Shedding light on mental illness through theatre

Photo by: Popio-Stumpf Photography

Annual Newsletter
July 2010
A Note From the Executive Artistic Director

Dear Supporters,

In a year of financial crisis for both our state and country, massive budget cuts for community organizations and the mental health field as a whole, and in a time of personal unpredictability for many, Erasing the Distance has found a way to not only succeed but grow.

As I look back on the year, I have been trying to wrap my arms around how we have been able to find our way in this time of darkness.

What has surfaced is that four qualities seem to permeate everything that Erasing the Distance does — Erasing the Distance being our storytellers, staff, actors, board, volunteers, donors, audience members...each and every one of you reading this right now! Those qualities are:

Persistence, passion, creativity, and courage. Throughout these pages, you will read about how those qualities are manifested in action as well as find out more about the people who make the magic possible. You will also hear firsthand accounts from those who have been impacted by the power of our programming. Whether it is a donor’s name listed or an entire paragraph shared about a school we’ve visited, every word and person within these pages holds significance and power.

Read on.

Remember, you are part of the magic. You are the light in the darkness.

Fondest regards,

Brigid O’Shaughnessy
Founder/Executive Artistic Director

Erasing the Distance generates awareness, disarms stigma, and ignites the healing process by:

- Creating and touring professional theatrical performances based on the true stories of people’s experiences with mental illness.
- Designing custom productions bringing to life the stories of your unique community.
- Conducting long-term residencies where ETD artists come to you. Together, we create original theatre about how mental illness shows up in your world.
- Facilitating trainings to educate your faculty and staff about mental illness signs, symptoms, and treatment options.

How We Work: From Story to Stage

We start with the story...
People of all ages share their story with us through personal interview. You may be moved to tell your story after seeing a performance, or we may actively seek out story-sharers in order to chronicle mental illness from different perspectives. (See next page for a profile on three amazing story-sharers!)

Adapt it for the stage...
We adapt the interview for the stage, using only the person’s original words. An interview is usually 15 pages of text, from which we cull about 2–5 pages to create a scene or monologue. We then cast our professional actors and rehearse.

Then it’s show time...
From our repertoire of stories, we pull together the combination of perspectives that fits the needs and interests of the audience — the people at your school, college campus, workplace, place of worship, or community organization. Then, we come to you to perform.

Our professional actors are some of the best in Chicago, and every performance is followed by a facilitated dialogue and free resources to connect people to further information and support.
We Start with the Story...

Meet Three of Our Amazing Story- Sharers

“I felt fear, confusion, and anger while trying to learn how to deal with my wife’s OCD.

Erasing the Distance provided me with education and empathy to help alleviate some of the pressure and anxiety that surrounds the healing process. In sharing our story, I hope that I can help others see that they are not alone.”

—Jay Lynch

“My reasons for deciding to share my story with ETD were twofold. The first reason being that I felt that it would facilitate my own healing process. I remember the day I shared my story with Brighid. Afterwards I felt lighter, like I had dropped off a piece of “baggage” that I had been lugging around with me for so long. Don’t get me wrong, there’s still plenty of luggage there, one day at a time though.

As for the second reason, I do it because I hope that my story will reach out there and help someone, anyone.

Through the process, I’ve learned to not be ashamed of my past. It’s what’s made me who I am today, for better or for worse, and it’s helping me learn to like myself despite/and because of it all.”

—Ryan Castillo

“Being in an ETD residency allowed me to get a huge burden off my chest in an environment that made me feel like a human instead of having people judge me and condemn me for my prior actions. It was a feeling of understanding and love regardless of my problems. I enjoyed telling people my story in order for them to see how normal a person with a condition can be, as well as how they can overcome things in their life that hold them down. ETD brought me to a place where I felt that I could help someone else who may be struggling and give them hope for the future, just like the hope I now feel.”

