



We had a fun time on February 3 with a visit from Cindy Barton (above center), the morning DJ on 102.9 LITE FM. She brought us beautiful flowers, treats from Wuollet, and a huge box of McGarvey coffee (which will probably take us a year to get through given that half of us are off caffeine at any given time). Your organization could be treated, too: <http://www.wlte.com/page/Buble.jsp>.

Congratulations to Brooke Ahlquist for being accepted to the Masters in Public Health programs at the University of Minnesota and Cornell University. We are lucky that Brooke has decided to stay in Minnesota, and she will begin her program immediately following her completion of the Masters in Geography program, also at the University of Minnesota.

We recently welcomed Nathan Salzl as our spring intern at the Improve Group. He will be with us through May 2006. Nathan is finishing his Masters of Sciences in Applied Psychology at the University of Wisconsin-Stout, where he has focused on health research and evaluation. He has spent time with us analyzing data and preparing a journal article on collaborative advantage and why networks are a good way to address complex social issues as part of our cross-site evaluation of Minnesota's Safe Schools/Healthy Students grantees.

The Improve Group was recently awarded a contract with the Minnesota Department of Human Services (DHS) to review each of the State's Medicaid waiver programs. These waivers are designed to allow individuals to remain in their homes or community environment of their choice while still receiving services more typically provided in an institutional setting. We will be working with DHS to review waiver programs operated by each of the State's counties, plus one tribal government and nine health plans, and have the opportunity to talk to consumers, staff and policy makers to determine how the waivers are helping recipients improve their quality of life.

In late spring we will be on the move again. While we love the homey environment in Eagan, we need a little more elbow room. We are currently finalizing plans for a space near the Mall of America in Bloomington. The space is quite large (with room to grow – no more moving for at least a few years!) and the building has extensive conference and classroom facilities, making meeting arrangements a snap. Watch for our announcement in June. We hope to welcome you to our new space over the summer.

It is a busy event season for our corporate giving program. On April 27, the Improve Group sponsored both the National Association of Women Business Owners annual lunch and the Minneapolis Urban League annual dinner. On May 6, we will sponsor the PACER Center annual benefit. For information on having your event sponsored by the Improve Group, contact Susan Murphy at [susan@theimprovegroup.com](mailto:susan@theimprovegroup.com).

# the improve groove

The Improve Group Quarterly Newsletter

## UNESCO World Conference on Arts Education

By Leah Goldstein Moses

Beginning in 1999, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) launched a global initiative to strengthen arts education. In 2003, Portuguese delegates to the United Nations called for a global conference to address this aim, resulting in the 2006 World Conference on Arts Education. The World Conference brought together artists, educators, policy makers and researchers in Lisbon, Portugal. The conference aimed to affirm the role of arts in the development of children, stress the role of policy makers in implementing arts education and develop a framework for teaching the arts.

Several themes emerged and were consistent across disciplines and nationalities. It was both surprising and heartening to see how much similarity there is across countries. Among the major themes:

- The classic model of teaching each subject in isolation from each other does not

provide students with the skills they will need in the context of globalization. Children need to **integrate multiple types of information**, including the arts, to understand the world in which they live.

- The two essential skills children need to gain from education are **critical thinking and creativity**. The arts are an essential component in teaching these skills; they provide opportunities for children to think about problems in new ways, develop new and creative solutions to those problems, and communicate their ideas in a variety of contexts.
- The arts present a further opportunity for helping **children develop both self-awareness and an appreciation for diversity**. Because most children are growing up in a more technological and diverse world than their parents did, the arts can serve both as a tool for exploring that world and a medium in which children can build and share new values.

- Finally, despite the opportunities that the arts present, they are usually forced to **compete with rather than complement** "core subjects" like math, reading and science. Opportunities for arts learning and artistic expression seem to be decreasing rather than increasing across nationalities.

These themes suggest that rather than continuing to look at arts as one of the subjects taught in school, they would better serve as one framework for teaching all subjects. Increasing the role of the arts would help students develop the important creative skills needed and many of the lessons learned in recent years about multiple intelligences and learning styles would be addressed.

