

Finding Volume in their Voices

A Resource Pack for Practitioners of CWTP wishing to consider spoken word events

If you are considering including a spoken word event in your practice, then it is worthwhile reflecting on the issues below. These suggestions are based upon my case study research of the experience of women survivors of domestic abuse (who had practised CWTP) reading their written work at a spoken word poetry event.

Ethos

An event will be best received if you have an existing relationship with a group of participants who know each other well, where trust and confidentiality provide a strong foundation. Ensure that participants are involved in discussions about the event and that they can choose to withdraw. Bring your skills as a writing practitioner and your knowledge of and relationship with the group to the event. This will help you offer appropriate levels of support. Previous experience of reading at a spoken word event is not required. Safeguard yourself and your participants with a working alliance, advice on self-care and access to other support. Ensure that you access supervision.

Early ideas

Ask your participants if they would like to consider reading at a spoken word event. If it their first foray in to spoken word and their issues are particularly sensitive then encourage a closed audience invited by participants.

Discuss the potential impact that more performative reading might have. It can re-traumatise readers and they need to be aware, but not afraid, of this.

Agree on the specific activities that you, as writing practitioner, and your participants will take responsibility for. This will need to be reviewed regularly.

Agree on a venue with which participants are familiar and in which they will feel comfortable performing.

Arrange at least one preparation session using CWTP activities to explore and prepare for the potential affect of the event.

Generate a list of practical activities that help individuals prepare.

Support participants to read pieces of their choosing.

Limit the amount of group preparation you offer. Allow participants to prepare in their own ways.

Consider holding a dress rehearsal or run-through to address any issues that might arise.

The event

A spoken word event needs planning. Agree with your group who will take responsibilities for the range of activities needed including:

- publicity and audience invitations – even a closed audience needs to be invited
- venue preparation, risk assessments and relevant action plans
- front of house roles such as room layout, access times, refreshments
- stage management roles such as sound and light facilities
- MC
- event working alliance, event programme and running order

On the day.

As writing practitioner my main focus was to ensure that the readers were safe and ready to read. Allow time for final practical checks such as accessing the mic, if you use one, and its sound levels. Allow time for some quiet focussed time and do some simple breathing and calming activities.

Allow the event to run based on the list above.

I primarily took on the role of MC and ensured that I made a noticing comment about each piece that was read, as I might in a CWTP writing group.

Be flexible to offer more support to individuals if they feel they need it.

Offer thanks and congratulations to those who have read, attended and supported.

Factor in time for a quick de-brief/check out to ensure that readers are safe and ready to leave the event at the end.

After the event

Run a whole group de-brief session to review successes and areas for improvement.

If all goes well, and the environment is safe for participants, consider wider audiences and other opportunities for reading.

Consider the plethora of genres in spoken word- poetry, hip-hop, RAP, storytelling.

Consider arranging an internal poetry slam event for fun.

Final word

Taking part in a spoken word event can be a very impactful and therapeutic experience for participants and for you as a practitioner. It can be a valid extension of our CWTP activities. In the words of one of the women I worked with:

“bite the limp lemon, and feel the acidic surge and the words will flow”

Have fun and enjoy