

# Fostering Friendships Through Meaningful Engagement with the Arts

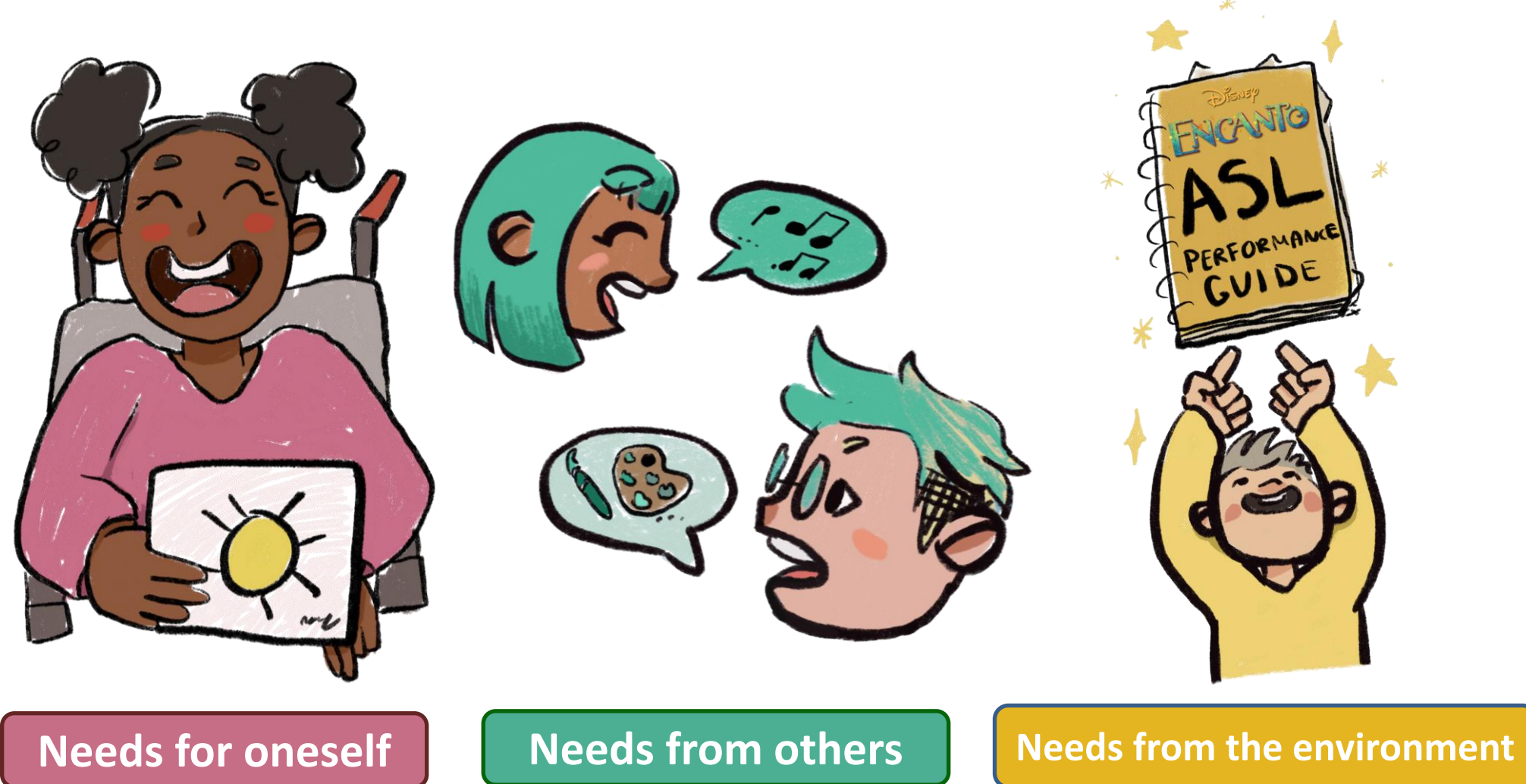
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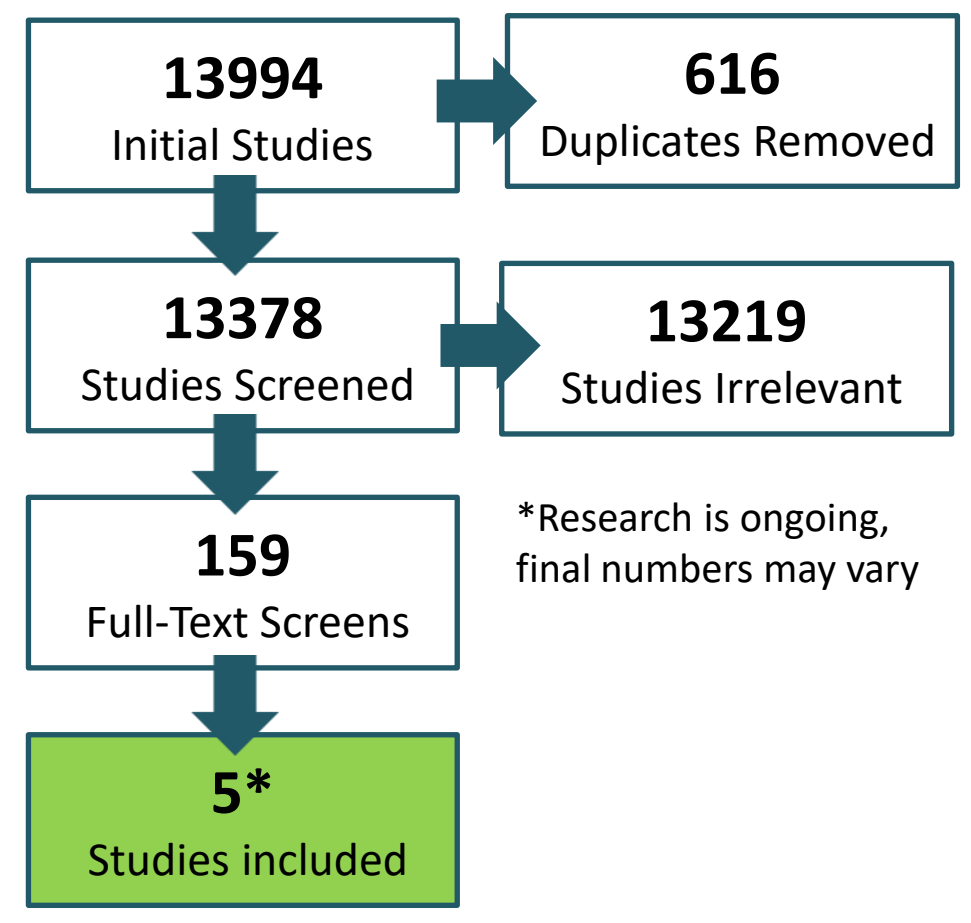
## Background

