

**AN EVALUATION
OF THE
WORKING THEATRE
PILOT PROJECT**

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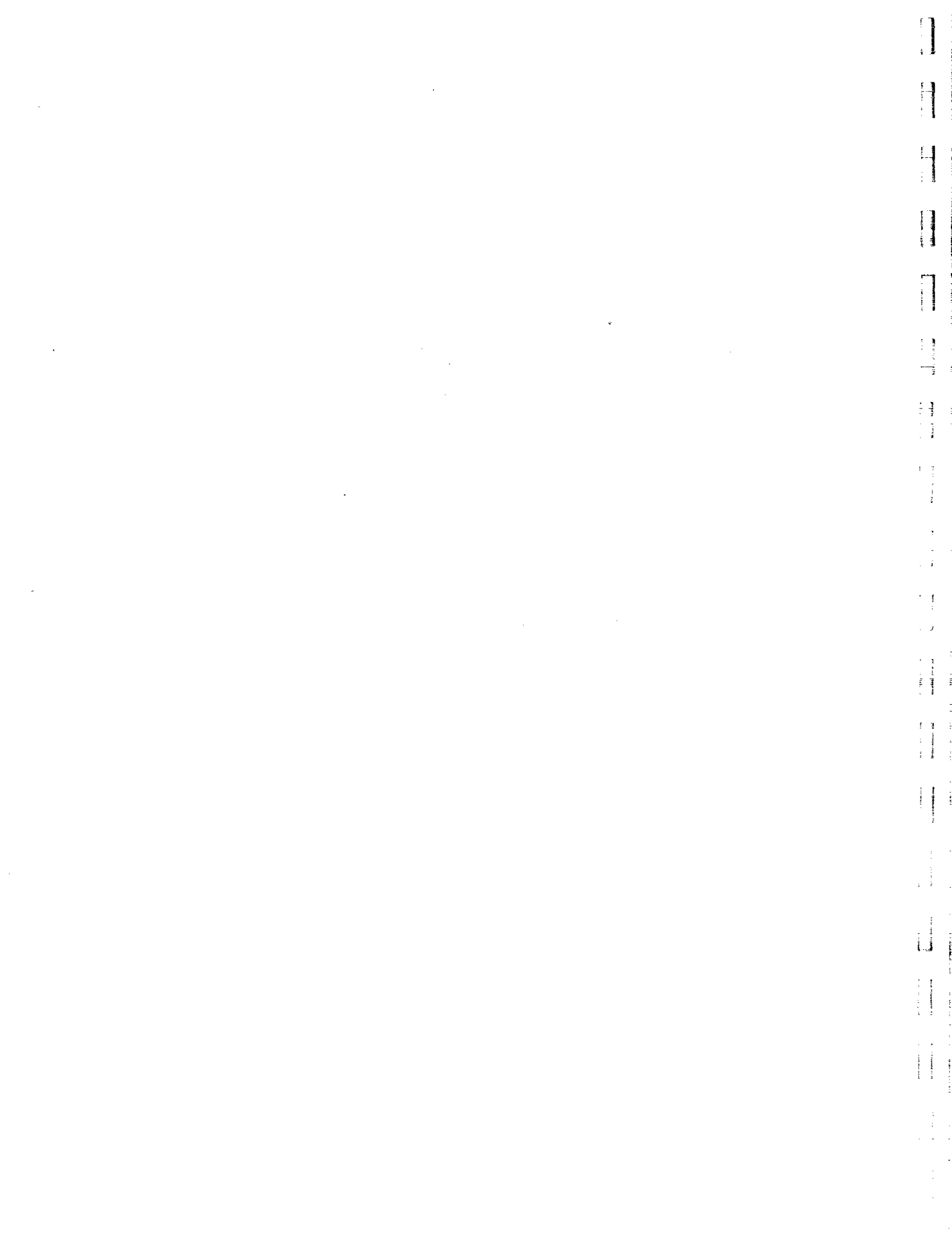


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1. INTRODUCTION

A. Background

In the spring of 1987, Catalyst Theatre received funding from Canada Employment and Immigration Commission (CEIC) to develop the Working Theatre Pilot Project. This project was funded under the Innovations Program of the Canadian Jobs Strategy.

Traditional skill development projects geared to long term unemployed individuals are often less than successful because they fail to deal with the frustration, depression, and lack of self-esteem that effectively prevents individuals from finding work and then functioning effectively at work. Catalyst Theatre's experience in participational theatre has demonstrated that theatre has a unique ability to educate and change people. Catalyst Theatre proposed the Working Theatre Pilot Project as an innovative method to provide training for the long term unemployed.

B. Purpose of the Evaluation

In its proposal, Catalyst Theatre identified eight program objectives. They are listed below. The Edmonton Social Planning Council was approached to evaluate the pilot project in terms of the impact of the project in improving the self-esteem and initiative of the project participants, and the influence of the play on audience attitudes toward unemployment.

1. To examine the labor market issue of long term unemployment.
2. To test the effectiveness of theatre in improving self esteem and initiative of participants.
3. To provide transferrable life skills training for participants in areas such as communication, group dynamics, responsibility and initiative, leadership.
4. To provide participants with the skills needed to create and perform collective theatre.
5. To explore possible solutions to the frustration and depression associated with long-term unemployment.

6. To create a climate of support for the unemployed in the broader community through providing an opportunity to hear and understand the concerns of the unemployed.
7. To establish an ongoing program offering employment to participants in the pilot project.
8. To develop an awareness in the participants of the potential of theatre as a positive leisure time activity.

C. Methodology

The evaluation is based on interviews with the seven people who participated in the project, and audience surveys. The interview and audience survey questionnaires are in Appendix 1.

Project participants were interviewed three times during the nine weeks that the project ran. A fourth interview was conducted two months after the project ended. The interviews focused on:

1. participants' feelings and attitudes about unemployment;
2. their experiences with unemployment;
3. their efforts to find work;
4. the impact of the project on their self-esteem and initiative; and
5. other expressed changes.

The interview questions were open-ended, allowing participants to tell us, in their own words, about themselves, the project, and the changes they experienced during the project. Standardized psychological questions on self-esteem, mastery, and depression were asked at the first, third, and fourth interviews. The psychological questions provided a standard comparable measurement of each participant's self-esteem, mastery, and level of depression.

After each performance, members of the audience were asked to complete an audience survey about the play and their views on unemployment.

2. A BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE PROJECT AND ITS PROCESS

Participants were led through the process of developing a play in a structured, closely supervised, learning setting. Workshops were held eight hours per day, five days a week, over the course of the project. The workshop content was designed to give the participants skills in all of the areas essential to the production of a collectively written play. As the play was being developed, resource people from interested groups were invited to sit in on the sessions and provide input on the content, themes, and format of the play.

The play, which emerges from this process reflects the concerns of the participants since in order to create such a play, the participants must be able to confront and analyze their own feelings about being unemployed. In doing so, they develop coping skills and self-esteem and begin to explore solutions to their problems. Those attending the performances become sensitized to the concerns of the participants. Discussions with the audience after each performance provide an opportunity to discuss strategies for collective action to deal with problems of the chronically unemployed.

3. INITIAL INTERVIEW

The first interview was held just as the seven participants began the project. The purpose of this interview was to learn more about each person and his/her experiences with unemployment. It is by knowing about these individuals and how unemployment affected them, that we can come to appreciate the changes they experienced in this project.

A. The Unemployed: People, Not Statistics

We often hear about unemployment in terms of an unemployment rate or the number of people unemployed. Perhaps, because unemployment is often referred to in these ways, there is a tendency to think of the unemployed as a homogeneous group.

The unemployed are not, in fact, a homogeneous group. The seven people who took part in the project, while not representative of the unemployed in a scientific sense, illustrate this point. Their ages varied from 24 to 48 years, and

education from grade 7 to college and university graduation. Four were single, three were single parents. Their occupations included self-employed carpet cleaner, waitress, heavy equipment operator, roughneck, community outreach worker, language teacher, and researcher.

Being unemployed was perhaps the only thing they had in common. Even so, there were differences in their unemployment experiences. One person had been unemployed almost seven years. Another has used unemployment as a 'paid sabbatical' from the labour force. The others fell between these two extremes.

B. Reaction to Being Unemployed

The loss of one's job is frequently conceptualized in the literature on unemployment as being similar to other major personal losses experienced through such events as retirement, divorce, or death. Numerous authors support the notion of an adjustment cycle consisting of a number of stages which the unemployed individual moves through in sequence. The model most widely supported in the literature consists of four stages: shock, optimism, pessimism and fatalism.

