



UPDATED June 26, 2020

BACKSTORY THEATRE DIVERSITY, EQUITY, AND INCLUSIVITY ACTION PLAN

“Backstory Youth Theatre recognizes the unique power of theater to hold space and give voice to diverse perspectives, experiences, and ideas. As we respond to the Black Lives Matter civil rights movement, we renew our commitment to ensuring that all peoples who step within our program will feel safe, protected, and heard; and will never feel discriminated against due to race, religion, gender, sex, sexuality, or any variety of self-identifying factors that allow us to be individuals. We are rooted in a mission to serve and enrich our community in a manner which seeks to understand, cultivate, and build upon the unique differences that each individual brings into the room. These include but are not limited to: 1) Reaching out and asking questions of our community about how best to serve their needs and overcome barriers to participation; 2) Recognizing missteps and proactively working to evolve and adapt; and 3) Actively acknowledging difference and modeling inclusive behavior to ensure all participants know they are seen, heard, and celebrated.”

BackStory Theatre is committed to inclusivity across all programming; making programs accessible for all groups (including low-income/disadvantaged families, at-risk youth, seniors on fixed income, underserved cultural and LGBTQiA+ individuals, and people with physical/developmental disabilities) is a critical part of our delivery model. BackStory’s vision is “community is enriched by theatre”. This occurs through the enjoyment of and appreciation for live productions, through participation in shared community experiences, and through confidence-building and development of life-skills (such as teamwork and communication) which result from participation in live theatre.

A guiding principle of the organization is that ability to pay and special needs should never stand in the way of a child receiving confidence and joy in theatre. While BackStory’s home community is majority comprised of Caucasian, middle to higher income families, we prioritize access and services being shared with our marginalized community members who often don’t see equitable inclusion and representation.

In an ongoing effort to recognize need and assess opportunities for growth, BackStory commits to the following actions and behaviors:



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ASK

BackStory has studied our community and worked with leaders across various non-profit and city organizations to assess barriers to access and ways to overcome these barriers. To that end, the organization has prioritized collaborations and partnerships which bring classes and performance experiences into the community, into spaces and places where community members feel a strong sense of agency and have easier access (transportation or other needs being a factor). We commit to direct outreach to ask our marginalized communities what they need, want, and how we can be of help in engaging students and families in theatrical education and performance opportunities.

OFFER

BackStory will expand current connections with local partner groups and actively reach out to collaborate on programming which specifically focuses on providing opportunities for specific, marginalized communities within our larger community. Currently, classes are taught for free in Food Banks/Resource Centers, homelessness support shelters, city libraries, low-income apartment complexes, and low-income school settings. Partnerships with the local city government provide specialized classes with para support for adults and youth with developmental disabilities. Most recently, partner collaborations with FISH food bank/ family resource center have resulted in the addition of a Spanish/English bi-lingual story playtime to our weekly free online workshops.

ASSIST

For those who are able to arrange transportation, BackStory will continue to offer multiple scholarships each year for studio-based classes along with work-study or volunteer exchange opportunities to offset fees. Additionally, educational programming culminating in public performances at the city auditorium will continue to be offered to families with ticket prices ranging from \$0-3, and free coupons for shows will regularly be given to partner agencies to share with low-income families to encourage participation. Since 2014, BackStory has offered a free field trip performance to each of its full-length fall musical productions, held during the school day to allow



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attendance by students who might not otherwise have access to live-theatre productions. Schools with a high rate of free/reduced lunch participation will continue to be prioritized for this fieldtrip experience. BackStory will remain open to solutions-based ideas for how to meet specific needs and overcome barriers to access in tangible ways as informed by communities for service.

RECOGNIZE

Inclusivity is a complex and ever-evolving process. We commit to recognizing our mistakes and taking accountability for with a growth mindset. We commit to recognizing micro-aggression, bias, and racism on an on-going basis and to address such behavior with a lens toward learning, growth, and progress. Persistent acts of discriminatory or non-inclusive behavior from participants, staff, contractors, or board members will be grounds for dismissal from position or participation in programming. We commit further to recognizing and celebrating diversity in all its forms; to model inclusive behavior as educators and set strong examples for receptive language, civil discourse, and solutions-based problem solving.

Notes on our staff:

Executive Director is LGBTQiA+ with lived experience of homelessness, domestic violence, and has a child with physical and developmental disabilities. Staff, contractors, and board of directors represent diversity in gender, communities of color (Black/African American, LatinX, Asian/Pacific Islander, multi-ethnic), LGBTQIA+ and experiences in low-income households. BackStory does not discriminate and actively recognizes the right to inclusion of all people without exception, embracing the orientation, self-identification, religious, and cultural perspectives of all.