

A Guide to Creative Health & Bunkateki Shoko

First Steps in Cultural Prescribing

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Everyday Care through Art

Let What You Love Guide Others

Many of us have felt a quiet strength or deep calm
in moments of drawing, playing music, or simply gazing at nature.

Culture and the arts offer more than connection with others;
they help us reconnect with ourselves.
In doing so, they can play a powerful role in
how we live well and stay well.

Cultural Prescribing is about bringing culture and creativity
back into the heart of everyday living.

As more people embrace this approach,
we move toward a society that's truly inclusive—
where everyone has a space to belong, a role to fulfill,
and the chance to lead a full, healthy, and meaningful life
on their own terms.

It's not just artists or healthcare professionals who shape this future.

By sharing what we love or do well,
each of us helps cultivate communities
where we feel free to be ourselves,
and where unexpected connections emerge
through what others love too.

Let us introduce the first steps on that journey.

First Steps in Cultural Prescribing

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What Is Cultural Prescribing?

Reconnecting with Culture to Live Well

From our first breath to our last,
we live our lives rooted in *culture*.

For some, culture means long-standing traditions;
for others, it's found in art, historic architecture, or
the rituals of daily life.

Living in a community, carrying out everyday life...

These simple acts, woven together, become what we call culture.

Living itself is a kind of *expression*,
and each of us expresses it in our own way.

But in the rush of modern life, filled with duties and deadlines,
those connections to community and culture can fade.

Cultural prescribing invites us to return—
to reconnect with culture,
and to find strength and well-being
in the *art of living* itself.



A Place Where Being Alone Still Feels Like Belonging

Philosopher Hannah Arendt once reflected
on the difference between solitude and loneliness:

"In solitude, I am 'by myself,' together with myself,
and therefore two-in-one,
whereas in loneliness I am actually one,
deserted by all others."

— *The Life of the Mind, Vol. I: Thinking*

Feeling safe in solitude, for you and those you care about,
begins with the belief that you are never truly alone in the world.

Is there someone nearby who understands the art of living
just as you are?

And when you're by yourself,
do you still feel a sense of belonging?



Your Gifts, Their Strength

Do you have something you love,
or something you're naturally good at?
For some, this might be listening to music, dancing, or taking photos.

Maybe a photo you snapped without much thought
will one day inspire a young person, decades from now.

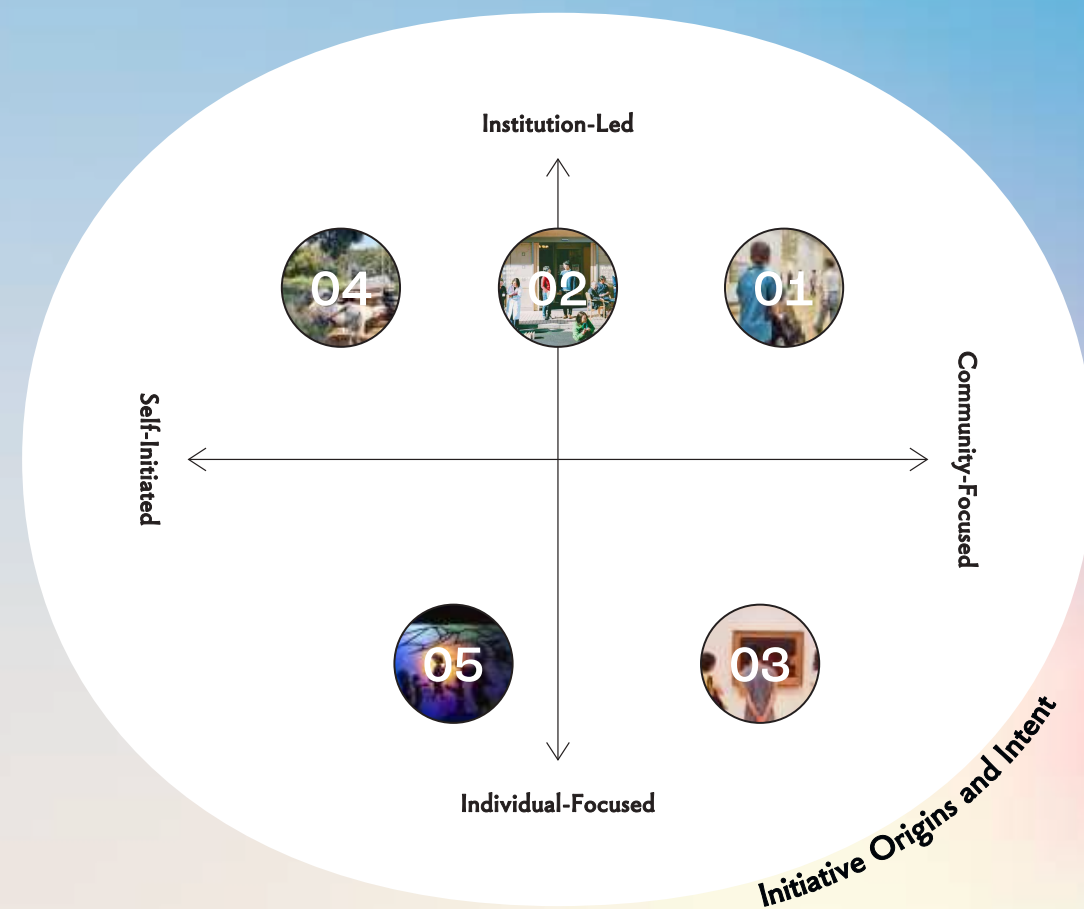
Your unique way of expressing yourself
could awaken creativity in someone else
and become a light that illuminates their path.

