

Inspiration House Retreats

INSPIRATION HOUSE RETREATS gather men and women of conscience to seek rejuvenation through honest dialogue, dynamic silence, and the magic of cultural art performances. Our goal is to provide respite -- especially for staff who work in the stressful working conditions of nonprofit community service and social justice organizations. At Inspiration House Retreats, individuals explore how music, art, dance, theater, video arts, and creative writing can help them transform their stress into professional inspiration, personal renewal, and a new set of strategic tools. Retreat participants also attend performances and presentations by virtuoso cultural artists (as well as roundtables and conversations with the artists), in order to fully experience the renewing power of art that is created by men and women who imagine a humane and just society.

Rationale:

Over the years, in our work in a variety of nonprofit community service and social justice organizations, we've have found that:

- Staff working for community service, neighborhood development, and social change can burn out emotionally, become territorial, begin to mistrust collaboration, and sink into helplessness, because of the inherently slow pace of reaching their goals
- Staff become less effective in advancing their social justice agendas, maintaining organizational stability, and developing a broader base of partners and constituencies
- There are few tools and systematic training approaches addressing both structural/institutional causes of conflict/oppression *and* the importance of engaging and healing the personal/political pain, grief, and frustrations that organizers/activists often carry after operating for years within crises

Inspiration House believes that no social change can be sustained unless the social change workers are sustained. Cultural arts are uniquely able to help individuals rejuvenate themselves despite having to work from crisis-to-crisis. Cultural arts such as poetry, drama, music, dance, painting, sculpture, and video/film can be particularly effective tools for integrating personal awareness, interpersonal skills, and organizational service. Producing art and witnessing performances by artists can help individuals explore ways to remain committed to their highest organizational and ethical principles.

Primarily, cultural arts incorporate and transform strong, difficult, often contentious, human emotions into artistic statements through tools such as symbolism, metaphor, improvisation, indirection, storytelling, personal testimony, movement, and role-playing. Using these tools can help individuals improve their imaginations, creativity, and flexibility in their approaches to social justice work. They return to their organizations understanding how cultural arts are profound tools in the creation of survival and thriving strategies in the work to create a just society. They return motivated, inspired and equipped with tools and attitudes that can help foster an institutional atmosphere and operational system in which staff can face crises with individuality and improvisation.

Individuals working on community service and social justice issues need the capacity to apply a variety of vibrant strategies to remain politically effective and interpersonally healthy. Tapping the cultural arts can fundamentally improve the capacities of retreat participants to convert inevitable difficulties into inspirational opportunities to improve individual and organizational work for a humane society.

Cultural arts, explored in a retreat setting and within an atmosphere which values and encourages *ethical relationships*, helps participants adhere to their guiding principles even under stress. Ultimately, cultural arts help them contribute to the development of their nonprofit community service and social justice organizations, because they learn to apply dynamic patience, respectful listening, and a supple strategic capacity to balance paradox, organize chaos, and put pain (and its healing) on the agenda.