



December 4, 2014

VSA Vermont uses the magic of the arts to engage the capabilities and enhance the confidence of children and adults with disabilities.

Making Magic

Here at [VSA Vermont](#), 2014 has been a truly magical year. We have had many wonderful moments in our arts education programs, professional development workshops, and cultural access activities. Each moment has felt like a precious gift. From making a BOOM at our drum festival to helping children and adults find their artistic voices to empowering educators and artists to engage all participants, we have traveled a magical journey, reaching rich outposts and magnificent destinations! We look forward to continued journeys and adventures in 2015. We hope that you'll join us a VSA Vermont donor, volunteer, or supporter!



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VSA Vermont Represented in the 40th Anniversary VSA Quilt



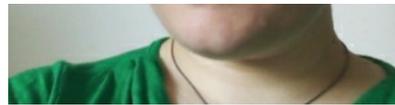
In 2015, the [International VSA](#) program will celebrate its 40 anniversary. As part of this celebration, the 89 VSA Affiliates from 54 countries are making a quilt square that will be sent to VSA Tennessee. On Saturday, Feb. 21, 10 young people with disabilities will work with the Human Sciences Department at Middle Tennessee State University to sew this

international quilt together. The quilt will be presented in Washington, DC, in July 2015, and it will then reside at the Kennedy Library.

[Toby MacNutt](#), VSA VT High School Performing Arts Program Coordinator recently finished VSA Vermont's quilt square. The square was designed so that viewers would be able to read it and feel the texture since each element is defined by different fabric textures and tactile seam work.



Visual Description: The 8.5 inch square of white, barely-patterned cotton has several shapes appliqued (stitched) onto it. On the left is green, marbled fabric cut into the shape of Vermont. At the bottom right, disappearing behind the bottom half of the state, are three purple flannel mountains with snow-caps outlined in white thread zig-zags. They overlook a lake made of layers of blue fabric, all stacked and outlined with curves. Above the mountains in the upper right is a red felt heart. Embroidered on the heart in chunky white thread are the words: VSA VT.



Finding Voice through Poetry

A story by David French

Leslie Freeman didn't know what to expect when she began teaching an eight-week poetry course on behalf of VSA Vermont. Leslie had taught at the University of Iowa, facilitated workshops at Goddard College, and taught Gender and Disability Studies at the University of Vermont. She had been involved with activist disability organizations like ADAPT and was co-founder of the Disability Caucus of Occupy Wall Street. But Burlington's HowardCenter, from which her students were drawn, was new territory for her.



Leslie's initial goal was simply to get her students to "play with writing" and see what happened. It turned out, she says, that "They all had stories they wanted to tell, and wanted their poems to tell the stories." Through their writing, students found a voice that some of them had never been able to express before.

Often, they found their voice in reading their poems in class. "They were super encouraging" with each other, says Leslie. Both students and their personal attendants wrote poems and would react to each other's work. There was no sense of hierarchy – when one of the attendants read a poem he'd written, a student responded: "I think it's a little wordy!" (It was, says Leslie.) And when Joseph felt that an attendant was leaning too hard on him to make changes in a poem, he resisted: "I just don't want your voice in my voice," he said.

Some of the deepest work was in response to poems Leslie brought for the class to hear and discuss. "The students were awesome," Leslie says; "I've never known people so interested in trying to figure out what poets were talking about." One of their favorites was "I Am Running Into a New Year," in which Lucille Clifton talks about how hard it is to let go of the past. ("i beg what i love and / i leave to forgive me.") Reflecting on this, Joseph wrote: "I've had to let go of my / Grandfather, who passed away, / and my Stepfather. / I've let go of being a police officer / and being / a bus driver / and a firefighter / and an ambulance driver. / sad... / But I still want / to save lives." Leslie says that when Joseph read his poem aloud, "The room just kind of stilled."

Others had important things to let go of as well. In the immediate aftermath of his mother's death, Mark wrote: "I am letting go / of being a little boy. / I am so sad to say good bye / to her. Whenever I think of her / I see her / working in her garden / dearly tending her plants / like she tended me. / Joy / on the feeling of finding / a new type of manhood / is what I calmly walk towards."

