

## Kulture Klub

*artists and homeless youth bridging survival and inspiration*  
*at Project OffStreets/Minneapolis Youth Diversion Program*

*"Home is the place where you can lay your head without having to sell yourself short.  
 Home is a stable place to stay and sleep. Used to be a family establishment."*

**Kulture Klub Youth**

Adolescence is like a stage between tadpole and frog. It's where the private meets the public, family meets culture, where youth meets adulthood, where we rethink who we've been told we are, who we think we are and who we want to be. When one adds to that vulnerability, the complex tensions and pressures of being homeless, an adolescent is in trouble.

Kulture Klub was created in 1992 by artist Dorit Cypis for Project OffStreets, a drop-in center providing intervention services for homeless youth. Kulture Klub develops and guides interactions between artists and homeless youth, between social service, arts organizations and funding institutions. Kulture Klub is directed and staffed by professional artists.

**Kulture Klub** believes that artists and their practice offer valuable aesthetic tools which can reach at risk youth on deep personal levels, modeling positive expressions of vision and interaction with others, ultimately inspiring youth towards creativity in their lives, communities and in art. Artists survive to be inspired. Homeless youth are inspired to survive. Kulture Klub is dedicated to mentoring and supporting artists who want to share their knowledge with and learn from at risk youth. Kulture Klub is a bridge for at risk youth from isolation to expression, towards participation in one's community with a voice.

There are 3 key elements to how Kulture Klub works. **1.** consistent access for youth to witness artistic presentations in the Twin Cities communities. **2.** consistent programming where artists and youth interact. **3.** consistent programming for youth to publicly present their own artistic expressions.

Since 1992, core to Kulture Klub has been a weekly programming schedule where youth are taken to a wide range of cultural events including music, theater, dance, visual art, crafts, literature, and film, regularly witnessing artists presenting the best of artistic expressions. Over 300 youth have attended hundreds of aesthetically and culturally diverse artistic events. Kulture Klub has partnered with many local theaters, museums, galleries, community art centers, and cinemas to provide tickets.

In addition, since 1994, Kulture Klub has developed numerous workshops led by artists where youth have learned performance, writing, music and visual arts skills. We engage artists who can model professionalism, commitment and creative vision. To youth who have too often experienced adults as abusive and controlling, the artists working with KK offer a radical expression of experimentation and critical insight, permission and encouragement, uniqueness and collaboration. The artists support and expect the youth to reach further, to have confidence in themselves, to commit to their visions.

In 1995 Kulture Klub initiated partnerships with the Southern Theater and with Patrick's Cabaret to present public performances by Kulture Klub youth. In 1996, KK youth presented their sculpture at the Jahn Arts Gallery. Since 1995, several talented Kulture Klub youth have received scholarships to McPhail Center for the Arts in music and voice training. KK has quarterly produced Open Mic at the Drop-In center where youth and the staff who are working with them in crisis situations, hear each other present poetry, song, social commentary.

## Kulture Klub 1997/1998 Highlights

*A highlight of 1997 was the honoring of KK Director Dorit Cypis with the **Sally Ordway/ First Bank Award in Vision**. Two KK youth read their work to a standing ovation at the Ordway awards dinner!*

Kulture Klub continues to grow our programs and sharpen our vision as well as develop our strategies for working with our Kulture Klub staff, Project OffStreets social service staff, participating artists and homeless youth. This past year we have greatly strengthened our internal management, tightening our policies, and our staff roles. This has allowed us to more effectively program for the needs of both the homeless youth, artists and Project OffStreets.

KK continues to offer youth the weekly opportunity to view arts presentations of excellence at the numerous venues which have assisted us in procuring tickets. Our commitment to weekly contact with artists has been hugely successful with numerous youth learning skills very important to the development of their own expressions.

