



# **Creative Wellbeing Curriculum Guide**

**A R T S** FOR  
**HEALING**  
AND  
**JUSTICE**  
N E T W O R K

Los Angeles  
County  
**Arts &  
Culture**

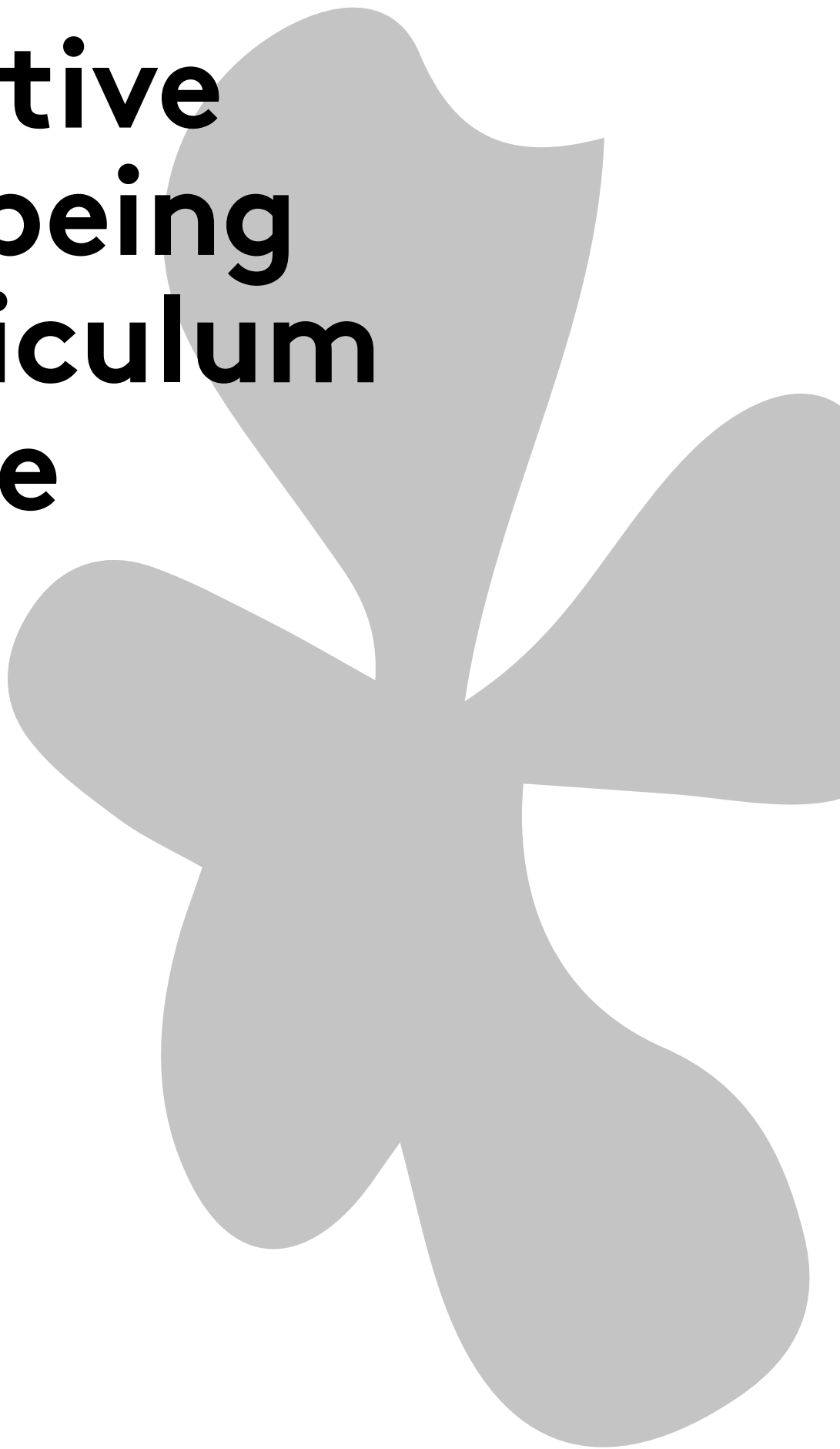
LA COUNTY  
**artsed**  
COLLECTIVE



LOS ANGELES COUNTY  
**DEPARTMENT OF  
MENTAL HEALTH**  
hope. recovery. wellbeing.



# **Creative Wellbeing Curriculum Guide**



Creative Wellbeing is a strategic collaboration between the Los Angeles County Department of Arts and Culture, Office of Child Protection, Department of Mental Health, and the Arts for Healing and Justice Network, as part of the LA County Arts Education Collective to advance the goals of Arts for All Children, Youth, and Families: LA County's New Regional Blueprint for Arts Education.

We want to uplift and recognize the collaborators who contributed to the creation of this guide:

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# **Welcome Artists, Educators & Advocates**



Creative Wellbeing is an approach for fostering communities of wellness, especially for systems-impacted youth, those who are vulnerable to becoming systems-impacted, and the adults who support them. This approach provides culturally relevant, healing-centered, arts-based workshops for young people under 25 and professional development coaching for youth-serving adults—educators, service providers, and community based organizations.

## Background

In 2019–2020, members from the LA County Department of Arts & Culture, Office of Child Protection, Department of Mental Health, and Arts for Healing and Justice Network created a strong foundation for this work, the [Creative Wellbeing: Arts, Schools, and Resilience Professional Development Training Facilitators Guide](#). From June 2020 to December 2021, the Facilitators Guide was piloted in a number of virtual settings for schools; congregate care sites for foster youth; recreation centers in parks; and drop-in self-care sessions for educators, families and caregivers, and the general public. During the pilot, input gathered from teaching artists, youth content advisors, educators and evaluation partners at Harder + Company Community Research identified the following needs, which directed this curriculum guide:

- + Further uplift culturally responsive and sustaining pedagogy and anti-racist practices.
- + Identify and unpack Creative Wellbeing’s foundational concepts for Teaching Artists, and create more space and creative freedom to weave the concepts into their individual teaching artistry.
- + Share tangible lesson plans with educators to support them in adapting and leading healing-informed arts activities in their classrooms and on their campuses.
- + Highlight examples of art made by young people.
- + Provide more opportunities to listen to the lived experience of young people and adults.

## Using the Curriculum Guide

The purpose of this curriculum guide is to support teaching artists and facilitators in understanding the foundational concepts that guide Creative Wellbeing. It is meant to be a springboard to brainstorm, design, and lead your own Creative Wellbeing workshops. We encourage you to be creative in your applications of the tools and strategies. Whether you review it top-to-bottom, explore the glossary with many links to resources, choose one of the sample activities to incorporate into your lesson plans, or read an in-depth interview with a teaching artist, we invite you to consider the following questions along the way:

- + **How might you weave this approach with your own individual teaching style and arts discipline?**
- + **How might you invite your participants to explore and reflect on themes of wellbeing through art?**
- + **How might the stories shared here by youth and artists help inform your own journey in leading healing-informed arts activities?**

We hope this guide inspires more people to incorporate healing-informed arts-based mental health supports into their classrooms, programs, workplaces, and individual lives. We also hope it sparks ideas for activating your own personal creativity and self-reflection. Finally, we hope the strategies and resources here are useful in building on your own community's strengths to support young people and adults in their own healing journey.

The Department of Arts and Culture, and the Arts for Healing and Justice Network are dedicated to uplifting healing-centered arts approaches. Please reach out for additional support, resources, and to connect with networks of healing-informed practitioners. Also, we are interested in hearing from you about how you use this guide in your own practice.

#### **Arts for Healing and Justice Network**

<https://ahjnetwork.org/contact>

[admin@ahjnetwork.org](mailto:admin@ahjnetwork.org)

#### **Los Angeles County Department of Arts and Culture**

[https://www.lacountyartsedcollective.org/initiatives/creative-wellbeing,](https://www.lacountyartsedcollective.org/initiatives/creative-wellbeing)

[artsedcollective@arts.lacounty.gov](mailto:artsedcollective@arts.lacounty.gov)

#### **For more information about Creative Wellbeing and toolkits created by Harder & Company Community Research visit:**

[www.lacountyartsedcollective.org/research-evaluation/reports/creative-wellbeing-evaluation](http://www.lacountyartsedcollective.org/research-evaluation/reports/creative-wellbeing-evaluation)





Artist engaged in art-making activity at Chuco's Justice Center. Photo by Sylvanus Leone.

# Contents

This guide is broken up into four key sections:

## **Section 1: The Big Ideas** **12**

The opening section introduces the four Foundational Concepts of Creative Wellbeing. These four big ideas should infuse the workshop experience and be kept in mind when framing lesson plans for workshops and training.

## **Section 2: Curriculum Cookbook** **20**

This section includes tips and samples of both art-making and facilitated discussion exercises that you can incorporate into your workshop. Each recipe highlights what foundational concepts and art form it connects to along with tips from previous Creative Wellbeing facilitators.

## **Section 3: Shared Wisdom from Teaching Artists** **76**

Interviews with teaching artists and Creative Wellbeing facilitators highlight lessons from the field, what workshop experiences can look like, reflections on our own self-care, and aspects of “facilitating in the moment” that might not show up in a lesson plan resource.

## **Section 4: Glossary for Shared Language** **114**

This Glossary of Concepts is to provide resources for inspiring and framing your Creative Wellbeing lesson plans. Part One (p. #) takes a deeper dive into Creative Wellbeing’s Four Foundational Concepts, and Part Two (p. #) provides additional concepts and resources that inspire the Creative Wellbeing approach to form a shared language among facilitators.

## **Artworks by Youth Content Advisors**

Each section is broken up by artworks from Creative Wellbeing Youth Content Advisors reflecting their perspectives on themes like circles of support, restoring identity, self-care, and suicide prevention as a community issue:

- + Daniel Bisuano, **p. 18**
- + Danielle Galván Gomez, **p. 50**
- + Oswaldo Lira, **p. 72**
- + Agustín Herrera, **p. 112**
- + Chris Anthony, **p. 140**

# The Big Ideas

Creative Wellbeing is an approach for fostering communities of wellness, especially for systems-impacted youth, those who are vulnerable to becoming systems-impacted, and the adults who support them. This approach provides culturally relevant, healing-centered, arts-based workshops for young people under 25 and professional development coaching for youth-serving adults—educators, service providers, and community based organizations.

## Healing-Centered Arts Engagement

This is a strengths-based and whole-person approach to arts education and engagement. It offers prompts to explore one's unique gifts and lived experiences. It generates spaciousness for self-reflection. It opens up an empowering process where young people (and the adults who support them) are leaders in their own healing. For additional resources and a deeper understanding of healing-centered engagement, **visit p. 116**

## Culturally Relevant and Sustaining Pedagogy

The Creative Wellbeing approach uplifts diversity in thought, culture, and traits as strengths.

Connecting to one's cultural identity can be a major protective factor for wellbeing. Culturally Relevant and Sustaining Pedagogy uplifts multiple forms of knowledge and achievement. It supports young people to uphold and celebrate their cultural identities while developing critical perspectives that challenge societal inequalities. For additional resources and a deeper understanding of culturally relevant and sustaining pedagogy, **visit p. 124**

## Self- and Community-Care for Collective Wellbeing

Taking care of ourselves enhances our ability to live fully, vibrantly, and effectively. Establishing self- and community care practices and policies are a reminder to the self and to others that individual needs are valid and a priority. For additional resources and a deeper understanding of self-care and community-care, **visit p. 126**

## Mental Health Promotion

Mental Health Promotion works to encourage and increase protective factors and healthy behaviors that can help shield against the development of mental health challenges. For additional resources and a deeper understanding of mental health promotion, visit **p. 118. Creative Wellbeing focuses on four areas:**

## Increasing Awareness of Protective & Risk Factors:

Protective factors are attributes or conditions (like caring relationships, and access to resources) that support wellbeing and resilience. They are the things that increase the likelihood of positive outcomes, and include, for example: creativity, a consistently supportive and caring adult, a religious, spiritual, and cultural practice, well-lit streets, and a caring school environment. Risk factors are conditions and attributes that can cause negative outcomes and threaten wellbeing. They may be physical, family, community, or system-wide, for example: poverty, systemic racism, learning disability, parental neglect, substance use, bullying or social isolation. Learning to identify and strengthen existing protective factors and create new ones can support individuals to be resilient in the face of stressful life events. For additional resources and a deeper understanding of protective and risk factors, visit **p. 119.**

## Stigma Reduction:

Stigma causes people to feel ashamed for something that is out of their control. Worst of all, stigma often prevents people from seeking the help they need. For additional resources and a deeper understanding of stigma reduction, visit **p. 120.**

## Understanding Typical Adolescent Behavior:

Understanding what to expect at different stages of development can help adults to better understand and provide a supportive and empathetic response to young people. Also, understanding how trauma can impact development is key for both young people and adults. Helping young people understand what is “typical” may help them navigate the rapid and unfamiliar changes they may be experiencing. For additional resources and a deeper understanding of typical adolescent behavior, visit **p. 121**.

## Nurturing Confidence in Offering and Receiving Support:

Feeling informed and prepared to support a person in crisis is an important part of nurturing a culture of asking for and receiving support. Networks of care and receiving support as a caregiver are integral to healing and helping others heal. For additional resources and a deeper understanding of offering and receiving support, visit **p. 121**.







Street Poets performing with Agha de l'Abba musicians. Photo by Sylvanus Leone.



# Artwork by Creative Wellbeing Youth Content Advisor

# Daniel Bisuano

My original idea for my creative project was to throw an actual Ball, but obviously that's a lot of work, so I created a short documentary film that includes a bit about my story and some short clips from my Ballroom career—which I've only been a part of for like three months. I've done two out-of-state balls, one in North Carolina, and one in Atlanta, and then a lot of stuff that happens here in Los Angeles.

To give you a little context, Ballroom culture was created because back in the day, typically on the East Coast, a lot of gay and transgender children were getting kicked out of their homes. The older community would take in the children, and they would build what's called a "House," and then the House goes and competes in something called a Ball, or Ballroom. They have different categories like Performance which is dancing/vogue, and Runway (which is self-explanatory). They have Realness, which is the category I walk, which basically means that if I were walking down the street like I would pass as my character. I could be an executive, a gangster, an everyday person, and they wouldn't know that I'm gay kind-of thing. Another category is called Face, if you're really beautiful, you've got structure, you've got to sell it. This culture, or community, is helping me to move past the kind of barriers I set within myself as far as being a gay man, and exploring the feminine side and the masculine side of myself. It has also given me a family. On the West Coast it hasn't been as big as the East Coast, because of the weather—a lot of homeless kids can sleep on the street. But now on the West Coast it's starting to get big. My house father just created a new house called Marc Jacobs, and we're the first house to be recognized by the actual designer. Marc Jacobs sent us a video welcoming all of us, and that was pretty special.

To view Daniel's five-minute film visit: <https://youtu.be/JMvSLSToywA>



BALLROOM HAS GIVEN ME FAMILY A HOUSE AND A CHANCE TO BE LEGENDARY I AM NOW PART OF THE HOUSE OF MARC JACOBS

Ballroom is a lifestyle

House of Marc Jacobs

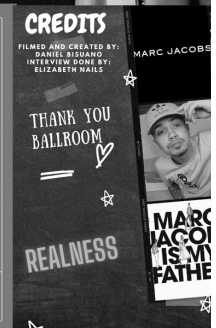
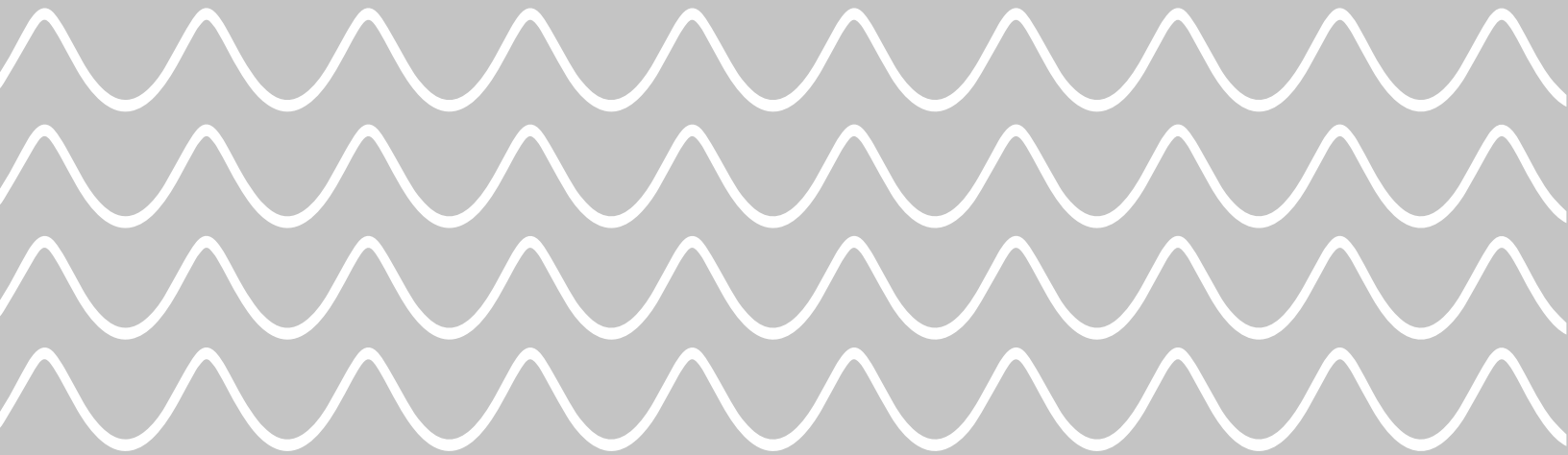


Photo collage of Daniel Bisuano and Friends. Photos by Daniel Bisuano and Friends.

# Curriculum Cookbook



**Every great dream begins with a dreamer. Always remember, you have within you the strength, the patience, and the passion to reach for the stars to change the world.**

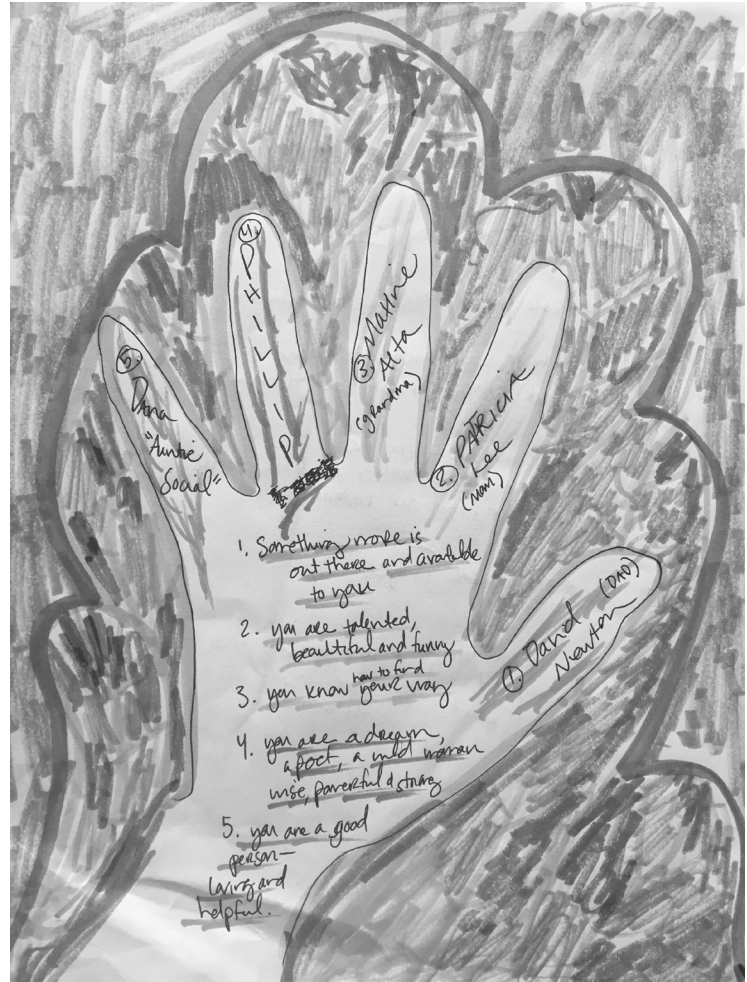
Harriet Tubman

**Cooking is like painting or writing a song. Just as there are only so many notes or colors, there are only so many flavors—it's how you combine them that sets you apart.**

Wolfgang Puck

The following section is lovingly referred to as a curriculum cookbook, and here you will find some ingredients to inspire your own Creative Wellbeing workshop.

It starts with ten sample “recipes,” or step-by-step activities that are field tested and can be woven into healing-centered arts engagement. By no means are they meant to be prescriptive. They are for inspiration, and if you use any of the activities, we invite you to adjust and update them according to your taste, style, and the needs of your participants and context.



Original artwork by Creative Wellbeing workshop participant.

- + A Window to Your Soul, **p. 22**
- + I AM / Where I Come From, **p. 24**
- + Iceberg Drawing, **p. 28**
- + I Love My People Who..., **p. 30**
- + Breathing Exercises: S-T-O-P and 5-4-3-2-1, **p. 32**
- + Pass the Stress Ball, **p. 34**
- + Now and Then, **p. 36**
- + Tapping and Pressure Points, **p. 38**
- + Count Them on the Palm of the Hand, **p. 42**
- + Scented Storytelling, **p. 46**
- + Resources for Additional Activities, **p. 48**

The sample activities are followed by tips from experienced facilitators and advice from young people:

- + 6 Helpful Elements in Any Workshop, **p. 56**
- + 10 Tips from Youth about Creative Wellbeing Workshops, **p. 60**
- + Tips for Virtual Engagement, **p. 62**
- + Preparing for Training/Workshops, **p. 64**
- + Taking Care of Yourself and Others, **p. 70**

# A Window To Your Soul

For young people with significant trauma-exposure (like foster youth), sometimes it's hard to find words to express what's really going on. This community tile/mural workshop allows participants to share a glimpse of who they are by reflecting on a person, a place or an object that is important to them. The tiles that young people create may offer a glimpse of something they are carrying that can weigh heavy, something that expresses culture, or something they can turn to for inspiration and motivation. Through this project, we make connections and find commonalities to demonstrate to participants that they are not alone. The community tile wall made from their windows to the soul show that, as teaching artist Fabian Debora notes, "There is no us and them—only us. One in unity."

