

Together We Dream - Together We Heal

While working at an in-patient Brain Injury Rehab Center (the same one in which Darryl was a resident), I facilitated the recording of an album of client-generated songs on a multitrack digital recorder with the above title track and album name. This took a couple of years. The song, "I Was Alone," discussed in the previous story of Darryl, appeared on this album. Each song was approached as an individual project that came up however it came up in the course of sessions. We simply collected them until we had enough to put out a compilation. Like "I Was Alone," I would characterize the songs as serious works of art - deeply honest, vulnerable, and exhilarating - reflecting the personalities and concerns of the client-artists that composed and recorded them. Some of the clients engaged in the process with a fairly intact awareness that initiated or enhanced their identity as a creative artist. Other clients, due to the nature of their impairment, were a little foggier about the big picture of the whole thing, possibly not even retaining a clear memory of the project once the session was over. Some of the tracks were improvisations that occurred within one session and would never, could never, be reproduced the same way again. Some were actual pre-composed pieces that were arranged and might have taken multiple sessions to record, such as the title song, transcribed below. This song, written by Darryl and several other clients, had a rock anthem feel, perhaps something like, "We Are the World," or "We Are the Champions." To underscore this, I collected as many staff (including upper management) and patient singers as I could to sing the chorus, about fifty in all. We recorded the chorus as an overdub and for the half-hour it took to get the it "in the can," we truly did believe together we can dream and together we can heal, just like the song says:

*So many possibilities
So we go out in the breeze
Then we find there's no more pain
Nothing's lost, nothing's gained*

(Chorus)

*I sing what I believe
I sing the way I feel
I believe together we can dream
And I believe together we can heal*

*Together we can find a way to live
We all have so much love to give
So now my heart is serene
With the evidence of things not yet seen*

(Chorus)

Whatever a client's manner of participation, everyone had a good time attending a cover photo shoot session and "wrap" party that included staff. The administrator encouraged staff to listen. The completed album seemed so enlightening and inspiring that we considered trying to enhance or re-mix it in a professional recording studio. The administrator knew somebody who

owned a professional recording studio and we had a meeting. Although the owner was sympathetic, to his expert ears our recordings sounded amateurish. He suggested bringing in some experienced studio musicians, re-recording the songs and having the clients become, more or less, guest singers or instrumental soloists on more professionally produced tracks.

I'm not sure where the money was supposed to come from to pay professional session players but we never got that far in the discussion. We said to him: "You're missing the point. We can't be bringing in the ringers and slick it up like that. Perhaps it might sound more accessible to some people if that's what we were going for, but this is the clients' songs and recordings. That's the therapy. That's the point of it. That's the beauty of it." Well, the studio owner might have been sympathetic, but he didn't agree, and that ended that. As it was, the album was distributed to family, friends and visitors to the facility. A few of the songs were aired on local radio when I was a guest for an interview. We even set up a number of local concert performances with some of the client/performers and a "music video" was produced.

So what, in the end, did the patients get out of it all as they continued to live their lives, some rather discontentedly, in this long-term care facility?

Some Benefits of a Recording Project in a Post-Acute Rehab Setting We Can (Hopefully) All Agree Upon

- *Engaging in and completing the recording, then hearing the finished piece, was an uplifting, exciting, and pleasurable experience that the client enjoyed, regardless of whether he or she retained the memory of it later.*
- *Having the opportunity to express one's unique personal voice and vision in a creative endeavor was fulfilling in and of itself.*
- *Being on the album enhanced the client's social visibility and standing in the facility and led to an improved degree of recognition, positive acknowledgement and social engagement.*
- *Engaging in the project contributed to the client's self-esteem and confidence, leading to the likelihood that they might be motivated to engage in subsequent music projects.*
- *The project was a sophisticated adult endeavor, in comparison to some of the keeping-busy activities in a long-term adult rehab center, such as arts & crafts, trivia contests, coffee socials, and Bingo.*
- *Staff, administration, family, and friends who heard the recordings might have a new-found respect and understanding for the inner-life of the resident that could positively influence future interactions.*