

# Rebuilding blind: Life after epilepsy brain surgery

Sarah Brown

## Abstract

Rehabilitation programs after epilepsy brain surgery are scarce for such an invasive procedure. The role of art therapy is an effective modality to help people process emotional and psychological challenges that are too painful to talk about. Specifically, art therapy can help others make meaning, process emotions, and rewrite their narrative after such a turbulent time.

## Keywords

Epilepsy, art therapy, sculpture, rehabilitation



Figure 1. Sarah Brown, *Letting Go & Letting In*, 2023, mixed media, 279 × 254 × 254mm.

## Creative arts therapist statement

Psychosocial adjustment and difficulty transitioning from ‘chronically ill’ to ‘suddenly well’ after brain surgery have long been discussed (Wilson et al., 2001). However, few resources are provided to patients and families to help people adjust throughout this turbulent time. Longitudinal research by Coleman et al. (2020) states that patients continue to experience long-term psychosocial adjustments following brain surgery for up to 15–20 years. This author’s work helps others gain insight into these challenges by offering visual documentation and increasing the importance and use of art therapy as a therapeutic modality to help others express these challenges.

Years of living with epileptic seizures caused my cognitive abilities and functioning to decline. I experienced a reduction in my ability to understand social cues and how to relate to others around me. By the time I had a temporal lobectomy surgery, I felt frozen. This surgery was thankfully very successful, but I woke up to a world that I did not recognise. I felt blind. I had to let go of everything I knew and allow a ‘new version’ of myself to come forward. It was terrifying rebuilding myself when no resources or rule book for guidance existed. The piece ‘Letting Go & Letting In’, referencing an ice sculpture, reflects this profound experience.

Fifteen years after brain surgery and obtaining my master’s degree in art therapy and counselling, I can communicate appropriately, respond healthily, meet my needs, and advocate for others. Finally, my authentic self is beginning to emerge from behind shattered bits of ice; I feel more confident, doubt myself less, and believe in my values and rights. I have emerged, embracing my authentic self and my imperfections.

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## References

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Sarah became a licensed professional clinical counsellor and registered art therapist after having brain surgery for seizures in 2008. Today, Sarah works for an intensive outpatient program providing coping skills to help others live well despite challenges. Sarah continues to advocate for rehabilitation after brain surgery by utilising art therapy. Among her accomplishments, Sarah is pursuing her PhD, her artwork has been featured internationally, and she has presented at Australia's Epilepsy Society in 2023 and the University of Oxford in 2022.



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