

Anti-Violence and the Arts

By Dana Di Tullio

There's dirt that sticks to your face. You're grateful to get out of a dark, claustrophobic subway. The streets are hard. A mugging can happen just around the corner. To you.

There's a big, beautiful castle. A magic castle. Six year olds are being guided by a fairy-godmother as they fall into character. In an instant, the castle is flying through the clouds.

"I'm driving the castle!" A boy yells. VROOM!

This is a meltdown of what makes the world ugly and fearful. Combatting hardships, crime, domestic violence, AIDS and all sorts of abuses can make one's head spin, but there are people who believe it's possible to do so.

At the heart of this meltdown is Bronwyn Rucker, a certified social worker and Artistic Director of Meltdown, Inc. on Flatbush Avenue. She is a woman of boundless energy, ideals and inspiration. Her group utilizes sensitivity discussions, counseling, social services and referrals, drama and art workshops to help open up a person's imagination and give them direction as to what they can aspire to. Meltdown's service is given on a person-by-person basis as to avoid anyone falling through the cracks emotionally or in dealing with large agencies that tend to overwhelm a client. They can help one young man find a suitable GED program, or console a family of a young woman who had lost her fight with AIDS, and through art therapy make memory books together to help cope with their bereavement.

"You can do a creative art workshop with any kind of person, of any age...and you'd be surprised at how quickly people will start talking about their personalities. It's fascinating to me because I work with so many people that are non-artists. People are just hungry to talk about how they're feeling. But sometimes they need a hook, and art is a wonderful hook for that to

happen," says Rucker.

She and Meltdown are also very vocal and active in creating self-awareness, and educating people about society's ills through performance by the people who are experiencing it. In helping themselves, they help each other.

One such advocacy group is Voices of the Armory for the women residents of the Park Slope Armory, who with Meltdown maintain relations with other Park Slope residents. Their group created a performance piece called *Voices Of The Armory* which deals with the women's personal experiences of racism, classism and sexism. The Armory women also work on art projects that give them a routine outside of shelter life and develop a sense of entrepreneurship.

Another major satellite group is Meltdown's Teen Leadership which is in partnership with the YWCA of Brooklyn.

"The core of it is the drama group discussing whatever issues they may have," explains Rucker. "We've been focusing on relationship violence, but also racism and sexism." Teens work from scripted and improvisational scenes along with role-playing to develop their values and resolve problems.

This year Meltdown has been working with younger kids in a violence prevention program in Red Hook, and theatrically experimental kindergarten-age children at the Open House Nursery School on Court Street and Atlantic Avenue.

"These kids are amazing," beamed Rucker, who has been noticing a shift in attitude against the artistically gifted-child as more arts programs are being cut from schools' budgets.

"I believe that art should be for everyone. Those who want to excel and get special training need to have it." Meltdown offers a Master program for students who are serious about

continued on page 5