

Canadian Centre on Disability Studies Final Activities Report: Arts Ability



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Overview

The Arts Ability pilot project, which began in 2002 at the Canadian Centre on Disability Studies (CCDS), with funding from the J.W.McConnell Family Foundation, aimed to build the capacity of people with disabilities to express their creativity in all aspects of their lives, using the arts as a tool for transformation. This project provided opportunities to persons with disabilities who would otherwise have little opportunity to use self-expression as a tool to respond to the world around them in creative ways. The project enabled participants, their families and caregivers to nurture mutually respectful relationships, open up the channels of communication, reduce power relationships and challenge stereotypes of people with disabilities in the arts. This project also received funding from Manitoba Culture, Heritage and Tourism, and CCDS. The Arts Ability Training and Dissemination component of the project, which was funded primarily from the Office of Disability Issues (ODI) was initiated in January 2003 and supported research, training, the development of a training manual and four videos (three videos were also funded by the Canadian Independent Film and Video Fund (CIFVF)) in relation to the Arts Ability project and dissemination. This whole project was further amended by ODI in December 2003 to include *Challenging Stereotypes: A Celebration of the Arts in Community*, a three-day Winnipeg based event involving artists from across Canada. Ryerson University, through a SSHRC grant, supported the work of Principle Investigator, Kari Krogh, after she took over this role from Deborah Stienstra during the first quarter of the project.

Goals:

- Build the capacity of people with disabilities (in particular those with more severe disabilities) to identify and benefit from their creative potential
- Enable often static organizations that serve people with disabilities to transform their understanding of people with disabilities
- Challenge traditional stereotypes of people with disabilities in the arts
- Create vocational possibilities for both professional and emerging artists

Scope of Project

The Arts Ability project consisted of **three** main components:

1. Program Component:

The objective was to provide integrated arts programming for more than **200** adults and youth with and without disabilities at **four** sites (Appendix A). The Canadian Centre on Disability Studies (CCDS) worked with **eight** Winnipeg artists (Appendix B) to initiate programs at these sites in

- a. Dance/Drama
- b. Visual arts
- c. Dance/Movement

The various programs were delivered in the context of existing site programs to allow for continuity, safety and the potential for sustainability.

2. **Evaluation Component:**

The evaluation component included a literature review and development of an evaluation framework/tool to measure the impact of the arts programs on participants, families, caregivers and community. The research team used a variety of techniques to ensure that findings were integrated into the programming component on an ongoing basis.

Assessment Methods:

Each year, programs were delivered through **24** sessions ranging in size from **5-30** participants. A variety of evaluation methods were employed including

- a. On Site Program Assessment: assessed the effects of using art on the interactions of participants with disabilities, their support providers, family and community members, program administrators and Artists Animators
- b. Participant Observation: evaluators/researchers engaged in art activities alongside participants in order to develop an understanding of what it was like to participate in the classes and to observe artists, participants and members of the community collaborating together
- c. Focus Group Interviews: documented experiences of participants, support workers, administrators and artists in the program at each site
- d. Interviews with Family Members: gathered information from family members about their experience of the program and their impressions of its impact on the family member in the program
- e. Artist Animator Reports: documented artists' work within, impressions about and reflections on the project and its impact on themselves, participants, apprentices, administrators, and community members.
- f. Administrative Meetings: solicited and incorporated administrative perspectives about the project over the course of the program that both informed the research and training offered by the research team
- g. Working Retreats: conducted with artists, apprentices, and musicians where research findings were shared, discussed, and integrated by the programming team. .
- h. Project Information Sessions: offered in conjunction with the programming team in order to share information, provide updates and receive feedback from program participants, family and community members
- i. Training Workshops: conducted by the research team for select host organizations provided a two-way exchange of ideas, insights, and technologies for running arts programs for people with disabilities within specific contexts
- j. Class Video Clips: provided closer analysis of particular segments of the program
- k. Reflective Journaling: enabled researchers to identify and analyze personal participation as part of reflective research practices

Additional resources:

Six months into the project CCDS received funds from the Office of Disability Issues for the Arts Ability Project – Training and Dissemination. Research was also part of this component.