For more information about the conference, see: [http://portal.unesco.org/culture/en/ev.php-URL\\_ID=26967&URL\\_DO=DO\\_TOPIC&URL\\_SECTION=201.html](http://portal.unesco.org/culture/en/ev.php-URL_ID=26967&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html)

## Lessons from the Workshop: What are the impacts of arts education?

By Leah Goldstein Moses

The UNESCO conference provided an opportunity to present the results of our three-year evaluation of the Performing Arts Workshop's Artists-in-Schools (AIS) program. The AIS program set out to evaluate three participant-level goals: improved academic outcomes, increased critical thinking using the arts, and improved behaviors. The evaluation used a comparison-group pre- and post-test design. Many significant benefits of arts education program were discovered through the evaluation. When compared to the comparison-group, participating students showed:

- Greater gains in reading test scores than their comparison-group peers, including fluency, comprehension and vocabulary
- Better attitudes towards school than their comparison-group peers, including enjoyment of classes and homework
- Improved critical thinking skills including being able to reflect on the artistic process and finding ways to be creative
- Ability to apply the artistic concepts to other subjects to solve problems and understand concepts
- More positive classroom behaviors, including showing respect for peers and teachers

These program benefits were even more apparent with longer participation in the program.

From the conference we learned that having a solid evaluation basis is important in both developing strong programs and in building relationships with the teachers, artists, policy makers and funders who are essential in delivering those programs to children. We heard from numerous countries, including Scotland, Japan, Cameroon, Jamaica and France that demonstrating the value of arts education is essential to building support for arts education. Many attendees were excited by our findings, and that they mix an appreciation for the value of the arts with the scientific basis for that value. After the presentation, we were asked to share our findings and methodology at an international symposium on the impact of arts education to be held at the Pompidou Center (Paris) in January 2007. For that presentation we will be sharing the methods we used and suggesting ways that outcomes can be more widely evaluated and communicated.

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To see our presentation, visit: [www.theimprovegroup.com/reports/UNESCOpres.pdf](http://www.theimprovegroup.com/reports/UNESCOpres.pdf).



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## Sharing Our Evaluation Expertise

By Marian Kimball Eichinger

The 16th Minnesota Conference on Adolescent Females was convened on March 27 with the theme “*Rejuvenating the Optimism, Energy, and Personal Power of Working with Girls.*” Conference participants representing a vast array of local and national organizations that provide services for girls had the opportunity to learn about and share experiences of empowering girls through workshops on: successfully energizing girls through art; the unique qualities of the adolescent female brain and thought processes; promoting healthy sexual development in girls; and preventing violence and bullying among girls. In addition, participants could learn from panels of girls sharing personal stories through a section of the conference entitled “*Young Women Speak to Us.*”

Marian Kimball Eichinger of The Improve Group and Nancy E. Weiss of Catalyst Consulting Group had the privilege of presenting *Evaluation Basics: Collecting and Realizing Results to provide conference participants with an introduction to program evaluation.* Workshop attendees worked for a variety of programs for girls including residential treatment facilities and detention centers and recreation and adventure programs. Each attendee came to the workshop prepared with specific and well-conceived questions and concerns related to program

evaluation and how to make it effective. As Marian addressed these issues and led the attendees through a discussion of different types of evaluations and data collection methods, she used examples of evaluations that The Improve Group has conducted with organizations serving girls. The workshop format allowed for an animated discussion.

The highlight of *Evaluation Basics* was taking the participants step by step through the construction of a Logic Model. A Logic Model is a way to visually illustrate how program goals and activities lead to results and how to measure them, which can serve as an essential foundation to successful evaluations. Logic Models were a new concept to most workshop attendees and they enthusiastically tackled the activity of identifying their program’s goals, activities, outcomes, indicators of success and measures, and creating a concrete guide for a potential evaluation of their programs.

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**Marian Kimball Eichinger has been with The Improve Group for over two years and specializes in project coordination, research design and qualitative data collection and reporting. To contact her, email [marian@theimprovetgroup.com](mailto:marian@theimprovetgroup.com)**

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## ‘Tis the Season: Non-Profits and Public Policy Advocacy

By Becky Stewart and Nathan Paine

Nonprofit organizations can and should lobby.

It isn’t difficult.

It isn’t mysterious.

It isn’t expensive.

And it is a proper role for nonprofits.

- **Marcia Avner, Minnesota Council of Non-Profits**  
***The Lobbying and Advocacy Handbook for Nonprofit Organizations***

Many non-profit leaders know that public policies have significant effects on their organizations and constituents. While the Internal Revenue Service regulates policy-related activities of 501(c)3 organizations, non-profits still have many opportunities to have a powerful role in influencing public policy. Compelling data showing their impact can be of invaluable help in these efforts.