- Social connectedness is a well-known determinant of health.<sup>2</sup>
- Children and youth with disabilities (CYwD) experience more social exclusion than their peers without disability.<sup>3</sup>
- The arts have potential to facilitate friendships, however research on this is lacking.

**Our goal** is to explore how the arts meet **three essential needs** that we identified as **foundational** to friendship development:



**Research Question**  
How does arts-based programming facilitate friendships for children by meeting three essential needs?



## Methods

- Scoping review
- Search of five databases
- Keywords included “Arts-Based Programming”, “Disability”, “Friendship” and related terms

# The arts are an accessible way to facilitate friendships while promoting overall health and wellbeing.



Scan me to learn more about the importance of friendships!

**Holland Bloorview** UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO  
**Kids Rehabilitation Hospital**

**References**  
<sup>1</sup>Draper, A. R. (2022). Music Education for Students With Autism Spectrum Disorder in a Full-Inclusion Context. *Journal of Research in Music Education*, 70(2), 132–155. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00224294211042833>  
<sup>2</sup>Lauris, C. L., Rojas, D. O., Shelton, T., & Tucker, A. (2017). *Friendships: Building a good life*. The PEAL Center and the Pennsylvania Developmental Disabilities Council.  
<sup>3</sup>Sentenac, M., Gavin, A., Arnaud, C., Molcho, M., Godeau, E., & Gabhainn, S. N. (2011). Victims of Bullying Among Students With a Disability or Chronic Illness and Their Peers: A Cross-National Study Between Ireland and France. *Journal of Adolescent Health*, 48(5), 461–466. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jadohealth.2010.07.031>  
<sup>4</sup>Wu, J., Chen, K., Ma, Y., & Vomočilová, J. (2020). Early intervention for children with intellectual and developmental disability using drama therapy techniques. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 109, 104689. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2019.104689>

## What we are learning

The arts meet CYwD needs for **oneself** by creatively encouraging self expression, meaningful participation, and exploration of one's identity.<sup>1,4</sup>

I know who I am, and what I have to offer.



I'm free to talk in a way that works for me.

The arts meet CYwD needs from **others** by allowing children to engage with peers in diverse ways, while providing opportunities to connect and be accepted.<sup>1,4</sup>

The arts meet CYwD needs from **the environment** by being an accessible and easily adaptable medium to accommodate diverse needs. Specific spaces, tools, and abilities are not necessary to engage with art.<sup>1,4</sup>

I'm happy this is a space that includes me.



## Conclusions

- The arts can create spaces that make friendships a possibility.
- By implementing Arts-Based Programming at Holland Bloorview, children can participate meaningfully while promoting their overall health.
- The arts are an accessible medium for staff at Holland Bloorview to implement in any space a child is present.

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