2012 Level 2 Humor Academy
Project Descriptions for Learn About

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Here is brief description of the Level 2 Projects for the Humor Academy this year. Level 2 of the Humor Academy involves both research and application of humor practice in an individual’s chosen field of study.

**What’s So Funny About…. Chronic Illness?**
By Karyn Buxman RN, MSN, CSP, CPAE

A diabetic, an epileptic, and an asthmatic walk into a bar, and the bartender says, “Hey, what is this? Some kind of joke?!” Chronic illness is no joke… over 133 million Americans (that’s 1 in 2 adults) have at least one chronic illness. Seven out of 10 deaths in America are due to chronic illnesses. Chronic diseases are among the most costly—and preventable—of all health problems in the US. Chronic illnesses cost the country more than $1 trillion a year and according to a recent study this figure could jump to a whopping $6 trillion by 2050 unless people take steps to improve their health.

We’ve heard since Biblical times that laughter is the best medicine. Research is finally beginning to support what we’ve suspected all along. Humor and laughter really are beneficial—physically, psychologically, socially and even spiritually. So while chronic illness is no joke, it can be laughing matter. Thus the birth of the *What’s So Funny About…?* book series, with *What’s So Funny About… Diabetes?* being the first in the series.

**Can Poetry Can Be a Serious Tool for Humor Therapy?**
by Mark Clarke

This project explores the theory that humor combined with poetry can be effective tools in a hospital setting. My goal at the beginning of this project was to share this information with colleagues in the Association for Applied and Therapeutic Humor. This past year, I have observed the impact of humor and poetry with patients and shared this information with the staff at my hospital. As a goal of level 2, I wrote a proposal for a presentation on the topic of poetry and humor at the 2012 AATH conference. This proposal was accepted. This year I have been sharing my humor practice in both my own local workplace and now at a national conference to further the understanding of how humor and poetry can make a difference in recovery.
Living and Working Well with Laughter/Humor
by Dwayna Covey M.Ed

My project involves Laughter/Humor injections for the staff and physicians at Darmouth-Hitchcock Medical Center; where I work as Manager, Safety & eLearning Systems. There have been many changes (which we can always count on in our world) throughout our organization in the past two years and it is hoped that a little Laughter/Humor will help support stress reduction, positive communications and human connections.

How Humor Affects the Learning Process of 2nd Graders
By Adrienne Edmondson.

The objective of this project is enhancing the use of humor in the classroom. The participants are 2nd graders and their teacher Mrs. Gonsher. The students were encouraged to take the humor techniques home and share with family members.

Parents have been asked to participate in a humor survey. By having parents participate in the survey, they will have any understanding of their humor style and will be encouraged to adjust to help their child adjust to stressful situations in an effort to enhancing their child’s learning experience in school.

Laughter Yoga and Broad-Minded Coping in the Homeless
By Fif Fernandes BFA, CLYT/L, CLL, Andrew Brack, BEd, MA, Hamish Boyd BFA, CLYT/L, Janette Hurley MD CCFP IBCLC, Fellow

This study explores whether laughter yoga may enhance homeless persons’ coping skills. Psycinfo, Social Services Abstracts and Medline index 5000+ articles on homelessness and laughter separately, but none addressing both together. Laughter favors the prefrontal cortex and hippocampi over threat-driven amygdalae for enhanced diversity in declarative memory retrieval, and may thus broaden the range of available coping behaviors, beginning a self-reinforcing spiral of positive emotion, broadened cognition, and discovered positive meaning, e.g. enhanced shelter security.

This study will pilot the use of three Laughter Yoga workshops given over the course of a week to clients of the Calgary Drop-In shelter. On each evening consenting participants will be randomly assigned to either a laughter yoga group or a yoga control group. They will fill out before and after questionnaires assessing broad-minded coping, ability to identify social supports, perceived self-efficacy, and positive possible actions for the next 24 hours. A mix of Likert scales and open-ended questions will permit quantitative and limited qualitative analysis. This study may offer insight into a transient population during the very evenings when they are at a shelter amidst challenging circumstances.
**Wait Lifters & Mood Elevators: AATH Awareness and Community Service Project by Deb Gauldin, RN**

Most people agree humor and laughter are beneficial. Most people can describe a time when humor helped them survive a difficult time in their lives, yet too few people know about the resources, supportive community and education offered by the Association for Applied and Therapeutic Humor (AATH). The idea for my project came from a sincere desire to bring the AATH message to places where people most need a moment of laughter and hope.

**Phase 1: Wait Lifters.** “Wait Lifters: Lifting Spirits While You Wait” is one-page monthly publication designed to lift the spirits of people waiting in waiting rooms. Sent electronically to hospitals and clinics, volunteers print and distribute them to waiting rooms. Content includes humorous and uplifting cartoons, short stories, quotes, bits of research, and other stress-diffusing information. Space is available for advertising and sponsorship.

