Erasing the Distance: A Year in the Life

Annual Newsletter
July 2010 – June 2011

Shedding light on mental health issues through theatre
A Note From the Executive Artistic Director

Dear Supporters,

It’s been a full and exciting year at Erasing the Distance. In many ways, it has been a year of partnerships. We began our Fall of 2010 with a partnership with AASPI (the Asian American Suicide Prevention Initiative). Together we brought to life a beautiful multi-media event shedding light on how mental health issues affect the Asian and Indian communities. In addition to the performance, ETD Artistic Associate Meredith Samsam created a multi-lingual, interactive installation at the installation and visual artist Alfredo Li Tiao showcased his stunning work. The show was such a success that it was announced in March of 2011 for three dates at the University of Illinois Chicago and will see more audiences in 2012!

Next, we worked closely with Affinity Community Services on Chicago’s South Side to bring to life a brand new violence prevention initiative. From each of our organizations’ programming, we knew there was a link between violence and mental health and wanted to creatively respond. This exciting endeavor included a community forum, an original performance at the Vittum Theater, and free violence prevention workshops for the general public offered in collaboration with some of Chicago’s most respected agencies, such as Rainbow House and Cease Fire.

In the Spring, we premiered an original production brought to life for Sexual Assault Awareness Month, done in collaboration with Community Counseling Centers of Chicago’s Quirtal Center and Center on Halsted. The house was full that night, and we even had The Clothesline Project featured in COH’s lobby to deepen the impact of the event.

The season completed with an exciting partnership between Erasing the Distance and The Chicago School of Professional Psychology. Graduate students learned the ETD methodology, sculpted stories into monologues, and six were chosen for a final performance at the prestigious Chicago Cultural Center. 300 people were in the audience. We were chosen for a final performance at the prestigious Chicago Cultural Center. Three of our storytellers even got up and shared his slam poetry during the talk back.

I speak to partnerships because without them, none of what Erasing the Distance did this year would have been possible. Together with these amazing collaborators and many, many others, we combined our creativity, commitment, and courage to have a powerful impact.

We also couldn’t have done it without you—our storytellers, our audience, our volunteers, and our donors. Thank you for your partnership. We look forward to many more years of it to come.

Warmest Regards,

Brenda O’Shaughnessy
Founder/Executive Artistic Director
Erasing the Distance

Who We Are

Founded in 2005 and now seen by over 26,000 people, Erasing the Distance is a non-profit arts organization that sheds light on mental health issues through theatre.

Vision: To be a national creative leader in generating insight and compassion around issues of mental health.

Mission: To use the power of performance to disarm stigma, spark dialogue, educate, and promote healing surrounding issues of mental health.

Values: Central to the accomplishment of our mission and vision is a commitment to the following core values:
- Collaboration
- Compassion
- Courageous Communication
- Excellence
- Sustainability

You can expect to find these values in our words and actions.

What We Do

- Gather, transcribe and sculpt true stories from people impacted by mental health issues into theatrical pieces for the stage.
- Present high quality, professional theatre productions for the general public.
- Offer custom performances to enliven meetings, conferences, events, and curriculum for organizations and schools around the country.
- Lead outreach programs that provide youth with an opportunity to explore, share and perform their own mental health stories.
- Teach our unique methodology of gathering true stories and transforming them into performance pieces.

How We Do It

Erasing the Distance programming has three primary branches: ETD for Hire, Custom Productions, and Outreach and Education. Read on for more information about each of these vital areas of our organization.

ETD for Hire

Erasing the Distance has a repertoire of over 40 true stories covering a wide range of topics related to mental health issues.

Our stories feature people of all different ages, ethnic and racial groups, genders, sexual orientations, and perspectives. We even have a few stories in Spanish!

These stories are brought to life by our professional actors at various organizations across the state and country. See below for a list of the many places at which ETD performed this past year.

"What an impactful way to stimulate conversation around topics and issues we all face in some form. Very beautiful and positive—and real."

—audience member

Call 773.856.3455 or email brighid@erasingthedistance.org to bring Erasing the Distance to YOUR community!
Custom Productions

Erasing the Distance creates or co-designs custom shows for communities and organizations interested in exploring mental health from different perspectives.

ETD staged FIVE world premieres during this past year! Here is a brief glimpse into each.