The collaboration between the artists, researchers, the respective consultants and graphic designers resulted in the creation of an accessible manual titled *Arts Engagement* (Appendix D) that provides rich detail and direction for those who are interested in developing an understanding of and the capacity to facilitate both programming and project evaluation of arts opportunities for people with disabilities who live and/or work within institutions.

The researchers developed a strong section on the research component of arts programming for people with disabilities. This section outlines the epistemological and philosophical commitments made by the researchers within this project, it evaluates the advantages of this approach, and provides concrete suggestions with appendixes that outline how these processes can be replicated.

Community members and disability advocates interested in disability research and evaluation of arts programming for people with disabilities have been directed to this manual for preliminary background information on these subjects. The assessment is that this manual is proving to be a valuable deliverable that has salience for disability and academic communities both nationally and internationally. The manual and art catalogue are now available on the CCDS website at www.disabilitystudies.ca

3. Training Component:

The Project was used to train **nine** apprentices in arts programming to enable them to work alongside and later independently of the artist to deliver existing and future programs in various locations. Their input was significant for the development of the training process outlined in the program manual. The apprentice system is an effective way for artists to develop their facilitation skills. For those who moved from participant into artist apprentice role this transition was not only empowering, but also enabled vocational and occupational experience.

Training also included sessions with the artists from each site meeting and discussing the programs and their participation with the project and research managers. Two sessions were held with New Directions staff. These sessions were valuable for establishing communication and for individual, organizational and program growth. The program manual *Arts Engagement* and the video *Creating Spaces* were completed in March, 2004. These are excellent training tools and will be available to the community and distributed long after the project is over.

Activities:

The project staff, researchers and artists (Appendix C) worked with participants, apprentices and site staff to respond directly to the needs of participants with respect to program/class activities. An Advisory Committee of local artists, researchers and administrators were consulted on a regular basis with view to programs and activities.

A professor of Disability Studies at Ryerson University and founder of the Disability Arts and Culture movement, served as the external evaluator for the entire project.

In *New Directions*, youth and staff worked in drama as well as visual arts as a way of expressing their creative potential. At CMHA, participants opted to shift to music sessions in year two. In line with Participatory Action Research methodology, the intent was to nourish the creative potential of participants and not impose structured activities in the arts on individuals at any of the locations. When people with disabilities are able to make informed choices on their degree of involvement in programs, then their contributions are deemed more valuable, from an individual and group perspective.

Sites:

Norway House: Over **100** children with and without learning disabilities from the Frontier School Division of the Cree Nation participated in integrated arts programming on a weekly basis. Four sessions were conducted in three schools for one-hour a week from the end of September to the end of May. In the second year extra whole class sessions were added to the program in two schools and the program in the high school was discontinued due to schedule problems.

New Directions: Two programs hosted the Arts Ability project to include the participation of 40-45 individuals. The first host was the Teragy Program, which is a day program for people with developmental disabilities and severe impairments. The second host was the Social and Interactive Development community outreach program for people with developmental disabilities and dual diagnosis. Participants had the opportunity to engage in both the dramatic and visual arts.

Deer Lodge: Each year **15-20** senior residents of a hospital who experience advanced dementia, plus family members, engaged in visual arts activities.

Canadian Mental Health Association: **5-10** adults who have experienced mental health challenges engaged in the dramatic arts classes in year one and a music program in year two of project. Two other pilot classes were initiated at Prairie Theatre Exchange and grew to include **10-15** participants each class.

Contemporary Dancers: A total of **8-10** participants attended dance classes for youth with disabilities from January to March 2004.

Reflections:

Over the course of the project, there were changes in the expectations of the artist animators and apprentices re the artist participants, and the program was reported to have a significant impact on the artist participants, artists, family members and site staff:

At times, it seems like creating art with some of the participants is an impossible task. It is important to be able to create a bridge for training apprentices, to be able to articulate our approach, and to be able to support the apprentices until they see results. (Artist Animator, year one)

I want to stay open so that if there's a way around an obstacle that nobody else has thought about, I'll be open to it just because I don't have all the intellectual baggage about the condition with me . . . I just treat [participants] as real [human] beings [and not people with a diagnosis]. I find [they] actually find a way to communicate [something] that they may not have been able to [previously communicate] just because I'm there. (Artist Animator, year two)

You tend to do what you're familiar with and to offer what you're familiar with and I'm familiar with music, so I do a lot of programming with music, . . . so I never saw the residents' abilities when it came to a paintbrush; so it's like another whole type of program. The experience for me is seeing what they [participants] are capable of doing, so it has been a learning experience for me. (Support Worker, year two).

