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**YOUNG AUDIENCES CONFERENCE  
BREAK-OUT SESSION B2  
THURSDAY, APRIL 24, 2015 2-3:15PM**

**THEATRE FOR YOUNG AMERICA COLLABORATIONS/PARTNERSHIPS:  
IT TAKES A VILLAGE**

*COMMUNITY PARTNERS AT THE ARTS, EDUCATION, AND CIVIC LEVEL*

**Sheryl Bryant, Director of Education** for **THEATRE FOR YOUNG AMERICA**, is a founder of the professional theatre and drama school, now in its 41st year. She also creates the theatre's study guides for eight annual professional productions. Sheryl developed TYA's Outreach Workshop Programs which serve classrooms and youth groups. Sheryl also administers and teaches in the year-round weekly drama classes program for TYA held at Wonderscope Children's Museum, Avila University, and Union Station. In 1990, 2004, and 2014 Sheryl served on the statewide revision committee for the KS Curriculum Standards for Theatre. With a Master of Arts from the U of IL and a Bachelor of Arts from the U of AR, she also performs as a member of Actor's Equity Association.

**SESSION OUTLINE:** In this time of tightening resources, partnerships are often needed to finance projects. Now some funders are requiring a partnership/collaborating organization be on board to order to grant funds. Often partnerships can align the strengths and particular resources of each partner for a greater project of more value to the community. In the following examples of Theatre for Young America's partnerships, organizations wanted to partner with us because TYA is known for original productions written by our Resident Playwright. The non-arts organizations were looking for imagination and creativity to increase the attractiveness of the product. Our most successful partnerships have been with non-arts organizations.

Theatre for Young America has had the pleasure and challenge of working on five types of ongoing civic and educational partnerships that might be of interest to you. The first 3 of these collaborations use LEARNING THRU DRAMA as a technique for changing behaviors. The last two partnerships are simpler collaborations with a science museum Union Station and a history museum The National Negro Leagues Baseball Museum, both located in Kansas City. With these 5 successful partnerships, challenges and missteps occurred and had to be dealt with.

**BUBBYLONIAN ENCOUNTER:**

First, TYA's collaboration with the Kansas Committee for the Prevention of Child Abuse (now known as the Kansas



Children’s Service League) to develop a play on the topic of sexual child abuse prevention. After a year or more of pilot programs and research and carefully examining every line of the script, and numerous meetings with parent groups and educators, *Bubbylonian Encounter* was adopted by the National Committee for the Prevention of Child Abuse. It toured nationally and the play was licensed by TYA to groups wishing to mount their own productions in the United States. It was also presented in France, England, Holland, and Switzerland. It received the Bacchus Foundation Grant for an eighteen school local tour. One of the largest grant received was from The Junior League of Kansas City, KS to sponsor a weekend conference for out-of-town groups wanting to learn how to mount the play in their communities and develop community support for the project.

**WHAT BEGAN THIS PARTNERSHIP?** TYA received a phone call from a local resident SuEllen Fried, then President of the National Committee for the Prevention of Child Abuse, having heard of a play about child abuse in Minnesota and wanting something of the same nature but in story form for Kansas. As Director of Education, I arranged for our executive director/resident playwright to meet with her. She brought with her Helen Swan, then on the staff of the Johnson County Mental Health Center as a therapist specializing in the treatment of youth who had been targets of sexual abuse. From that first meeting and many, many more evolved *BUBBYLONIAN ENCOUNTER*, a product of Theatre for Young America and the National Committee for the Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect.

### **TOUGHEST KID IN THE WORLD**

The **second** collaboration/partnership of note



was between Arts Partners of Kansas City, TYA, and the Kansas City KS Public School District (termed an “at risk” and “high need” district) to develop and produce a play and follow-up workshop that addressed how to resolve conflict peacefully. The follow up drama workshops involved two members of the cast visiting the school classroom and leading a language arts class in drama, role-playing the strategies they watched the “toughest own verbal language skills. This play is still produced and toured in collaboration with the district. TYA Resident Playwright and our current Artistic Director update the play every year with current world events.

**WHAT BEGAN THIS PARTNERSHIP?** The Young Audiences employee who was the Senior Arts Partners Representative called TYA in to meet with KCKS public school administrator in department of language arts. His vision was to teach students how to deal with violence and promote conflict resolution through language arts. “Use your words instead of your fists.” Arts Partners, a branch of Young Audiences in Kansas City provided a research and development grant to develop the script. The school district agreed to provide funding for play tickets with talk backs and follow-up workshops reinforcing the themes of the play.

### **BULLY BOT AND THE GANG OF GEEKS**

The **third** collaboration was between THE WHOLE PERSON, a Greater Kansas City organization that assists people with disabilities to live independently and encourages change within the community to expand opportunities for independent living. VERY SPECIAL ARTS MISSOURI is a statewide organization that promotes access to the arts for people with disabilities. The organizations and TYA to developed a play and post show discussion that addressed bullying—especially for targets who happened to be disabled.

**WHAT BEGAN THIS PARTNERSHIP?** The executive director was a TYA season ticket holder and his child was a student in our classes program. When he saw our TOUGHEST KID IN THE WORLD production, he felt we needed to address the high number of people with disabilities who are targets by bullying behaviors. He asked for a meeting with TYA. The Whole Person provided a research and development grant for the creation of the play. Then he also brought on board the organization VSA Missouri to sponsor tickets for certain schools to attend. TYA was also asked if we would give our lobby space during the run of the show for the annual VSA Art Exhibit of works by artists with disabilities. TYA hired an actress who was hard of hearing and a wheelchair user as a member of the multiracial cast. The Whole Person assigned two of their employees: one with cerebral palsy and one with a communication disorder to take part in the post show discussions after every performance. VSA Missouri which has its offices in St. Louis and The Whole Person also hosted an evening performance and reception for their membership.