Through the art of living,
we become part of something greater—
A light that helps others find their way.



Stories from the Field

Cultural prescribing nurtures human connection through the power of culture and art. These are stories of individuals taking their first steps, and over time, those steps create change within the surrounding community. Why not use these stories as a starting point, and begin your own journey in cultural prescribing? Small clues, not big changes, are what build new connections over time.



Where Shared Sensations Spark a New Circle of Art and Healing

Creative Ageing ZUTTOBI

In Japan, activities that connect art and physical/mental well-being may still feel unfamiliar. In response to the challenges of a super-aged society, the Tokyo Metropolitan Art Museum (hereafter, Tobi) launched *Creative Ageing ZUTTOBI* — a pioneering project in this field — which is now conducted in collaboration with Tokyo University of the Arts (hereafter, Geidai). By combining cross-disciplinary research and hands-on practice, it envisions a society where people of all ages can stay connected to art and museums.

Held in 2021 during the COVID-19 pandemic, *Van Gogh Exhibition at Home: in Company with Art Communicators* was Tobi's first program designed specifically for people living with dementia. Participants and *Tobira* (art communicators based at Tobi) viewed masterpieces through online dialogue. Hayato Fujioka, curator at the museum and coordinator of the *ZUTTOBI* project, explains, "Alongside the exhibition, we wanted the museum to actively collaborate with local welfare and healthcare sectors. That's why we organized Community Connection Meetings with the Taito Council of Social Welfare as well as medical and care professionals, and shared footage from the *Van Gogh Exhibition at Home* program."

Meanwhile, Yoshiko Chigasaki from the Taito Council of Social Welfare had been concerned about elderly people becoming isolated in their rooms or facilities, leading to cognitive and mobility decline. "I still vividly remember how struck I was when I first saw the *Van Gogh Exhibition at Home* footage. I thought, 'So this is how people can connect and interact. That's the power of the arts!'" she says with a smile. "I was also impressed by the important role that *Tobira* played."

At the same time, to better understand community-based healthcare, the museum team visited *Café Y.O.U.*, a dementia café. "Before visiting, I felt unsure of what I could contribute,"

recalls Yoko Kanahama, Program Officer for *ZUTTOBI* at Geidai. "But once we took part in the Café's activity, conversation began to flow naturally, and I felt a real sense of mutual connection. It was a powerful experience that made me want to build something together—beyond individual needs or areas of expertise, through shared understanding."

What came to life through this collaboration was *Orange Café - Exploring the Museum with Tobira: The World of Danish Furniture*, a joint program between Tobi and the Dementia Disease Medical Center of Eiju General Hospital. In front of the furniture exhibits, participants exchanged ideas freely.

"It's incredibly reassuring to be able to develop the program with input from healthcare and welfare professionals, who can point out things like dim lighting or potential tripping hazards from a professional perspective," says Fujioka.

Healthcare and welfare professionals who are regularly connected with local seniors also played a key role in promoting the program. Their involvement offered reassurance to potential participants, who often said, "If you're recommending it, then I'll give it a try." "To improve quality of life for older adults and people living with dementia, it's important to have as many 'cards in hand' as possible—things that bring a sense of purpose and enjoyment to daily life. Adding art to those options is incredibly valuable," says Chigasaki.

From Junya Nomoto, a registered occupational therapist working in clinical operations, came a specific suggestion: "Because family plays such a crucial role in the lives of people with dementia, it would be great to offer programs focused on family members as well."

Even when people come from different fields or roles, the challenges they recognize are often shared. Through active, two-way communication and shared sensibilities, more and more possibilities can begin to take shape.

Left: People with dementia and their families look at Danish chairs at *Finn Juhl and Danish Chairs* (Tokyo Metropolitan Art Museum, 2022)
Right: Leaflet from the *Van Gogh Exhibition at Home* program



ZUTTOBI Art Appreciation - Enjoy Art at the Museum! targeting people aged 65 and over and their families in collaboration with Taito Hospital (The University Art Museum, Tokyo University of the Arts, 2024) Photo by Yusuke Nakajima



From left: Junya Nomoto (Registered Occupational Therapist, Taito Hospital / Geriatric Health Service Facility Senzoku), Yoshiko Chigasaki (Community Social Worker, Taito Council of Social Welfare), Hayato Fujioka (Curator, Tokyo Metropolitan Art Museum), and Yoko Kanahama (Project Research Assistant, Care & Communication, Geidai Platform of Arts and Knowledge for the Future (Geidai PARK), Tokyo University of the Arts). Photo by Yumi Saito

Creative Ageing ZUTTOBI

Operating interactive programs to foster creative engagement, aiming to ensure lifelong accessibility to art and museums.

