



6128 DELMAR BLVD
ST. LOUIS MO 63112

(314) 863 5811
(314) 863 6932 FAX
WWW.ART-STL.COM

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A Brief History and Description Community Arts Training (CAT) Institute, St. Louis

→ **The Community Arts Training (CAT) Institute** is an innovative program centered on the belief that art has the power to be an agent for social change and that art can engage the voices of those who may not be heard. Now in its 13th year, the CAT Institute is an annual five-month program fostering successful partnerships among artists, social workers, educators and community activists with the goal of creating significant arts programs in community settings such as neighborhood organizations, social service agencies, political arenas and education programs.

Picture refugee teens recently arrived from war-torn places in the news like Afghanistan, Sierra Leone, Somalia and Bosnia along with African-American teens from St. Louis neighborhoods – all exploring their conflicts, similarities and differences through art, music and drama. Project Common Ground was a partnership of Community Arts Training (CAT) Institute graduates – musicians, theater directors and social workers - collaborating through Community Health-in-Partnership Services, Metro Theater and Center for Survivors of Torture and War Trauma to bring about a creative dialogue among these teens.

→ Picture an arts-based program with the men in transitional housing at Peter & Paul Community Services that documents with visual art, video, poetry and drama their personal journeys from homelessness to independent living. Through this program, these men struggling out of homelessness create art exhibitions, videos and dramatic public readings. Not only does art create personal change in the participants – it creates change in the organization and in our community by helping us vividly understand the causes and the trauma of being homeless. Artists along with the social workers who are CAT Institute graduates collaborate to facilitate and sustain this program.

→ And picture the arts programs at the St. Louis City Juvenile Detention Center that offer opportunities for the Center's troubled young residents to participate in hands-on art workshops such as African drumming, metal and leather crafting, hip hop poetry, murals and circus performance – all coordinated by a dynamic CAT Institute alum along with many artists/mentors who also participated in CAT. This program provides the inspiration for some of these teens to pursue art after they leave the Detention Center as well as make a difficult situation into a valuable one that taps into the better parts of themselves.

The Regional Arts Commission (RAC) is the area's largest annual funder of the arts dedicated to the cultivation, promotion and fostering of cultural programming of all kinds in St. Louis City and County. Always taking a dynamic role in the support of their grantees, RAC staff encourages arts organizations to actively seek partnerships in the greater community. Conceived by Ann Haubrich, then Director of Community Initiatives at RAC, with the notion to promote the power of art outside the traditional concert halls, theaters and galleries, the CAT Institute officially began in 1997. Executive Director Jill McGuire led a coalition of RAC staff, community advisors and Bill Cleveland of the Center for

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Study of Art and Community in the design of the core curriculum for training partners for sustainable community arts programs. The CAT Institute prepares artists and arts organizations to be able to successfully collaborate with social service, community and education organizations.

As former CAT Director Haubrich stated, "RAC did not want to simply throw dollars at community arts projects. We were interested in much more than popsicle art and oatmeal box bongos. Not only did training need to take place on both sides of the fence, the fence needed to be dismantled so that the yard could be bigger. Artists wondered how communities operate, how social service agencies tick. Social workers/community organizers/leaders wanted to gain a better understanding of where an artist works from, how creativity manifests itself, how art breaks down barriers."

The Goals of the Community Arts Training (CAT) Institute include:

- Bringing artists and community workers, social service providers and educators together to understand the others' language and points of view so that successful programming is created and sustained.
- Allowing participants to confront and grapple with unique issues in program planning and adaptability, partnership development, hands-on projects, teaching and situational strategies and assessment tools.
- Providing an active, progressive experience through a rigorous, mentor-based curriculum.
- Providing an ongoing support system for artists and community workers/social service providers/educators engaged in community-based work.

Why the CAT Institute is unique:

The Community Arts Training Institute, now considered a national model, specifically provides the tools for collaborations and partnerships. It is designed as a professional level, comprehensive education program for the sixteen CAT Institute fellows (eight artists of various disciplines and eight social service providers/community activists/educators.) Participants are selected through a nomination, application and interview process based on the professionalism, dedication and articulated goals of each candidate. CAT Institute fellows participate in more than 55 hours of training that occur during intensive two-day sessions once a month. In addition, the fellows are assigned readings, site visits to community arts programs and lab projects.

