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Finding Voice, Supporting Process: The collaboration between teaching artists and social workers in an arts intervention program with populations affected by incarceration

Annie Arnzen

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Community Partner: Judy Dworin Performance Project(JDPP) Bridging Boundaries program, including JDPP teaching artists and social workers affiliated with the program.

Faculty Advisor: Professor Judy Dworin

Introduction

There are currently 184,000 women in prison and more than 7 million children have a parent in prison, on probation, or on parole. This population suffers from an array of emotional, social and behavioral challenges. Due to the nature of incarceration and the stigma associated with it, both populations suffer in silence, commonly leading to depression, aggression and low self-esteem.

Art programs allow individuals to uncover past memories, process painful experiences, and re-establish relationships with family, friends and self. Within the field of arts interventions, there are three varying approaches: **arts-as-skills**, **arts-as-therapeutic**, and **art therapy**. While both arts-as-skills and arts-as-therapeutic are led by teaching artists, one focuses on the final product and the other emphasizes the healing value of the process and product. Art therapy in contrast is conducted by mental health professionals who make diagnoses based on the process and product. Of the 230 arts organizations in the U.S. that provide programs for people in prison and at-risk youth, the majority use the arts-as-therapeutic approach.

Acknowledging the healing process that takes place, teaching artists are beginning to consider ways to collaborate with social workers already working within schools, prisons, or social services agency. Currently, there is minimal research on how teaching artists can collaborate with social workers to provide comprehensive care when working with populations affected by incarceration.



YWIP performance



York Performance Group

Research Questions

•Is it beneficial for teaching artists to collaborate with mental health professionals when engaging in art with incarcerated populations?

•What are the potential strengths and challenges of these types of collaboration?

Research Design

The Judy Dworin Performance Project(JDPP): Bridging Boundaries program was selected as a case study. JDPP creates arts intervention programs that engage incarcerated women and youth who have parents in prison. At each site -- York Correctional Institution, A.I. Prince Technical High School, Moylan Elementary and Church of the Good Shepherd -- teaching artists collaborate with social workers to provide support for the program participants. Studying the work of JDPP offers insight into both how the collaboration works and how it is experienced by the teaching artists and social workers themselves.

Methodology

Interviews	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The five JDPP teaching artists who work with the Bridging Boundaries program The four social workers affiliated with each program site 										
Observations	<table border="0"> <tr> <td>Bridging Boundaries programs in schools:</td> <td>Bridging Boundaries at York C.I.</td> </tr> <tr> <td>•A.I. Prince Technical High School (in school)</td> <td>•JDPP performance group</td> </tr> <tr> <td>•Church of the Good Shepherd (after school)</td> <td>•Moms and Kids group.</td> </tr> <tr> <td></td> <td>•“Talk it out” therapy group</td> </tr> <tr> <td></td> <td>•support group for arts program.</td> </tr> </table>	Bridging Boundaries programs in schools:	Bridging Boundaries at York C.I.	•A.I. Prince Technical High School (in school)	•JDPP performance group	•Church of the Good Shepherd (after school)	•Moms and Kids group.		•“Talk it out” therapy group		•support group for arts program.
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	•“Talk it out” therapy group										
	•support group for arts program.										
Email survey	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Thirty programs listed on the Prison Arts Coalition website; five responses. Information collected on arts approach, and current collaboration efforts with mental health services. 										
Focus group	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Five JDPP teaching artists and three affiliated social workers Discussed my research findings, and possible solutions for the identified challenges 										

Finding Voice, Supporting Process:

The collaboration between teaching artists and social workers in an arts intervention program with populations affected by incarceration

Challenges of collaboration

Findings
Strengths of collaboration

Common Themes	Teaching artists	Social workers
Access	<p>Youth Social workers provide assistance in finding students who have a parent or relative in prison.</p> <p><i>“it would be much harder to get into the school systems because they are the ones that find the kids.”</i> (JDPP teaching artist)</p> <p>Women Women in prison who might otherwise avoid the stigma of mental health services, often participate in the groups.</p>	<p>Youth Previous to the art program, many of the school social workers didn’t know which students had a parent in prison.</p> <p><i>“if it weren’t for Judy’s program, the population would be underserved.”</i> (Moylan Elementary)</p> <p>Women The social worker at York gains access to the women who have not approached her for one on one counseling. <i>“if it were a mental health group they probably wouldn’t come to the group. So even though they’re doing that process, because it’s a performance group, or a mother’s support group, it’s different.”</i> (York social worker)</p>
Uncovering Emotions, And follow up support	<p>When working with women and youth through the arts process, teaching artists often uncover emotions, and memories that may not be available through verbal discourse.</p> <p>Youth <i>“This one young man, the day it really came to a head he found a space between the wall and a filing cabinet, and I think we were doing a writing at the time about the parent in prison, and he just started to punch the wall and cry...”</i> (JDPP teaching artist)</p> <p>Women <i>“ some of the women (performance group) go really deep, they go into stuff they’ve never faced, they’ve never dealt with, and they’re writing about it, and they’re sharing it.”</i> (JDPP teaching artist)</p>	<p>Follow-up support for individuals who need to further process the information that arises through the arts.</p> <p>Youth <i>“the group supports them if they want to be connected and being in touch with their feeling and maybe that relationship. So maybe they start asking relatives to take them to the incarcerated person. So then they’ll come in and say I went to see my dad last weekend and this is what happened and this is what he said and this is what it was like.”</i> (A.I. Prince High School social worker)</p> <p>Women <i>“I felt like people needed a place to be able to further work through some of the topics that were brought up because I noticed that some of the women that I work..really open up through performance, and I thought..maybe I could dig in some areas.”</i> (York social worker)</p>