Miss X, who participated in the drama and music program at New Directions, generally appeared restless and irritable in the initial drama classes. However, by the end of the first year of classes, she [would] pull a chair up to the table with the keyboard on it and put her head on her arms to listen to the music [for up to two hours at times]. During this time, she was calm, content and happy to be close the musician. Staff and participants are able to see completely a different side to Miss X. (Artist Animator, end of year one)

I feel that my relationship with family and friends has changed for the better. Maybe I feel a bit more detached in a positive way if that makes sense. I think they see a positive change. (Artist Participant, year two)

While the project is now winding down, every effort is being made to work with staff to share tools and resources to help the programs to continue.

The final research report is in progress and delivery is expected by August 31, 2004. Due to illness, Dr. Kari Krogh, the Principle Investigator, is sharing some of her responsibilities with Maya Gislason for the remaining few weeks of the project.

Dissemination:

This included

- Exhibition of **20** pieces of artist participants' work at the CCDS Grand Launch at Winnipeg's Legislature Building in October 2003
- Exhibition of **20** pieces of artist participants' work at Art-cetera, an art auction for Reaching E-Quality at the Millennium Centre in October 2003
- Exhibition of various art pieces at sites during CCDS and New Directions board meetings and/or on permanent basis
- Presentation of research findings at the Canadian Disability Studies Association (CDSA) inaugural meeting and conference which was part of Congress in Winnipeg, May 2004
- Presentation of research findings made at the Pacific Rim Conference in Hawaii, the Canadian Sociology and Anthropology Association, the VSA Conference in Washington, USA and the Reflective Research Conference in Gloucester, England, all May-July 2004
- Presentation on program and research process by participants, artists, researchers, administration and staff at the *Challenging Stereotypes* event in Winnipeg, March, 2004

Of great significance was the three-day celebratory event titled *Challenging Stereotypes: A Celebration of the Arts in Community*, held in Winnipeg.

Challenging Stereotypes: A Celebration of the Arts in Community

Goals:

- Showcase the work of the participants in the Arts Ability Program through product display and process demonstrations
- Showcase the *Arts Engagement* manual and videos
- Challenge traditional stereotypes of people with disabilities in the arts
- Inspire and excite participants and performers in realizing individual and community capacity
- Provide opportunities for workshops to highlight Arts Ability and other programs and activities across Canada
- Explore dynamics of relationships between performers, service providers, family members and others

Objectives:

A **three-day** event was organized to

- Highlight the tools, manual and video produced out of the Arts Ability project

- Bring together professional and non professional artists with and without disabilities from across Canada to network and perform
- Exhibit the art and clay pieces of the Arts Ability participants, artist apprentices and artists
- Provide workshops on aspects of the arts to instruct and entertain participants and members of the community
- Challenge perceptions of people with disabilities in the arts

Activities:

A program (Appendix E) and Arts Catalog (Appendix F) were developed and distributed to showcase the activities of the *Challenging Stereotypes* three-day event, which was attended by artists, arts groups and organizations from across Canada and the USA. Members of the Office of Disability Issues were among the **100** plus contributors/participants over the three days.

The event was an inspiration to participants, families, arts organizations and groups working with people with disabilities. The venue was impressive although acoustics proved difficult at times. The facility allowed for a central staging area and room for pockets of activities around the perimeter, such as painting, mask making, mural making and pottery making (Appendix G). Accordingly, those in attendance could choose which activity to participate in, when to rest and when to observe.