**Falling Petals**

OCT. 2, 2010  Created in collaboration with The Asian American Suicide Prevention Initiative and staged at The Theatre Building (now Stage 73), Falling Petals featured stories exploring how mental health issues and suicide impact the Asian and Indian communities. The show also featured an interactive, multi-lingual art exhibit by Meredith Siemsen and visual art by Alfred Li Tsao. Falling Petals was remounted in March 2011 at University of Illinois in Chicago and will be performed a third time in 2012.

**What You’re Not Expecting When You’re Expecting**

OCT. 27, 2010  Two real mothers’ stories compared the differences between storybook expectations of motherhood and the actual reality of post-partum depression. Featuring a panel of health experts, the show was staged at Flourish Studios and presented in partnership with Swedish Covenant Hospital.

**Will You Stand Up?**

DEC. 1, 2010  Will You Stand Up? featured six stories exploring issues of violence and how it impacts the mental health of individuals and their communities. The show was presented in partnership with Affinity Community Services and staged at Adventure Stage Chicago’s Vittum Theater. Will You Stand Up? was part of a three-month-long, three-pronged violence awareness initiative we spearheaded that also included a community forum and free violence prevention workshops for the community. Northern Trust was our gracious sponsor.

**Stronger Than Silence: surviving our secrets**

APR. 28, 2011  This custom collaboration with C4 Quetzal Center featured four stories about the mental effects of sexual assault and was staged in the Hoover-Leppen Theater at Center on Halsted as part of National Sexual Assault Awareness Month.

**Finding Peace in This House**

JUNE 23, 2011  This theatrical production was the culmination of a five-month residency and training with The Chicago School of Professional Psychology (see pg. 7). Six stories, all transcribed and crafted by The Chicago School students, were staged in the Chicago Cultural Center’s Claudia Cassidy Theater.

“Truly one of the best theatre experiences I’ve ever had. I feel so empowered by ETD in its ability to challenge and motivate through theatre. Thank you a million times.”

—audience member

**ETD TO HOST FIRST ARTISTIC SEASON!**

Beginning in 2012, Erasing the Distance will offer an artistic season of shows so that more people can witness our work and join the conversation about issues of mental health. The productions will be performed over a series of nights by members of our professional acting ensemble and will occur in partnership with major mental health organizations that will offer training to the actors, referrals, and clinical support to any audience members who need it.

Stay tuned…more info to come!
An ETD outreach residency typically lasts 3–5 months and includes in-depth mental health discussions with students, speakers who come and share their personal experiences, and an array of creative activities to help students give voice to their own stories.

This year, ETD provided outreach at two Chicago schools:

Robert L. Grimes Middle School
ETD hosted a three-month residency led by Certified Art Therapist Danniel Anthon, Brighid O’Saughnessy and volunteer ETD artists. Students received support and education about mental health issues while giving voice to their own experiences with depression, substance-addiction, eating disorders, self-injury and more.

Al Raby High School
Brighid O’Saughnessy led a five-month residency as part of the students’ service learning. The residency culminated in a self-created performance, staged for the school and community, which featured the students’ own mental health stories told through poetry, song and theatre.

The Chicago School of Professional Psychology
Our biggest educational undertaking this year was with The Chicago School of Professional Psychology.

With the guidance of Brighid O’Saughnessy and ETD Board Vice President Jamie Pekarek Krohn, LCPC, graduate-level future clinicians conducted and transcribed interviews from individuals throughout the Spring 2011 semester. The students then edited and shaped those interviews into theatrical monologues, which were performed as the show Finding Peace in This House in June 2011.

Erasing the Distance’s process of giving voice to true stories about mental health issues is unique, and we often lead presentations, workshops, trainings, and longer-term programs to teach artists, mental health advocates, and current/future health professionals our specific methodology.

“ This is the only part of my day where I feel expressed. I want us to have this program year-round. ”
—Grimes student

“ What an amazing, life-changing, powerful process! A great opportunity for me to throw my textbook out the window and better appreciate the subjective experiences of individuals who have experienced mental illness. ”
—The Chicago School student
Falling Petals

Finding Peace in This House

DEC 1

JAN 4

JAN 19

Two stories performed for students at The Chicago School of Professional Psychology to help kick-off the story-sharing residency with Brighid O’Shaughnessy and ETD Board Vice President Jamie Pekavec Krinn.

FEB 25

FEB 15

Falling Petals remount at University of Illinois Chicago.

Story of Chicago performed at Alexian Brothers Hospital’s Coalition for a Psychologically Healthy Community.