While the participants' responses to the interview questions on unemployment do not necessarily "prove" this view of unemployment, it is interesting to note how their reactions to unemployment changed over time.

6. *Just before you heard about this project, how did you feel about your chances of getting a job soon?*
7. *How does this compare to how you felt when you first became unemployed?*

When I first became unemployed, I thought there might be a little problem but not that big of a problem to get a job in a reasonable amount of time, but it just isn't the case. There just aren't any jobs out there. I've been to so many places. There's always a line-up when you go to apply for a job - for any kind of job. It's bad. It's pathetic.

I wasn't totally aware of the situation. I knew things were bad but I wasn't aware it was so bad. I mean, so many people out there are looking for work too.

I was very depressed. It got to the point where I ended up having to see somebody at Mental Health. I was trying so hard to get off welfare and get a job and better myself. It was one big stress. I was putting too much on myself. It just got to me. I don't want to feel like that again.

I didn't feel as bad when I got laid off because I figured at that time I could get another job.

I wasn't looking for work at first because I became strung out from my last phase at work. I really needed to stay home and be with my daughter. And then I realized what was happening to me. I was starting to get really frightened of not keeping my skills up. I just started looking for dip jobs.

I was completely defeated because what I was working against was a field where there were so many people who were qualified to work. I was just beginning to work. So I was trained and I had experience but I had minimal experience. I was also a woman and a parent so I had to compromise a lot to work in that field. My last job was a camp job and I decided after that that I just couldn't take it anymore.

My U.I. had run out when I found out about this job. I had been living on carefully hoarded savings that I had accumulated over about 3 1/2 - 4 years. I was very, very, depressed. I was feeling negative about any chance of getting into the job market. I was on my very last thread.

The first month you're unemployed, you feel relieved. Especially as a single parent, there is all kinds of work to be done. And now you've got the time to do it.

My nerves got really bad.

Actually it was kind of a relief. I had been working in the bar business so long. I thought there were lots of jobs out there so I took it as kind of a holiday.

I wasn't looking.

I felt wonderful. I needed a rest. I needed some time to do my work. So it was great.

This time I was a bit worried that I wouldn't find anything and that I would have a repeat of last time and go to school dead broke. When you have plans and you want to be working for something, unemployment is more threatening.

At first I was enthusiastic about getting a job. I had quite high standards. Maybe too high really. I was quite determined. I really pounded the pavement.

I didn't want to have a shit job. I wanted to have a good job that would interest me. I wasn't even looking for jobs that offered lots of money. I was looking more for an interesting experience.

C. Looking for Work/Checking Out the Alternatives

When unemployment rates remained relatively low in the 1960's and '70s there was a tendency to view the jobless either as being unemployable or as not really wanting to work. Whether or not this was ever the case, there can be no doubt that today, the vast majority of unemployed Albertans are both employable and eager to find jobs. Such was the case with the project participants.

8. Were you looking for work before you joined the project?

9. Have you thought about getting into something else?

I was going through the newspapers. I was going to Manpower. I was calling the odd friend that I hadn't been in touch with for a long time, seeing if they were doing anything or knew anybody that might be able to help me. It's funny because, anything I think of doing, I've met people who had qualifications in those fields and couldn't get any jobs. So my attitude was that I should probably go for what I want to do in my heart and what I want.

I have put in my application for a nurse's aide. I wrote and passed the written but they say there's a waiting list of up to 2 years. It's been a year already and I haven't heard anything from them. I wasn't sitting around waiting for them to reply. But that's one of the things I've done.

My nerves got really bad so I went to my doctor and got a note to apply for a training program. They classified bartenders and waitresses as skilled labour so they wouldn't retrain me even if I had a good reason. That makes me so mad when the government says you can go in and get trained but then they say they can't retrain you because you're already a skilled worker.

I used the newspaper, manpower centre and tried to talk with as many people as I could. Whenever I talked with anyone, I would try to bring up the fact that I was looking for work and perhaps they knew someone who was hiring.

The majority of the jobs that were in the newspaper are exploitive positions when I checked them out. I'd phone the guy and find out that I'm not going to be able to support the kids on that.

I thought about what job there would always be a need for. I thought of a Chef's course. I waited two years to get accepted into the program. It's very hard. It's a long wait.

When I was looking for work these past few months, I would get up and start telephoning places that I found in the paper at 9:00 in the morning. When I got there, there would already be 15 people filling out applications. The competition is very stiff.

D. Social Supports

While a person's reaction to losing a job is bound to be quite idiosyncratic, it is likely to be influenced by a number of important variables. The extent to which an unemployed person's needs for affection, esteem, approval, identity, and security are met through a social support network of family and friends has been shown to be a significant factor in coping with the negative effects of unemployment.

a) Family

10. How do you think your family feels about you?

They don't like it. It's really hard for them. My mother is starting to understand. My father just doesn't understand.

They hate it. They think that I should have had a job all along and that living on welfare is a most incredible embarrassment. They think that I should have a job no matter what it is - even if it's washing dishes.

They were very concerned because I was quite depressed. I could see how people crack up. I saw the potential. They were concerned. My family treated me well once they knew I was unhappy.

Their attitude has changed over the last four years. I think perhaps two years ago they would have liked to see me with a full time permanent job instead of what appeared to be bouncing around from grant to grant which seemed to be the only positions I could get into. Their awareness has changed. They're aware that there just aren't any jobs in Alberta and that it's hard times for many people.

My children think it's great. They trust me and they know what I'm doing. My parents are a different matter.

They've never told me and I've never asked them but I guess they feel that I should be ashamed of myself because I go to the Food Bank and I'm on welfare. They always seem to mention that they'd never beg themselves.

b) Friends

11. Do you feel that your friends treat you differently since you've been unemployed?

No. Most of the people I know are pretty understanding because they have been in the same boat. They don't ask to borrow money as much.

No, because I know so many unemployed people.

The ones that are working figure there is work. You are treated differently. I guess it's just human nature. I can't afford to do things with them. Actually, I'm losing a lot of contacts that I had when I was working. I've lost a lot of people that I used to know because I can't live that same lifestyle anymore. I have to budget. I can go for a coffee but that's about it.

Most people I know, unemployment is something that they've planned. Many people I know, getting U.I. is part of their cycle, so I think there's no real stigma to being unemployed.

No, most of my friends are very supportive. They're aware of conditions here.

c) Others

12. Do you feel that others treat you differently when they know you are unemployed?

It's a stigma of some sort that if you're not working, you just don't want to work. I don't think people who are working realize just how hard it is to get a

job. Some of the retired people or people on a fixed income - I don't think they realize how hard it is.

When you hand your card to the druggist, you notice the look and you can feel it.

Superstore won't give you more than a \$50 limit on a cheque if you've been unemployed.

It depends. There does seem to be so many more people affected now by the economic crisis that there are more and more people that you can talk to. They understand that there is a problem. You pick up on the others really quickly and you just shut your mouth because there's no reaching them.

E. Living With Unemployment

Present circumstances differ markedly from those of the depression years in that a more comprehensive safety net is now in place to assist the unemployed and the poor. Living with unemployment however, requires more than simply cutting out the frills one enjoys when one is working.

13. What are some of the more difficult things that you have had deal with in being unemployed?

You take on a completely different lifestyle. I shop at second hand stores. I don't even think of shopping where most consumers shop. We eat vegetarian at home because it's cheaper and I can still provide adequate nutrition. There are not a lot of choices; not a lot of long-term thinking, you can't think long-term. It's sort of like you're living in a state of unpredictability. And that state of unpredictability is a very important thing to recognize because it keeps people unbalanced and vulnerable to government changes and you don't fight back. You don't have any security.

I've only been dead broke a few times in my life and it's quite stressful. It sort of becomes a sense of your personal worth. You can't afford to go out and

see a movie or you have to scrape together the rent every month. Financial stress is difficult to take.

Finding work for me is a humbling experience. You have to sell yourself so often and it's quite difficult to wake up in the morning, read the paper, and pound the pavement and when you go for interviews you have to put on the act and that's also work.

Going to the welfare office and talking to the social worker there. It seemed so strange to me discussing my finances with a total stranger. I didn't particularly enjoy it. I don't want to do that anymore.

You have no future it seems. You just live from day to day and it's very emotionally draining. It gets you down. You can't plan. Even to have a girl friend.

I'm not looking for work every day because it's just too emotionally draining. You get no response from a lot of these people when you go and fill out applications. Whenever you're not doing anything, you go for a coffee with a friend who's unemployed. You sit there and cry about the situation, you might say.

Separating from my wife. Raising my son. Taking the American Sign Language Course. Applying for the Chef's course. These were all new steps for me. Being dependent on my parents.

