

Green Fools Circus of Unity Evaluation

Outcomes from a Social Circus Summer Program

November 2017



Evaluated with support from
Constellation Consulting Group
www.constellationconsulting.ca

Acknowledgements

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What is Green Fools' Circus of Unity?

Green Fools Theatre (Green Fools) is a non-profit charitable society that creates, performs, and teaches physical theatre arts for diverse audiences internationally and locally. While all of Green Fools' work is impactful and engaging, our social circus work has intentional social purpose, working as a socially innovative arts-based intervention that uses circus arts as tools for the advancement of positive social outcomes amongst vulnerable youth.

Over July and August 2017 we offered 7 weeks of social circus programming to young people from all backgrounds. Three weeks of the summer program was dedicated to *A Circus of Unity (COU)*, which culminated in a one-night-only showcase performance at the Jubilee Auditorium.

The final COU performance weaved together a fantastic tale where worlds collide forcing divergent tribes to find the courage, strength, creativity, and balance to restore peace and harmony. COU participants ranged from recently arrived refugees to participants from disparate cultural and socio-economic backgrounds, with the COU performance tapping into the group's collective courage and strength to articulate a story that transcended language and physical ability.

To ensure continuous learning, growth, and program improvement, COU was evaluated with support from external evaluation experts at Constellation Consulting Group. The current report provides a summary of key evaluation findings.

In 2017, Green Fools' social circus summer program included:



Over 900 youth participants from multiple cultural, religious, and economic backgrounds with ages ranging from 7 to 17 and an average age of 12.



1 final COU performance at the Jubilee Auditorium on August 29, 2017, involving **48** youth and **8** professional performers with over **1,100** audience members and Calgary's mayor in attendance.



105 total hours of summer programming over **7** weeks in July and August 2017.



13 professional circus and theatre artists working as program facilitators and performers.

What We Know About the Impact of Social Circus

Academic research has shown that social circus interventions with vulnerable youth create important positive social outcomes that have long-lasting impact on youth and their communities. Beyond the skills and experience participants gain, research has demonstrated that social circus increased social inclusion and contributes to positive changes in overall wellbeing.

Social Benefits

Social circus has been shown to create numerous social benefits including:

- Increased social inclusion
- Development of positive peer relationships and natural supports
- Development of positive adult relationships
- Increased confidence and recognition of capacity
- Increased emotional regulation
- Improved overall wellbeing
- Increased resiliency

Spiegel et. al. (2015); Lavers & Burt (2015); University of Tampere (2013)

Health Benefits

Social circus also has been shown to create numerous health benefits including:

- Increased physical literacy
- Development of fine and gross motor skills
- Decreased need for physiotherapy, speech therapy, osteopathic therapy, and occupational therapy amongst high needs youth
- Development of positive health habits
- Improved overall health

Fournier et. al. (2014); Seymour (2012); Maglio & McKinstry (2008)

Community Benefits

Positive outcomes experienced by social circus participants results in community benefits (including benefits for families) including:

- Decreased behavioural issues amongst youth
- Increased family integration and natural supports
- Increased inclusion and acceptance of different

Lavers & Burt (2015); University of Tampere (2013)

Evaluating Green Fools' Circus of Unity

Evaluation of Green Fools' Circus of Unity (COU) involved multiple stakeholders and a mix of qualitative and quantitative research techniques to garner robust information about the positive outcomes fostered by the program as well as areas for improvement. Surveys and a focus group were conducted with participants during their last COU session before the performance. Facilitators, parents, partners, and audience members were invited to participate in the evaluation via online survey after the performance. All survey and focus group questions were custom designed by a Credentialed Evaluator to measure anticipated outcomes from COU.

COU 2017 evaluation activities included:



A post-program reflective survey completed by **46** of the 48 participants.



A post-program online reflective survey completed by **3** program partners.



A post-program focus group conducted with **10** participants.



A post-program online reflective survey completed by **23** parents of participants.



A post-program online reflective survey completed by **8** of the 13 program facilitators/performers.



A post-performance online reflective survey completed by **69** audience members.

