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# THEATRE OF THE BEAT'S RESTORATIVE JUSTICE THEATRE PROGRAM: BASELINE EVALUATION FINDINGS MARCH 2020

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## SUMMARY

### Purpose

The purpose of this project was to evaluate Theatre of the Beat's (TOTB) Restorative Justice Theatre Program at Grand Valley Institute for Women (GVIW), during its sessions from May 2018 until April 2019. While the evaluation ended in April 2019, the program itself continued to run after this date. Specifically, this evaluation aimed to address the following questions:

- What are the staff members' (i.e., TOTB facilitators and GVIW staff members) perceptions of the program?
- What are the theatre program participants' (i.e., the inmates who are involved in the theatre program at GVIW) perceptions of the program?
- What are the audience members' perceptions (i.e., the other inmates who are incarcerated at GVIW but are not involved in the theatre program, GVIW staff, or any others watching the performance) of the program?
- How do these perceptions (i.e., TOTB facilitators, GVIW staff members, participants, and audience members) relate to the objectives outlined by the TOTB?
- How might these perceptions (i.e., TOTB facilitators, GVIW staff members, participants, audience members) and/or inputs better inform the programming offered by the TOTB?

### Methods

To address our research objectives, several data sources and methods of data collection were used. These included:

1. Field notes written by TOTB staff facilitating the workshops
2. Observation of workshop participants by the research team
3. Surveys with audience members at the theatre performances
4. Surveys with inmates who participated in the program



5. Key informant interviews with TOTB facilitators
6. Surveys with GVIW staff

## Main Findings

### Positive Impacts

- Improvements to personal wellbeing
  - 72% of participants noted improved emotional wellbeing as a result of the program
  - 100% of participants indicated they benefitted from the program
- Learning (and enhancing) new skills
  - 83% of participants agreed or strongly agreed that they learnt new skills; 78% reported improvements in communication skills; 67% reported improvements in public speaking confidence
  - 94% of participants agreed or strongly agreed they are more creative as a result of the program
- Connecting with others in a safe space
  - 100% of participants reported that the program created a positive environment; many commented that it helped them cope with life in an institution
  - 94% of participants agreed or strongly agreed that the group worked well together

### Challenges

- Prison culture and interpersonal dynamics
  - Prison hierarchy, dominant voices and personal relationships among participants that were brought into the program, were seen to have an occasional impact on the overall group dynamic. This included bullying-type behavior that resulted in the exclusion of some participants.



- Some participants and facilitators felt some people attended the program exclusively to socialize, which was distracting to many others in the group.

### Barriers for Future Consideration

- Present a variety of opportunities for new skill development
  - Some participants and TOTB staff mentioned that other opportunities in theatre, such as costume and set design, play writing, and other technical skills, could keep those participants who have been involved for a longer term interested, as well as attract new participants
- Consider addressing logistical barriers
  - Many (participants and staff) noted that attendance is the primary challenge for the program
    - Attendance is not mandatory, thus there can be issues with people coming and going
    - Participants in the secure unit are not always able to attend due to policies and logistics with GVIW
  - Some of the TOTB programming may not be suitable for all participants
    - Many of the games are fast paced which may provide barriers for those who are unable to follow due to physical or other restrictions. This may deter some from attending

### Conclusions

- This research has found that TOTB's Restorative Theatre program is meeting its objectives through the overwhelmingly positive impacts found in this study
- Several future considerations have been highlighted which include exploring issues around attendance and logistical barriers; creating more diverse programming (and barrier free programming); and addressing issues around social dynamics



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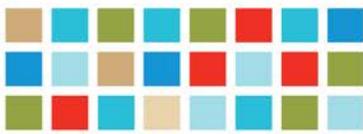


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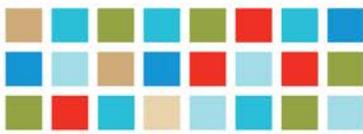
## INTRODUCTION

This project was conducted by the Research Shop, part of the Community Engaged Scholarship Institute (CESI) at the University of Guelph, in partnership with Theatre of the Beat (TOTB), a not-for-profit theatre company with a process rooted in restorative justice principles and a passion for promoting conversations around social justice. In 2018, TOTB approached CESI to conduct an evaluation of its Restorative Justice Theatre Program. The program works with incarcerated persons in the Grand Valley Institution for Women (GVIW), a federal prison in Kitchener, Ontario operated by the Correctional Service of Canada.

### Background

Founded in 2011, TOTB is a Canadian touring theatre company that works to catalyze conversations on social justice and its intersections with the benefits of the communities in which it finds itself. The program at GVIW specifically aims to create theatre pieces with individuals who are not typically exposed to theatre in an effort to effect positive personal and social change. Although a relatively new idea in Canada, correctional settings around the world have been using drama-based interventions for several decades. Prison theatre programs vary in scope and intention, with some institutions using theatre to explicitly target offending behaviour, and others being more open-ended or recreational in nature. While this program is not explicitly offense-focused or clinical in nature, the program's intent is to support reintegration into society through meaningful experiences of personal growth and reflection that help participants forge a prosocial identity. Part of this reintegration includes participants learning specific skills through theatre work.

