



Best Practices Database

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Doctors of Happiness, Sao Paulo and Rio de Janeiro Brazil

Best Practice

New for 2002

Categories:

Children and Youth:

- 0-9 years
- 10 years to adult
- health and nutrition
- vulnerable groups

Environmental Management:

- environmental remediation
- environmentally sound technologies
- pollution reduction
- resource management

Civic Engagement and Cultural Vitality:

- community participation
- expression and animation
- social and cultural vitality

Level of Activity: National

Ecosystem: Continental

Summary

Doctors of Happiness (Doutores da Alegria) is Brazil's pre-eminent performing arts organisation devoted to bringing joy to hospitalised children two days a week, 48 weeks per year. Using clown theatre as its main language, experienced, professional artists perform delightful parodies of medical rounds where the healing power of humor is the chief medical treatment.

After going through a rigorous selection process, these artists undergo twelve months of training in hospital protocol and artistic adaptation to that environment, followed by constant reviews that maintain the high quality of the work. This training enables them to visit special units such as intensive care, burn, bone marrow transplant and AIDS.

Working one-on-one with chronically ill children, their parents and healthcare professionals, these "doctors of delight" help ease the stress of hospitalisation by reintroducing laughter as part of their lives.

While doctors and nurses focus treatment on the illness, clown doctors focus on what is good and healthy, stimulating it through creative artistic interaction that creates a healthy working partnership that benefits all involved.

Established in September of 1991, the organization has earned national recognition, being considered a role model for its professional, innovative work, such as influencing public policies.

The Ministry of Health has just launched a national programme for the humanisation of health care, due to the attention Doutores da Alegria brought to the subject. The program in partnership with the Ministry, will develop special training programs for hospital personnel and generating knowledge for organised dissemination. In nearly eleven years, over 250,000 children have been visited in nine hospitals, seven in Sao Paulo and two in Rio de Janeiro.

Narrative

SITUATION BEFORE THE INITIATIVE BEGAN

Doutores da Alegria was initiated in Sao Paulo, Brazil, by Brazilian born and raised actor Wellington Santos. From 1983 through 1991 he lived in New York City, studying drama and working as a professional performer. In 1988 he joined the Big Apple Circus Clown Care Unit (a programme that sends professional clowns to visit hospitalised children one-on-one, three days a week, bringing them the joy and magic of circus, to help them cope with trauma and finish their medical treatment. This became a turning point in his life and led to the opening of the Brazilian sister-programme, Doutores da Alegria.

Having been raised in Brazil at a time of military government, when theatre, culture and the Arts were considered "superfluous" and artists "subversive troublemakers", working at the hospital as a professional artist, touching the lives of the young patients in a very visible way, helped the artist pay his social dues

In the three years Wellington worked with The Big Apple Circus Clown Care Unit in New York, he was mostly based at Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Centre, which had a significant number of Brazilian patients who were truly delighted to interact with a fellow Brazilian clown; he would also hear from parents about the lack of any activities in Brazilian hospitals that would help patients and families cope with the ordeal of long medical treatments.

Sensing he had acquired enough experience in New York, it was time to return to Brazil in order to establish the Brazilian sister-programme.

In 1991 Brazil was going through a rough period both socially and economically: sudden currency changes, inflation, corrupt politicians, total disregard for social causes and cultural production at its lowest. This led to the impeachment of the Brazilian president. These were among the problems that had to be dealt with. There was also ignorance and fear of the unknown that became an obstacle for change.

ESTABLISHMENT OF PRIORITIES

The priority was to fight ignorance with proactive actions such as:

1. Starting a clown doctor pilot-programme on an experimental basis, in the "right hospital" to test its acceptance by the Brazilian public and to allow people to see the social, artistic and humanitarian relevance of the work.
2. Selecting Hospital Nossa Senhora de Lourdes, a small, unknown hospital in the south zone of Sao Paulo, for a three-month pilot-project, because its administrator, Cristiane D'Andrea, understood what the work was all about and paved the way for it to begin with the proper settings.
3. Educating people at all levels, so they could understand, respect and support this new work. For example sponsors so that they see the importance of investing in such programme, doctors for them to take the work seriously and consider it as an opportunity for study and research, and finally the general public to help them understand and support the work

FORMULATION OF OBJECTIVES AND STRATEGIES

A work plan was created, in which Wellington would perform twice a week at the hospital, for a trial period of three months, adapting and adjusting the work to the Brazilian pediatric patients and hospital

setting, so that it could be evaluated by the hospital staff.

Objectives:

The purpose of the work is neither recreation nor therapy, but a creative artistic interaction with the hospitalised child, in which the actor offers the best of his work and skills and the child chooses to interact or not, thus regaining control over his life/body during the hospitalisation process. By being able to choose, children's dignity is respected and the continuous quality of the work allows them to open up to it at their own pace and time. The regularity of the visits motivates them to respond better to treatment and feel better and play. The common desire among all hospitalised children is to be able to outside leading a normal life.

