

# Using drama in community advocacy work

1

## Identify the problem

Choose the human rights issue that you want to focus on. This should be a general problem known to the group or community. Identify who in the community suffers from abuse, and who is responsible. For example, one problem might be domestic violence, where a husband beats his wife.

Show a scene of a possible abusive situation. This should not be a specific case, but should show what happens in general.



2

## Emphasise the injustice

Follow this scene with another scene showing the abuser carrying on with their business as if nothing was wrong. The purpose of this is for the audience to feel the injustice of the situation. The more angry people become, the more they will want to participate and try to change things.

3

## Encourage participation

Now explain that the audience can ask questions of any of the characters in the play. The facilitator should ask the audience which character they want to speak with, and then encourage the audience to ask questions, such as:

- Why did you act in this way?
- What do you think about the other character?
- Why didn't you speak up?

The role of the facilitator is very important. They should repeat each

question from the audience to confirm the meaning and make sure everyone has heard. They can also challenge the audience to think beyond their own experience with questions like, 'Did it have to be this way?' 'Will it always be like this?'

The actors should reply as if they were the character they are representing. Before the play they should think carefully about their character. Why might they do what they do and what might they think about the situation?

This process allows the community to begin to discuss problems together and identify underlying attitudes.



4

## Practising advocacy

The audience can then break into small groups to discuss how they could solve the problem. They should then share their ideas with the other groups.

Another technique is to encourage volunteers from the audience to join in the play, taking the role of one of the characters, talking with the characters and trying to convince them to change. The facilitator should explain that the play will be shown again, and if at any point the audience wants to change what is happening, they should raise their hand and shout 'stop'. It may be that the audience wants a new character, such as a friend or family member, or the police, to intervene in the



situation. A volunteer from the audience, or another actor, can take this role.

The facilitator needs to:

- explain the task, and invite people on stage
- stop the action if it is going nowhere, or if things might get violent
- summarise the learning at each stage, by asking the audience questions like 'What did they do there? Did it work?'

The actors respond to the audience participation as their character would on a bad day. For example, they might walk away, not listen, or grow angry.

In this way the community can explore different ways to approach the problem, and try to make a difference. They can try to agree a realistic way to advocate for the situation.

*The author, Joy Borman, is a freelance Theatre for Development consultant experienced in working with a range of groups including churches, internally displaced people and people with disabilities.*

*Email: drama@inspiredbyjoy.com*

*Photos by Alex Mavrocordatos, Centre for the Arts in Development Communications.*

5

## Summarise the learning

The facilitator should end the session positively by thanking the actors and the audience. They should summarise the learning and any practical suggestions as to what worked and didn't work. For example, the role play might have shown that when dealing with conflict, it is better to approach someone when they are not drunk or angry, and it may be helpful to bring someone with you.