TOTB's Restorative Justice Theatre Program is one of two theatre programs running in Canadian correctional facilities. The goals of this program include:



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- To offer participants an opportunity to develop confidence in public speaking skills that may aid them in future situations, such as going before the parole board and attending job interviews
- To offer participants the benefit of being part of a collaborative group, wherein they may experience both safety and support, as well as a chance to practice communication and conflict resolution skills with the help of the facilitators when conflicts arise
- To contribute to a positive atmosphere in the institution, as performances by the participants may become a unifying and inspirational event for the community at GVIW
- To offer participants opportunities for artistic growth
- To integrate theatre and performance into the cultural life of the institution in collaboration with inmates and staff, through potential performances at special events and assemblies such as Pride, Black History Month, Volunteer Appreciation day, etc.
- To continually evaluate and evolve in the work

### **Research Goals**

The purpose of this project was to conduct a year-long evaluation of TOTB's Restorative Justice Theatre Program for 2018/2019. Specifically, it aimed to examine the opinions and experiences of those involved in the theatre programming, including facilitators of the program, participants, and those observing the finalized products/performances. Ultimately, the goal was to understand the overall impacts of the program as well as the benefits and challenges associated with its current programming. Information gathered from this study can be used to both advocate for and improve future programming.

The following research questions were created in collaboration between the Research Shop and TOTB to evaluate the impact of the program:



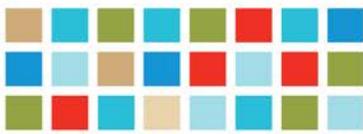
- What are the staff members' (i.e., TOTB facilitators and GVIW prison staff members) perceptions of the theatre program?
- What are the theatre program participants' (i.e., the inmates who are involved in the theatre program at GVIW) perceptions of the theatre program?
- What are the audience members' perceptions (i.e., the other inmates who are incarcerated at GVIW, but are not involved in the theatre program, GVIW staff, or any others watching the performance) of the theatre program?
- How do these perceptions (i.e., TOTB facilitators, GVIW prison staff members, participants, and audience members) address objectives outlined by the TOTB?
- How might these perceptions (i.e., TOTB facilitators, GVIW prison staff members, participants, audience members) and/or inputs better inform the programming offered by the TOTB?

## METHODS

To evaluate TOTB's program at the Grand Valley Institute for Women (GVIW), a variety of tools were used to assess the perceptions of the program amongst facilitators, inmates participating in the program, audience members for the theatre performances, and GVIW prison staff. To address our research objectives, several different data sources and methods of data collection were used. These included:

- Written field notes by TOTB staff facilitating the workshops
- Participant observation of workshop participants by the research team
- Surveys with audience members at the theatre performances
- Surveys with inmates who participated in the program
- Key informant interviews with TOTB facilitators
- Surveys with GVIW staff

Ethics approval was received from the Community Research Ethics Office (CREO) and Correctional Service of Canada (CSC).



### TOTB Staff Field Notes

Program facilitators created weekly field notes over the course of 40 weeks between May 2018 and March 2019. The field notes followed a standardized template, and detailed participant attendance at the workshops and/or performances. Facilitators recorded their insights and thoughts on how the workshop went each week, and how the workshops could possibly be improved in the future. All identifying information about program participants was removed from the field notes by the facilitators.

The overall objective of the field notes was to provide commentary by the facilitators regarding participant behaviour, reasons for participant's absences, and/or issues arising during the workshops. The research team used thematic analysis to identify, analyze, and report on patterns within the data contained in the field notes. A codebook including codes, accompanying definitions, and examples was developed and used to code the field notes. The codebook was divided into three topics, including commentary regarding participating behaviour during workshops, commentary regarding reasons for participant absences from workshops, and commentary regarding issues arising during the workshops. A subset of the field notes was coded by two reviewers to ensure the codebook was valid and reliable for coding the data. Codes were then combined into potential sub-themes and overall themes generated from the data.

### Participant Observation

The research team observed the TOTB program participants and engaged in TOTB workshop activities with participants during one workshop in June 2019. As part of this process, the research team recorded their thoughts and observations on the workshop overall, as well as on the specific components and activities completed during the workshop. Notes taken by the research team did not contain any identifying information. Thematic analysis was used, and a codebook specific to the participant observation notes was developed. The codebook included codes, accompanying descriptions, and examples related to participant behaviour or feelings during the workshop, facilitator behaviour or feelings during the workshop, and group dynamics/overall experience during the workshop.

### Audience Member Surveys

A survey was developed by the research team to assess audience perceptions of TOTB performances, and to give them the opportunity to make suggestions for future productions (Appendix A). Paper copies of surveys were distributed to audience members following a TOTB performance in November 2018. The survey asked



audience members to indicate their overall opinions on the performance, as well as any ideas for future performances. Because some audience members were inmates, they were also asked whether or not they would consider joining TOTB in the future. Results from the survey were entered in a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet and summarized using descriptive statistics.

### TOTB Participant Surveys

A survey was developed by the research team to assess TOTB participant perceptions of the workshops and overall theatre program and ask about how the program can be improved in the future (Appendix B). Paper copies of the survey were administered to program participants in December 2018 and March 2019. The survey asked how the program had impacted their creativity, confidence, communication skills, coping abilities, and public speaking abilities. Additionally, the survey asked specific questions about working with a group, respect between program participants and facilitators, and challenges/opportunities for the future. Results from the survey were entered in a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet and summarized using descriptive statistics. A codebook was developed for written survey responses and used to code the data for analysis.

