Community Building Through Collaborative Art

Claire Robson
Presentation Overview

• About me
• About community art
• The Arts & Health Project
• Intergenerational Arts Project Reducing Elder Abuse in LGBTQ Community
About me

- Curriculum consultant and designer for Vancouver Park Board Arts & Health Project
- SFU researcher specializing in collaborative arts
- Lead artist
  - *Quirk-e: The queer imaging & riting kollective for elders*
  - *Britannia Players Theatre Group*
About community art

- A rapidly growing field...
- It brings together practice, education, and research centering on the value of the arts for health and wellbeing
- It integrates different forms of art including performing, visual, and literary
A GLOBAL PHENOMENON
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“The difference between exercise and dance is, exercise is exercise, you do and you feel better physically, but dance makes me feel better from head to toe. I have lots of fun doing it and it helps clear my head and makes me happy from inside”

Arts & Health in the United Kingdom
ART BRIDGES: THEORY OF CHANGE

WHAT WE DO
- Raise Awareness
- Make Connections
- Gather Resources
- Share Resources
- Highlight What’s Going On

WHO WE SERVE
- Community-engaged Arts & Arts for Social Change Initiatives

WHAT WE AIM TO ACHIEVE
- Connections
- Knowledge
- Inspiration
- Higher Profile Field

and our ULTIMATE IMPACT:
more opportunities and access for people in Canada to engage and participate in arts within communities. As well, communities in Canada are healthier and more resilient.
Collaborative collective arts processes are difficult to quantify.

From the outside, they can look similar to other arts workshops.
From the inside, their outcomes are often profound
• People become a resource – doing rather than being ‘done for.’
• The group becomes larger than the sum of its individuals
• Hidden talents are revealed
• A sense of purpose and belonging is forged
• Outcomes go beyond the space or the time frame
• Outcomes develop from the needs and interests of the collective
• The artist facilitates emergent directions
What community art is not...

• individuals making art side by side

• your typical art class:
  – 1) techniques
  – 2) individual experiments
  – 3) teacher critique

• contained by ‘curriculum’ with predetermined outcomes
What community art is...

- Collaborative
- Emergent
- It extends beyond workshop hours
- It builds confidence and agency
- It builds strong communities.
The **Arts & Health Project** began in 2005 in partnership with Vancouver Coastal Health.

- Recognizing that the number of old people was on the increase, it sought to provide them with quality programming.
- Built on the work of Gene Cohen around ageing and the arts.
THE PILOT:
SIX SITES & DIFFERENT FORMS OF ART
Renfrew Collingwood Adult Day Care Centre
Roundhouse: Express Your Voice Choir
Silver Harbour Digital Storytelling
Strathcona Puppetry
Britannia: The Queer Imaging & Riting Kollective for Elders
Renfrew Park Community Centre
Showcasing is a central feature of the work
Research conducted during the Arts & Health Project indicated that participants became more confident, felt a sense of accomplishment, and experienced improved physical wellbeing.

They forged stronger social connections and a sense of belonging.
About the Intergenerational Art Project

- *Reducing Elder Abuse in the LGBTQ Community*
- Funded by a $55,000 grant from the Council to Reduce Elder Abuse
- Managed and facilitated by SFU Departments of GSWS and Gerontology
Quirk-e: The queer Imaging & Riting Kollective for Elders
Quirk-e

The queer imaging & riting kollective for elders
—Activist arts collective based at Britannia Services Centre
—Ages range from 60-84
—Funded by City of Vancouver, Britannia, and QMUNITY
Youth For A Change
Youth for A Change & Quirk-e

Youth for A Change

– A group of young activists and advocates based in Surrey
– Ages range from 13-21
– They provide workshops; network; lobby; create art and performance; advocate; educate; monitor public policy and host youth events amongst other activities
Outputs

• Three videos
  – A F-M trans* individual in residential care who asks for a pap smear
  – A lesbian couple, one of whom physically and psychologically abuses the other because she forgot to dress ‘properly’ for an impending visit by her grandchildren.
  – A gay male couple where the younger partner makes withdrawals from the older partner’s bank account

• Posters/Fact sheets
  – Images and text, information about resources available
  
All materials available free of charge at SFU Gerontology website [https://www.sfu.ca/lgbteol/lgbt-elder-abuse-2.html](https://www.sfu.ca/lgbteol/lgbt-elder-abuse-2.html)
LGBTQ Elder Abuse: What Do You know?

What is Elder Abuse?
Elder abuse occurs when people in positions of trust harm elders, either through their actions or their failure to act.

What is Emotional Abuse?
Severe or persistent verbal/non-verbal behavior that results in emotional or psychological harm.*

Who Commits Elder Abuse?
- Private households (family, lovers, friends, children, neighbours, caregivers).
- Institutions such as hospitals, care homes, and assisted living (staff, visitors, other residents).

