

Disabilities in the Arts Focus Group

Date: August 12, 2008
Location: Maryland State Arts Council
175 W. Ostend Street, Suite E, Baltimore
Forum: Focus Group Meeting
Facilitator: Morrie Warshawski, Theresa Colvin, Janel Cohen, Sharon Blake
Scribe: Elizabeth A. Bentley-Smith

MAJOR THEMES

What we value about Maryland:

- the weather
- its progressive attitude
- the city of Baltimore
- “land of pleasant living”

Concerns:

- ingrained attitudes
- lack of equal treatment
- transportation
- need for more inclusive venues

In the future we’d like to see:

- changed attitudes
- more opportunities as consumers, performers and students
- more jobs and internships for the disabled
- inclusivity training in the schools

Suggestions for MSAC:

- make staff more aware of disabilities issues
- provide training in disabilities issues
- encourage collaboration among disabilities agencies

SOME QUOTES

“Baltimore is more edgy so can push the ‘waters’ a little more.”

“The state is a progressive place...very unique environment...very specific prides are notable based on region of living.”

“We need to think about people with disabilities as part of society just like Hispanics and Blacks.”

“Unique gifts take unique strategies...there are different ways in working with people who have disabilities.”

“We need to determine the level of accessibility that doesn’t decrease the art itself and doesn’t turn others off to help perform the art...the venue needs to be inclusive and open to those with disabilities.”

“Provide equal opportunity across all disabilities; those persons who are natural artists and have a disability - it is much easier for them than those who use the arts as a tool to help them through their disability.”

“[Five years from now] a public awareness campaign that celebrates artists with disabilities and their inventive/exciting/aesthetic choices.”

“Laws are great, but need help in preparing theatres and educating them in how to gain an audience and gain performers...learn from mistakes.”

“Provide training, seminars, forums that are safe places for orgs that are clueless to what the needs are for people with disabilities.”

RAW TRANSCRIPT

Introduction by Sharon Blake, MSAC Disabilities in the Arts Staff Member

- What is Imagine Maryland?
 - Strategic plan...provides details regarding timeline
- Introduces MSAC Staff: Theresa Colvin, Janel Cohen, Elizabeth Bentley-Smith, Sharon Blake

Morrie Warshawski, Consultant

- Introduces the idea and purpose of strategic planning
- Working with film makers regarding traveling as a disabled person
- Process of today’s meeting
 - A series of questions that are constant for all meetings

❖ **1ST QUESTION → WHAT DO YOU VALUE MOST ABOUT LIVING IN MARYLAND?
WHAT MAKES MARYLAND SO GREAT?**

- Access to culture venues and access to major cities such as Annapolis, Baltimore, Alexandria, DC...ability for family members from other countries
- The weather/seasons are just great...wonderful climate

- Can see the affect one has in Maryland...tangible effect is visualized in Baltimore
- More appreciative environment in Baltimore than DC
- Baltimore is more edgy so can push the “waters” a little more
- Baltimore is an exciting city that leads to great collaboration...won’t get lost in the city because of its size
- Came from Milwaukee and heard about the land of pleasant living
- Came to Maryland because of wife, but also like the food
- Intersecting cultures within the State
- The state is a progressive place...very unique environment...very specific prides are notable based on region of living...chose Maryland because of the flag and believes what it stands for...strong traditions
- From a professional standpoint, the support of MSAC is too great to pass up

❖ **2ND QUESTION → WHAT ARE THE MAJOR ISSUES FACING YOUR COMMUNITY (THE DISABILITY AND THE ARTS COMMUNITY)? WHAT ARE THINGS WE NEED TO THINK ABOUT?**

- Concept of people with disabilities is part of the diversity of our communication; people will do surveys with focus on diversity, but not include disabilities; focus from NEA and its grants focus on accessibility...need to think about people with disabilities as part of society just like Hispanics and blacks
- The face of the disability community is shifting and it is sometimes difficult for the public to keep up...this is due to technology and opportunity...more individuals have learning disabilities...how do we provide for this community when it changes so quickly...also need to learn to work with parents of children with disabilities and garner that trust ...where is the line of accessibility and inclusion
- As an artist sometimes asked to make a dance for a group that is deaf or blind and it is important to ensure that all are included in the same piece rather than just focusing on one disability at a time
- As an artist don’t want to always have to explain myself...ensemble built work that makes the presentation sing...multiple ability...better art when we are all adapters and make better art...unique gifts take unique strategies...there are different ways in working with people who have disabilities
- Ready, Set, Go...survey of Baltimore Harbor and how the city was accessible to disabilities...the area was so open to these authors and trying to help make their needs met...attitude was very open and positive
- School systems...how the arts can help students be successful through movement or computers...especially through computer
- Learning about disabilities is learning...and the arts is learning
- Arts helps those communities that are marginalized
- The role of arts in learning does help those who are disabled when nothing else does

