

Partnering with New Communities Best Practices

Oklahoma Arts Council - Teaching Artists

Julie's group:

- Acknowledge there are dynamics happening in a space before you come in. You may need to do some digging to understand these
- Try spending some time in the community before taking a leadership position
- Step back and ask questions about the history of the community
- Understand that there are appointed leaders and then there are the *real* leaders.
- Balance jumping right in with observation
- Understand and expect cultural differences - especially regarding hugging, touching etc
- Building trust may take time
- Listen before forcing your agenda
- Just because you've talked to the administrator doesn't mean you're going to be accepted by the residents
- Find a smaller community within the larger community to help you feel connected
- Look for the folks who can teach you. Be teachable
- Sharing your talents, in this case playing piano for folks, allows an entry. Offer music or art that folks can connect with, that's attractive to the specific community. Art can be a connector, and can reach through barriers
- Play games, encourage play. Direct back to the art, to the music, to the song; that participation will lead to connection and helps getting over awkwardness
- Don't get stuck doing one thing, have back-up plans
- Understand that your work may be new to people at the site, especially staff. Develop a team with them

Antonia's group:

- Be flexible in adapting your program to the needs of the facility and the participants
- Maintain open communication and transparency with your partners
- Keep that communication ongoing
- Connect with facility staff such as custodial and security staff. Follow security protocols
- Visit the site before your program to start to familiarize yourself with people and where you'll be working. Ask questions
- Have a "one hit wonder" lesson that you can plug-in in case of emergencies—something you know has worked in the past with diverse populations
- Be your own advocate
- Know when you might need to take the reins in a situation rather than waiting

Asma's group:

- When entering the room, listen
- Partner with the organizations; bring something to the table
- Be blunt and honest, find out what the community wants to be called, what they want from you
- Think locally, nationally and globally
- Incorporate the advice, suggestions, and stories of participants
- Be multi-faceted
- Create a practice that honors loss and grief

Jade's group:

- Establish strong partnership with staff at the facilities - teaching artists offer skills and coaching on programming, and staff may offer some leads and guidance as to how things work in the community
- Learn from staff with more knowledge and experience about the community
- Be open and learn about the diverse culture
- Listen to both people who are outspoken, as well as people who are more quiet (heard not as often.) Observe and understand everyone's needs
- Be friendly to everyone - you never know what kind of help you will need and from whom
- Respect and be aware of everyone's concerns in order to establish trust
- Some staff or members may be a bit difficult to work with; in this case still try to listen and work with them; continue to be friendly and ally with them
- Learn from mistakes - don't assume you know their needs; don't overstep the boundaries; listen and understand their needs