Curtain Razors shared the following field notes in 2023 as part of their Balancing Act Level UP! Pilot Project.

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CURTAIN RAZORS

BALANCING ACT

Curtain Razors
Level UP! Compassion Fund Pilot
Towards Field Notes

The following reflections are from Johanna Bundon, Artistic Associate with Curtain Razors.

Project focus

Funds were designated for four projects, *Burnt Sienna, Untitled Peter Tripp Project, Acknowledging,* and a Consultation of Care process. With an exploratory spirit, we tried an array of methods. Each project we supported needed a slightly different strategy that suited the project's lead artists and their artistic relationships.

Project inspiration and approach

Our Compassion Fund took a responsive and relational approach.

We explored the question, "How can we support artists in bringing their whole selves to the process?" This question was largely discussed in conversation, though we did explore it in email and through a Google Form.

Our approaches included:

- offering gifts and honorariums to artists and elders,
- inviting artists to complete a Google Form to illustrate areas where they could use support,
- having cash on hand to respond to the emergent needs of artists in the creation process, and
- offering to support travel costs for artist-parents to travel between cities with their children.

These ways of working were influenced by ongoing dialogue between us as Artistic Associates and consultations with three guiding artists who supported our application to Level UP!.

We found a face-to-face and conversational approach was congruent with our company's values and history. This way of working allowed us to invite dialogue about care in practice, and further learning about "Compassion Funds" as a way of inviting processes of care to unfold.

Our intention is to continue supporting conversations and learning surrounding compassion and care within our company practice, and our region.

Fall 2022: Designing and distributing funds

I had conversations with the Artistic Associates, board, and our part-time administrator in the fall, sharing more about the results of our Level UP! application. There was general enthusiasm, support, and excitement for the project. There was a strong component of talking through what a Compassion Fund is—this is new terminology for lots of folks.

I had a conversation with Kris Alvarez, the lead artist of *Burnt Sienna*. *Burnt Sienna* was the first project to have access to the Compassion Fund and everyone was supportive of this idea. Funds were designated to guests at the September 30th / October 1st, 2022 event. This is the final *Burnt Sienna* project after many years of Kris offering this practice and gathering to the community. I want to acknowledge *Burnt Sienna* as a long-term project that centered IBPOC participants and is reinforcing a culture of care. Funds were dedicated to gifts, honorarium for participants, and food.

Kris and I agreed that having cash on hand would be best in order to work in a responsive way. Balancing Act does not require receipts for tracking, but Curtain Razors will need receipts/proof of payment for end-of-year purposes so if the money is coming through the company, we still might need to track it.

We agreed that the labour associated with information tracking should not be on the artists receiving funds, because the feeling should be of less work, and of support and generosity. If invoices are required, Kris has agreed to take on this labour for the artists, using a template that she has.

Winter 2022–2023:

Consultations on Care
Curtain Razors engaged in consultation with three guiding artists who supported this project: Fritz Pino, Curtain Razors Board Member; Pete Kytwayhat, Artist and single dad; and Erin Goodpipe, Artist and new parent. Reflections from these rich consultation conversations can be found here.

Community meeting with Globe Theatre
This meeting happened about the time that Globe was moving into a rehearsal project engaging a lot of parent artists. It felt like good timing to talk about supporting parent artists in life / art integration. I spoke with a Globe producer about the Balancing Act programs, our experience, and the different ways that I was hearing about the Compassion Fund being engaged. As the largest and most funded theatre in our region, they could be leaders for setting standards of best practices when supporting caregivers in the performing arts.

Making Treaty 4 Moveable Feast gathering event
Curtain Razors has an event called Moveable Feast. In 2023, the project was focused on private and public conversations between artists who make up Curtain Razors and those who make up Making Treaty 4 Collective. We are exploring our common histories, our overlap through practice, and opening to the possibility of working together in the future. We also all happen to be parent artists.

We created a Google Form in anticipation of the event. I did this following the cohort meeting and felt the Google Form has lots of merit—letting the artist lead the request, opening to possibilities about what could be included, offering time for artists to reflect on their needs, and leaving the form open for a period following a project for needs that emerge during or after.

