March 16, 2016*

It's national Creative Arts Therapies Week, and I'm delighted to present this timely report on an event that took place last week in Washington, DC. On March 7 & 8, AATA Executive Director Cynthia Woodruff, and President Dr. Donna Betts, ATR-BC, represented the [American Art Therapy Association](#) at the [Arts Advocacy Day](#) National Arts Action Summit. This annual event provides attendees with advocacy training and an opportunity to attend

coordinated visits with Members of Congress. Hosted by Americans for the Arts in partnership with over 85 national arts-related organizations, Arts Advocacy Day is the largest gathering of its kind, bringing together a broad variety of the nation's civic and cultural groups. Grassroots advocates from across the country came to Washington to garner support for issues related to funding for the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA), arts education policy, and more.

The AATA has been represented at this important event in previous years, and we are proud to continue this mutually beneficial partnership. [Americans for the Arts has recognized AATA](#) members in previous venues. This year, on [Monday, March 7](#), Ms. Woodruff and I joined hundreds of colleagues from across the U.S. for interactive advocacy training, networking, and peer-to-peer learning. That evening, we attended the Nancy Hanks Lecture on Arts & Public Policy at the Kennedy Center, featuring keynote speaker Dr. [John Maeda](#), an American designer

and technologist who led the movement to transform STEM to [STEAM](#) during his tenure as President of the Rhode Island School of Design.



*Congressional Arts Caucus member, Rep. David Cicilline (RI), at the Congressional Arts Kick Off, Russell Senate Office Building, March 8, 2016*

A *Congressional Arts Kick Off* event in the Russell Senate Office Building prepared and energized attendees for the activities of Tuesday, March 8th. Inspiring remarks were made by R&B singer [Ledisi](#), NEA Chairman Jane Chu, National Endowment for the Humanities Chairman Bro Adams, slam poet [Ayinde Grimes](#), and several Members of Congress. After the event, attendees came together into designated state groups to



*From left: AATA Executive Director Cynthia Woodruff; Board President Dr. Donna Betts; and, GW art therapy graduate student Lida Sunderland at the Kennedy Center, March 7, 2016*



*Ledisi & Donna Betts in the Russell Senate Office Building*

conduct pre-arranged visits with Congressional representatives. Each team included a [state advocacy captain](#) to lead 500 attendees. Visiting representatives' offices in Washington enabled Ms. Woodruff and me to impart our own stories about the impact of art therapy. We joined different teams representing Virginia. My group, led by a policy expert from a local arts council, embarked on several visits.

The staffers with whom I spoke, such as the Legislative Correspondents for Senators Tim Kaine and Mark Warner, and the Legislative Assistant for my Congressman, were enthusiastic recipients of information about the art therapy profession. They were particularly interested in hearing about how [art therapy helps veterans](#), given that they comprise nearly 800,000 of Virginia's constituents. They were also eager to hear about the importance of art therapy for [older adults](#), for patients in [mental health treatment](#), for [children in schools](#), and other client groups whom we serve. Our

talking points were informed by the materials from Monday's training, and the comprehensive document, [Complete Legislative Issue Briefs and Statements](#).

Of interest to us as ambassadors of AATA and the art therapy profession in the United States, was the information described in the [Arts in Health Issue Brief](#). Despite strong historical beginnings in veterans hospitals during World War II, and inclusion in federal programs and research grant awards over many years through agencies within the Department of Health and Human Services, there remains a need to expand opportunities for creative arts therapies (CATs) and artist-directed programs. Two legislative items were of particular relevance. We urged Congress to:



(1) Support [H. R. 4063](#), the Jason Simcakoski PROMISE Act, sponsored by Rep. Bilirakis (R-FL), to improve access to evidence-based complementary and alternative treatments for veterans, including CATs. The bill would update and improve treatment guidelines for managing pain and



*House and Senate Building hallways bustling with Arts Advocacy Day participants!*

treating PTSD, psychiatric disorders, and substance abuse, and establish a new Federal Commission to study alternative treatment models used by the Veterans Administration (VA) in treating mental health conditions, and make these available in non-VA facilities. CATs services and artist-directed programs within VA hospitals and on military bases would provide increased access to affordable, outcomes-based healthcare and successful treatment options for veterans and military personnel who do not respond to traditional interventions.

