

REHEARSING RESILIENCE



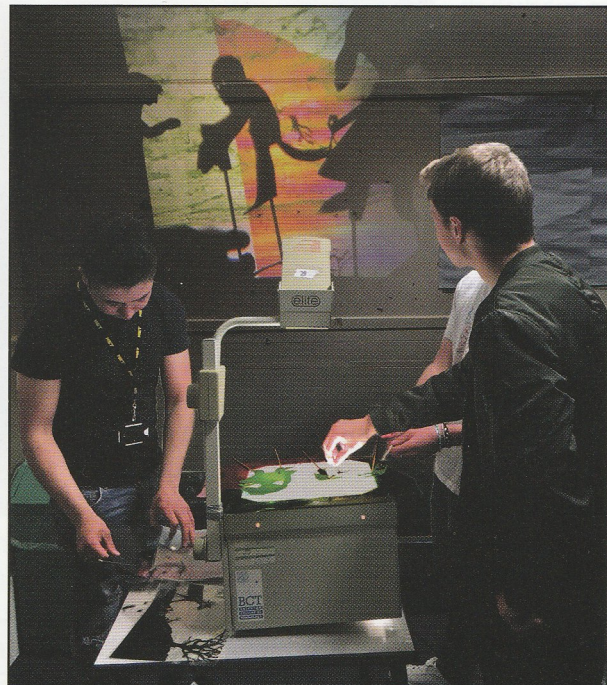
LOVE VS TRAUMA REHEARSAL PHOTO: RAVEN KALIANA PUPPETS

by Raven Kaliana

The *Love vs Trauma: Puppet-Based Resilience Project* was initiated in response to a core problem we face as a species – everyone experiences trauma at some point – and it can effect every aspect of our lives, from our family relationships to world politics. The body’s trauma responses make it harder to intellectually evaluate a distressing situation, to reach out for support, and to respond pro-actively.

A longtime professional puppeteer, puppet maker, and director, I’m also survivor of human trafficking. My process of recovery has consisted of escaping my abusers, establishing a healthy and loving “chosen family,” connecting with a supportive professional community, processing the emotional effects, and nurturing joy and self-expression in my life. It feels so meaningful to me now to reach out through the medium of puppetry, to teach the next generation techniques for peer support and resilience, and to help adults learn approaches for intervention, prevention, and recovery. (love-vs-trauma.tumblr.com)

My organization, Outspiral (outspiral.org.uk), has been developing the project since 2015. It has been quite wide-reaching in scale, consisting of two parts: *Love vs Trauma*, a live shadow play with a post-show discussion, and an associated workshop, Rehearsing Resilience, which can be paired with the performance, or stand alone.



THE REHEARSING RESILIENCE WORKSHOP AT PRINCE'S TRUST PHOTO: MARLYZOHREHIE

Love vs Trauma is a 45-minute live shadow theatre production for adults and teens, followed by a 30-minute post-show discussion. Using 3-dimensional puppets in shadow with moving lights and reflective effects, the show illustrates the isolating dynamics of abuse upon a child. The audience witnesses the child's mental escape through dissociation, then sees her discovering a sense of self-worth, gathering support, and ultimately moving on to build a better life. The distressing events in the story are abstracted enough that the family's dysfunction can represent a wide range of situations involving interpersonal trauma.

During a work-in-progress performance, the audience made it clear that the shadow imagery, so colorful and entrancing, underscored the necessity of finding a way to convey the practical information clearly. For the next version, I re-wrote the script as lyrics to help the audience understand the inner experiences and recovery processes of the child. The characters are each represented by a different musical instrument. Each part is sung in a distinct and emotionally evocative way by Kate Daisy Grant (katedaisygrant.com), who also composed and performed the music. Additional music and mixing were performed by Nick Pynn (nickpynnmusic.com), who recorded the post-show discussion as well.

My company, Puppet (R)Evolution, developed and premiered the show at Little Angel Theatre in London (littleangeltheatre.com) with the support of their Incubate artist residency as well as their Firsts launch programme. The audience discussion was phenomenal: "If I had seen this when I was in school and stuck in [the abuse], I would have been absolutely heartened. At that time, I couldn't have seen an end to it." The feedback afterwards was also very positive:

...a terrible childhood does not have to mean a terrible adulthood. It was beautiful, evocative, imaginative beyond belief, and the beautiful moving words sung so enchantingly stung and soothed straight to my heart. The emotional message of the story is crystal clear, probably because Raven herself has been through and survived the trauma herself. All I can say is Wow, thank you...

We plan to tour this two-handed live show around to venues in the United Kingdom and international puppet festivals in 2018.

The Rehearsing Resilience workshop forms the second part of the project – a 2-hour shadow puppet-based workshop on resilience and trauma recovery, mainly aimed at young people. This component has been supported via an artist residency through Artists Access to Arts Colleges (aa2a.org) and City College (ccb.ac.uk) and was developed



interactively with input from participants aged 16-25 at Prince's Trust (princes-trust.org.uk). Many participants on the Prince's Trust program have trauma backgrounds themselves, so their feedback proved very insightful.