It was emailed out prior to the event, but we didn't receive many responses. I ended up reaching out individually to participants to see if they needed anything, to share more, and to generally explain more about what a Compassion Fund is. I think just with the newness of the idea, folks needed a bit more personal touch to get oriented.

It was in some ways reassuring of the scale we work at and what feels like a natural way to make this invitation. Voice to voice, face to face. At least for now. I think if we had more collegial support and this was an invitation that artists were often being met with when engaging work, then eventually a Google Form could be useful.

As the artistic associate managing the administration of the Compassion Fund for Curtain Razors, I am eager to find ways to make the administration less work, but I don't think this was the right fit for us.

After conversation, some funds were then designated to participating parent artists to support their travel expenses to attend the gathering as a team. (Return fuel Regina Saskatoon). This felt positive, useful, and like a good beginning of an artist-led request.

Spring 2023: An adaptation

One of our projects, *Conversations for Love + Loss*, played out largely online and without the anticipated needs for Balancing Act support. Instead, we redirected those funds to a project we co-presented, *Untitled Peter Tripp Project.* The artist leads, Jayden Pfeifer and myself, Johanna Bundon, are artist co-parents. Funds were designated for travel for our daughter Hannelor during the tour (for a flight) and childcare while we were on the road and in the theatre.

Deeper into the Spring 2023: Holding questions

- How to make these processes easy for both the artists and administrators?
- How can we make time for face to face debriefs?

Deeper Mucky Spring 2023

Balancing Act engages in evaluation through face to face debriefs! And more questions:

- How do we keep this learning in our region?
- What might we need as artists in Saskatchewan as we care for our parents in future years?
- How do we grow this from where we are at?
- Differentiating Compassion Fund from accessibility?
- How to hold a reflective quality in processes, reporting, and administration?

April 2023

Acknowledging was one of our Compassion Fund projects. We used a similar approach as for *Burnt Sienna*, and found that having cash on hand helped to meet emergent needs in the process. The lead artist managed the funds and relationships with artists. No receipts were required.

May 2023

Looking ahead, we will be reporting to the Professional Arts Organizations Program (PAOP; a Saskachewan-based program) and talking about the Compassion Fund as an initiative we took on this year. We will make a case for it being a part of our operating expenses moving forward and will highlight it as a space to grow our network of support with other companies.

We are also looking to grow the mindset of asking artists what they need to fully come out the work.

We are still reflecting on the sustainability of the project, and are considering how we could have a budget line that is designated for “Compassion Funds” for the year.

Later: Added reflections

We are exploring an ongoing inquiry: "how do we make an offer to support?" and reciprocally, "how do we invite requests for support?"

In the journey to normalize “asking for help” and “'asking for what we need” within our field, we have come to understand that our company does our best work face to face. We have chosen not to use “forms” and processes similar to this in an effort to prioritize the human and heart to heart aspect of our work. This choice is, of course, made easier because of the size of our company (small). As we grow (laterally) and into broader relevance within our artistic community, it's very likely we will maintain this orientation.

No matter the scale of one's work, it merits reflection: in what way could processes like surveys, forms, and requests for information be harmful to some artists? How could these effective tools for gathering information also exclude, or push some folks away, or prompt them to question the invitation?

A face to face, voice to voice approach isn't an insurance policy against possible harms. (Of course we regularly misstep, harm, and offend one another). But it does maintain reciprocity, listening, spontaneity and adaptability as priorities we are centering.

Detour...

“One size fits all” seems to be falling away. But how do we embody an ethos that makes room for singular, personal, and emerging contexts? Our friend and colleague, Traci Foster (artist, disability advocate, and powerhouse), is leading this conversation in

Saskatchewan. Her work, and the work of the organization *Listen to Dis*, around intimate access is entirely related to this predicament. Traci, I think, would say that learning how to provide this spacious invitation to others is related to how we understand our own access needs. I can't recommend *Listen to Dis'* disability audits enough :).