

# Iona Senior Services Art Therapy Program Hosts First Lady of South Korea

*Elizabeth Kim, MA, ATR  
July 13, 2017*

Congratulations to Elizabeth Kim, MA, ATR, who runs the art therapy program at [Iona Senior Services](#) in Washington, DC. She and her program were selected to host South Korean First Lady Kim Jung-Sook. South Korean President Moon Jae-in and the First Lady have both expressed their commitment to funding services for older adults with dementia and their families in South Korea. This effort is what sparked the First Lady's tour of Iona Senior Services, one of Washington D.C.'s premier aging organizations.



*(From left) First Lady of South Korea Kim Jung-Sook, Iona Participant, and Elizabeth Kim, MA, ATR*

## **Elizabeth Kim recounts the visit with the First Lady:**

On June 30, 2017, Iona hosted the First Lady of South Korea. The highlight of her visit was the opportunity to participate in the art therapy session. The studio had four participants, representing a range of age, diagnosis, and cultural background. I invited the group into the colorful studio, decorated with wall to wall participant artwork. As the First Lady softly painted a blue bird, a participant, who is a veteran, recollected a song, "There'll Be Blue Birds over the White Cliffs of Dover." This thought reeled in memories of his time in the Navy, viewing the ocean, birds, and the blue sky. The First Lady became immersed in the studio process or, as participants have called the studio, their "home away from home."

At the end of the visit, Kim Jung-Sook shared that her mother is in the advanced stages of dementia, and she wished she had known about treatment interventions such as art

therapy and the impact it could have had in her varying stages of dementia’s progression. Art therapy may have provided her mother an outlet for self-expression and relaxation.

As an art therapist at Iona Senior Services, I get to plant seeds of hope, positive energy, creativity, and healing. Integrating stories and exploring the here-and-now experience bring dynamic engagement and awareness, which is where healing takes place. I consider my role as a “compassionate witness,” who facilitates self-awareness in the individual and supports present emotions, thoughts, and perceptions. Participation in art therapy develops a positive and happier outlook on life for my participants.

Participants have expressed that the art studio is “peaceful,” a “room of possibilities,” and “a place where words come out.” One participant who is cognizant of his diagnosis often says a variation of, “I have Alzheimer’s, and my mind isn’t as good as it used to be, but this [art] does something for me; I am grateful.”



*First Lady of South Korea Kim Jung-Sook and Elizabeth Kim, MA, ATR*

Before our guests left, I gave the First Lady a gift, a collage of artwork and participant quotes on a canvas; it represents the wide-range of talents and forms of expression in the Art Therapy program at Iona Senior Services. I hope that this visit substantiated Kim Jung-Sook’s interest in art therapy and that it will help her to integrate art therapy programs back in South Korea and foster further collaborations for the Wellness and Arts Art Therapy program.

### **Read more about Elizabeth’s work and Iona’s innovative programming:**

Elizabeth Kim has worked at Iona Senior Services for sixteen months. She serves on the Board as Communications Co-Chair of [The Potomac Art Therapy Association](#) (PATA) and enjoys providing opportunities for art therapists to network with one another in Washington D.C., Maryland, and Virginia through CEU (Continuing Education) training and workshops. Since graduating from George Washington University’s Art Therapy program in 2014, Elizabeth Kim

has worked as an art therapist in New York, Virginia, and Washington D.C. in a variety of settings, including a residential facility for adolescents with eating disorders and Retirement Communities.

Iona Senior Services provides innovative and creative services to the aging population, and the Wellness & Arts Center uses a model focused on well-being and creativity to improve cognitive functioning and reduce depression and hospitalization. One innovative program that Iona offers is through a unique partnership with The Phillips Collection Museum. Every other month, participants visit the Phillips for a private tour designed for people with memory loss or cognitive impairment. In Iona's art studio, they explore themes that emerge in their discussions while at Phillips. Each year, The Phillips Collection displays [artwork created by Iona's Wellness & Arts Center's Participants](#) for a two-month exhibit, offering exposure and awareness for the Washington D.C. community.

Elizabeth provides art therapy for adult clients who have dementia, Alzheimer's, Parkinson's, and other cognitive and physical disabilities. She integrates mindfulness, meditation and sensory-based interventions such as, felting, printmaking and pottery.

[Click here](#) to learn more about the Art Therapy program at Iona Senior Services.



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