### TOTB Facilitator Interviews

Key informant interviews were conducted with TOTB program facilitators in June 2019 in order to assess facilitators' perceptions of the impacts of the workshops on participants, group dynamics, challenges with implementing the program, and overall atmosphere. A total of four interviews were conducted over the phone using a standardized interview guide (Appendix C); all interviews were audio recorded with the consent of the interviewee. Following the interview, the audio recordings were transcribed verbatim, and thematic analysis was used to analyze the data. A codebook was developed that contained codes, descriptions, and example quotes from the interviews.

### GVIW Staff Surveys

An online survey was administered to staff at the GVIW to assess staff support of the TOTB program, their perceptions of the program and its impacts on participants, and the impact of the program on the institution overall (Appendix D). The survey was administered in May 2019 via Qualtrics and distributed to GVIW staff by email. The results of the survey were entered into a Microsoft Excel document, and a codebook was developed for analysis of the open-ended survey questions. Codes were then assigned to responses, and thematic analysis was used.



## FINDINGS

The following sections present the main findings of this evaluation as grouped into three main themes: program impact; social dynamics; and, future directions and barriers for consideration.

### Theme 1: Impact of TOTB Program on Participants

#### Personal Growth

Most participants expressed that participation in the TOTB program helped with their personal growth, including developing confidence, improving moods, promoting positive behaviours (e.g. compassion, openness, honesty), and overcoming nerves. For example, one program participant indicated that the program “allowed me to come out of my bubble, develop better confidence, self-esteem, and social skills.” Of the program participants who completed the surveys, 67% agreed or strongly agreed that their confidence increased, and 61% agreed or strongly agreed that they are less nervous when speaking in front of people as a result of participating in the TOTB program. When asked what the experience of participating in the TOTB program meant to them, 28% of program participants indicated personal growth. The experience gained through participation in the TOTB program allowed participants, as one noted, the opportunity to “[speak in public] and not feel nervous” and as another noted “realize that I am capable of taking on leadership roles”.

Participants expressed that the program gave them a voice and the confidence to speak about their own experiences, as well as an opportunity to develop and utilise conflict resolution and anger management skills. One participant indicated that “This experience meant I matter; I have a voice and I don't need to avoid conflict. I need to figure out the best possible way to express my anger and conflict.” Another participant echoed this sentiment, explaining that she has “benefitted from this workshop in various aspects: skills of stage and expressing; emotions controlling; stress managing; and relationship reinforcing and establishing [sic].”

The idea that participation in the TOTB program helped facilitate the personal growth of participants was echoed by the program facilitators, who described the growth that they were able to witness through their interactions with the participants each week. One facilitator explained that this type of environment gives participants an “opportunity to express themselves, and a positive, open space to do so. It allows them to feel open to expressing themselves.” Another facilitator emphasized the importance of the environment, stating that “the environment that we were kind of working to establish



was very supportive, and I think it gave a lot of [participants] an opportunity to be creative and to be open and emotional and even vulnerable in ways that they hadn't experienced in the institution thus far, and I am really proud of that."

### Skill Development

TOTB program participants indicated that skill development was an important impact of participating in the program, particularly with regards to theatre-related skills and creativity. Overall, 83% of participants agreed or strongly agreed when asked if they learned new skills as a result of program participation, and 100% indicated that they benefited from the program. One participant highlighted the potential transfer of these skills to job opportunities, explaining that "this experience has been a good start for future careers that might include stage performances." When asked if they were able to be creative, 94% of program participants agreed or strongly agreed, noting that the program facilitators helped foster creativity among the group.

The majority (78%) of program participants agreed or strongly agreed that their communication skills had improved, and 67% felt that they are more confident now with public speaking. Program participants also said that the program helped with their interpersonal skills and teamwork abilities. One participant said that she "...used to have trouble working in groups, but now I am a bit better at working in groups and contributing. It isn't so bad anymore."

The audience members at TOTB performances also highlighted the perceived skills of the program participants; 100% of audience members agreed or strongly agreed that they were impressed by the performance, and that they enjoyed watching the performance. The performance also appeared to evoke an emotional response in some audience members, with 86% agreeing or strongly agreeing that they were inspired by the performance. When asked for more specific feedback on the performance, the majority of audience members provided positive comments, indicating that the performance was entertaining and fun, followed by well-done and well-rehearsed.

### Personal Well-Being

TOTB program participants indicated that the program positively impacted their personal well-being, and provided them with joy, coping mechanisms, teamwork skills, and new relationships with other participants and facilitators. All participants in the program reported that their overall experience with the TOTB program was positive and that they benefited from the program in some way. When asked if they were provided with time for self-reflection, 83% agreed or strongly agreed. Nearly three quarters (72%)



of program participants indicated that their emotional wellbeing improved as a result of program participation, and 78% indicated that they were better able to cope with stress. When asked for comments on what the program has meant to them, 29% mentioned that it helped them cope with their daily lives in the institution.