Another of the class's favorites was Laura Hershey's "You Get Proud by Practicing," with its call to "...practice knowing / That what you do / And the way you do it / Is the right way for you / And cannot be called wrong.... / You get proud by practicing."

Participants felt they had much to be proud of. Marjorie has twice had the cancer from which her mother died ("I think of / my mom / as a sunset...") but is now a meditator and a runner at events ranging from the relay for breast cancer to the Special Olympics. She writes: "I am proud to be a survivor. / I am a survivor / twice. / At the relay for life, / a butterfly / landed on me / and climbed / upon my back."

For his part, Joseph had many things he was proud of: "I'm proud to have company / and friends, proud of / Special Olympics... / I'm proud of belonging / to community. / I'm proud of being a U.S. citizen.... / I'm proud of / my freedom."

Danielle found still another theme in Mary Oliver's "Wild Geese," one of her favorite poems. ("The wild geese, high in the clean blue air / are heading home again.") For Danielle: "The geese remind me of my / dad in heaven... / Someday / in the future when I get really / old, I will be a geese-bird / in heaven too and I will see my /dad in heaven, also known as home to him."

For Leslie, perhaps the best thing about all this work was the genuineness people brought to it, as opposed to the tone in some of the more academic workshops she'd been in. "It was really amazing," she says, "to be with people who had no desire to fake their way through anything. Everything they did was authentic."

And accomplished. By the end of the course, the students were no longer just dabbling in poetry. According to Leslie, "They are poets. They've earned that title through passion, creativity, and risk-taking. It's easily the best teaching experience I've had."

Good Vibrations: The BOOM VT Drum Festival

A story by David French



A usual program at the Elley-Long Music Center in Colchester might involve a string quartet playing Mozart before a graying audience. On October 18, the pattern changed with a BOOM:



– Burlington Taiko (first picture at left) opened an afternoon of joyful drumming, proving that beat, volume, and grace can combine to captivate an audience ranging in ages from newborns to seniors.

– Jeh Kulu (second picture at left), drumming and dancing to a West African beat, brought the audience out of their seats and to the front of the auditorium (or onstage!) to join in.

– To the delight of the audience, Bruce McKenzie took the stage with groups whose disabilities melted away through the energy of their drumming (third picture at left).



– Mark and Alex, UVM seniors who were going to demonstrate djembe drumming, asked others to join in (fourth picture at left). By the time their set was finished, the stage was full of drummers and the audience was on its feet again.

– To add spice to the afternoon, there were also performances by George Sliter and crew (fifth picture at left), Jeff Salisbury and David Segal (sixth picture), and the samba street band Sambatucada.



– Between performances, two MCs kept the energy moving. Tim Kavanagh introduced groups and awarded prizes. Rene Pellerin, who describes himself as a “deaf-blind comedian,” told stories about parting the crowd with his cane at a fireworks display in Washington, D.C. The audience expressed their appreciation by stamping their feet to make the hall tremble in ways Rene could sense, leading seismographs around the area to register “earthquake.”



It was all part of BOOM VT, the annual drum festival of VSA Vermont. As Judy Chalmer, VSA VT’s Executive Director, describes it, BOOM is “one of the greatest ways that we can demonstrate that creativity and engaging in the arts is something that is common to humanity – it’s part of what it means to be human. Drumming, rhythm, our heartbeats -- life itself is organized by rhythm. And we get to play with it, we get to make it ours. And we get to do it together in an inclusive setting.”



BOOM’s afternoon of drumming was what Judy has referred to as one of the “noisy” ways VSA carries out its mission. The morning had highlighted what she might call a “quiet” way – a drum-making workshop (seventh





...of quiet... (second picture at left). Dozens of children created drums of their own from two-gallon plastic pails, tape (many layers stretched across the open end of the pail make a skin to beat on), markers, and stickers. Many of them then joined an informal session of drumming led by Stuart from Taiko and Chimie (eighth picture), a Montpelier-based drummer from Guinea.



To add to the “quieter” ways of BOOMing, there was a tent outside the Elley-Long Center where you could soak a cloth-wrapped drumstick in paint and beat patterns into sheets of paper.