Contact: Learning and Public Projects,
Tokyo Metropolitan Art Museum
Tel: +81-3-3823-6921 (Mon-Fri, 9:30-17:30 JST)
Email: info@zutobi.com
Web: www.zutobi.com (EN/JP)

01



A Place to Discover Life's Joys

Dozen Hospital & Dozenkai Clinic

02

"What does this look like to you?" "It looks sweet and delicious." "Might it be a bag?" A group of people gathered around a table share their impressions while looking at a playing card sized image. Spread out before them are other cards printed with images of paintings and sculptures. The aroma of coffee fills the air, a record player softly plays music in the background, and lively conversation flows. It's easy to forget this is a medical facility.

Located in Tokyo's Taito Ward, *Dozen Hospital* and *Dozenkai Clinic* make up a community hospital complex; the hospital provides inpatient and home care including rehabilitation, while the nearby clinic offers outpatient services, just a one-minute walk away. On a weekday morning, the first-floor community space of the clinic, known as *Mino Room*, was hosting a unique event called *Art Dialogue Café*. "*Mino Room* was launched in January 2023 with the goal of creating a place where not only patients, but also local residents, can gather freely," explains Ayaka Fukui, a community planner at the facility. The space

hosts a variety of programs developed in collaboration with the community, including health exercises led by rehab staff, *Mino Room Café*, a pop-up run by physicians, and a nostalgic *Showa Pop Music Club*.

"In medical care, the relationship between doctor and patient is usually very clear," Fukui continues. "But when it comes to brewing or knowing about coffee, the patient might be more skilled. I want this to be a space where we can shift those roles and relationships that are often unconsciously shaped by clinical care."

One of the key features of *Mino Room* is that many of the programs are born from participants' own ideas. One popular example is *Healthy Mahjong*, now a regular event that many look forward to. Another is the *Dialect Club*, where people chat in their native dialects—also initiated based on a suggestion from an outpatient.

"That person had nowhere else to go besides the clinic, and we worried he might become isolated after rehab ended. So I invited him to *Mino Room Café* for a chat about his interests. When I

happened to speak in Kansai dialect, his eyes lit up—and that led to the idea for the *Dialect Club*. Now he's opened up and is even joining other programs."

At the *Art Dialogue Café*, one man looking at a card featuring Monet's *Water Lilies* began talking with a smile about fishing: "There are fish in spots like this, you know." Having recently lost his spouse, he initially said, "I only talk to the TV at home." Another participant shared passionately about his hobby of photographing airplanes, inspired by an image on a card. "Using art as a starting point opens up perspectives and creates space for freer, more equal connections between healthcare professionals and patients," says Fukui.

The vision of *Mino Room* is to create a space where everyone can be themselves and feel connected to their community. Whether or not someone needs medical care, it's a place they can look forward to visiting. Here, people can rediscover joy and meaning in everyday life.



Left: Medical staff sometimes join *Healthy Mahjong*

Top right: *Art Dialogue Café*

Bottom right: Ayaka Fukui, who plans and operates *Mino Room* (Photo by Takeshi Abe)

Dozen Hospital & Dozenkai Clinic

A community hospital providing comprehensive, locally rooted care that links rehabilitation, home visits, and outpatient services.

2-7-5 Minowa, Taito-ku, Tokyo, Japan

Tel: +81-3-3802-2102

Web: www.dozen-hp.com (JP)



Art Has a Way of Unlocking the Heart

Flatart

Everyone is equal and flat in front of art. That belief is reflected in the name *Flatart*—an organization that connects socially isolated youth in their late teens to early twenties with society. At the heart of their activities is, of course, art. The group has organized a range of experiences with young people facing various challenges, including museum visits to institutions like the National Museum of Western Art and studio visits with working artists.

Co-director Misa Mizukami first experienced the power of art through parenting. Her son, who showed signs of a developmental disorder, had difficulty adjusting to school. But one place he did find comfort was in an art class he began attending as a young child. “The teacher placed great importance on letting children express themselves freely. It wasn’t about being good or bad at drawing—he would always praise the feelings my son expressed through his art,” Mizukami recalls. “Thanks to that, the art class became his safe space. He kept attending all the way through high school, and he’s now a student at Tokyo University of the Arts.”

Hiroko Nakajima, the other co-director, had long been familiar with art through her work, frequently visiting museums and galleries. “I once organized a walking tour exploring the ups and downs of urban topography, and it attracted a wonderful mix of people with diverse interests. That experience made me realize how art can bring people together and create a truly rich and expansive space.”

The two met through the Tobira Project, a joint initiative by the Tokyo Metropolitan Art Museum and Tokyo University of the Arts that fosters community through art. In 2021, they founded *Flatart* in collaboration with the nonprofit *Sankakusha*,

which supports young people who are unable to rely on parents or trusted adults as they navigate independence.

At the core of *Flatart*’s programs with youth is a method called *dialogue-based viewing*, developed through the *Tobira* Project. Participants look at the same artwork together and share their thoughts freely; there are no right or wrong answers. This open format helps create a relaxed environment where many begin to speak from the heart. “There was a participant struggling with decisions about work. During the exhibition, we only exchanged a few casual comments, but on the way home, she suddenly began talking at length about what she really wanted to do,” Nakajima recalls. “Being in a quiet space and facing the art may have helped her clarify feelings that had previously been hard to put into words.”