That's really depressing when you put 20 or 30 dollars aside each week for a couple of years and face the possibility of having to go through it in 2 or 3 months. And worse than that, even once you've done that, what was occurring to me was that I would simply maybe never get another job, ever.

There's a certain subtle demotivating force that begins to play on the unemployed. I go through cycles of that where I find I have to psyche myself up to get out there and knock on empty doors of empty rooms. That's what it feels like. And you can do that for a certain period of time and then you have to back off and take a little break and rejuvenate yourself with your peer group just to keep your sanity and your confidence. It's impossible to keep your confidence at a consistent level.

What are empty rooms? Well, that's what it feels like when you're sending off applications for positions. I do follow-up phone calls and find out

that there's between 15 and 75 applicants. I usually make it a point to check out what the qualifications of most of them are. There might be 5 to 10 highly qualified people in a specific area and if that's the area that's being advertised, people with my experience who don't have the specialized expertise being looked for, there's no chance, there's no chance at all.

When I was unemployed last summer I sent my daughter away to my sister's place. That was the hardest. I was restricted in the times I could talk with her and they just put me through hell. They'd tell me that my daughter was a delightful girl in spite of me. She did come back at Christmas. It seemed like everything was going crazy. It took five months to get things rolling again.

There are times that I feel that maybe I'm wrong to risk what I'm doing and go for what I really want. Maybe I should be living the rules of the society I'm in. And then I feel guilty and scared. Scared that U.I.C. is going to find that I'm not really looking for work and they're going to cut me off and then I'm going to really have some problems.

F. Unemployment: What Does It Really Mean?

For those who have a job, unemployment is likely to mean simply "not having a job". For the unemployed person, unemployment has a more personal and complex meaning.

14. Based on your experiences since you have been without a job, what does unemployment mean to you?

Now I have a totally different perspective. I used to believe that there were jobs out there and I used to believe that it just took a lot of hard work because I worked very hard at getting a job. I knew all the tricks. I just figured that people who were unemployed weren't doing that. They just weren't trying. They weren't looking.

I had a lot of energy and no pressures. But now that I'm a parent, I have incredible pressures. I find that a person becomes emotionally immobilized very easily because of the problems and stress. Now I can relate to other people being unemployed. I can look at them with empathy.

I'm mad now. I think there definitely should be some awareness brought to this problem. It's a problem. It's a crisis. And I really feel our government is dumping the crisis on unemployed people.

Unemployment to me means hopelessness, alienation. You're alienated from the mainstream of life. You can't do anything because you have no money. All your money is spent on just getting by, just the bare necessities. I lived on social assistance before I got this job. It's just enough to get by - nothing more, nothing less. You're just an outsider.

It means not being able to get anywhere. Not being able to take pride in myself. I want my son to be proud of me, if there is no employment, it's pretty bad. I get the feeling my son will think less of me.

Employment is the only thing that puts food on the table. If you don't have employment, you better think of some ways of getting it. It's a dog eat dog world out there.

Unemployment means guilt about having to send my daughter to live with my sister for five months.

Is it ever going to get better? Will I have a secure job? Will I just have to end up being a waitress?

It means desolation. It's a very alienating experience. It's a very meaningless experience. You're feeling that you're not making any contribution to your life. Your life beings to feel like it has no purpose. Any long term goals or dreams seem unthinkable.

Unemployment sort of has two phases. Unemployment is when you don't have a job and you're glad. Maybe you worked hard all winter and you don't feel like washing somebody's trucks for the summer and so you quit.

Unemployment is a fine thing. Working is all well and good. Not working is also a pretty good thing.

But then again, when you're unemployed and you want to have a job, unemployment is a bad situation. It's hard on your self-esteem. You'd like to be able to support yourself. It's good to think that you've got something that people are willing to hire you for. So if you are looking for work and no one wants to hire you, it's not so good for your self-esteem.

It is the only way I can see that someone in my position, that is, not very well off and without the kind of job that recognizes these things - it's the only way I can see that I can take a sabbatical or time to do what I consider real work. I use it to the limit. I encourage other people to use it for that purpose, particularly with women who have raised children and who are in the work force. It's the only way they're going to get a break. Every single mother on this planet needs to get a break and if they need U.I. to get it, that's okay.

G. Joining the Working Theatre Pilot Project

Some of the participants had been unemployed for years. All had been on welfare at one time or another. Initially, all of them regarded the pilot project as a paying job first and foremost. The offer to take part in the project was for them, a job offer. This fact overrode any doubts they might have had about their abilities to write a play and then perform in front of an audience.

15. What were your reasons for joining the project?

What did you hope to get out of it for yourself?

When I was told about it, I wasn't too enthusiastic about it because I had never done it before. It was kind of scary, but when I was told what we'd be making a week, well, I'll do anything for that right now. Now I can get enough money to get a car. Then I can go out and look for these jobs. I can pay for my son's camp for 5 days in July. I can pay for day care.

When I found out I got accepted, it felt like I had just won the lottery. It was unbelievable. It's better than any grants I've ever been on. I couldn't believe that I'd been so lucky considering the number of applicants who had been interviewed. It felt like I had won the lottery.

It also felt very ironical because at the time when Ruth called me initially to let me know she'd like to interview me, I had been sitting there looking at my resume for an hour and just pulling my hair out thinking what can I exaggerate, or what things can I fabricate in here, and what things I could say in my resume, so that it will appear that some of my experience is much more extensive than what it is. And I was just pulling my hair out thinking I don't have enough experience in anything. And Ruth called and introduced herself and said what she was doing, she said that I'd been recommended because I'd had a lot of experience being unemployed!

I was excited. I was scared. I was really happy. I thought it was great. I didn't really know what to expect and what I'd get out of it. All I knew was it paid \$325 a week. That was why I applied. I was thinking about the job. Here was a job I can go to.

I hoped to get my spirits lifted. I thought it would be a great opportunity to get back into the mainstream of life and be somewhat of a human being again.

I thought of it as therapy immediately. Because I would be around people. I would no longer be isolated like I had been. I would be around people sharing similar experiences. And all of a sudden I had a voice to speak with.

And for finding out if there really is a problem. Are there jobs out there or are people just bums? It really actually bothered me because what I had done in order to survive was I had plugged my head into the sand like an ostrich. I felt that if I identified myself with other peoples' problems, I was being dragged down.

It really hurt because I didn't want to identify with poor people and their problems. I had thought I'm not that way. I don't want to live that way. I don't have to be that way. That's not what's going to happen to me. There's something wrong with those people. By becoming a part of this project, I pulled my head out of the sand and looked again, "There's nothing wrong with

those people." And it's terrified me because now I have to say and I believe it, that I have just as much potential for heading off in that direction as they do. And we all have to fight very hard to stay off that situation. It's a process that takes place.

First, I knew I could learn a lot of the things I wanted to learn, and secondly, it was a place where I could bring some of the things I firmly believe in and say it in a way that could be heard.

Specifically new ways of expressing, group skills, and the whole thing of theatre was exciting.

I decided I needed to be really up front and honest about all the things I think even though they may be somewhat unusual in some ways. And that's often risky when dealing with a new person. And I really liked the way Denise received that. Obviously she was hearing and I felt good about that.

This one was the complete opposite of the job I had just done - in every way. The job I had just finished; I was finishing up somebody's bloody PEP grant. It was just towards the end of the last week that I talked to Ruth and I thought "wow", this is going to restore my faith in even the shitty jobs there are out there.

16. What things did you like about the project as it was explained to you?

I was glad to hear that somebody was taking an interest in the fact that there just isn't any work. I was interested in being part of a group that was going to show people that it is bad out there. I also thought that it would help boost my morale and give me more confidence too.

We were going to be making a statement.

One of the things that appealed to me was that I'd be working with people that I had more in common with. I liked the idea of the experience I'd be

getting. It should be able to help people who watch the play, and I liked that idea.

It was funny when Ruth told me what the project was about. No thank you, I could never do this. I get shy sometimes in crowds of three. And she said 'I promise you, no problem.' If you're one of the final participants, you won't have a problem being shy by the time you finish the project. So in a sense it sounded as if I should be paying for this experience myself. That I was getting paid for it and a relatively decent wage was just phenomenal. I liked the feeling that I was going to go through my gut fears and get paid for it. I was doing what I considered to be an impossible thing for me to even agree to try to do and if I could do this then my going to University or whatever I decided to do just might seem easy.

I liked the fact that it was 10 to 5. Instead of getting off at 7:00 at night and not getting home until 8 or 8:30 which left more time for my daughter.