—Jaron Salazar

Do you have a story to share? Contact us!
... And Adapt it for the Stage

FROM LEFT TO RIGHT: Actors Eddie Jordan III, Jaron Salazar, David Hornreich, Maura Kidwell and Rhonda Marie Bynum perform a scene from ETD’s teen show, What’s Behind Our Eyes

Actors take notes from Director Krista Hansen, in preparation for a custom production for DePaul University’s Chronic Illness Symposium

ABOVE: Brighid O’Shaughnessy leads a residency with students from Al Raby High School

We won’t leave you empty-handed.
Erasing the Distance provides: facilitated discussions after every performance, training programs for faculty and staff, long-term residencies, AND information and resources from respected mental health organizations.
Our Successes

20,000 people reached since 2005
10,000 people reached this year
211 faculty and staff were trained on mental illness signs and how to help a student in distress
30 professional artists
1 Mental Health Advisory Board was formed this year
3 customized productions
1 event with author Abby Sher in honor of National Eating Disorder Awareness Week
40 diverse stories
25% increase in individual donor support
60% increase in foundation support

Where We've Been JULY 2009 – JUNE 2010

Middle Schools/High Schools
Al Raby High School
Clemente Academy*
Grimes School
Loyola Academy*
Lubavitch Girls High School of Chicago
Marquette Elementary School
Northside College Preparatory High School*
Roosevelt High School
St. Gregory High School
Trinity High School*
University of Chicago Laboratory High School
Whitney Young Magnet High School*

Colleges/Universities
Adler School of Professional Psychology*
College of Lake County
DePaul University*
Dominican University*
Loyola University*
Oakton Community College – Des Plaines*
University of Chicago*
University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

Community Organizations/Faith Groups/Workplaces
8th Annual School Based Health Center Conference
Art of Recovery Conference
Chicago Communities in Schools
Elgin Mental Health Center*
Flourish Studios*
Lake County Center for Independent Living*
Mental Health America of Illinois
NAMI of Greater Chicago
Temple Chai
United Methodist Church of Libertyville
VW Credit, Inc.

* indicates repeat clients
What's the Impact?

Testimonials

“A major goal of the Wellness Center at Harold Washington College is to de-stigmatize mental illness. The ETD production has been a centerpiece of this effort. When tying the production to a “wellness week” with links to classroom activities in English, Communications, Theater, Psychology and Biology, for example, ETD can form the core of a dynamic outreach program to students, faculty and staff. I highly recommend that any school bring this program to their campus.”

—Michael Russell, Wellness Center Director, Harold Washington College

“I was first introduced to an Erasing the Distance performance at the College of Lake County in October 2009. I was AMAZED with their unique way of raising awareness of mental illness through the performing arts. I knew right away that I had to bring them in to do a performance for our employees. The staff here at VCI didn’t know what they were in for. After the performance I received emails from staff, and was stopped in the hallway several times, thanking me for bringing them in. I would definitely recommend inviting ETD to your institution.”

—Agime Rahmani, Diversity President at VW Credit, Inc.

“Thank you for bringing your group to Libertyville and sharing your talent and passion. Each of the five stories enlarged our vision of what it means to live with a mental illness. The attendees bonded in surprising ways because of your performance. At least two action groups formed during the luncheon discussion afterward. The ripple effect will live on for years.”

—Karilyn Parrott, Event Organizer, United Methodist Church of Libertyville
May 19, 2010 was a powerful day for Erasing the Distance. We traveled to Roosevelt High School in Chicago’s Albany Park neighborhood and ETD actors Ryan Castillo and Stephanie Diaz performed two true stories on depression and addiction for small groups of 25 – 30 psychology students six times throughout the day.

It was incredible not only to experience the gripping performances of each of the actors but to watch the students around the room completely still and so engaged, said Dana Traub, Manager of School Health Centers for Heartland International Health Center.

The student feedback was tremendous across the board. I recommend this performance be seen by the entire school. You can motivate teens to find a change and seek help. You can literally save people’s lives, one student commented.

Afterwards, many students courageously picked up mental health brochures for both themselves and their parents, and ETD referred almost a dozen students to the counselors at the end of the day.

I was crying when you told that story. It’s like my own life. I thought I was alone. Now I see that I’m not, said another student.

This amazing day would not have been possible without Francie Moody of the Roosevelt Health Center who saw the need for our programming in her school, Jessica Mondres, ETD Outreach Director for her coordination efforts, and ETD Supporter Ben Shapiro who organized funding for this event.

Since mental health is crucial for education at any level and since the onset of many mental illnesses occurs during adolescence, a high school setting is the perfect one for this program . . . Both adolescents and adults who experience the performance expand and deepen their understanding of mental health and the human condition. The benefits of the Erasing the Distance performance are exponential.

