



# National Children's Mental Health Awareness Day 2016

*Donna Betts, PhD, ATR-BC,  
AATA President  
May 18, 2016*

On May 5, 2016, the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration ([SAMHSA](#)) held [National Children's Mental Health Awareness Day](#) at George Washington University, Washington, DC. Held in conjunction with Mental Health Awareness Month, this annual event explores how communities can increase access to behavioral health services and supports for children and youth. The AATA proudly participated as a National Collaborating Organization.



*From left: AATA Board President, Dr. Donna Betts; SAMHSA Principal Deputy Administrator, Kana Enomoto; AATA Executive Director, Cynthia Woodruff; and SAMHSA Director for Mental Health Services, Paolo del Vecchio  
Washington, DC, May 5, 2016*



*From left: GW Art Therapy student Deondra Wilkins; art therapists Stephanie Tyler and Jane Woo*

AATA officials as well as representatives from the Potomac Art Therapy Association ([PATA](#)) were in attendance, including practicing clinicians and students. The PATA coordinated to represent the profession at a designated table, complete with informational brochures, promotional materials, and an exhibition reflecting the significance of art therapy in children's mental health.

Honorary Chairperson and Special Recognition Award recipient, [Reid Ewing](#) – who plays Dylan on “Modern Family” – opened with remarks describing his own mental health challenges related to self-image and identity. Aaron Gilchrist, NBC News4 Today co-anchor, continued the conversation as Host and Moderator for three panel discussions. Audience members and live viewers submitted questions in an interactive format. Interspersed throughout the dialogue, representatives from key organizations around the country joined via teleconference, reflecting the event's national reach.

The theme of National Children’s Mental Health Awareness Day was “Finding Help. Finding Hope.” Testimonials were featured from members of three groups that are best positioned to help children: families, schools, and law enforcement. The panels, each of which included three different sets of presenters, addressed: *How Family Support Can Lead to Help and Hope*, *How to Find Help and Hope in Schools*, and *How to Find Help and Hope Through Law Enforcement*.

As a National Collaborating Organization for this year’s Awareness Day, AATA Executive Director Cynthia Woodruff and I had the opportunity to meet with SAMHSA personnel, as well as network with event presenters and representatives from organizations such as the National Council for Behavioral Health, the National Alliance on Mental Illness, and many more. SAMHSA Principal Deputy Administrator, Kana Enomoto, and SAMHSA Director for Mental Health Services, Paolo del Vecchio, were delighted to have our support, and for the opportunity to hear directly from us about the work of the AATA and the many benefits of art therapy for children and families.



From left: Dr. Cheryl Doby-Copeland and Dr. Jordan Potash



From left: Donna Betts, Reid Ewing and Cynthia Woodruff

In fact, art therapy was well represented and our group helped to spread the word among attendees about art therapy. In addition to a number of clinicians and students, also among us were: member of the AATA Board of Directors, Dr. Cheryl Doby-Copeland, ATR-BC, LPC, LMFT (also of the DC Department of Behavioral Health); AATA Ethics Chair, Dr. Jordan Potash, ATR-BC, REAT, LCPAT, LCAT; PATA President

Nicholas Denson; and PATA Ethics Chair Deni Brancheau, EdS, ATR-BC, LCPAT.

To learn more about the AATA’s and our local chapters’ efforts to promote Mental Health Awareness Month, visit the AATA’s social media sites. For more about the May 5th event, view the on-demand version: [Awareness Day 2016](#), join the social media conversation, #HeroesofHope and use this to share your experiences and perspectives throughout the month. Also see SAMHSA’s [Awareness Day 2016 Short Report](#) with new data on systems of care, and access some of the AATA’s resources on children’s mental health: <http://3blmedia.com/News/Campaign/Art-Therapy-Children>