Some participants have never set foot in a museum before. But their experience or background doesn’t matter, because in the freedom of the art space, they feel accepted and find a sense of self-worth. In fact, more and more participants have begun making requests like “I want to go to this exhibition” or expressing interest in creating their own work or even organizing an event themselves. Seeing these changes, both Mizukami and Nakajima say with bright smiles, “We don’t think of this as ‘support.’ We’re just doing something we enjoy.” Mizukami adds:

“Care and welfare, we believe, are really just extensions of everyday mutual help—something we all naturally do. So there’s no need to overthink it. If something you love or are good at ends up helping someone else, that’s the ideal.”

Misa Mizukami (left) and Hiroko Nakajima (right) were also brought together through art. (Photo by Kentaro Kase)



Flatart

A group that connects young people—particularly those in their late teens to early twenties who struggle to find their place in society—with the broader community through art-based activities.

Instagram: @flatart22



A Space that Belongs to No One—and to Everyone

Goat's Eyes Project

In 2020, goats arrived at Tokyo University of the Arts' Toride Campus in Ibaraki Prefecture. First came Ehime and Mugi, followed by Tanpopo, bringing the total to three. The *Goat's Eyes Project*, initiated by Professor Tsuyoshi Ozawa of the Department of Intermedia Art in collaboration with the Toride Art Project (TAP), has grown far beyond its academic roots. As Ozawa sensed from the beginning—"Something is definitely going to come out of this"—the project sparked new encounters and fostered communities that extended well beyond the university framework.

According to Yasue Habara, Inclusive Director of TAP and a key figure in launching the initiative, "This is a place where anyone can say, 'I came to see the goats,' and feel welcome to stay." To become a member, one condition applies: signing up for a monthly shift to help care for the goats. Students, faculty, and local residents of all generations and backgrounds now form a diverse group of participants. The project's group chat has grown to include 109 registered members, each with their own relationship to the goats. "Local moms often feel a strong sense of responsibility and genuinely enjoy caring for the goats. Students, on the other hand, tend to engage with them more casually. There's a difference in proximity, but that's perfectly fine—each person's way of relating to the goats is valid," says Habara.

Kyoko Soeda lives near the campus and often visits to walk the goats and let them graze on the campus's wild plants. "They're just too cute—I can't help stopping by." She also started the *Goat*

Hair Club, where members create writing brushes and yarn from goat hair. Other offshoots include the *Foodie Club*, where members experiment with cooking the same plants the goats enjoy, and the *Ceramics Club*, which uses goat droppings as glaze in pottery-making. Each uses the goats as a creative springboard for artistic exploration.

The *Goat's Eyes Project* is often referred to as a "transparent art center without walls" because of how it creates new connections through the goats, allowing people to see worlds they hadn't noticed before. "After over ten years of working here, I've started to notice people I hadn't seen before—not just in the community, but even within the university. The goats have helped us become aware of the plants around us too. Now I find myself thinking, 'Oh, it's the season for that leaf,' or 'Looks like a good year for chestnuts,'" says Ozawa.

"The project creates a place where artworks are born, and where people feel free to explore what they want to do. Some may be inspired by the goats to create; others may simply care for them. Everyone comes from different backgrounds, with different goals—and that's okay. It's a gentle, open-ended community that sustains itself, and as long as the goats are thriving, the activities will continue. That kind of relationship is what makes it feel like a true art center. Getting to work alongside these completely unpretentious goats—I think that's something truly rare and joyful," says Habara.



Goat's Eyes Project

An art initiative at Tokyo University of the Arts' Toride Campus, where the act of raising goats creates connections between students, faculty, and local residents, fostering new relationships and forms of community.

Web: yaginome.geidai.ac.jp (EN/JP)
Instagram: @yagi_nome

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From left: Yasue Habara (TAP), Professor Tsuyoshi Ozawa (Tokyo University of the Arts), Kyoko Soeda (member), and the three goats grazing freely around the campus. One of the goats, Ehime, has since passed away, and two goats are currently being cared for. (All photos by Kentaro Kase)

The Day Your Purpose in Life Inspires Someone Else

Sumita Sake Shop

Located in western Mie Prefecture, the city of Nabari has long been committed to welfare and community support. Recognized as a model municipality by the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare, Nabari has earned a reputation as a town where residents look out for one another. Historically, it flourished as a coaching inn town along the Hase Kaido route that connected Osaka and Nara to Ise. Its historic core, known as Kyucho (meaning 'old town' in Japanese), still retains the nostalgic charm of that era. Near the entrance to this old town, by the *Ichi no Torii* gate, stands *Sumita Sake Shop*, a 180-year-old building that has become a beloved gathering spot for locals of all ages. The owners, Masaru and Hisako Sumita, have been performing shadow puppet plays in a traditional tatami room at the back of their shop for nearly 20 years. What began as a one-time performance for a local event has since become their shared passion and life's work.