I liked doing the research. The idea of really finding out the facts. The workshops about learning how to express yourself. I liked the pay. I liked the people. And I liked the attitudes.

4. THE SECOND INTERVIEW - HALFWAY THROUGH THE PROJECT

The second interview took place six weeks into the project. This phase in the process is a stressful time, since each person has to deal with the problem of "telling his/her story" and then the group has to put together the play that they will perform. At the time of the interviews, a play had been written. It was subsequently discarded about halfway through the interview round. Because the first performance was just a week and a half away, the group had to come up with a new play quickly. This added more stress to an already stressful situation. Despite these circumstances, everyone was optimistic that a play would be written and performed. They were confident that it would tell their stories in a way that the audiences could understand.

A. Sharing Experiences

The "circle" is at the core of the workshop process. Besides being used to begin and end each day's activities, it is the critical exercise for developing the group's collective story-telling and skills. In the circle, participants develop listening skills and learn to feel at ease speaking in a group. Each participant gives support to the circle and in return, receives the support of the circle.

In the initial interview, the participants had made highly personal statements about what employment had meant to them. The first two questions of this interview explored what they had learned about themselves and each other through the circle, and other activities during and after the workshop sessions.

1. What have you learned about unemployment since you started on the project?

I learned what it means to other people - the other people I've been working with. We're all different so other peoples' experiences are different from mine.

I've always not only been able to find work when I've needed to, but had work shoved down my throat when I didn't want it. And that isn't everybody's experience. I knew that intellectually, but in getting to know these people, I've been able to understand what a drag that is - how devastating it is to just keep on and on, looking for work and getting those feelings of "where do I go next?" And how hard people try. I never did have the bum philosophy myself but now I understand more just how hard people work to find work. And it's such lonely work looking for work.

Basically I've learned what the others in the group have gone through the last few years. Another thing I've been sensitized to is the plight of single parents and just how much having a kid is such a big factor in one's life. I've learned that basically I've had a pretty easy time of it.

There's still a lot of labelling about people who are unemployed, that we're all bums and so forth. But we're not. We do have potential.

People are trying but they're not getting the help they need. I find myself being more aware. You have to stand up for yourself and go to these rallies. I always thought they were useless and a pain in the ass. People just went because they had nothing to do. But since I've been in here, I've come to realize those things are important. You have to have them.

Before coming to this program I thought because I can't get a job it's kind of my fault. There must be something I'm doing wrong. But now that I've talked to a number of people, they all seem to tell the same story. I've come to the conclusion that there aren't enough jobs to go around.

The biggest thing that frightens me is what I call "The Attitude". The attitude that the people don't count and the employers do. Especially the attitude of people who have stable incomes and can't relate to people who are out of work. I also see people that don't want to do anything about it. They just say "Well, there's no money in the budget. We can't do anything." And I see a great shift of responsibilities of the government on the private sector. When it's pushed onto the private sector, in my opinion, the people who will have the power are the ones with money. I think it's getting worse, not better.

2. *How did you feel about sharing your feelings and experiences about unemployment with others in the group?*

As the circle was going around and it came to me and I found these people being very honest. They had nothing to be ashamed of because we were all in the same boat. So it got to my turn and I just told them the truth. It more or less broke the ice.

I found myself overanxious to get statements in that perhaps hadn't been touched in the group. I wanted to make a statement for a lot more people and a lot more people's experiences.

First off, I was a little bit hesitant. I was depressed a bit because of the whole situation that I've been in. I've been looking for work and I still couldn't find it. And thinking that it is all my fault. That maybe I'm not doing something right. And so you blame yourself. There must be something the matter with me. So when I first got into the project I was a little hesitant to tell my end of it until the odd one started breaking the ground and we all started sharing and finding out we've all got the same thing here. In the end, it was a rewarding experience.

It took me a long time to tell my story. I only told it last week (about 5 weeks into the project) so it took me a long time. Only because it was close to my heart. It was something I really hadn't dealt with. It hadn't even been a year since my daughter came back, so it was really hard for me to open up and tell them. They were really supportive when I did.

Now that I have told it, it's been hard on me the last few days just thinking about it and going over it again because I had put it behind me and, "boom" it's back in front of me again. And I'm having a hard time dealing with it.

I sort of felt that until recently, there was sort of a lot of people telling their hard luck stories and it was getting a bit much. So I think some of the positive aspects had to be expressed also. I think that's started coming out recently.

There was one day I felt very shaky about it because basically I choose to be unemployed so I can do important work. One time I was talking about that and I just felt, I don't know if it was real, but I was feeling people reacting to me saying "It must be nice" and I felt very lonely there because it was different. But mostly I put out what I feel and it's okay.

B. Talking With 'Outsiders'

In the initial interview, the participants had been pretty candid about their reasons for joining the project. In most cases, it was the salary. More than that, it was a job.

The difficulty for the participants in talking with friends, relatives and others outside the project was that this project was not a typical training program and certainly not your average job. The desire to talk about their work was tempered by the uniqueness of what they were doing in the project.

3. *Have you talked with relatives, friends, neighbors, or others about the project?*

What did you say? What was their response?

I've talked about it to a limited extent but not very much.

Last Friday, Ruth said that if you try to talk about things to people who haven't experienced it, they don't really understand it. It sort of weakens the power of it all. I think that's quite true. It sort of weakens your ideas. If people ask about it, I don't refuse to talk about it, but I don't talk about it in detail.

I put my son into day care yesterday and they asked me what kind of work I was doing. I told them I was working on a play for Catalyst Theatre. A lot of people have heard about the Catalyst Theatre. They mentioned that they've seen some of their plays. They asked what we're putting on. They asked where it's playing at. A lot of people are interested in seeing it. As soon as I get a schedule, I'll be passing a lot out.

One person doesn't understand it - that we're getting paid for doing this. He just thinks it's ridiculous. My family thinks it's great. They can hardly wait to see me and see the whole thing.

My parents think that it's a government project so therefore it's not useful. They think it's a waste of taxpayers' money. I tell them about it but I don't tell them very much about it.

I don't want to lose my positive energy for it so I protect it. Most people can't really relate to what's going on.

I tell them what it is, and day-to-day occurrences. They think it's wonderful and mention that it must be nice to get paid for doing something like that.

I don't talk about it in great detail. Of course my family has got fantastic hopes that this is the beginning of some incredible field for me which I don't share with them. They're dreaming.

C. Reflection on the project and themselves.

All the participants chose to highlight the positive things that they had learned about themselves even though this interview was conducted during a stressful phase in the project.

4. I asked you earlier what you have learned about unemployment. What have you learned about yourself? Good things. Not so good things.

I've learned that prior to coming to the group I was kind of down and withdrawn. I've learned that I still have a lot of capabilities and I can do things just as well as anybody else given the opportunity for training or whatever. I thought that way a little more seriously than, maybe, some of the other people in the group. I'm 42 now and I've found that to be a barrier in many of the jobs I've applied for. I was looking really negatively at the future. I think this has lifted me up to the point where I won't let that get in my way.

I'm not afraid to speak up in front of a crowd. I surprise myself a lot. I watch myself and I think "you're doing that?" And it's really something to see myself do that - to be able to see myself acting like that. I still have this little scared voice saying "I'm going to screw up." I've been rehearsing at home. I'm a lot happier.

I'm really growing by leaps and bounds. But it also frightens me. I'm a searcher. I search for truths in my life and I always have. And it gets really scary when your truths are totally the opposite from the way you're supposed to be as the government says.

I'm calmer in some things.

A lot of things I used to block off. I wouldn't think of them or deal with them. Now I do. I used to talk with my friends if I had a problem and they would give me solutions or try and help me. Now, I try to think my problems out and find my own solutions. So I've learned that I don't always need somebody, that I can do it on my own.

I built my self-esteem. I know that.

I listen more and hear more. I hear not just what I want to hear.

I don't take things so personally anymore. Before, if someone said something I would take it really personally when it actually didn't have anything to do with me. Or if they were judging something, then I would take it personally. Well, I don't do that a lot anymore. I don't take all that on my shoulders.

I must be in a good headspace these days because lately I've been coming across as being quite a cheery person. Perhaps more so than usual. But maybe that's because my life is in pretty good shape these days.

There's a lot of good stuff but it's quite difficult to verbalize.