## Art Form/Key Concepts

**Visual Arts:** Healing-Centered Arts Engagement, Culturally Relevant and Sustaining Pedagogy, Mental Health Promotion-Risk and Protective Factors, Stigma Reduction, Self-care

## Duration, Audience

- + 1 hour
- + Youth & Adults

## Supplies

Color pencils, markers, pastels, graphite, 5 x 4 in. cardstock (represents the window), masking tape to stick cards on the wall

## Leading The Exercise

1. **Introduction (5 mins):** Place an index card, or 5 x 4 in. piece of cardstock against your chest and explain to participants, that "This is no longer a piece of cardstock. It is now a window to your soul. Today I'm inviting you to share with us and the rest of the world a window to your soul."
2. **Prompt (5 mins):** Invite participants to think about a person, place, or object that they miss or turn to for support. This is an opportunity to bring that person into this space and help you with any unresolved issues. Maybe it is a place that has bad memories, or a place you turn to for motivation. Maybe it is an object that they still own that was given to them by someone special in their life like Grandmother, Mother or Father.
3. **Demo (10 mins):** Model by bringing in an object or talk about a personal place or person that is close to you and that you turn to when in times of struggle or even for inspiration. Remember that the depth of what you share reinforces the brave space. Demo how to find the basic shapes from your object and how to compose it on the 5 x 4 in. card.

4. Allow participants to create their own drawing for 20 minutes, while you walk around for support, checking for understanding, and asking questions for exploration.
5. **Reflection (15 mins):** Bring participants back into a circle. Invite them to take some time and take a look at their window to their soul. Set the tone for brave space and ask, “Would anyone like to share?” What did they feel? In one word, what happened while creating these windows? Everyone has the opportunity to share back. Remember we are all here together, and let’s be respectful of what others have to share.
6. **Closure:** Once all are done sharing then you can reinforce their strengths, courage and wrap up any personal experience that as facilitator you would like to share back. Invite participants to tape their cards on a wall to create a community mosaic. Then you gesture toward the community tile wall, and state this represents that “there is no us and them, only us.” This could be a moment for reflection about how this activity and the act of sharing can support reduction of mental health stigma.



### Facilitator’s Note

During sharing, the facilitator needs to listen carefully. This is the most important part of the share back, for the facilitator needs to capture the commonalities in their windows. It is important to make connections for participants, followed by a statement acknowledging that we are not alone. There is someone who has a similar story that you can turn to, etc.

### Source

Fabian Debora, Somos LA Arte / Homeboy Art Academy

# I AM/Where I Come From

The I AM poem is a poetry prompt designed to elicit self-reflection, self-understanding, self-awareness and compassion for self and for others. The poem can also be used as a tool of resistance and resilience when writers give name to challenges, oppressions, discomforts and injustices.

## Art Form/Key Concepts

**Writing:** Healing-Centered Arts Engagement, Culturally-Relevant and Sustaining Pedagogy, Mental Health Promotion: Increasing Awareness of Protective & Risk Factors

## Duration, Audience

- + 20-45 min
- + Youth & Adults

## Supplies

Paper and pen, poetry Prompts written on White Board or Giant Post-It note

## Leading The Exercise

1. **Preparation:** Write out all of the prompts for all to see in advance.
2. **Introduction (5 mins):** Pass out blank sheets of paper and pens. Explain that in this activity participants will get to describe aspects of themselves in a poem. They will get to share how they feel, how they see themselves, what they like to do, what they are good at, and what they wish for. The exercise will begin with writing statements that start with “I am...,” but participants can get creative and explore other ways of writing.
3. **Demo (10 mins):** Read aloud an example of a “I am...” poem.
4. **Warm-up:** Invite participants to begin by writing five “I am” statements. When they are done with those, invite them to write two or three “Where I come from” statements on their paper. Invite students to silently read back what they wrote.
5. **Expand (15 mins):** After a minute, invite students to continue writing. You can continue to provide additional prompts to support exploration. If participants need additional support you can provide them with a simple template to follow. Encourage students to mix and match together their responses to create a poem.
6. **Share Out: Three Options:**  
OPTION 1: Direct participants to get into pairs. Have participants choose which partner will go first. This partner will read their “I am...” poem first.

OPTION 2: Invite participants to circle 3 lines they feel are important to share. Go around the room/circle and invite each participant to share their 3 lines.



OPTION 3: Invite volunteers to read aloud all or excerpts of their poems. If time permits, encourage everyone to share—even just one or two lines.

ADD ON: You could also create a group poem by including one line for each participant. If you use index cards or a digital format, you can facilitate a group process where the group moves the lines around to explore how the meaning changes as the order of lines changes.

7. **Closing Reflections:** Invite participants to share something they noticed about the activity, or something that moved them. Go around the circle or pop-corn style.



### Facilitator's Note

- + If participants feel stuck they can complete any of the following statements (post list of prompts):  
I am...  
Where I come from....  
I know that...  
( \_\_\_\_\_ ) breaks my heart.  
( \_\_\_\_\_ ) helps me.  
I think...  
I dream...
- + **Cultural Considerations:** The poem taps into personal identity and lived experience, and this may sometimes include traumatic experiences. It is crucial to listen non-judgmentally and to honor participants' responses. Sometimes issues of racial and/or gender inequalities may emerge along with examples of oppressions and injustices. It is recommended that facilitators check-in 1:1 with any participants that share about trauma, and or feelings of loneliness, hopelessness, anxiousness and/or depression.

### Modifications

- + This activity is highly adaptable. This can be a 1:1 exchange, small groups, and big groups. The easiest way to adapt is to control time allotted for writing and methods/time designated for sharing.
- + This activity could be a drawing activity if language/writing is a barrier. Participants could also respond verbally and have their statements transcribed by the facilitator.

### Source

Various, including adaptations by Arts for Healing & Justice Network, Los Angeles County Department of Arts and Culture, UCLA Art & Global Health Center's AMP! Program, and Las Fotos Project

# I AM/Where I Come From

## Sample I Am Poem #1

I am a teacher. I am a woman. I am a dancer. I am Gabriela.  
I am a child of divorce.  
I am worried sometimes, except when I am cooking.  
I am a volunteer.  
I am hopeful.  
I am grateful for my friends. I am Gabriela.

## Sample I Am Poem #2

Written by students, mentors and staff of Las Fotos Project

I am tu amiga  
Your sister/hermana

Where I come from women should get married  
Where I come from women should not be loud,  
or take up space

Where I come from women should cook and do  
housework,  
Make babies  
Listen to their husbands

Where I come from women should not  
Argue, talkback, be picky

I believe women should do whatever makes  
them happy  
I understand women should not let anyone  
oppress them

Racism breaks my heart  
Abuse breaks my heart

The state of women and marginalized people in  
our country  
And world  
Breaks my heart

Where I come from women should be respected  
Where I come from women should not be  
ashamed

I am strong, determined, a boss  
I am not weak, unworthy, uneducated

Where I come from women should take up  
more space

Where I come from women should not hold  
back as much

I think women are motivated, tired, strong,  
ambitious,  
And careful.

Women are fierce, strong, loving, and  
deserving of respect.



Youth Justice Coalition member at an Arts for Healing & Justice Network summer 2021 event. Photo by Sylvanus Leone.

# Iceberg Drawing

Through the metaphor of an iceberg, what is seen/unseen, participants have the opportunity to talk about emotions, identity, and culture, and reflect on where there might be risk or protective factors and a network of self-care.

<b>Art Form/Key Concepts</b> <b>Drawing/Writing:</b> Healing-Centered Arts Engagement, Self-care, Culturally Responsive and Sustaining Pedagogy, Mental Health Promotion: Nurturing Confidence in Offering and Receiving Support	<b>Duration, Audience</b> + 15 min + Youth & Adults
<b>Supplies</b> Paper and any combination of pencils, pens, markers	

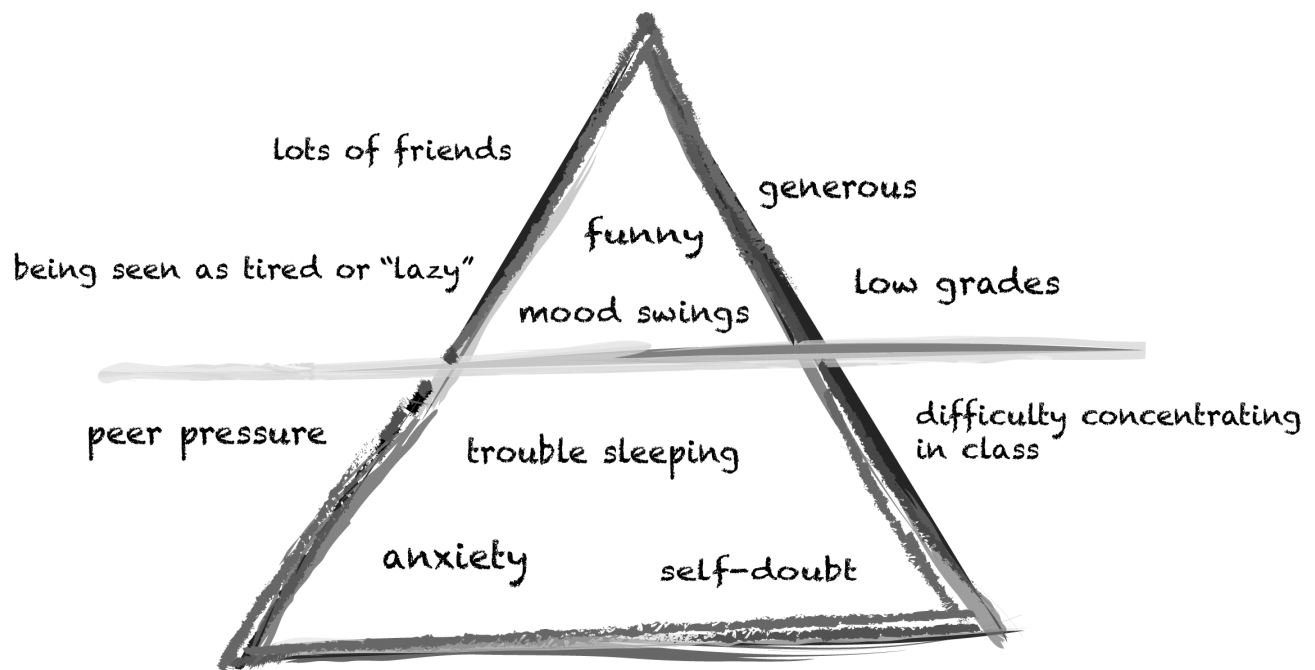
## Leading The Exercise

1. Take a piece of paper and draw a triangle on it in the middle of the page. It can be any size.
2. Draw a horizontal line from left margin to right margin, through the middle of the triangle.
3. Above the line, write a list of things about you that people can see. It could be an emotion/expression, something tied to culture like fashion, identity (what makes “you” you?), or any sensed assumptions/perceptions about you. Below the line, write a list of things about you that people might not or cannot see. Again, this could be an emotion, something about your identity and culture people might not assume, something you wish people knew about you, and more.
4. If they wish, participants can color in the iceberg, the sky, and the ocean.
5. Ask people if they’d like to share. Invite people to post their drawings on one area of the wall.

## Modifications

- + If it is easier, create a list called “All My Cultures.” Invite people to write as long a list as they can of the different cultures they’re part of... share and allow people to add to their lists, inspired by other people’s lists in the room. You could also layer in what cultures may be visible or invisible to others.

- + Adding a reflective question can help to make stronger connections for participants. In looking at your iceberg drawing, does anything appear that might increase or decrease stressful life events? In doing this exercise, how difficult was it to identify and acknowledge our emotions? Does naming it help you to recognize how something is impacting your wellbeing? Does naming it help you to support your wellbeing?
- + **Cultural Considerations:** The activity taps into personal identity and lived experience, and this may sometimes include traumatic experiences. It is crucial to listen non-judgmentally and to honor participants' responses. Issues of racial and/or gender inequalities may emerge along with examples of oppressions and injustices. It is recommended that facilitators check-in 1:1 with any participants that share about trauma, and or feelings of loneliness, hopelessness, anxiousness and/or depression.



Original artwork and photo by Danielle Galván Gomez.

### Source

Lisa Schoyer, Los Angeles County Department of Mental Health

# I Love My People Who...

## Often the best way to create a brave space is through play.

In this fun and culturally relevant call-and-response exercise, participants take turns being the Leader where they get to call out “I love my people who \_\_\_\_\_,” for example “love to wear baggy jeans”, “were born and raised in Boyle Heights”, “make tamales with their grandmas every Christmas”. The Leader gets to choose who/what they want to uplift, and the participants choose to jump into the center, or remain outside and give applause/cheers to validate and affirm those who are “in the center of the circle.”

In this active and fun exercise, participants learn to read nonverbal cues and build connections with other participants. Participants get to choose what they want to uplift, making it culturally relevant, and the action of participants who choose to jump in the center (applause, etc.) validates/affirms those who are also “in the center of the circle.” In moments of vulnerability, especially depending on what the person in the circle chooses to share, there is the opportunity to build a community of healing, while reducing the stigma of acknowledging discomfort or unpleasant feelings or situations.

Using a healing-informed mindset, over time a facilitator can invite the group to hold space for the wholeness and complexity of participants’ experiences and identities.

For example, “I love my people who feel anxious and lonely sometimes”; “I love my people who have a loved one who died from COVID”, “I love my people who don’t feel safe around the police” etc.

<b>Art Form/Key Concepts</b> <b>Theater:</b> Culturally Relevant and Sustaining Pedagogy, Self-care, Mental Health Promotion-Stigma Reduction	<b>Duration, Audience</b> + 10-15 min + Youth & Adults
<b>Supplies</b> Chairs	

## Leading The Exercise

1. **In advance:** Set up chairs in a circle. There should be one less chair than players.
2. Starting the Game: One person stands in the center. Everyone else sits in a chair in a circle (again, there should be one less chair than there are players).

3. The person in the center makes a statement that is true about themselves by starting with “I love my people who...” (Examples: I love my people who love video games. I love my people whose parents are divorced, etc.)
4. Anyone else who the statement applies to must stand. If it’s a celebratory statement the person in the middle gives everyone standing an air high five, if it’s more sad or serious everyone gives themselves a hug.
5. The person in the center then claps their hands, and everyone standing must find a new seat. The one person left without a seat then becomes the person in the middle to make a new statement. If you find there is only one person in the center, consider inviting the group to acknowledge and validate that individual by giving a round of applause.
6. **Reflection/Closure:** What did it feel like to be the person in the center? What did it feel like when others joined you in the center? Were there any connections that were surprising or affirming for you today? What’s something you wanted to uplift but didn’t have a chance to share?



Teaching Artist Monique Sypkens during a professional development training at Barry J. Nidorf Juvenile Hall. Photo by Maira Rios.

## Source

The Unusual Suspects Theatre Company

# Breathing Exercises: S-T-O-P and 5-4-3-2-1

Creating space in the day to stop, take a break from worries, and get back into the present moment has been shown to be enormously helpful in mitigating the negative effects of our stress response. When we drop into the present, we're more likely to gain perspective and see that we have the power to regulate our response to pressure.

Here's a short practice you can weave into your day to step into that space between stimulus and response.

<b>Art Form/Key Concepts</b> <b>Mindfulness:</b> Self-care, Mental Health Promotion Reduction	<b>Duration, Audience</b> + 2-5 min each + Youth & Adults
<b>Supplies</b> Chairs, if done while seated	

## Leading The Exercise

1. **S-T-O-P Breath:** Invite participants to either stand or sit. Guide them through the following prompts:

**S = Stop** / Stop what you're doing; put things down for a minute.

**T = Take** / Take a few deep breaths. If you'd like to extend this, you can take a minute to breathe normally and naturally and follow your breath coming in and out of your nose. You can even say to yourself "in" as you're breathing in and "out" as you're breathing out if that helps with concentration.

**O = Observe** / Observe your experience just as it is—including thoughts, feelings, and emotions. You can reflect about what is on your mind and also notice that thoughts are not facts, and they are not permanent. Notice any emotions present and how they're being expressed in the body. Research shows that just naming your emotions can turn the volume down on the fear circuits in the brain and have a calming effect. Then notice your body. Are you standing or sitting? How is your posture? Any aches or pains?

**P = Proceed** / Proceed with something that will support you in the moment: have a drink of water, talk to a friend, rub your shoulders, give yourself a hug.



2. **Reflection:** Treat this whole exercise as an experiment: Get curious about where there are opportunities in the day for you to just STOP—waking up in the morning, taking a shower, before eating a meal, at a stop light, before sitting down at work and checking email. You can even use your smartphone’s message indicator as a reminder to STOP, cultivating more mindfulness with technology. What would it be like in the days, weeks, and months ahead if you started stopping more often?



## **Modification: 5-4-3-2-1 Breath Variation**

1. Invite participants to either stand or sit. Guide them through the following prompts:

Take a moment to look around the space and silently note:

### **5 things you can see**

(i.e. your hands, the sky, your shoe)

### **4 things you can feel**

(i.e. your feet on the ground, the fabric of your shirt, your friend’s hand)

### **3 things you can hear**

(i.e. own exhale, the wind blowing, noises from outside of the room)

### **2 things you can smell**

(i.e. fresh cut grass, coffee, soap)

### **1 think you can taste**

(a mint, fresh air, your favorite fruit)

2. Now take a breath and on the exhale, think of something that calms you.
3. Take two more breaths on your own time thinking about that calm thing..

## **Source**

Elisabeth Nails, Los Angeles County Department of Arts and Culture, inspired by Mayo Clinic’s Complementary and Integrative Health program

# Pass the Stress Ball

The purpose of this short/burst activity is to invite limbic system (the body's fight, flight or freeze response) calming through play and allow for individual self-expression to be seen and heard. It is also an embodied method to move stress from the internal realm (inside of the body) to the external realm (out in the open). It allows others to see that they are not alone in feeling the way that they do.

## Art Form/Key Concepts

**Theater:** Mental Health Promotion and Self-Care

## Duration, Audience

- + 5-10 min
- + Youth & Adults

## Supplies

Color pencils, markers, pastels, graphite, 5 x 4 in. cardstock (represents the window), masking tape to stick card on designated wall

## Leading The Exercise

1. Invite the group to imagine and pretend that they are holding the ball in their hands.
2. Invite them to transfer as much stress and anxiety from themselves and into the ball.
3. Invite them to mime holding the ball with all of this stress and anxiety. Ask them to notice if the ball wants to be still, or does the ball want to move? Does it move fast or slow? Is it small or large?
4. Invite everyone to mime throwing the ball to you (the facilitator). Try to catch as many balls as you can.
5. Mime catching one ball and displaying it for the group, show how it moves and if it makes a sound, demonstrate the sound.
6. Invite the group to be ready to pass the stress ball one-by-one around the circle. Let them know that when they receive the ball, they should take a moment to hold it and to observe the stress and anxiety. As each person explores the ball, invite them to add some of their own worries and stress to the ball. If this causes the ball to change size or the way it moves or the sound it makes, that's totally great.
7. Once they have explored the ball and added some of their own stress to it, they should pass it to the next person. The next person explores the ball, adds their own stress and worries and passes the ball. This repeats until the ball makes it all the way around the circle. Once it makes it back to the facilitator you can hold the ball for a moment and then mime shrinking, smooshing it, stomping it, or letting it float up into the air and sail away, etc.

8. **Reflection:** At the end of the activity, ask participants, “What did you notice about the experience?”



## Modifications

- + For participants with developmental and/or learning differences, an actual ball could be used to ease the pressure of having to imagine the ball and move the imaginary ball. This way participants can focus on moving the actual ball to express how their stress makes the ball move.

## Source

Elisabeth Nails, Los Angeles County Department of Arts and Culture,  
and The Actor’s Gang

# Now and Then

This is a reflective writing exercise guided by prompts that support building self-awareness. This activity explores the concept of the adolescent experience around change and identity. It could be used for youth to think back on childhood, compare different ages and/or environments and how they've grown, or for adults to think back to adolescence and build compassion for the youth they serve.

<b>Art Form/Key Concepts</b> <b>Theater:</b> Healing-Centered Arts Engagement, Mental Health Promotion-Understanding Typical Adolescent Behavior, and Self-Care	<b>Duration, Audience</b> + 5-10 min + Youth & Adults
<b>Supplies</b> Poetry prompts, journal/paper, writing tool	

## Leading The Exercise

1. Think of ways you've changed from yesterday to today, from last year to this year and so on. For today, try to focus on what it was like when you were a (kid/teenager) vs. what it is like now as an (adolescent/adult).
2. **Complete the following phrases to build a poem:**

Once I felt \_\_\_\_\_

But now I feel \_\_\_\_\_

Once I thought \_\_\_\_\_

But now I'm sure \_\_\_\_\_

Once I wondered \_\_\_\_\_

But now I know \_\_\_\_\_

Once I couldn't \_\_\_\_\_

But now I can \_\_\_\_\_

Once I was \_\_\_\_\_

But now I am \_\_\_\_\_

Once I wished for \_\_\_\_\_

But now I wish \_\_\_\_\_

Because I am \_\_\_\_\_, I will \_\_\_\_\_

Because of this I will create \_\_\_\_\_

3. **Small Group Reflection:** Participants then get into groups of 3-4 to share their poems.
4. **Whole Group Reflection:** What did you notice? What was it like to reflect on your feelings now vs. then? How might increased self-awareness about your own experience as a youth help you to support youth now?



## Facilitator's Note

For this activity, in particular, take time to think through and consider how participants' lived experience may impact how they receive this activity. For example, if working with foster youth in a congregate care setting, this activity may trigger memories from past trauma-exposures. You may want to adjust the prompts, and/or be sure to include space to listen and validate participants' feelings and experiences. The cookbook's section "Six Helpful Elements in Any Workshop", especially "opening and closing space" and "community agreements" offers further guidance.

- + **Cultural Considerations:** The activity taps into personal identity and lived experience, and this may sometimes include traumatic experiences. It is crucial to listen non-judgmentally and to honor participants' responses and/or their decision to not share. Issues of racial and/or gender inequalities may emerge. It is recommended that facilitators check-in 1:1 with any participants that share about trauma, and or feelings of loneliness, hopelessness, anxiousness and/or depression.