—Charlene M. Floreani, English Teacher, Whitney M. Young Magnet High School

We bring the show to you.

For more information on how to bring Erasing the Distance to your community, please visit ErasingTheDistance.org or call us at 773.944.5062.

‘‘ Powerful, moving, engaging and fun. ETD encourages audiences to think and talk about mental illness in a safe and enjoyable way. Transforming true stories of mental illness healing and coping into theater is powerful and makes it real. You can’t help but be moved. Professionally and personally speaking, ETD is a must see. ‘’

—Jae Jin Pak, Prevention Specialist, C4 Quetzal Center

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Can you tell me about your role in the Foundation, and what inspired you and the Foundation to become involved with Erasing the Distance as a funder?

The Foundation was started by my grandfather in the 1930’s, and I’m one of four trustees. We are a Chicago-based foundation, although we fund all over the country. Healthcare is an important area to us, and I tend to like organizations that are doing hands on work. You’re telling a story! People can relate to that. It’s a great process.

Have you been able to come out and see a show?

Yes I did, and it was great! The show was fantastic. I was impressed. I think the common thread throughout all the stories is that mental health is not something that should be frowned on. And at the end of the day there’s hope. That stuck with me. It was definitely something I had not seen before, and an interesting way to probe the mental health arena.

Why do you think it’s important to fund mental health outreach and education programs like ours? How do you see it impact your community?

It doesn’t matter who you are, or how much money you have or don’t have—it touches all of us in some way. I think the most important thing is really to get the message out that mental health should be talked about. A lot of people don’t want to deal with it, because it’s a complicated issue. I think Erasing the Distance helps break down those barriers.

What do you like to do to relax and unwind?

I like playing golf. Also reading, I read a lot. Particularly at night—you know I haven’t seen a TV show in 30 years. And spending some time with the kids when that’s possible. Otherwise I love working, but that’s off the record!

ETD Staff: Persistence, Passion, Creativity and Courage

By Elizabeth Finlayson
Board Treasurer/Secretary

It used to be true that if you knew Erasing the Distance, you knew Brighid. Nowadays, thanks to our small, but mighty, board, a fantastic company of actors and our new stars on staff, the little-engine-that-could has become a lot more powerful.

Persistence, passion, creativity, and courage — these words can be applied to each staff member at Erasing the Distance (ETD).

Brighid harnesses creativity and courage to create a sustainable and effective organization that addresses an unmet demand, even if that means letting go of an idea, plan, or program that is not working. Her vision continually launches ETD forward to the next level. Oriana’s persistence is integral to ETD’s success. She’s willing to make the cold call, to get the in-kind donation, to follow up with you on a project that needs completing and I always respect her more for it in the end.

Whether through story collection or outreaching to potential partners, Jessica has a true passion for ETD’s work and for breaking the silence around mental illness. She asks great questions, listens empathetically and really wants to know and understand people’s experiences.

This talented staff achieves results far beyond their numbers and time available. It is hard to imagine that ETD served ten thousand people this fiscal year alone and has worked with dozens of organizations with one full-time staff (Brighid) and two part-time staff (Oriana and Jessica), for a full-time equivalent of less than 2 people! This is only possible because of their unique abilities, amazing dedication, and the values that permeate everything they do. As we continue to grow, we look to these values — persistence, passion, creativity, and courage — for powerful results.
The Erasing the Distance Family

Board of Directors
Elizabeth Stewart Finlayson
Lisa Liebman
Brighid O'Shaughnessy
Terence O'Shaughnessy
David Strauss

Staff
Oriana Fowler
Communications Director
Jessica Mondres
Outreach Director
Brighid O'Shaughnessy
Founder/Executive
Artistic Director

Advisory Board
Kelli Brooks
Virginia Goldrick, LCPC, Ph.D., C.R.S.S.
John Mayes, LCSW
Erin Mason, Ph.D.
Selina McGuire, M.A.
Frederick Miller, M.D., Ph.D.
Jamie Pasquale, Psy.D.
Julia Rahn, Ph.D.
Michael Russell, LCSW
Lisa Sniderman, LCSW