- Persons with accommodations must self-identify which automatically places them in box...this isn't asked of those persons
- Education is the key for success...education and being educated...if people with disabilities would be allowed ...people with disabilities are often limited by others not their own disabilities...dance and theatre helps for self-esteem and the same movements are used for medical purposes so why not use them for pure enjoyment...need transportation aides...lack of opportunities slows progress
- Opportunities may come up but if they are 100 miles away, then how feasible is it for the person to get there...need to create a system of services...need to replicate a good model and determine what is right in
- Need to provide more training for those individuals for faculty at the secondary level
- Need to determine the level of accessibility that doesn't decrease the art itself and doesn't turn others off to help perform the art...the venue needs to be inclusive and open to those with disabilities
- Camp Greentop is a camp for children with disabilities...this camp allowed the children to go on stage and just perform whatever they wanted...this action led to such memorable changes and opened the doors for these children who were previously unable to access those arts in their every day of life
- Providing equal opportunity across all disabilities; those persons who are natural artists and have a disability it is much easier for them than those who use the arts as a tool to help them through their disability
- Have the opportunity to redefine what is art...it isn't less than it is just different...need to liberate the rest of the world
- The different types of genres within the art also lead to different explanations of the arts...folk vs. rock music, more likely to discuss the purpose of the music in the former as opposed to the latter, but VSArts provides opportunities for explanations within all genres
- Acceptance and dignity from within our own community...we are a culture within ourselves and that issue is not always recognized...not all disabilities meet certain stigmas that already exist...need to push those barriers down...parents can sometimes be as much of a supporters...recognize how powerful they can be as a group rather than individually as a disabled person...need to quit fighting amongst ourselves in order to be more affective

❖ **3RD QUESTION → WHAT THINGS CAN BE CHANGED AND HOW WOULD THAT LOOK LIKE IN 5 YEARS FOR THE ARTS AND DISABLED COMMUNITY? WHAT SPECIFIC CHANGES WOULD YOU PROPOSE (THAT ARE POSSIBLE AND SHOULD HAPPEN)?**

- Want Delegates to look for connections within the Disabled community and not put the onus on the disabled community
- Arts in the schools...can be used for all students as a form of empowerment
- Individual Artist awards...rethink what the criteria are for such awards
- Cannot wish to have more artists with disabilities...need to be more proactive

- Encourage the arts as a viable career path for those persons with disabilities
- Art making is the center of what we are doing, not just participating
- More acceptance of individuals with disabilities as artists
- The joining of organizations to help work with persons of artists...transportation and arts organizations...
- Every healthcare worker and family member has experienced an arts activity together
- More proactive on getting TV spots to help change the attitudes
- Would like to have more individuals with disabilities in the audience and not be remarkable
- Arts organizations as a place for employment
- Would like to not have to worry about if the venue is accessible as a performer with a disability...want a permanent access
- Increase in arts classes for students with disabilities and greater funding for such opportunities
- Make arts more accessible for those disabled within the school system
- Make colleges more acceptable of students with disabilities and not just academically, but also in the arts
- YMCA ...helping people understand disabilities through programs as a disabled individual, especially in learning functionality in one's life
- Define artistic outcomes as an expression not as an event, specific to those individuals with disabilities
- Inclusivity of programming for museums becomes the norm
- Greater job opportunities and internship opportunities for persons with disabilities
- Further awareness of the disabled community not just on the national level, but also at the state/local levels
- Public awareness campaign that celebrates artists with disabilities and their inventive/exciting/aesthetic choices
- Would like to see faculty within college/HS arts programs to be trained on what it means to be inclusive in your classroom...what tools are needed for equitable opportunity
- Reserve a place for arts education solely for persons with disabilities to allow people to feel comfortable creating their art as a stepping stone to inclusion, but not instead of inclusion
 - Need places of safety and challenge and they can be the same

❖ **4TH QUESTION → HOW AWARE ARE YOU OF WHAT MSAC DOES?**

- Can you articulate their mission...(about 4 raised hands fully understand)
- How many have worked with MSAC...(6 raised hands)

❖ **5TH QUESTION → WHAT CAN MSAC DO FOR YOU?**

- Laws are great, but need help in preparing theatres and educating them in how to gain an audience and gain performers...learn from mistakes

- Make the MSAC staff more aware of what artists with disabilities do
 - Provide training, seminars, forums that are safe places for orgs that are clueless to what the needs are for people with disabilities
 - Initiate collaboration with the agencies that provide disability services
 - Help re-educate the younger audiences about disability arts and foster grassroots education once they move here from college and start working
 - Make it part of the plan to include disability arts programs
 - Artistic forum that is interactive and engage all of the artistic/executive directors and help make sure that disabled artists are part of their organizations' mission
- ❖ Thank you for coming...