## Modifications

- + **Movement Poem:** Continuing in the small groups, one individual volunteer reads their poem aloud as the other group members respond to what they hear by improvising spontaneous movements, gestures and poses. The movement is freestyle according to one's own interpretation of the words, phrases and thoughts that emerge from the oral reading of the poem. The purpose of the exercise is to allow the writer of the poem to hear and see their poem expressed in a different way. Thus perhaps, presenting a mirror of understanding to the viewer.

## Source

Megan Kirkpatrick and Kimberleigh Aarn, Los Angeles County Department of Arts and Culture

# Tapping and Pressure Points

**The purpose of these short self-regulation activities are to access the body's energy and reduce stress.**

Proponents say that Tapping, or the Emotional Freedom Technique (EFT) helps you access your body's energy and send signals to the part of the brain that controls stress. They claim that stimulating the strings of energy that flow through the body can reduce stress or negative emotion, restoring balance to your disrupted energy.

Pressure points are also easy ways to self-soothe. In many cultures, it is believed that there are pressure points all over the body that correspond to organs and ailments, and that these pressure points can be massaged or accessed to aid in healing. In the modification below, three points are accessed with massage to self-soothe.

## Art Form/Key Concepts

**Dance:** Mindful Connection to the Body/Self-Care

## Duration, Audience

- + 5-10 min each
- + Youth & Adults

## Supplies

If needed, maybe a visual of areas of the body to focus on for each exercise

## Leading The Exercise

1. Share the context in the description above and make sure that participants can see you model.
2. Using four fingers, begin to tap the side of your hand, moving from right to left.
3. Then, tap the top of the head.
4. Tap the inside of the eyebrow to the outside of the eyebrow to under the eye.
5. Tap the area under the nose.
6. Tap under the lip, the crease on your chin.
7. Tap the collarbone.
8. As you tap, feel free to add a positive affirmation: "I love and accept myself."
9. End by taking deep breaths and repeating your positive affirmation.
10. **Reflection:** At the end of the activity, ask participants, "What did you notice? How do you feel now compared to five minutes ago?"



## Modification

- + Some proponents start by calling up something that is giving them stress or anxiety and considering how they feel about it at the moment. Then, they create a “set-up statement” of accepting the self to focus on during the tapping exercise. A sample set-up statement might be, “I honor my feelings and give my body permission to relax.” At the end of the tapping, they might repeat an affirmation like, “Even though I’m still a little worried about \_\_\_\_\_, I deeply and completely accept myself.”

## Leading The Exercise: Pressure Points Massage

1. The pressure point above your nose and between your eyes is called the hill of impression, and applying light pressure with a thumb or finger can help relieve stress and anxiety. Try to slow your breathing while you massage this point.
2. The union valley point is in the web between your thumb and first finger. This is a great place to massage if you have a headache, or have tension. Sometimes you can even feel a specific spot that is tender. Don’t dig in too hard, but gently massage the area, while breathing calmly.
3. You can find the inner frontier gate point on your arm, about three finger widths below your wrist.
4. **Reflection:** These names of the pressure points offer a terrific opportunity to flow into a writing activity! Choose a point on your body and give it an entirely new name. Is it a “hill of calmness,” a “plain of waiting”?

## Source

Write Girl / Bold Ink Writers





I love and accept myself



Original artwork and photo by Danielle Galván Gomez.

# Count Them on the Palm of the Hand

For a detailed description of this activity and its power, please read the interview on p. 90 with teaching artist Fabian Debora in this guide. Fabian makes important connections between this activity and circles of support, resourcing, trauma-informed approaches, and cultural relevance.

## Art Form/Key Concepts

**Visual Arts:** Healing-Centered Arts Engagement, Culturally Relevant and Sustaining Pedagogy, Mental Health Promotion-Risk and Protective Factors, Stigma Reduction, Self-care, Mindful Connection to the Body/Circles of Support

## Duration, Audience

- + 1 hour
- + Youth & Adults

## Supplies

Paper and drawing tools (color pencils, pastels, markers, etc.)

## Leading The Exercise: Tapping

1. **Introduction (5 mins):** Trace the outside of your hand. Maybe try it twice, once with your dominant and once with your nondominant hand to see which you prefer. Hands are very unique. What do you notice about your hand after you made your outline?
2. **Background (20 mins):** Decorate the outside of the hand in a way that speaks to you. It could represent something about you. It could be abstract and just include shapes. It could represent a certain place for you.
3. **Developing the Hand (30 mins):**

Consider who you can really call on when you need them, and put their name somewhere on your hand. It doesn't have to be a certain number. Maybe you only put down one name, or maybe you put down five, one on each finger. We put their name to honor them and bring them into this space.

After you put their name, write down their relationship to you. Remember that this doesn't have to be a friend or family member. It could be a teacher, a coach, a mentor—anyone that is there for you in some way. Also remember that the person can be in the physical world, or in the spirit world—maybe it is someone who has passed.

Finally, let's write or draw a symbol of what the intention they bring to you. What words or symbols could you include near their name to represent how they show up for you?

4. **Reflection (10–20 mins):** Invite participants to share their completed artwork and as much of the stories of who they included as they feel safe sharing. Remind them that it is packaged in a way. Now you have created something that is tangible. This can live on your refrigerator. You can put this on your wall whenever you need it.



### Facilitator's Note

- + It is very important that the facilitator share in the demo and model how deep this exercise should go while considering all of the dynamics they know about how it is in the space.
- + Fabian often challenges participants to consider, “When was the last time you had a conversation with this person? When was the last time you picked up the phone and called to say, ‘Thank you for everything you’ve done?’ Today, I challenge you to pick one from the hand and maybe reach out and let me know how that goes.”

### Source

Fabian Debora, Somos LA Arte / Homeboy Art Academy





Original artwork and photo by Danielle Galván Gomez.

# Scented Storytelling

This activity connects multiple senses by using images as jumping off point for writing about scent. Scent is tied to memory, and the prompts here might point to identifying and taking time to think about circles of support.

## Art Form/Key Concepts

**Writing:** Mental Health Promotion-Nurturing Confidence in Offering and Receiving Support, Circles of Support

## Duration, Audience

- + 20 min
- + Youth & Adults

## Supplies

Images (crowd-sourced from participants in advance): There are some examples here, including: peeling an orange, coffee, pouring concrete, bread), journal/paper, writing tool

## Leading The Exercise:

### Part One

- + Engage participants in a brainstorm to name items that they might smell:
  - + In their family's kitchen
  - + During summer
  - + During holidays
  - + Walking in their neighborhoods
  - + At school
  - + In their dreams, etc.
- + Gather (or invite participants to gather) images that correspond with the crowd-sourced suggestions; or have participants search and submit images or links to images that can be projected for the class.
  - + Optional expansion: This could potentially be expanded into a larger photo essay project paired with participant writing (memories, poems, stories, etc). They could also interview family members and friends and weave their responses into a poetry or story collage.

### Part Two

- + Share with participants that today we tap into the senses by using images to evoke scents, and scents to evoke memories. Some fun facts about scent: people can detect at least one trillion distinct scents. Dogs have 50% more scent cells than humans. The UK's favorite smell is freshly baked bread. Good smells make us feel happy.

- + **Show an image (either from the crowd-sourced collection, or use the examples below) and invite participants to write down a memory connected to the scent. For example:**
  - + First Image: Peeling An Orange
  - + Take in the scent of orange and write down a memory.
  - + Second Image: Coffee
  - + Who do you think of when you smell this coffee? Is there a person that is connected to the scent of coffee for you? Take a moment to write whatever person or memory comes up for you.
  - + Third Image: Fresh Cut Grass
  - + Do you smell the grass? Where do your thoughts go? Imagine being barefoot in the grass....when was the last time you did that?
  - + Fourth Image: Baked Bread
  - + Mmmm Carbs! Do you remember any family gatherings where bread has been an integral part of the experience?
  - + Fifth Image: Concrete Pouring
  - + See if you can smell the liquid concrete. When have you been on a construction site, or walked past one? When have you pressed your hands into concrete or clay?
- + **Reflection:** The power of scent to evoke memories is clear. Memories can be connected to support systems that we have in our lives. What did you notice about the scents we chose? You may have noticed that the variety included, natural, humanmade, industrial, outdoor, indoor. The variety is key—we all react differently to different kinds of imagery and scents. Can you think of another memory that has a distinct scent to you?
- + **Reflection:** Can we identify smells for certain ideas? What does love smell like? friendship? loneliness? fear? What does anger smell like? What does injustice smell like? What does racism smell like? What does connection smell like? Unity? Justice?



## Modifications

- + You could also do this same activity but focus it on a different sense: textures, flavors, sounds, colors...
- + You can change the images to reflect on the subject that you are teaching.
- + You could expand this activity by having participants select one memory and write more about it, or they could combine two memories into one longer story.

## Source

Write Girl / Bold Ink Writers

# Resources & Inspiration for Additional Activities & Lesson Plans

## **Alliance for a Healthier Generation Action Center**

Free to create an account and access resources, toolkits and guide  
<https://www.healthiergeneration.org/app/account/login?appDest=/app/resources/981>

## **Classroom Mental Health Toolkit, University of Michigan Depression Center**

<https://classroommentalhealth.org/exercises>

## **Creating Connections: An Arts & Culture Framework and Toolkit, Sandra de la Loza, Creative Strategist Artist in Residence for the LA County Department of Arts & Culture and Department of Parks and Recreation**

<https://www.lacountyarts.org/sites/default/files/creatingconnections.pdf>

## **Decolonizing the Music Room**

<https://www.decolonizingthemusicroom.com>

## **Engaging Tradition Digital Media Resource, Alliance for California Traditional Arts**

<https://actaonline.org/resource/engaging-tradition>

## **Essential Tools, Heard Alliance**

<https://www.heardalliance.org/help-toolkit-resources>



**Explore Justice, 211LA.org**

<https://www.211la.org/explore-justice>

**Free Guided Meditations, UCLA Mindful Awareness Research Center (MARC)**

<https://www.uclahealth.org/marc/mindful-meditations>

**Kohl's Healthy at Home resources:**

<https://www.healthiergeneration.org/campaigns/kohls-healthy-at-home>

**Resources for Schools, Directing Change**

<https://directingchange.ca.org/schools>

**School Wellbeing Toolkit, UCLA Pritzker Center for Strengthening Children and Families**

<https://d3kdbh1wduemv1.cloudfront.net/rec4FXriKOrRDVPi9.pdf>

**Technology Enhanced Arts Learning Project (TEAL), Los Angeles County Office of Education and Department of Arts & Culture**

<https://tealarts.lacoe.edu>

**UCLArts & Healing Resources**

<https://uclartsandhealing.org/free-downloads>

Artwork by  
Creative Wellbeing  
Youth Content Advisor

*Suicide prevention is*



*A loving home,  
affordable housing, &  
safe living conditions*

# Danielle Galván Gomez

*Suicide prevention is*



*Food security,  
clean water, free healthcare,  
access to mental health &  
social services.*

*Suicide prevention is*




*Community, care,  
support, solidarity, racial,  
social & gender justice.*

I went to some of the Los Angeles Suicide Prevention Network Summit sessions in September 2021 and I was inspired by the presentations given by mental health providers and others in the field. One of the things I've been thinking about since the summit is how when we talk about suicide and suicide prevention a lot of the resources are "here's a hotline" or "go see a therapist" or "take this medication," and solutions that put a lot of pressure on individuals and the healthcare system, which is not an accessible or a safe space for everyone.

One of the things I was reflecting on with my mentor is that when I had a period where I was struggling, I remember feeling like the thing that was affecting me or bothering me wasn't changing and that made me lose hope. There were all of these other things around me affecting me and you can only do so much coping sometimes.

So, based on my personal experience of what would have helped me and what did help me, as well as what I learned at the summit regarding the impact of systemic issues and the importance of care—not just care for the individuals but talking about the network of care and how the people in that network also need to take care of themselves and have network of support—it just started to make me think about how this is not just a problem for individuals, it's something to solve on the community level.

I started putting together my thoughts about how to convey suicide prevention as a community issue. When coming up with this concept I realized I really didn't want to draw people—so I visualized it through birds, thinking about how a loving home, affordable housing, safe living conditions, etc., can be shown through imagery not involving people, like in the first image with birds building a nest and caring for that nest. The second image is about how people need food security and access to healthcare and clean water as part of suicide prevention, and how I could show that through a bird feeding her baby birds. And for the last one, I was thinking what does a community look like and what does it mean to be at different stages in your healing process? So some of the birds are resting or are just coming out of the nest, some are fine flying on their own, some are on the branch, and this is the visual solution I found to convey this metaphor.

A large, stylized graphic of a plant with several broad, rounded leaves in shades of light gray and white, set against a light gray background. The leaves are arranged in a fan-like pattern, with some overlapping. The text is centered over the middle of the graphic.

**This project is about advocating for systemic changes that can help prevent suicide and about visualizing community care and support.**





Teaching Artist engaged in art-making activity led by Arts for Healing & Justice Network. Photo by Sylvanus Leone.

# 6 Helpful Elements in Any Workshop

## 1. Opening and Closing Spaces

Short check-in activities can help create a welcoming environment for participants. Whether writing, improv, or brief prompts for sharing, check-ins allow everyone to be aware of the energy in the room, give people the space to own and voice any obstacles to their participation or focus, and create a moment for everyone to connect on a human level before getting into the work. Check-ins are an opportunity for everyone's name to be heard and include signs of respect like inviting participants to include gender pronouns and pronunciations.

Introductions and check-in prompts can also provide opportunities to connect with joy and gratitude.

Often when people are stressed, particularly chronically, it can be hard to remember what gives them joy, and to find gratitude for the many protective factors in their lives. Providing different ways to help them remember, reconnect with, or find new ways to enjoy life is what can make these exercises so valuable and healing. It can be as simple as taking a moment to go around the room and ask people to share, write, or show one thing that brings them joy.

Check-in prompts can use metaphors or symbols for people who want to communicate how they are coming or leaving a space without revealing too many personal details, for example:

- + *Check in by number, 1–10 (clarify “10 being \_\_\_\_\_”): Feel free to share or not share what is behind your number.*



- + Describe your mood in a color today.
- + Describe yourself as a stop light (red, yellow, green).
- + Describe yourself as a weather pattern (windy, rainy, sunny, stormy).

As Fabian Debora mentions in his interview here (p. 90), opening and closing spaces is critical when asking participants to open up and express vulnerability. Equally important to opening check-ins, closures make sure participants do not leave for the next part of their day in a raw or vulnerable state.

Here are a few samples that can be used for closure activities:

- + **Clap together:** Invite participants to hold their hands in preparation for one clap and see if, without speaking, the participants can sense each other's energy and all clap at the same time.
- + **Pass the Applause, or Pass the Pulse:** If participants are able to join hands in a circle, then one person starts and "passes the pulse" by squeezing the hand of the person next to them. The squeeze continues at every joined hand in succession until it comes back to the first person. If joining hands is not possible, a modification is for two people to hold their hands apart, look each other in the eye, and try to clap at the same time. One person then turns to the other person next to them in the circle to clap together, and the cycle continues until it comes back to the first person. Sometimes it is fun to do a couple rounds to find a rhythm with the group.
- + **Shake it out:** Everyone stands up. We shake out our right arm for an eight count, counting down aloud in a group 8-7-6-5-4-3-2-1, then shake out the right leg counting down from 8 again. Continue with the left leg, then the left arm, then the whole body. Go around again counting down from 7, then from 6, etc.
- + **Group Count-up:** In this activity for sensing group energy, you count the number of people in the room. As a group, we will try to count up from "one" to this number. However, each person can only say one number, and no one can say a number at the same time. If a person says a number more than once, or if participants say the same number at the same time, then the count goes back to the one.
- + **One-word reflection:** Invite participants to share an experience from the workshop, "Something I saw today... Something I heard today... Something I felt today..."

*Given that sensitive topics might arise during the workshop, facilitators should be aware not to send any youth back who might have opened up wounds too big to be closed during the group close-out. In these cases, have a post-closure conversation, or contact the appropriate staff person and take steps to ensure a supportive adult is looped in about the situation. Follow-up with the young person and/or supportive adult whenever possible.*

## 2. Brave Spaces and Self- and Community-Care Breaks

Not all spaces we enter or facilitate are guaranteed to be “safe spaces,” especially when we are inviting people to be vulnerable.

We cannot control if and when people are triggered, especially by things other participants may say.

This does not mean we cannot prepare to care for others or put guidelines in place to make people safer or more comfortable. The following are some considerations and guidance for how to communicate with participants in a group setting who may need extra attention or care:

- + How can participants indicate if they need extra time or care after a workshop while also respecting confidentiality? For example, could you request that everyone close their eyes, and invite those who may need a personal check-in to put their hand in the air or over their heart as an indicator that they would like additional support?
- + If participants share things that are triggering or vulnerable with the group, is it appropriate for another participant to approach or reach out about what they shared after the workshop? Check with your partnering adults in the space and define strategies to communicate and maintain boundaries in the setting.
- + During the workshop, do participants have to stay in the space even if they are uncomfortable or triggered? In what circumstances will people be allowed to step away or physically leave the room? For example, a training might offer a *Self-Care Break with a Check-out: Step out when you need to, but please give the facilitators a thumbs-up so we know you're okay. Otherwise stepping out may prompt one of us to follow you to make sure everything is alright.* If leaving the room is not possible, are there other ways to step away from the workshop (i.e. sitting in a quiet area, maybe wearing headphones for a while, or stepping aside to take a few deep breaths).

## 3. Community Agreements

Community Agreements can also help provide a framework for Brave Space considerations. Agreements can be done at the beginning of the workshop to co-create the shared expectations for the group. These agreements provide a shared understanding for behavior to help us be accountable to the group and to ourselves. The agreements should come from the group, but here are a few that pop up frequently:

- + **Step Up/Step Back:** Participate, but don't dominate.
- + **One Mic:** Honor one voice at a time when someone is speaking.
- + **“I” Statements:** Use “I” statements and share about your own experience.

- + **Listen with Heart:** Pay attention to others, without judgment or preconceived ideas.
- + **Assume Good Intent:** Don't jump to conclusions. Give grace and try to understand someone's point of view.
- + **Know Your Impact:** Let's remember that people in the group may differ in social and cultural background, sexual orientation, or gender identity and expression. Be careful about making insensitive or careless remarks, and apologize if something you say is hurtful to others.

## 4. Objectives & Intentions

Providing an agenda or road map to the workshop before the actual implementation gives participants a sense of stability, knowing what to expect, and anchors the experience in health, productivity and wellness. Walk participants through a summary agenda, or have it posted somewhere, and go over your objectives for the day. Give space for participants to state their own intentions that they bring to the experience.

## 5. Grounding Activities

Grounding activities can include breathing techniques, some of which you can find on p. 38 of this guide, and simple sensory check-ins:

*"Notice your body and its connection to the floor, chair, your hands on your legs, etc. Start from your feet and work your way up. The idea here is to really notice the tactile sensation and pay attention—is it hot, cold, rough, scratchy? Does your body feel warm when you focus on that section?"*

Affirm that this is a simple way to ground in the body, to focus, and it's an excellent way to manage stress, fight or flight. It's a self-regulating technique that can be used in a stressful meeting, in class, or a job interview.

## 6. Objectives & Intentions

For Creative Wellbeing workshops we recommend, whenever possible, a minimum of two facilitators, to support addressing issues that arise in the room and may require focused one-on-one conversation; and to ensure that different perspectives, skills, and personalities are brought into the group. At the beginning, teaching artists should always start and demonstrate activities as a way to make it both clear and safe for others to follow. You set the tone, including your interactions as a facilitation team, and model the kinds of responses (time, content, tone) you want to encourage. Always remember: never ask participants to do something you have not tried yourselves.

# 10 Tips from Youth about Creative Wellbeing Workshops

The following tips come from an advisory meeting with youth in Art for Healing & Justice Network's (AHJN) Our True Colors program. Our True Colors (OTC) is a weekly fellowship program that functions as a gateway to opportunities for system impacted youth. These opportunities come in many forms such as art-making, traveling, advocacy, field trips and paid internships with AHJN member organizations.

