



FROM THE ACL NETWORK

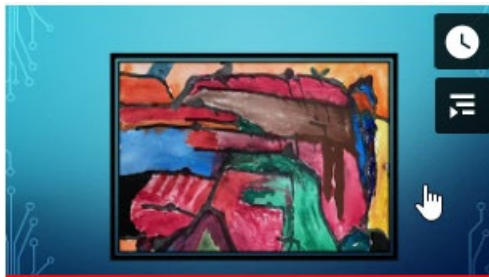
Opening Minds through Art

The pandemic has been especially difficult for people with dementia. Locked in their minds by their disease, they often experience isolation and loneliness even without social distancing. But ACL grantee [Lutheran Community Services Northwest](#) (LCS Northwest) has figured out a way to foster connection and artistic expression online even when in-person classes weren't possible.

LCS Northwest offers the Opening Minds through Art (OMA) program with funds from ACL's [Alzheimer's Disease Programs Initiative](#) and support from the [National Alzheimer's and Dementia Resource Center](#). The program uses award-winning, evidence-based curriculum developed by Scripps Gerontology Center at Miami University in Ohio to build intergenerational relationships and provide an outlet for creative expression for people with dementia. Although the curriculum was originally designed for a classroom setting, the pandemic canceled the class, but an instructor reimagined the classes for a virtual environment. In September 2020 LCS Northwest became the first OMA class in the nation to roll out completely online—with beautiful results!

For the classroom version, the OMA program usually pairs people with Alzheimer's and other forms of dementia with college students who work together over several weeks to create art and new connections. During the pandemic, a caregiver or family member serves as the partner. LCS Northwest arranges for contactless delivery of art supplies to the participants so they have everything they need to create beautiful and expressive works of art.

The class may be virtual, but the connections created are just as real as those formed in person. "It's exciting to facilitate a way for people with dementia to communicate through art," says Laurie Arndt, the certified OMA instructor who adapted the curriculum.



At the conclusion of the class, LCS Northwest usually partners with a local art gallery to display the participants' artwork.

This [short video slideshow of art from the fall 2020 online show](#) offers a glimpse of the powerful images they created.