Kulture Klub youth attended over 100 artistic presentations throughout the Twin Cities and have participated in 13 artist workshops including Comix Workshop with Peter Gross and Peter Gaustad, Musical Instruments with Douglas Ewart, Performance with Patrick Scully and Heather Wilson, Pride Day Parade Float Building, Visual Symbols with Ilene Krug, Drawing and Graffiti, Modern, Jazz and African Dance with Roxanne Wallace, Digital Music Recording with Jake Rodriguez, as well as participating with numerous artists who have made presentations on their work at the drop-in center.

KK sponsored Open Mics on themes including HIV/AIDS, Black History, and Woman's History. During the fall 1997 after the tragic death of Khadar, a youth of Somalian descent, Kulture Klub sponsored a memorial service inviting youth and staff of POS and elders from the local Somalian community. KK added an Open Mic on Life and Death : Grieving Loss, Respecting Life.

We strengthened our alliance with **Patrick's Cabaret**, to ensure youth public performance opportunities and to draw on local performance artists as mentors. We established a new alliance with **Music Against Violence**, to develop workshops in digital sound recording to train youth to develop their own sound compositions to tape. We have also continued to nurture relationships with arts organizations which can offer youth scholarships for individual training; i.e. **McPhail Center for the Arts** in music.

In Spring 1998, we partnered with **Patrick's Cabaret** to sponsor performing artists Roxane Wallace, Leslie Ball, Jake Rodriguez, Djola Branner and Patrick Scully in a 2 month workshop helping youth develop their performance skills for 2 nights of public performances at Patrick's Cabaret in May. At least 12 youth consistently participated in these workshops and successfully performed their poetry, rap, dance and songs to an overwhelmingly enthusiastic audience. KK commissioned one of the youths whose interest is in filmmaking, to video document this process.

This summer we expanded our artist led workshops into a new **Artist in Residence** program so that youth have increased time to bond with the artist, learn commitment and further develop their projects. In the past we allocated 3 weeks for each artist's project. Our experience has been that this framework only began to scratch the surface of developing engaged interactions. Also because the KK youth population is extremely transient and often in life crisis, it takes time for the artist to adjust their teaching strategies, ways of connecting and expectations.

The Kulture Klub Artist In Residence Program is a commissioning program for artists of professional excellence working in specific fields i.e. visual, performing, dance, music and writing. The KK Artist In Residence Program will commission artists to develop and create a program out of their artistic process in collaboration with KK staff, adapted to the needs and abilities of the homeless youth at Project OffStreets. The program is intended to develop out of the artists' vision *with* the KK staff, who know the needs and context of KK youth, helping to shape it.

Our first Artist in Residence, Mike Hoyt, developed a mural/graffiti project training and inspiring youth in graphics and airbrush painting techniques. Over 10 weeks this summer, KK youth produced an extraordinary body of work titled "**Doors into the Future**", painted on individual doors which were then hinged together to form free standing screens. This work was honored at an **exhibition at the Soap Factory**, where youth had a chance to present their work to the public and to the staff of Project OffStreets. Staff who work with these youth in crises, learned so much more about the youth through their artistic expressions.

This fall we are working with an Artist in Residence collaborative team, dancer Roxane Wallace and performer Djola Branner, both veterans of our Spring performance project, to design an 8 week performance project, including taking youth to see dance performances at Twin Cities arts venues, and culminating in their own public **performance at Intermedia Arts** this coming November.

This year KK has developed another new program complementing our arts activities with cultural perspectives. The **Khadar Elders Program** is dedicated to Khadar, the Kulture Klub youth who was tragically killed last summer by another homeless youth. Khadar, a recent Somalian refugee, was vulnerable to being taken advantage of because of his cultural invisibility. At Khadar's memorial service Somalian elders participated and shared something of their culture with staff and youth of the Drop in Center. It brought the community together in grief and in appreciating the richness of our cultural differences. Kulture Klub saw this occasion as a precedent for developing a program sharing culture through the experiences of Community Elders.