In the Rehearsing Resilience workshop, students learn about the effects of trauma and stages of recovery, peer support, reclaiming personal narrative, and together enact a scene in which a character must seek support to manage the situation. Trauma freezes language, so puppetry can serve as a way to share experiences with others without verbal explanations – breaking down the barriers of isolation. In his book *Resilience*, Boris Cyrulnik states, “Bond and meaning...make resilience possible.”

The lively experimentation with shadow puppetry helps to counterbalance the serious subject matter, giving a “one-step-removed” effect, which allows the students to deal with the topic with some emotional distance. One student thanked me for “coming in to teach a workshop about trauma, and for sharing about your own life.” Another wrote, “The workshop has changed the way I think about trauma and resilience by thinking in a positive way.” In terms of which parts of the workshop were especially useful, one student wrote, “All of it.” Feedback in regards to the use of puppetry was, “It was very fun and helpful.”

The Rehearsing Resilience workshop has been adapted as well for training staff members of charities and agencies working with children and families. This version features some drama therapy techniques and empowerment approaches inspired by Augusto Boal's Theatre of the Oppressed. This version of the workshop has been developed with the support of Folkmanis Puppets (folkmanis.com), which makes beautiful, soft animal hand puppets. These cuddly and well-made characters pres-

ent more options for working with younger children.

The Rehearsing Resilience workshops will be offered to a wide range of national and international charities working with young people, and we will seek funding to tour it to secondary schools across the UK. A pilot program in London on trauma education in primary schools

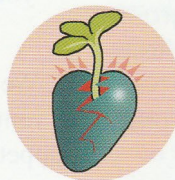
has recently been launched, with some participating organizations having booked Rehearsing Resilience training events for their staff members.

The ability to manage trauma is a crucial hurdle we must cross in order to survive as a species. Animals commonly respond to trauma with “fight or flight,” which fuels immediate action. Humans, on the other hand, most often suffer trauma from other humans, and since we are dependent upon each other for survival, we will flip into a “freeze” response to preserve our social fabric. The freeze response is what produces post-traumatic stress, along with making a person vulnerable to a host of other ill-effects such as anxiety, depression, substance addiction, heart disease, cancer, ADHD...

The freeze response entraps the physical trauma reaction in such a way that the body can't recognize that the danger has passed. In an ever-vigilant effort to protect ourselves, our bodies will unconsciously re-enact the traumatic events in our lives. Unless these trapped responses are recognized and processed, parents, for instance, might reflexively respond to stressors by replaying the ways they themselves were treated as children. Unhealthy patterns from frozen trauma repeat, not only into one's family dynamics, but also into one's workplace, community, political choices, economic structure, and the way we mistreat the planet.

In order to shift towards an economic and social structure based in environmental stewardship and social justice, as opposed the current economy based on the exploitation of human beings and natural resources, we need to look at the role of trauma, and how that tends to be replayed when its not consciously addressed.

Our world urgently cries out for healing. It's hard to imagine a different way of doing things, and to picture – much less to build – processes that would



LOVE vs TRAUMA
PUPPET-BASED RESILIENCE PROJECT

help to: repair the damage we have done to the environment, mitigate war; establish social justice. As puppeteers, however, we have a lot of practice with building new worlds: self-organizing, collaborating, supporting each other, and sharing our vision. We can lead with the heart and empower others through our imaginations.

The current economic system relies on the illusion of isolation and urges us to think of ourselves as things or commodities – cogs in a machine – rather than as precious human beings, deserving of respect and tenderness, beaming with an inner universe. Through trauma, we lose touch with our inner resources – creativity, emotions, empathy and sense of self-worth – and that reinforces demeaning cultural messages. Puppetry illuminates the inner life of objects. It can help to restore connection with our own core strengths, while the cooperative aspect of the art form can heal victims' sense of having been abandoned or not protected by their communities... One of the musical refrains in *Love vs Trauma* is, "We all deserve care, we all deserve care."

Puppetry, like child's play, allows us to rehearse an alternative scenario, a different outcome, and new potential

realities before we try them out in the real world. For an audience, the puppeteer restores the soul back into objects, thawing our hearts in unexpected ways. I believe that the invitation for both personal and societal healing can be offered in beauty, in love, in compassion, and in joyfulness. We can help to re-write the story.

For inquiries about the *Love vs Trauma* play and Rehearsing Resilience workshops, please contact Raven Kaliana at puppets@ravenkaliana.com

Raven Kaliana is the writer/director at Puppet (R) Evolution, works as a puppet maker and puppeteer, and founded Outspiral - providing public education on child protection issues through the medium of puppetry. She's presented *Hooray for Hollywood*, her puppet-based show on human trafficking, to audiences at Oxford University, New York University, United Nations events in Switzerland and New York, and at puppet festivals in Kazakhstan, Denmark, France, Poland and America.

This Spring at the Ballard Institute & Museum of Puppetry

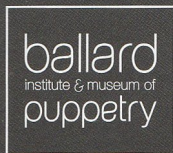
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Evelyn Baird building puppets for *Jerry Pulls the Strings* (1938)