I learned I can be quite good at improvisation which was a lovely surprise. I learned I clearly enjoy theatre. I tapped into levels of stress that I went through 10 years ago in marriage and business. When I started the project, I hadn't been sleeping all that well. The project was so exciting I wasn't aware of how exhausted I was. There were so many responsibilities on me, shopping, cooking, laundry, the kids, and so on. I didn't have any time for myself. I got myself so exhausted and so overtired that I was unable to sleep. Last week I missed two days of work because I hadn't slept in two nights. And I woke up crying hysterically and I went through all the negative garbage I've ever accumulated about myself over the last 30 years. I really thought I was cracking up. I ended up going to the hospital to get some medication to help me sleep at night. I had to choose between completing the project and feeling good about it, or adding to all my negativity about myself and quitting. I tried to

imagine how I could possibly live with myself when I had got the perfect job of my life, a wonderful opportunity and one that I was happy and thrilled about; and experiencing personal failure. I started to project how I would feel six months, one year later if I dropped out. I chose to medicate myself a little, get a good night's sleep, and continue with the project. So it was a major crisis, major decision and complete total upheaval.

5. Since you have joined the project, have there been any changes in your thinking or actions about the following:

a) Leisure activities?

I don't go out on week nights anymore like I used to. I don't drink as much as I used to. I'm out riding my bike more. Instead of just laying there doing nothing, I'm out there exercising on my bike. I'm in bed a lot earlier than I used to.

Getting up at seven and staying up, instead of just getting up and getting my daughter ready for school and then going back to bed for an hour or two before going to work like I used to. So it's up and on the go. And I do find I have a little more energy.

I'm more outgoing now since I started the project. Especially with my friends. Before all the talk was quite negative because we were all in the same boat. But since I've started on this project myself, I can see the difference between me and my friends towards my outlook on things.

This project is so entirely overwhelming that when I go home, I'm overwhelmed. I'm really trying to take care of myself, not get overloaded and enjoy the simplicity at home even if its doing the laundry, planning a meal, doing the dishes or whatever. So I'm enjoying the work at home in a little different way than when I'm not working.

b) Life in General.

There was one talk show on TV. They were talking about people who were in the work-for-welfare program. They were talking to people in Sherwood Park in this fancy neighborhood, asking them what they thought about it. They said "Well, it's no good. It's not going to work". I just listened to one woman and what she was saying. I thought "If only you know what the hell was going on." I was really surprised for finally I could see what they were thinking. Before I used to say. "Yeah, she's right. These guys just don't want to work. They don't want to get up at 7:00 and go look for a job." But I have a different attitude now.

I really like this job. It's a wonderful feeling to wake up in the morning and to say. "Great, I get to go to work again." And that is something I'd like to do more of.

If anything, I find myself becoming a little bit more cynical because the project itself is very empowering and quite overwhelming. I seem to be constantly saying to myself when its over its going to be bleak and stark once again and I'm still faced with life decisions about what I'm going to do.

It's hard to put my finger on how its helped me. Actually one thing. My spelling has improved. We keep a journal that we write in every night. I noticed that it makes more sense than it used to. Now I have more confidence in my writing and more confidence in expressing myself on certain issues or with certain people.

c) Dealing with Problems.

Because I'm in a different frame of mind now, I'm capable of handling situations that come up. Before it was getting kind of nerve-wracking. I don't know how long this will last after the project. If I find work soon after this project it would be great. I know it really makes a difference.

I've learned to concentrate better since I've been coming here on this program. I use my head more and more.

d) Ideas about job possibilities.

I'm not going to get out of here and say "Yes, I've picked my career out of this." But I think it's helped set my standards more because I enjoy it and I liked the atmosphere.

I have a better idea of what I don't want to do. I don't want to go back to the bar business. I don't want to be stuck in a dismal never ending, never-going-anywhere job. I want a job where I can be constantly learning.

Not really because I have plans anyway. I had them made before I started. My goals still remain the same. I plan on taking a course at A.V.C. It's just a matter of waiting. Other than that, it's whatever work I can get around before I can get in.

e) Being Unemployed

I can see the point of rallies now.

It has reminded me that being unemployed for some people is a rather serious matter. I think it makes you realize that when you're unemployed, you're very often alone, looking through the paper, going to the Manpower office. Lots and lots of people are in the same boat. I think about other peoples' situations more.

I have a job I can go back to but it's only one day a week. I've been starting to put my resume out. I've been looking in the paper a little bit, but not a lot. I don't want a store clerk job. I want something I can learn from and

has adequate benefits like dental care. I don't want to have to worry about going back on social assistance. And also, I don't want to have to live in a slum.

I don't like how the media and certain other people label unemployed people. I hate it. There shouldn't be a label and if there are ways to make people aware of it, I will do it.

f) Expectations about getting a job after the project ends.

Catalyst Theatre. Just the name will help a little bit. If I put it on the applications and they say "You worked in theatre?", that might help you know. I'm hoping the name will give me a boost.

It will add a bit of an interesting flavor to my resume but I don't see that there are any jobs around that I could even succeed in getting an interview for.

I really anticipated going to school this fall. So it was really important for me so I could get some extra cash and get into a routine.

I think the experience could help me get a job.

D. Post-Project Plans

The group members either had not given this matter much thought or else they planned 'to take a break' for a while. This may have been a reflection of the project workload which at that time was heavy and hectic, and/or the fact that they had job or school plans. Those without definite plans were less optimistic in their responses.

6. What are your plans after the project ends.

I'm going to relax for a week and then hit the road. The last two weeks in August will be feverish job hunting.

I might like to give temporary work a try for a week and then spend a few weeks on the farm.

I'm saving up to buy a pick-up so my son and I can go on a camping trip. That's what I plan to do after.

That is a downer because as far as I can see, I'll be back in the same old boat. You're still back to the same old grind looking for work. I'm on the waiting list to get into AVC, I don't know how long that will be yet. So the only other thing I can do is to hit the job market and carry on that way.

Going to university may be my ace in the hand just in case I'm not able to get work which is more than likely what's going to happen. I'm just carrying on with spreading my education out over the next year. That's assuming that any applications I send out, I won't get any interviews for. Which happened the whole year before.

E. Good and Bad Things about the Project.

The "circle" is the key component of the workshop process used in this project. Not surprisingly, when group members talked about the good things about the project, they talked about the circle.

7. What things about the project do you feel good about?

I love the circle, the group togetherness.

I'm doing something I enjoy. I doing it with good people. I'm getting paid adequately for it.

I'm learning a lot about people, the group process and theatre. And I'm having a lot of fun. I'm also getting subjected to some new ideas. There are a lot of different people and it's interesting to get to know them all. Generally, its a positive experience.

I can air my opinions without people saying "No, you're wrong". And I'm meeting friends here. Friends that will probably be with me the rest of my life.

The group. The power of the group. And the way that we all bring our stuff here in very different ways and we're accepting of each other's stuff - mostly. I now feel good about what we seem to be coming up with in terms of product. And I feel good about my participation in the group.

Everyone has an opportunity to speak their mind. And because it is a circle we're expected to listen to each other.

Considering that the second interview was conducted during a stressful period in the project - the writing and rehearsal of the play - there was little criticism about the project itself. Most criticism was directed to the short time they had left to get the play into production. There was one negative comment about the circle.

8. What things about the project do you not feel good about?

I can't think of anything I dislike. Ruth and Pam take the negative out.

Its been short. Its been packed. They've kept us moving all the time.

I don't feel that good that we're four working days away from performing and we're all just going on trust. I guess a sense of heavy pressure will help us get our act together so to speak. I can't imagine pulling it together in four days.

Discussions. I cannot stand that. Sitting in the circle. When I sit down I just get bored. There was one day here I got totally bored. I just didn't want to do anything. At the end of the day everyone said "How are you doing? So how are you feeling, before you go home?" It got to me. I said "This day's the shits. I'm bored. I'm glad we're going home."

That's the only thing I don't like. It reminds me of lifeskills workshop. I've gone to so many of those, I'm just tired of it. Whenever I see that paper on the wall it just reminds me of that at little. That's why I don't like them.

F. Getting the message across.

It was one week before the first scheduled performance and the group had just scrapped the first draft of the play and started over. Despite this, group members felt optimistic that they would get what they wanted into the play and that the audience would understand it.

9. *Do you think the audience will really understand what unemployment does to people?*

People are not stupid. And I believe that anyone with even a little intelligence will catch on. People will know and they will understand.

They will be that much more informed. They're going to get something out of it because it'll come across in regular layman terms. It will be something they'll understand.

If they listen to it, they will understand.

5. THE THIRD INTERVIEW - END OF THE PROJECT

The third interview took place on the last two days of the project. By this time, the group had performed the play 23 times. The individual responses reflect the personal satisfaction of beginning the project as seven individual strangers, and successfully completing it as a group.