**The Khadar Elders Program** is an innovative opportunity to bring the general sense of community into physical form. Invitations to significant individuals from a variety of communities in the twin cities will be extended to bridge our drop-in center with the network of support and rich heritage that surrounds us. In addition the drop-in center will venture into the neighborhoods from which the youth and staff find their identity, their inspiration and, occasionally, our misconception or fear of each other. The impact of this communion of diverse people will be made real through the sitting down to share a meal together, to hear the stories, the struggles and the parables. The language beyond words will be communicated through the music, the art, the movement and scents of that community will be expressed.

In August and September KK produced our first Khadar Elders' Programs, with the Hmong community and with the Ojibawa community. The Khadar Elders Program can be an example of how a phoenix of understanding can transform out of the flames of ignorance and fear.

To encapsulate, in 1997/1998 Kulture Klub programming included :

- strengthening our **internal management**
- continuing **Art View**, weekly outings to view art events of excellence around the Twin Cities;
- continuing weekly **artists workshops** in writing, performance, music, dance and visual arts
- continuing **Open Mic** readings at Project Off Streets every 3 months;
- producing **public performances** at other Twin Cities venues, i.e. Patrick's Cabaret;
- continuing to develop **partnerships** with Twin Cities arts organizations;
- initiating longer **Artist in Residence** programs
- initiating the **Khadar Elder's Program**

### **Kulture Klub : Evaluation**

Kulture Klub continues to be one of the most consistently attended programs of Project OffStreets. KK staff meet bi-weekly with POS staff to evaluate the progress of individual youth and the overall function of KK activities. Case notes are logged weekly. KK staff evaluate effects of programming at weekly meetings and regularly check in with participating artists and cultural centers which sponsor us. Several cultural venues routinely offer us tickets to their events as they so value the participation of KK youth in their audiences.

By providing at risk youth with the experiences and guidance they need to engage in works of creative self expression, their quality of life, social skills and overall sense of purpose does increase dramatically. Youth

learn from and are inspired by the artists and the artistic contexts in a very different way than in interactions with other POS staff. Through KK, even if only for a short time, they can approach their crisis situations with some creative distance. And the participating youth take the positive energy they get and recycle it back into the Drop-in center, serving as positive models for other POS youth. For many of the youth who are prone to hyper activity, depression and chemical dependency, a heightened sense of self esteem has diverted their attention from potential violence and self destruction.

Artists and artistic expression have revealed to these youth a rich mirror of their diversity, validating and supporting their identities, massaging their imaginations, visions and insights. They have been given tools to see themselves and a fighting chance to find a place of participation within the social fabric.

### **Glimmers of Effectiveness : Artists and art as models for homeless teens :**

#### **Marquita**

In winter 1996, when soliciting interest in youth performing at the Southern Theater, KK discovered that Marquita was very secretly filling a journal with lyrics for herself to sing . Artists mentored and supported her to sing "Killing Me Softly" at the KK Kabaret, for an audience of 200. Not only could she write but also really sing. KK arranged for her to begin voice lessons at McPhail Center for the Arts, which generously offered her a scholarship. After 6 months of training, her teacher is reporting that her vocal range is potentially that of an operatic singer. She continues to study 1 1/2 years later.

#### **Celeste**

Celeste, a youth at POS, changed his name to feminine as part of his coming out as a transsexual. He was rejected by his peer group of homophobic male youth, especially by the black youth. He found support through mentorship by KK artists who encouraged him to develop a lip synch performance of "Black Butterfly", in drag, at the Southern Theater May 1996. It took a lot of guts to present not only to his peers but to a stunned public. His presentation was spectacular and gave him the confidence to continue pursuing his sexual identity.

#### **Carlos**

Carlos had been coming to POS for assistance since 1992, at age 15. At the drop-in center he was always loud, hyper, unconscious of others, hard to handle. The one program that he consistently attended was the Kulture Klub outings to view cultural presentations. Over the next 4 years Carlos witnessed countless expressions by a great variety of artists. He learned to listen and be open to the voices of others while receiving something in return. He vastly expanded his belief in himself and his tolerance of others. Carlos went on to train in early childhood education and today loves his work in a local Daycare Center.

