

## Storytelling Outreach Program

Storytelling has an extraordinary ability to affect personal growth, build community and family relations and bring strength into the lives of participants as they discover their individual voices. Local workshops are held in New Haven in conjunction with the **Moth** series. Recent participants have included students at: **High School in the Community** and members at **Fellowship Place**, a social club helping adults to recover from mental illness. Graduates of these local workshops attend the Moth performances, and share their own personal stories on stage, as part of the professional and celebrity line up.

The Educational Outreach Program offers storytelling workshops, free of charge, to under-served populations. We work with a variety of youth groups, as well as adults in rehabilitation programs, including homeless men and women in job training, recently released prisoners, and individuals recovering from substance abuse. The workshops are designed to teach the participants to shape their life experiences into well-crafted stories, embracing the key elements of narrative.

### The Workshops in the Schools, Leadership Programs, Hospitals, Prisons and Youth Initiatives

All workshops begin with a series of stories shared and performed by the workshop leader. This introduces the art of storytelling and acclimates participants to the medium. The focus then shifts to the stories of the participants themselves, rooted in the experience of each individual and refined through a wide range of focal points from detail development to delivery. The workshops last 4 to 7 weeks – or can be done in a 1 or 2 session “Masterclass” setting, and are conducted by professional storytellers and teams of trained volunteers.

### The Benefits

Feedback from our programs has demonstrated that our graduates obtain skills which are extremely effective in helping them gain control of their lives and manage situations such as job interviews, examinations, negotiations, and all other forms of communication that are crucial to their ability to interact and succeed in society. Through evaluations from participating organizations and their clients, we have learned that:

- Assessing and applying narrative rules develops our graduates' **ability to focus, distinguish, and prioritize.**
- Transforming a story from a personal anecdote to a public piece promotes **self-awareness and self-confidence.**
- Performing the story in front of an audience **enhances public speaking skills.**
- Listening and sharing with other participants develops qualities of **empathy and tolerance.**
- The process of structuring one's experiences according to story principles brings perspective and a sense of control over past events. This, in turn, **empowers** participants to **gain control over their current lives.**

### Graduates of the program are invited to (but NOT obligated to):

- Attend main stage productions of *The Moth*, a pro storytelling series in NY & New Haven
- Perform for their peers, parents, friends and/or general public alongside established storytellers, thus connecting with a powerful community of writers, artists, and professionals.
- Join the corps of trained volunteers and storytellers who travel to other Outreach communities to introduce the art of storytelling.

The opportunity to teach what one has learned is not only the best way to perfect one's own skills, but also a significant step in the process of growth and rehabilitation in which our students and community participants are involved.

*"The workshop helped me with my social skills, and with going on a job interview, and it improved the way I present myself to people in general."* Richie, Project Renewal

*"The workshop helped me deal with my inner problems and learn how to speak better in front of a crowd."* Marlene, West Manhattan Outreach High School

*"I would like to take part in a similar program in the future because it kept me out of trouble."* Chris, Adolescent Initiative Project:

**Just a few schools and agencies where workshops have taken place (ADD WHERE WE PLAN TO BE...)**

- Adolescent Initiative Project, a peer-tutoring center for teens
- Fellowship Place, New Haven, a rehabilitation agency for adults recovering from mental illness
- High School in the Community, a magnet school in New Haven, CT
- Public Allies, New Haven, CT
- Branford High School
- Junta
- Bedford Hills Correctional Facility, a program for incarcerated mothers and non-incarcerated children
- The Bronx Academy of Letters, junior high school
- Council Senior Center, Manhattan: A recreational facility for senior citizens
- The Family Center, a counseling & assistance center for terminally ill patients and their children
- Fountain House, a center for people coming out of long-term psychiatric care
- Health Force, an HIV/AIDS counseling and prevention center
- The Hope Program, job training center for formerly homeless men and women
- MainChance, Publisher of *Upward!* newspaper written & edited by homeless men & women
- Neighborhood Youth & Family Services, a young mother's program
- Project Renewal, a substance abuse treatment center for homeless men
- Promesa, a substance abuse treatment and public health program
- Stanley Isaac Center, an after-school and peer-tutoring center for teens

