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Examining the Impact of Art Therapy Related Activities and Emotional Well-being: Make & Take Mondays Program

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Abstract

Various emotional well-being issues often arise in college students. Participation in creative activities, regardless of previous art experience, contributes to a significant decrease in cortisol levels, resulting in less stress. However, to better understand the impact of art therapy related activities on well-being, it is important to examine what specific areas of emotional well-being may be applied to specific art activities. The Make and Take Mondays Program was implemented through the East Tennessee State University Counseling Center and provided students with the opportunity to participate in seven different art therapy related activities. Students were then given informational handouts in reference to research on each specific activity, information about the counseling resources available on campus and the opportunity to complete a quick survey and optional additional survey. As a result of implementing the Make and Take Mondays program and compiling survey results, it was determined that the majority of students found the program to be helpful and reported feeling calm and positive while participating in the activities.

Introduction



The Make and Take Mondays project aimed to promote mental wellness for ETSU students through creativity and expression, while also promoting mental health awareness, to eliminate stigma. The goal was to positively impact ETSU Student's mental well-being through implementing art therapy related activities addressing the following: Life Balance, Stress-Relief, Self-Awareness, Gratitude, Mental Health Awareness, Mindfulness and Self-Expression.

Methods

When implementing Make & Take Monday's activities to students, I conducted the therapy process as follows:

1. Build rapport
2. Converse & engage with the participant (while also allowing the individual to create independently)
3. Close/ terminate in a positive manner

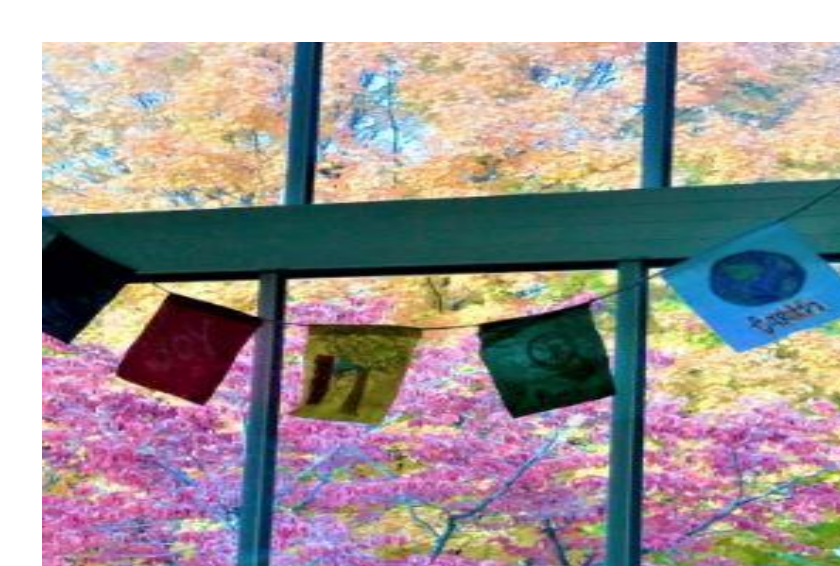
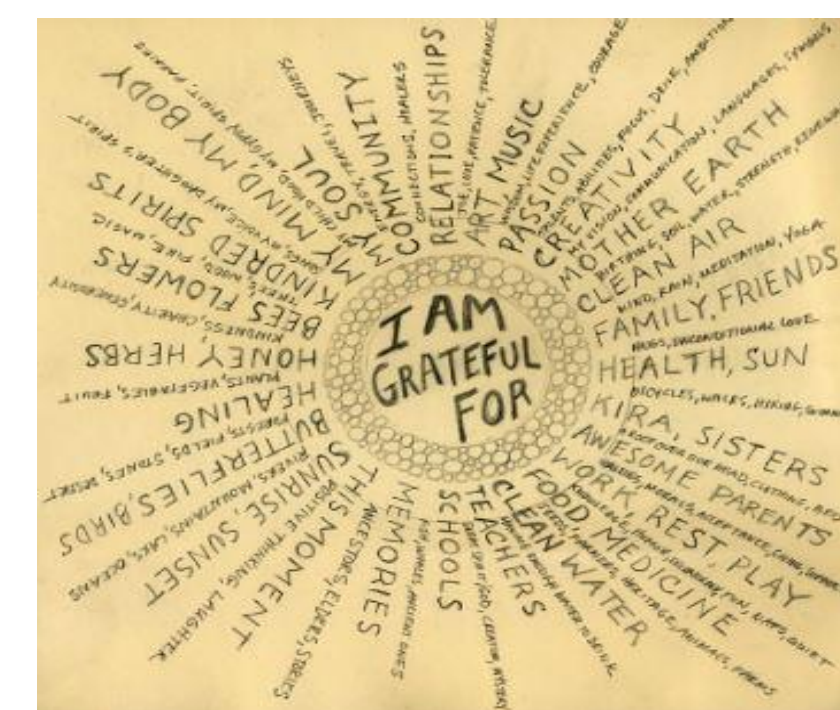
I provided participants with a quick survey, and an optional additional survey to determine results.