The program participants described how the program positively impacted their relationships with other participants, and fostered relationship building and new friendships. The vast majority (94%) of participants agreed or strongly agreed that the group worked well together, and one participant described a benefit of the program as being able to “bring my fellow inmates some joy.” Program facilitators also noted the development of relationships and the positivity amongst the group, with one facilitator stating that “Sometimes I forget it, but these little “in between” moments of relationship building are I think just as important as the actual theatre we are creating, especially for this participant who often shares about feeling lonely, feeling that no one likes her, like everyone she is living with wants her out of their unit, etc.”

The program also provided opportunities for participants to interact outside of the theatre group, as one facilitator commented, “...participants in the program shared that they also have been practicing when they see each other on the compound. This was heartwarming for me to hear, because it's neat to see folks from the different cliques making friends with each other – friendships that might not have happened if it were not for this program.” The positive relationships between participants was evident to the audience, as 100% of audience members agreed or strongly agreed that the performers seemed to work well together.

Additionally, program participants described how the program experience has given them an escape from their everyday lives in the institution. One facilitator perceived that, “they're interacting with people they enjoy, and that they're laughing, and creating memories, some said that it feels good to laugh and smile, and to inspire the audiences, and prompt discussions...”. A program participant echoed these comments, stating that the experience “...has been filled with joy, positive and creative energies, and self-confidence building. We laughed but also dealt with real life problems, personal issues. This has brought me great relief from the mundane gloom and jail politics, into a healthy space.”



## Theme 2: Social Dynamics of TOTB Program

### Safe Space within the Institution for Participants

Of those who completed the survey, 100% of TOTB program participants indicated that the workshops provided a positive environment, and 94% believed it to be a positive experience overall working with the group. Of those who attended the show as an inside guest (i.e. were inmates of GVIW), 100% believed that the performance was positive, and many indicated they were happy it was something offered within GVIW. The respondents of the GVI staff survey indicated they also believed TOTB provided a positive experience at the institution.

In part, the positive experience can be attributed to the efforts of the TOTB facilitators to generate a cohesive working group. As one facilitator noted, “we purposely spent a lot of time with drama games and ensemble building, so that we would have a tight-knit, trusting group”. The group became cohesive as a result of these efforts; at one point a facilitator noted, “the group was not fragmented along social lines for once, everyone was listening to each other and sharing stories, it felt both very simple and very much like progress for a group that has occasionally struggled to get along with the subgroups of folks from different backgrounds”. While the subgroups will be discussed in the challenges sub-section below, it is important to note that these subgroups were not always present, as the group did at times work cohesively, as was the intent of the workshops.

Program facilitators wanted participants to have a positive experience and feel like their thoughts and opinions were being considered when developing the theatre material. With the effort to create a positive group experience, multiple facilitators noted that they worked to create an atmosphere without hierarchy for the participants. Facilitators explained that they, “tried very much to make it a more collaborative environment, one where we weren't telling them what to do but were kind of overseeing what their ideas were to our suggestions and things”. 94% of TOTB program participants indicated they felt respected and heard by program facilitators. One participant shared with a facilitator that she, “like[d] the way things are because it feels like [she is] an equal when [they] make decisions”. The facilitator further explained that this is important to this inmate “because she doesn't feel like she gets a lot of choice being incarcerated, and so being an equal in the decision making was important to her”. As one participant wrote, “it gave me a sense of happiness, a place to come and feel normal rather to just be looked at as an inmate”. One other participant disclosed to facilitators that “she really valued the safe environment that we have created as a group”. As one facilitator explained, “one of the



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best things about our program is that it offers an opportunity for us to just be together as humans, to put something together". This approach to the program provided the inmates with an opportunity to "escape" the realities of prison, and to feel a sense of normalcy within their lives. Overall, the efforts to create an equal distribution of power within the group was beneficial for participants as they progressed through the program.

One final way facilitators mentioned they attempted to create a safe space was by allowing all participants the opportunity to speak at any point throughout the program. This was most frequently reported as being done through the use of opening and closing sharing circles, in which the facilitators themselves were open and honest about their feelings, and what may be impacting their mood prior to beginning the workshop. In modelling this behaviour of openness, the facilitators were able to encourage participants to also be open. As one facilitator explained, "even just to create that space where the women could share the things that were bothering them that week or share the things that they had accomplished that week, we did a check in at the beginning of every workshop, and even just that little opportunity to voice things I think was pretty like um pretty big for self-confidence over the duration of the program."

### Challenges within the Group

While the program has clearly had numerous positive impacts on participants, a variety of challenges were also identified. Notably, the challenges that were most commonly discussed included the impact of prison culture on the group dynamic, and the interpersonal relationships between program participants.

As one facilitator explained, "there's drama in the drama club", when discussing the impact of prison culture on the group dynamic. To further explain, another facilitator highlighted that, "one of the most complicated things is that the individuals bring cliques and history that is kind of set and established in the institution outside of our program, and therefore we aren't always privy to knowing what the tensions or relationships are outside of the walls of our group, and so sometimes it seemed like there would be issues between two groups of people that we never really knew what it was about and we could see that that was sometimes effecting kind of group dynamics". As explained above, this group dynamic was not always the case, but in some instances, "there would be some days where the interpersonal dynamics that we weren't really privy to came to really hinder the work ethic or the working together".