A. Personal Gains

1. *What did you feel you personally accomplished?*

I was beginning to lose my self-respect because I really thought prior to this that there was something the matter with me. I had a tough time getting a steady job and I began to get really depressed. All my self-esteem dribbled away. When I got into this, and I started talking to a group of people who had the same experience as me. This was very uplifting because I realized that "Well, it's not your fault."

I knew there was a problem out there but you say to yourself, "Well, what can you do as one person?" You feel so helpless about the situation. You're just as apathetic as the next person. This project has given me the opportunity to let people know just how I feel and just what's going on in the world. I felt that was my small way of saying "Hey, I was able to do this."

I know now I'll be able to stand up for myself and not be timid if someone says "No, this can't happen." I'm going to question why it can't happen. I'm more aware of my thoughts and feelings and how I can deal with them.

I've acquired a lot of strength in myself. Confidence in the process, in the group, in the play. I know we were effective.

The work that I've contributed, the feelings that I've contributed, and the things that I have said have been heard, and I feel that's been effective.

A lot of people have helped me in the past. I was able to get out there, and give them a good show and show others what kind of problems are out there. A lot of people were unaware of what was going on out there just like I was.

I was able to get a message across to people. I realized that the reason I don't have a job is not all my fault.

It's given me a lot of confidence. Like acting - I'm not afraid or shy anymore. I've gotten over that.

The project was certainly worth it. Not only did I make a couple of grand, I learned a lot, like human relations - dealing with people. I learned a lot about staging a play and a lot about other people and other situations. I made a lot of good friends.

I learned and understood a whole lot of stuff that I didn't understand in the beginning such as how its possible to do these things (theatre) and not be terrified.

I learned some skills. I learned some things about myself such as I have greater ability to work with a group than I thought I had, I see some exciting developments that can come from here. I made some friends. I feel good about my contribution.

I went through the process and I was still here at the end which I find quite amazing. And loving every moment of it.

It's the most valuable experience I've had. Personal insight - being able to see my strengths and my weaknesses and to move through a lot of what I thought were weaknesses that I had - shyness, phobias inside groups of people, fear of failure, a negative image of myself. I don't think any one of them got left untouched. I looked at every one of them. I realized what they were.

B. Sustaining the Personal Gains

2. *How can you sustain the good things that came out of the project?*

The one thing that we are doing is keeping in touch with Catalyst Theatre in case something else comes up. We are going to try holding the group together meet on a regular basis, until we all get settled into something that we are satisfied with. Keeping in touch with the group should help prolong the good things.

We are a tight group. If one of us has a problem, someone else will come to the rescue or give us information or stuff like that and they'll pick us back up. I'm not saying that we should always rely on that but like I say, it is a very

tight group, I feel anyway. These people will help if you ask, but they're not mind readers or anything like that. You have to ask.

I've projected on future work experiences, personal kinds of crises and relationship and situations, and I can't see that I'm going to be quiet and allow anyone to step on me.

C. What the Play Accomplished

3. *What do you feel the play accomplished?*

We staged the play in front of, I don't know what the actual figures are, probably close to a thousand people or so. So a thousand people saw the play. I would have to assume that for at least some of these people - it sort of raised their consciousness somewhat.

And also this play accomplished perhaps a lot more than that. I think it helped a lot of people in the group. It gave us self-confidence.

It accomplished a lot. It opened a lot of people's eyes. A lot of social workers that had seen the play realized how they were treating some of their clients. We did one play and after, this social worker said, "I treat my clients like that but I'll be different now" That really said a lot.

It accomplished a lot. Especially when you get people almost in tears. They come up to you and their eyes are all watery. It accomplished a lot.

We got to tell our stories. It was in a way that we didn't have to be totally articulate. It was a way we could just show people.

We reached out to a small number of people. The people who had seen it had positive reactions that said "Now we understand. We see more clearly. We empathize with you." And they wanted to know what they could do as a person themselves. So I feel that if people feel that way, you've touched someone. And if you've touched someone that's better than touching no one.

Some people have really woken up and are saying "Okay you told us your story and it's really happening out there." But then we got other comments like "social worker bashing" or that they couldn't understand Joe and Herman's

scene where people were living by the river. It's really happening. Those are still the people who have blinders on. We did a hell of a job showing people that there are problems out there and that these problems should be dealt with.

When we're playing to people whose issues these are, that's very supportive and empowering to people. There's very little entertainment that deals with these issues. And I think that there's definitely been a change in the awareness of some people. We had a comment on one of our evaluation sheets today where somebody had said that she had always thought people on welfare were lazy and now she was really rethinking that.

I'm finding that's what's so interesting in what we're doing is the social impact we're having on the audiences. I've never sensed or had a good look at "us and them". That seems to come up a whole lot with our audiences.

They're comparing their lifestyle with our lifestyles and going through incredible change and realization. That that realization had never occurred to them before dumbfounds me. The experience of poverty. They're just totally amazed at the experience of poverty and joblessness or whatever issue they select from the play. It seems to be teaching everybody something. And people are seeing different things in the play.

I never really realized how people would react to the play. A lot of people experienced almost something similar to culture shock when they saw it. And for me, that was a measure of their ignorance and a measure of their unawareness of poverty.

D. Feelings About the Audience Response

One of the project goals was to use the play as a vehicle to help the audience hear and understand the concerns of the unemployed. After each performance the actors and audience discussed the issues raised in the play and talked about strategies for dealing with the problems of the long term unemployed.

4. *How do you feel about the discussions with the audience that took place after each performance?*

There's a whole lot of middle class people out there. I guess that I had never identified those people as being that much different than myself. Apparently they find us incredibly different than they are.

There's a good portion of the audience that can relate to large segments of the whole performance because they've experienced unemployment.

It gives you a better understanding of what you're doing and how it's going across to them. If it hadn't been for the discussions we wouldn't know what kind of a reaction the audience was having and their opinions also, on the situation. Most people do agree that there is a problem but how do we go about changing it? Whether they're employed or not, they're still worried because they realize that at any given time they could be unemployed too, and in the same boat.

I think the play sort of stands up for itself and that very often any sort of discussion afterwards is redundant with people talking and agreeing with each other. A lot of times I sort of felt that I would rather not have a discussion after the play, but on the other hand we also had some very interesting discussions after the play.

Yesterday morning was perhaps the most interesting. There was an exchange of views. The people there were bureaucrats and our play is directed against bureaucrats. They took it personally, and I think they should have. And I think that it disturbed people and people got upset with the discussion and it was a good thing.

I think it's planted some seeds. I don't think that everything people are thinking comes out in the discussion afterwards.

They're all a little bit different. I find it really interesting that we have such an incredible response to the skits, because we're just touching a huge surface of experience.

I didn't like those at all. It was like being at a workshop, like going to AADAC or lifeskills training. I never did like those discussions.

I think they're essential. It's a hard thing to do because on one hand it's crucial that people in the audience who have strong feelings get to put those feelings and their thoughts related to them out in a safe place where they won't feel threatened. Then we have the other element which is the cast who are speaking from their characters and speaking from themselves. We are getting more and more confident and wanting to respond.

Some days it was really great. Some days it was very frustrating. Yesterday was very very frustrating. We had a few people in the audience that were blaming us for the problems that were out there and not taking any responsibility for it themselves. And they were labelling us. I don't feel anybody should really be labelled anymore. Like I say, sometimes it was good. Other times it just got me mad.

I feel I have to learn a lot about the dynamics of discussions because I saw in myself some things happen. One group basically took it upon themselves to start counselling us and it got right out of hand and they were overpowering us. I had this incredible urge to take my power back and I did that.

I'm starting to see that the play says more than the discussion. If the people aren't aware or sympathetic we can put ourselves in a very dangerous position by speaking out. And we have to learn to keep a check on that. It's important that we decide on objectives that we want to get going in the discussion. It's upsetting when people don't respond in a positive way to you. But at the same time, we've still learned about our power to speak.

E. Usefulness of the Workshop for Other Unemployed People

5. *Would you recommend this type of workshop for other unemployed people? Explain.*

It does some very practical things like it gives you nine weeks for your next UIC claim, and a job, and some more money than people have been getting in awhile.

It has also given us self-confidence, not just assertiveness, but a deeper thing - like knowing our worth. And what was demanded of us in this project was to speak, put forth our thoughts and that is not normally what one is asked

to do, especially when being unemployed. I think there is a deeper self-confidence and self-worth as a result.

Other unemployed people begin to get depressed. They begin to feel alienated. They lose their self-respect because they're isolated and they figure it's their fault. This project was therapeutic. I figure that being in the group was more therapeutic than going to a psychiatrist, because you get to talk to real people who are really feeling hard core feelings that you felt on the unemployment line.