This program provides skills as well as explores creative techniques in collaboration and community work. The curriculum includes guidance on partnership and survival strategies, mediation and conflict resolution, learning styles, teaching strategies, public relations, identifying funding sources, legal and liability issues in the arts and social services, assessment techniques and advocacy.

The CAT Institute also provides on-going professional development opportunities for its graduates with workshops, dialogues and casual gatherings called CAT Cafes.

Accomplishments of the CAT Institute:

The accomplishments of the Community Arts Training (CAT) Institute can be measured in the accomplishments of the alumni. Approximately 160 Community Arts Training Institute graduates are working in areas such as neighborhood organizations, at-risk schools, prisons, homeless shelters, hospices, labor unions, community centers, jobs programs, and daycare facilities. With

dedication, creativity and resolute spirit, these artists, community activists, social service workers, educators and administrators are a force in the St. Louis area equipped with powerful tools to foster transformation in individuals and in our community. For a look at the graduates and some of the programs they have initiated and participated in, please see the CAT Institute Directory at www.art-stl.com

In a recent survey of CAT Institute graduates, approximately 75% of our respondents reported they have worked directly with one or more CAT alums on a collaborative project or in a program since their graduation. These alums also overwhelmingly noted that they gained new skills or knowledge in the CAT Institute and 100% found that the CAT Institute's stated goals (see above) were met or exceeded. This survey is part of the first phase of an impact study examining the influence of the Institute on personal, organizational and community levels.

Who the CAT Institute serves:

The Community Arts Training (CAT) Institute promotes collaboration, civic engagement and change through art. Arts organizations look to the Regional Arts Commission for guidance in reaching into the community and the CAT Institute is one means to accomplish that. Likewise, social service and community organizations seek ways to amplify all the diverse voices – sometimes unrecognized – that make up our region. Among the organizations that benefit from the CAT Institute are: Barnes-Jewish Hospital, Center for Survivors of Torture and War Trauma, COCA, Community Health-in-Partnership Services, Craft Alliance, Herbert Hoover Boys & Girls Club, Lydia's House, Metro Theater, Missouri Jobs with Justice, Neighborhood Houses, Peter & Paul Community Services, Saint Louis Art Museum, St. Louis City Juvenile Detention Center, South City Open Studio & Gallery for Children, and The Learning Tree Intergeneration Center – to name a few.

Additional Background Information:

Community Arts Training (CAT) Institute faculty:

- **Roseann Weiss** directs the CAT Institute in her position as the Director of Community Art Programs and Public Art Initiatives for the Regional Arts Commission. She has 25 years of experience in arts and community administration in both nonprofit institutions and gallery settings. Before joining the Regional Arts Commission staff, she served as Director of Programs and Education at the Contemporary Art Museum St. Louis.
- **Jane Ellen Ibur**, the Institute's lead faculty, is a poet, writer, teacher, and community artist with twenty years of experience teaching creative writing and literacy through writing programs in jails, housing projects, homeless shelters, residential schools, and other community settings. She is a founding faculty member for the CAT Institute. Recently, she wrote a chapter in the book *Teaching the Arts Behind Bars*. Ibur is the recipient of a 2008 Grand Center Visionary Award.
- **Renee Franklin** is Head of Community and School Programs at the Saint Louis Art Museum. She is a CAT Institute alum from the class of 2001.
- **Sue Greenberg** is Director of Volunteer Lawyers and Accountants for the Arts.
- **Jackie Masei** is Artistic Director for Playback Workshop Theatre. She is a CAT Institute alum from the class of 2005.
- **Bill Cleveland** is the Director of the Center for the Study of Art & Community and author of the recently published *Art and Upheaval, Artists on the World's Frontlines*. He is a founding faculty member of the CAT Institute.
- In addition, numerous **CAT Institute Alumni** are guest faculty.

About the St. Louis Regional Arts Commission:

Founded in 1985, the Regional Arts Commission is a cultural catalyst in the St. Louis area, providing financial, technical, promotional and other support for arts organizations. Directed by a board of fifteen commissioners appointed by the chief executives of St. Louis City and County, RAC is a pivotal force in the continuing development and marketing of the arts in the region. RAC has awarded more than 5,000 grants totaling nearly \$70 million. Visit www.art-stl.com and www.artszipper.com.