Their main repertoire consists of historical tales rooted in Nabari's rich cultural heritage. They collaborate with scriptwriter Sosaku Naka, a renowned scholar of local author Edo-gawa Rampo,

while Hisako designs and creates the shadow puppets using construction paper and cellophane. She also operates the puppets and manages scene transitions during performances. Masaru's role is the emcee, delivering the opening narration and rhythmically striking wooden clappers to set the tone. "I just handle the intro and the clappers," Masaru laughs. "Sometimes I try to help with the puppets too—but she always scolds me for it!" Still, the chemistry between Masaru warming up the audience and Hisako skillfully bringing scenes to life behind the screen is undeniable. The *Two-Person Theater Troupe* is also skilled at drawing others into their creative world. Although they pre-record most of the dialogue and narration, they've featured a wide array of voices—everyone from their daughter-in-law and neighbors to local middle and high school students and even teachers. In the lead-up to the Tokyo Olympics, they even produced an English version of one of their plays in collaboration with a local school's broadcasting club, anticipating visits from international tourists. "The students still stay in touch after graduation," Masaru says. "We're like their parents in Nabari."

While their performances serve both as local cultural promotion and subtle advertising for their shop, one particular experience reminded them that their shadow plays were something more profound. A few years ago, a group from a local nursing home came to watch. During a scene featuring a little girl playing ball to the tune of the children's song *Yuyake Koyake*, one elderly woman shed tears. "I was surprised, but the caregivers who brought her were even more shocked," recalls Hisako. "They said she rarely expressed emotion or connected with others, but that day, she cried, laughed, and truly seemed moved. It was a breakthrough."

The shadow puppet plays have become a source of joy and inspiration, forging new relationships and evoking genuine emotion across generations. "If we'd just stuck to running the sake shop, these kinds of connections would never have happened," Masaru reflects. "We're both over 75 years old, but we hope to keep going for another three or four years." "Well, he always changes his mind!" Hisako laughs. "If we stop doing shadow plays, we'd have nothing left to talk about!"

And just like that, their playful banter brings smiles to everyone around them once again.



Sumita Sake Shop

370 Nakacho, Nabari City, Mie Prefecture, Japan

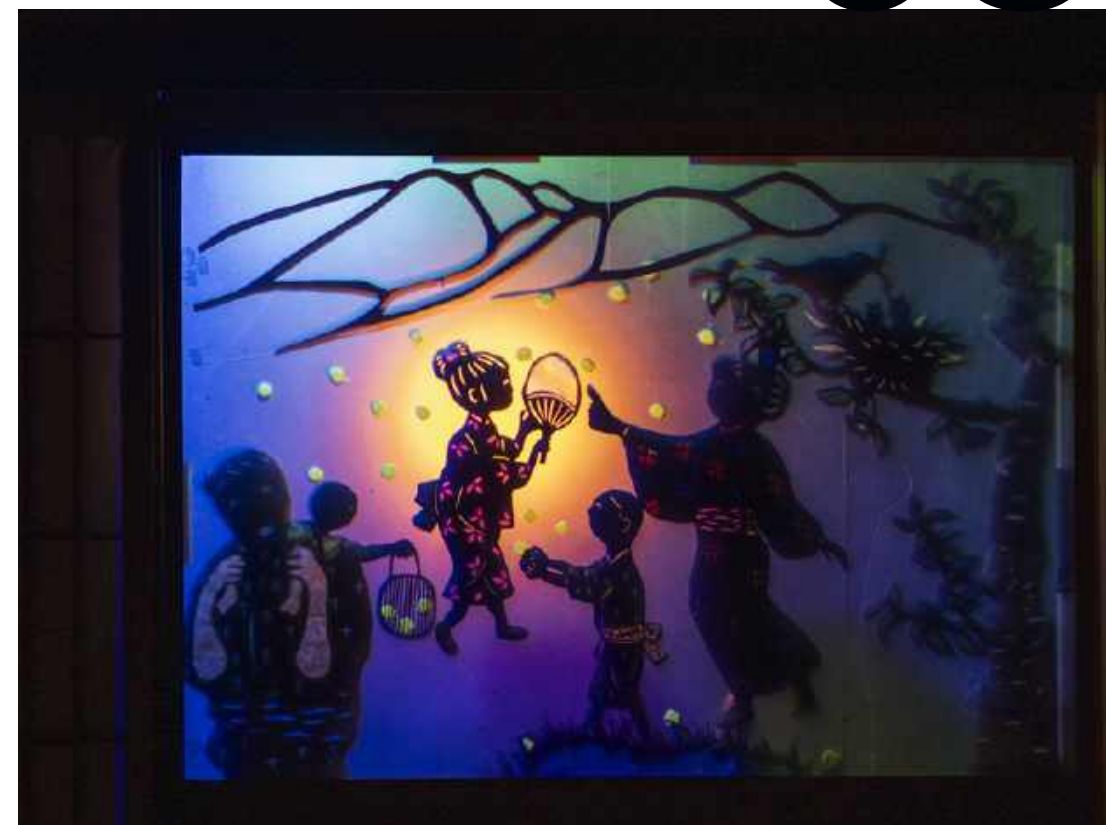
Tel: +81-595-63-0032

Instagram: @sumitasaketen

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Over the past 20 years, the Sumitas have created 25 original shadow puppet plays involving many people from the community.



In response to popular demand, they've even added a hands-on area where visitors can try operating the puppets themselves—an especially big hit with children. (All photos by Kiyoshi Nishioka)

— A Starter Guide to Cultural Prescribing —

THE TOOLS

We've explored many paths of cultural prescribing. Now it's your turn to begin.

You might join a creative gathering, meet others engaged in the arts,
or simply return to something you love.

Let that small step lead you to deeper connections—with culture, your surroundings,
and a community that may already be waiting for you.

