

Research Brief #6: Health and Well-being

In 2022, Creatives Rebuild New York (CRNY) launched its Guaranteed Income (GI) for Artists Program. This program provided 2,400 artists across New York State with \$1,000 a month for 18 months. Built on the principle that all artists deserve financial security, the GI program ensured artists could use these no-strings-attached monthly payments in whatever way they chose, including directly supporting their artistic practice, stabilizing their financial situation, building a savings buffer to help with financial emergencies, paying down debts, or anything else.

This research brief describes the impact of guaranteed income on artists' health and well-being using data from both surveys of artists and in-depth interviews.¹ The GI program improved artists' physical and mental health, relationships, self-esteem, and sense of purpose. In particular, artists reported that they felt a greater sense of control and autonomy over their lives, which allowed them to care for themselves and pursue their artistic practice (see **Brief #2 Artists' Labor** for more on artists' work and earnings). GI payments also supported artists financially during unexpected health emergencies while in the program, alleviating mental and physical strain during that time. A guaranteed income for artists offers a powerful opportunity to promote improved health and stable well-being, benefiting both the artists themselves and the communities they enrich.

1. See *Guaranteed Income for Artists Impact Study: Introduction* for a detailed description of all research methods and data sources.

FIGURE 6.1

Artists’ Report of Mental Health During the Two Weeks Prior to Survey²

% of Artists Experience These Nearly Everyday	Participants	Non-Participants
<i>Severe Anxiety/Depression</i>	25%	35%
<i>Felt Nervous</i>	20%	29%
<i>Uncontrolled Worry</i>	14%	22%
<i>Felt Depressed</i>	5%	10%
<i>Felt little interest/pleasure</i>	7%	13%

Key Findings

Artists who received guaranteed income were mentally and physically healthier as a result of fostering stronger relationships, increased self-esteem, and a renewed sense of purpose and optimism.

Participants consistently noted that having access to GI payments allowed them to better prioritize both their mental and physical well-being. Many saw tangible improvements in their health. One artist reflected, *“I think it improved both my physical health and my mental health. I started eating better and going to places where I could meet new people.”* Another participant explained how the financial support helped manage high blood pressure: *“...because I had more resources to look after my health and nutrition.”* With the guaranteed income, participants could afford more nutritious food, join gyms, take exercise classes, and prioritize rest.

2. Kroenke, K., Spitzer, R. L., Williams, J. B. W., & Löwe, B. (2009). Patient Health Questionnaire-4 (PHQ-4) [Database record]. APA PsycTests <https://doi.org/10.1037/t06168-000>



Memory is Punishment by anonymous*

“Being able to have extra funds through this program has given me time to heal and process parts of my life that I previously was too overwhelmed to address. Having funds allows me to take a step back from constantly working and address parts of my life that used to be on the back burner.”

Several also highlighted significant changes in their mental health. As one artist described, *“Before getting the payments, my long-term goal was just staying alive. I was very, very depressed, and it’s something I can speak about now because I’m much better. My only goal then was survival. Now, I’m alive in every sense—not just physically, but spiritually, mentally, emotionally, even cosmically.”*