Here is what OTC youth had to say:

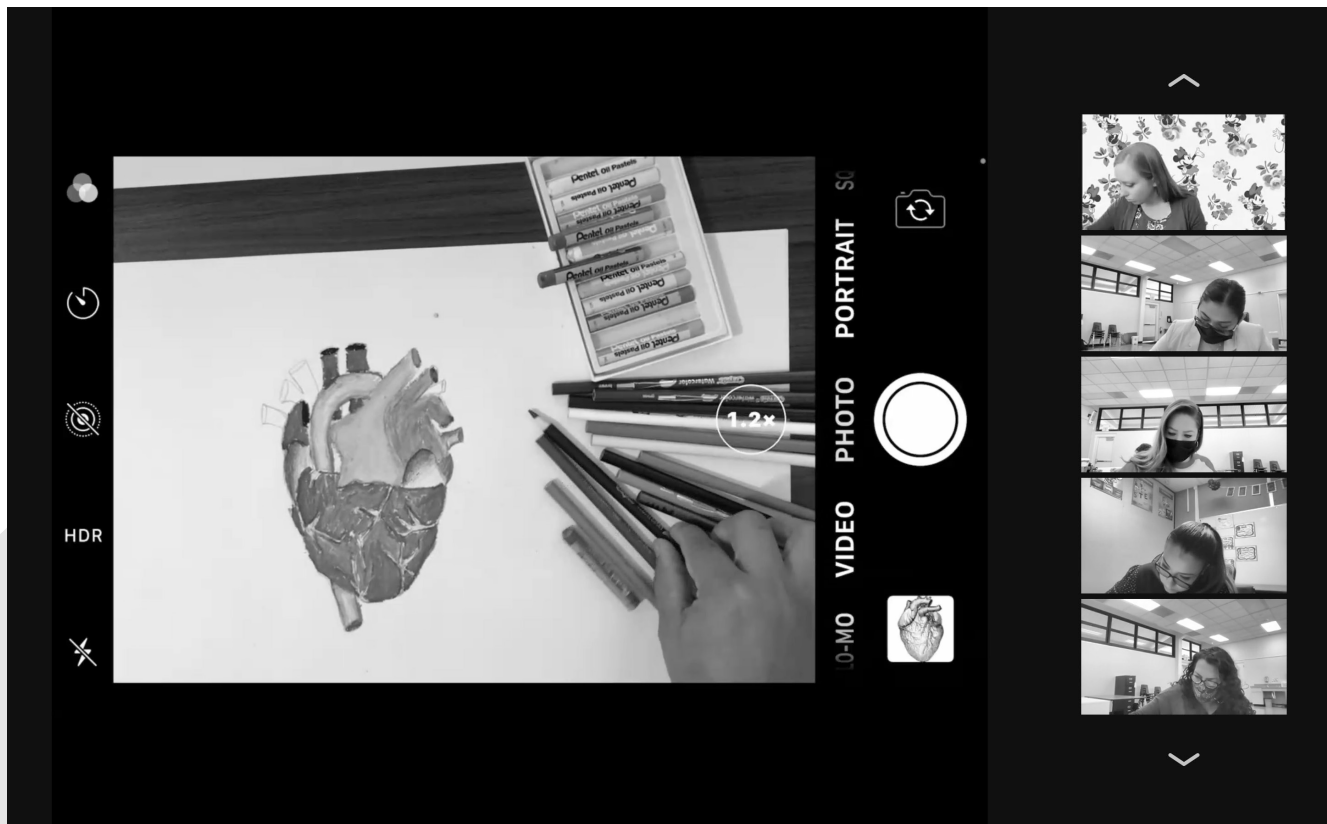
1. Ask about and **acknowledge other ways** we care for our mental health. Some of us do breathing and meditation exercises, exercise/work out, or even cleaning, to take care of ourselves.
2. Something we wish adults knew about our wellbeing is that **we need patience**.
3. Sometimes we just **need our privacy**.
4. We can make our own mistakes. **Let us make our own mistakes**.
5. We have power and agency. **Let us set our own boundaries**.
6. We have **different experiences with expressing our cultural or racial identity**. Some of us had teaching artists that always made us feel comfortable. Some of us had teachers who did not live in our communities and didn't understand us, so we were afraid to express ourselves. For some of us, expressing culture felt like something reserved for holidays, not everyday life.
7. Make a space where **everyone has a voice**.
8. Make sure everyone knows that **what they share matters**.
9. A safe space should include **information to be shared and free snacks**.
10. Look at **everything through the lens of community**. Everyone should know they are not alone, but are in community with others.

# Tips for Virtual Engagement

In-person engagement is not always possible or preferable. Consider these tips for adapting Creative Wellbeing's healing-informed arts approach in virtual spaces:

- + If the workshop is being conducted virtually, it is helpful to have a few slides and background music, if possible, to welcome participants into the virtual space while participants join and settle.
- + In your meeting presets on Zoom, consider "muting all participants" upon entry to avoid distractions/interruptions, but remember to also include the "Allow participants to unmute themselves" option selected as well.
- + Gently encourage participants to turn on their videos or other ways to simulate the feeling of being in-person, but also understand what the feelings of "being looked at" and what visually entering someone's home environment might bring up for participants.
- + If time and budget permits, consider putting together materials (art kits, workbooks, etc.) and distributing in advance for the participants to use.
- + Consider asking participants to check-in using the Chat feature. Introductions can include name, pronouns, school/organization, and/or a fun check-in question.
- + Virtual workshops can easily be facilitated by two people, but three people make it even better! In addition to lead facilitators, consider having additional support to help manage elements like the Waiting Room (letting participants in), Spotlight and pinning presenters, and managing Share Screen. Sometimes having someone to manage the Chat by dropping messages and verbally uplifting comments, and someone to manage Breakout Rooms, relieves pressure and minimizes distractions for facilitators. Combined, they support a smooth workshop that minimizes technical issues and delays.

- + Ensure the teaching artist team are hosts and co-hosts of the virtual room. This will allow you to control and run share-screen, breakout rooms, etc. as needed.
- + Log into the virtual workshop 10–15 minutes early to check connectivity and run through any slides/video/music prior to participants joining.
- + If you have any links or resources, have them ready in advance so they can be easily dropped in the chat with cut-and-paste.
- + Be sure to send a reminder to participants with the Zoom link. It might be helpful to send reminders one week out, two-days prior, the morning-of and 5-minutes before the start of the meeting.
- + Take breaks for stretching, resting the eyes away from the screen, getting water, or time for any other needs participants might have.



Whittier City School District Wellness Team engaged in Creative Wellbeing workshop led by the Armory Center for the Arts.

# Preparing for Training/ Workshops

## Learn about the Culture of the Site:

- + How long has the space (whether a school, residential facility, recreation center) been **in service**? What are the different offerings that happen onsite?
- + What **resources are in place** at the site that might be helpful to know about?
- + What SEL (social emotional learning) and health **curricula are in place**, if any?
- + Are there any **mindfulness practices** in place at the site? What is the **site's policy/perspective** on mindfulness and/or spiritual practices?
- + What is the site's **plan/policy for mental health referrals, suicide assessments, and crisis management**? Could it be shared? How informed/comfortable are participants about the plan?
- + What is the site's policy regarding **mandated reporting**?
- + What is the site's plan/policy on **handouts, especially those regarding mental health resources and crisis response**?

## Learn about the Space and Prepare:

- + Be sure to **confirm the final numbers** for any supply or space needs you might have.
- + Does **directional signage** need to be part of your materials for set-up?
- + What **audio-visual set-up** might you need? Is there a monitor/speakers/Smartboard in the space?



- + **Circle up:** Is it possible to set up the space with seating in a circle? A circle set-up helps create an atmosphere of participation (no one hiding in the back or feeling on the spot in front), and ensures everyone is visible to each other. It often helps to have additional chairs nearby in case of unexpected participants, and also to create space should someone need to step out of the circle. There should always be enough room between participants for safety precautions and movement.
- + What logistics might you need to know (**parking/entrance instructions, safety precautions**, etc.)?
- + For visual learners, **is there a space for notes and visuals**, whether it is a wall for large post-its or a dry erase board? Is there enough space for participants to circulate and add their thoughts to any posted notes? Facilitators might want to bring easels/flipcharts with markers, etc., and prepare any visuals in advance. For example, having a visible agenda creates a sense of stability as participants enter the room, that there aren't any surprises coming, which helps put people at ease.
- + For a professional development training, can there be **a welcome table near the entrance** to the space? The table would have name tags, a variety of art supplies to decorate them, and food/water. It is always nice to have an "affirmation wall" with post-its near the entrance as well. Setting up the room this way creates a welcoming, inclusive atmosphere. It puts creativity (making our own name tags) and self-care (snacks, affirmations) right up front. It also creates an activity for people to engage in as they arrive—to minimize awkward sitting in chairs, getting on phones, and clustering with friends.

### Learn about the group/participants:

- + Can participants complete the **a pre-survey** in advance of workshops?
- + How long have participants been **connected** to the site? This might be the length of service for educators/practitioners in a training, or the length of enrollment for youth.
- + What are some **strengths** of the (school, residential facility, rec center, neighborhood) community?
- + What are some of your **greatest concerns** for the community right now?
- + What are some **needs** of the individuals/site?
- + What **relevant training** have the adults already experienced?
- + How were participants enrolled in this workshop series? Did they **volunteer**, or were they **assigned**?



Teaching Artist engaged in art-making activity led by Arts for Healing & Justice Network. Photo by Sylvanus Leone.

- + What are some things you think our **facilitators should know** in advance?
- + Have there been any recent **events that impacted the site’s wellbeing** (i.e., suicide, intimate partner violence, fights/conflict, accidental deaths, sexual harassment or assault)?
- + Are there ways to **communicate with participants in advance** (pre-/post-surveys, what they might need to bring, wear comfortable clothing/shoes, etc.)?

## Check in with Yourself: Healing-Centered Self-Assessment Questions for Facilitators

Part of preparing for training and workshops is checking in with yourself before you enter the space. Sometimes in planning for how much traffic there might be to show up early for set-up, preparing lesson plans, or making sure there is space for participants’ questions if they approach you during breaks or after the workshop, we might overlook taking time to ask important questions of ourselves in relation to this work.


The following self-assessment questions are excerpted from Healing-Centered Engagement: Reflections and Insights From the Field, a zine created by VPR Consultants and commissioned by the LA County Department of Arts & Culture.

In healing-centered engagement, who we are on the inside—the interior—matters as much as our outward practices—the exterior. **Beginning (and/or continuing) the process of healing oneself before working with others to heal themselves is an important aspect of healing-informed arts facilitation.** We have included these self-assessment questions to support Creative Wellbeing facilitators to engage in self-reflection and self- and community-care. These can also be used in peer supervision (for social work), peer support, or peer learning community (PLC) settings to deepen healing-informed practice. We invite you to grab a piece of paper and a writing tool to explore:

### Internal Self-Assessment Questions

- + What is my worldview, related to healing? Where does this worldview come from? Is it rooted in a particular culture, history, or lived experience?
- + What has brought me healing?
- + What does medicine look like in my life?
- + How do I respond to trauma? What are my specific trauma responses (e.g., fight, flight, freeze, or fawn)?
- + What emotion(s) am I feeling right now?

## External Self-Assessment Questions

- + What healing practices do I practice with the young people I work with?
  - + What healing practices does my organization practice with youth?
  - + Where do these healing practices originate? Are these practices Western, non-Western, or a combination of both?
  - + Are any of these practices appropriated from a culture that is not my own? If practices are outside of my culture, have I sought the expertise and permission of the culture who created the practice?
  - + How, if at all, do I bring my lived experience into my healing practice with youth?
  - + In what ways am I or my organization causing or perpetuating harm?
  - + What are ways I want to shift my practices? What steps do I need to take in order to reduce potential harm?
- 



Teaching Artists engaged in shared art-making during AHJN's Network Wide Training. Photo by Raul Flores.

# Taking Care of Yourself and Others:

## Additional Tips for Facilitators

The following tips have been adapted from the *Facilitation Guide—Quick Tips from Trainers to Trainers* developed by Dr. Daisy Gomez, EdD, the Lead Trainer from [UCLA Prevention Center of Excellence \(COE\)](#), with input from the COE's trainers.

### **Practice Self-Care**

Taking care of yourself and attending to your needs is fundamental to effective facilitation. Being well rested with a good night's sleep and getting enough nutrients are some of the ways in which we get ready to facilitate. If we facilitate without proper sleep or while hungry, we find it challenging to be at our best so that our participants get the most benefit. It's important to recognize that our participants are diverse in their ways of thinking, learning and moods. As facilitators we hold a lot during our trainings, take nothing personally, and when training on challenging or controversial topics give yourself grace and space to let it go and continue as the pro that you are!

### **TRAINER SIDEBAR:**

“As a facilitator, normalize and model self-care. If you need a drink of water, take the time to have it and encourage your participants to get some water or snacks if needed. If you need a break, take it. Participants love breaks as well.”

### **Be Familiar with the Content and Concepts**

It's important to be familiar with not only the main concepts within your training, but also the content that supports them. Before the training begins, we suggest that you review your slides and the associated notes, making sure you understand what is

there and ensuring that you could answer any questions that the participants might have. Once this review is complete, move on to the following steps:

- + Identify the main takeaways that will guide your approach and connection with the material. Use these takeaways to guide your training so that you are prioritizing concepts over specific content.
- + Imagine your presentation is a story. Organize the main takeaways in such a way that you create an arc with a beginning, middle, and end. In this story, be sure to evoke emotion, since an experience is much more memorable for your participants than facts.
- + Think about the message you want to deliver and be concise with descriptive and efficient language.
- + With visuals, use more images than words.

#### **TRAINER SIDEBAR:**

“Incorporate your own stories and experiences in the material. Not only will it help you understand the material better, but it’ll help you connect with the audience and make them remember what you talked about. Everyone remembers a story.”

### **Engaging Learners through Activities and Active Listening**

When participants are given the opportunity to interact with one another to complete a task, they get to discuss, process, and apply the information introduced during the training. To successfully engage participants in an activity, here are some tips, design activities that allow participants to collaboratively (pairs or groups) discuss and process the information you have introduced.

Ensure that activities encourage participants to reflect, conceptualize, and develop a response to the prompt in the activity. Allow sufficient time for an activity to have meaningful processing. Base time for the activity on the number of participants in each group and depth of task (i.e. for a group of 4, allow 8 minutes for a task so each member has 2 minutes to contribute).

#### **While participants are engaged in an activity, listen in to what they are saying!**

By doing so, you are better able to learn about the participants’ thoughts and ideas, assess whether they are on the right track, and then develop formative feedback about the ideas shared once the task is complete. The feedback you provide should reflect active listening without repeating what the participants said. Be sure to be mindful of the participants’ feelings when offering feedback.

#### **Put Yourself Into It!**

- + Use your voice and body language. For example, use your hands to make a point or modulate your tone to emphasize something of importance.

- + Spark joy. Make the training experience enjoyable for not only the trainees, but yourself. Be engaged, really pay attention to what the audience is saying (especially when you ask them to report out), and do something meaningful with that information. Process, summarize, and support.

#### **TRAINER SIDEBAR:**

“Put your personality in it! It’s ok to have fun and showcase who you are, flaws and all.”

#### **Wait-time is Think-time.**

- + Be comfortable with silence. Do not feel as if you must talk the whole time. Use pauses with intention and wait for connection. Then continue!
- + After posing a question, count to 10 before calling on anyone or expecting a response in a chat. This wait time offers all participants sufficient time to develop an answer, not just those who are quick thinkers. If no one has a response to share after 10 seconds, consider the following options.
- + The participants’ silence may indicate that the question or task was too complex. You can give your participants more time to think or simply offer some answers that “other participants in other trainings who had ample time” have said.
- + The participants’ silence may indicate that they don’t know what to do. In this case, restate what you expect and offer an example response. Then give the participants more time to develop their own response.
- + If you’re met with silence, you can also provide alternative ways for people to respond via a show of hands, typing in the chat, or participating in a poll. You can also have participants work with a partner (using breakouts in a virtual environment) to develop answers together.


#### **Be kind to yourself.**

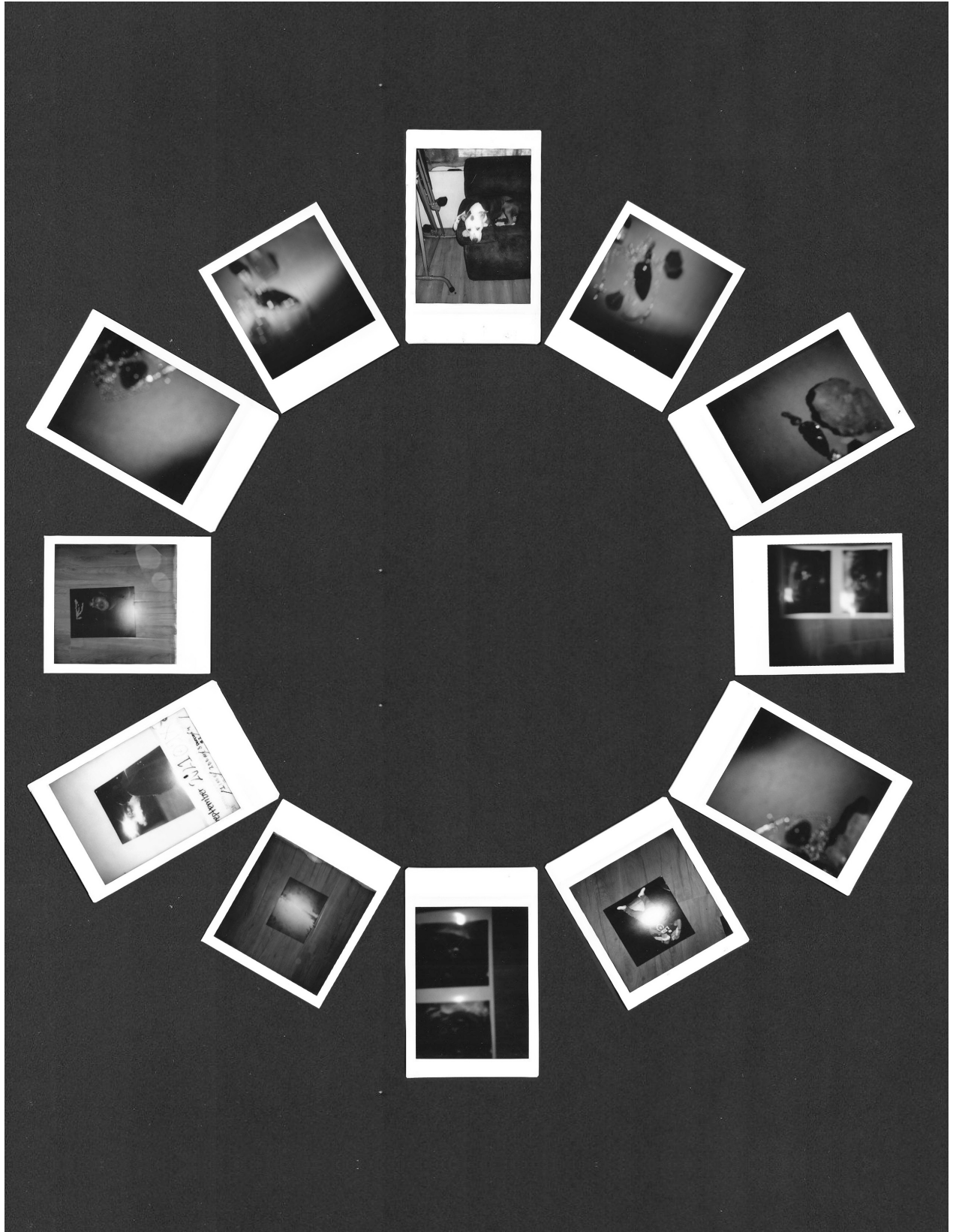
Mistakes can and will happen. Be kind to yourself. Allow yourself to make a transition from “training mode” by way of debriefing with colleagues or friends. You have sustained a space full of knowledge, thoughts, opinions, creativity and conversations and for that you deserve a round of applause and some chill time for you to regain all the energy that you gave during your presentation.



**TRAINER SIDEBAR:**

“Don’t sweat the small mishaps. Tech issues, forget a bullet point, mispronounce something—we all do this! No matter how many times we’ve run a training or how much experience we have, we’re human and it’s just going to happen. Don’t sweat it! Acknowledge that it happened, crack a joke, or just keep it moving. But those mistakes will show you’re human which will help you connect with the audience.”





Original artwork by Oswaldo Lira. Photo by Raúl Flores.

**Artwork by  
Creative Wellbeing  
Youth Content Advisor  
Oswaldo Lira**

“The purpose of my project was to capture the moments in my life that meant a lot to me.”

Reflecting on circles of support, Oswaldo Lira’s Polaroid photographs of the special people, places, objects, and picture-in-picture moments point to the possibilities for resourcing in everyday life.





Arts for Healing & Justice Network Member Organization Versa Style performing. Photo by Sylvanus Leone.

# Shared Wisdom from Teaching Artists

The Creative Wellbeing approach is shaped in large part by the skills, curiosities, sensibilities, and expertise of teaching artists. We have included interviews with three teaching artists who have facilitated Creative Wellbeing sessions. There is wisdom, nuance and understanding that comes from listening to a practitioner share about their process and practices. These artists speak directly to the questions, challenges and impact of healing-informed arts engagement. Highlights include:

**Teaching artistry is the artful, effective, engaging, successful, joyful, transformative, proven way to guide humans into and through artistic experiences that expand the sense of the way the world is or might be.**

Eric Booth

## **Jahanna Blunt, Program Director, Rhythm Arts Alliance, p. 80**

### **On Cultural Relevance:**

“I think it’s important to find the ties, find the connections, while still honoring the real history of these cultures and just showing that we are all the same more than we’re different... Not only can children and elders do the same thing, but we’re doing what our ancestors did, and being tied to them as well. It’s very powerful that you get to witness a piece of history, and that we’re also doing that when we do these dances and play these rhythms. And that’s cultural relevance, right? It’s not just this one-time thing, but it’s embedded into everything.”

## **Fabian Debora, Executive Director, Somos LA Arte / Homeboy Art Academy, p. 90**

### **On Healing-Centered Arts Engagement:**

“We’re not here to save lives. We’re here to serve life.” When we go there thinking we’re going to save somebody, you’re already being biased. It becomes prescriptive rather than organic. That’s two different things. “Saving” is stepping on their experience. “Serving” is meeting them where they are... As a facilitator, I ask, “How deep should I go, or how do I keep it on the surface enough for them to tap into something, but not go too deep?...” You reinforce and remind them of the goodness they shared, so they can feel confident in their vulnerability and are able to stand with it.

## **Andrea Ohlsen-Esparza, Former Program Coordinator, Write Girl/Bold Ink Writers, p. 104**

### **On the connection between Mental Health Promotion and Healing-Centered Arts Engagement:**

“What works best is asking people one question at a time. It helps people get past their fear... Making time to ask questions and see what emerges—leaving room for that is what makes the connection for me between suicide prevention, building young people up, and healing-informed arts.”

# Interview

# Jahanna Blunt

## Program Director, Rhythm Arts Alliance

Jahanna Blunt is a Los Angeles native and a child of two educators. She grew up practicing and performing West African music and dance and continued these studies while majoring in Theatre at LACHSA and UCLA. As Program Director of Rhythm Arts Alliance, she has been able to combine her scholarly upbringing with her cultural education to share her practice with much deserving, underserved communities, in the hopes of promoting a more culturally diverse and equitable society.

**CWT** CREATIVE WELLBEING TEAM: **Thank you for sharing some of the practices you bring to Creative Wellbeing workshops. How would you describe the flow of a workshop and the way participants connect to it?**

**JB** JAHANNA BLUNT: Rhythm Arts Alliance teaches drumming and dance. In the absence of drums, what can [participants] use? Well, they can use their own bodies. Not everyone has an instrument they can pull out, but everyone has a body.

I always start with polyvagal exercises followed by a warm-up of full-body stretching. Then, we do traditional dance movements, and I sometimes incorporate body percussion.

We always incorporate time for self-reflection after each activity. It is really great to see the transition that some people make from the beginning to the end of the class.