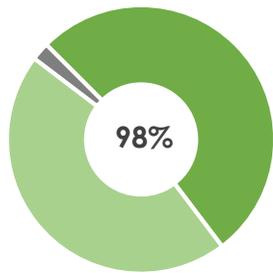
**Survey and focus group questions available upon request.*

Positive Outcomes for Participants

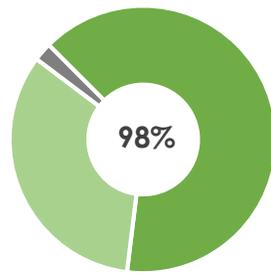


Evaluation of COU revealed that the program is creating important positive outcomes for participants. Reflecting on their experience with COU participants indicated that they had increased their social connections through new friendships and relationships with facilitators, had increased their confidence and skills, and had explored new activities and ways of working together as a team.

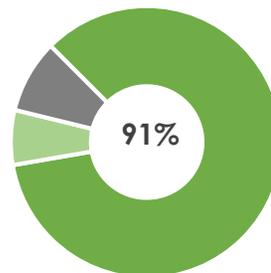
Participants agreed or somewhat agreed that at Circus of Unity they had:



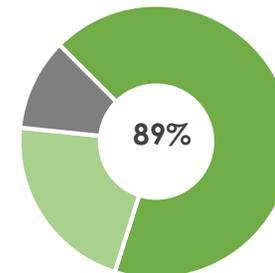
Learned About Teamwork



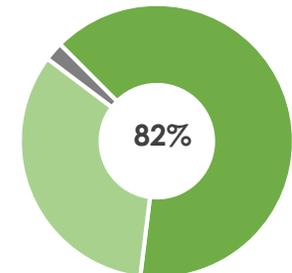
Discovered a New Skill or Ability



Met Someone from a Different Culture



Made New Friends



Increased their Confidence

■ Agreed ■ Somewhat Agreed ■ Neutral or Disagreed

“ *I made lots of friends and learned new skills* ”

– COU Participant

Program Satisfaction and Safety

Circus of Unity strives to create a safe and welcoming space for all participants, regardless of their background, ability, personal struggles, or socioeconomic status. Through the post-program survey, participants indicated that they felt COU was a safe and inclusive space where they could explore new avenues for expression. Parents and program partners also commented positively on the program's inclusiveness.

98% of participants felt the adults they interacted with at Circus of Unity were supportive

96% of participants said they got to try new things through Circus of Unity

86% of participants said that when they were at Circus of Unity they felt good about themselves

80% of participants felt they were valued as a member of the Circus of Unity team



Given the opportunity to participate in Circus of Unity again, 86% of participants said they would participate again, and 100% of parents indicated they would provide permission

“ I liked how nice all the people are and how I got to try so many new things. ”

– COU Participant

In their Own Words: Participant Experiences



I can do things that I can't normally do in my life here. It is also free which I really appreciate. This is a good place for me to meet new friends and have fun.

I liked how we were able to learn about diversity and art.

The instructors are supportive and tried their best to teach us new skills.

I love all the friends that I've made.

I liked that we can try everything and get a chance to do what we wish to do. I had a great time!

Perspectives from Parents



The parents of Circus of Unity participants had overwhelmingly positive perspectives on the impact of the program on their children. They spoke about the increased confidence they had witnessed in their child due to the program, and highlighted the sense of belonging and 'family' fostered through participation. Parents were proud to see their children build new skills and bravely perform what they had learned at the end of the summer.



100% of parents felt their child had become more confident through Circus of Unity.



96% of parents felt their child had made new friends through Circus of Unity.

I believe that the Circus of Unity is a life changing experience for every single child.

My son gained more self-confidence in himself and we have noticed this carrying over into high school learning.

The most important things my child experienced because of Circus of Unity was integration with Canadians, confidence, and language.

It dramatically improved by son's emotional well-being as well as his desire to go back to school.

Perspectives from Circus of Unity Partners



Circus of Unity partners support the advancement of the program by referring clients and sharing expertise and resources. Reflecting on their experience with the program, partners felt that Circus of Unity had been effective in creating positive outcomes for participants such as increased confidence, increased self-esteem, increased language ability, and increased tolerance and acceptance of difference. Overall, partners hoped that the program could continue and expand in the coming years to further advance the impact it creates.



100% of program partners felt that they were satisfied with the partnership.