BOOM’s motto was “Art beats for all.” For Chimie, “That means that everybody gets together to play some music, to work together on some music, because music is all about working together, working to make the song sound right, and people enjoy it.” For Jacob, it meant that “Everybody should be exposed to music in an educational way.” Lucy felt that “Art beats for everybody, no matter what abilities they have; they all have a certain level of ability, and it’s a great success for all of them.”

For BOOM, that implied first that people of all abilities were able to participate in the events of the day (ninth picture at left). To allow that to happen, a range of accessibility services was provided: assistive listening devices and signing for people with limited hearing, earplugs for people sensitive to noise, large print and Braille materials for people with vision issues, wheelchair access, a relaxation room for people in need of respite from the high-energy day (last picture).

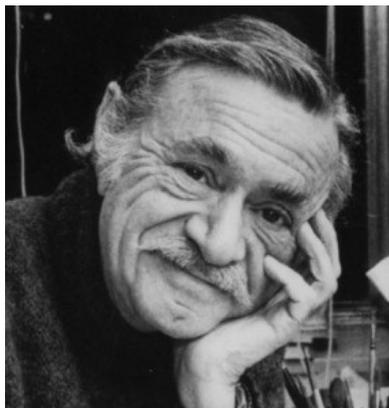


As it turned out, though, most people proved less interested in respite than in keeping the energies going. The drum-making workshop was scheduled to end at noon, but people were still making drums toward the end of the day. And an hour after BOOM was supposed to end, the stage was still full of drummers jamming together.

In the run-up to BOOM, Heidi Pfau, VSA’s Volunteer Coordinator, had said, “Everybody can drum. What happens when people drum together is that there’s joyful celebration.” That’s the way BOOM turned out. Participants described the day in words like “awesome,” “inspiring,” “good fun,” “fantastic”; and most plan to be back next year. Good vibrations...

News You Can Use:

Ezra Jack Keats Foundation Mini-Grant Applications: Established by children's book author and illustrator Ezra Jack Keats, the [Ezra Jack Keats Foundation](http://www.ezra-jack-keats.org/) is accepting applications to its mini-grants program from public schools and public libraries anywhere in the United States. The mini-grants program supports projects that foster creative expression, collaboration, and interaction with a diverse community. To that end, the program will award grants of up to \$500 to educators interested in creating special activities outside the standard curriculum. Projects funded in the past include murals, pen pal groups, quilts, theater productions, newspapers and other publications, intergenerational activities, and programs that bring disparate communities together. Public schools, public libraries, and preschool Head Start programs are eligible to apply. Private and parochial schools and charter schools are not eligible. Only one application from each library or school will be considered. Complete program guidelines, a video tutorial for applicants, and the application form are available at the Ezra Jack Keats Foundation website: <http://www.ezra-jack-keats.org/> The deadline for application is March 15, 2015.



Include VT!: The Statewide Independent Living Council (SILC) has introduced an online K-12 curriculum that promotes inclusion and is intended for the entire school community. It is available for Vermont schools to use at no cost. You can find the curriculum at: www.includevt.org.html



Include VT! was developed by the SILC with the help of teachers, family members, and individuals with disabilities with the goal of inspiring students of all ages to promote the principles of equality, dignity and respect for all in their classrooms, homes and communities. The materials are available free to interested schools. Schools and educators can use Include VT! as a separate curriculum, but many choose specific lesson plans and materials that they incorporate into their anti-bias and diversity activities.

The Include VT! curriculum:

- Complies with Vermont Learning Standards.
- Includes ready to use lesson plans for elementary, middle and high school classes.
- Is easily integrated into different grade levels and subject areas.
- Provides additional resources and activities to enhance classroom experiences.
- Links disability awareness work to other diversity and anti-bias education.
- Encourages student, parent and community involvement in school-based

disability awareness activities.

- Explores disability as a social experience similar to other multicultural, women's rights and civil rights movements in America.

The four Learning Units are titled "Identity and Belonging," "Disability Awareness," "Civil Rights and Social Change" and "Exploring Disability Experience through Literature." Artwork from VSA Vermont's Engage exhibition is featured in the Disability Awareness Unit in a section on disability and the arts. Look for the artwork and verbal descriptions of a number of Engage artists! Interested schools are urged to contact SILC Executive Director Peter Kriff at vtsilcpeter@gmail.com for information on how to get started with Include VT!

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