

ArtBridges Tips & Tools Series #8:

Training for Artists Working with Seniors in the Deaf or Disability Communities

By Peter Wolf



ArtBridges asked the H'art Centre to share tips & tools, inspirations and reflections about their new and unique training program for artists working with seniors in the Deaf or disability communities. Peter Wolf, Volunteer/Board Member with the H'art Centre in Kingston, Ontario, tells us about the H'art Centre's MixAbilities Artist/Educator Training Program: Enabling Access to the Arts for those Deaf and with Disabilities. Tailored somewhat to the specific needs of H'art Centre participants, the outcomes of the course are intended to be transferable to those in Deaf or disability communities and beyond, helping to ensure access to affordable and inclusive arts programs.

What kind of special training does an artist need to work in community-engaged arts with seniors? How does training better prepare artists working with seniors in community-engaged arts?

The H'art Centre is a non-profit charitable organization dedicated to providing people with disabilities and those facing barriers with opportunities to study, enjoy, and produce works in the arts throughout their lives and as they age. Artists with some education background and educators with some arts background come already equipped with many of the characteristics and skills, interest and motivation to work with seniors and others who experience barriers to arts engagement. We aim to support their ongoing development and to formally recognize that development through the H'art Centre MixAbilities Artist/Educator Training Program – enabling access to the arts for those Deaf and with disabilities. Our desired impact is that artists/educators will be more engaged and proficient in their work with H'art Centre participants and more broadly sensitive to ensure inclusion of all adults and seniors with disabilities.

The H'art Centre MixAbilities Program is inclusively designed to augment the skills of professional artists and educators with arts interests to ensure people with disabilities and those facing barriers have the opportunity to study, enjoy, and produce works in the arts throughout their lives and as they age. After appropriate intake and orientation to the H'art Centre, the artist/educator is invited to volunteer for a minimum of 3 hrs/week for a season and to complete the first self-paced learning module, which focuses on timely knowledge and expertise. This stage is important – it helps define their interest and commitment. After completing the season and the first learning module, and if there is a good fit and mutual interest in taking the next step, the artist/educator is then provided a small weekly honorarium to continue their engagement with the H'art Centre and to move on to further learning modules, which go into further depth and provide opportunities for practice, feedback and reflection. All artists/educators who complete the program will be awarded a formal certificate at an annual event.

The outcomes for the artists/educators taking the H'art Centre MixAbilities Artist/Educator Training Program are to:

- effectively and empathetically support participants who experience hearing impairment or other disabilities as they engage in the arts
- further develop skills and confidence as a community-engaged artist
- increase understanding of H'art's vision and mission and their application when working with participants
- increase knowledge of and commitment to Deaf and disability arts

The topics we cover include background on disabilities, effective communication, classroom management and designing learning.



Artist Isidora Spielmann leading a textile class.

What inspired you to introduce the idea that artists need specialized training to work with seniors in your community-engaged arts programs?

Over the years, we have collaborated with engaged, skilled and motivated artists/educators. Our MixAbilities Program allows us to advance a commonly-held set of knowledge, skills and approaches upon which are continually being developed and innovated.

The H'art Accessible Arts Program (HAAP) for seniors are generally held at public funded long-term care homes or in public spaces – ensuring accessibility and affordability. This means that artists/educators have to adapt and adopt on-the-fly, engaging participants where they are and with the spaces and resources available. The

MixAbilities Program helps support the artists/educators in their efforts to optimize opportunities for participants.

Finally, we have been impressed with so many of the artists/educators who have worked with us that we believe they should be recognized not just for their engagement, but their related knowledge, skills and approaches that are specifically applicable to the Deaf and disability arts movement and transferable to many other contexts.

What could happen if artists weren't specifically trained to work with seniors?

We weren't so much looking at this as a problem, but rather an opportunity to help support our programs and those who help lead them by focusing on the development of specific and transferable knowledge, skills and approaches that help reduce barriers participants. The artists/educators also help frontline health care staff recognize that HAAP can deliver a meaningful arts program to those who may seem unable.

Have you received funding to support this specialized training? Do you have community partners that you can learn from and get support from for this? What kind of resources or supports do you need to offer your artists who work with seniors in community arts at the H'art Centre?

H'art has received federal, provincial and municipal funding supports to initiate HAAP and are supported through local community charities and other fundraising. Pilot agreements with three public funded Long-term Care Homes (LTCH) are currently being shaped with the goal of including the HAAP program in their annual budget.

Did you find available training methods? Or did you have to create/tailor it to the participants at your centre?

There are many relevant content resources freely available on topics related to working with seniors or other populations that the H'art Centre serves – for example, it benefits everyone to understand Universal Design of Learning (UDL), inclusive arts principles and practices and effective communication strategies. We have curated those resources we think most helpful, combined them with reflective, active and mentored learning strategies and contextualized them to the work of the H'art Centre.

The program was designed by H'art Centre volunteers and staff, led by a board member with adult learning expertise. Though tailored to some extent to the specific needs of H'art Centre participants, the outcomes of the course are intended to be

transferable to those in Deaf or disability communities and beyond, helping to ensure access to affordable and inclusive arts programs.



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What kind of health issues may arise during community arts programs with seniors that staff needs to have training on?

HAAP artists/educators must attend an orientation and training session provided by each LTCH and annually update their First Aid and CPR training. In the LTCH, the staff communicate directly with the artist/educator regarding any resident who may need special attention and are available if needed.

What kind of special training does an artist need to work with seniors who have cognitive disabilities?

The HAAP program helps to compliment the skills and interest of the artists and educators. Through the MixAbilities Program – workshop observations, mentored learning, self-assessments and critical reflection help the artist/educator and program leads to determine areas for development.

Any further advice, mentorship, or tips to share?

We think it's important to provide a strong foundation for the growth and development of the artists/educators who are interested in the Deaf and disability arts movement and engaging with H'art Centre participants. This helps ensure a high quality of programming and encourages innovation through active collaboration.

We also believe that those artists/educators engaged in the Deaf and disability arts movement should be recognized for their efforts, experiences, abilities and commitment.

Though the H'art Centre MixAbilities Artist/Educator Training Program is a new venture for us, we are confident in our approach to supporting the development of artist/educator knowledge, skills and approaches to breaking down barriers and opening arts opportunities through engagement with participants.

ArtBridges Tips and Tools #8: Training for Artists Working with Seniors in the Deaf or Disability Communities was written by Peter Wolf (H'art Centre Volunteer/Board Member) and questions conducted by ArtBridges. Photos by H'art Centre. Wolf has been working on developing the training course for volunteers focusing on arts engagement with participants of the H'art School and the H'art Accessible Arts Program.

If you would like to learn more about the H'art Centre Centre MixAbilities Artist/Educator Training Program, please contact the H'art Centre at 613-545-1392 and visit:

www.hartschool.ca

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