【 What is Bunkateki Shoho? 】

Bunkateki Shoho, or “cultural prescribing” in Japanese, involves integrating arts and culture into health and social care to help people lead healthier, more fulfilling lives. Creative engagement has been shown to reduce stress, stimulate appetite, and improve mental and physical well-being. Closely aligned with international practices, including the concept of creative health, the Japanese approach places particular emphasis on civic participation and the use of cultural assets rooted in local communities.

LEARN

Get to Know Cultural Prescribing: 5 Key Terms

【 Unwanted Isolation 】

Though often used interchangeably, *loneliness* and *social isolation* differ: loneliness is a subjective feeling, while isolation is the objective lack of social contact, typically with family or community.¹ Unwanted isolation refers to being emotionally disconnected and excluded from society, not by choice. While often linked to older adults, national surveys in Japan reveal that people in their 20s and 30s experience the highest levels of loneliness. In fact, loneliness is more common in midlife than in old age.²

1. Townsend, Peter, *The Family Life of Old People: An Inquiry in East London*, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1957
2. “Nationwide Survey to Ascertain the Actual Situation of Loneliness and Isolation” conducted by the Japanese Cabinet Office in 2022
https://www.cao.go.jp/kodoku_koritsu/torikumi/zenkokuchousa/r4.html (Japanese only)

【 Act on the Advancement of Measures to Address Loneliness and Isolation 】

In April 2024, the Japanese government enacted this law in response to the growing erosion of social ties, driven by societal changes and a rise in single-person households. This act aims to reduce the health risks of loneliness and isolation, promote multifaceted support for better quality of life, and foster a society where offering help to those in need becomes second nature. It encourages citizens to work together to build more connected communities and has already sparked local action through collaboration between governments and residents.

【 Social Prescribing 】

Research has shown that loneliness and isolation can reduce life expectancy more than smoking or excessive drinking³, prompting global action. One growing solution is social prescribing, a UK-born model from the 1980s that improves well-being by linking individuals to community resources and social support, rather than relying solely on medication. In Japan, the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare recognized its value by including social prescribing as a key measure in the 2021–2023 *Basic Policy on Economic and Fiscal Management and Reform* to help address loneliness and isolation.

【 Creative Health 】

Research shows that engaging in cultural and artistic activities can help maintain health, manage chronic conditions, and improve quality of life.⁴ Building on such research, the UK has been advancing creative health, a cultural policy approach that promotes well-being through the arts by encouraging collaboration across healthcare, welfare, technology, and the arts. In Japan, *bunkateki shoho* draws inspiration from such approaches while shaping its own path. It places strong emphasis on community-rooted care, leveraging cultural resources and fostering partnerships among citizens, artists, and local communities to promote well-being through art in everyday life.

【 Cultural Link Workers 】

A cultural link worker supports people in need of connection by engaging them through art and culture. Their role is to guide individuals to feel present, empowered, and able to realize their potential. Core qualities include: 1) deep listening; 2) the ability to walk alongside others as a supporter; 3) skills to empower through local cultural activities; 4) an interest in healthcare, welfare, and education; and 5) a commitment to building communities of learning. In Japan, similar roles are seen in art communicators, such as artists and facilitators who connect people through creative practices, both traditional and contemporary. Cultural link workers help expand cultural prescribing by bridging citizens with care providers and fostering shared learning within communities.

3. Holt-Lunstad J, Smith TB, Layton JB. (2010). *Social relationships and mortality risk: a meta-analytic review*, PLoS Med, 27:7(7): e1000316. journals.plos.org
4. WHO Report: “*Health Evidence Network Synthesis Report 67*”
<https://iris.who.int/bitstream/handle/10665/329834/9789289054553-eng.pdf>

CONNECT

A 4-Step Guide for Cultural Link Workers

The words “culture” or “the arts” may sound distant, but they often begin in small, familiar moments—such as listening to music, taking a photo, or being moved by a poem or story. A cultural link worker helps share these moments, gently connecting people through the joy of creative expression and the inspiration found in everyday life. They offer a bridge to culture in forms that feel personal and meaningful, helping people feel more alive and more connected. Just start where you are.

Find a Small Seed of Culture

Start simple. Snap a photo with your phone, draw to your favorite song, pick up a book outside your usual shelf, breathe deeply at a shrine, or notice the shift in seasons through flowers. These moments stir the heart, a quiet “that felt good.” As they ripple outward, joy catches on, and the air around us begins to brighten. Look around—a notice board, a flyer, a shop window. Sometimes, one small spark is all it takes.

Share What You Love

Offer something you love. Sharing invites others in and creates space for connection. Saying, “I’ve always wanted to try this,” or “I enjoy sewing,” can open new conversations. What seems small to you may be meaningful to someone else. A social media post, a casual chat, or showing someone your work can lead to surprising connections and shared discovery. You might be surprised by who responds.

Step

1

Step

2

Form a Small Gathering

Create a small space—no big project needed. A cultural link worker offers gentle invitations: “Here’s one way to enjoy this.” Host a music session, a book circle, a sketch walk, or a mini group exploring local history. Start with two or three people. Flyers, social media, or a local venue can help you find others. Even a brief shared moment can spark a sense of belonging and inspiration to keep going.

