

Pink Umbrella Summary Report

Information about the Applicant

Based in Milwaukee, WI, Pink Umbrella Theater Company was established in 2018. We set out to amplify that theater arts need to be accessible and inclusive for all. Our mission is to provide and promote theatrical experiences with and for actors and artists of all ages who identify with physical, intellectual, or emotional disabilities.

In our first year of programming, 2019, our classes reached 59 participants and 2 teaching artists who identify with a disability. With the onset of the coronavirus pandemic in 2020, Pink Umbrella quickly pivoted and developed online programming and engagement for our community. Ensemble classes, 1:1 coaching sessions, and interactive productions were born out of this troubling time, offering virtual opportunities for our target population. Online programming allowed our network to expand immensely; participants were tuning in from across the country for our weekly Laughter Yoga classes, and across the world for an Improvisation class held for participants in Sri Lanka. Through careful mitigation practices, Pink Umbrella was able to once again offer in-person classes and produce our first set of live, public shows in 2021. As of today, Pink Umbrella has joyfully co-created with 144 participants, 17 teaching artists, and 18 actors who identify with a disability.

We believe that “there is room for all under the umbrella”. We welcome participants of any age and disability, and we welcome self-diagnosed participants to join us. Pink Umbrella Theater is currently creating our own theater standards based upon the developmental stages of individuals with disabilities and referencing DPI’s Theater Standards created for typically developing humans. Our teaching team is trained to meet the participants where they are, in the moment. By engaging in these practices, we honor, uplift, and support our participants, actively building inclusivity in our city. Together, we create, cultivate, and use our voice to better advocate for ourselves and others like us in the community. More importantly, it is our goal to grow to a point where we are completely staffed and run by people with disabilities. Their potential to impact the performing arts is endless.

Statement of Need

We are a unique organization; we are the first and only professional theater company for people with disabilities in Milwaukee county. As such, we offer value that no one else can duplicate. We believe we have a bright future within the performing arts community in Milwaukee by serving clients whose need for creative expression in the arts is not currently adequately addressed.

We kindly ask for the support of \$3,000 from the Wispact Foundation to bolster the continuation and expansion of Pink Umbrella Theater Company’s in-person and virtual instructional classes. Specifically, funding from the Wispact Foundation will support Fall, Winter, and Spring classes in the upcoming school year. Grant funds would support us in marketing our classes, procuring supplies, reserving communal spaces (in person and on Zoom), and employing teaching artists, assistants, and 1:1 actor ally’s.

Project Goals and Expected Benefits

Over the next three sessions of classes - Fall, Winter, and Spring - we are hoping to increase our overall impact in the city of Milwaukee and nationwide. For our Fall, Winter, and Spring classes, we aim to see an increase in enrollments from our 2021-2022 school year programming. To do this, we plan to increase our marketing efforts (advertising in the local publication Shepherd Express) and hire additional 1:1 actor ally’s as needed for in-person and virtual classes.

The Wispact Foundation prioritizes efforts within the educational and recreational sector, particularly those which enhance quality of life for the Disability Community. The classes that we offer at Pink Umbrella so closely align with this priority; all members at every level of our company have input on our lessons, pedagogy, and best practices on a continuous basis, ensuring that our work is fulfilling the artistic needs and desires of the community. We know that programming like ours is limited, both in Milwaukee and nationwide. Feedback from our families includes, "The pink umbrella theater has been so very wonderful for my son and he so looks forward to it. Thank you for having a program for special needs kids over 18" and "Pink Umbrella is special. I have never experienced such an inclusive and collaborative program in the creative arts. Done with pride and respect". Funding from the Wispact Foundation will ensure that Pink Umbrella can continue to provide client-centered programming, where voices from the Disability Community are heard and honored, first and foremost.

Project Implementation Plan

Administrative Artists at Pink Umbrella will develop a marketing plan that reaches participants, teaching artists, and 1:1 actor ally's for the Fall, Winter, and Summer sessions. Each session will have a unique set of classes that meet weekly for an eight-week session. Classes will run in the Fall from late September through mid-November, in the Winter from mid February through mid-April, and in the Summer from June-August.

Our teaching team is one of the main pillars of Pink Umbrella. As specialists in both theater education and special education, our teaching artists and teaching assistants prepare and facilitate weekly lesson plans with the guidance of the Executive Director, Director of Accessibility and Inclusion, and our annually-reviewed Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion Commitment. Our programming would not be complete without our 1:1 actor ally's. We will continue to seek and hire the most qualified individuals for these roles.

Evaluation Plan

At the start of each eight-week session, Administrative Artists will track the number of enrollments (new, returning, and total) and compare these statistics with those of the previous school year. Upon review of the statistics, the marketing plan will be adapted and/or updated for the remaining sessions to help us meet our goal of increasing enrollments.

Due to the qualitative nature of theater arts programming, our main sources of evaluation are progress reports and parent surveys. Teaching artists complete a Pink Umbrella branded progress report for all participants under the age of 18. Measuring Engagement (participation and confidence) as well as Expression (communication, emotion recognition/expression, and empathy) allows Pink Umbrella to analyze both personal and artistic development in our participants.

Budget

For one eight-week session, Pink Umbrella anticipates the following average costs:

\$7,500 - Stipends for teaching artists, teaching assistants, and 1:1 actor ally's

\$1,500 - Space rental fees

\$750 - Cost of supplies

Staff Recommendation

The grant can be recommended for approval. The proceeds will directly benefit the persons with disabilities who participate in this theater opportunity. The stipend for the teaching artists, teaching assistants and 1:1 actor ally's are not a staff expense and their participation is what makes it possible for many of the actors to participate in a production. They are on stage with the participant helping them to act out a scene. The grant aligns with the initiatives of the foundation.