QUICK SURVEY

NAME: _____

1. where did you hear about make & take mondays?
 - flyer
 - email
 - social media
 - tv screens/ marquee
2. did you find this activity to be helpful?
 - YES
 - NO
 - somewhat
3. would you be interested in completing an additional 10 question survey online?
 - YES, my email is: _____
 - NO

Activities



1. Balance
Students were provided stones to represent each value in their life to balance. The goal of this activity was to encourage students to examine their personal values and apply each to the wellness wheel.

2. Stress Relief
Materials were provided to create hemp bracelets. The goal of this activity was for students to focus on the task at hand, to promote stress relief.

3. Gratitude
Templates of gratitude journals were provided for students to assemble and decorate. This activity encouraged students to list one aspect each day to ultimately implement gratitude into their daily lives.

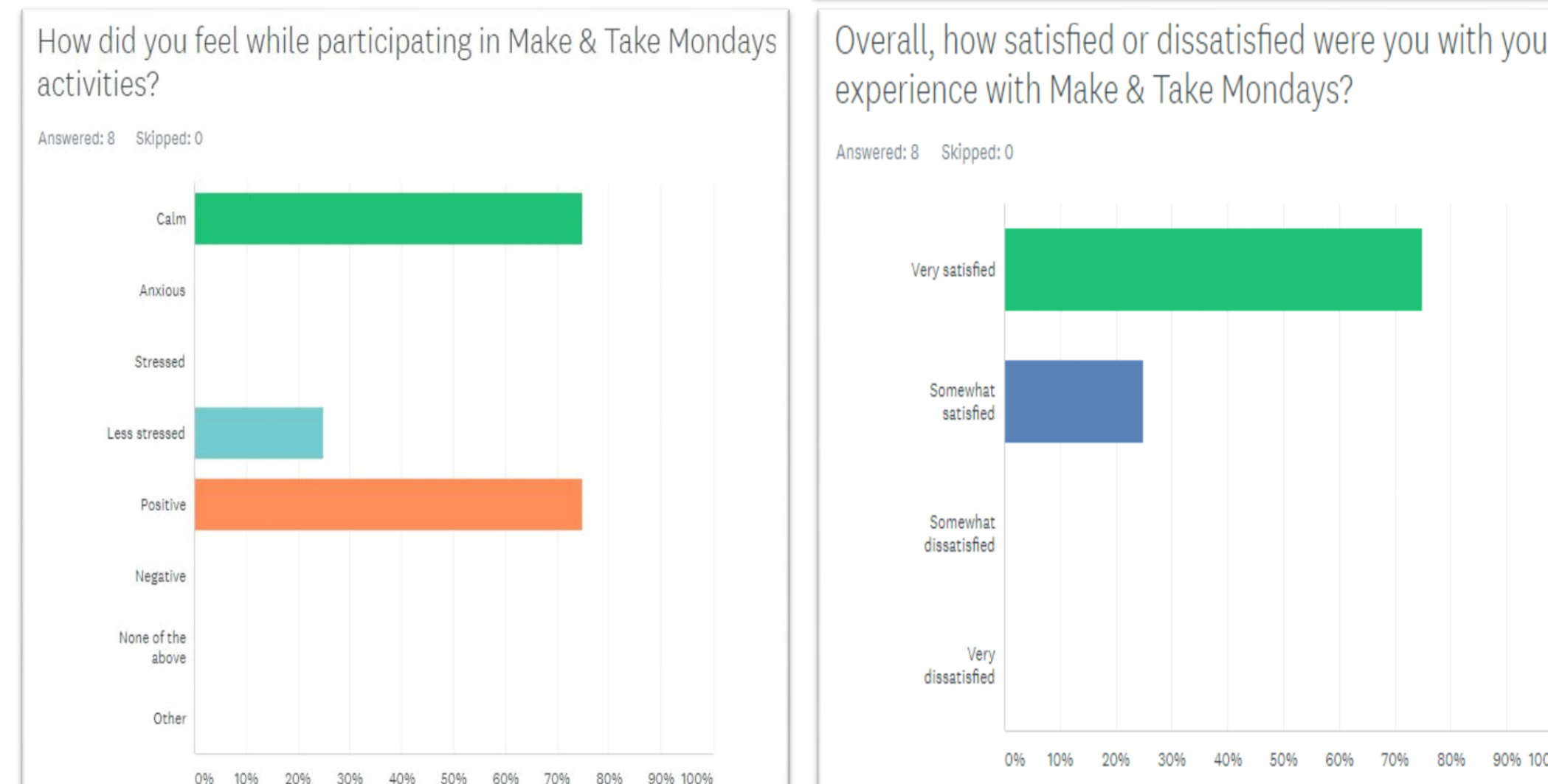
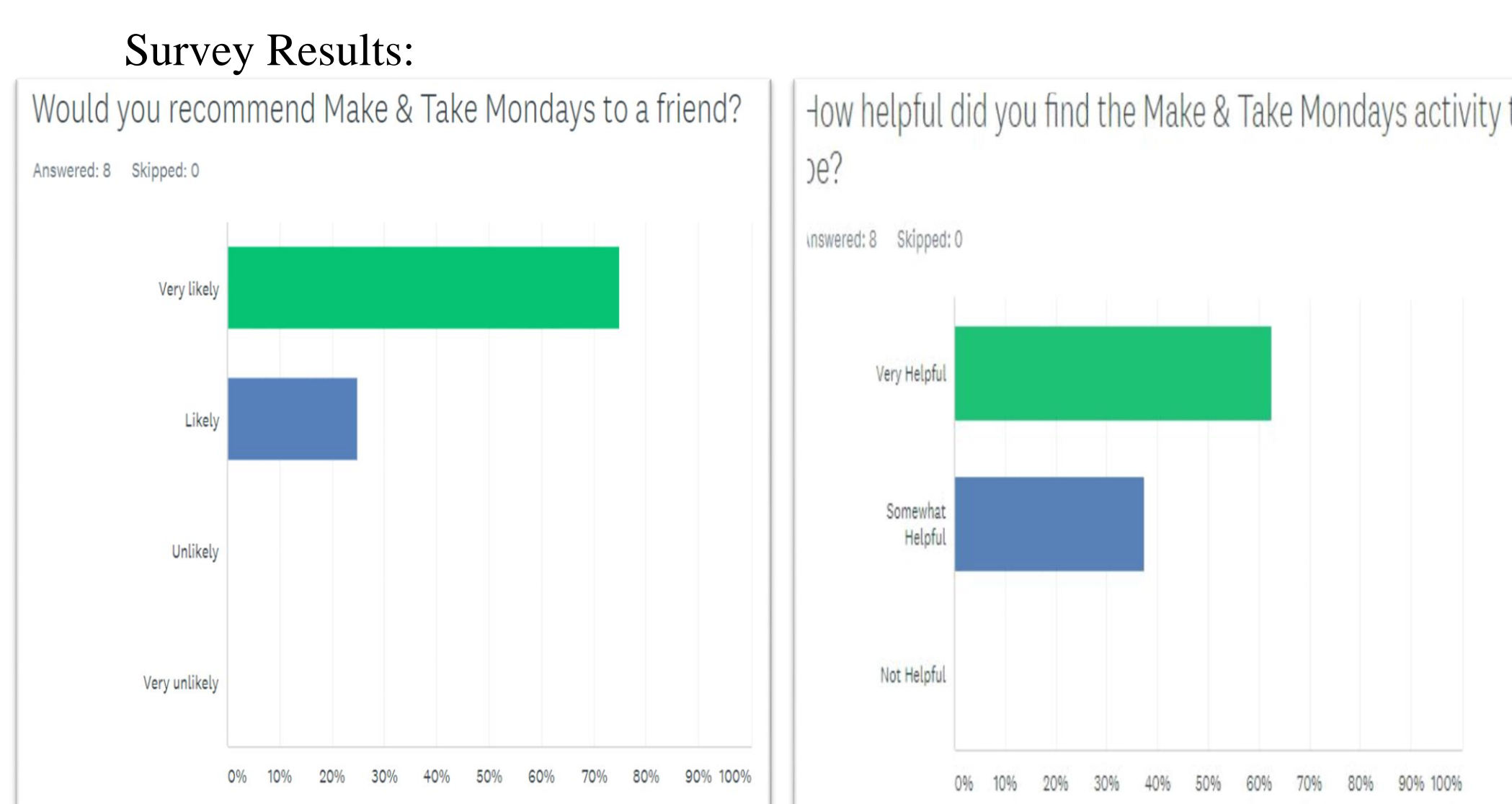
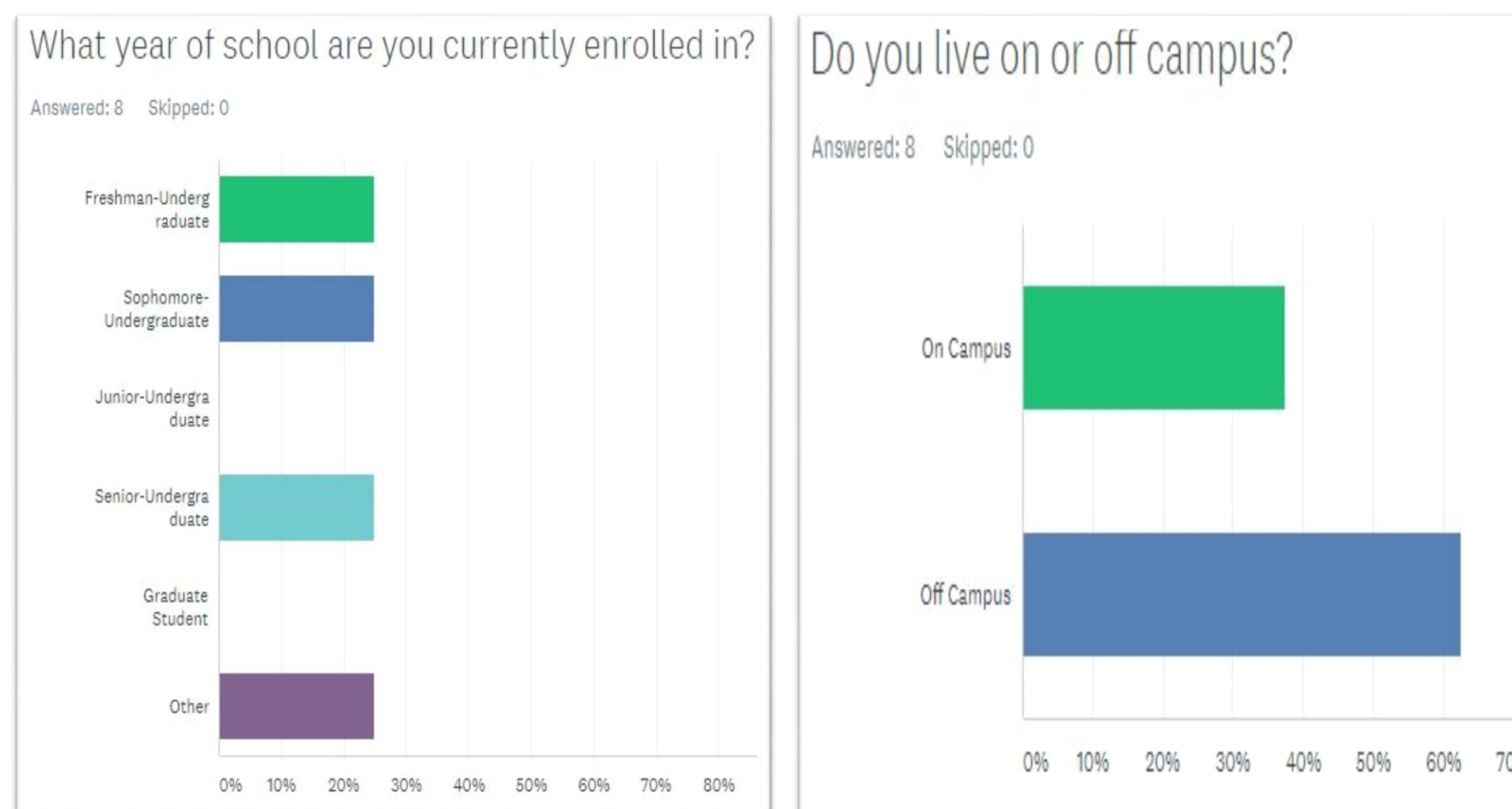
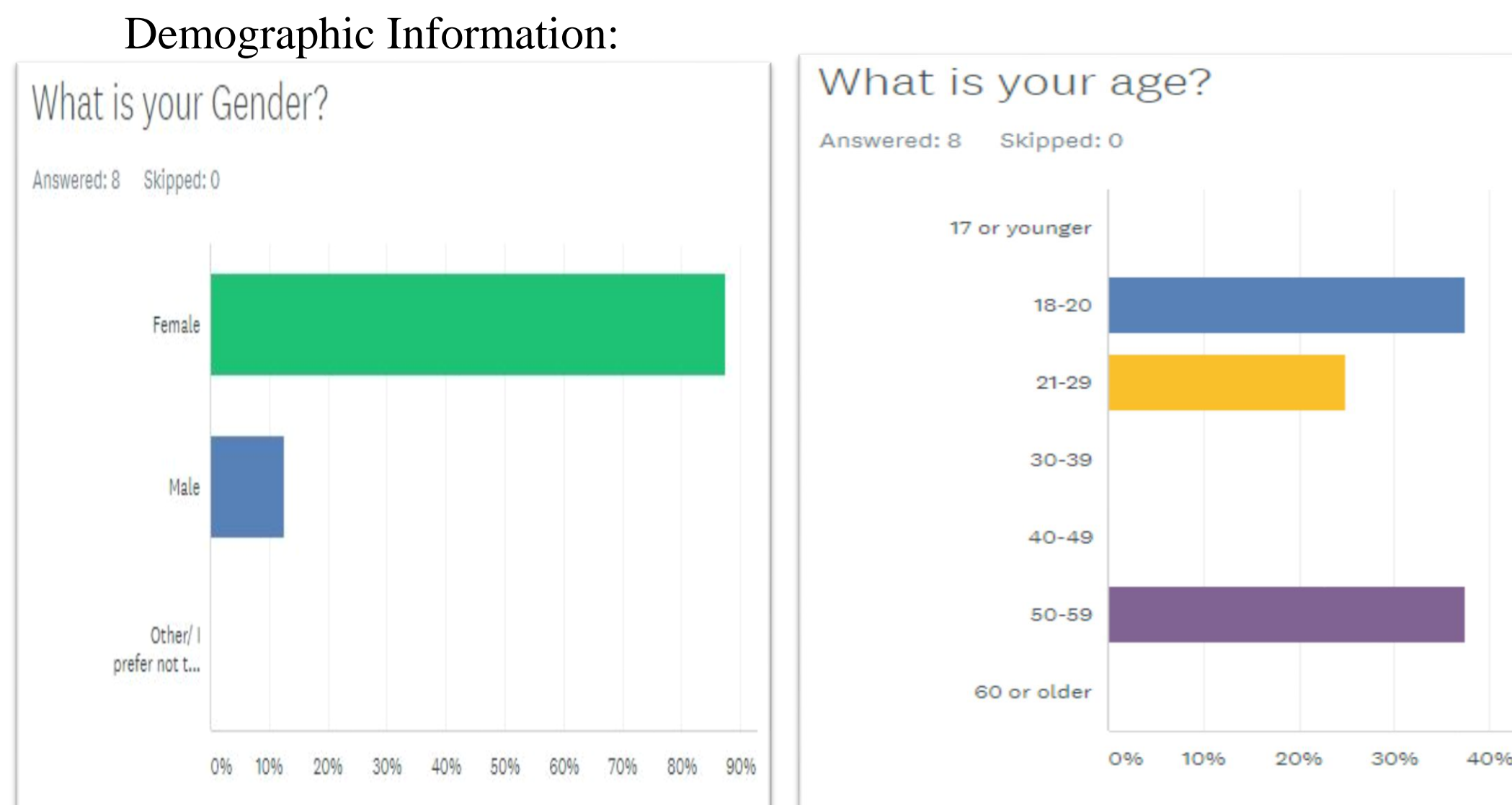
4. Self-Awareness
Cutouts of people were provided for students to creatively decorate into a magnet of themselves, to promote self-awareness.