The most important assets non-profits have in this role are their special expertise in the issues they address, and the great passion and commitment they bring to that cause. Their expertise stems from their close understanding of the issues they address and their many facets and challenges. Moreover, non-profits have experience in, and data to prove, what works and what doesn’t to address issues.

Non-profits are finding innovative ways of introducing their expertise to policy debates and policy discussions.

Some non-profits have involved policy-makers on the leadership team of community initiatives; this experience allows lawmakers to

gain considerable insight into the nuanced opportunities and challenges of an issue. Other non-profits have captured the attention of policy-makers by sharing their evaluation findings that show the impact of a particular approach. Organizations have also used their evaluation data to increase their community’s knowledge about an issue; this can have policy impact in the longer term. In addition, in an election year like this one, non-profits can also do voter education work, as long as these activities are strictly non-partisan.

These are just a few ideas of ways in which non-profits can engage to influence public policy. The Improve Group enjoys working with our clients on understanding their evaluation data and finding ways it can be used for developing public policy.

For more information about the do’s and don’ts of non-profit advocacy, please also see: <http://www.mncn.org/advocacy.htm>.

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## Chickpea Soup with Spinach

By Leah Goldstein Moses

While in Portugal, I had the opportunity to eat at a wonderful casual restaurant that served only soup and bread, and the soup I had was fabulous. The following recipe is adapted from *Portuguese Homestyle Cooking* by Ana Patuleia Ortins, which was a (very thoughtful!) gift from former Improve Group employee Kari Schuch. Makes a very big pot.

3 15-oz. cans chickpeas, rinsed and soaked for 1 hour  
5 T. olive oil  
1 small onion, finely chopped  
4 large garlic cloves, finely chopped  
1 bay leaf  
12 c. water  
1 c. rice

1 T. salt  
1 t. pepper  
2 T. chopped fresh cilantro  
1 package frozen spinach, thawed in a colander  
1 lb. chorizo or other spicy sausage (can use turkey or vegetarian varieties)

1. In a large soup pot, cook onions, garlic and bay leaf in oil over medium-low heat until onion is transparent (about 7 minutes).
2. Add chickpeas and water and simmer until chickpeas are very tender, about 1 hour.
3. Use a fork to press the chickpeas against the side of the pot. They should mash easily, and skins will float to the top of the broth. Scoop out the skins and discard.

4. Remove the bay leaf.
5. Blend with either an immersion blender or in small batches in a blender.
6. Bring soup to a boil. Add rice, salt and pepper. Cover, reduce heat, and simmer until rice is nearly done, about 20 minutes.
7. Add cilantro and spinach. Stir well and simmer for another 5 minutes.
8. Slice and brown the sausage in a separate pan. Use to garnish bowls of soup.



The Monument of Discovery, Lisbon, Portugal

## featured client: HIRED

Dawn Hall, Senior Employment Coordinator and Jan West, Program Manager work with HIRED, a leading provider of employment services in the Twin Cities metro area for over 35 years. Job seekers and employers rely on HIRED to provide personalized and innovative work solutions at no cost to participants. HIRED collaborates with a number of other organizations recruitment and retention services to employers. More than 9,000 people, many of whom are greatly disadvantaged, are served by HIRED each year. HIRED has special programs for youth, refugees, welfare-to-work individuals, and low-income adults.

In 2005, the Improve Group completed an outcome evaluation of HIRED’s Building Lives/Ramsey County program, funded by the Minnesota Department of Public Safety. Leah recently asked Dawn and Jan to share their insights for other organizations providing grant-funded programs.

**LGM: Please tell us a little bit about the Building Lives program.** The Building Lives program was designed to help youth and young adults to become productive members of the community. Key components of the Building Lives program were education, employment, support services and the long-term involvement of a caring adult.

Building Lives was recognized by the U.S. Department of Labor with a **Promising Practices Award**, a special recognition for programs exhibiting exemplary services in the youth employment arena. Building Lives was one of only five programs selected from throughout a 10-state region.

**LGM: Who do you help with your services?**

We assisted at-risk youth and youth offenders ages 16-21 in Ramsey County, Minnesota. Through the program they learned to avoid criminal behaviors and develop new skills that support employment and improved connections to the community.

