Obsidian Theatre Company shared the following *Artist Testimonials* in 2022 as part of their Balancing Act Level UP! Pilot Project.

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Obsidian Theatre Company
Level UP! Compassion Fund Pilot
Artist Testimonials

The following testimonials are from two artists who participated in Obsidian Theatre Company's Level UP! pilot project, which focused on providing childcare support for artist caregivers during rehearsal and production of Is God Is in the spring of 2022.

Raha Javanfar, Lighting Designer:

"It would have been nearly impossible for me to complete my duties as lighting designer on the production of *Is God Is* had I not had access to the funds that were made available to me through this Balancing Act initiative.

Artist rates in Toronto are barely meeting livable wage standards as it is, let alone when the cost of childcare is added to the already inflated cost of living.

It seems to me like the reality of our industry is that it is often a playground that only the privileged have easy access to. I recognize and acknowledge my own privileges that allow me to participate. For example, my mother was able to take time off work to be with my family during this production, minimizing my childcare costs. According to a rough calculation, had I required a hired babysitter for all of the hours that I worked, my childcare costs would have almost equaled my entire design fee! (Not being enrolled in daycare, this would have been a babysitter hired at $20+/hour). So although the $1200 I received from Balancing Act was a huge help, it actually wouldn't have covered all my costs had I not had access to free care from my family, which many artists don't. But I was able to put the funds towards compensating my mom and my partner for some of the time they took off work.

I'd also like to acknowledge that the non-financial supports I received were extremely helpful as well. Having access to a room for pumping in private or having the baby on site, as well as general compassion and understanding from the team about my situation as a new mother all went a very long way. It would be wonderful for more companies to have actual policies around reaching out to artists who are caregivers in order to become aware of their individual and specific needs during their time on a project.

I am so grateful to Obsidian Theatre for the support and compassion I received and to Theatre Direct for launching this initiative and for the funding. Thank you.“

Sabryn Rock, Actor:

“Quite simply, without the help of Balancing Act, I would not have been able to take part in Obsidian’s production of *Is God Is*. In order to take on a full-time rehearsal schedule I required full-time childcare, the cost of which negates more than one third of my earnings on a theatre contract. When I expressed these concerns to Artistic Director, Mumbi Tindyebwa Otu, before accepting the contract, I was assured that I would be supported in a number of ways and that couldn’t have been truer. I was able to accept the role knowing that there was financial support for childcare and that there would be an appropriate and welcome balance between the work commitment and family commitments.

A pumping and breastfeeding room was set up adjacent to the rehearsal hall so I was able to continue to feed my child at work. When I was not needed, I was encouraged to go home and be with my son. I am a professional and take my craft very seriously but if there’s anything the last couple years have taught me it’s that life is more important. Family, physical and mental health are more important than a play, so being in a company where that was understood and actually put into action gave me so much hope for the future of working parents/caregivers.

I was also given monetary help to pay for full-time daycare which helped justify taking the job. To alleviate the stress of trying to balance finances for artists in one of the most expensive cities to live in in Canada enabled me to be fully present at work in rehearsals and be fully present at home with my family.

This initiative proves that you can have rigour and more reasonable work hours. It proves that having a compassionate care fund for those that need the extra support yields better results. The show was a hit and I was proud of the work I was able to do because I wasn’t completely distracted by the guilt of being away from my child or financial hardship. I am so grateful to both Obsidian and Balancing Act for welcoming me back to the theatre after having a baby to a truly changed process. I hope this continues and that this standard becomes the norm for theatre companies and those artists who are attempting this delicate balance between work and family.”