

SAMPLE TEXT FOR GRANT WRITING

What Is OMA?

Opening Minds through Art (OMA) is an evidence-based, intergenerational art-making program for people living with dementia. OMA provides those living with dementia and their caregivers opportunities to connect with students and to experience joy through creative explorations.

OMA's mission is to build bridges across age and cognitive barriers through art. Through this intergenerational work, we envision a world free of stigma for people living with dementia. We believe in: the creative capacity of all people throughout the lifespan; everyone's rights to autonomy, dignity and integrity; and the necessity of intergenerational connections to bridging the age divide.

OMA serves people living with dementia in long-term care facilities, adult day centers, and those living at home. After initial training that develops skills to communicate in sensitive and respectful ways, volunteers are paired one-to-one with older adults living with dementia for 6-12 weeks. Volunteers are made up of high school and college students, community members, as well as family and professional caregivers.

Launched in 2007 by Miami University's Scripps Gerontology Center and since replicated at more than 200 North American communities, OMA serves tens of thousands of people living with dementia, their caregivers, and students.

The Benefits of OMA

Art-making in OMA brings the older people and the volunteers closer and staff often witness new levels of engagement and expression among residents released from their daily routines. Volunteers typically start out with some degree of apprehension and anxiety but by the end of the term, they develop a deep appreciation for the friendships, or even kinship, with their partners. And staff and family visitors witness new dimensions of social and aesthetic capability they had not seen before.

For the older people, living in a retirement community can be a very isolating existence. People with dementia tend to be misunderstood, rendered unable to engage in meaningful activities, and therefore underserved. The weekly arrival of student and community volunteers brings them joy and success in creating beautiful artwork that brings them pride.

OMA was designed in response to both the elders' needs for more social engagement and students' needs for experiences that will challenge value system that tends to privilege youthfulness. To help students value diversity and appreciate all people regardless of age or cognitive status, we need to get students out of conventional classrooms and into the community. The opportunity to experience structured and supported interactions with older people on a weekly basis is bound to change their views of aging. Over the years, we have witnessed the growth of genuine and reciprocal relationships that are built across the generations. An analysis

of student journals and pre- post-tests of their change in attitudes show that volunteering in OMA does contribute to a more positive view toward people living with dementia. This transformation was only possible because of the direct interactions with their older adult partners.

Students may start the program believing they will be providing a service and helping the elders but quickly learn how much they benefit from the experience. They learn important life lessons, about paying attention and active listening; about love and respect; about valuing people who are very different from themselves. This transforms the elders' role from care recipients to teachers and artists which promotes the elders' wellbeing.