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CATHERINE CONANT – Workshop Leader [www.4astoryteller.com](http://www.4astoryteller.com)

Catherine Conant performs, coaches and teaches the oral tradition for modern expression. She works with non-profit organizations seeking ways to build stronger communities and is a consultant with the Connecticut Assets Network, providing support and information for community groups. She has appeared at schools, museums, conferences and festivals, founded and produced of the Doggone Storytelling Festival, Chester, CT and writes the bi-weekly newspaper column *"Looking Sideways at Life"*. She recently released a CD entitled *"Exit 11 and Other Stories; Growing Up in the Shadow of the New Jersey Turnpike"*. She lives in Chester, CT and loves to contra dance, and buys and sells antiques as a hobby.

FOR MORE INFO ON WORKSHOP SPONSORSHIPS: Debbie Bisno at [debbie@bisnoproductions.com](mailto:debbie@bisnoproductions.com)

## With a Loud Voice there was Mommy

By **Melissa** – a Jr. from New Haven's High School in the Community MOTH Storytelling Workshop

With a loud, blood curdling scream it ended. It was the end of motherhood; it was the end because she could no longer take it.

The two-year old boy screamed in pain as his two sisters watched in apathy-initially they did not know what was going on, they were too young to even know. But when they saw their 16-year-old mom scoop up their two-year-old brother and proceed to beat him, they knew it could not be good.

"What-are-you-doing-playing-in-that-window-" she worded aloud beating the child harder with each word. 'Now-you-got-yourfingers-mashed-thats-what-you-get-" The young girl, Tammy Thomas was never known to be cruel, she was a quiet gentle shy young lady, everyone though, and she even surprised herself by her own actions. Still she beat the child. Why? The boy's sisters watched, and this was the last that they saw of their brother for a while. And that was it, that was the end of her motherhood as a 16-year-old mommy of three.

I would say that it could have been the last straw, why would a mother bear her two year old child because he hurt himself? Was she frantic? I suppose so, but whatever the matter, that was it for her and time for "the other mommy" as we called our dad's friend who lived below us.

"Mommy" was what we called the young woman who gave birth to us three, we couldn't call her "mom". I don't know, it wasn't the same. "The other mommy" was called "mom" when she only babysat us, but after "mommy the 16 year old" left, Denise stepped in and became known as "the other mommy" but as years progressed Tammy the 16 year old mother of three became known as "our mom" and Denise was no longer called "the other mommy" she was "mommy" she was our mommy and we were proud. No one gave us more than she-not even our dad. She was once just living on her own a 44 year old woman who was full of life and had no barriers to what she wanted to do in life because her child was grown and on her own also. It's a loving gift to come out of the blue and say "I want to take these three children who are not mine, as my own." That was a huge decision for her and she had reasons to regret it as years went on and our dad was in and out of jail, leaving her to be a single mother of three. She appreciated us still, and we appreciate her always as if our birth mother. "Mom" was never thought of again for ten years after it all, she was even *forgotten*.

Well it so happened that the now 14-year old boy who got his fingers mashed in a window when he was two was walking home one afternoon when he spotted a familiar face walking down the stairs of a small apartment building. The boy knew that he knew her somehow. And the familiar face knew that she knew this young boy. Yes it was, the now 28 year old formerly know as the 16-year old mother of three. She was mom now. She was the "Mom" of the 14 year old boy because she couldn't be his "mommy" anymore she was mom...someone's mom, not his mommy, but the woman who gave birth to him, his mother, but that's unlike his "mommy". To call this woman, this familiar face mommy would just over rate her. This woman was his mom, from long ago, she's my mom too, but not my mommy because mommy is my mom if you break the word into its syllables and switch them around...my-mom they mirror themselves, a mommy is my mom, a mom is a mom, but Denise, the woman who sacrificed for us three children rather than giving up during hardships is our mommy, always. Now I do know the difference between "mommy" and "mom."