In further discussing the challenges of prison culture within the TOTB group, facilitators noted that there were some dominant voices in the group, at sometimes from people

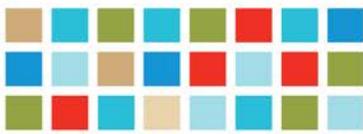


who appeared to come from a higher position within the prison hierarchy. One explained, “there were also some dominant voices at the prison... so some people who had some more I guess like social capital or whatever could sometimes dominate the conversation a little bit more or could be a bit more authoritative or decisive about their opinions.” Another described that, “there were some individuals.... more like alpha individuals or like dominant individuals who seemed to be coming from a higher place in the kind of prison hierarchy um, who had more sway like that was just undeniable”.

While facilitators noted that this dynamic could at times make working with the group challenging, at some points participants seemed to challenge the facilitators' own position within the group, and the differences amongst participants could make structuring the performance difficult. As was noted, “In-groups and out groups, unspoken prison hierarchy, and racism I believe are all at work here in making the casting challenging. I am wondering how best to encourage folks to work with others that they don't like – what is realistic, what is possible, how to break down stereotypes and walls between the groups.”

This hierarchy was also seen to result in unfavourable interpersonal dynamics, with what some facilitators described as bullying behaviour occurring. As one described, “I was a little taken aback by a bit of the bullying behaviour that I witnessed the first time I went in...sort of like mean girls style bullying of excluding people from the conversation, sort of making fun of them behind their back, that sort of like exclusivity behaviour”. This behaviour of exclusion was seen to have an impact on the group participants, as it was noted that one participant stopped attending following exclusion from others in the group, “the politics of being excluded by [group member] and her posse last time likely weren't easy, so I speculate that perhaps this might be keeping her away”. In addition to this exclusive behaviour, it was noted that, at times, members of the group would also make fun of others for their personal characteristics, such as difficulties with speaking and emotional/mental health struggles.

A final interpersonal dynamic that resulted in challenges for the group were personal relationships that occurred among the participants of the program. As the facilitators explained, “we found that when people from SU [the secure unit] would come, that there would be other individuals from gen[eral] population [medium security] that wouldn't normally come, who would attend basically so that they had the opportunity to hang out with their friends from the secure unit”. This in turn resulted in others joining the group on various weeks to see people from the secure unit, which “caused some issues with people's attentiveness and willingness to participate in the activities”. This was then explained to cause conflict within the group, as “other participants [believed] if they're



not [t]here for the theatre stuff they shouldn't be [t]here at all". As one facilitator explained, on some occurrences, it seemed like the secure unit members were "mostly there to socialize with each other, so this was mildly distracting towards the end and seemed to frustrate many of our regular group members who perceived that they were just there to socialize and have snacks". As one participant noted, "At first it was a bit much because people would only come to the group to see their friends", and another emphasized that "some people are there for only treats or [to] socialize with their friends and that I find is a hindrance [sic] to our growth. One participant highlighted a need to address this behaviour, by writing that "we will need to have a system if participants are not engaging or disrespects [sic] group agreements/norms, that they be asked to leave instead of creating a negative environment."

Overall, while there were difficulties present as result of prison culture and the interpersonal dynamics of participants, the data from this evaluation indicates that the positive impact this program has for regular attendees outweighs these occasional challenges.

### **Theme 3: Future Directions and Barriers to Consider**

#### **Other Theatre or Artistic Opportunities**

In addition to the experience of theatre performance, set design, and other experiences in the TOTB agenda for the year, members of the program outlined other opportunities they would be interested in for future workshop series. These included: costume design, playwriting, and further stage planning/set design experiences. Participants expressed an interest in pursuing more technical skills associated with theatre, such as costume planning and design, working with lighting and stage design. In regard to future performance opportunities, inmates who attended the performance indicated they would be interested in watching, or participating in, future plays on social justice issues. One inmate also noted that it would be beneficial to program participants if the facilitators or guest facilitators were more representative of the GVIW population.

Facilitators also indicated that they would need to explore additional opportunities in the future, as many of the participants are now "regulars", and they need to "keep finding work that would challenge them as artists". Some ideas that emerged from facilitators were opportunities to work on writing pieces, to "process some of their feelings on their own especially for some of those more introverted participants", though it was also noted that writing work could pose some difficulty depending on participants capabilities.



### Logistical Barriers

While challenges exist around group dynamics and various artistic opportunities, it is important to note that some challenges were the result of logistics of the program itself. Notably, barriers to the program around logistics that were highlighted included a lack of consistent attendance, planning challenges that arose due to institutional policies, and capabilities of the program participants.

The most frequently discussed barrier was participant attendance. As the program did not have a “mandatory” attendance policy, some participants did not regularly attend every week’s session. Additionally, new participants were free to join the group until a mid-way point, leading to a larger number of potential participants for various roles, with few returning regularly. As one facilitator described, “we’re always looking for more people to come but we do encourage the same people to come every week, so that we can have a good core group and so that we can in a sort of traditional sense put on a play when it comes time for that workshop series”. This was particularly true of secure unit inmates, who would attend less consistently due to institutional policies and procedures. As one facilitator noted it makes it “challenging that all of a sudden there’s someone in the room that other people don’t know very well, people don’t feel very comfortable, and so it takes a while to try and build up that like rapport and comfort level when we never quite know who is going to be in the room”. The inconsistent attendance was also highlighted as a barrier by regular program participants, who indicated frustration with new people coming sporadically over the weeks.