(2) Enact [S. 192](#), the Older Americans Act Reauthorization Act of 2015, sponsored by Sen. Alexander (R-TN), which passed in the Senate in July 2015 and was referred to the House Committee on Education and the Workforce. This bill reauthorizes funding for support services, including CATs and artist-directed health promotion programs, and requires the Administration on Aging to focus on health and welfare needs of older individuals, which could increase access to art therapy programs.



*From left: Senior Innovation Advisor to the Chairman, NEA, Bill O'Brien; and Managing Partner, The Kass Group, Sara Kass, MD, showcase the National Geographic cover featuring art therapy (Feb., 2015 issue)*

In addition to sharing personal anecdotes describing how patients benefit from working with art therapists, it was advantageous to elucidate the positive outcomes reflected in economic analyses, cost studies, and clinical research demonstrating a positive trend in the use of CATs. Representatives and their staff appreciated hearing that access to creative arts therapies services reduces patients' levels of anxiety and depression, contributes to patient satisfaction, and improves providers' recruitment and retention rates. The impact on containing healthcare costs and facilitating functional outcomes achievement, addressing quality of care issues, enhancing coping and improving response to treatment, reducing the costs associated with pain medication and extended hospital care, were also noted by the staff with whom we met. The take-away: An investment in arts in health is an investment in America's health.



*From left: Certification Board for Music Therapists' Regulatory Affairs Advisor Dr. Dena Register, MT-BC; American Music Therapy Association Executive Director Dr. Andrea Farbman; and, AATA President Dr. Donna Betts, at the White House Briefing, March 8, 2016*

Importantly, we clarified that, in contrast to artists in community settings, art therapists are set apart by such criteria as our credentials, independent licensure (in some states), academic training, scope of practice, and ethical code. Of note, the team captains and advocates had done their homework, and were clear on these points.

Following the day of Hill visits, I had the honor of representing the AATA at a White House Briefing on Arts Policy. Officials from the White House Office of Public Engagement and the White House Office of Management and Budget, the Deputy Assistant to the President for Education Policy, the

U.S. Assistant Secretary of Commerce for Economic Development, and representatives from the National Endowment for the Arts and Americans for the Arts, were among the distinguished speakers. I am pleased to report that the benefits of the CATs were emphasized, in the context of veterans with PTSD. U.S. Navy CAPT (Ret.) Sara Kass, Military/Medical Consultant to the NEA, former Commander of the National Intrepid Center of Excellence (NICoE), WRNMMC, cited art therapy as a "Top 5" effective treatment for PTSD. The message was made abundantly

clear in support of art therapy and the CATs for the audience of policy makers, key White House personnel, Presidential advisors, arts leaders, and other stakeholders.

The connections and gains made by the art therapy profession in conjunction with Arts Advocacy Day 2016 represent one of the many ways in which the AATA collaborates with colleagues in related professions to contribute to the furtherance of art therapy.



*From left: Bill O'Brien, CAPT (Ret.) Sara Kass, AATA President Dr. Donna Betts, and AMTA Executive Director Dr. Andrea Farbman at the White House, Washington, DC, March 8, 2016*

The AATA is pursuing opportunities that were generated last week in Washington. Our full participation in this year's event broadens AATA's connections on a national scale, and provides multiple opportunities for follow up on policy matters impacting the art therapy profession. Arts Advocacy Day organizers and attendees, and Members of Congress and their staff with whom we connected, appreciate art therapy as a distinct profession. To perpetuate this momentum, the involvement of art therapists in advocacy is essential, in educating our colleagues and the public, as well as propelling art therapy into the future. Plan to attend Arts Advocacy Day 2017, and please inform the [AATA office](#) if you do, so that we may coordinate our efforts with you.



*From left: AATA President Dr. Donna Betts, Americans for the Arts CEO and President Robert Lynch, and AMTA Executive Director Dr. Andrea Farbman at the White House, Washington, DC, March 8, 2016*

The AATA is recognized as an indispensable resource by Americans for the Arts, the National Endowment for the Arts, and many other organizations. Our collective ability to increase accessibility to art therapy services for Americans is bolstered by your support of the AATA. I thank our members, who help ensure that AATA has a voice in the various milieus affecting policy, and in the public sphere, illuminating our vital contribution to society.

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[Arts Advocacy Day 2016.](#)



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