- Time was set aside to launch formally the *Arts Engagement* manual and excerpts from one of the instructional videos. A sense of camaraderie and enthusiasm for the arts was evident as professional and non-professional artists shared ideas, their art and contributed freely to workshops held at the venue and in the community.
- In one of the evening performances, David Roche, professional artist and inspirational speaker, shattered stereotypes of people with disabilities in his moving performance of “Church of 80% Sincerity.” Integrated dance duo Spirit Synott and Rachel Gorman also shared of their time in workshops and on stage.
- At an entrepreneur workshop conducted by an artist with a disability hosted by the local Independent Living Resource Centre, **45** aspiring artists and members of the local community were provided with information from professional artists with disabilities on how to network with other artists from across Canada.
- At a dance workshop hosted by Contemporary Dancers, more than **12** youth with disabilities performed for and were instructed by Spirit Synott as she shared dance techniques and her own journey in the arts.
- Entre’Actes, Quebec City, conducted an improvisation workshop, which included ten participants. The clowns in the Hospital enjoyed a brunch hosted by Manitoba Artists in Healthcare on the Saturday morning, which provided opportunities for networking and potential partnerships in other projects.
- The first video, episode one of a series of four, was completed and launched at the event. Many of the video participants were at the launch and able to see themselves and their work on the big screen, allowing them to share their

accomplishments with and be validated from the community as artists in their own right.

Feedback from participants, staff and families in attendance was positive. One of the artists from Arts Ability site noted that participants seemed delighted to be photographed next to their art. Four pieces of art by participants from the Arts Ability project were sold at the art auction, and three pieces of art were sold by one of the artist apprentices. When one of the artist participants' family members discovered that her mother had sold a piece of art, she was overjoyed and asked for a photocopy of the cheque to celebrate her mother's creative talent. This example not only validates the work of Arts Ability participants, but also challenges the stereotypes of people with disabilities as unproductive and unable to contribute to society in meaningful ways.

Evaluation:

The research team that was assembled to evaluate the *Challenging Stereotypes: A Celebration of the Arts in Community* event comprised of the Arts Ability Research Manager and the Principle Investigators, two disability researchers with a community advocacy orientation and one artist with a disability. This team is working collaboratively to analyze the data and prepare a very thorough and detailed report about the event.

The video consent process provided an opportunity for the video participants to view a rough cut and to offer feedback to the video director. This was a rich and participatory process and much positive and constructive feed back was forth coming. This viewing process also gave the participants an opportunity to see the program in the other sites. This proved to be a validating and affirming experience for the participants increasing their sense of community involvement and contribution. The video series is being distributed through Kinetic Video.

Dissemination:

- Interviews were conducted by CBC with David Roche, Spirit Synott and Sue Proctor, with air time on radio and television March 26, 2004
- Two articles about the project have been published in *Abilities* in April and May 2004 (Appendix H)
- Two articles published in *CCDS Bulletin*, Fall 2003, Spring 2004
- 50 copies of the manual were provided to CCDS for distribution to arts groups and organizations
- Two copies of the manual were sold at the *Challenging Stereotypes* event
- Conferences as noted above
- CBC requested a copy of the video and expressed an interest in doing a "special" on the project
- Presentation of the *Arts Engagement* manual and video at DPI World Summit in September 2004

- Presentation of the project at KickstART, September 2004 in Vancouver

Conclusion

The finances available were sufficient to support the long term goals of the project and had a positive impact.

Summary:

The Arts Ability project has indeed met its goals and objectives. There are recorded benefits to conducting inclusive arts programming for persons with disabilities in institutional and other settings. Programs have been empowering in some critical ways for persons with disabilities, informative to staff and have provided family members with new and innovative ways of recognizing and supporting the creative talents and interests of people with disabilities.

The research team has targeted a variety of conferences and potential sites for publishing academic articles which outline the research approach taken during this project and its contribution to the development of the Arts Ability manual and video. In this way, the work of the Arts Ability team will be more broadly disseminated and the project deliverables promoted within community advocacy and academic circles. A more intensive collaborative approach to working with the School of Disability Studies at Ryerson University was also forged in the final quarter under the guidance of Dr. Kari Krogh.

The evaluation framework, videos and manual are concrete tools for enhancing existing and beginning new arts programs for people with disabilities. For many participants, particularly youth with disabilities, the ability to write, produce and direct drama pieces for performance was validation of time well spent. Similarly, for others, the opportunity to view their art matted, framed, exhibited and sold was empowering and encouraging. Administrators, caregivers and family have begun to see the potential in creative expression and that engaging collaboratively in the creative process can level the power hierarchy among people with disabilities and their care providers.