As mentioned, the secure unit participants had the most inconsistent attendance, likely the result of institutional policies and practices. It was explained that sometimes facilitators were “unable to pull those people from the secure unit to the program room, and there’s no way of bringing our program to them because we can’t have the medium security inmates in that space”, and that “if we’re told by the administration that we’re not allowed to have those participants, or those inmates participate in the program that week, or if we can only retrieve one pod of people, thereby excluding others who might be interested, then that causes issues”. Due to the inability to predict which of the secure unit inmates would be attending, facilitators indicated that they eventually had to make the decision to not include secure unit inmates to the same extent as medium security (general population) ones, noting that they “tried our best to make opportunities for everyone to feel involved, but definitely the women in maximum security got the short end of the stick, and were not as involved as we would like them to be, or as they would like to be either”.



Another institutional challenge was the frequency of the program. Some facilitators emphasized that having more than one workshop a week may allow for better attendance, or an impact on a wider population at the Institution, though it would be an additional challenge for planning. One participant explained that they are “very thankful I had the chance to be in TOTB and wish it happened more than once a week.” This sentiment was also shared by one of the GVIW staff who noted that, the program has not yet “had a high enough profile to affect the overall atmosphere of the institution”, as it would “have more impact if it happened more frequently and [had] a dedicated space”.

A final logistical barrier highlighted was the capabilities of the inmates themselves who participate in the program. As one facilitator explained, “we realized that the games that we were playing were more movement based games or more fast paced activities that some of the individuals couldn't participant in as easily because of kind of like movement ability”, and that this posed a deterrent to some participants attending future workshops, as they may have felt uncomfortable, or that the program was not inclusive for their participation. Other facilitators noted that the inmates capabilities were also sometimes dependent on their skills, noting that sometimes “individuals in our workshops may not be fully literate, in terms of reading or writing skills, but are also really good at hiding those...so that's maybe one problem in terms of not knowing how much to engage them on reading or writing activities”. It was also noted that some participants are less extroverted, and required more attention or time in overcoming these obstacles of nerves in exploring their creativity.

## CONCLUSIONS

This project has evaluated the extent to which the Theatre of the Beat's Restorative Justice Theatre Program has met its objectives by analyzing the results of data collected from a variety of participants through a number of methods. The analysis of the data indicates that that TOTB is meeting its objectives.

The data shows that participants have opportunities to learn new skills in the program – with 83% of participants reporting they learnt at least one new skill. More than half (67%) reported improvements in public speaking skills and 61% reported feeling less nervous when speaking in public. More than three quarters (78%) reported they had improved their communication skills as well as gained experience working well with within a group. Participants also noted they had opportunities for artistic growth – both in becoming more creative in general (as reported by 94% of participants) but also in learning theatre specific skills.



Many of the positive impacts found were around wellbeing, which included safety and support as well as creating a positive atmosphere within the institution. Every participant reported that they felt the program created a positive environment; many commented on its impact in helping them cope with life within the institution. Nearly three quarters (72%) of program participants indicated that their emotional wellbeing improved as a result of the program, and 78% indicated that they were better able to cope with stress. Program participants and staff also mentioned that the program gives space for participants to be able to express themselves in a positive, safe, environment. Inmates who were audience members at a performance, as well as staff, also indicated that they believe this program provides a positive environment at the institution.

While the results of this evaluation are mostly positive, several challenges and opportunities for future growth were found as well. The main challenge, as experienced by program participants and TOTB staff, is around group dynamics. It was noted that some elements of prison culture could have a negative impact on the program, such as dominant behaviours and bullying. It was also found that some participants and facilitators perceived some group attendees to be there in a socializing capacity only – resulting in distractions and frustrations for the regulars of the group. TOTB may wish to prioritize looking into practises to address issues group dynamics in this environment.

Some logistical barriers were identified as well, such as including participants from the secure unit, having more frequent programming, and trying to encourage regular attendance. In an effort to continue to interest regular participants, as well as attract new ones, several potential changes were offered. One potential change or addition included adding a wider variety of opportunities for new skill development, such as costume and set design, play writing, and other theatre skills. In order to recruit new participants, it was suggested that programming could be made more accessible by removing barriers that may prevent those with physical or other restrictions from participating.

This data is useful in determining both the benefits and challenges of running the program for participants, TOTB facilitators and staff at the GVIW. It is clear that this program meets its objectives and offers many important positive impacts to participants, and likely, the institution as a whole. The research team encourages TOTB to continue to build on what they are doing well, while also recognizing there are areas for potential improvement. This report can be used to help inform potential changes to the current program, as well as to support and advocate for future programming funding for the program.