**Phase 2: Mood Elevators.** “Mood Elevators: Moving Messages to Lift Your Day” are a similar publication for posting in the elevators of long-term care facilities and medical complexes. Imagine captive audiences around the world improving their moods from the ground floor up!

This project and a plan for sustaining it will launch when I complete my role as Conference Co-Chair and Chair of the AATH Website Committee.

**Humor at Work: Is Leadership Using Humor Effectively?**
by Roberta Gold R.T.C.

We spend more time at work than with our families. We work an average of 8 hours a day, six days a week. By adding appropriate humor into the workplace, we can increase trust, promote a friendlier work environment, increase productivity, strengthen working relationships by building teamwork, decrease stress, improve customer service, increase sales, and be healthier overall.

This project explores how managers are using humor and if they feel they are effective in the use of humor. The process also includes surveying employees to find out if they feel their managers use humor appropriately and effectively.

**1000 Red Noses**
by Deb Hart RN, BFA, CLL

Working in the field of gerontology specifically Alzheimer’s and dementia, having a humor assessment tool, and discovering what makes a person laugh is important in reinvigorating and recreating client/patient past memories of happiness and positivity. I practice and work with the applications of humor theories such as incongruity, tension relief (tensegrity) and superiority. Many times in a nurse/patient relationship, the nurse (or any medical professional) seemingly has control. Using the aforementioned humor
theories the balance of control is shifted back to the client/patient. Simply put, the patient feel less” done to” and is inclined to be more agreeable when Activities of Daily Living (ADL’s) and medication regimes are set up. I also base part of my nurse practice on the concept of “Planned spontaneity,” often carrying a red nose, laughing pen, or wearing a colorful pin or vest that might spark a conversation. My 1000 Red Noses Project uses the concept of “planned spontaneity” to invoke smiling as a communicative device in foreign cultures. I emotionally explored Mother Teresa’s words,” Peace begins with a smile.”

July 2011: 1000 red noses were taken with me to a trip to Huarez, Peru. I travelled to other small Peruvian villages as well as Machu Pichu. I volunteered and led laughter exercises at Seeds of Hope, a Quechuan school. It is the custom of paying the villagers (a very small sum of money) before taking their photo, with or without a red nose. I handed red noses out to any person that asked for one. This included (but not limited to) taxi drivers (both in the U.S. and abroad), airline passengers, shopkeepers, shamans, travelers from other countries, and people in the market place. I also gave 100-200 to those that I met at hotels that were travelling to other villages, orphanages or schools. Model release forms were also used in most cases, especially those that involved children. This project is ongoing. Plans to become a “Not for Profit” organization and showcase photos in hospitals and other conferences.

The Role of Therapeutic Humor in the Tucson Shooting and other Tragedies
by David Jacobson MSW, LCSW

The goal of this project was to understand the role that humor plays in reducing emotional anxiety and decreasing the emotional and psychological impact that those with symptoms of PTSD experience after a traumatic event. This includes ways to use humor to nurture the self after experiencing traumatic situations and gaining insights into the appropriate timing of humor use after a crisis occurs.

Conclusions drawn were that many are able to utilize humor as a buffer and therapeutic agent in treating their PTSD symptoms, but there will always be some that it is not effective for.

When not to use therapeutic humor:
• During the initial crisis
• If there is no rapport and you know nothing of the persons perspective on humor
• If visibly upset
• If making them the target of the humor
• Is perceived as uncaring

When to use therapeutic humor:
• If humor is initiated by patient
• If you have good rapport and there is mutual trust
• When humor focuses on the positive side of life
• Self effacing humor
Those that were able to gain the most from therapeutic humor interventions were those that had the ability to generate their own original spontaneous humorous responses to stressful situations.

**Laugh Box**  
by Chip Lutz

The goal of this project is to initiate leadership in our media outreach for AATH members through use of a podcast. These informational clips will be available on iTunes for download by our members and possibly non-members. The format will consist of interviews with leaders in the field of humor, positive psychology, the emotional brain, and other "stuff." The "show" will be called the Laugh Box. This is an ongoing project that will archive a body of knowledge on the website that will be available for future downloads. A "memory stick" will be created as a benefit for new members when they join.

**Humanitarian Clown Trip to Brazil: The Perception of Managers of the Institutions Visited**  
by Elizabeth Machado

A Humanitarian Clown Trip to Brazil was my choice to spread the Therapeutic Humor in 14 health institutions in Ceara, Brazil. For this we count with the participation of 18 clowns from different countries and fields along with Patch Adams. The methodology was field survey, with an exploratory / descriptive approach and qualitative and quantitative data collected through a pre-tested questionnaire with closed and open questions.