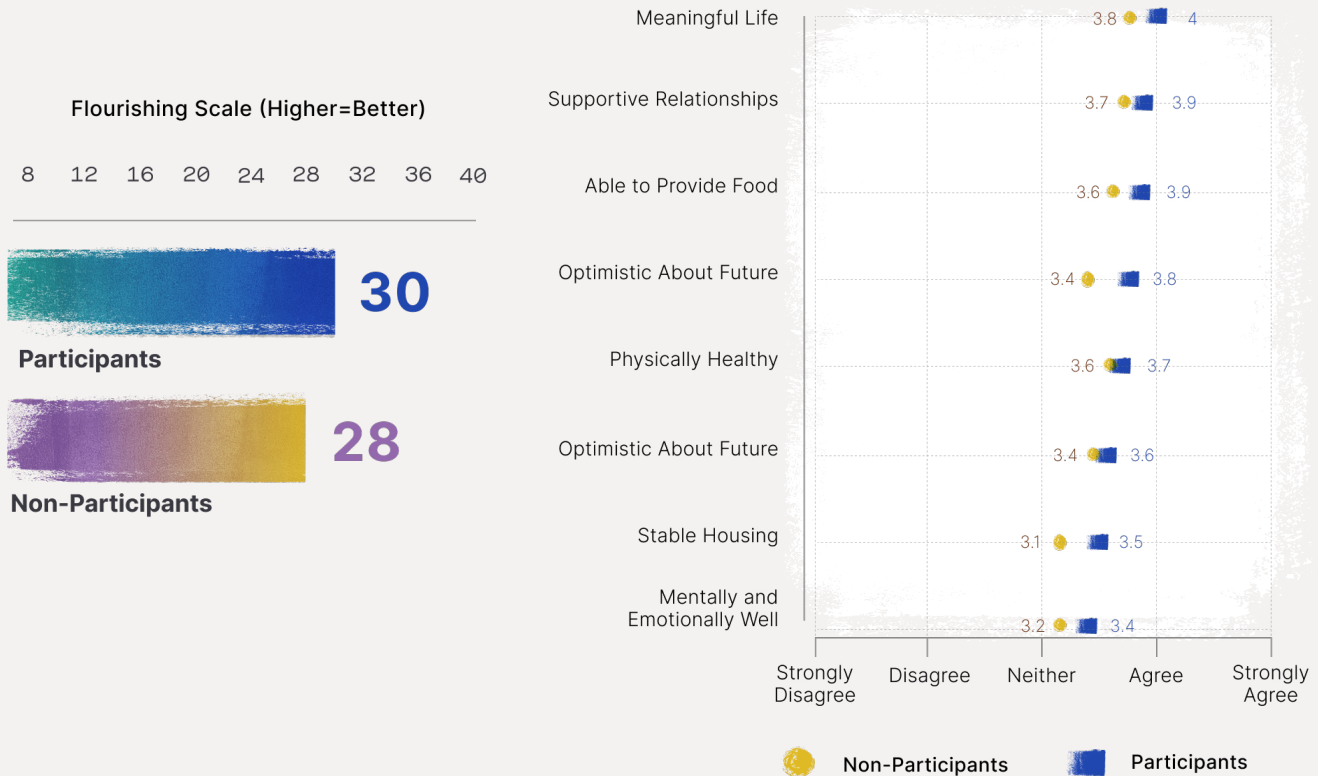
These recountings are emblematic of participants’ health improvements. The GI payments buffered against feelings of anxiety and depression. Overall, participants experienced fewer instances of severe anxiety and depression (25%) compared to non-participants (35%). More specifically, artists who received the GI payments felt less nervous, anxious, or on edge nearly every day (20%) than those who did not receive the GI payments (29%). Participants also experienced far less uncontrolled worry nearly every day (14%) than non-participating artists (22%), and they had a greater interest and pleasure in their activities [See Figure 6.1]. Participants also reported better physical health than non-participants [See Figure 6.2].

Improvements in physical and mental health also fostered a greater sense of purpose and optimism, better relationships, and more control over their future. Participating artists reported more supportive relationships than non-participating artists (3.9 vs. 3.7 on a 1-5 scale) and a greater sense of control than non-participants (3.5 vs. 3.1). More generally, participating artists are more likely to agree that their life is meaningful compared to non-participating artists (4 vs 3.8) [See Figure 6.2].

Interview participants frequently expressed how having extra money each month allowed them to better care for themselves. Others mentioned significant improvements in their health and wellness due to the added financial stability. Several participants also noted that the extra income allowed them to prioritize self-care, including mental health support. One participant explained the toll artistic practices take on the artist: *“I think even having that money available to get a therapist and things like that. Just knowing that it’s there and you can use it for things that you might need or things that might come up that was really impactful.”* This access to wellness services helped them maintain a balanced life and better maintain their artistic practice.

FIGURE 6.2

**Artists' Report of Mental Health (Flourishing Scale)
During the One Month Prior to Survey**



The guaranteed income enabled artists to manage unexpected health challenges and medical expenses.

In qualitative interviews, participants described how health emergencies and medical challenges often brought sudden financial and emotional strain. For many, the guaranteed income served as a crucial buffer, offering stability during difficult times. One participant shared how the program helped them through a particularly challenging period:

“I started experiencing medical difficulties that led me into a depression for a couple of months. Having that guaranteed money was crucial—it allowed me to pay rent while I sought medical solutions and worked on my mental health.”



Scan the QR code to listen to
 "Green Summers"
 by Drunk Painters.*

Participants gained control over their lives.

Interview participants also described feeling a greater sense of control over their lives. One shared, *"Dios mio. It definitely facilitated my being able to continue moving forward, and I think in an exponential sense. I felt like I was doing this and then with CRNY, I went like whoop, a big jump, in terms of how much stuff I can get done."* This leap was attributed to the program's financial safety net, which allowed them to prioritize rent, address health challenges, and focus on creative goals, including completing a manuscript and advancing new artistic projects. Others explained how their mindset has shifted since the program began. One participant noted, *"[CRNY] made me commit more to living how I want to live. It shifted my thinking, making me realize that I can create my own path and fight to live and work creatively."* Another participant expressed, *"CRNY helped shift my scarcity mindset into one of abundance."* This newfound sense of agency and abundance resonated with many survey respondents, with the vast majority (87%) agreeing that artists deserve financial stability.

"The program helped me find peace within and tranquility in the world around me. I was free from the constant worry of city money hustling, allowing nature to wash over me."



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