

How do YOU reduce youth GANG violence? 10/19/2007

Inspired by a youth-led project which took place at Alternatives, Inc. in Uptown

Artist Tiffany Bullard:

Tiffany has been a Shanti artist since 2005. The community projects are usually based in schools. Right now she is working at Washington School in Evanston. The project entails working with 4th graders to create their own civilizations. Doing mediums of theater and visual arts. Tiffany is a theater artist who does improvisational work.

Background information on Shanti Foundation:

Shanti has been around since 1993, founded by Indira Johnson. Shanti goes into schools and communities to talk about issues, exploring all possibilities of the respective issue. At Shanti we work in groups to create one singular goal. Stress is put on the idea that the creative process is always more important than the final product.

Participants got into a circle to introduce themselves.

Name Game activity:

Individuals were asked to throw a ball – when you catch it, say your name. The facilitator adds another ball, and asked people to focus on eye contact and concentration. Participants walked up and down the aisles and through the space throwing the balls to each other.

Silent Community Activity:

Participants walked around the room without talking trying to find their “community” of people who had the same eye color as them. They found their groups silently. Next they silently found people who have the same material of shoes. Next, they silently had to find people who speak the same 2nd language as them. Most spoke only English, some Spanish, French, or Greek. Next, they silently found people who have the same age range. Next, they silently found people who are the same height. Then, they silently found people who are from the same side of Chicago.

At the end participants were asked to find their twin. It could be internal, physical, or somebody you feel that you relate to. Tiffany asked the participants what made people decide who their twins were? Participants looked at looks, age, ideas, creative work, values and vision.

“Where do you stand” Activity

Each person starts out the exercise by calling out a topic. If you are 100% yes, you go to center of room. If you are 100% no, go to the far end of the room. Unsure or 50% go to the space in between the center of the room and the end of the room.

“Quotes presented by participants and facilitator” : *where participants stood*

- “I only drink soy milk” : *most people were on edges*
- “I believe the most morally wrong position is to do nothing” : *many participants went toward center – but not all the way*
- “I am a musician” – *many toward center*
- “I am 100% drawing artist” – *a few in center, many on edges.*
- “I am not from Chicago” – *most people in center where from Panama, Indiana, Brazil, etc.*
- “I am a White Sox fan” – *participants were on opposite ends.*
- “I believe that reality is created by my beliefs”
- “I create my reality” : *few participants in the center, more scattered through out the space.*
- “I am adopted” (this doesn’t have to be adopted by parents, could be by a community, a belief system) : *Small amount of participants in the center*
- “I like my dog more than I like some people” – *majority in the center*
- “I am a dancer” – *majority of participants toward center*

Through out the activity the facilitator asked participants to look for their “twins” and see where they were standing. The purpose of having participants look to their twins was to have them visualize that although from the outside individuals looked the same or carried similar physical features, it does not make their perspective the same or their lives the same.

The facilitator then asked participants to find somebody 100% opposite from them and stand by that person; now group yourself with two more people so that each group has four people.

In the next activity the participants talked about how identity is both very personal and very publicly reflected. How the way we define ourselves may not be the way that others define us. Sometimes we may feel like somebody, but maybe we aren't. Where there is a lack, there is always accumulation. We are combined with people in our groups with people that we disagree with on some things. For example, Gangs are built on togetherness, even though they practice violence. How can we find a way to remove that violence out of gangs. Participants were told that they can interpret violence any way you want, the groups could talk about anything, but needed to try to think about how we can remove violence from gangs. As a group you want to come up with a performance of any kind; dance, theater, speech, interpretation.

Performances:

Insight into group brainstorm:

One group spoke about what would motivate somebody to be in a gang. They talked about having a sense of security, a sense of purpose. They talked about what people are capable of as individuals vs. what people are capable of as groups, how gangs feel that they have to group themselves together in order to create an identity. How the process of creating a gang results in cultures being stripped away as everybody assumes the same identity. They said violence can come from a lack of identity or purpose. They talked about how gangs may be created because they feel like their culture is threatened. The group talked about what teenagers go through and how they want to belong.

Group 1:

In the first group, participants started as one community. Two people broke off and began fighting, and it affected the whole community. Two peaceful

people stopped the people acting out and fighting, symbolizing that it is up to the community to stop the gang violence.

Group 2:

The group huddled and swayed back and forth. Shouted words: “support, acceptance, sharing, fun, secrets, money, mine, mine, mine, sharing, entry, out” then one person left the huddle, and the group symbolically killed her. Then when another person tried to leave the group, they held him back. They described their process. They described how gangs are a family. They talked about how one act of violence escalates into more and more.

Group 3:

In a circle, they pushed each other, then stopped and stood still. Then they walked in a circle following each other, they stopped and shook hands. They described their process. They described how people have to start with themselves and then extend peace and respect to a group.

Group 4:

Started doing their own things separately. One woman tried to get another woman to come stand by her. Then she tried to get the other woman to come stand by her. Neither did. Then she began singing and acting as if she was painting. One woman joined her in singing and painting. Then the other woman joined as well. As they painted together, their strokes got bigger and their song got louder and harmonized. They ended by holding hands. They talked about how art and music are universal languages. They described how physically doing something together can break down a barrier.

Group 5:

Two of the group members acted out fighting, then it spread from the center all the way around the room. Then around the room they turned to the person who hit them and said things like “your actions affected me, your attitude affected me, your words affected me, your ignorance affected me...”. They described how the actions affected everybody, and the effect is broad ranging.

Next Steps/Conclusion:

- The facilitator ended the workshop by thanking everyone for creating such beautiful pieces.
- Discussion of how it was to work in groups, participants felt that they couldn't have come up with these ideas on their own. This goes to show that one person can't step in on their own to save a community.
- Participants also discussed how gangs thrive on non-identity. So, once you start to get to know people in person and as individuals, it breaks down the group non-identity.

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