Circus of Unity gave participants the opportunity to learn from each other and share without having to rely on language alone.

Green Fools is a leader in the space of arts-based interventions and pro-social engagement, especially for children and youth of immigrant families.

Circus of Unity is a true arts-based intervention that equalizes the idea of a safe space by reducing all barriers to participation.

Perspectives from Facilitators



Circus of Unity facilitators are professional physical theatre artists with a passion for circus performance and working with children. Over the course of their time with participants, facilitators felt that they had observed important transformations amongst participants.



100% of facilitators observed positive changes in self-confidence.



100% of facilitators observed positive changes in physical literacy.



100% of facilitators observed the development of positive peer and adult relationships and socialization.

It was the perfect vehicle to create an environment of fun, team building, self-confidence, and pride.

Seeing participants' skills and self-confidence grow every day was a beautiful thing to see.

This is the best project I've been a part of in years!

Perspectives from the Audience

On August 29, 2017, Circus of Unity was performed at the Jubilee Auditorium as a one-night-only show with over 1,000 audience members (including Calgary's mayor) in attendance. In a post-performance survey, audience members shared their perspectives with a resounding appreciation of the performance and the program. Many spoke about the importance of the social purpose connected to the performance, and felt that the show was extremely engaging.

"The performance was excellent and knowing the social purpose of the program made it all the more appealing."

"I loved seeing such a diverse audience at the Jubilee Auditorium! My 2.5 year old LOVED the show! I really appreciate what Green Fools offers youth and their philosophy of inclusion."

"The performance was incredible! It was so heartwarming and uplifting. We need more events and opportunities like this in the City!"



98% of audience members felt that the social purpose of the show was 'somewhat' or 'very' important for them.

85% of audience members rated the show as 'very good' or 'excellent'.

Suggestions for Improvement

While perspectives from participants, parents, partners, facilitators and the audience of Circus of Unity were significantly positive, areas where the program could be enhanced were also thoughtfully highlighted by evaluation stakeholders. Many emphasized that they felt there were no ways in which the program could be improved, or indicated their only suggestion for the future would be to continue the program. Other suggestions for program improvement included:



Having only one program space and/or having a bigger program space to decrease travel time and increase effective use of time. It was also suggested that this could include a dedicated Green Fools space rather than renting or borrowing space from others.



Including more participants and engaging them by age group. Stakeholders felt more participants could be engaged in the impactful experience of COU, and that engaging age groups separately could enhance impact. Although most participants said their experience was extremely positive, a few suggested more could be done to ensure all participants feel included.



Offering a longer program, providing more time for skill building and the development of social connections. Several stakeholders also suggested offering the program year-round.



Streamlining registration procedures and ensuring program logistics/timing are not a barrier to participation. This could include better coordination with partners and parents around registration, and decreasing things like transportation barriers.



Producing more than one final performance, giving more options for people to attend the impactful final event.



Continuing to provide a variety of food as part of the program, as it is an engaging aspect of programming for young people.

Learning, Growth & Opportunities for the Future

The evaluation of Circus of Unity revealed that the program is creating important positive outcomes for participants, including increased confidence, development of positive social connections, and improved overall wellbeing. Building on the Circus of Unity experience, Green Fools has the opportunity to take key learnings forward to grow the social impact created by their social circus programming. Based on findings from the evaluation, the following is recommended:

1. Continue the Program & Seek Opportunities for Expansion
With positive social outcomes demonstrated in 2017, Green Fools has the opportunity to create broader social impact by offering COU again and seeking opportunities for longer summer programming and/or social circus programming throughout the year. Program expansion could also include a larger program, offering more spaces for participants and including more program staff.

2. Seek Resources to Establish a Dedicated Program Space
In order to continue the program and leverage this year's success towards offering more programming, it is suggested that a dedicated program space could act as a program anchor, decreasing program costs, transportation barriers for participants, and logistical challenges while increasing ability to focus energies on creating impactful experiences for participants.

3. Deepen Dialogue and Communication with Partners
While program partners indicated overall satisfaction with their COU experience this year, deepening dialogue and communication with partners going forward could increase efficiency, decrease program overlap, and ensure effective participant recruitment and communication of expectations, increasing the overall effectiveness of COU.