Invite Someone In: “Want to join?”
“Let’s do this together”

When you find joy in a cultural activity, share it. A simple “Would you like to come?” or “I’d love to do this with you” can open a door. And if you see someone enjoying themselves, you might say, “I’d love to try that too,” or offer encouragement with, “That’s beautiful, can I share it with others?” A cultural link worker keeps extending small invitations, quietly walking alongside others—not leading, not pushing— just making space for connection to grow.

Step

3

Step

4

Culture doesn’t require special skills or big crowds. It lives in everyday life—a moment, a gesture, a willingness to connect. A cultural link worker nurtures these small beginnings, helping creativity take root in daily life and supporting others in expressing who they are. When you find joy in your own way and foster connection, you may notice a quiet bloom, a culture of creativity growing within your community. So why not share your spark? With a family member, a friend nearby, or even someone you haven’t met yet.

EXPLORE

Tracing New Paths: 5 Ways to Discover

1 Learn about Social and Cultural Prescribing

To dive deeper into social prescribing, we recommend the books “*Shakaiteki Shoho*” (Social Prescribing) and “*Minna no Shakaiteki Shoho*” (Social Prescribing for All), which explore its origins and case studies from Japan and abroad. The media platform *aa-tomo TODAY*, run by the Art & Wellbeing aa-tomo project led by Tokyo University of the Arts and the National Center for Art Research, features interviews and real-world examples of cultural prescribing in action. You can also explore *100 Books of Social Prescribing*, a curated collection by the General Incorporated Association PlusCare. This unique selection includes tanka poetry, photo books, and manga, showcasing the rich diversity and creative spirit of social prescribing.

●*Shakaiteki Shoho* & *Minna no Shakaiteki Shoho* by Tomohiro Nishi
(Gakugei Shuppansha, JP)

●*100 Books of Social Prescribing* (JP)
<https://calil.jp/recipe/5274883296067584>



●*aa-tomo TODAY* (EN/JP)
<https://aatomo.jp/>



●*Social Prescribing Channel* (JP)
<https://www.youtube.com/@syakaitekisyohou>



2 Explore Local Cultural Activities

Local initiatives can provide both inspiration and practical ideas for your own projects. Civic Activity Centers often offer consultations, bulletin boards for event postings, and even small subsidies. In Japan, platforms like the Local News Network share rich stories of community and culture across regions. You can also discover opportunities by browsing flyers, posters, and local magazines at libraries, train stations, and neighborhood shops.

Examples)

●*Local News Network* (JP)
<https://minkei.net/>



●*Tsunagaru DAY YABU* (JP) – A portal for social prescribing in Yabu City, Hyogo
<https://tsunagaruday-yabu.jp/>



3 Explore International Case Studies

Cultural and social prescribing have strong roots in countries such as the UK and Canada. Learning from their approaches can spark ideas for your own practice. Even if you're not fluent in English, online translation tools can help.

Examples)

●*National Academy for Social Prescribing* (UK)
<https://socialprescribingacademy.org.uk/>



●*BC Alliance for Arts + Culture* (Canada)
<https://www.allianceforarts.com/>



4 Seek Advice on Cultural and Artistic Activities

If you're unsure about legal issues, funding, or venues, local arts consultation centers can help. In Tokyo, *ARTNOTO* offers advice on accessibility, contracts, grants, and more.

Examples)

●*ARTNOTO* (EN/JP) – Tokyo Support Center for the Arts and Culture
<https://artnoto.jp/>



●*KACCO* (JP) – The Kyoto-City Arts and Culture Counseling Office
<https://www.kyotoartsupport.com/>



5 Find Collaborators and Funding

Start small and free—then explore funding through grants or crowdfunding platforms. In addition to national platforms like *READYFOR* and *CAMPFIRE*, local services like *Kawafun* (Kawasaki City) can connect you to community-based projects and potential collaborators.

Examples)

●*Kawafun* (JP) – Local crowdfunding in Kanagawa
<https://kawafun.com/>





Cultural Prescribing from Global and Local Perspectives

Creative Health: A Growing Global Movement

By Sawako Inaniwa

(Senior Curator, National Center for Art Research)

Art and Culture for Health and Wellbeing

Recent studies have revealed that engaging in the arts and cultural activities can help reduce stress and support physical and mental health. These practices are increasingly recognized as effective tools to address complex challenges such as aging populations, chronic illness, and loneliness—particularly in countries like the UK, the US, the Netherlands, Canada, and Taiwan. In some cases, such programs have even been shown to reduce public healthcare costs.

The term *arts and cultural activities*

here spans a wide range: not only visual arts like painting, sculpture, and printmaking, but also photography, craft, digital art, ceramics, performing arts, dance, film, music, literature, cooking, and gardening. In recent years, participatory cultural programs have spread beyond formal institutions into everyday spaces—cafés, bookstores, libraries, museums, and theaters. At the same time, research reveals a clear link between disparities in cultural participation and disparities in health outcomes. The implication is clear: arts and culture are no longer simply leisure activities, but essential elements of a society where health and well-being must be made accessible to all.

References:

APPG AHW report: "Creative Health: The Arts for Health and Wellbeing, the Short Report"



Beyond the Self: Sensing Connection

So, how is cultural prescribing different from medical prescribing? While diet, sleep, and exercise remain key pillars of health, two additional elements—*emotional well-being* and *social connection*—are increasingly recognized as equally vital. Cultural prescribing supports these needs by helping us reconnect: with ourselves, with others, and with the present moment as it is.