According to Doctor Martin Nash, from Babies Hospital, NY, "It's much easier to treat a happy child". The work focuses on children but involves parents and healthcare workers. So, when clown doctors visit, all involved are equally given the license to play and experience the healing power of laughter, thus changing the hospital atmosphere into one that is fun and joyful. After all, the experience of joy puts one in touch with his healthiest side. This provides way to a healthy partnership with the medical staff.

A new concept in treatment is being developed and the only way to realize it is by being very professional and strategic to seize opportunities.

MOBILIZATION OF RESOURCES

Everything that needs to be done to ensure the programme would be established in a very professional way. The evaluations at the end of the pilot-programme were terrific and as a result, by December:

1. It was clear Wellington would have to organise the work under a non-profit structure (his experience with the Clown Care Unit was a very good role model) in order to raise awareness and funds from individual and corporates.
2. The hospital had committed to paying a small starting salary to both Wellington and a female clown (that would be hired and trained by him); the salary would be paid until he could structure the work and find sponsors. For this purpose, all the hospital office structure was made available to him.
3. The nature of this work (which demands highly skilled professional actors with good clown/circus training) would naturally provoke a rescue of that form of artistic expression to the Brazilian cultural scene.

The general feeling among hospital and clowns was that a bit of history was being made. That was the key to nurturing a healthy partnership.

Six months after Wellington and his newly trained partner initiated the second phase of work, Brazil's top-rated TV news programme discovered it. A journalist was visiting the hospital and saw the clowns and was highly impressed by the beauty and seriousness of the interaction and did a major covering on the media.

That is how we learned the media could become our best ally in educating the country about the work of Doutores da Alegria. In Brazil, television has a great impact on people's lives.

Some of the achievements by the end of November of 1992, were

1. The city of Sao Paulo created a tax-incentive law for the development of cultural projects.
2. The project, since the NGO still did not exist, was given that tax-incentive permit to raise funds from corporate sponsors.
3. Doutores da Alegria got its first corporate sponsor from a small construction company.(US\$25,000 per year, for two years).

PROCESS

By mid-1993, the work had been expanded to three Sao Paulo hospitals, with nine trained professional clowns known nationwide. But this did not mean people or companies saw it as something worth investing in despite growing interest.

Problems did not come from the implementation of the hospital programmes. The problems were more of social, economic and cultural such as:

1. Brazilian health system was bankrupt due to mismanagement and inflation.
2. No concept of cultural or social investments from corporations or individuals.
3. Lack of nonprofit organisational concept at the time
4. Several phony nonprofit organizations set up by corrupt politicians to launder money were being reported daily in the papers.
5. No clown/circus tradition or regular training available in Brazil and the belief system among most hospital staff:
6. The attitude among people: "If there is not enough money for medication, why pay for clowns to visit the children?"
7. "Hospitals should provide treatment, family members provide care."
8. "Volunteers can give patients attention; we don't need professional actors to do it."

The best solution was to keep the work going cause people and institutions that had been touched by it helped open more doors. More investors began getting interested in funding the project and demanded tangible results as proof before committing.

UNVEILING THE EFFECTS OF WORK THROUGH INVESTMENT IN RESEARCH

At that time, artists were starting to deepen their relationships with the work and felt the need for the creation of an emotional support system. This made the opportunity for Psychologist Morgana Masetti, a specialist in preparing hospital patients for difficult surgeries, to make his way into world of clowns, humor and their connection with health and healing. The results of this partnership were:

1. Morgana established the "emotional Hygiene" sessions with the group, which became a fundamental tool of support and burnout prevention.
2. From observing the hospital work, she saw moments artists never got to see: the before and after each interaction. That became the basis for the research protocol she developed in order to measure the impact of the work on the hospital.

By September 1994, Brazil's third largest Brazilian insurance company, shared our vision and agreed to sponsor Doutores da Alegria for one year, with a budget of US\$220,000, enough to set up the NGO, headquarters, research and growth.

RESULTS ACHIEVED

By mid 1997:

1. Ms. Masetti's research was completed and presented at the VIII International Conference of the International Society for Humour Studies 1997, in the USA, and was highly welcomed by the scientific community in her qualitative research. She interviewed parents, doctors, nurses and medical staff from hospitals where the programme exists, about the impact of the clown work on that environment.

Results show that after clown visits:

- a) children react better to treatment and have good relationship with medical staff.
- b) The work raises hospital morale and is considered a stress reducing factor for both staff, patients and family.
- c) hospital staff feel more humane at work
- d) hospital image is improved
- e) children cope better with their hospital traumas.

To measure the impact on children, drawings were used, precisely before and after each clown visit, and results show:

- a) significant change in the use of color and space on the paper (larger)

- b) stories involving drawings tend to develop more hopeful endings (from fear to hope)
- c) drawings become more clear and defined.

