



Introduction

Who would ever imagine that a pile of paper and some crayons could transform lives?

After Hurricane Katrina devastated New Orleans, thousands of families ended up living in horrific conditions in the Houston, Texas, Astrodome. Sanitation was poor; people didn't feel safe; and there was little hope in sight. Nearly everyone, including many children, suffered from trauma. People in Houston helped in all kinds of ways, but the work of a group of four stay-at-home Texan moms particularly caught our attention.

These four women gathered piles of crayons, markers and paper and headed to the stadium. They invited children to draw pictures of their experiences and talk. While their first pictures were filled with terror, over time their images turned brighter and more hopeful, as the sun and rainbows adorned the pages.

"Just by listening and sitting with them while they drew, we saw how amazing the transformation occurred with the children," Sue Jensen, one of the four moms, told NBC News.¹ They called their ad hoc initiative the Katrina Kid's Project. The drawings made their way to the national news, and some were even sold to raise money for schools for Katrina survivors. These women were not social workers, and they weren't psychologists.

They simply cared and believed that the act of making art might help kids find a way to process their experience and get their feet back on the ground.

This simple story illustrates what motivated both of us to leave our jobs mid-career and devote ourselves to working with young people through the arts. Our life experiences had shown us that young people around the world, from all cultures and socioeconomic classes, are a well-spring of hope and resilience. Furthermore, we had witnessed over and over again that making opportunities for creative expression within a context of care and connection is a seemingly magical key for unlocking that hope and resilience. And it doesn't require the work of experts. We can all do this.

We entered our work with youth, arts and empowerment from different directions but with a common concern for the environment that today's young people are growing up in. Youth are surrounded by a seamless web of media images and messages that tell them who they are, what they should look like and how they should act. They live in a world that is experiencing dramatic demographic shifts that too often lead to misunderstanding, conflict and injustice. Severe stress upon our natural environment is causing upheavals that will increasingly affect the upcoming generations. And these are just a few of the big issues young people face.

Millions of us are busily working on ways to address these issues, but too few of us spend time sharing our wisdom and passion with the upcoming generations. Vipassana meditation teacher Sharon Salzberg said, "It's as if the transmission of knowledge from one generation to the next has broken down in our modern world."

We have found that the arts and creative expression serve as an incredibly effective bridge between generations as well as between cultures and socioeconomic classes. Creative expression ignites joy and hope; develops empathy, teamwork and collaboration; and fosters the desire to live meaningful lives. We see it as a power tool for the kind of social healing and positive change called for in our world.

A lot of attention is being paid to creativity these days; bookstore shelves are increasingly populated with new titles promoting the concepts of creativity, imagination and "right-brain" potential. Theoretical

treatises on creativity and related subjects, however, leave many feeling on the outside of this new wave of understanding. Those who lack artistic experience, or who don't think of themselves as talented, are left searching for a way to experience their own creativity. What's needed are easy and safe opportunities to jump in and get started.

In the past 18 years we have learned again and again that the arts and creative expression are the birthright of every human being. We all get to play in this realm, and it's through doing so that we learn how creative we really are. That's why we take a very practical and participatory approach to creativity. At our trainings and youth programs—all based on a learn-by-doing model—we have the pleasure of seeing person after person awoken to innate creativity. And once recognized, that creativity can never hide again in quite the same way. Our work is about re-enchanting the world through arts for everyone.



Who We Are

Charlie spent his early years working as a professional musician, leading a popular Seattle band called Rumors of the Big Wave. At 40, he left the music business to become cultural coordinator of the Earth Service Corps, a national YMCA teen environmental organization. Curious whether the skills he had learned as a poet, songwriter and performer might be useful for young people, he started leading creativity-based programs with youth throughout North America and internationally. He was heartened by young people's willingness to take creative risks and their desire to make a positive difference in the world, whether they came from the inner cities, the suburbs or rural communities, from detention centers, impoverished high schools or fancy private academies. It turns out that young people really do want to express themselves fully and make their lives count.