#### **Lady**

In Spring 1997 KK again arranged for artists to mentor youth to perform their own work at Patrick's Cabaret, a popular performance venue in Minneapolis. On the last rehearsal evening Lady, a youth who was preparing to sing, told us that her older brother had been shot to death in an incident in St. Paul the previous week. She seemed strangely cool and unaffected, unable to feel. Lady has 17 brothers and sisters as part of a large extended family of siblings and half siblings. She told us that the only violence which deeply shook her was when at age 4, a brother died in her arms. KK artists suggested to her that artists often make strong statements by consciously channeling deep feelings through their artwork and that she could do so through the song she would be performing at the Cabaret. The next night, when it was Lady's turn to present, she introduced herself and the story of her brother and shared that the following performance was dedicated to his memory. Her performance was deeply provocative for the audience and for herself. She learned something important about strategies of artistic expression to share human stories.

#### **Qwendy**

Qwendy was an A student and president of her high school student union. Constant quarreling between her mother and her resulted in her mother throwing her out of the home. All of a sudden she found herself homeless. Unable to find support for her basic living needs, like food and shelter, she could not keep up with her studies. Her grades fell. Her friends, who could not understand her crisis lifestyle, abandoned her. She dropped out of school. In 1995 Qwendy sought help from POS, where she found the support to finish school. Through KK she was encouraged to write and present publicly an essay she wrote on her

experiences of becoming and surviving homelessness. She submitted this essay as part of her entrance portfolio to McAllister College, where today she continues to study towards a degree in medicine.

### **Sara**

At 14, Sara was the second youth in her family to seek assistance from POS. At 16 she began consistently coming to KK events. For the next 4 years she drew a lot from the artists whose performances she witnessed. When KK began sponsoring Open Mic evenings at the Drop-In center, Sara was one of the first to perform her writing. She continued to develop her writing and also her leadership skills. In January of 1997, Sara read an extraordinary piece dedicated to her crack addicted mother, at an awards ceremony at the Ordway Theater. She received a standing ovation. This attention and validation of her voice continues to motivate her to focus her life in order to provide for her soon to be born child. Sara has recently been chosen to be youth leader in an upcoming sound recording workshop through Music Against Violence. She is also being considered for mentoring young girls through the Hennepin County Correctional Department.

### **LaShawn**

LaShawn has been using the services of POS since age 15. He has been an active member of Kulture Klub since age 16, in 1993. KK programming has helped him to focus his writing on social issues confronted by black youth which he has consistently performed at KK Open Mic sessions, at the Southern Theater, at Patrick's Cabaret and at the Ordway Sally Awards. With this focus LaShawn has been able to successfully participate in the independent housing program and this spring '97 he received his high school diploma. In the fall '97 LaShawn became employed as guard, protecting art at the Walker Art Center, for which he is very proud.

### **Dizzy**

Dizzy, a second generation homeless youth, describes himself as a "Gutter Punk". He has attended KK sporadically for 3 years, bringing with him political and social critique and informing the group on how he intersects art and social justice. Dizzy especially enjoys participating with KK activities which help him develop his skills in graffiti art.

### **Antoine**

Antoine came to Project OffStreets early 1996 very disoriented, homeless and estranged from his family, isolated from other teens and with few living and social skills. Few of the POS staff could reach him. Kulture Klub recognized his abilities in music and drawing and encouraged him in these areas. Through the KK outings he became socialized to participate with the other teens and also became inspired and hopeful through the art and artists he was meeting. Antoine has rarely missed a KK event in 2 years. KK works closely with POS mental health staff to provide stabilization for Antoine so that he can develop from himself. Today, Antoine has his own apartment supervised through the independent living program of POS, has enrolled in Carmichael Arts High School, and through the efforts of KK has received a scholarship for computerized music recording from McPhail Center for the Arts.

