



# Tribute to Laura Chasin

## 1936-2015

by Erica Hollander

Laura R. Chasin passed away suddenly Nov. 17, 2015. She was a remarkable woman, and lived committed to creating and healing community. She twice was a recipient of ASGPP awards: first the Hannah Weiner Award in 1990, then the Collaborator's Award in 1997. She was an ASGPP Fellow. She had received many other awards and affirmations for her contributions to civil discussion in polarized and conflicted situations in the US and abroad.

Laura's unique passion was for using psychodrama to further understanding and empathy across cultural chasms. She took family therapy practices and remodeled them with psychodramatic methods to develop means of creating and sustaining dialogues where only deep and acrid divisions had previously existed. In the Public Conversations Project Laura founded a way of working with the most widely diverse and irate groups. They call the method Reflective Structured Dialogue. Her idea at its heart was to introduce a protocol for productive discourse. Parties who had never been able to



talk were invited and instructed how to talk respectfully with one another. The central theme of this work is that healing relationships occurs through civil conversation, empathy, and understanding. It is a form of sociatry in Moreno's sense.

Abortion ideas have deeply divided Americans for decades. One ready example of The Public Conversations Project's success was a group comprised of Pro-Choice and Pro-Life advocates in the Boston area who kept on talking to one another for many years, while others had long since given up hope for such discussions. This work was

covered on NPR more than once, as an example of sustainable discourse even across deep divides of identity, experience and belief.

To learn more about what she had been working on for many years, visit [www.publicconversationsproject.org](http://www.publicconversationsproject.org). The project offers a manual on ways to foster respectful conversations even when participants are highly divided and polarized.

In times like these we will really miss her.