Artistic Ensemble
Rhonda Marie Bynum
Ryan Castillo
Amanda Eaton
Amos Ellis
Jared Fernley
Deanna Foley
Hannah Gomez
Krista Hansen
Chris Hauser
David Hornreich
Anish Jethmalani
Angela Johnson
Eddie Jordan III
Maura Kidwell
Sarah Luse
Jennifer Mathews
Gustavo Mellado
Jessica Mondres
Christina Nieves
Remy Ortiz
Brighid O'Shaughnessy
Chris Popio
Olivia Porter
Adam Poss
Stephanie Diaz Reppen
Michael Russell
Dwight Sora
Cory A. Wright

Who Makes It Happen
Photo by: John LaVere Photography
Erasing the Distance would like to thank our donors for their generosity. This year, we reached over 10,000 people, doubling our lifetime audience total in just one year. We couldn’t have done it without each and every one of you.

Get Involved

$96,628*

Visionary ($5,000+)  
Anonymous (3) 
3 Arts 
Arch W. Shaw Foundation 
I.A. O’Shaughnessy Foundation 
Sirius Fund

Transformer ($2,500–$4,999)  
Chicago Board of Trade Foundation

Leader ($1,000–$2,499)  
City Arts Program I Grant 
Paul and Jill Meister 
Dennis and Helen O’Shaughnessy 
Caroline and Geoff Rogers 
David and Debbie Strauss

Change-Maker ($500–$999)  
Ed and Robin Culbertson 
Lisa and Marc Liebman 
David O’Donovan 
Devin O’Shaughnessy 
Susan Rogers 
Sue and Robert Strauss 
Leanne Fonteyn and Rob Viola

Healer ($250–$499)  
E. Paul Dunn 
Dick Goldberg 
Virginia Goldrick 
Juliet and Michael Gray 
Mary and Michael Jawor 
Gail Owens 
Jame Pasquale 
Aimee Schneider

Supporter ($100–$249)  
Sara and Casper Balistreri 
Cheryl and Ted Banks 
Alisa Bergman 
Allison Bernier 
Christine Bollettino 
Maria Braham 
Robin Broadnax 
Lauren and Jeff Brown 
Kimberly Caldwell 
Karen Cunniff 
Deborah and James Dallet 
Susie and Marvin Dickman 
Tim Dowling 
Brad and Heather Farha 
Peter V. Fazio 
Jill and Jason Feldman 
Elizabeth and Greg Finlayson 
P.J. Fitzsimons 
Connie Foster 
Holly Gloff 
Marty and Gail Gottner 
Robert and Lois Greendale 
Sheldon Harris 
Karen and Tony House 
John and Alice Huff 
Eric Jackson 
Eric Jarmin 
Amy and Marty Kaplan 
Nambi E. Kelley 
Aria Knee 
Manus Kraf 
Eric and Melissa Linn 
Lois Long 
Russell and Renske Lynde 
Robert and Alyssa Mandel 
John Mayes 
Anthony McKerr 
Myles Megdal 
Rebecca and Eric Mondres 
Elisabeth Monsalve 
Cindy and Michael O’Connor 
Marianne O’Shaughnessy 
Mary O’Shaughnessy 
O’Shaughnessy 
Tim and Sheila 
O’Shaughnessy 
Janel Palm 
Amy Panici 
Karyln Parrott 
Erie Pond 
Karla and Joe Pope 
Julia Rahn 
Gail Randal 
Dave Rasmussen 
Colleen Robson 
Tony Romas 
Michael Russell 
Joseph Sanfilippo 
Jill and David Schlossberg 
Barbara and Ben Shapiro 
Laura Shatkus 
Mark and Andrea Silverman 
Rhonda and Skip Stern 
Mary and Kenneth Sullivan 
Guy Van Swearingen 
Jeffrey and Stephanie Widman 
Nancy Williams 
Dominican University Theatre Arts

