

5 NUMBERS

YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT CHILDREN AND YOUTH IN OTTAWA

Frontline Reflections

Featured Member: Naomi Tessler, Artistic Director/Facilitator, Branch out Theatre

Creativity, Community, Transformation: The Role of popular Theatre in Motivating Personal and Social Change

Every child is creative, courageous and capable of being a leader for social change. By supporting children to harness their imaginations and express their innate sense of creative play, they build the confidence to let go of inhibitions and just be themselves. Through the art of storytelling, performance and theatre games, I have witnessed and heard young people freely express their personal hopes, collective fears and wishes for a better world. Sometimes all young people need is an invitation to move beyond their comfort zones, to be asked important questions, and to know that their voice matters.



The opportunity to *play* and use our imaginations greatly contributes to overall health and well-being: theatre is a collaborative art through which young people can build community, foster self-acceptance and self-esteem. I have found that the language of theatre opens the gate for young people to let loose, be silly, and creatively express themselves. They can use body language, facial expressions, sounds, and tableaux to make sense of their experiences and share the challenges they face, and as such, theatre can be a vehicle for personal and social change.

When they take part in theatre games and dramatic techniques, young people engage in creative dialogue about the kinds of change they wish to see in the world and explore how they can be leaders in making that change possible. In my work with children, we co-create plays that address issues they care about, and rehearse how to transform the conflicts presented in each other's pieces. My hope is that this type of exercise will prepare young people to use their voices to stand up for themselves and their peers, to speak out against bullying and social injustice, and to know in their bodies and in their hearts what change feels like.

As Artistic Director of my company Branch Out Theatre, I facilitate various styles of popular theatre workshops and co-create original productions that address social issues. As a storyteller and writer, one issue that is close to my heart is illiteracy. I am grateful to have been invited to share one of my workshops called: Literacy through Drama for the recent Ottawa Child & Youth Initiative Summer Literacy Training, to support their efforts to counter the summer literacy slide. It was a gift to work with so many passionate child and youth workers, managers and librarians who joined me in improvisation games, miming characters, sharing rhymes on the spot and co-creating stories. I sincerely hope the creativity explored during this workshop will help support the children these participants will be working with this summer to hone their own passion for bringing literature to life.

For more information on workshops or play opportunities offered by Branch Out Theatre, please visit: www.branchouttheatre.com or contact: naomi@branchouttheatre.com.

Submitted by:



Branch Out Theatre