They don't always have to share. Sometimes we ask them to just write down their thoughts. Some of them say, "I didn't know that I was angry today, but when I started to write it down, that's the answer I gave myself." It's good just for them to identify what they were feeling in the moment. Movement is mostly outward expression. But at the end of our session, there's also a portion for internal reflection.





Jahanna Blunt. Photo by Rhythm Arts Alliance.

Whatever you choose to write is reflecting whatever is going on inside of you that you didn't necessarily want to share with the rest of the group. It's a little bit of self-discovery.

**CWT** **How would you describe the polyvagal exercises that start the workshop?**

**JB** I learned this from our Executive Director, Peter Walden. I am not an expert in Steven Porges's polyvagal theory, but my understanding is that the exercises are rooted in the vagus nerve, which runs along the spine from the top of the head to the base of the lower back. and is activated when we are responding to traumatic events in life. People have various responses—flight, fight, or freeze—and there are different parts of the body that are affiliated with each trauma response.

I found a way to connect them, because this is kind of like what we do in dance warm-ups. First, we brush our arms, which is an example of cross-body work that sends mixed signals to the brain.

Sending signals to the brain is important in calming a trauma response, because it's the opposite of what you would do in a traumatic situation. Fight, flight, and freeze get you to tense up, elevate your blood pressure—all the things that happen in your body when you feel threatened. These exercises help to slow everything down.

They send the mixed signal saying, "Oh, what's going on? We're okay." I guess because we are super relaxed right now, and doing the most unnecessary thing that a human body needs to do in a moment of crisis, it confuses the brain into thinking that everything is okay.

The polyvagal warm-up seems to be a huge hit, because—especially if I'm teaching dance and music, specifically—not everyone is comfortable dancing. Not everyone feels like they have good timing. [Creative Wellbeing workshops] are for teachers and parents who might not identify as artists or performers. The polyvagal warm-ups were a really good introduction because, not only did it address calming the nervous system, but it also introduced movement into their body in a non-intimidating way, and actually like a welcoming and relaxing way. I think that that was a good segue into what they might be less comfortable doing. It is always good to start in the chair and then have them stand up later—start from the top of the body and move downward. I get them out of their chairs in a gradual way, and find a way to make everything seamless.

**From Polyvagal Exercises to Traditional West African Dance**

**CWT** **What is the transition like going into traditional dance movements?**

**JB** We start with slow head turns. It's always amazing when you add rhythm to anything. It just adds this new dimension to whatever you're doing. I'll ask my partner to hop in with drumming, and then we do the movement in time. It synchronizes everyone in their homes when we are virtual.

We're suddenly all moving at the same time, and it creates this invisible connection right there.

I refer to the left and right. It's interesting because, in dance, we start off with just breathing in some technique classes. We incorporate rhythm and repetition to generate heat in the body. And then you pretty much do everything one time on the left and one time on the right, universal left side, right side.

West African movement has this type of repetition in it, so we can create a smooth transition. I've found movements and rhythms that are particularly meant for healing, so we're calling on the proper spirit, in an effort to be culturally appropriate. I introduce movement through the left and right repetition, and elaborate from there: adding arms, adding the head, or whatever else, add a turn. I add a bit more complicated movements each time as the class progresses.

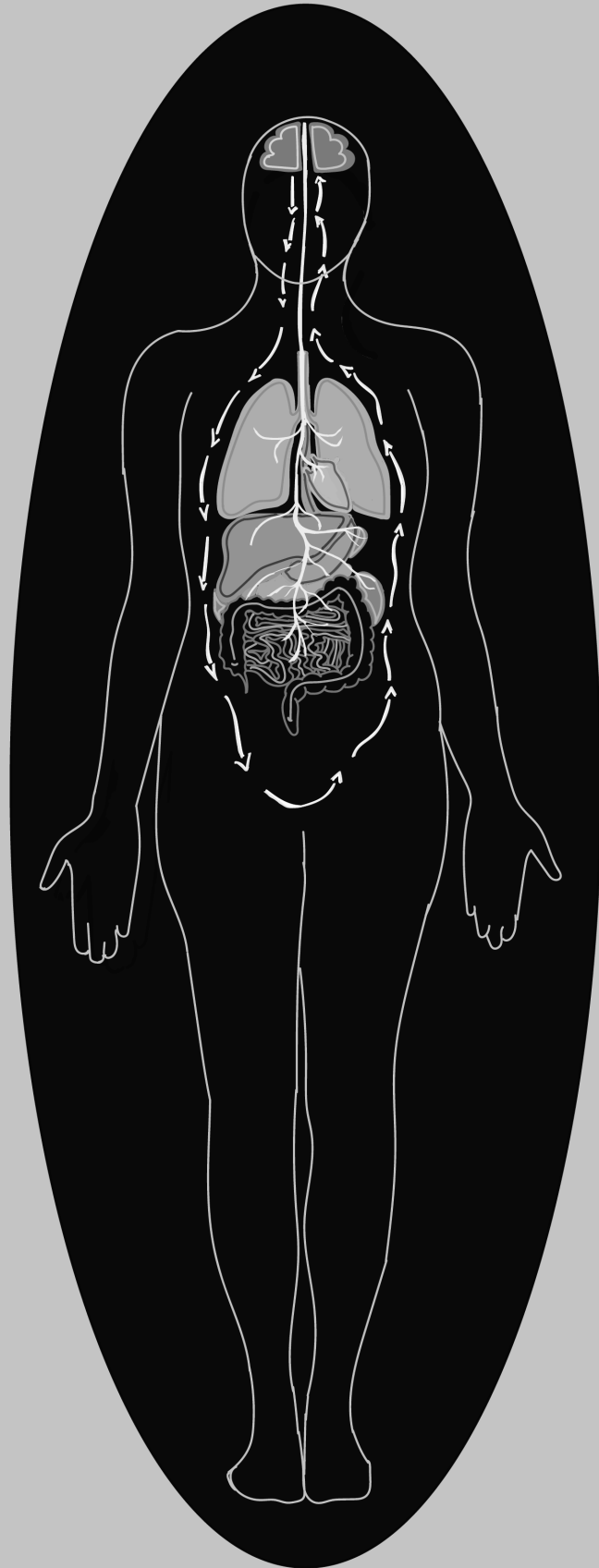
It starts off just from a very simple place of left and right, going slower to faster, and going from your own time to synchronizing time. We go from rhythmic warm-up into full blown dances bringing certain energies into the space.

**CWT** **One of the participants said that “dance humanizes” and “introduces worldviews into the classroom experience” that they didn’t feel comfortable exploring as an educator before the workshop. Another participant said they loved the way your workshops exposed her to a beautiful culture she did not know much about, but was able to connect to in her own movement. Could you share a little about how culturally responsive pedagogy is inherent to your work?**

**JB** Peter and I had a conversation about why it's important to teach cultural arts specifically and not in a Western context. It is unadulterated, pure. We try to be culturally accurate. Even if you think it's weird or funny or different—they should be as true to its original form as possible. I think the participant meant it humanizes the people that practice the movement.

So for someone who is not familiar with a certain culture, if you teach them a dance from that culture, you can step into that person's world. That's pretty much what art does. You bring people into your world and they can see your innermost thoughts and feelings. That is what we're trying to do when we teach this cultural art and [the participant] is not of this culture. You might realize this is difficult, or fun, or even healing. And you start to acknowledge and maybe even connect with the people who created this.

In the case of African music and dance thousands of years ago, they did this work that we don't have to today, because they found a way to heal themselves. As an outsider practicing it and giving it respect and your full undivided attention, you start to see the humanity in the people that created this, because you're literally putting yourself in their shoes. That is how we frame it—you're understanding the humanity of the people that created this dance that you're learning and practicing.



I also try to find imagery that we can connect to as Americans. For example, one movement I might do has arms that I'll call "the airplane arm." With West African traditional movement, it's always based on some community ritual or activity—a baby is born, harvesting crops, or the full moon is out tonight, and the tide is really high—a lot of movement imitates life—farming the land or honoring a higher power.

**Everyone understands farming and crops, feeding your family, and providing sustenance. We always give the proper meaning of the movement: the history of that rhythm, the region that it comes from, what it meant, and then connect it to what we have today.**

For example, there's movement, there's rhythms that are rite of passage rhythms. In West Africa, there are ceremonies where young men have to go out into the woods and survive.

That's their rite of passage, transitioning from childhood into adulthood. Here we have quinceañeras. We have Sweet 16. I find these American customs—which are from different cultures but still very American—tie into the rhythm that I'm teaching that day. Everyone has a rite of passage. We all go from childhood to adulthood. We all have birth and death, and the sun exists for all of us. The moon exists for all of us. Water. Universal themes, universal messages of healing. All of this is tied to gratitude as well.

**I think it's important to find the ties, find the connections while still honoring the real history of these cultures and just showing that we are alike more than we're different.**

**CWT I love what you're saying. When I was in West Africa, I was able to witness a community harvest millet, and then we watched them do the dance. It's a part of their everyday life. So when I hear you talk and I see you dance, what I'm hearing is that this should be a part of our everyday lives. Art is not something that we can just sprinkle on.**

**JB** That's the difference. We lost, coming to this place, that art is not a special discipline. You know, the cool thing is that millet has been a staple crop in West Africa for thousands of years. Ancestors being honored is also a thing that we miss here. You're literally doing the same thing that your ancestors did thousands of years ago, breathing the same air, practicing the same movement. It also humanizes our ancestors. When I think about a thousand years ago, I can't envision what they felt like walking down the street. There is no street. I always feel like it's just a different dimension.

But they were doing this movement, and

**I think that's really cool that we can make that connection. Not only can children and elders do the same thing, but we're doing what our ancestors did, and being tied to them as well. It's very**

powerful that you get to witness a piece of history, that's what we're doing when we dance and play these rhythms. And that's cultural relevance, right? It's not just this one-time thing, but it's embedded into everything.

**CWT** **How do you see the impact of these workshops on the adults that take part in Creative Wellbeing?**

**JB** What's really impactful for me is to see how affected people are by this. There was one woman who cried at the end. She said, "I just didn't realize how much tension I was holding before I did this."

I think it is also impactful to watch the transformation in someone who was not participating in the beginning. Especially when I get men up and moving their hips and comfortable with dancing (and not to say that women are not also shy), but we live in a society and a culture that teaches men not to be expressive. Our hips are always such a touchy subject. We warm up our necks. We warm up our shoulders. We warm up everything else. The hips are just another part of the body. I think the Polyvagal exercises flowing into the other exercises helps people be more comfortable with moving the rest of their body. I think it's really great to see people just in the space of one class go from, "I'm not doing this," or, "I don't feel comfortable being seen," to, "I'm happy to participate. I feel free. I feel connected."

I'm going to be honest with you. I'm so terrified and nervous and jittery every time I do these things. Maybe you can't tell, but I am. I feel this responsibility, and I feel this pressure to do well to create this experience for them. I'm not able to put my emotions into it. I have to stay business-minded, but also think about how I'm representing my culture of my ancestors. I feel this pressure. When I hear the reflections of the participants, it's actually a relief and lets me know that maybe I'm doing something right.

I forget that taking a moment to just breathe is this luxury that some people don't get to experience. Sometimes telling someone, "It's okay. Go ahead and breathe," gives them the permission they need.

**CWT** **I'm curious how do you, as an artist and as a facilitator, take care of yourself? How do you breathe?**

**JB** Well, I practice this on my own outside of teaching it.

Teaching and studying are very different experiences.

But, that's a great question. I go to dance class and I meditate. I do yoga, and I get a massage. I get a pedicure. I play with my nephew. He's two, and he shows me everything about the world that I did not know. Things like that. In my day-to-day life, I have to do things that keep me grounded.

I've been able to take trips to Africa and stay for a month or two. As far as West African dance, I make sure that I am diligent with my studies. I'm so hungry for the

knowledge. I have those moments where I release, almost like a punching bag. Some of this movement comes so naturally to me and is so freeing and demanding at the same time. When I'm totally spent at the end, that's when I feel the best, when I'm sore the next day. That's how I know that I released whatever I needed to. That's my self-care.

I'm so grateful that my parents raised us doing this, and we fought them and fought them. It was not a cool thing among many of my peers,, but it has come full circle. My parents raised us in a whole community that does this—all of my best friends I have known since birth—and we all do this together. Every birthday party, every wedding, every funeral. I have done this my whole life, so I always receive healing from it.

# Interview Insights From LA County Department of Mental Health (DMH)

Celeste Meza, LCSW and Daphne Quick-Abdullah

In therapy, a body scan exercise is a mindfulness practice that also starts with your head and moves down into your body. It can be pretty activating if you automatically start asking people to tell you their story, and there are all types of trauma in the body. For some people, it's in their hands. For some people, it's the left pinky toe. It's about having that connection between the body and feeling and just becoming more aware. These exercises reminded me a lot of grounding in relaxation, of being able to be centered and focused. Being attuned to what is going on in your body a lot of times translates into being able to access your feelings a lot quicker. It's not so much about our prefrontal cortex, thinking or functioning or organizing. It's a lot more about our reptilian brain. Where are you feeling?

Similar to these workshops, it's always good to incorporate two to three minutes of reflection at the end of any session. You need time usually to process a therapy session. What was the meaning? What are some insights?

Where are you right now? Reflection allows for integrating a lot of what you experience, what you're thinking and the identification of feeling. Working with kids or adults, a lot of times people know their basic emotions. I'm angry. I'm happy. If we look at those feelings, maybe it's not angry. Maybe I'm frustrated. Maybe right now I'm able to expand that vocabulary. Writing it down to me is very similar to journaling. Journaling doesn't have to be writing three paragraphs. Journaling is, "I have an idea and want to spit it out."



**As a facilitator, whether of music, movement, therapy—we really never know what a person is holding. Being able to release or exhale is just so powerful and so gratifying.**

## Interview

# Fabian Debora

**Executive Director, Somos LA Arte / Homeboy Art Academy**

Fabian Debora was born in El Paso, Texas, and began his career in 1995 as a member of the East Los Angeles Streetscapers. He was mentored by many Chicano artists and muralists and introduced to creative expressions of all forms, from graffiti and murals to sketching and fine art painting. Fabian's work has been showcased in solo and group exhibitions throughout the United States and abroad, including Santa Barbara, Los Angeles, Kansas City, Brooklyn, and throughout Latin America. Fabian served as a counselor and the Director of Substance Abuse Services & Programming as well as a mentor at Homeboy Industries in Los Angeles for a decade. He then moved on to work as Community Connection Director at Arts for Incarcerated Youth Network. He has now returned to Homeboy Industries as the Executive Director of Homeboy Art Academy pursuing and developing his vision to continue to serve the greater Los Angeles area, and abroad.





Image Credit Goes Here



**CWT** CREATIVE WELLBEING TEAM: **One of the powerful art experiences you create in Creative Wellbeing workshops is Count Them on the Palm of the Hand. Could you describe this exercise, and how it connects with participants?**

**FD** FABIAN DEBORA: Count Them on the Palm of the Hand was initiated when I was incarcerated. The idea came from conversations with a homie/cellie: “Hey, seriously, who can visit you? Who is there for you?” “The only one I know, dogg, to be honest with you, is my mom and my lady—they’re the only ones that have been there for me since day one.” I remember having those conversations.

When you think about the population we serve, we tend to lose sight of our resourcing. Resourcing really does exist within us if we just look a little closer.

It’s human nature that we want to take control of things. If it’s not driven by shame, if it’s not driven by guilt, then we don’t reach into those resources. “I’m not going to call my mom and let her know what I’m doing, because she doesn’t need to know those things.” This mindset blocks us from actually tapping into those resources.

When I do **Count Them on the Palm of your Hand (p. #)**, it’s a creative invitation to recall the memory of a kindergarten event—when you are in school, raise your hand, and do a tracing for a Thanksgiving turkey. It’s that simple. After you trace your hand, you can decorate the background to bring contrast and add any flavor behind it. The hand pops out, whether with swirls, stars, anything that may come to you. I usually give about 15 minutes, depending on time, to trace the hand and decorate it to make it their own.

This works well with the camps and juvenile halls. It’s important to help the little homies reconnect to resourcing, to the people who are actually in their corner. For adults, it serves as a reminder. The goal is to identify how many people are there for you through the palm of your hand. Is it all five? Is it one? Is it three? When I do this with the little homies who are incarcerated—some of them only have one, sometimes two. I tell them, “That’s ok, and it doesn’t matter. You may have all five. You may have one. But, I bet if we look deep enough, we can possibly find another and another.”

We place the person’s name and their relationship on each part of the hand, because people matter. We also include a gesture of what they provide. Here I have María, who is my mother, who is unconditional love and no judgment. José, my father who passed away—and I always remind [participants] the person could be in the physical or in the spirit world. Even though there was some negativity around us and our relationship, my father still gave me the knowledge and wisdom that I needed to survive the lifestyle. Maybe it’s a mentor. Maybe it’s a teacher of some sort, someone that has helped you along the way. Over here, I have Father Greg Boyle, who is my mentor and gave me compassionate love. Then, I have my wife Elizabeth, who gave me constant support. Maybe it’s not a loved one. Sometimes we have to lean on ourselves. If we don’t have people we can count on, then can it be you? If it’s you, what are some of those things you have discovered that have helped you along the way?

When they share their hand, it is packaged in a way.

Now you have created something that is tangible. This can live on your refrigerator. You can put this on your wall. Whenever you feel down and out, or going through some trial/tribulation, or even if you need to just check in, look and count them on the palm of your hand. There's your resources right there.

When was the last time you had a conversation with your father who passed away? When was the last time you picked up the phone and called mom to say, "Thank you for everything you've done?" Today, I challenge you to pick one from the hand and maybe reach out and let me know how that goes. That's a beautiful idea, and it came from the homies when we were locked up.

**CWT** **How would you describe some of the participants' responses to the project, and what are some of the healing-centered approaches you utilize when facilitating?**

**FD** You'd be shocked how some people are like, "Damn, I never thought about that. Honestly, I wanted to put like ten more people." It also invites them to share and feel proud talking about their loved ones, which probably hasn't happened, or rarely happens. It works on both ends.

This exercise is multi-tiered. You could do it as an icebreaker and a way for people to connect. I consider that a "Level One" exercise. It could move to a "Level Two," when I had people crying and really talking deeply about their loved ones. Sometimes, it even serves a "Level Three" exercise, especially when [participants] visit the spirit world. Sometimes we follow up with writing to a person who passed away, and maybe they haven't fully grieved. Sometimes this exercise could provoke it. So we have to be mindful and respectful when we set the tone according to the space, location, and the support in the group.

**I always keep in mind a trauma-informed approach in preparing prior to the exercise. As a facilitator, I ask, "How deep should I go, or how do I keep it on the surface enough for them to tap into something, but not go too deep?,"**

depending on what prompting questions I ask, depending on my voice, my volume, how I'm starting to set the tone, and how I model. If I model sharing something very deep and intimate, that's what I'm going to probably invite folks to do. If I don't want to trigger someone, or cause some sense of harm, I'll probably keep it minimal, especially if I don't have the space to follow up.

**Know the age group, the backgrounds of where they may come from, and the dynamics of the room. That's being culturally relevant right there.**

In a [Short-Term Residential Therapeutic Program for foster youth] where participants might have gone from one or more homes, how can you empower them to utilize this exercise, to really hone in on their resiliency? I take a lot of risks, and that's only because I have the clinical lens myself. I have a trauma-informed lens. For a teaching



Arts for Healing & Justice Network Member Organization Versa Style performing. Photo by Sylvanus Leone.

artist who may not have that clinical lens or at least a sense of experience around that, maybe this isn't the exercise to bring into a foster home right away.

Maybe I'll be able to say, "Let's make sure that as we close this up. If things keep lingering, my boy, reach out to Probation or whomever you have here as a support group."

**You reinforce and remind them of the goodness they shared, so they can feel confident in their vulnerability and are able to stand with it.**

If they feel shameful when they walk away, it might also create an association with weakness. I always remind them to only share what they're comfortable sharing. If they can't, that's okay. We invite you to show your hand—that's enough. You'd be surprised by the confidence they feel when there is a roll call on the hand.







\*AHJN Youth Advocate, Mora Greer, at an Arts for Healing and Justice Network summer 2021 event.

# Interview Insights From LA County Department of Mental Health (DMH)

**Celeste Meza, LCSW**

Count Them on the Palm of the Hand is a creative way of identifying what we typically call “circles of support.” Usually when we explore circles of support, people feel stuck. “I can’t think of a certain number of people. I don’t know who to put.” Using the palm of your hand creates a kind of focus. If a participant feels stuck and they can’t think of more than maybe two people, you can also ask, “What are some qualities that you have?” That’s when you can start looking into their own strengths/resiliency. If they have difficulties with that, then reframe it. “What are some things that people say they like about you, or what do you like about yourself?” Often I ask, “What is a gift? What is something you like to do?” When you find that something that you like to do—I like hiking—then what does that bring to you? What brings peace? Put that down on one of the fingers. Drawing allows for the opportunity to use the other side of your brain, and doing the background designs provides space to think about who or what am I going to add to each section without feeling pressure.



**FD** In one workshop, an Indigenous woman shared a lot from her hand, and she tapped into her culture. She tapped into her own medicine, talked about the ego, shared stories of what it's like to be an Indigenous woman and the things that she goes through. I just didn't want her to stop, honestly. I was like, "Keep going. I'm learning as you're speaking. You're reassuring everything that I was taught in ways that you just don't know." She said, "The Hummingbirds, they're the ones who keep me company, and I've been paying attention to them lately." When she finished, I had a hummingbird drawing right near me, and my way of reassuring her was to pick up the Hummingbird drawing and show it on screen as my offering to her. That sealed it. That helped to seal everything she shared. I wish I could come across her, because I think she has a lot to offer. That's how much of an impact she made on me—that's the beauty of it.

**CWT** **I feel like I'm hearing that the more healing-informed work you do, you go deeper into the healing process for yourself, and that it's a lifelong journey. Many of the Creative Wellbeing participants said they were also moved by the way you share your own experiences, how they resonate with their own lives, but also how they resonate with the lives of the youth they are teaching.**

**FD** Sometimes in the field of mental health, I come across self-disclosure. Self-disclosure is only given when it is for the benefit of the client. I think sometimes teaching artists can get stuck on how much disclosure they can give of themselves. I ask sometimes, "How is your self-disclosure going to benefit the dynamic of this group?" That comes from the clinical perspective and understanding trauma. When I share my lived experience, I'm already planning to see what I'm trying to provoke from the dynamic to kind of go there—and that's okay, because I'm okay with my story. I know not all teaching artists are there, but you don't have to have my experience to be able to make an impact. That's a misconception.

