

‘PERFORMING WELLNESS’™
when the artist and the public meet in wellness....

BACKGROUND

In 2000 Kate Hawkes, then Artistic Associate and Education/Outreach Director at Portland, Oregon’s Artists Repertory Theatre, created an arts process called Performing Wellness. First introduced as a community outreach program around a production of the play WIT by Margaret Edson, Kate guided a group of individuals living after a cancer diagnosis through a writing process, then paired them with professional actors and in the 4th month two weekends of public performances were produced.

Following the success of this project Kate founded The Well Arts Institute (WAI) with writers, actors and others involved in the first Performing Wellness. Through April 2005 six more Performing Wellness (PW) productions with writers sharing their stories of cancer, Multiple Sclerosis, HIV/AIDS, and war-related PTSD have been produced. Through each of these Kate facilitated the writing process, paired the actors and writers, directed and produced the show. She also took the lead in evaluation and has taught numerous workshops using the PW writing exercises, and coordinated performances of stories created through the PW process in a variety of venues. She has also performed some of the writing herself.

Over 20 years Kate has honed and clarified her philosophy and the steps in this remarkable process, and is now ready to offer training to others willing and able to facilitate a Performing Wellness in their community. This manual does not intend to stand instead of training sessions with Kate but rather to offer a clear philosophy of arts in wellness as it applies to this process, activities/exercises to utilize in some degree in existing practices and to serve as the foundation for a full training course.

TOUCHSTONES

In essence these three touchstones guide and at the heart of the PW process.

- The creative process provides a venue to find meaning in experiences of illness or trauma. (*see references at the end of this manual.*)
- The individual exploring that experience is the Primary artist. This artist accesses his/her intuitive knowledge, expresses it in some artistic form, and shares that story in some way.
- An Artist and Healer reside within each individual.

In very simple terms and in its most articulated form to date:

Performing Wellness (PW)™ is text-based creations by the primary artists, performed for the public by professional actors, dancers and musicians. (These are often accompanied by post-performance questionnaires completed by all participants as well as the audience. The primary artists also fill out a pre-test.)

As I have come to recognize and now articulate what it is I do and how I arrived at this place I have realized a core philosophy. A philosophy is an underlying understanding and/or belief and in many ways it is the place from where we can draw our answers when faced with unsettling or awkward questions and dilemmas. This is the core philosophy of Performing Wellness and the work I do:

- the primary artist is the person creating the art
- the art is process based and not outcome orientated

(therefore the work is artist driven and not counseling or therapy.)

The Process is for the wellbeing of the Primary artist and the basic premise is 'first do no harm'. (ie: If the work has the power to do good we must equally acknowledge it can do harm.) With this in mind, it is important that each Primary artist (particularly in the full PW process) has a good support person or group and that the facilitator have full access to that support.

This translates to an Artistic set of standards.

- The Primary artist (regardless of the circumstances, a full PW or workshop) chooses to participate and is not coerced in any way and may also choose to leave the activity.
- Artists working in a facilitative, leadership or mentoring capacity must fully understand and adhere to the core philosophy as stated above. This may involve some training process in order to work as a facilitator or Supporting Artist. (ie: the one who puts that work before the public.)
- The quality of the work put before the public has high production values thus honoring both the deeply personal nature of primary artists' creation, and the professionalism of the Supporting and Facilitating artists. This standard of quality pertains to technical areas such as lighting and sound, as well as performance standards; PR; reproduction and other means by which the art is made public.
- All materials created by the primary artists belong to that artist. That Primary artist may grant the right to use their story and is always informed in advance of its use. This permission may be withdrawn by the artist. Thus, records of the work on dvd, video, in books or other forms cannot be sold or randomly distributed without express permission of each artist thus represented and reproduced.