Tapestry Opera created the following *Project Field Notes* in 2024
in reflection of their Balancing Act Level UP! Pilot Project.

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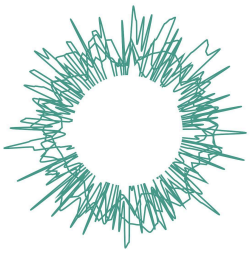

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Tapestry Opera
Level UP! Compassion Fund Pilot
Project Field Notes

The following notes were written by Jaime Martino, Tapestry Opera's Executive Director, after Tapestry Opera completed their Level UP! Pilot Project during Of The Sea by Kanika Ambrose in April/May 2023.

Project focus and inspiration: The focus of Tapestry's Level UP! Project was to develop a Compassion Fund for artists and contracted workers. Following this project, Tapestry Opera piloted a Childcare and Parental Leave Policy. The inspiration for the policy grew from leadership with children having to navigate how to support each other through those early months, and realizing they wanted a formal policy to support other staff members with children.

Planning and implementation

We had an opportunity to test out our Compassion Fund Pilot for the production Of *The Sea.* The show was about Black and Afro-Caribbean history, including slavery, and required additional care for the cast members. Even so, we were clear that we didn't want to limit compassionate support only to shows that had difficult topics because anyone could be dealing with anything, and we wanted to remove as many barriers as we could.

We spoke with our co-producers, *Obsidian Theatre Company,* about how best to communicate about the Compassion Fund, and decided that sending a dedicated email would be the most effective approach, rather than lumping the offer in with other contracting or onboarding information.

Two people took advantage of the Compassion Fund during *Of The Sea*, and we have offered the fund for other shows since (for example, two people accessed the fund during *Dragon's Tale,* and one during *Rocking Horse Winner*).

The Compassion Fund was distributed in the form of honorariums of up to $100 per person, and we made it clear that we were open to having conversations about specific

needs at any time. We did not require people to provide receipts because we wanted to remove barriers, gatekeeping, or adjudicating what was and wasn't eligible.

Key conversations

The Compassion Fund and childcare funding for artists were integrated into individual show budgets and the artistic operations budget, which was approved by the Board, but we did not ask for permission to do it.

We also spoke to the Board about the Childcare and Parental Leave Policy, and they were very enthusiastic and supportive, especially the idea of parental leave funding for staff. They said it was just the cost of doing business to take care of our staff.

Staff and artists all receive copies of policies when they are onboarded. We have also incorporated them into first-day-of-rehearsal talks for artists.

Future planning

It's tricky to get out of the mindset that saving every extra penny is the goal, and that fewer people using the fund means more money saved. In the long run, I do think it is better to have more people using the Compassion Fund so that they understand this as a good place to work. We can all push for better across the sector.

Language considerations

I think that the more communication there is about the fund, and the fewer requirements associated with it (e.g. requiring receipts) the more uptake there will be.

Sustainability

The Compassion Fund is honestly such a small part of a show budget. Opera budgets are SO BIG already that it's easy to just pop it in and accept it as an ongoing expense. What's required is making it a priority to include it.