



The Power of Art to Transform Communities

# In Review

Summer 2008

To our ArtSpring friends and family:

So many things have changed since our last newsletter, it is hard to remember everything we wish to share with you! We started the New Year with some fresh starts: ArtSpring Founder and Artistic Director Leslie Neal resigned her tenured position as associate professor of dance at Florida International University in order to devote her full attention to ArtSpring. A few weeks later, she was officially appointed co-chair of the Florida Department of Corrections' Arts in Corrections Advisory Group to assist in implementing a statewide Arts in Corrections (AIC) initiative. We are pleased that ArtSpring programming, alongside several other successful and highly acclaimed programs, is being regarded as a best-practice model in this statewide initiative and will serve as a basis to grow AIC programming across Florida. We are proud and excited to be involved at this level and are impressed by the foresight shown by the executives and staff at the Department of Corrections.

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Upon hearing of Leslie's resignation from FIU, Daniel Lewis, dean of dance at New World School of the Arts, extended an invitation for ArtSpring to align with NWSA as an organization in residence. We are honored that our work in the community is respected and appreciated by this internationally recognized academic school and thrilled to accept this generous opportunity. (Read more on page 3).

Another fresh start for 2008 is our move of ArtSpring's offices back to Homestead. With Leslie in the office fulltime, we needed a larger space to work and meet, and we were fortunate to find a great opportunity right in the heart of Homestead. We are grateful to Michael and Karen Daugherty, our wonderful landlords, for giving us a fantastic "nonprofit" rate and favorable lease agreement. We now have private office space, a large meeting room, our own kitchen and bath, and a studio space for movement and artistic creation. We also are pleased to welcome two new part-time assistants, Kimberly Bradshaw and Holly Wickstrom! While we continue to use our post office box as our mailing address, please come by and visit if you are in Homestead; we are located at 35 NW 1<sup>st</sup> Street. Phone numbers and email addresses remain the same (see the back page for contact information)....

Read on for more about ArtSpring developments and recent events, and meet some new additions to our family. Hope to see you soon!

Best regards, *Vivian Bible* Executive Director

## ArtSpring Artist Facilitators Gather to Share and Learn

In February and again in May, ArtSpring artists came together to share ideas and experiences, and to learn effective tools for teaching in correctional facilities and foster care group homes, where we offer the majority of our programs. A component of ArtSpring's role in the statewide Arts in Corrections initiative will be the training and professional development of new artists to facilitate workshops in prisons, as we have done over the past 14 years in expanding our outreach. A big Thank You! to our dedicated faculty!



**Above (L-R):**  
Laurie Oudin,  
La Vonne Canfield,  
Teo Castellanos and  
Matthew Hill



**Below (L-R):**  
Amy  
Carol Webb,  
Brooke Bell and  
Lela Lombardo

**Below:**  
Mabel Perez and  
Nicole Bible



**Dawn Addy (2<sup>nd</sup> from Right), Director of the Center for Labor Research and Studies at Florida International University, taught a two-hour workshop on Conflict Resolution. Also pictured are (L-R): Elena Garcia, Allisen Learnard, Allison Gardner, Mabel Perez, Leslie Neal and Lela Lombardo.**



## New Facilitators Give Voice to Women Inside

ArtSpring welcomes two new facilitators to its artistic family, who bring tremendous musical gifts to their work inside.

Interviews by  
Leslie Sternlieb

### Laurie Jennings Oudin

Laurie is a singer-songwriter, performing with the acoustic duo Jennings and Keller. The former proprietor of the Main Street Café, in Homestead, Laurie studied at the National Shakespeare Conservatory in New York and has especially enjoyed performing as Shakespearean heroines. Laurie has worked with the *Inside Out* program at Homestead Correctional Institution since the beginning of this year.