### **Pumpkin**

Pumpkin was one of several KK youth who stayed on to hear the discussion after the Spike Lee documentary "Four Little Girls", sponsored by the Walker Art Center. The film re-exposed the racial tensions which led to and were influenced by the 1963 bombing of a church in Birmingham, Alabama, where for young black girls were killed. During the discussion, Pumpkin raised her hand to say that she had recently graduated from high school where she had taken an Afro-American History class but never heard of this incident. She asked "why?" The black elders present, two of whom had been present at the church during the bombing, admitted that the shock and trauma of this incident numbed them from talking publicly about it until now. Pumpkin then asked "now that you told all of us here, now what do we do?" Simultaneously, all those present, young and elder, black and white, turned to her, pointed to her and said, "it's up to you!". Her jaw fell open with recognition. "Oh, I get it. I have to continue telling this story...", she replied. For an extraordinary moment all the people present became a community guiding this youth on. This event will surely leave a lasting impression on all the youths present, each one lacking a community of guidance.

### **Josh**

Josh, a gentle 19 year old with an appreciative presence, attends KK when he is not busy with mental health appointments. He has been a sporadic member of KK over the last 3 years, benefiting especially from the workshops which stretch his beliefs of what his body and creativity can express, i.e. the dance workshop

with Roxanne Wallace. Josh also speaks of how much he enjoys learning about other cultures and how this stimulates his imagination.

### **Charles**

Charles has not missed a KK workshop or event since coming to Project OffStreets in August 1997. At 19, he has been homeless for many years and brings a lot of energy, enthusiasm and imagination to the group. He thrives under the involvement of many staff and has honed his interest in music and performance through the structure and attention of the KK family. Charles is very involved with the music recording workshop and has initiated being in charge of collecting autographs of all the performers at the performances KK attends.

### **Nici**

Nici is an 18 year old who came to OffStreets fleeing the prostitution she was forced into when kidnapped last summer 1997. She became involved with Kulture Klub because of a friendship she had with another KK member. She is an intelligent and creative youth who lacked focus and was often under the influence of drugs. Nici regularly attended the Dance Workshops which also provided support for her as she recovered from a miscarriage. Nici is currently a regular KK member and is developing her interest in music and the music industry through attending the recording workshops of Music Against Violence.

## **Staff Qualifications**

Dorit Cypis, Artistic Director, oversees programming, KK staff, fund raising and administration. Christi Atkinson, Co-Director, develops programming and weekly contact with youth at POS. Kristen Stuenkel is POS staff, assisting Kulture Klub and acting as liaison with other POS staff. KK staff report to POS Supervisor Molly Miller and POS Director Edward McBrayer. Dorit Cypis also coordinates administration with MYDP Development Director Nancy Morton, Accountant Mary Carter and Executive Director Mary Weeks.

### **Kulture Klub, Artistic Director, Dorit Cypis.**

Visual Artist with an international exhibition record in performance, multi-media installation and photography. BA in Art Education from the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, MFA from the California Institute for the Arts. Numerous grants and fellowships from local, national and international agencies. 20 years teaching experience from K-12 to colleges and universities and in private practice. Creator and Director of Kulture Klub since 1992.

### **Kulture Klub, Program Assistant, Christi Atkinson,**

Visual artist with a focus on Comic Book illustration. BA from the University of Colorado, Boulder. Program Director for No Name Gallery, in Minneapolis, since 1993. Walker Art Center Teen Programs Consultant. Involved in education and the arts since 1988.

### **Kulture Klub Artists,**

Multi-aesthetic, multi-cultural professional artists from the Twin Cities communities.

### **Project OffStreets, Case Manager/liasion with Kulture Klub, Kristen Stuenkel.**

BA from St. Olaf College; 8 years experience in social services/youth counseling.

### **Project OffStreets, Associate Director, Edward McBrayer.**

BA from Concordia College LSW; 10 years experience as a Youth Counselor; 10 years experience as Associate Director for Project OffStreets.

### **Minneapolis Youth Diversion Program, Executive Director, Mary Weeks.**

Masters of Social Work from University of Minnesota Duluth; 23 years experience in social services/youth counseling; 11 years Executive Director of youth programs.