**As long as you're comfortable, as long as you're in your own healing and recovery—what are those discoveries of self that you made that have been beneficial to you and you can possibly utilize?**

If you're going to do the **Window to Your Soul project (p. 22)** in order to get something from the audience, you have to share. When we talk about a place, an object, when we talk about a person in your life, you have to be able to share some intimacy with the audience, or else it's just going to be flat air.

I have teaching artists, and we dialogue. We break bread and we sit around in a circle. "How would you do [the project]?" They get all shy and say, "I was going to do this..." I remind them, you have a story. Find a way to weave it.

**I challenge them to think of their own personal lived experience and then find those highlights and those aha moments that have made them. What is that place you go to? It's a rhythm. You're setting the tone. You're painting with words. You're creating as you're facilitating. That's what is going to make these workshops intentional and intimate. Let's get to what they're intended to, what they're designed to do.**

Sometimes, they are like, “[the participants] weren’t paying attention.” Okay? So what do you do? How do you de-escalate? How do you re-engage? How do you not judge? How do you find the strength within that moment to bring it back? There is strength in that. Only if you’re attentive, observant and listening—you can bring it back. This is the kind of support that is needed for a curriculum.

**CWT** **When you are choosing activities, or going into a space and reading a room, how do you gauge which questions you’re going to ask? How do you gauge how far you go based upon your audience?**

**FD** My formula is centered in the Homeboy Art Academy. I do my three Rs: reconnect, re-identify, and reimagine—that’s my scaffold. What am I putting in place to help folks reconnect? When you’re scaffolding, I would not ask anyone to do what I wouldn’t do. My introduction is to be vulnerable, share my story, set the tone, be an open book, and then begin to invite folks to that.

Now, how do we help folks reconnect with self and others? Window to Your Soul (pp...) helps do that, because we start to share commonalities. In a classroom of 15 or 20, you say, “Ok, cool. Now that you have been able to see that you’re not alone.” Your job is to make connections then ask, “How do I build on that?”

I don’t bank on it, but I give myself just enough information. If I am working with gang involved youth, they come from complex trauma, grief and loss, abandonment, neglect. I understand a lot of the repercussions or the hurt or whatever it is that that particular population can be carrying. When I think about foster youth, there are a lot of intersections. There might be a lot of resentment, a lack of self-esteem, a lack of confidence that might cause someone to place in the back of the mind what they feel. With folks who are a little more mature, I don’t have to work too hard, because some of our thoughts are already receptive, but some of our youth are not there yet.

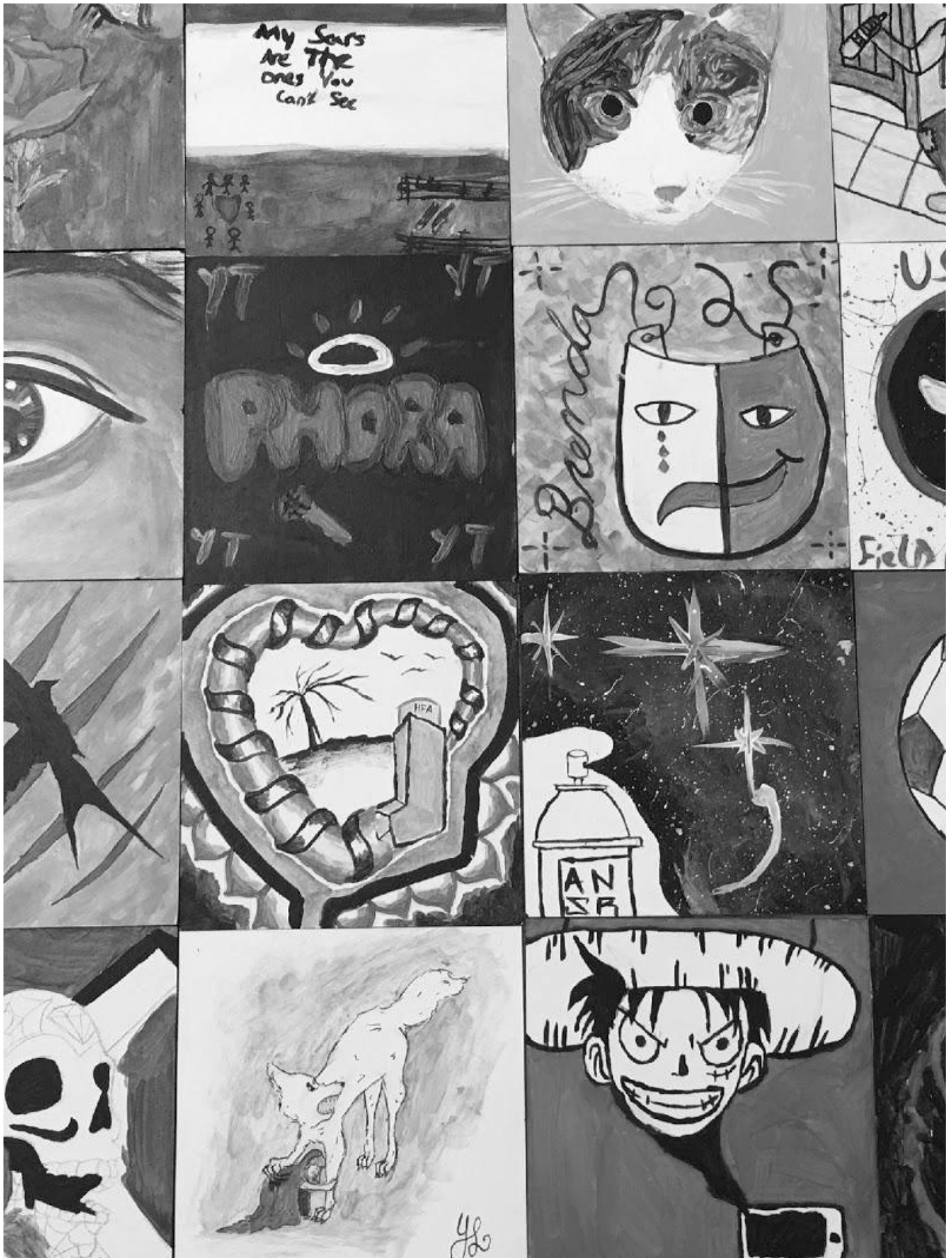
With gang-involved youth, I would even deliver Count Them on the Palm of Your Hand a different way. I say,

“Look, homie, I’m not here to ask you to leave the gang. I’m not here to say, ‘You’re going to leave the game.’ That’s not what I’m about.” I say, “I’m only here to walk with you as long as you need, and the minute you stop, then I take a pause and hope that you return.” Then I say, “As we’re walking, we’re going to be talking, as we’re talking, we’re going to be reflecting. Then, we can begin to imagine what it really looks like, and that is when you have your hand on the pulse.”

We do sage exercises. I bring in cultural knowledge, ancestral images, the heartbeat of the drum. Some of them come with wounds. Open the wound; tend to the wound; and then you close—that’s a very important ingredient, because if they leave with an open wound, it can cause a lot of harm. Everything is intentionally scaffolded.

**CWT** **How do you scaffold the healing process with the art-making process?**

**FD** I know there’s a deliverable. In a four-week session, I decided to instruct airbrushing. I have ten airbrushes laid out, and then I bring them through the historical knowledge



Window to Your Soul Community Mosaic created by Homeboy Art Academy participants. Photo by Fabian Debora.

of airbrushing. Growing up in the 80s, it's a hint of graffiti, and how we used to airbrush our clothing. We're going to invite you all to think about someone in your life who has passed away, and let's bring them into this space.

Once I set the tone, and we are in a circle, I ask, "What is their name? Can you say their name three times? Does it sound like them low-key?" Sometimes they respond, "It does. It's like I'm hearing him right now." Cool, so is that the person you want to memorialize? Now tell me more about them and tell us what it is that they did. They go out for a writing exercise. In our last week they airbrush a T-shirt with a quote that reminds them of the person. The goal is to dedicate that shirt to someone related to them.

Now they learn how to use the airbrush and use different techniques. Most importantly, they went through grief and loss, like a Memorial T-shirt.

**At the end of the day, it's about their lived experience. We want them not to be afraid of stepping from behind those experiences that have held them back for so long.**

So, how do we use the arts in that way? Make it okay to take a risk.

I think the curriculum was already designed since the age of six, because art was my refuge. When I think about reentry, when I think about trauma-informed care, I did that way back then. I don't know if spirituality is defined in mental health, but some of it has to be. I think it's at the center when we're doing this restorative practice. Spirituality is free. I think it's through my own experience and all I've been through, and how I was able to find my way and discover my way, because we didn't have resources in the 80s. My experience is not their experience. I must make room for their experience. But what are the common themes and threads that can actually provoke an emotion to take me there? And that's how I start to think. What is the common theme? How do I read into their lived experience?

It's playing music that they like and not knocking it. It's moving beyond the mindset that lettering contributes to symptomatic behavior of gang culture. If we can embrace them, but then challenge them, we can say, "You got it out of your system. It's already out. All right, let me pull the paper. Now, let's begin to think about how we can take that letter, and let's add this."

Recently, I've been doing healing circles and before we started, [the participants] got into a fight. I'm just right there just waiting. Probation is trying to get them all to sit down. They come back to the camera, and I wasn't giving them what they were seeking—an exaggerated response. They sat down and asked if it was my painting behind me. That was my hook. I said, "Let me show you more," and I started walking around my studio, showing them all the artwork and breaking it down. Sometimes I talk to them sternly, beautifully, calmly. Then, they all make a commitment. Next week, you got us for an hour. I don't think I will be the center of attention, but at least I hook them.

We can make them, or we can break them, depending on the level of facilitation, experience, and delivery. That's something to think about as a teaching artist.

**“We’re not here to save lives. We’re here to serve life.”**  
**When we go there thinking we’re going to save somebody, you’re already being biased. It becomes prescriptive rather than organic. That’s two different things. “Saving” is stepping on their experience. “Serving” is meeting them where they are.**

**Fabian Debora**



## Interview

# Andrea Ohlsen-Esparza

**Former Coordinator, Write Girl/Bold Ink**

Andrea Ohlsen-Esparza is currently the Middle & High School Specialist for Young Storytellers. She previously worked as a Program Coordinator for WriteGirl, developing curriculum leading creative writing workshops, and overseeing participation of teaching artists and special guests. She has a wide variety of experiences in the nonprofit field from creating email campaigns for LA's BEST to leading bilingual literacy classes for parents with the Boys and Girls Club. She has an intense passion for the arts and is a trained improvisational actor/comedian and co-hosts frequent live shows. She has a BA in Anthropology from California State University, Dominguez Hills with a Minor in Theater Performance.







Andrea Ohlsen-Esparza, image courtesy of the artist.

**CWT Thank you for sharing about practices you bring to Creative Wellbeing. Your experiences have been diverse, including professional development for educators and healing-informed arts sessions for foster youth in congregational care. Can you describe how your facilitation process works in one of those spaces?**

**AOE** ANDREA OHLSEN-ESPARZA: We (WriteGirl) led at least 10 virtual Teachers' Space workshops in 2021. Each one had a theme, like memoir. We followed a very set structure that we would adapt for each session.

We always had an opening warm-up question, something to create a nice warm energy and linked to the day's theme like, "tell us a catch phrase from a loved one."

Next, we would briefly review our agenda, set community agreements, and then move into a writing experiment. For example, for memoir we led "scented memories," where we played short video clips (like a steaming cup of tea, a forest, a warming fire) and invite folks to share in the chat a memory inspired by this video or image.

**We used the activity to introduce the mental health promotion concept of protective factors** and invite teachers to reflect on how recalling positive memories and protective factors might be linked. The most important part is to specifically acknowledge those connections out loud. It goes something like this—"we asked you to explore a memory and share specific details of that memory in the chat, now that you've shared and saw others' responses—what happened?" This opens an invitation for people to start naming how they feel. After a few minutes of reflection, next we would offer a few variations on the activity and suggestions for adapting it for different grade levels and subjects.

For the rest of the session, we build and usually do about two more writing experiments—the key is to know your audience and to tailor according to the needs of the group. We learned to gather more about participants' needs from the pre-surveys, and sometimes we would just ask, "tell us in the chat what are you teaching, and what do you hope to get out of this workshop?"

Each session always included self-care/grounding activities and then a discussion about how they might want to use any of these practices in their class or for themselves.

For the closing, we did a quick review of the whole, uplifting a few highlights, mentioning a few things we may have left out. We'd take a moment to ask if anyone has any questions, and we would always end with a closing chat question to bookend. That is basically how we did all 10 spaces.

**CWT Can you describe a few of those self-care moments?**

**AOE** We did tapping for emotional grounding, you can read more about the technique here. We also created something called "Statues," which involves showing a series of images of dynamic statues and inviting folks to hold each pose for about 10 seconds. I would always research the science behind the self-care activities and share juicy tidbits about the science to make sure they understood why and how it worked.



For self-care and grounding it's often about focusing on the senses, dancing/movement, mirror games, tongue twisters, anything that explores different types of meditation, breathing.

Anything you can do that gets you out of your head is grounding.

Many of these activities connect different parts of your brain at once, like dancing to music, so they call it double pleasure. That's why it's so fun to connect the arts with mental health. As an artist I know why art works, but sometimes I lack the knowledge to fully appreciate the mental health aspects of it. It's like learning new vocabulary and being able to merge new information—to see how this art thing fits this mental health thing and 10 out of 10 it fits, you just have to see which parts fit, and that's what we're doing right?

**CWT** **When you were doing your research, was there anything from the mental health side that you found surprising or would need more support with?**

**AOE** I did the Department of Mental Health's suicide prevention training workshops, and I found that work surprising. I realized that I lacked a lot of knowledge, even though I thought I was pretty knowledgeable about the subject. I was really emotionally impacted by that a lot.

**CWT** **Coming out of the suicide prevention trainings, has it shifted some of the way you approach your work as a teaching artist?**

**AOE** Yes, the listening aspect really struck me. I gained a new appreciation that all people really want is to be listened to. It's really important to recognize that's what's happening each time we ask people to share. In the past, sometimes with the (juvenile) camps and halls there were times when I wanted our workshop to be a fun light moment where they can escape the heavy stuff and have lots of fun. This training reminded me of the importance of listening and what if this is the only hour that someone is listening to them?

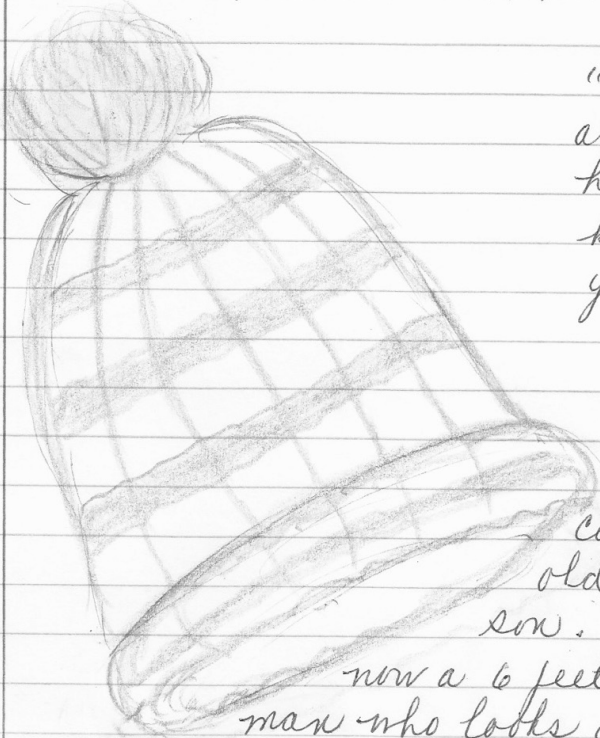
Making time to ask questions and see what emerges—leaving room for that is what makes the connection for me between suicide prevention, building young people up, and healing-informed arts.

**CWT** **You were also involved in the virtual adaptation of the Creative Wellbeing professional development curriculum. The training was spread over the course of a week with facilitated morning sessions on Monday, Wednesday and Friday, and self-guided independent art assignments on Tuesday and Thursday. The participants created such beautiful art. Can you share how you prompted some of these projects, like “One of the Oldest Things I Own” and “Dedication for Someone I Admire?”**

**AOE** What works best is asking people one question at a time. It helps people get past their fear.

Writing can make people so nervous. We have to do work in order to ease fears. The prompt “write about one of the oldest things you own” offers a way in. Also, we always use personal examples. We have WriteGirl anthologies and use examples of

One of the Oldest Things I Own  
Helene - 6/18/2020



"There really are places in the heart you don't know exist until you love a child"  
— Anne Lamott

This tiny and very soft baby cap is 25 years old, the age of my son. My son is now a 6 feet 3 inches young man who looks a little bit like a football player, but he once weigh 4 pounds... He was born over 7 weeks early, for no apparent reason, and spent the first month of his life in the ICU. I would have given my right arm to save him, but I didn't have to. He made it! And I can use both of my arms to hug him each time I see him.

This baby cap represents vulnerability and strength at the same time. It represents the kindness and generosity of the staff at the hospital. Most of all, it is a reminder of the ~~love~~ depth of Love that I discover when my son was born.

what the teens have written. It always helps young people when they hear another teen's voice. And, it is ok to adjust the prompt and/or to scaffold. We might start by asking "think of an item you've held on to?" Sometimes people have an immediate answer, others don't have one, they don't hang on, and there's probably a story there as well. You might ask "what's something you've held on to that you really care about?" The next question might be, "Can you literally describe it to us, give us all the details: what are the colors, how does it smell?" Go through all the senses. "If you tap it, does it make a sound? If you touch it, how does it feel on your fingers? Write that down." We take them sense by sense, and that provides a bunch of stuff to work with. Then you ask, "Tell me about it? Why do you care about it?" By doing this in steps you build it up and get them excited to answer the harder question which is essentially—"tell me about your feelings." And that's the hardest question, usually, for everyone.

**CWT This prompt can provide an invitation for folks to share about their lived experience, culture and traditions. Have you noticed this exercise opens up new conversations and understanding?**

**AOE** Yes. There are items that get passed down a lot—jewelry, rings, baby blankets—and so many stories emerge. I do remember one particular youth shared that he comes from Samoan culture, and that his family is from a certain village where his great grandfather was a chief. Although I don't recall the item passed down, I do recall learning all this about him, and I noticed how much care he took as he shared the story. He had talked about (being Samoan) before, but to get that historical connection to his ancestors was a good thing. I also remember this young person really exhibited good leadership qualities, and it was fun to trace the connection to his ancestors and affirm those positive connections. Perhaps the biggest thing is being able to hear aspects from folks' lives that they wouldn't usually share because it's personal, right? But that's what art can do.

It's the asking them to share a story about an object that leads to them to indirectly sharing about themselves and that helps create a warmer space.

**CWT What a beautiful story. How about when participants are hesitant to share? What kind of strategies have you used to make people feel more comfortable?**

**AOE** If I'm hit with silence,

I always share first and role model my own vulnerability and honesty.

Those community agreements can really help, too, emphasizing there are no wrong answers and repeating it again and again.

It's important to use agreements for both youth and adults.

For some reason self-deprecation for adults is allowed, but it's a big no-no for me. It's a big thing that needs to be stated with adults more than the teens. The teens will do it, but the adults will really beat themselves up. Remind them there are no right answers, no self-deprecation, and to be kind to yourself. It also helps to review the

agreements right before you invite people to share. People will ask me “should I do this or this?” and I say you can do it anyway—there is no way to do it correctly, it’s art baby there are no wrong answers!

**CWT As adults, we tend to shy away from creative risk-taking and people need encouragement that it’s ok to fail. It’s especially important for adults to remember and embrace this because they are role models for students.**

**AOE** Exactly.

**CWT Can you share about your work with foster youth in congregate care sites like Short-Term Residential Therapeutic Programs (STRTPs)?**

**AOE** I worked with a group of teens girls, ages 14–17, who were drawn from three different STRTP sites. It was a completely different type of environment than I’ve worked in before. There were a lot of adults, but the adults were doing different things and were not necessarily engaged and participating. There is something that shifts the dynamic when there are so many adults in the room, and questions emerge like who is in charge? How do you clarify who is leading? Or, if I need to ask someone to hold on and let someone else speak, is it my role to do that, or that adult, or that one? You have to speak to all the staff and clarify roles so you can set it up correctly. You have to recognize how young people will talk about things that may be shocking (i.e. drug use, sex, violence etc.) and to not let the adults stigmatize or shame them with their reactions. The community agreements have to be extra strong and there’s a lot more need to repeat them. Also,

**when the first person shares, make sure to focus on giving encouraging feedback. Soon, almost everyone wants to share because they want good feedback, too.**

This STRTP group was particularly hard because there were many cliques. It’s the cliquy age, but they all live together, so it’s much more intense, and the cliques were a barrier. You need as much info about the group as possible before you start. If I had known, maybe I would have talked longer with the staff member about the dynamics of the group. I didn’t know that three of the girls were bullying one girl actively all the time. If I had known, I would have brought different activities, or done the seating differently, and made other choices. I met with them twice and learned a lot in those two meetings. I learned of the bullying because of the writing. The one being bullied wrote about it, and the other three got upset. I’ve seen bullying, but this was different. I’ve seen cases where someone says “oh, you wrote that blah, blah, blah,” and tries to bring down someone’s writing. You can easily turn that off at that moment—you can easily address it and remind everyone about community agreements and respect. As long as you do it instantly and consistently, and remind everyone that this is a space where we don’t do that, it works. But this was an extreme instance where that background would have really helped. I learned a lot.

On the flipside, the main staff member I communicated with was always thanking me. She really liked the work, despite the bumps. She seemed almost surprised that I wasn’t scared off by it. It seems like they have had instances where other service providers may have left.



Arts for Healing & Justice Network Staff and Youth Members. Photo by Sylvanus Leone.

I really appreciate the work I've done with my colleagues at AHJN to learn to handle ourselves in these situations, and to always recognize that we are working with teens, and that all (teens) want is to be heard. It's so important to have artists like us in these spaces, who recognize that these teens have faced many challenges.

