



STRATEGIC DIRECTIONS

SPOTLIGHT ON CREATIVITY AND PLAY

PHILOSOPHY

Be Present, Inc. believes that creativity is about having a wider ability to question, make connections, innovate, take risks, problem solve, reflect critically and collaborate with others. Creative learning empowers people to imagine how the world could be different and gives us the confidence and motivation to make positive change happen. This helps people to engage with their own development and to achieve.

Play is the way people of all ages and cultures discover, create and communicate. It is the essence of life and learning. It satisfies a need to experience our own creativity through self-expression; it enhances our knowledge of the world and ourselves through interactions with others. It is an opportunity to learn by playing with possibilities, being flexible, being curious, thinking creatively, taking initiative, making choices, acting and interacting.

A person's capacity to play is an important part of being a healthy, competent, whole human being. Developing the power of creative play enables individuals, organizations, and communities to create transformational differences in their individual, family, school, organizational and community lives.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

- Learning begins with creative play.
- Creativity builds self-esteem, a necessary ingredient for success.
- Support and celebrate the natural creativity within each person.
- Play is a major driver of innovation.
- Sustainable, innovative solutions are needed to address local and global socioeconomic challenges.
- Children are our next generation of leaders and encouraged to develop and communicate their ideas and views.

Guiding principles are most effective when they align with the overall strategic plan for the organization. "Creativity and Play" is a strategic direction of Be Present, Inc. We take a whole-organization approach to intentionally infuse creativity and play into organizational structures, programs, and practices.

ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE AND CULTURE

Be Present, Inc. operates with an innovative organizational structure and culture that models the level of transformative leadership necessary to strengthen the non-profit sector and move forward agendas for social justice. Like a spider's web, this web of inclusion constantly grows to meet the needs of the organization as well as the diverse individuals, organizations and communities with whom we partner. Ideas come from all partners and strength emerges from our interconnectedness. Individuals are inspired by

clarity of vision and purpose, and the edges of the web of inclusion connect with people beyond Be Present, Inc.

The uniqueness of Be Present, Inc.'s organizational web is that it emphasizes process as well as structure, thereby establishing innovative ways of cultivating a supportive learning culture, approaching challenges, of thinking, of connecting people, of sharing information and motivating them. In doing so, this web of inclusion establishes joy, creativity, and a firm sense of participation to the work done at every level.

PROGRAMS

Be Present Family Camp brings together a diversity of families to learn and practice the *Be Present Empowerment Model*[®] (BPEM) through child and adult focused processes and activities. Weaving engaged creativity, imaginative play and community celebration, this five-day experience empowers individuals, children and adults alike, with skills to build trust and connection, to improve communication and to help family members transform challenging moments into learning opportunities.

Our goal is for campers to:

- Experience sharing their voices in a nurturing environment where their feelings and experiences are validated and supported.
- Increase knowledge of self and awareness of others through learning how to listen in a clear and conscious state.
- Practice ways of supporting one another within the family system and amongst peers to increase feelings of connection and community.
- Engage in the conversations that nurture and sustain authentic relationships across the interconnected issues of race, gender, class, ethnicity, culture, language, religion, age, sexual orientation and gender identity.

ORGANIZATIONAL PRACTICES

Since Be Present's inception, children of all ages have had an essential role in the circle – bringing their voices to important issues, offering valuable insights, and modeling what it means to be in a conscious and present state. ***Children's Learning and Play (CL&P)*** is one of Be Present's organizational practices that teaches a highly interactive, participatory and creative play curriculum to support children and adults alike in learning, sharing and teaching the Be Present Empowerment Model[®] (BPEM). The Be Present Empowerment Model[®] is a tool for dialogue, learning and practice in addressing the impact of race, gender, class, ethnicity, sexual orientation, religion and power issues on personal and collective well-being, effectiveness and sustainability.

The CL&P practice is led by the ***Children's Learning & Play Team (CL&P Team)***, facilitators and trainers in the BPEM who have a specific interest in supporting the leadership development of children and their parents/caregivers. Our team members range from camp counselors to family daycare providers to child care professionals with advanced degrees in early childhood education. An essential criteria of all CL&P team members is a demonstrated, consistent practice of the BPEM and active participation in a Be Present Peer Led Support Group – these serve as ongoing mechanisms to support their leadership within the team.

The CL&P team takes responsibility to create the environment, develop the training design in partnership with other Be Present trainers and facilitators, lead portions of the training, and engage with children and their parents/caregivers to support everyone's participation. Among the elements considered by the CL&P team include:

- Assessing meeting sites to ensure they accommodate the needs of children of all ages (access to adjoining rooms, playground/outdoor space)
- Gathering needed materials and equipment to support children's participation in and out of the meeting space. For example:
 - Manipulatives (puzzles, knitting, bead work that keep hands busy while still allowing the children to listen and engage)
 - Art projects that facilitate community building and deepen understanding of the BPEM (identifying emotions, listening to others)
- Having conversations with children and their parents/caregivers before trainings to help them decide if they are ready to participate together and how to prepare; understand the structure and expectations for children's participation; and discuss materials that are helpful to bring, as well as those that may be distracting.

The CL&P team introduces the participation of the children within the training and raises consciousness among all of the participants about how to think well about the children and their parents/caregivers, and support their full participation in the space. Children participate in all Be Present training sessions until it is determined that another activity is needed (such as outdoor time, nap time, or quiet indoor activities). Learning and play continue both in and out of the meeting space.

Read on to learn more about several of Be Present's Children's Learning & Play Team members.