What needs to be explored further is the possibility of expanding programs outward into the community in more inclusive ways. The youth in Norway House have expressed regret at losing contact with the Arts Ability team, because their commitment to the arts, especially drama had been very rewarding. Artist apprentices have been empowered to further their careers in the arts or return to university to take fine arts and disability studies. Contacts with the sites are being maintained to support them to look for further funding and to continue to create opportunities in the arts for people with disabilities.

It is apparent through the development of this project that the arts can indeed be the vehicle for social change, leadership development and transformation of our societal systems. One individual example is of a young man who is quadriplegic who took part in the drama program. It was noticed that he had great ideas for scenarios. He expressed a desire to write but had not had accommodations to “write” since high school. The Project supplied him with a small tape recorder and some bank tapes. The staff at his day program assisted him and he has now written several stories through audio recording, which have been transcribed and turned into electronic format. To help him to continue with this process, the project hired a local writer for ten hours to

help edit these stories. The individual has now applied for a Community Access grant to allow the writer to continue to work with him. The individual, who was previously considered “evocational”, now has aspirations to pursue a career in writing, travel (he presented with Arts Ability in Winnipeg, Washington, D. C. and will present in Vancouver) and create societal changes for people with disabilities. He is one of many individuals with exceptional talent that are often seen as having nothing to offer society.

A CEO of one of the Arts Ability project sites came into the boardroom and encountered bright, vibrant paintings lying on the table. When he discovered that these paintings were created by the participants in the site programs, he was stunned. He said it was an amazing and moving experience for him. He is now one hundred percent behind finding a way to continue to provide opportunities in the arts in his organization.

As the project ends, CCDS and the many individuals and organizations involved in the progress of the last two years, look forward to new beginnings.

Appendix A: Project Sites (See page 19 *Arts Engagement* for more details on each site).

- I. Deer Lodge: Special Care Unit for Seniors Living with Dementia:
Visual/textual arts
- II. New Directions: Drama and Music
 - a. Program for Children, Youth, Adults and Families: Community outreach program for adults with developmental disabilities and dual-diagnosis.
 - b. Specialized day Program for People with Developmental Disabilities
- III. Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA), Portage La Prairie: Drama in year one with music added in year two.
- IV. Frontier-Northern School Division: Children and Youth from Grade 2 to High School. Children with Fetal Alcohol Syndrome or Alcohol Related Neurological Dysfunction (FAS/ARND)
 - i. Norway House High School
 - ii. Jack River Elementary
 - iii. Rossville Elementary

Pilot classes were offered at Prairie Theatre Exchange (October 2003-March 2004), funded by the J.W. McConnell Family Foundation and at Contemporary Dancers (January –March 2004), funded by ODI. While these pilots were not officially a part of the original proposal project sites, they were exploratory classes to establish a relationship with the arts community to meet an evolving need of persons with disabilities and the arts groups.

Appendix B: Artists or Artist Animators

These artists worked with assistants or artist apprentices at each site:

Sue Proctor, Director of Clownwise Inc. is a performer, clown, mime, storyteller and drama educator.

Claire Stephenson, BFA, is an artist, visual arts teacher and facilitator; she has worked with children and adults who are deaf blind or have autism. She has developed curriculum for arts programs and worked with adults with developmental disabilities

Brigitte Urben, BFA, is an artist, and visual arts teacher who specializes in work with clay. She has enjoyed her work with the adults and children in the Northern community of Norway House.

Judy Cook is a dancer who performs nationally. She has worked with children and adults with developmental disabilities.

Carolyn Combs is a videographer with an MA in drama education. She has worked with children with emotional difficulties. She has knowledge of theatre, film production and script writing.

Marcia Barkman is a musician who is an improvisation artist and puppeteer.

B. Pat Burns is a well known local film and theatre actor, teacher and director.

Appendix C: Project Team

Advisory Committee:

Jim Derksen
Shari Johnston
Susan Gibson
Daisy Monias
Dr. Elias Katz

Staff:

Sue Proctor	Project Manager
Cassandra Phillips	Liaison between research and management teams
Neil Okumura	Financial Officer
Cathy Archibald	Administration
Robb Nickel	Media

Research Team:

Dr. Kari Krogh
Maya Gislason