

PLAYWRITE INC

Using the power of performance in art to transform the lives of youth at the edge

Executive Director's Report

May 19, 2008

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As we come to the end of the 2007-2008 school year, I am pleased to report that PlayWrite has had a phenomenal year. We have benefited from -- and put to good use -- an outpouring of support from you, our generous donors and volunteers. PlayWrite's Underwriters' Circle grew by 25 percent in 2007. Thanks to your commitment, we have completed nine workshops this year, and will present two more performances toward the end of May. (Please come! See the schedule, this page.)

Since our fall newsletter, we have held core workshops at Portland Night High School, the White Shield Center, Centennial Learning Center and the Christie School. This was our first collaboration with the Christie School, and it was an amazing experience. The staff at ChristieCare -- especially Mary Liefeld, Laurie Gordon and Alexia Halen -- was a dream team to work with. The kids were remarkable, and the way they connected with their coaches and related to each other and the audience on performance night was thrilling. One young writer's family drove all the way from Warm Springs to see her play come to life. It was quite a night, and we'll be working with ChristieCare as far as I can see into the future.

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We're finishing off this school year with a bang. In May we are doing "core" workshops at New Avenues for Youth and the Rosemont School, and a songwriting workshop at Mt. Scott Learning Center. Whew! But wait, there's more. Alyson Osborn is inaugurating our first "Radio Lab" workshop. Graduates of the PlayWrite "core" workshop learn new ways of thinking about characters, making sound drive the action. It's great fun, and gives new perspectives for both kids and audience.

Executive Director's Report continued

Being a coach for PlayWrite is a tough job. It requires deep insight, the ability to shift tactics on the fly, empathy and self-discipline. There's so much more, hard to capture in a few words. They are incredibly dedicated. I love them dearly.

Alyson Osborn shared this moment (facing page) about a recent workshop experience.



Wendy Mitchell

On the organizational front, there's really big news (I wish my Ed Sullivan impression was up to snuff). On March 25th, the Meyer Memorial Trust awarded PlayWrite a capacity-building grant that will provide partial funding for PlayWrite's first Development Director. When Wendy Mitchell's letter and CV arrived, the search was over. She has had a career in development at UC Berkeley spanning nearly two decades; came to Portland in 1998 to be the first Development

Director of the Japanese Garden, and then spent six years at OHSU as Director of the Office of Program Development and Outreach in the Center for Women's Health. Within a whirlwind week, Wendy met with Board VP Renée Glasgow, Program Director Kristin Steele and our grantwriting consultant (and coach) Lisa DeGrace. I'm thrilled to have her be a key element in the leadership of PlayWrite.

Looking ahead, we are presently talking with Caldera about doing a core workshop at their beautiful summer camp at Blue Lake in central Oregon. We are also in the final stages of planning a program at St. Mary's Home for Boys in early August.

By the end of this school year, PlayWrite will have impacted the lives of more than 300 middle and high school students in our community. Their creative work for theater will have been seen by more than 3,000 people, at venues ranging from cafeterias to the wonderful Gerding Theater at the Armory.

Please mark your calendars for our gala on October 30. We will need items for both the oral and silent auctions. To donate, please call Renée Glasgow at 503-245-9797.

I hope you can come to see some of the performances. It's amazing work that our kids and coaches do – through challenge, strife and tears, they reach for their core and touch us all.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Bruce Livingston". The signature is fluid and cursive.

Bruce Livingston
Executive Director

Creative Writing

(for T. W.)

by Alyson Osborn

At the school for kids on the edge –
The ones who've already learned tactics:
To dance/duck/swing/bargain/plead
to have made it this far,
A playwriting program;
And today an especially spit-fire gal
Who finds my questions unbelievably lame.
With one perfectly orchestrated motion of bullying incredulity
She both shoves and flops herself further back into her chair,
Her sternum punches forward, her head tips back, her jaw juts out,
A sitting up, self-propelled resuscitation Annie.
“What?! Oh my God. Are you serious? How should I know?”
She's writing about a cactus who's listening to the wind;
I ask her how it sounds, how the cactus hears wind.
A full glottal stop/sigh of disgust and exasperation escapes her lips.
She's winding up from the inside,
preparing to fast ball pitch herself to me across the table.
“What do you mean how does it sound?! I don't know how it sounds and my
character don't know how it sounds. Because it's just the wind. And everybody
already knows how it sounds.”
Slight snort for emphasis, with a widened eye stare in case I missed the snort.
I do the mentoring thing – wait a bit before continuing on.
She counters with the hard palette tongue cluck. The head shake. An eye roll,
pointedly looks away from me like I'm the Elephant Man,
then sort of turtles down into herself and hunches over.
She's seen enough of these middle age do-gooder types,
Hoping to make kids love language, from pain create art,
Show the world in a way so resonant and profound an audience will gasp.
...But I'm beginning to think she might be right about the wind question –
Everyone does know how it sounds. It whistles of course, and screeches and
howls and whispers. It rustles leaves, flap/slaps laundry, whisks papers.
Wind's been done to death I realize.
And just as I decide to tell her she's right and we should move on,
She seems to squirm out from under a weight, shimmying herself up like a cobra,
Huge heaving sigh, then... “It's just a little wind –
Like how it would sound if a baby could whistle.”





4924 NE Multnomah St.
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Performance Dates & Times

- Wednesday, May 14, 7 p.m.
Portland Night High School Live RadioLab
- Friday, May 16, 1:15 p.m.
Rosemont School Performance
- Wednesday, May 28, 1:00 p.m.
New Avenues for Youth
- Thursday, May 29, 1:00 p.m.
Mt. Scott Musical Performance

If you are able to attend any of these performances, please call (503) 249-5800 for more information.