It would help them the same way that it helped me and that would be great for a lot of people. There are a lot of unemployed people out there who feel the same way I did 10 weeks ago.

I remember that one Saturday, I'll probably never forget it because I really got depressed that day. I was really down. I said I wish I could get a good paying job for awhile. Then 10 minutes later _____ from the _____ phoned me up and told me about Catalyst. Talk about a bloody miracle.

It makes you believe in yourself again and yourself as a whole. You can overcome these barriers that people put up in front of you.

I have more confidence in myself now. Before I would question that, whether or not I could do it or not do it. I don't question it anymore. I know I can do it.

We've all become very much alive and are feeling very whole as individuals and as a group. And it's so wonderful to see the changes that all of us have been through over the last nine to ten weeks. And how we're speaking out to 50 to 100 people and feeling comfortable doing that.

A lot of people, not only unemployed people could benefit from such a workshop. The people within the workshop spend many hours communicating with each other and then afterwards have a play, which they present to other people outside the workshop, and that involves even more communication. When people talk and exchange ideas, people are learning and that's how it helps.

I would recommend this workshop for all kinds of things. It's a way of getting stories from people that otherwise would not get heard..

6. THE FOURTH INTERVIEW - PROJECT FOLLOW-UP

The fourth interview was held in early September, some 17 weeks since the beginning of the project and 9 weeks after the final curtain call. The purpose of this interview was to see whether positive personal gains experienced in the project were long-lasting or just temporary.

At the time of the interview, four participants were unemployed and were looking for work and/or planning to get into a training program. Two were studying full-time at university. One was working.

A. Reflecting on the Personal Gains

This was a follow-up to the participants' thoughts in the third interview. Would the participants feel as optimistic about the personal gains as they had nine weeks earlier?

Overall, their feelings remain as optimistic and positive. They mentioned how they had become more aware of their personal strengths. They talked about the building of their self-confidence and their willingness to stand up for themselves. One mentioned having expectations for the future again.

2. *Has the project had any influence on how you see or feel about yourself*

I became more fulfilled as a human being. It built up my confidence.

I spent a fair amount of time thinking about the project. It seems very different in hindsight. I'm not sure how long the "empowerment" if any, lasted among the group, but I hear that _____ has a job. If that is so, I can't think

of anything that might speak better of the project and make it all worthwhile. On second thought, I think among the group members I have kept in touch with - they have more confidence and empowerment, as I think I have myself.

I had a better look at my strengths and weaknesses. It was a temporary rejuvenation.

It opened my eyes about why strikes happen. I talk more. I'm more open with people. I stand up for myself. I'm not afraid to go and apply for jobs.

Its a little bit abstract. I acquired a support group. I found out about resources such as daycare and women's groups. My self-confidence is up and I feel more assertive in getting what I want.

I feel like I'm allowed to have expectations. I'm getting out of the victimization trap and allowing myself to have expectations about the future.

B. Sustaining the Personal Gains

By the end of the project, seven individuals had become a cohesive group. The members had acknowledged it as a source of strength and personal comfort. We were interested in finding out if the momentum of the group and optimism about it had been maintained and what, if anything, had replaced the group.

The whole group has not been together since the project ended. There was one group meeting called to discuss future actions, however; some members were out of town at the time. One member of the group now lives in Montreal. Several group members have kept in touch with others in the group. Two members are good friends.

3. *Have you kept in touch with the group? Explain*

After leaving Edmonton, I have had little contact with the group apart from one phone call and a couple of letters.

Not with the group. But I've kept in touch with _____. I see _____ once in a while.

In most cases, participants already had a support network of family and/or friend that they could rely on at the time they started the project. Since the project ended, the influence of the "circle" has faded and these other supports have "filled the gap". Although several group members keep in touch, there is not longer a feeling of "the group". One person has moved out of Edmonton. Another is in a counselling group.

4. Have you found anything to replace the group with?

The group is pulling apart. I don't have the time. No, I've found other activities.

I already had a strong support group.

You get a good bond and then it's the end of the project. I've got family in Edmonton and the people I live with.

Now that school has started, I am very busy. I have become involved with a student newspaper.

I'm going for counselling at _____.

7. ASSESSING THE PROJECT - OTHER PERSPECTIVES

A. Results of the Standardized Tests

Standardized psychological questions about self-esteem, mastery, and depression were included in the first, third and fourth interviews. (See

Appendix 1 - Participant Questionnaires, for a list of the questions.) The objective of these questions was to provide a standard, comparable measurement which would indicate the change in feelings of self-esteem, mastery and depression that each individual underwent over the course of the project. The questions were supplied by the Population Research Laboratory, Department of Sociology at the University of Alberta. The results are presented below and on the next page.

Comparisons between the scores before and after participation in the project strongly suggest that there was improvement in feelings of self-esteem, mastery and depression, especially during the run of the project. The test scores from nine weeks later show some "slippage".

Taken by themselves, the test scores do not "prove" or "disprove" the value of the project. However, the test score findings do corroborate what the participants said about themselves in the interviews.

Self Esteem

As measured by the scores, all participants showed an improvement in self-esteem at the end of the project when compared with how they felt at the beginning of the project. Nine weeks after the project end, six of the seven participants still show an improved feeling of self-esteem when compared to the May test score. It should be noted however, that of these six, three showed a "slippage" in self-esteem nine weeks after the project ended.

Average Scores: 5 represents low self-esteem, 1 represents high self-esteem.

<u>Person</u>	<u>May/87</u>	<u>June/87</u>	<u>September/87</u>
A	3.7	2.5	2.9
B	2.8	1.7	1.3
C	2.8	1.3	1.0
D	2.8	2.3	3.1
E	2.5	1.8	2.3
F	3.5	1.5	2.5
G	1.2	1.0	1.0

Mastery

At project end, all participants had either improved their mastery score, or maintained their level of mastery. Nine weeks after the project ended, five of the seven had maintained a level of mastery that was higher than when they began the project. As with self-esteem, there has been some "slippage" in feelings of mastery since the project ended.

Average Scores: 5 represents low mastery, 1 represents high mastery.

<u>Person</u>	<u>May/87</u>	<u>June/87</u>	<u>September/87</u>
A	3.0	1.5	2.5
B	3.0	1.0	3.5
C	2.0	1.0	1.0
D	1.0	1.0	2.0
E	1.5	1.0	1.0
F	2.5	2.5	1.5
G	1.0	1.0	1.0

Depression

At project end, all participants had lower depression levels. Nine weeks later, three participants showed improved scores, three "slipped" although their final score was still an improvement on their initial score. At the fourth interview only one individual had an overall higher score (indicating a higher level of depression when compared to the initial score).

Average Score: 5 represents high depression, 1 represents low depression

<u>Person</u>	<u>May/87</u>	<u>June/87</u>	<u>September/87</u>
A	3.1	1.0	2.4
B	3.1	2.6	2.3
C	3.1	1.4	1.3
D	2.9	2.0	2.7
E	2.3	1.8	2.1
F	2.9	1.7	3.3
G	1.9	1.8	1.6

B. Audience Response to the Play

The performances are important to the workshop participants and the project itself. First and foremost, in telling their stories on stage the performers develop better feelings about themselves and their abilities. Just as important for the performers, however, is whether or not the audience has heard the message that they are trying to get across. Most of the audience response came through in the discussion that took place between the cast and the audience after each performance. To supplement the audience comments, surveys were distributed at each performance (see Appendix 2).

Two hundred and sixty-three surveys were completed. The overwhelming response (88%) was that the play was accurate, informative and entertaining. While the number of employed respondents outnumbered unemployed respondents roughly two to one, there was little difference in the 88% approval rating. Eleven percent felt neutral, only one percent gave negative ratings.

A high approval rating does little for the performers if they are presenting their play to the converted, however. About a third of the respondents answered the question, "After viewing the play, do you have a greater understanding about unemployment that you did before?" Their responses indicate that the play did reach the "unconverted".

Three people expressed a desire to "do something". They left their names and phone numbers.

The quotes below broadly represent the views expressed.

a) Employed Respondents

As could be expected, there were sympathetic and unsympathetic responses.

My perception of unemployed people has changed. Having never been unemployed, I was not aware of the personal hardships one can experience. I'm

ashamed to admit it -- but I thought unemployed people are lazy. I can see now that the problem is much more complex, and that I'm only beginning to understand it.

It is easy to look at them but it is unnerving to realize that we are part of the problem.

The way it was presented was very innovative. From the questions and discussion, I felt that the message came across more forcefully than any lecture could have achieved.