In the STRTP space, teens are lacking a lot of protective factors, and they will speak to it. They shared with me all the things they are upset about, because they just want an adult to hear them. That's a very emotional space for me, honestly. I feel for everyone. It was intense, and a lot of self-care had to go in between those sessions, because I always want to do more. I wanted to share this as a reminder as you go and think about how you want to work in that space.

# Interview Insights From LA County Department of Mental Health (DMH)

## Celeste Meza, LCSW

The group process that Andrea describes is similar to how we would set up and run a group with various clients; including the quick check to begin, establishing rapport amongst the group members, and establishing an agenda to help orient participants. The creation of community agreements is similar to how we incorporate group rules to promote confidentiality, and understand boundaries, as well as begin building trust between participants. Also, including a self care/grounding exercise and processing if/how one may implement it is an excellent way to help participants implement skills introduced during Creative Wellbeing sessions.

**Andrea is spot-on when she explains how simply listening and connecting can be incredibly powerful and can help save a life.**

For Creative Wellbeing sessions, we recommend that facilitators browse and download one/some of the mental health promotion resources on p. # and save the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline number: 800-273-8255, and starting July 2022 the new number to call/text/chat will be **988**, on their phone so it's easily accessible if it were ever needed for themselves to speak to someone, or to get guidance and coaching on how to support someone in crisis, as well as to have it easily accessible to share as a resource with anyone who may be in crisis.

Being seen, heard and understood is so valuable in preventing suicides. The activity Andrea describes—to share something old—is a great example of making brave space for vulnerability, and for participants to practice active listening and connecting skills. Activities like this provide invitations for people to express joy and celebrate memories, but also opportunities to share, reveal, and sometimes disclose that they are hurting and are in need of support.

The self-awareness that Andrea carries as a provider, and her ability to recognize a need to debrief and practice self-care after such emotionally heavy workshops is important. The act of sharing about this also helps model for the adults in the school/agency that are working with young people to tap into their own self-awareness and grow their own toolkits for self-care.





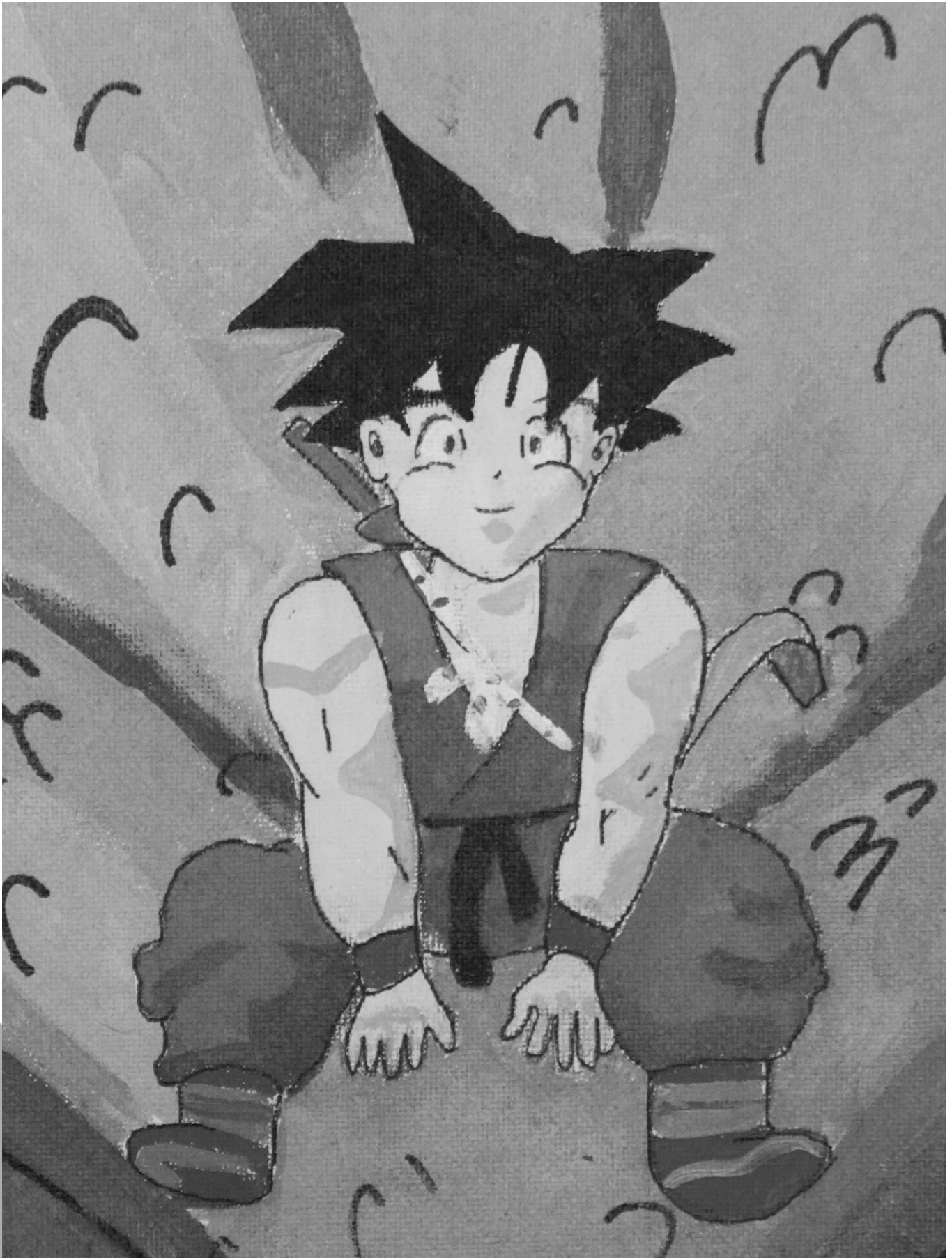
Whittier City School District Students with Creative Wellbeing Artists-in-Residence Frankie and Stunts from No Easy Props. Photo by Elisabeth Nails.

**Artwork by  
Creative Wellbeing  
Youth Content Advisor**

# **Agustín Herrera**

“I want people to understand that there will always be a journey that will try to beat you to your last but you have to look into your inner spirit to be able to conquer every battle you go through.”

Agustín Herrera's painting of Goku from Dragon Ball Z looks to popular culture for symbols and stories of strength when faced with challenges and loss.



Original artwork by Agustín Herrera. Photo by Raúl Flores.

# Glossary of Concepts

Part One: A Deeper Dive into Creative Wellbeing's  
Four Foundational Concepts





DJ So California, sponsored by Youth Justice Coalition at an Arts for Healing & Justice Network summer 2021 event. Photo by Sylvanus Leone.



# Healing Centered Arts Engagement

Healing-Centered Arts Engagement is an asset-based approach to arts education aimed at the holistic restoration of an individual's well-being; it is strengths-based and seeks to promote resilience and healing from traumatic environments and experiences (Ginwright, 2018.)

The Arts for Healing and Justice Network has incorporated this into the core of its work. The very foundation of AHJN's organization and its practices are rooted in healing-centered engagement and facilitation. Using arts as a vehicle, AHJN programs aim to be asset-based, strive to provide young people and adults who serve young people with tools to be agents in their own healing, and work to be culturally-grounded through all of its practices.

The field of youth development continually evolves to better address the challenges that young people face growing up in communities worldwide. Dr. Shawn Ginwright (2018) coined "healing-centered engagement" (HCE). In his influential 2018 article, *The Future of Healing*, he outlined key elements that make up this new approach:

## **Healing-Centered Arts Engagement:**

- + Views communities and individuals who experience trauma as agents in their own healing
- + Is asset driven and focuses on the wellbeing we want, rather than symptoms we want to suppress
- + Supports adult providers with their own healing and well-being
- + Is culturally-grounded and views healing as the restoration of identity, especially for people who have experienced having aspects of their identity marginalized and potentially traumatic
- + Acknowledges that individual and collective wellbeing is impacted by systems, and our systems suffer from implicit and explicit bias, systemic racism, and other forms of systematic marginalization

HCE acknowledges that for many young People of Color trauma is not just something that occurred, it's ongoing trauma exposure, a toxic environment fueled by systemic racism and inequality. HCE acknowledges that a complex web of systems touches our lives, and the lives of young people even more so. The systems can engender

positive, negative or neutral feelings about the world in young people, depending on the quality of their relationships with these systems. Healing-centered engagement invites us to examine our relationships to systems and explore how we can influence young people—and entire communities—to create alternative approaches.

The LA County Department of Arts & Culture commissioned the research consultants VPR to conduct a Literature Review on HCE. In a series of interviews, practitioners shared powerful healing practices with young people that were often coupled with stories of the practitioners' own personal healing. Beginning the process of healing oneself before working with others to heal themselves emerged as an important theme (Rojas & Trinidad, 2021). For more details please see VPR's zine: Healing-Centered Engagement: Reflections and Insights From the Field (link below).

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## Citations

Ginwright, S. (2018, May 31). The Future of Healing: Shifting From Trauma Informed Care to Healing Centered Engagement. Medium. <https://ginwright.medium.com/the-future-of-healing-shifting-from-trauma-informed-care-to-healing-centered-engagement-634f557ce69c>.

Perera Rojas, V., & Trinidad, R. (2021). Healing Centered Engagement: Literature Review Synthesis Findings. Los Angeles County Department of Arts & Culture.

## Additional Resources/Reading

Components of an Arts Education and Student Wellness Ecosystem, Arts Education Partnership (AEP) & Education Commission of the States.

[https://www.ecs.org/components-of-an-arts-education-and-student-wellness-ecosystem/?utm\\_source=ECS+Subscribers&utm\\_campaign=315b5ed402-NEW+FROM+AEP+11+17+2021+COPY+01&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_term=0\\_1a2b00b930-315b5ed402-62596655](https://www.ecs.org/components-of-an-arts-education-and-student-wellness-ecosystem/?utm_source=ECS+Subscribers&utm_campaign=315b5ed402-NEW+FROM+AEP+11+17+2021+COPY+01&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_1a2b00b930-315b5ed402-62596655)

Healing-Centered Engagement: Reflections and Insights from the Field, Los Angeles County Department of Arts & Culture & VPR Consultants.

<https://www.lacountyartsedcollective.org/research-evaluation/reports/healing-centered-engagement>

Frameworks for Healing-Centered Arts Instruction, Los Angeles County Department of Arts & Culture.

[https://www.lacountyarts.org/sites/default/files/frameworks\\_for\\_healing-informed\\_arts\\_engagement\\_1.pdf](https://www.lacountyarts.org/sites/default/files/frameworks_for_healing-informed_arts_engagement_1.pdf)



# Mental Health Promotion

Mental health promotion works to encourage and increase protective factors and healthy behaviors that can help prevent the onset of a diagnosable mental disorder, and reduce risk factors that can lead to the development of a mental disorder (Youth.Gov, 2021).

According to the World Health Organization (WHO, 2021), “mental health promotion interventions improve overall wellbeing and are delivered in the settings where people live, work, learn, and thrive...in order to maximize impact, mental health promotion activities must be linked closely with mental health services, and engage a variety of health and non-health (e.g. education, labor, social welfare, justice, environment, etc.) sectors.”

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## Citations

Youth.Gov. (2021). Mental Health Promotion and Prevention.

<https://youth.gov/youth-topics/youth-mental-health/mental-health-promotion-prevention>

World Health Organization. (2021). Promoting Mental Health.

<https://www.who.int/westernpacific/activities/promoting-mental-health>

## Additional Resources/Reading

Back to School Toolkit, Mental Health America

An excellent resource that is free with registration:

<https://www.mhanational.org/back-school>

Century Community Charter School Wellness Resources/Recursos de Bienestar

<http://centurycommunitycharter.weebly.com/resources.html>

Mental Health Promotion and Prevention, Youth.Gov

<https://youth.gov/youth-topics/youth-mental-health/mental-health-promotion-prevention>



Mental Health Resources, California Department of Education  
<https://www.cde.ca.gov/ls/cg/mh/mhresources.asp>

Promoting Mental Health, World Health Organization  
<https://www.who.int/westernpacific/activities/promoting-mental-health>

Promotion of Mental Health and Wellbeing Toolkit, Heard Alliance  
<https://www.heardalliance.org/help-toolkit-promotion/>

Protecting Youth Mental Health, The United States Surgeon General's 2021 Advisory  
<https://www.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/surgeon-general-youth-mental-health-advisory.pdf>

Wellbeing 4 LA Learning Center, DMH+UCLA Prevention Center of Excellence  
Access to an expansive library of training and resources is free with registration:  
<https://www.wellbeing4la.org/>

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Creative Wellbeing focuses on the following four areas of mental health promotion:

## **1. Increasing Awareness of Protective & Risk Factors**

Protective and Risk factors are individual or environmental characteristics, conditions, or behaviors that reduce or increase the effects of stressful life events. These factors also increase or decrease an individual's ability to address risks or hazards, and promote social and emotional competence to thrive in all aspects of life, now and in the future. Examples of protective factors include: parental resilience, social connections, concrete support in times of need, knowledge of parenting and child development, as well as social and emotional competence of a child.

### **Additional Resources/Reading**

Creative Wellbeing: Arts, Schools, and Resilience Professional Development Training Facilitators Guide, Los Angeles County Department of Arts & Culture, Office of Child Protection, Department of Mental Health, and Arts for Healing & Justice Network  
[https://www.lacountyartsedcollective.org/sites/lacaec/files/cw\\_facilitators\\_guide\\_final\\_.pdf](https://www.lacountyartsedcollective.org/sites/lacaec/files/cw_facilitators_guide_final_.pdf)

Protective Factors - Adolescent and School Health, CDC.gov  
<https://youth.gov/youth-topics/youth-mental-health/risk-and-protective-factors-youth>

Core Meanings of the Strengthening Families Framework's Protective Factors,  
Center for the Study of Social Policy  
<https://cssp.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/Core-Meanings-of-the-SF-Protective-Factors-2015.pdf>

Paving the Road to Safety for our Children: A Prevention Plan for Los Angeles County,  
(p. 6), Los Angeles County Office of Child Protection  
[http://ocp.lacounty.gov/Portals/OCP/PDF/Reports%20and%20Communication/Prevention%20Plan/01%20Paving%20the%20Road%20to%20Safety%20for%20Our%20Children%20\(06-30-2017\).pdf.pdf?ver=2018-10-24-083728-787](http://ocp.lacounty.gov/Portals/OCP/PDF/Reports%20and%20Communication/Prevention%20Plan/01%20Paving%20the%20Road%20to%20Safety%20for%20Our%20Children%20(06-30-2017).pdf.pdf?ver=2018-10-24-083728-787)

Risk and Protective Factors from a Substance Use Perspective, Substance Abuse and  
Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA)  
<https://www.samhsa.gov/sites/default/files/20190718-samhsa-risk-protective-factors.pdf>

Risk and Protective Factors Graphic, New Brunswick Health Council  
<https://nbhc.ca/sites/default/files/assets/images/protective%20factors%20infographic.jp>

## 2. Mental Health Stigma & Stigma Reduction

Stigma causes people to feel ashamed for something that is out of their control. Worst of all, stigma often prevents people from seeking the help they need. For a group of people who already carry such a heavy burden, stigma amplifies their pain. Raising awareness about and reducing stigma is an important way to promote mental wellbeing and communities of care.

### Additional Resources/Reading

Addressing Stigma, The Centre for Addiction and Mental Health  
<https://www.camh.ca/en/driving-change/addressing-stigma>

Creative Wellbeing: Arts, Schools, and Resilience Professional Development Training Facilitators Guide, (p. 17) Los Angeles County Department of Arts & Culture, Office of Child Protection, Department of Mental Health, and Arts for Healing & Justice Network  
[https://www.lacountyarts.org/sites/default/files/creative\\_wellbeing\\_facilitators\\_guide\\_final\\_reduced\\_pdf\\_size.pdf](https://www.lacountyarts.org/sites/default/files/creative_wellbeing_facilitators_guide_final_reduced_pdf_size.pdf)

4 Ways Culture Impacts Mental Health, Mental Health First Aid  
<https://www.mentalhealthfirstaid.org/2019/07/four-ways-culture-impacts-mental-health/>

9 Ways to Fight Mental Health Stigma, National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI)  
<https://www.nami.org/blogs/nami-blog/october-2017/9-ways-to-fight-mental-health-stigma>

### 3. Understanding Typical Adolescent Behavior

Adolescence is the period of transition between childhood and adulthood. It includes some big changes—to the body, and to the way a young person relates to the world. The many physical, sexual, cognitive, social, and emotional changes that happen during this time can bring anticipation and anxiety for young people and their families. Understanding what is “typical” and what to expect at different stages can help adults who work with young people to better understand and provide a supportive and empathetic response to young people. Also, helping young people understand what is “typical” may help them navigate the rapid and unfamiliar changes they may be experiencing.

#### Additional Resources/Reading

ABCs of Adolescent Development, National Institutes of Health (NIH)  
<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC548185/>

The Adolescent Brain (4 min), Dan Siegel  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0O1u5OE5eY>

Creative Wellbeing: Arts, Schools, and Resilience Professional Development Training Facilitators Guide, (p. 24) Los Angeles County Department of Arts & Culture, Office of Child Protection, Department of Mental Health, and Arts for Healing & Justice Network  
[https://www.lacountyarts.org/sites/default/files/creative\\_wellbeing\\_facilitators\\_guide\\_final\\_reduced\\_pdf\\_size.pdf](https://www.lacountyarts.org/sites/default/files/creative_wellbeing_facilitators_guide_final_reduced_pdf_size.pdf)

Stages of Adolescence, Healthy Children  
<https://www.healthychildren.org/English/ages-stages/teen/Pages/Stages-of-Adolescence.aspx>

### 4. Nurturing Confidence in Offering and Receiving Support

Feeling informed and prepared to support a young person in crisis is an important part of nurturing a culture of asking for and receiving support. If adult comfort level is low, young people may sense it and not seek support. Also, adults may not know what signs to be on the lookout for that indicate a young person may be struggling. Adults may mis-interpret signs as “bad behavior” instead of indications that a young person may be seeking support or help. The Creative Wellbeing curriculum incorporates the Change Direction campaign’s tools:

- + Know the 5 Signs Help is Needed
- + 5 Ways to Help
- + 5 Habits of Emotional Wellbeing

## **Additional Resources/Reading**

Creative Wellbeing: Arts, Schools, and Resilience Professional Development Training Facilitators Guide, (p. 29) Los Angeles County Department of Arts & Culture, Office of Child Protection, Department of Mental Health, and Arts for Healing & Justice Network

[https://www.lacountyarts.org/sites/default/files/creative\\_wellbeing\\_facilitators\\_guide\\_final\\_reduced\\_pdf\\_size.pdf](https://www.lacountyarts.org/sites/default/files/creative_wellbeing_facilitators_guide_final_reduced_pdf_size.pdf)

Change Direction Campaign Tools and Resources, Give An Hour

<https://giveanhour.org/changedirection/>







# Culturally Relevant Pedagogy

Culturally Relevant Pedagogy (CRP) is a theoretical model that focuses on multiple aspects of student achievement and supports students to feel affirmed by their cultural identities. Culturally Relevant Pedagogy also calls for students to develop critical perspectives that challenge societal inequalities.

In the early 90s Gloria Ladson-Billings proposed three main components of Culturally Relevant Pedagogy: (a) a focus on student learning and academic success, (b) developing students' cultural competence to assist students in developing positive ethnic and social identities, and (c) supporting students' critical consciousness or their ability to recognize and critique societal inequalities. All three components work in tandem with one another, and it is important to include all three.

On a related note, Culturally Relevant, Sustaining and Revitalizing High Quality Instruction includes asset-based teaching practices that view diversity in thought, culture, and traits as strengths.

- + Instruction is designed to accept and affirm the backgrounds of students of color (Culturally Relevant).
- + The learning experience invites students' cultural knowledge, prior experiences, and frames of reference (Culturally Responsive).
- + Instruction sustains cultural ways of being in communities of color while supporting students to critique dominant power structures in society (Culturally Sustaining).

## Important Considerations:

- + We all bring our culture/s with us wherever we go, we have to know ourselves before we know others—do the work to be aware of what you bring/who you are.
- + It is not enough to simply respond to students' cultures and languages but to sustain them by ensuring that the students, their languages and their cultures are at the center of the teaching. Intentionally craft a learning environment in the classroom that includes all experiences and uplifts all voices will help to ensure that students of color's culture and language are not devalued or seen as a deficit.
- + Create empowering environments for students, where their thoughts, culture, and identities matter and that the classroom, community, and world are richer for their inclusion.

- + Culturally Responsive Teaching requires teachers to recognize the cultural capital and tools that students of color bring to the classroom and to utilize their students' cultural learning tools throughout instruction" (California Department of Education, 2020).
- 

## Additional Resources/Reading

Avoiding Racial Equity Detours, Paul Gorsky

<http://www.edchange.org/publications/Avoiding-Racial-Equity-Detours-Gorski.pdf>

Beyond Conversations About Race: A Guide for Discussions With Students, Teachers, and Communities, Washington Collado, Sharroky Hollie, Rosa Isiah, Yvette Jackson, Anthony Muhammad, Douglas Reeves, Kenneth C. Williams

<https://www.solutiontree.com/beyond-conversations-about-race.html>

Culturally Relevant Pedagogy, California Department of Education (CDE)

<https://www.cde.ca.gov/pd/ee/culturalrelevantpedagogy.asp>

Culturally Responsive Schools, Dr. Tyrone Howard

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FkzOVMxbKhM>

Culturally Responsive-Sustaining Education Comprehensive District Self-Assessment, New York University Steinhardt Metropolitan Center for Research on Equity and the Transformation of Schools

<https://steinhardt.nyu.edu/sites/default/files/2021-09/CRSE%20District%20Self%20Assesment%20final-Fillable-ToUpload.pdf>

How to Practice Culturally-Relevant Pedagogy, Teach For America

<https://www.teachforamerica.org/stories/how-to-engage-culturally-relevant-pedagogy>

Latino Family Literacy Project

<https://www.latinoliteracy.com/>

Racial Microaggressions and African American and Hispanic Students in Urban Schools: A Call for Culturally Affirming Education, Ayana Allen, Lakia M. Scott, and Chance W. Lewis

<https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1063228.pdf>

Supporting the African American Learner: A Guide for Transforming Beliefs, Systems, and Practices for Black Students, (p. 29-39), Los Angeles County Office of Education

<https://www.lacoe.edu/Curriculum-Instruction/Equity-Diversity-and-Inclusion/African-American-Learners>

Understanding Culturally-Responsive Teaching, New America

<https://www.newamerica.org/education-policy/reports/culturally-responsive-teaching/understanding-culturally-responsive-teaching/>



# Self- and Community-Care for Collective Wellbeing

Self-care is important to maintain a healthy relationship with yourself. It means doing things to take care of our minds, bodies, and souls by engaging in activities that promote well-being and reduce stress. Doing so enhances our ability to live fully, vibrantly, and effectively. The practice of self-care also reminds both you and others that your needs are valid and a priority. Self-care is not selfish. You must fill your own cup before you can pour into others.