Moms and Kids Group



Thank you to: Judy Dworin, the JDPP teaching artists, the social workers at each of the program sites, Professor Clark, Sarah Gardiner, Michael Oleskewicz and the faculty, staff, and students of the CLI Research Colloquium

Common Themes	Teaching Artists	Social Workers
Confidentiality	<p>Lacking sufficient background information on participants impedes teaching artists’ ability to fully adapt sessions to particular children’s needs.</p> <p>Youth <i>“one of the kids in the FIC after school program, now his dad is not coming out of prison, but we didn’t know that. So there was one occasion where we were talking about your dad coming home and afterwards (social worker) told us “well his dad isn’t coming home.”</i> (JDPP teaching artist)</p> <p>Women Not an issue when working with the women at York.</p>	<p>Particularly when working with youth, social workers are limited in what information they can divulge due to legal restrictions.</p> <p>Youth <i>“I don’t divulge personal information”</i> (A.I. Prince social worker)</p> <p>Women <i>“for the most part, these issues that would be considered confidential, I am getting through Judy, through them, rather than me giving them to Judy.”</i> (York social worker)</p>
Time	<p>Some concern that increased social worker presence in the sessions might constrain some of the participants.</p> <p>Youth <i>“I think if she was in the room, maybe they would be a little more intimidated to say stuff.”</i> (JDPP teaching artist)</p> <p>Women <i>“It would possibly stop some of the women from sharing, a lot of these women have trust issues and if they don’t fully trust the person that’s there...they might be like “I’m not going to write about that, I’m not going to share about that” because I don’t want her to know.”</i> (JDPP teaching artist)</p>	<p>Busy schedules make it difficult for the social workers to always attend the art groups, and provide ongoing support.</p> <p>Youth <i>“I would love to sit in on more of the groups...just realistically I don’t know if that can happen. It’s a full plate, and I know the kids are in good hands.”</i> (A.I. Prince High School social worker)</p> <p>Women <i>“Sometimes I think there’s not enough hours in the day. If there were...maybe making it a point that when I end my group at 2:30, from 2:30-3 I come to sit in, even if I am only an observer.”</i> (York social worker)</p>
Ongoing support	<p>Establish a relationship with participants, that is then interrupted when the program ends.</p> <p>Youth <i>“it was difficult for us to leave the kids. Because after eight weeks it was like we were just getting going.”</i> (JDPP teaching artist)</p> <p>Women <i>“we always worried about the women after the final production. Because when we finish it goes into August which is a very quiet period at York.”</i> (JDPP teaching artist)</p>	<p>Full caseloads make it difficult for the social workers to support participants, whether through one-on-one counseling or group support sessions.</p> <p>Youth <i>“We are trying to get student linked up with additional supports outside of school through FIC. And somehow there was a breakdown in communication.”</i> (Moylan Elementary social worker)</p> <p>Women The social worker at York created bi-weekly support groups for the women in the JDPP programs as a way of providing ongoing care for women involved in the arts intervention.</p>

Suggested solutions based on the focus group

- Have JDPP teaching artists attend some of the support groups at York
- Have social workers at Moylan Elementary and A.I. Prince Technical High School lead support groups, similar to that at York.
- Host bi-annual focus groups with all the professionals affiliated with the JDPP: Bridging Boundaries program
- Educate other arts programs and social workers working with populations affected by incarceration on the importance of collaboration

Conclusions

•I have concluded that it is highly beneficial for teaching artists to collaborate with social workers when initiating art interventions with populations affected by incarceration.

•While there are many strengths to the current JDPP collaboration, there are also some obstacles to cohesive collaboration between the professions.

Limitations of the study

Due to restraints of time and geography my research focused on one case study. In future research it would be important to examine other collaborative art programs, to verify whether the same strengths and challenges exist. In addition, it is important to examine arts intervention programs that do not collaborate to uncover greater understanding of the potential benefits of a multi-professional approach.