### **Limitations of the Report**

The results presented in this report may not reflect the opinions of all program participants, audience members, TOTB staff and facilitators and GVI staff. The evaluation was not a random sample of the participants, and the results cannot necessarily be generalized beyond the study sample. This measures in this evaluation were taken during the programming – ideally it would have included pre- and post-measures to have a greater understanding of the impacts. However, this evaluation provides valuable evidence that restorative justice prison theatre programs have the potential to create positive impacts on incarcerated people – especially those in the Grand Valley Institution for Women, where the TOTB program takes place.



## APPENDIX A: AUDIENCE SURVEY

Your participation is completely voluntary.

You do not waive any legal rights by agreeing to take part in this study.

*By submitting a completed survey, you will be consenting to participate in the research project. Please answer all questions to the best of your ability, and feel free to skip any questions you do not wish to answer.*

**For Questions 1 – 5, please respond to the following statements:**

Statement	How much do you agree with this statement?				
<b>I was impressed by the performance</b>	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
<b>I enjoyed watching the performance</b>	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
<b>I was inspired by the performance</b>	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
<b>The performance created a welcoming environment</b>	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
<b>The performers seemed to work well together</b>	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree



## The **Research** Shop

Theatre of the Beat's Restorative Justice Theatre Program:  
Baseline Evaluation Findings

*For Questions 6 – 10, please answer to the best of your ability, and feel free to skip any questions you do not wish to answer, or you do not feel are applicable to you.*

**Question 6: Why did you come to see the performance?**

**Question 7: What was your overall opinion of the performance?**

**Question 8: Would you consider joining this program in the future? Why or why not?**

**Question 9: Do you have any ideas for future performances? Please include any specific examples.**

**Question 10: Do you have any other thoughts or comments you would like to share about the performance and/or Theatre of the Beat?**

Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey!

Please seal your survey in the provided envelope and submit it in the basket.

*By submitting a completed survey, you will be consenting to participate in the research project.*



## APPENDIX B: PARTICIPANT SURVEY

Please answer all questions to the best of your ability, and feel free to skip any questions you do not wish to answer.

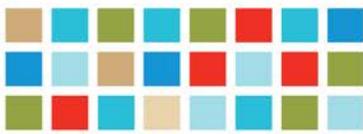
**Question 1: Is this your first time participating in a Theatre of the Beat workshop?**

- Yes
- No

**Question 2: If this is *not* your first workshop, how many workshops have you previously participated in?**

**Question 3: For the following questions, please reflect on your experience in this workshop series and respond to the following statements.**

Statement	How much do you agree with this statement?				
I was able to be creative	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
I was able to be artistic	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
My communication skills have improved	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
I feel more confident about public speaking now, compared to past experiences	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
I am less nervous now when I have to speak in front of other people	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
I am more confident now	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
I was provided time for self-reflection	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree



Statement	How much do you agree with this statement?				
<b>My emotional well-being has improved</b>	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
<b>I am better able to cope with stress</b>	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
<b>I am better able to focus on tasks</b>	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
<b>I felt that the group worked well together</b>	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
<b>Working with the group was a positive experience</b>	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
<b>The workshops had a positive environment</b>	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
<b>The workshops provided me with new skills</b>	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
<b>I felt my opinion was heard, and respected by others in the group</b>	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
<b>I felt my opinion was heard, and respected, by Theatre of the Beat</b>	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
<b>Overall, I had a positive experience with this workshop series</b>	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree



## The **Research** Shop

Theatre of the Beat's Restorative Justice Theatre Program:  
Baseline Evaluation Findings

For Questions 4 – 10, please answer to the best of your ability, and feel free to skip any questions you do not wish to answer, or you do not feel are applicable to you.

**Question 4: Do you feel that the program has allowed you to be creative or artistic? Why or why not? Please provide any examples.**

**Question 5: How did you find working with a group? Do you feel everyone was able to contribute and share? Why or why not?**

**Question 6: Do you feel that you have benefitted from this program? Why or why not?**

**Question 7: What has this experience meant to you?**

**Question 8: Have you learned anything in particular from this workshop that will benefit you in the future?**

**Question 9: Would you participate in future workshops like this one? What other theatre workshops would like to participate in?**

**Question 10: Were there any parts of this program that you found challenging? Was there anything you would like to see changed for future TOTB programs?**

**Question 11: Do you have any additional thoughts or comments you would like to share about the workshop and/or program?**

**Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey! Please seal your survey in the provided envelope and submit it in the basket. *By submitting a completed survey, you will be consenting to participate in the research project.***



The **Research Shop**

COMMUNITY. CAMPUS. COLLABORATION. 

Theatre of the Beat's Restorative Justice Theatre Program:  
Baseline Evaluation Findings

## APPENDIX C: PROGRAM FACILITATOR INTERVIEW GUIDE

### INSIDE PRISON THEATRE: AN EVALUATION OF ONTARIO'S THEATRE OF THE BEAT PROGRAM

#### INTRODUCTION

Hello, my name is \_\_\_\_\_ and I am calling you as a member of the research team from the Research Shop, part of the Community Engaged Scholarship Institute at the University of Guelph. As you may know, we are working with Theatre of the Beat to evaluate their program at the Grand Valley Institute for Women, in Kitchener, Ontario. I received your name and number because you sent a signed consent form to Karen Nelson, indicating that you are willing to participate in an interview.