## Relationship Between Self Care and Community Care

Self-care is what we engage in as individuals to heal, improve our mental health, and recover. However, self-care can be difficult to manage in the systems that we currently live in, which is where community care comes in. Self-care is not always possible without community care, especially for people with trauma, and in particular historical and racial trauma resulting from racial injustice. Community care is all the things we need to do to support each other within systems that do not inherently support care. Community care can look like providing childcare, skill sharing and mutual aid, worker-owned coops, and community-based healthcare organizations, among many other things. Community care should be cultivated alongside self-care and prioritized by leaders and advocates who are truly invested in improving collective wellbeing.

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## Additional Resources/Reading

Caring for Yourself to Care for Others: A Burnout and Vicarious Trauma Toolkit,  
Larissa Pham

<https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1b4ozwgZh7Fqxm3piohww444Q67hOpVPI>

Hell Yeah Self Care, a zine by Meg-John Barker

<https://rewriting-the-rules.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/HellYeahSelfCare.pdf>



Professional Quality of Life (ProQOL) Measure for Self-Assessment,  
Center for Victims of Torture  
<https://proqol.org/>

Resources on Vicarious Trauma: Self Care and Strategies by Organizations to Support  
Wellness, Government of British Columbia  
[https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/health/managing-your-health/mental-health-substance-use/child-teen-mental-health/vicarious\\_trauma\\_and\\_organization\\_resource\\_list.pdf](https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/health/managing-your-health/mental-health-substance-use/child-teen-mental-health/vicarious_trauma_and_organization_resource_list.pdf)

Self-Care, Active Minds  
<https://www.activeminds.org/about-mental-health/self-care/>

Self-Care is Community Care. Lu Hanessian, MSc  
<https://luhanessian.medium.com/self-care-is-community-care-b7c811d5e236>

Self-Care isn't enough. We need community Care to thrive. Heather Dockray  
<https://mashable.com/article/community-care-versus-self-care>

Self-Care Starter Kit - University at Buffalo School of Social Work -  
University at Buffalo  
<http://socialwork.buffalo.edu/resources/self-care-starter-kit.html>

Why It's Time to Turn Self Care Into Community Care for Deeper Healing. Minna B.  
<https://www.wellandgood.com/what-is-community-care/>

# Glossary of Concepts

Part Two: Additional Concepts & Resources  
for Shared Language





Teachings Artists engaged in a role-playing exercise during AHJN's Network Wide Training. Photo by Omar Ramirez.



# Emotional Literacy

Emotional Literacy is the ability to read or recognize your own emotions in order to figure out, allow and experience what you are feeling. Emotional literacy is also noticing what other people are feeling. By tuning in to what other people are feeling, you are better able to develop empathy. Also, emotional literacy also supports you to distinguish your own emotions from the emotions of others which can support with self-awareness, healthy emotional regulation, and boundary setting.

## Food for Thought:

- + It's a powerful practice to shift our mindsets around emotions, not see them as good/bad, or that showing emotion is weak
- + Emotional Literacy starts with permission to feel. Most of us don't get an attuned listener, who asks open-ended questions, who doesn't freak out when they hear unpleasant feelings. If we don't share our emotions and role-model transparent emotions—how will young people learn that it's ok to share their feelings beyond one-note responses of “fine”, “ok”?
- + Cultivate an inner emotional scientist vs. emotion judge (in both yourself, and in young people). The scientist:
  - + Accepts all emotions as information.
  - + Sees emotions as ephemeral, and changing like weather patterns.
  - + Is open, curious, and reflective.
  - + Is in learner mode (investigates).
  - + Gets granular, into specifics i.e. the difference between envy and jealousy.
  - + Move beyond the goal that happiness is the goal.
  - + Inviting young people to become their own emotion scientist can support students. with diverse personalities, races, religions, and cultural background to discover what works best for them to support wellbeing.

## Additional Considerations:

- + There is no one strategy to reduce anxiety, stress, frustration or feeling overwhelmed

- + Most people want a quick fix, instead of slowing down to figure out what we're feeling and being self-compassionate as we investigate why we are feeling what we're feeling
  - + We can learn how to pay attention to the feelings we feel to help us grow
- 

### **Additional Resources/Reading**

On Emotional Intelligence During A Pandemic, Brené Brown and Marc Brackett  
<https://www.forbes.com/sites/christopherrim/2020/04/24/brene-brown-and-marc-brackett-on-emotional-intelligence-during-a-pandemic/?sh=24e468a1c0ae>

Teaching Emotional Literacy, Kylie Rymanowicz, Michigan State University Extension  
[https://www.canr.msu.edu/news/children\\_and\\_empathy\\_teaching\\_emotional\\_literacy](https://www.canr.msu.edu/news/children_and_empathy_teaching_emotional_literacy)

To Build Emotional Intelligence in Students, Start With the Adults. SEL Pioneer Marc Brackett Helps Schools to Do Both in “Permission to Feel”, Kate Stringer, The74  
<https://www.the74million.org/article/to-build-emotional-intelligence-in-students-start-with-the-adults-sel-pioneer-marc-brackett-helps-schools-do-both-in-permission-to-feel/>



# Implicit Bias

An important step in dismantling racism is supporting individuals to examine, better understand and acknowledge their own implicit bias, and to reflect on how implicit bias shapes one's decisions and actions.

Implicit bias comes in varying degrees of stereotyping, prejudice, and/or discrimination that occur below conscious awareness in a manner that benefits oneself or one's group. It involves a limited or distorted perception of others.

- + Stereotype: belief about another group
- + Prejudice: liking or disliking another group
- + Discrimination: behavior that disadvantages another group

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## Additional Resources/Reading

Acknowledging and Managing Implicit Bias, Dr. Bryant T. Marks, Associate Professor of Psychology, Morehouse College

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=toQCvWpyJXI>:

Dr. Bryant T. Marks provides grounding Definitions (2.5 min till 15:13):

<https://youtu.be/toQCvWpyJXI?t=759>

Dr. Bryant T. Marks provides an example in the classroom (2.5 min till 20:36):

<https://youtu.be/toQCvWpyJXI?t=1078>

Addressing Implicit Bias and Anti-racism in Education, DMH + UCLA Wellbeing for LA Learning Center. Training available with creation of free account.

<https://learn.wellbeing4la.org/detail?id=21922>

Conversations About Race: Understanding Privilege, Children's Mental Health Network

[https://www.cmhnetwork.org/news/conversations-about-race-understanding-privilege/?vgo\\_ee=o28b2%2BgXVoipPwfJQ1AdHVf2nC5QOhwnlg62fryhK6Q%3D](https://www.cmhnetwork.org/news/conversations-about-race-understanding-privilege/?vgo_ee=o28b2%2BgXVoipPwfJQ1AdHVf2nC5QOhwnlg62fryhK6Q%3D)

Implicit Bias Explained, Perception Institute

<https://perception.org/research/implicit-bias/>

Take your own implicit bias test – Implicit Association Test (IAT), Project Implicit, Harvard University

<https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/takeatest.html>

# Radical Care

One of the goals of Creative Wellbeing is to build on a site's existing strengths, strengthen capacity, increase protective factors, and apply what Dr. Tyrone C. Howard from the UCLA Center for the Transformation of Schools calls a "radical care" lens that acknowledges the resilience and genius that all students possess, particularly those who are living in poverty, experiencing homelessness and/or systems-impacted. Radical care is a fundamental belief that students need something different from what schools have typically offered.

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## **Additional Resources/Reading**

This Moment Calls for Radical Care for All of Our Children, Dr. Tyrone Howard:  
<https://edsource.org/2021/this-moment-calls-for-radical-care-for-all-our-children/650031>



# Restorative Practice

The aim of restorative practice (RP) is to develop community and to manage conflict and tensions by repairing harm and restoring relationships. Its use is part of a larger and longer history of indigenous practices such as peacekeeping, healing and daily community building.

Restorative practice is often used interchangeably with restorative justice (RJ). RP/RJ is different from Transformative Justice (TJ). TJ aims to transform the conditions that enabled the harm, at the same time as facilitating repair for the harm, by cultivating accountability, healing, resilience and safety for all. RJ/RP is used as an alternative to punishment while still existing within larger carceral systems/ways of thought.

## Important Considerations:

- + To internalize RP, it is necessary to understand that conflict is a normal part of life and being a part of conflict doesn't make you a bad person
- + While most commonly seen in the form of community circles, implementation is more often about having impromptu conversations, "affective questions" and statements, and implementing processes and dialogues to be proactive about when harm happens
- + RP does not have to be intimidating; the most basic skills of RP are skills you may already have or just need to lean into more such as active listening, affective communication (i-statements, "I felt \_\_ when you \_\_"), and curiosity questions when you want to learn more about someone's situation
- + RP is a mindset shift from replacing punitive discipline with a community-oriented approach towards addressing harm that should be invested in by everyone in the community

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## Additional Resources/Reading

Bringing Restorative Practices to Your School, Laura McClure, Edutopia  
<https://www.edutopia.org/article/bringing-restorative-practices-to-your-school-laura-mcclure>



Supporting the African American Learner: A Guide for Transforming Beliefs, Systems, and Practices for Black Students, (p. 35), Los Angeles County Office of Education  
<https://www.lacoe.edu/Curriculum-Instruction/Equity-Diversity-and-Inclusion/African-American-Learners>

Ways to Implement Restorative Practices in the Classroom, Larry Ferlazzo, Education Week  
<https://www.edweek.org/teaching-learning/opinion-ways-to-implement-restorative-practices-in-the-classroom/2020/01>



# Student Centered Learning

Student-centered classrooms include students in planning, implementation, and assessments. Involving the learners in these decisions will place more work on them, which can be good, to build skills and strengthen resilience. SCL increases student's opportunities to decide what material they learn and how they learn it.

## Important Considerations:

- + Allow students to share in decision making - They need a voice in why, what, and how learning experiences take shape.
- + Believe in students' capacity to lead - Give students the chance to take charge of activities, even when they may not quite have all the content skills.
- + Recognize that students are reflections of us as learners and their confidence rises as they understand how their existing expertise fits into the new concepts being taught.

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## Additional Considerations:

- + Teachers must become comfortable with changing their leadership style from directive to consultative -- from "Do as I say" to "Based on your needs, let's co-develop and implement a plan of action."
- + Student-centered learning does not sideline or diminish the role of teachers. Instead, it seeks to use teachers' expertise in different ways to increase student engagement.
- + SCL uses curricula to help connect students' interests with skills that prepare them for college and their desired careers. This approach doesn't lead to a less challenging learning environment. The collaborative environments in schools that use SCL often lead to a curriculum that revolves around group projects.

## **Additional Resources/Reading**

Student-Centered Learning: It Starts with the Teacher, John McCarthy, Edutopia  
<https://www.edutopia.org/blog/student-centered-learning-starts-with-teacher-john-mccarthy>

Unpacking Each Feature of Student-Centered Schools, Stanford Graduate School for Education Center for Opportunity Policy in Education  
<https://edpolicy.stanford.edu/node/1207>

What is Student-Centered Learning, and Why is it Important?, XQ Insittute  
<https://xqsuperschool.org/rethinktogether/what-is-student-centered-learning/>



# Transformative Social Emotional Learning (TSEL)

Social and emotional development is a complex, dynamic, culturally-adaptive and life-long process. Transformative SEL views SEL as a potential means to reduce the educational, social, and economic inequities that result from the interrelated legacies of racialized cultural oppression in the U.S. and globally (Jagers, 2019).

Transformative SEL is a process where students and educators build strong, respectful relationships founded on an appreciation for similarities and differences; learn to critically examine root causes of inequity; and develop collaborative solutions to community and social problems (Jagers, 2018).

- + Transformative SEL acknowledges that educators need space and PD to reflect and consider how to implement SEL from a strengths-based approach, otherwise educators might consider SEL as a means to “fix” students rather than nurture them to grow and thrive as unique individuals (Jagers, 2018).
- + Identity and culture shape how social emotional competencies develop and are expressed, and individuals learn how to socialize and express themselves in accordance with their community and cultural norms. It is important to be responsive and build upon individuals’ strengths rather than blunt these assets and experiences (Jagers, 2018).
- + Transformative SEL is a process where students and educators build strong, respectful relationships founded on an appreciation for similarities and differences; learn to critically examine root causes of inequity; and develop collaborative solutions to community and social problems (Jagers, 2018).
- + For SEL to adequately serve and to promote holistic wellbeing for all children, youth and adults it must cultivate in them the knowledge, attitudes and skills required for critical examination and collaborative action to address root causes of inequities.
- + “TSEL helps develop appreciation of diversity as strength, and also awareness of cultural identity and biases”—Dr. Helen Mozia
- + “All kids are geniuses in their unique way, the goal is to help them to find out where their strengths are, and where their natural inclination is pulling them to become”—Dr. Helen Mozia

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## Citations

Jagers, R., Rivas-Drake, D., Borowski, T. (2018). Toward transformative social emotional learning: using an equity lens. CASEL Special Issues Brief on Equity. <https://measuringSEL.casel.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/FrameworkEquitySummary-.pdf>

Mozia, H. (2021). No Less Than Genius. TEAL (Technology-Enhanced Arts Learning). <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Qgv3m08RpxM>

## Additional Resources/Reading

ArtsEdSEL, The Center for Arts Education and Social Emotional Learning  
<https://selarts.org/>

CASEL CARES Webinar Series: SEL as a Lever for Equity and Social Justice, Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL)

A 5-part webinar series discusses equity and racial injustice through the lens of social and emotional learning:

- + Part 1: [Cultivating & Communicating Commitment](#)
- + Part 2: [Adult SEL to Support Antiracist Practices](#)
- + Part 3: [Elevating Student Voices and Vision](#)
- + Part 4: [Authentic Partnerships with Families & Communities](#)
- + Part 5: [Policy & Data Practices that Dismantle Inequities](#)

Developing and Refining Transformative SEL Towards Equity, Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL)

<https://casel.org/fundamentals-of-sel/how-does-sel-support-educational-equity-and-excellence/transformative-sel/>

LAUSD Educator and Parent/Caregiver Roadmaps for Social-Emotional Well-Being & Academic Success, Los Angeles Unified School District

<https://achieve.lausd.net/Page/17558>

**Artwork by  
Creative Wellbeing  
Youth Content Advisor**



# Christopher Anthony

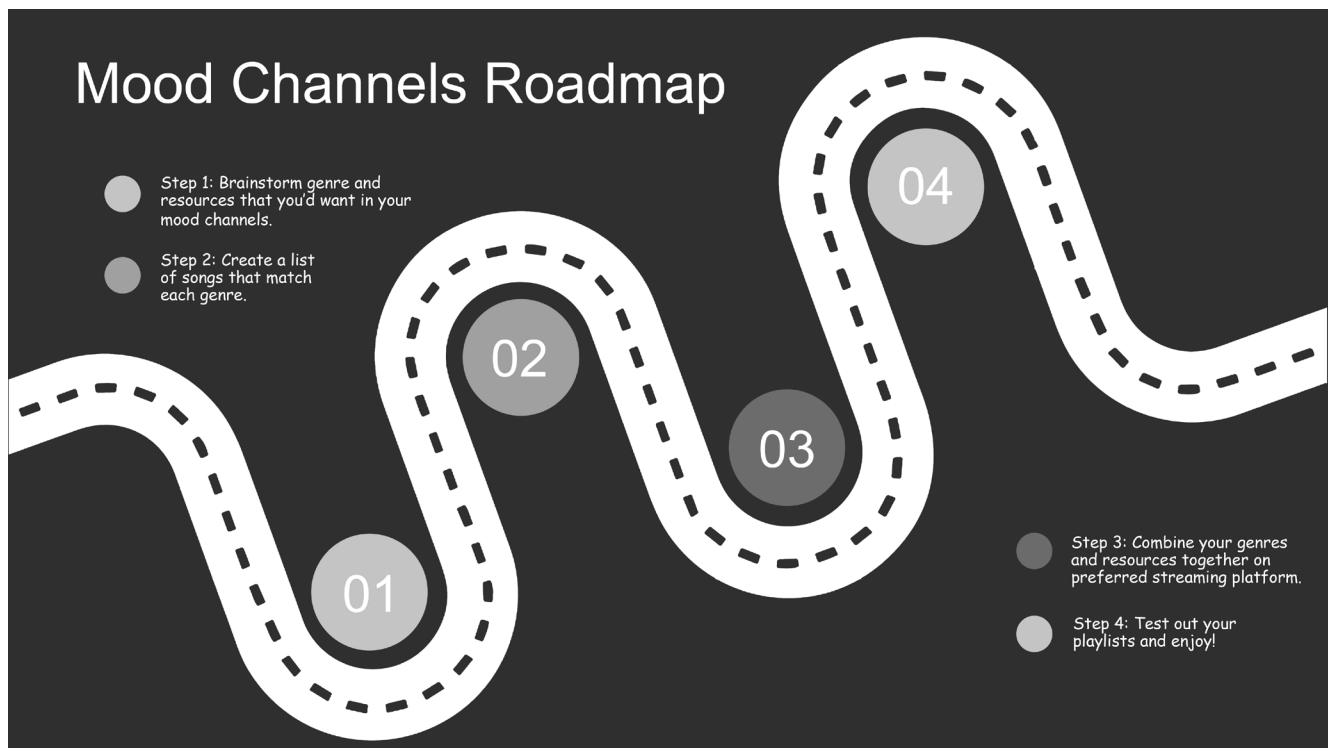


Image from [freepngimg.com](https://www.freepngimg.com), adapted by Chris Anthony.

# Musical Mood Channels

In an age of social media, the internet, and increased connectivity, we still find ourselves having a difficult time bridging the gap between young people and critical resources. It's important that we meet people where they are when we highlight or provide resources.

This is the basis of where the Musical Mood Channel comes from. You'd be hard-pressed to find a young person who doesn't listen to music or utilizes some sort of audio-related software in their daily lives. This is why we have integrated resources and the world of music together to provide a seamless streamline between the world of listening to music and the, at times, hard-to-reach resources.

## What You'll Need:

- + Access to a streaming platform (Spotify, Youtube, Pandora, Apple Music)
- + Ability to produce QR codes and the resources that go along with them
- + Use of creativity!

## Instructions:

1. Brainstorm what emotions and what songs you would like to explore in creating your Mood Channels. It's important to remember to customize it to YOU. Use what songs (or playlists) you like most or your favorite streaming service and personalize it!
2. Then assign the songs that you associate certain emotions with into separate categories while making sure that your list is at least 30 minutes worth of music. This is to ensure that you have time to reflect and utilize the resources or do the activity associated with the Mood Channel.
3. Think of resources or activities that you like to do when you feel those emotions and create a connection between the two.
4. (Optional) Use a QR code as a playlist picture to remind you of a certain resource or activity that you can do while listening.
5. Pop some headphones in a groove out to your new Mood Channels!

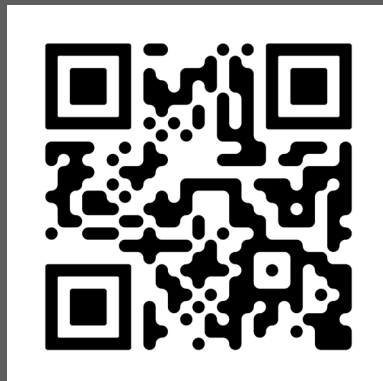
## Background on QR Codes

QR Codes are scannable images that can be produced in order to link a website, image, information, etc to a small image. They can be very convenient in linking resources or activities you are thinking of to your Mood Channel. This website has an easy-to-use interface to create QR Codes: <https://www.qr-code-generator.com/>



# Sample Mood Channels on Spotify

Creative Wellbeing



Chill Playlist



Cry It Out



Positive Vibes





Photo by Sylvanus Leone.

## Learn More

If you are interested in learning more about the links between music and emotion, please follow the links below. There are some amazing studies that support the strong bond between Music and Emotion.

Music Emotion and Wellbeing, Psychology Today

<https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/science-choice/201908/music-emotion-and-well-being#:~:text=Music%20has%20the%20ability%20to,alter%20mood%20or%20relieve%20stress>

Music and Emotion, Wikipedia:

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Music\\_and\\_emotion](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Music_and_emotion)

Emotion in Music, Giving You the Chills, Abbey Road Institute

<https://abbeyroadinstitute.nl/blog/emotion-in-music-giving-you-the-chills/>

Music-Evoked Emotions, Hans-Eckhardt Schaefer

<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5705548/>

Ooh là là! Music Evokes at Least 13 Emotions. Scientists Have Mapped Them, Yasmin Anwar, University of California, Berkeley

<https://news.berkeley.edu/2020/01/06/music-evokes-13-emotions/>

Music & Emotion, TEDTalk, Ria Patel

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oghkCpRYVjU>

## Suggested Resources

Some great resources to use within your project or just to have! Links Below.

Mental Health Resources, California Department of Education:

<https://www.cde.ca.gov/ls/cg/mh/mhresources.asp>

Mental Health in the Classroom, University of Michigan Depression Center

<https://classroommentalhealth.org/in-class/>

Explore Justice, 211LA

<https://www.211la.org/explore-justice>

Headspace (Mindfulness App):

<https://www.headspace.com/>

Calm (Mindfulness App):

<https://www.calm.com/>

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline:

<https://suicidepreventionlifeline.org/>

Prevention and Wellness, United States Department of Health and Human Services

<https://www.hhs.gov/programs/prevention-and-wellness/index.html>