Peggy worked off and on for 20 years as the editor of *New Age Journal*, a US magazine that covered emerging progressive movements barely noticed by the mainstream press. She left the magazine for a few years to earn a Master's of Education in Creative Arts in Learning at Lesley University Cambridge, Massachusetts, where she focused on the role the

arts can play in building strong people and connected communities. Back at the magazine, she became fascinated by the stories that came across her editor's desk about grassroots organizations successfully using arts-based approaches to help their communities deal with catastrophes such as shootings and natural disasters, to decrease rates of incarceration and keep young people out of gangs, and to build alliances across cultures and generations. She left the magazine in the mid-1990s determined to find a way to work with creativity to help youth and adults live more fulfilling lives and to build stronger more resilient communities.

In 1996, we tried an experiment on Whidbey Island in the northwest corner of the US. We convened a leadership gathering with 28 teens from diverse backgrounds and fourteen adult artists, youth workers and community leaders. We spent five days exploring our values and our hopes and dreams. We played, danced, made art and music, wrote poetry and told our life stories. We climbed into the trees on a high-ropes course, immersed ourselves in the natural world and learned from people very different from ourselves. Youth and adults alike left the camp brimming with self-confidence and a network of new allies, ready to take on the world.

The gathering gave us a glimpse into a whole new world of possibility for working with youth and spurred us to begin the body of work represented in this book in the spring of 1997. We started a non-profit program, called The Power of Hope: Youth Empowerment through the Arts, in the US and Canada to put on arts-based leadership camps. A decade later, in 2006, we began to work in Uganda and then in the UK where Charlie worked with Lucy Sicks to start a youth program called LIFEbeat. With our friend and collaborator Ian Watson we formed PYE: Partners for Youth Empowerment to respond to the growing demand for similar programming around the world. Through PYE we partner with communities around the world to train leaders who can provide transformative programs for teens. We currently work in the UK, Uganda, India, South Africa, Brazil, Canada and the US and continue to develop new partnerships with organizations that are motivated to release the creative potential of young people. In 2009, Peggy, Jamie-Rose Edwards, Leslie Cotter and a group of women from Power of Hope founded Young Women Empowered, a creative leadership program for teen women from diverse

backgrounds in the greater Seattle area. And this is not to mention all of the initiatives, programs and organizations started by our colleagues.

What has put the wind into the sails of this work is the amazing network of dedicated artists, youth workers, teachers and activists we have met along the way. We call these people—and ourselves—social artists, because we apply our creative zeal to the healing of the world, using society as our canvas. We dedicate ourselves to developing arts-based group-facilitation skills and finding ways to apply our skills to increase the effectiveness of programs for youth and adults all over the world. As far as we can tell, social artists exist in every community, in every nation on this planet, ready to be recognized and deployed.

Nadia Chaney is a perfect example. Nadia was working as a spoken word and performance installation artist in Vancouver, British Columbia, paying the bills by washing dishes in a café. “The first time I came to a Power of Hope camp, I realized that living my dreams didn’t necessarily mean living the life of a starving artist,” she said. “I went to more camps and trainings and expanded my definition of myself to include social artistry. Not only did I continue working as a performance artist, I started using my creativity to work with youth in schools, juvenile detention centers and community centers. It wasn’t long before I left the restaurant job, and I’ve been doing this work ever since.” A few years later, she and three colleagues started Metaphor, a performance troupe that has positively affected the lives of over 60,000 teens in British Columbia through hip-hop-based empowerment programs. Nadia is now a lead trainer for PYE and has led initiatives in India and South Africa.

