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PROMISING PRACTICES



Drama therapy encourages persons with disabilities to share their stories and talents

“Powerful” and “inspirational” were among theatergoers’ comments as they experienced emotions ranging from sorrow to joy in response to the *I Am You* series of original monologues written and staged by individuals with developmental disabilities in Bloomington, Indiana.

A recent [CARF](#) survey report commended [Stone Belt](#) for its exemplary role in envisioning, creating, and producing the *I Am You* series. Stone Belt is one of the oldest and largest service providers offering support and education for individuals with disabilities in south central Indiana.

I Am You is not only a vehicle for persons served by Stone Belt to showcase their writing and performing talents but also an opportunity for them to broaden public understanding of disabilities by engaging the audience with stories about their lives. Their stories are ones of self-determination, love, friendship, loss, triumphs, hopes, and dreams.

Michelle Davenport, a registered drama therapist, serves as the Stone Belt Lifelong Learning curriculum developer. She explains the value of dramatic activities to therapeutically explore disability topics and issues. “Through drama therapy, individuals can discover themselves without experiencing the boundaries, barriers, and stigmas that society often imposes on them. Drama therapy also enables individuals to delve into developing their social skills. Effective social skills are one of the key ingredients in society to experience the fullest level of inclusion.”

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About the ECS Promising Practices newsletter series

An organization receiving exemplary recognition in its CARF survey report stands out because of its professional and strategic response to a service or business need. CARF presents these ECS Promising Practices articles to encourage dialogue among service providers and to offer examples of creative solutions for improving service quality.

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Issues are categorized by topic: Business Practices, Community Services, and Employment Services.

She adds, "Self-revelatory theater such as *I Am You* can help ensure a safe, healthy, and transformational experience for the performers and audience alike. The goal of these presentations is for people who have never met, or don't know much about individuals with disabilities, to deepen their understanding of the human condition and break down stereotypes."

The Bloomington Playwrights Project, a local professional theater, has shared its performance space with *I Am You* since the biannual series debuted in 2008. The theatre has joined Stone Belt in cosponsoring three sold-out seasons.

While persons served by Stone Belt rivet the audience on stage, numerous Stone Belt artists exhibit their original paintings and other works of art in the theater lobby. The CARF survey report observed, "Stone Belt artisans developed a mosaic for the backdrop."

Davenport reflects, "I learn so much from the performers. During our workshops, I find how similar we all are to one another. Every time I hear a story, I learn more about myself and people in general."



Above: Actor-writers in the I Am You series build public understanding of disabilities by telling their personal stories at sold-out performances.

To learn more about *I Am You* and drama therapy, visit the Stone Belt website, www.stonebelt.org, or contact Michelle Davenport at mdavenport@stonebelt.org or (812) 332-2168, extension 229.

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