FEB 17

Five stories performed for students and faculty at Chicago’s Whitney Young High School.

JAN 25

Two stories performed for students and faculty at the Adler School of Professional Psychology.

JAN

MAR 2–4

JUN 23, 2011

JUN 5

JUN 8

FEB 22

FEB 25

FEB 17

Five stories performed for students at Loyola University.

A Secret Eats You Up

Five stories, including the premise of a new piece about one minister’s struggle with bipolar disorder, performed at the First United Methodist Church at Chicago Temple.

NOV 9

Brighid O’Shaughnessy and ETD Artistic Associate Meredith Siemsen instruct future teachers on the ETD methodology at the Anne Biltstein Theological College.

NOV 7

Brighid O’Shaughnessy presents at the Active Minds National Conference at Montclair State University in New Jersey.

NOV 5

Three pieces performed about Latino mental health for the DCFS Latino Family Institute Conference.

NOV 8

Premiere of new piece that explores the Latino mental health experience. Performed at the Institute for Puerto Rican Arts and Culture as part of The Greater Humboldt Park Community of Wellness Project.

FEB

DEC 1

Will You Stand Up?

Workshop Series

Presented in partnership with Affinity Community Services and in collaboration with C4 Quetzal Center, Rape Victims Advocates, Rainbow House, Cease Fire and more, six workshops help teach skills and practice action for violence prevention.

DEC 12

Will You Stand Up?

Workshop Series

MAR

MAR 25

MAR 29

MAR 18

Three stories performed at the Chicago High School for the Arts.

Brighid O’Shaughnessy interviewed on CBS radio by Brennan McCaffrey of WSCR 670’s “The Score.”

Brighid O’Shaughnessy instructs University of Illinois Chicago students and community organization representatives on the ETD methodology.

JUL–AUG

End of Summer Residencies

Like The Score.

ETD performs for the first time in Colorado with five ETD artists and volunteers collect interviews from anyone who wants to share their story at Flourish Studios.

JUL 21, 2010

MAR 10

APR 1

Three students performed at the Chicago High School for the Arts. ETD artists and volunteers collect interviews from anyone who wants to share their story at Flourish Studios.

APR 19

Stories on pot addiction and bipolar disorder performed for teens at Loyola Academy.

APR 8

Story Sharing Day! ETD artists and volunteers collect interviews from anyone who wants to share their story at Flourish Studios.

STONGER THAN SILENCE: Surviving our Secrets

WORLD PREMIERE!

APR 10

ETD performs for students at a city-wide service learning conference at Malcolm X College.

APR 1

ETD performs for students from the All Ruby High School residence to help kick off the story-sharing residency with Brighid O’Shaughnessy.

APR

ETD performs for students at the Institute for Puerto Rican Arts and Culture as part of The Greater Humboldt Park Community of Wellness Project.

SEP 13

Residency: Robert L. Grimes Middle School

SEP 16

ETD featured on Karen Meyer’s segment of the 11:00am ABC-News local news broadcast.

SEP 24

Three stories about healing and community performed at Chicago’s Congregation Rodfei Zedek.

SEP 29

Two performances of Facing the Rain at Dominican University.

SEP 20-23

Two performances of Facing the Rain at Dominican University.

SEP 15

Two stories performed for 7th and 8th graders at The Sonia Shankman Orthogenic School at the University of Chicago.

SEP 27

Two stories performed for students and faculty at the Latin School of Chicago.

SEP 28

Residency: Al Ruby High School

SEP 26

ETD featured on Karen Meyer’s segment of the 11:00am ABC-News local news broadcast.

SEP

ETD performs for students at the Active Minds Association Behavioral Health Consultants Annual Conference in Indianapolis.

SEP 27

ETD performs for students and faculty at the Latin School of Chicago.

SEP 20

ETD performs for students and faculty at the Anne Bilstein Center.

SEP 13

Residency: Robert L. Grimes Middle School

SEP 11

“An Evening With The Senses – Eyes

ETD performs for students and faculty at the Anne Bilstein Center.

SEP 16

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SEP 11

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Erasable the Distance would like to thank our amazing donors for their generosity. We simply cannot do it without you.

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**Donate Today!**

No amount is too small, and every contribution goes a long way toward supporting ETD’s diverse programming. All donations are tax-deductible.

To donate, visit www.ErasingtheDistance.org.