David Kafambe, a social worker in Kampala, Uganda, came to social artistry from the other direction. When he attended our Creative Facilitation training in 2007, he was working with youth for the Ugandan Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development and with DSW, a German NGO that focuses on the sexual and reproductive health of youth. Prior to the training, David had not considered creativity as a focus for empowerment work; nor had he imagined using the arts as a tool in his work with youth. Once he saw the impact of creative expression, though, David applied himself to becoming an excellent facilitator. Several thousand Ugandan young people have now attended creative empowerment camps

that David has organized and facilitated, and he has trained hundreds of youth workers and peer leaders in East Africa and beyond. David proudly calls himself a social artist and has been invited to join several international youth empowerment initiatives in other parts of Africa, Europe and India. Meeting David, one is struck by a sense of irrepressible joy and clarity of purpose. These are common characteristics of the people we are fortunate enough to meet through our work, and they make our lives a constant pleasure.

You don't have to be a full-time facilitator to be an effective social artist, however. You might be a teacher who finds ways to slip creative practices into the classroom or a businessperson who uses arts-based practices to lead exciting and motivating staff meetings. Maybe you are a community organizer who strengthens the bonds among people in your neighborhood by staging participatory community arts events. Or a youth worker, social worker, educator or government official who brings new life into your workplace by injecting the arts and opportunities for creative expression. Or a parent or grandparent who plays with your children in ways that nurture their creative spark.

Why This Book

Our work with creativity and communities reflects what we feel needs to happen in the world. We offer this book as our best effort in support of a massive shift that is trying to happen in our time. We see ourselves as fellow travelers with many millions of people around the world engaged in the high-stakes adventure of securing a just and healthy world for future generations.

The challenge that humanity faces has been described in countless ways. Kenny Ausubel, a cofounder of the Bioneers—a leading organization supporting the emergence of a thriving, Earth-friendly society—captures our predicament as a species with a powerful metaphor. He equates the challenge facing humanity to being travelers on a massive, smog-belching, ironclad cargo ship, heavy in the water, charging headlong in the wrong direction. What's more, only a fraction of the wisdom, compassion and energy of the passengers is being called upon. And we (the col-

lective we) have been given a challenge: somehow we've got to find a way to change direction while transforming this hulking mess into an elegant sailing vessel, equipped with the most innovative and nature-friendly technology imaginable. And all the travelers on the ship get to contribute the best of what they have to offer. This is our real-life adventure, serious, fraught, sometimes exhilarating and potentially full of joy—and there is room for everyone who wants to play. We need thousands, even millions, of social artists—engaged, confident, grounded, empathetic citizens—if we are to create that elegant sailing ship that can take us in a new direction. And that means you and me. You don't have to have experience with the arts to jump on board; you simply need a bit of courage and a taste for adventure.

In this book you will learn the basic tools for becoming a social artist—whether you work with youth or adults. We frame the book around our youth work, since that's where we formulated the model. But the principles and practices are applicable to adult groups as well, whether



Social artists in Cape Town, South Africa, relax after a training session.

Credit: PVE Global

it's a class, a work team, a community meeting or even a party. That's right, a party. This book prepares you to bring vitality into group encounters regardless of the context. Whenever people come together, there is an opportunity for creative engagement.

In Part 1, you'll learn about how the arts and creative expression are an overlooked force for positive social change. Through real-world examples, you'll learn about the Creative Community Model and how to use it in a wide range of situations with youth or adults.

In Part 2, you'll learn how to structure programs for success and how to integrate the arts into every aspect of your program.

In Part 3, you'll learn how to bring the worlds of visual arts and crafts, creative writing, improvisational theater, storytelling and song into your work through easy-to-lead activities. You need no prior experience in the arts to use them.

And finally in Part 4, you'll receive additional tips on facilitation and counsel on working in diverse cultures and intergenerational groups.

For over 18 years we've been blessed to work in an endlessly creative environment with a vast community of youth and adults who care about this world. We invite you to join the growing cadre of social artists working to transform the world through joy, imagination and compassion.

— Peggy Taylor and Charlie Murphy, 2013

A note on our sources: The activities in this book are, for the most part, widely known games with our spin added to them. We made every attempt to credit individuals when possible. If you find an activity in this book that you have personally designed, we apologize for the lack of credit. Please let us know and we will remedy this in future editions.

All proceeds from this book will support the work of PYE Global.