Why are Older LGBTQ People More Vulnerable to
- Stigma and prejudice makes them an “invisible population”
- They are twice as likely to be single, aging alone
- They are less likely to have children or find them supportive
- They are more likely to have experienced trauma and to have had drug and alcohol issues

Why are LGBTQ People Less Likely to Report Abuse?
- They may not wish to give others even more cause to criticize them.
- They may not be out.

Where to Find Help or Further Information:
If you are in immediate danger, call 9-1-1.
Seniors Abuse & Information Line at the BC Centre for Elder Advocacy & Support: 604.437.1940 or 1.866.437.1940 (toll free)
Fraser Health: 1-877-732-2808 or visit www.fraserhealth.ca/your_care/adult_abuse_and_neglect/
Interior Health: For direct community numbers visit www.interiorhealth.ca/reportabuse
Island Health South Island: 1-888-533-2273, Central Island 1-877-734-4101, North Island 1-866-928-4988
Northern Health: Northern Health Adult Protection Line 1-844-465-7414
Vancouver Coastal Health: ReAct Adult Protection Program 1-877-732-2899

* Abuse Definitions: National Initiative for Care of the Elderly 2015
This fact sheet was produced by the Simon Fraser University Gerontology Research Centre in cooperation with QUIRK It and Youth for A Change, supported by a grant from the BC Committee to Reduce Elder Abuse (CRBA)
Partner Organizations

• QMUNITY
• West End Seniors’ Network
• Haro Park Centre
• Alzheimer Society of BC
• Health Initiative for Men
• Roundhouse Gay and Grey Men’s Group
• Quirk-e
• Youth for A Change
• Britannia Community Services Centre
• Fraser Health, Interior Health, Northern Health, Vancouver Coastal Health, Vancouver Island Health Authorities
About Collaboration
Some guiding questions

- What is special about the communities that are being engaged? (First Nations, queer, Chinese, East Indian)
- What traditions, histories, and collective memories can be brought to light and explored?
- How can participants be engaged in doing the work themselves?
- How can challenges and obstacles be creatively negotiated with a can do philosophy?
- How far can the participants be challenged to engage in new artistic ventures?
- How can they succeed together in order to feel proud, inspired, and productive?
- How can their successes be shown to the wider community?
Creative Collaborations have surprising successful outcomes
Bill

• Bill was hospitalized recently. He is very frail and needs lots of in home care
• He has no living relatives
• Even so, he had ten visits in two weeks – all from members of Quirk-e
• He will be discharged only because of his Quirk-e connections
• How much would it cost to keep Bill in residential care?
Judy
• Judy is shy, suffers from depression, and has been diagnosed as bipolar
• Though she rarely speaks in public, she has attended Quirk-e faithfully for the last ten years
• She feels she belongs in our community, and she’s taught us a lot about mental illness
• She has made and shown her art about abuse, depression, and self-harm
• Two gay men in our group show up with ice cream when Judy is feeling down
• Where would Judy be without this one safe place?
• Where else would she feel not just accepted, but highly valued?
Outcomes

• Over 1000 people have seen the materials at town halls and other presentations
• Almost all 2500 posters have been distributed
• The elder abuse page on the Gerontology website has been visited over 300 times, and is the most popular page (after the home page)
The role of the professional artist

• Professional artists understand the capacity of art to change and mobilize communities
• They know how to engage participants deeply, rather focus purely on technique
• They conceive daring imaginative projects
• Because they are experts, they are quick on their feet and able to take advantage of the teachable moment
What does this mean for you?

Visible benefits

– Communities of citizens committed to community engagement and advocacy for community centres
– Tangible outcomes in terms of the centre’s promotion: books, installations and artwork
– Enrollment in other programs that support the artistic project (computing 101, music, art)
– Creation of a vibrant artistic culture
– Funding spinoffs through additional grant applications
– Social and cultural events stemming from the project (screenings, celebrations, performances)
What does this mean for you?

Less visible benefits

– Increased health (cognitive, emotional, and physical)
– A shifted lens, from ‘done for’ to ‘can do’
– Participants who show up and are engaged
– Communities of care
  • Participants who take care of each other’s needs (transport, housing, hospitalizations)
  • Staff and lead artists who flag concerns
The Arts and Health Project is built on the understanding that all people are creative. We have unique knowledge and life experiences, and can benefit in many ways from a connection to the arts.

- jil p weaving

Vancouver Board of Parks & Recreation

The Arts and Health Project: Healthy Aging Through The Arts

The Arts & Health Project is a working collaboration of seniors and professional artists, who together develop an arts practice that focuses on the creative expression of ideas and issues that are important to them. The project provides a forum for expression and communication, exploration and imagination, which in turn fosters a sense of well-being and belonging.

The Vancouver Board of Parks and Recreation and Vancouver Coastal Health partner with other organizations and associations with close ties to the community and with mandates focused on health, community recreation, and/or art participation to deliver this community engaged art programming for seniors.
Website Resources

Guides

Community-Engaged Arts Practice with Seniors: A Startup Guide Based on The Arts and Health Project

Arts Administration Practical Guide For Community-Engaged Artists

A Guide to Creating Peer Support and Collaborative Strategies For Seniors