**Q:** Describe some of your musical endeavors in the *Inside Out* program at HCI.

We just started a project in which each woman writes a three-verse song: The first verse describes the past, the second verse is the present and the third verse is the future. [The project concept was shared by *Inside Out* alumna and songwriter Windsong Young, released from Broward CI in November 2007.] We do improvisational exercises, like the one in which a woman sings her name any way she wants. Making a sound, making a melody, the possibilities are endless. It's declaring who you are to the world; your name is that statement. Some were comedic, some were joyful, some sang to a musical style like hip-hop or jazz, some took their name and made a mini-song out of it... There is no wrong or right to it. And their support of each other is so amazing.

### Amy Carol Webb

Amy is a singer-songwriter, actor, activist, adjunct professor and performance and recording artist with six CDs to her credit. She has appeared everywhere from the Kennedy Center to Florida's festival stages, and earned a Carbonell nomination for *Harry Chapin's America* at the Coconut Grove Playhouse. She wrote and performed an original score and two new songs for the production of *Any One of Us: Words from Prison: Miami* last October and has worked with the *Inside Out* program at Broward Correctional since January 2008.

**Q:** How does your work as a musician differ from other types of artists who may work with the women?

I do believe that we all have a song inside of us. In the *Inside Out* workshop, we are doing some voice work, learning about breath and the voice and singing together. We talk about getting in touch with our voices and what we have to say. A lot of these women have not had the encouragement to get in touch with their creative selves. They are astoundingly creative people and are so ready to channel that creative energy, given the encouragement and the method for how to do that.

**Q:** What kind of musical material are you focusing on?

We work with songs of mine that get people involved and that offer a message to them. Ultimately I want to guide them into writing their own songs. They need permission and need to be given a container for that energy. For many of them, their lives have not been validated as creative people. They feel unseen and unheard, and as facilitators we may be the first to have them feel that they are seen and heard, and what they have to show is worthwhile. Some of them are just downright brilliant. They come back with some of the funniest stuff as well...it's not a grim thing...it's such a celebration of who we are as human beings, and who we can be. Every experience I have with them, I am totally humbled, and inspired, and that's a beautiful way to feel.

**Q:** What is it like to work in a prison environment?

This work just strips it down to what's real: that's what they are looking for, somebody who will tell the truth and love you when you tell the truth. There's this couple of hours of safety, where they can try...it's not all dark and grim and nasty and violent. To be sure, there are those elements, but there's something greater at work: all we have is creative force, love and justice. That's it. What matters is our kindness and respect for one another.



## Laurie (continued from page 2)

**Q:** Can you relate your experience at the Main Street Café with working inside a prison?

We used to do open mike at the café and the open mike becomes a magical, special place, with no judgment. The idea was that they were going to be supported. Making a sound musically can be so transformative...I watched people change from that experience and become able to go about their life with tools they didn't have before. And it showed that people who think they can't sing usually can...At HCI, we recently did groups doing three-part harmony: one group did one note, another group did a third up, and another group a third up from that, making the vowel sound "ah." I would like to take that and expand on it.

**Q:** How do you see this work having an effect on the women you teach, and on yourself?

Every time you can touch a person, you walk away a bit richer than before, and they in turn touch someone—it's a chain reaction. It has potential way beyond what we can see. When I see what these women are capable of, I have learned to look inside and realize that I should discard my own fears as a performer, that I have nothing to lose. I also understand that there is no difference between them and me. They were in a bad circumstance and the same thing could have just as easily happened to me. The women in this class have reached a deep level of understanding. They are going to come out as greater individuals somewhere down the road.

## Women's Fund Luncheon

ArtSpring Board President Leslie Sternlieb [pictured below at left with Leslie Neal, Janet McAliley and Nicole Bible] hosted a table at the Women's Fund luncheon in April, where, as a 2008 Grantee, ArtSpring had the opportunity to display photos and artistic creations by the women in our programs. We were proud of our affiliation with the luncheon's musical guest, Amy Carol Webb [pictured right]



and once again send out our gratitude to funding partners Deborah Hoffman and M. Victoria Cummock.