Friend (up to $99)  
Ron and Lisa Abrams 
Julie Angello 
Sheldon Arkin 
Catherine Keiling Arnold 
Todd Atler 
Danielle Baird 
Mike and Jean Ban 
Maria Bartos 
Tim Batdorf 
Amy Bernhard 
Lisa Boone 
Susan Borovsky 
Tawanna Brown 
Ina Burd 
John Byrnes 
Krissy Callahan 
Reene Callahan 
Jennifer Carizey 
Michael Carrillo 
Annette Cazenave 
Chris Churchill 
Leslee and Jon Cohen 
Mary Coy 
Rachael and Ryan Deutsch 
Jane Dewey 
Steve Domsky 
Stephen and Joan Duffy 
Anne Durkin 
Richard Erwin 
Julie Espada 
Judy and Jack Fitzpatrick 
Adam and Wendy Fleishman 
Arthur Fowler 
Oriana Fowler 
Yolanda Fowler 
James Freund 
Lisa and Daniel Friedman 
Elizabeth Garlovsky 
Paul Gebhr 
Anne Good 
Frank Grady 
Kathleen Grady 
Marilyn and Eugene Gregory 
Daniel and Kim Griffin 
Andrew Grigg 
Krista Hansen 
Barbara Hendrickson 
Terra Hillyer 
Deborah Hoffman 
Pamela Holtzman 
Rebecca Hourston 
Ben Houston 
Janet Howe 
Kim and Chris Huss 
Gregory Janick 
Jeremiah Jarmin 
Joshua Jarmin 
Eunice Jensen 
Cynthia Johnson 
Sarah Jolie 
Bethany Jorgensen 
Melissa Josephs 
Shirley Katz 
Debbie and Robert Keller 
Linda Kim 
Tom Kinley 
Jamee and Scott Kohn 
Mark Konold 
Brittany Lambert 
Ruth Landis 
John LaVere 
Steve Leaver 
Warren Liebman 
Phyllis Lisk 
Darius Loghmanee 
Alissa Love 
Erahm Machado 
Judy Macior 
Lisa Maggiore 
Jennifer and Chris Mathews 
Nell McKitrick 
Scott McNulty 
Nancy and Mick Menyhart 
Elisa Miller 
Josh and Becky Miller 
Jessica Mondres 
Rose Moreno 
Liz Muckley 
Lindsay Muscato 
Sandy Newhouse 
Kaki O’Shaughnessy 
Stephanie and Michael Oettinger 
Jae Jin Pak 
Boyd and Phyllis Palmer 
Susie Piascik 
Jenna Rabideaux 
Jo Reizner 
Julie Ritchey 
Bradley and Mimi Saks 
Christopher Salvo 
Kenneth and Nancee Schmetterer 
Erik Schroeder 
Mike Schuppe 
Matthew Seeley 
Elizabeth and Doug Shabelman 
Kathleen Siemsen 
Meredith Siemsen 
Lisa Sniderman 
Jeanne and Bob Somers 
Krystal Steiner 
Jean and Don Stewart 
Sarah Stewart 
Barbara Theobald 
Blair Thomas 
Nate Tico 
Mark Tippery 
Lisa and David Weinberg 
Fred Welsch 
Tom Wiedemann 
Andie Zamber 
Robby Zar 
Danny and Amy Zoller

*Donations received July 1, 2009 - June 23, 2010

Erasing the Distance is a recognized 501(c)3 not-for-profit.
Get Involved

Our work of shedding light on mental illness through theatre is only possible through the dedication and support of many individuals. We would love to have you involved.

Brand Ambassadors
Erasing the Distance is looking for 10–12 people who are passionate about our mission and willing to talk about it! Help spread the word and help us reach another 10,000 people in the upcoming year. To learn more about the ambassador council, email jessica@erasingthedistance.org for more information.

Bring Erasing the Distance to your community!
Hire us to:
• Bring in a performance
• Collaborate on a custom show
• Lead a longer-term residency
• Facilitate staff trainings

Contact Brighid at 773. 944.5062 or brighid@ErasingTheDistance.org

Donate

Donations support everything from providing resource cards linking audiences with mental health assistance, to bringing productions to low-income schools and community groups who otherwise could not afford mental health programming.

Donate via PayPal.

To learn more, visit www.ErasingTheDistance.org.

Get Connected:

Don’t forget to wear your ETD button!

Become part of the ETD community on Facebook!

Subscribe to our blog!
erasingthedistance.blogspot.com

FROM LEFT TO RIGHT:
Jessica Mondres,
Meredith Siemsen,
Maura Kidwell, and
Angela Johnson