Yes, but we must be grateful for the social programs in Canada. Things could be infinitely worse!

(I) believe very complex issues have been reduced to simplistic terms.

b) Unemployed Respondents

The play definitely struck a chord with those not fortunate enough to have a job. Some acknowledged their isolation. Others expressed a need for action. Several wrote of their unemployment experiences.

It is well done, but somehow I didn't feel like laughing. It brings out the hurt in me.

What can we do?

It feels so close, real. Thank you!

Being at home, I find my head buried and I became a victim of ignorance. My eyes and heart have been opened. I thank you for reaching out and making me aware.

My husband has been unemployed for four years and although we have survived, as my work has been adequate, it has been a challenge emotionally in terms of self-worth, expectations and depression.

c) Others

A number of respondents wrote about changes in their way of thinking as a result of having seen the play. This last quote is refreshing in its optimism.

As a social work student, I am often asked by people not in the field, "Why don't those people on welfare get a job." Although I empathize with the unemployed, I found it difficult to answer this question. Now I have the answers.

8. CONCLUSION

The Working Theatre Pilot Project was proposed as an innovative method to provide training for the long-term unemployed. Traditional skill development projects often fail to deal with the depression and lack of self-esteem and mastery that the long-term unemployed face. The Working Theatre Pilot Project was based on Catalyst Theatre's experience of the ability of participational theatre to educate and change people.

The psychological tests conducted in the first, third and fourth interviews indicate that the project did accomplish its goal of improving participant's self-esteem and mastery, and reducing the level of depression. In nine weeks seven individuals wrote a play and gave twenty-three performances. While the message of the play was personal and emotional, the audience surveys indicate that the play was accurate, informative and entertaining. By these two measures, the project can be judged to have successfully attained its goals.

A more important measure of the project's success rests with the seven individuals who participated in the project. Their comments provide a ringing endorsement of the value of the Working Theatre Pilot Project. The first interview revealed how each one had been personally affected by

unemployment. By their own admission, most joined the project because it was a paying job, rather than a desire to be a playwright or an actor. The comments in the second interview reveal a growing awareness that their personal situations are not unique. This interview was conducted during a difficult part of the project - writing the play. Despite the stressful situation, a growing optimism about the project and their individual and collective contributions emerges. This optimism about themselves and the project continues in the third interview. The fourth interview was a test of the durability of the project's positive impacts two months later. In general, the positives generated by the project still persist, though they remain strongest for those who are working or in full-time studies.

This evaluation has used the words of the project participants as much as possible. It is fitting for them to have the last word. The statement below is taken from the third interview. It captures the essence of what makes the Work Theatre Pilot Project work.

It has given us self-confidence, not just assertiveness, but a deeper thing - like knowing our worth. And what was demanded of us in this project was to speak, put forth our thoughts, and that is not normally what one is asked to do, especially when being unemployed. I think there is a deeper self-confidence and self-worth as a result.

12. Do you feel that others treat you differently when they know you are unemployed?

()Yes. ()No. (Please specify.)

13. What are some of the more difficult things you have had to deal with in being unemployed?

14. Based on your experiences since you have been without a job, what does unemployment mean to you?

15. What were your reasons for joining the project? What did you hope to get out of it for yourself?

16. What things did you like about the project as it was explained to you?

17. Do you have any other comments either about unemployment, the project, or yourself?

18. For each of the following statements, please tell us how much you agree or disagree that it describes you.

	Strongly Disagree			Strongly Agree	
a. On the whole, I am satisfied with myself.	1	2	3	4	5
b. At times, I think I am no good at all.	1	2	3	4	5
c. I feel that I have a number of good qualities.	1	2	3	4	5
d. I am able to do things as well as most people.	1	2	3	4	5
e. I certainly feel useless at times.	1	2	3	4	5
f. All in all, I am inclined to feel that I am a failure.	1	2	3	4	5

19. Once again, can you tell us how much you disagree or agree with the following statements.

	Strongly Disagree			Strongly Agree	
a. There is little that I can do to change many of the important things in my life.	1	2	3	4	5
b. I have little control over the things that happen to me.	1	2	3	4	5

APPENDIX 1
PARTICIPANT QUESTIONNAIRES
WORKING THEATRE PILOT PROJECT

INITIAL INTERVIEW

1. How old are you?

() Under 30 () 30 - 39 () 40 - 49 () 50 and above

2. What level of education do you have?

() Junior high and below

() Senior high

() Post-secondary and above

3. What is your current marital status?

4. Including yourself, how many people are in your household?

5. What was your occupation before you became unemployed?

The next set of questions are about unemployment.

6. Just before you heard about this project, how did you feel about your chances of getting a job soon?

7. How does this compare to how you felt when you first became unemployed?

8. Were you looking for work before you joined the project?

()Yes. (Please specify what job hunting activities you were doing.)

()No. (Please specify why not.)

9. Have you thought about getting into something else?

()Yes. (Please specify what actions you have taken.)

()No. (Please specify why not.)

10. How do you think your family feels about you?

11. Do you feel that your friends treat you differently since you've been unemployed?

()Yes. ()No. (Please specify.)

3. After viewing the play, do you have a greater understanding about unemployment that you did before? Please explain.

WORKING THEATRE PILOT PROJECT

Follow-up Interview

1. What are you doing now? (e.g. working, going to school, unemployed?)

2. Has the project had any influence on how you see or feel about yourself? Explain.

3. Have you kept in touch with the group? Explain.

4. Have you found anything to replace the group with?

5. For each of the following statements, please tell us how much you agree or disagree that it describes you.

	Strongly Disagree			Strongly Agree	
a. On the whole, I am satisfied with with myself.	1	2	3	4	5
b. At times, I think I am no good at all.	1	2	3	4	5
c. I feel that I have a number of good qualities.	1	2	3	4	5
d. I am able to do things as well as most people.	1	2	3	4	5
e. I certainly feel useless at times.	1	2	3	4	5
f. All in all, I am inclined to feel that I am a failure.	1	2	3	4	5

6. Once again, can you tell us how much you disagree or agree with the following statements.

	Strongly Disagree			Strongly Agree	
a. There is little that I can do to change many of the important things in my life.	1	2	3	4	5
b. I have little control over the things that happen to me.	1	2	3	4	5

7. How often in the past two weeks have you:

	Never	Rarely	Some- times	Often	Almost Always
a. felt depressed.	1	2	3	4	5
b. felt lonely.	1	2	3	4	5
c. felt like doing nothing at all.	1	2	3	4	5
d. felt people were unfriendly.	1	2	3	4	5
e. talked less than usual.	1	2	3	4	5
f. felt angry.	1	2	3	4	5
g. lost your temper.	1	2	3	4	5
h. yelled at people.	1	2	3	4	5
i. got into fights or arguments.	1	2	3	4	5

**WORKING THEATRE PILOT PROJECT
MID-REHEARSAL INTERVIEW**

1. What have you learned about unemployment since you started on the project?

2. How did you feel about sharing your feelings and experiences about unemployment with others in the group?

3. Have you talked with relatives, friends, neighbors, or others about the project?

What did you say? What was their response?

20. How often in the past few months (before you started on this project) have you . . .

	Never	Rarely	Some- times	Often	Almost always
a. Felt depressed.	1	2	3	4	5
b. Felt lonely.	1	2	3	4	5
c. Felt like doing nothing at all.	1	2	3	4	5
d. Felt people were were unfriendly.	1	2	3	4	5
e. Talked less than usual.	1	2	3	4	5
f. Felt angry.	1	2	3	4	5
g. Lost your temper.	1	2	3	4	5
h. Yelled at people.	1	2	3	4	5
i. Got into fights or arguments.	1	2	3	4	5

4. I asked you earlier what you had learned about unemployment. What have you learned about yourself? Good things. Not so good things?

5. Since you have joined the project, have there been any changes in your thinking or actions about the following? Please explain.

a. Leisure activities _____

b. Life in general _____

c. Dealing with problems _____

d. Ideas about job possibilities _____

e. Being unemployed _____

f. Expectations about getting a job after the projects ends _____

g. Other _____

6. What are your plans after the project ends?

7. What things about the project do you feel good about?

8. What things about the project do you not feel good about?

9. Do you think the audience will really understand what unemployment does to people?

WORKING THEATRE PILOT PROJECT

END OF PROJECT INTERVIEW

1. What do you feel you personally accomplished?

2. How can you sustain the good things that came out of the project?

3. What do you feel the play accomplished?

4. How do you feel about the discussions with the audience that took place after each performance?

5. Would you recommend this type of workshop for other unemployed people? Explain.

6. Could any changes be made to improve the process?