As it is every year, the well-attended event was a wonderful opportunity to see old friends and meet new ones. In fact, it was at this year's luncheon that we were introduced to Kimberly Bradshaw, who is now working with us as our office administrative assistant.



## Amy (continued from page 2)

**Q:** How has it informed your own work as an artist and musician?

I went in thinking I had something to teach them, but they teach me. Doing this work strips away the trappings of "professional artist" work and gets back to the essential truth, the urge to communicate, from what's deep in us. And as human beings in this society it can get buried and sidetracked and lacquered over in our day-to-day conquests. When I work with them, all that falls away. It burst me open in that respect, it gets back to the core of the matter; it reminds me of why I got started in this.

**Q:** Why is this work important—to you, and the community?

It's important to me to cultivate community among us, to cultivate what connects us all, especially this population of women, who have had, by far, too little acknowledgment of who they are as creative, valuable children of our community. It makes me more human and them more human at the same time.

**Q:** Would you recommend this work to other artists, musicians?

Yes! It helps us remember what the initial motivation to perform was all about: to connect with somebody else in really organic ways. Our essence is no different from one another, our needs and desires are the same. I'm just really grateful that this has come my way. I'm also available to talk to artists and performers about pursuing this work. They can contact me through the ArtSpring office by e-mailing [artspring@artspring.org](mailto:artspring@artspring.org).

## ArtSpring Aligns with New World School of the Arts

Now in residence at New World School of the Arts, ArtSpring extends a special THANK YOU to Daniel Lewis, dean of dance, for initiating this alliance. We also wish to acknowledge the Center for the Arts in Healthcare Research and Education (CAHRE) at the University of Florida for granting Leslie Neal a Courtesy Appointment, Project Director for Arts in Corrections. We are extremely grateful and excited about this emerging collaboration.





ArtSpring, Inc. is a not-for-profit 501(c)(3) arts-based public charity dedicated to the power of art to transform individuals and strengthen communities through creative expression. Through a collaborative process, ArtSpring artist facilitators engage workshop participants in finding cultural meaning and creative expression through their own art-making. ArtSpring's programs primarily serve incarcerated women and girls in detention and foster care who are often victimized and forgotten.

ArtSpring is nationally recognized for the longest ongoing arts in corrections programming in Florida providing quality arts-based, educational programming for female offenders in collaboration with the Florida Department of Corrections since 1994. ArtSpring maintains two principal ongoing programs, *Inside Out-Expressive Arts Workshops for Incarcerated Women* and *Breaking Free-Arts for Adolescent Girls*, both of which promote creative thinking, personal growth, effective life skill development and confident self-expression that provide participants better tools for survival inside and upon their release. The success of *Inside Out* resulted in the implementation of *Rites and Passages (RAP)* in 2005, a program for male offenders using theatre and African drumming to create original work. ArtSpring's adult programs were recently approved as best practice models under the Florida Department of Corrections' Arts in Corrections statewide initiative.

ArtSpring contracts a faculty of talented artists to provide community arts intervention workshops that utilize a combination of art forms in a thematically designed arts program. ArtSpring programs are based on a unique interdisciplinary curriculum developed by ArtSpring Founder and Artistic Director Leslie Neal, incorporating theater, dance, writing, visual art, music, storytelling, guided imagery and performance as transformational tools for self-reflection and personal change. Original work by the participants that is explored in workshop sessions becomes the material for the creation and production of live presentations. Each program culminates in a performance/graduation presented to facility staff, other inmates/clients and, when approved, invited guests from the outside community. Ongoing programs each year occur in four adult correctional institutions, the Miami-Dade Juvenile Detention Center, and a residential facility for girls in the foster care system. ArtSpring believes that addressing the needs of men, women and girls through educational programs while they are incarcerated ultimately creates a safer community for all.

**ArtSpring gratefully acknowledges 2008 financial contributors:**

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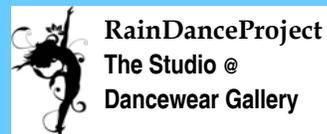
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