To learn more about HIRED’s services or how you can support its programs, please visit ([www.hired.org](http://www.hired.org)) or call 612-529-3342.

**LGM: What makes your program unique?**

The Building Lives program provided each youth a counselor who, among many roles, played the role of a longer-term caring adult. Clients worked with their counselor for up to 2 years, allowing a strong relationship to develop. The clients knew they could count on their counselor to help support them in their educational, personal and employment goals.

**LGM: What are some challenges facing HIRED and other workforce readiness organizations?**

Funding is always a major challenge. The Building Lives holistic approach to client-centered services has been proven to greatly benefit the clients and yet, due to budget cuts and lack of funding, couldn’t continue after the end of the demonstration grant.

**LGM: What have you been particularly proud of in the last few years?**

Long after the program ended, clients continue to call and visit their counselors to update them on their achievements and express wishes the program would restart. We’re very proud that we provided over 400 youth with excellent services and developed an environment where clients felt safe, welcome and encouraged.

**LGM: What special passion does each of you bring to your work?**

We all strongly believe that counselors need to develop good rapport with their clients, treat them with the utmost respect, hold them accountable for their decisions and be “real” with them. We are most passionate about helping youth discover their true potential and helping them reach their goals.

**LGM: What are you looking forward to in the coming year?**

We are going forward with the hope that funding will surface for us to continue the work we do with youth.

# Upcoming Grants and Requests for Proposals

By Susan Murphy

The Improve Group regularly monitors funding notices and seeks out new grant prospects. Since many funders are committed to promoting the health and development of the communities where they are located the following are up-coming opportunities of interest from local businesses and corporations. **Application Tip:** Whether or not your organization receives the grant or contract you were applying for you should contact the Program Manager and thank them for considering your proposal. This is also an opportunity to find out the reasons for their not choosing your application or to get suggestions on improving your approach in the future. If you have questions on the notices listed below or would like advice on applying for grants please contact Susan Murphy at [susan@theimprovegroup.com](mailto:susan@theimprovegroup.com).

## The General Mills Foundation

“The Foundation’s mission is to provide financial support to nonprofit organizations that create sustainable community improvement in the areas of social services, education, arts and culture, and youth nutrition and fitness.” In keeping with this goal they will be continuing their Celebrating Communities of Color grants program. A total of fifty \$10,000 grants will be awarded in 2006 to organizations that serve people of color. The submission deadline for this program is Sept 1. Guidelines and application materials can be downloaded at <http://www.generalmills.com/corporate/commitment/>.

## Target Foundation

The Target Foundation makes operating, project and capital grants to 501 (c) (3) non-profits in the Minneapolis/Saint Paul Metropolitan area. Specific areas of interest are: Partnering with arts and cultural institutions to make special exhibitions, performances and events visible and accessible to the community; and supporting direct service organizations that sustain the basic shelter, food and clothing needs of individuals or families at risk. Proposals are accepted February 1 through November 1. Download applications from their website at [www.targetcorp.com/targetcorp\\_group/community/guidelines.jhtml](http://www.targetcorp.com/targetcorp_group/community/guidelines.jhtml).

## Wells Fargo Foundation

The Wells Fargo Foundation serves the local community through applications to their Metropolitan Contributions Committee (MCC). Funding priorities include one-time project/non-recurring expenses for programs that target economic improvement. Highest priority will be given to equipment needs and facility improvements. The MCC also gives multi-year grants to capital campaigns for organizations with strong ties to the communities Wells Fargo serves. Application deadlines are April 1, July 1, October 1 and February 1. Capital campaign requests should be received no later than July 1 and will be reviewed once a year at the September meeting. For more information go to the foundation website at [www.wellsfargo.com/about/charitable/mn\\_guidelines](http://www.wellsfargo.com/about/charitable/mn_guidelines).

## Unique Marketing Opportunity

Does your non-profit organization want to present your program and evaluation in a new way that will reach a broad audience? Twin Cities Public Television (TPT) has small grants available that can be leveraged for corporate sponsorship for creating half-hour video programs that will be broadcast on Channel 2 and on I Tunes and promoted in TPT magazine. The Improve Group would be happy to help you craft your message. For more information, email Leah Goldstein Moses at [leah@theimprovegroup.com](mailto:leah@theimprovegroup.com) or Tom Trow with Minnesota Channel Partnerships at [tomtrow@earthlink.net](mailto:tomtrow@earthlink.net).