Art and cultural experiences allow us to move beyond the self and feel these connections more deeply, whether it's the lives of people who walked this earth a thousand years ago through a historic building, or crossing borders through a powerful work of art. Because art offers no single "right" answer, it invites us to go beyond binary thinking. It opens space for nuance, for coexistence, for reflection. As evidence grows around the health benefits of the arts, international interest in cultural prescribing is expanding, positioning it as a promising and evolving field of practice around the world.



Workshop in Kawasaki City: "Travel in Photos!"

Profile Sawako Inaniwa is a senior curator at the National Center for Art Research, Japan. Her work focuses on designing learning systems and building connections through the arts and cultural resources.



WHO Report: "Health Evidence Network Synthesis Report 67"

Cultural Prescribing in Everyday Life

By Tomohiro Nishi

(MD, Representative Director of General Incorporated Association PlusCare)

Catching Kappa with a Cucumber

During a recent visit to Tono in Iwate Prefecture, I came across a sign near a stream behind a temple: "Would you like to try catching a kappa?" A fishing rod baited with cucumber was provided. The idea was to sit by the water, dip the cucumber in, and quietly read a book while you waited. I found the invitation both playful and profound. It reminded me that I am part of something larger—a deep cultural flow.



A fishing rod with a cucumber tied to the end. Dangle it in the river and pass the time dreaming of catching a kappa.

Though most people have never seen a kappa, many Japanese know the legends: mischievous river spirits that pull horses and humans into the water, and who happen to love cucumbers. These folk tales, absorbed naturally since childhood, are what allow us to delight in something like "kappa fishing." It's culture not in a museum but woven into daily life.

The Grand Flow of Culture Is in Our Hands

The phrase cultural prescribing might sound technical or distant, but in truth, it's something deeply familiar. From

childhood, we've been immersed in culture: saying *itadakimasu* before meals, celebrating the blooming of cherry blossoms, visiting shrines, watching movies, reading manga. These rituals and expressions—some grand, some subtle—quietly sustain us. They offer comfort, meaning, and sometimes, healing. Culture is not a luxury; it's a part of how we live.

Have you seen the film *PERFECT DAYS* starring Koji Yakusho? A public toilet cleaner repeats the same quiet routine—cleaning, dining, reading—and within that repetition, something beautiful emerges: a gentle rhythm of culture embedded in everyday life. Or take the manga *Frieren: Beyond Journey's End*. While its central themes explore life and death, what I find most touching is how townspeople lovingly pass down a simple magic spell—one that lets paper airplanes fly further. A small, even silly tradition perhaps, but filled with meaning.

So, what are your cultural prescriptions? What stories, games, or manga did you love as a child? Are there scenes, sounds, or places in your neighborhood that bring you peace or spark wonder? Sometimes, all it takes is tying a cucumber to a string, dipping it into a stream, and imagining what might bite.

Profile Tomohiro Nishi is Head of Oncology at Kawasaki Municipal Ida Hospital and Representative Director of General Incorporated Association PlusCare. He leads initiatives like *Living Room Clinic* and is the author of *Minna no Shakaiteki Shoho*.

To Care and Be Cared For

HT したり、
HT されたり

Photographs by
Hiroshi Hatano



Each morning,
the same path unfolds

Profile Hiroshi Hatano / born in Tokyo in 1983. Photographer. Withdrew from the Nippon Photography Institute in 2004. Began apprenticing under a commercial photographer in 2010. Shifted to freelance and got married in 2011. His son was born in 2016. In 2017, he was diagnosed with multiple myeloma, which he continues to live with. Author of *Umakute Damena Shashin to Heta dakedo Ii Shashin* (Sophisticated but Not Good Photos, and Not Sophisticated but Good Photos), and *Musuko ga Umaerata Hi kara Amenohi ga Sukini Natta* (Started Loving Rainy Days since My Son's Birth), both published by Poplar Publishing Co., Ltd. Radio streaming *Shasinka no Hitorigoto* (Musings of a Photographer) on stand.fm





A Familiar Stranger





Painting the City with Life





Care and Art: To Give / To Receive

What is *care*?

Perhaps it is a form of communication essential to living well
in a world where everyone, in some way, carries a burden.
Care is not simply something to give or receive; it is more than that.
It is an act of mutual recognition, a gesture that affirms
our shared place in the world
and sustains our life together.

What is *art*?

Perhaps it is the joy of choosing clothes that feel like you,
or the delight in savoring a beautifully presented meal,
a creative spark woven into everyday life.
Art may be a work of the heart, growing little by little,
from today to tomorrow, and from tomorrow to the next.
In that quiet unfolding, it nurtures the strength to live.

That is why both care and art are essential
to living well and living fully.

First Steps in Cultural Prescribing

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ART Co-creation Platform

The "Arts-Based Communication Platform for Co-creation to Build a Convivial Society," led by Tokyo University of the Arts in partnership with medical and social welfare organizations, is a project aimed at implementing *bunkateki shoho* — cultural activities that foster connection among people — with the goal of building a society where everyone can comfortably express themselves through artistic communication.

<https://kyoso.geidai.ac.jp/en/>



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