**Bounce! Going from Funky to Flourishing; A Support Program for Military personnel and their Families.**  
by Linda MacNeal

The purpose of this program is to help people stay agile mentally so that we remain physically healthy during life’s ups and downs. By strengthening our humor skills, focusing on attitude, optimism and gratitude, we will increase our enjoyment of everyday activities and become more resilient. The program contacted participants 3 times a week for six weeks to encourage participants to take positive steps and acquire skills to become more resilient. The program includes these techniques;

- **Week 1:** B for Balance – Overcoming Overload
- **Week 2:** O for Optimism – Positive Psychology
- **Week 3:** U for Flexibility – Bend, Don’t Break
- **Week 4:** N for Nurture – Taking Care of Number One
- **Week 5:** C for Connectedness – Friends and Family First
- **Week 6:** E for Enrich your Life with Humor – Humor Heals
Is there a bright side to dark humor?
By Lois McElravy

Working with assistance from Dr. Frederick (Rick) J. Parente, PhD, Psychology Professor at Towson University, co-author of Retraining Cognition: Techniques and Applications

In my personal experience of living with a brain injury for twenty-two years and through my observations, I’ve noticed that many brain injury persons initially lash out at the cruelty and complexity of brain injury by using hostile or sarcastic humor, including self-deprecating putdowns as we struggle to adapt to our new life, grieve and let go of our previous life and accept our new self. As our recovery progresses, our style of humor progresses to a light-hearted, silly, child-like sense of wonder and a healthier self-appreciating humor. Survivors who get stuck in a cycle of using hostile or put-down humor stunt their recovery. They experience the temporary pain relief that laughing provides, but the negative humor they use self-inflicts more pain.

I have personally used negative humor as a powerful coping device to deal with difficulties and restore hope in moments of despair. The more challenging my life seems, the darker my humor gets. When my troubles lessen, my humor lightens up. Those who know me well recognize my emotional state based on the fluctuations in my sense of humor.

This project explores the potential for using a humor assessment to indicate a person’s emotional state and provide insights that could improve recovery outcomes. There will be a special focus on the use of negative humor as a useful and sometimes necessary device to provide relief from pain, and aid healing in recovery. The project hopes to define some guidelines for the beneficial use of negative humor.

This is a 2-year project with anticipated completion date March 2013.

Clowning to Teach Fire Safety:
By Merletta Roberts LMFT, GMHSpec.

Merletta our beloved past AATH secretary, has been very involved in level 2 until recently when she needed to delay her project work for another year because of family issues….but here is a note from Merletta with synopsis of what she has accomplished so far as the organizer of a clown troupe that teaches fire safety for the fire departments in her home town.

"The clown troupe is busy working on our upcoming Fundraiser event; dinner, silent auction and program coming up the 24th of March. Out troupe is being recognized nationwide after providing 1,313 hours of volunteer service to our community this past year. As far as County Fire Marshall can tell there is no other program like it in the
country. The troupe continues to grow as we now have 15 members."

**A Book project: "To Pee or not to Pee " "The Prostate Guide for the Common Man"
by Joel Schwartz MD**

I was diagnosed with prostate cancer in June 2011. Did you know that prostate cancer is the second leading cause of cancer-related death among American men? Did you know that the leading cause of anxiety in men is waiting for the results of their PSA Test? Did you know that books about the prostate can confuse people and put them to sleep? Since we know that humor helps relieve anxiety, my project is to write a humorous book about the prostate and its disease. "To Pee or not to Pee " "The Prostate Guide for the Common Man" is told from the prostates' point of view. "I am really not a bad organ, certainly not bad enough to get all the abuse that’s thrown my way I mean it’s a adult lifetime of digital exams pushing, poking and prodding me not to mention ultrasound nippers taking out small chunks of my maleness. Talk about being under appreciated." This project is a marriage of Healthcare and Humor as it relates to sharing information with caregivers and patients about prostrate cancer.

**Can a Prop (red noses) reduce holiday Stress?**
**By Enid Schwartz PHD**

The program discussed the stress issues people faced at holiday time, the problems of dealing with family pressures and social pressures, the importance of finding fun ways to decrease stress, and how humor helps to decrease stress. The audience was encouraged to share ways they used to decrease stress of the holidays. We did short laughter exercise as a way of demonstrated how laughter and exercise can be helpful. At the end of the program all participants were offered a red nose. One gentleman declined. The rest of the noses were distributed to employees at some of the stores. Preliminary results revealed that the noses were well accepted by most of participants and employees. The employee who admitted using it found it to be helpful for her and for her co-workers.