*[Provide time to acknowledge as willing to participate/that they know what we're calling about]*

Before we begin, I just want to make sure you've had the opportunity to go over the consent form that was initially emailed to you. Did you have any questions about it?

*[Respond to questions/concerns]*

I also wanted to remind you that you have the right to withdraw from this study at any point during this interview without any consequence to yourself or the research project.

You will also have up to two business days to withdraw, if you decide to do so after we have finished the interview. This is because the information you share with us will not be attached to your identity, so it may not be possible to remove your data after that point. You also have the right to not answer any questions without consequence. If a question does not make sense, please ask for clarification.

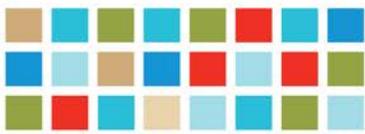
And finally, are you okay with this phone call being audio recorded? The recording of our conversation will be deleted from the recording device once it is transcribed. After it is transcribed that document will be stored on a password protected folder only the research team has access to and opened on password protected and encrypted laptops. *[Respond to question, if not comfortable ask if it would be okay to only take notes instead.]*

Do you have any questions or concerns before we begin? *[Respond to question]*



## QUESTIONS

1. From your experience with the sessions, do you feel that the workshops allowed participants to explore their creativity?
  - a. Why or why not.
  - b. Probe: How do you think the sessions allowed/did not allow participants to explore their artistic development?
2. Based on the workshops you were involved in; do you feel that participants were able to further develop or improve their public speaking skills?
  - a. Why or why not.
  - b. Could you provide any examples of this without naming a participant?
3. Do you feel that the workshops you were involved with were helpful in improving the participants' self-confidence?
  - a. Why or why not.
  - b. Could you provide any examples without naming a participant?
4. From your experience, did the participants work well together as a group/team?
  - a. Why or why not.
  - b. Probes: were they supportive, able to share ideas, did they all equally contribute
5. How did the program encourage collaboration among participants?
  - a. Probe: Were there ever any instances where some participants were not able to be equally involved in the workshop? If so, why/under what circumstances?
6. Were there any challenging moments between yourself and the participants?
  - a. How do you navigate the power differentials between the facilitators and participants?
7. How do you maintain the space as one that is safe for sharing?
8. Can you describe the overall atmosphere of the workshops?



- a. What was an average day like?
  - b. What was the best day like?
  - c. What was the worst day like?
9. What other workshops do you think TOTB could offer that would allow the participants to further their own creativity or artistic self-expression?
- a. Was there anything that the current workshop overlooked?
  - b. How could the workshop be improved for the future?
10. What was your overall opinion of this workshop session?
11. Do you have any additional comments about the program that you would like us to know about?

### **CLOSING REMARKS**

This concludes the end of our interview questions. I just wanted to thank you again for agreeing to participate in the interview, and for your time today. As noted in the letter of information previously provided to you, please feel free to contact our research team at any time if you have any questions about the research project. If you are interested in learning about the results of our research project, they will be available online in the fall of 2019 on the CESI website {provide website if they ask for it: [www.cesinstitute.ca](http://www.cesinstitute.ca)} or you can contact our research team. Thank you again for your time today!



## APPENDIX D: GRAND VALLEY INSTITUTE FOR WOMEN (GVIW) STAFF SURVEY

\*To be distributed via Qualtrics

*Please answer all questions to the best of your ability, and feel free to skip any questions you do not wish to answer.*

### Question 1: Which of the following best describes your role at Grand Valley Institute for Women?

- Administrative
- Security
- Education/Correctional/Social Programs
- Health
- Mental Health
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

### Question 2: How did you hear about the Theatre of the Beat program?

- Flyers around the Institution
- From an inmate in the program
- From an inmate not in the program
- From a Theatre of the Beat staff person
- From another GVIW staff person
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

### Question 3: Do you know anyone who has participated in one of the program's workshops?

- Yes
- No

### Question 3a: If you know someone who has participated in one of the program's workshops, how many hours per week (on average) do you interact with this person?

### Question 4: Have you ever attended one of the program's performances?

- Yes
- No



**Question 5: Please respond to the following statements:**

Statement	How much do you agree with this statement?					
<b>The TOTB program creates a unique opportunity for inmates to develop artistic self-expression</b>	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree	I don't know
<b>The TOTB program is an avenue for inmates to express their own creativity</b>	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree	I don't know
<b>The TOTB program creates an opportunity for inmates to develop self-confidence</b>	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree	I don't know
<b>The TOTB program encourages collaboration</b>	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree	I don't know
<b>The TOTB program creates a positive atmosphere in the Institution</b>	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree	I don't know

**Question 6: What are your overall thoughts on the program?**

**Question 7: Have you noticed any changes in behavior among any individual involved in the program? Could you provide any examples without naming this person?**

**Question 8: Do you feel that the program affects the overall atmosphere of the institution? If so, how?**



**Question 9: Do you have any additional comments about TOTB you would like us to know about?**

**Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey!  
If you would like to review your answers you can do so by clicking the back  
arrow.**

**Please click on the right arrow below to submit your answers.**

***By submitting a completed survey, you will be consenting to participate in the  
research project.***