The research made way for great developments:

1. The opening of a Research and Study Centre, coordinated by Ms Masetti, which is the "brain" of the NGO, generating, organising and disseminating knowledge on the relationship between health, joy, clowns and medicine, for there is very little documentation on that subject worldwide.
2. The publishing of:
 - a) Ms. Masetti's book "Clown Solutions- Transformations in Hospital Reality" is being printed for the 5th time
 - b) her thesis, "Good Blends", based on Espinoza's theory of the joyful and sorrowful passions.
 - c) The Book of Second Aid, a humorous book for children aged between 7-12, created to give hospitalised children voice. Sponsored by Tylenol, each book sold generated the donation of one book to a needy hospitalised child in a nationwide campaign. Written by Wellington Nogueira and Marcelo Duarte.
 - d) Several articles for indexed magazines in Brazil.
3. Turning knowledge into method used for training of more clown doctors.
4. Sharing of knowledge with health care professionals in a specially devised training and development programme of eight weeks. The purpose is not to turn health care professionals into clowns, but to share the essence of the clown's way of looking at and dealing with the world. Due to the success of this programme, the Ministry of Health has just hired Doutores da Alegria to teach in five Brazilian public hospitals.
5. Today, 15% of the NGO's income comes from these programmes, lectures and workshops given to hospitals and corporations, nationwide.
6. An average 50 university students a week visit the Research and Study Centre to consult books, videos, documents and theses available for the public, free of charge.
7. All of that activity has led us to start the Learning Space, a school division devised to handle all of these demands.

Actual improvement achieved in people's living conditions

- Better co-ordination and integration between various actors, organisations or institutions
- Changes in local, national or regional social, economic and environmental policies and strategies
- Improved institutional capacity at the national, sub-national or local levels
- Changes to local or national decision-making, including the institutionalisation of partnerships
- Recognising and addressing specific opportunities and constraints
- Changes in the use and allocation of human, technical and financial resources at the local/national level
- Changes in people's attitudes and behaviour.

SUSTAINABILITY

After a 5-year partnership with Itau Seguros(responsible for 95% of our income) in 1999, Doutores da Alegria have made a lot of improvement. Our new strategy was to become self sufficient

In the same year:

- two contracts were negotiated, with two different corporations, Telemar (Brazil's largest telecommunications company) and Janssen-Cilag Laboratories, as our Master Sponsors, which represented 80% of our income. The remaining 20% was obtained through fundraising events, credit card partnerships and corporate lectures given on the subject of "Joy in Times of Adversity".

Today, besides the two Master Sponsors, Tylenol and TRW auto parts, which amount to 60% of our annual budget, we have managed to achieve the following:

- Created a membership department for individuals and small businesses, that amounts to one thousand members.
- Created Partners' Club, for corporate donors who want to invest from US\$500 up to US\$ 100,000.
- Increased the number of corporate lectures responsible for 8% of our annual budget of US\$900,000.

- Created a new philosophy in fundraising: it is not about receiving donations, but being open for social investment. Interest is paid in the form of social change increasing the development level of the country.

LESSONS LEARNED

The most important lessons learned include, after ten years of activities, our goal now is to open up to the community, becoming an organisation devoted to bringing joy to hospitalised children through the art of clown theatre and generating and disseminating knowledge on the subject becoming a Learning Institution.

Another lesson is quality and integrity. Because of the way we did our job, hospitals nationwide started implementing humanisation policies to the point where the Ministry of Health encompassed the action and turned it into a major project.

Finally, you can do social work and generate money from it to fund more and more innovative work and invest in the development and discussion of ethics surrounding this kind of artistic intervention with social relevance.

TRANSFERABILITY

Doutores da Alegria is currently mapping out both nationally and internationally similar initiatives, in order to invite them to discuss the future and ethics of this work. So far, in Brazil, 152 have been spotted and received a 12-page questionnaire from us. With that information, we will be able to know how to best serve these initiatives.

Having learned from our mistakes, we have also decided to expand all the NGO of Doutores da Alegria. This way, it will not be about opening more hospital programmes, instead it will be about addressing the immediate needs of the community and in turn getting all the stakeholders involved.

We are establishing contact with a series of institutions and organisations in order to establish a programme that will be owned and developed by the local people. We got the ball rolling, but the future of this initiative is in the hands of future populations.

Key Dates

September 1991 - beginning of the activities, on an experimental basis in one hospital.

January 1995- work officially structured as nonprofit organisation and first major corporate sponsor for 3 hospitals - US\$220.000,00 and beginning of research on effects of work.

January 1998 - national expansion programme begins, with opening of two hospitals in Rio de Janeiro.

1999 - the year Doutores da Alegria and its sole sponsor, Itau Seguros (responsible for 95% the income), part amicably; the organization starts, as of 2000, raising funds under new strategies, in order to diversify income generation

January 2002 - structuring of a national cooperation network; opening of the Learning Space; expansion to the northeast of Brazil; launching strong partnerships with international organizations and successful diversified fundraising strategies generate 60% from two different corporate sponsors and 40% from a variety of actions

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Type of Organization: Non-governmental organisation (NGO)

Partners

Financial Profile

Year	Total Budget (US\$)	<i>Partner A</i> <i>(% of the budget)</i>	<i>Partner B</i> <i>(% of the budget)</i>	<i>Partner C</i> <i>(% of the budget)</i>
1999	600,000	Itau Seguros 95	-	-
2000	700,000	Telemar 60	Tylenol 20	Other actions 20
2001	800,000	Telemar 35	Tylenol 35	Other actions 30
2002	900,000	Tylenol 30	TRW 30	Others 40

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