5. Mental Health Awareness
During this activity, students painted stones that were to be placed across campus. Informational cards were placed on the back to direct other students to the ETSU Counseling Center.

6. Mindfulness
Students were encouraged to create a painting, reflecting what they see, hear, feel, taste and smell in the present moment. A "Peace Meditation" handout was also provided. The goal of this activity was to promote students to apply mindfulness skills into their daily life.

7. Self-Expression
Students were provided with the opportunity to create prayer flags, in order to promote a visual voice to express hopes, dreams, concerns, prayers, and wishes.

Results



Research

1. Art therapy allows individuals to visually express emotions, in a noninvasive manner, resulting in a positive impact on the participant's mood and anxiety levels. Shella, T. 2018
2. A significant decrease in cortisol levels, or stress hormones, were found after individuals participated in art making. Ultimately, this supports the concept that participation in art activities can decrease an individual's stress level regardless of one's artistic experience. Cole, A., Jenefsky, N., Ben-David, S., & Munson, M. R. (2018)
3. The study conducted by Watkins, P. C., Emmons, R. A., Greaves, M. R., & Bell, J. (2018). , provides a stronger understanding of the positive emotion; joy, as well as how gratitude has been shown to enhance an individual's joy and well-being over time.
4. Psychotherapeutic treatments, such as art therapy, can improve an individual's well-being and promote personal growth through ego-strength, emotional reactions, increased insight and improved self-awareness. Holmqvist, G., Roxberg, Å., Larsson, I., & Lundqvist-Persson, C. (2017).
5. Stigma associated with mental illness has been shown to contribute to a negative impact on individuals, which often results in self-stigmatization. Vingilis, E., & State, S. A. (2011).
6. Individuals participating in mindfulness, experienced body awareness as well as changes to the structure of the region of the brain that is associated with body awareness. Hölzel, B. K., Lazar, S. W., Gard, T., Schuman-Olivier, Z., Vago, D. R., & Ott, U. (2011).
7. During the process of art therapy, individuals often experience cognitive control and reflection and emotional levels are often explored in a less conscious manner. Haeyen, S., Hooren, S., Veld, W. M., & Hutschemaekers, G. (2017).

Conclusions

In applying the survey results, supportive research and my experiences with participants, the Make & Take Mondays art therapy program ultimately had a positive impact on students at ETSU. There were a total of 65 participants across all events, although a few of the participants attended multiple events.

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