#### **PLAY PRODUCTIONS AND EXHIBIT COORDINATION WITH UNION STATION**

This fourth partnership is marketing tie-ins with Union Station's national touring exhibits and the play productions offered by Theatre for Young America. Examples: *The Dinosaur Show* was presented by TYA to run the same time as the DINOSAURS UNEARTHED Exhibit. TYA's production of *THE LION, THE WITCH, AND THE WARDROBE* ran at the same time as THE CHRONICLES OF NARNIA: THE EXHIBITION was presented at the Union Station Exhibit Space. Also, our theatre presented a play adaption of Melinda Long's book, *HOW I BECAME A PIRATE!* Concurrent with the Union Station offering a special touring exhibition of REAL PIRATES: THE UNTOLD STORY OF THE WYDAH FROM SLAVE SHIP TO PIRATE SHIP. The partnership was so friendly that actors from our theatre were hired to be interactors for the exhibit.



**WHAT BEGAN THIS PARTNERSHIP?** The CEO OF Union Station made the initial contact with TYA executive director to coordinate our offerings. Marketing directors from each group talked and then talked to our artistic team about investigating play scripts for TYA to produce on our season to complement the exhibits. There was joint marketing of both attractions on the Union Station and TYA websites, newspaper ads, and in house promotions. Special pricing was offered for attending both attractions.

**TYA AND NEGRO LEAGUES BASEBALL MUSEUM PLAY FAIR BALL**

The fifth and final TYA partnership type to discuss today is one with TYA and a national museum located in Kansas City MO The Negro Leagues Baseball Museum. In partnership with this museum and a grant from the National Endowment of the Arts Theatre for Young America mounted *FAIR BALL*, a musical play that brings to life the inspiring stories of the Negro Leagues Baseball players.

**WHAT BEGAN THIS PARTNERSHIP?** A local singer-songwriter who also performs for us had an interest in the Negro Baseball Leagues because his father played for the Atlanta Black Crackers. He was also friends with Buck O'Neill who played for the KC Monarchs and in retirement served as the museum's ambassador. He and our Executive Director/Resident Playwright met and outlined the proposal to the baseball museum. The museum provided research material and Gene researched the stories to dramatize, and Danny wrote the words and music to evoke the time and spirit of the Negro Leagues Baseball. The museum also hosted a reception of Negro Leagues former players and Theatre for Young America participants in the project.



**TWP Supports Anti-Bullying Education with "Bully Bot"**

On January 21, The Whole Person, in partnership with Theatre for Young America and VSA Missouri, hosted a reception and a performance of the play "Bully Bot the Robot and the Gang of Geeks" at H&R Block City Stage in Kansas City's Union Station. More than 140 guests mingled before the play while enjoying wine, refreshments and art from VSA artist David Kontra.

After the play, SuEllen Fried (nationally known author and speaker) facilitated a discussion with the audience on the bullying and harassment of youth with disabilities, pictured above. TWP staff members with disabilities led similar discussions, spreading the anti-bullying message at additional performances of the play, including traveling performances at eleven local schools.

### **SESSION MEMBERS EXPERIENCES WITH PARTNERSHIPS:**

What collaborations/partnerships have members of this session experienced?

What can you share about them?

What worked well? What could have been better?

Any best practices hints?

What collaborations/partnerships are the session attendees considering?

### **STEPS TO MAXIMIZE SUCCESS IN A PARTNERSHIP/COLLABORATION**

1. Identify a need in the community?
2. How could you or your organization meet that need? What help would you need?
3. Who would be a possible partner? Target possible collaborators.
4. What could each organization they bring to the table?
5. What should be in the **PARTNERSHIP AGREEMENT?**

### **COMPONENTS OF THE PARTNERSHIP AGREEMENT**

- A. Clear work responsibilities and contributions of each partner.
- B. Financing the collaboration. Who pays for what?
- C. Who controls artistic content of the collaboration?
- D. How will the partnership resolve disputes that could occur?
- E. Deadlines calendar.
- F. Assessment plan for the project.

What else?

How can we assess our collaboration/ partnership results and impact?

- Financial figures?
- Attendance figure comparisons?
- Pre and Post Surveys to test knowledge of the subject?
- Self-evaluation by partners?
- Feedback from experts in the field?
- Noted changes in behavior by school?
- What else?

Discussions Questions:

- How do you deal with drains on time, resources, and energy on your organization when you take on a new project?
- How to end a partnership that is not working?

### **ADDITIONAL RESOURCES TO EXPLORE:**

[www.partnershipmovement.org/find-a-partner](http://www.partnershipmovement.org/find-a-partner) This website is organized by zip code and seeks to promote business and Americans for the Arts members partnerships.

[www.livable.org/livability-resources/reports-a-publications/583-arts-organizations-and-public-health](http://www.livable.org/livability-resources/reports-a-publications/583-arts-organizations-and-public-health) This 2015 publication contains a guide to creating partnerships between art and health organizations.

[www.wallacefoundation.org/knowledge-center/audience-development-for-the-arts/pages/default.aspx](http://www.wallacefoundation.org/knowledge-center/audience-development-for-the-arts/pages/default.aspx)

This brief by Chris Walker and published by The Urban Institute provides research and statistics. The main idea is “Partnerships between arts and non-arts organizations can confer benefits on both parties if the benefits are mutual...and the potential risks, and costs are anticipated.”