Buddies in Bad Times Theatre created the following *Project Field Notes* in 2022 as part of their Balancing Act Level UP! Pilot Project.

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Buddies in Bad Times Theatre
Level UP! Compassion Fund Pilot
Project Field Notes

The following notes were written in 2022 by Daniel Carter, Buddies in Bad TImes Theatre's Interim Director of Operations and Programming at the time, after Buddies completed their Level UP! Pilot Project.

Project Focus: A fund supporting artist needs for the first production in the theatre after the onset of COVID's Omicron variant.

Project Inspiration: Collaborating with manidoons collective who had already developed many care strategies in their rehearsal room and a framework of Indigenizing Practices, which can be found HERE on their website.

Planning and implementation

Our Compassion Fund pilot began in February 2022 and ran until April 2022. We worked with a partner production company manidoons collective for this project. We began conversations about the pilot with manidoons five to six months out from the production (one month before a workshop and four months before rehearsals started). The production team we were working with had a strong values system in place and, as a result, it was easier to determine a process for how the funds would be distributed.

Two months before the start of the pilot we developed language and messaging, and then six weeks out we shared language and process details with the creative team members and performers to allow time for them to review and ask questions.

The compassion fund was accessible to performers/creative team members until about two weeks after the production closed on April 8, 2022. We decided to keep it open post-production in acknowledgement of the strain that public performance can have for performers, and to give folks time to recover and then sort out paperwork, etc., rather than requiring folks to make a request before the final performance.

Key conversations

We had a lot of conversations with the co-producer. There was already an interest in the concept of care in the production process so there was easy buy-in.

The largest part of the conversation was regarding how we wanted to disburse the funds. For example, did we want to keep an emergency fund for larger requests? What barriers might prevent people from asking for access to funds?

We also had a company-wide meeting with the theatre's employees and the production crew, team, and performers. This meeting gave us a good sense of what was desired from a program like this, and helped us understand the scope of what might need to be covered under "care".

We made the decision to ask people accessing funds to submit receipts. This was mainly for auditing purposes so that we had a paper trail. In some instances, folks could invoice if they lost a receipt. Knowing how stringent our auditors have been in the past, especially for a multi-faceted business like Buddies, having those records was useful. I don't think this is the only way to go, but for how early we were in the process of rolling out the fund, this seemed to be the most direct route in meeting all the needs of all parties. Payments were made on a rolling basis. We used a reimbursement form to support the process.

Future planning

I think an important consideration is to consider how to expand the fund across an entire season, or perhaps as Nightwood Theatre did, provide a percentage of the season's budget towards a Compassion Fund. I think this decision depends on the various communities being engaged. A dynamic system needs to be in place that can adapt to specific needs.

Language considerations

"Care" is already so prevalent within queer communities that it was quite easy to find a foundation of language to work with and build from that was accessible for folks. See our Compassion Fund Form to get an idea of the language we used to frame the project.

Sustainability

I think Nightwood Theatre's approach (mentioned above—allocating a percentage of the season's budget to a compassion fund) is a feasible and useful measure.

I am also curious about the relationship between the company and each artist receiving funding related to what funding is being used for, and whether this needs to be disclosed, especially within a queer context. My largest thought here is around duty to report what comes up in the Compassion Fund requests, especially alongside the complexities of that duty and its friction with agency. For example, when experiences or feelings are disclosed to the organization concerning self-harm, abuse, etc., the organization has a duty to report. So how is that duty navigated beforehand and in the moment, in a way that still gives the individual agency? Even when a scenario isn't *that* serious, what is the responsibility to provide community care?

I would also want to consider how the Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP) might interact with a program like this, given that ODSP puts caps on earned income for individuals receiving disability benefits. So depending on how Compassion Fund money is distributed and the amount provided, folks on ODSP could lose access to their disability benefits for a period of time.

Key pieces of advice

A conversation or survey with the entire team is beneficial in determining the scope of the funds that might be used and the level of care that might need to be provided.