Théâtre la Seizième created the following *Project Field Notes* in 2023 as part of their Balancing Act Level UP! Pilot Project.

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Théâtre la Seizième
Level UP! Compassion Fund
Project Field Notes

The following notes were written by Tine Dupré, Administrative Director of Théâtre la Seizième, as part of the company's Level UP! Project.

Project Focus: Developing and piloting a Compassion Fund for parents and caregivers on staff. This work included developing a Compassion Fund manual and reimbursement form.

Project Inspiration: The pilot was inspired by the work of Buddies in Bad Times Theatre, Nightwood Theatre, and Obsidian Theatre—each of these companies developed Compassion Fund programs during the first Level UP! cohort (2021–2022).

Planning and implementation

Our project had three main steps:

1. **Dream phase:** Before learning about Balancing Act, we had started discussions with staff and board members about an internal Compassion Fund. We then discovered Balancing Act's Level UP! program and decided to apply. The application process helped us to articulate the "why" and part of the "how" of the project.
2. **Research and design:** Once accepted into the Level UP! program, we met with fellow strategy partners who were also working on Compassion Fund strategies. We also had internal team discussions and began designing our Compassion Fund Manual and request form. We had to strike a balance between what we thought caregivers would need and the limitations of what we could offer.
3. **Implementation:** Final versions of the manual and request form were presented to the board and sent to parents and caregivers on staff. We later shared these materials with the whole staff team. Since the project was a pilot, we felt we needed to limit access to the funds in case we were overwhelmed with requests.

Key conversations

Discussions were mostly internal conversations with staff and the board. We also benefited from the recurring meetings of other Level UP! strategy partners in our cohort, and from the Balancing Act Conference of Care. All of these discussions and interactions supported us to develop the first version of our pilot.

Future planning

We are interested in opening up our Compassion Fund to artists and arts workers, beyond our office staff. In order to prepare for that, we will be sending out a survey to next season's artists. We are earmarking a small fund for the next few seasons. We would like to avoid assumptions moving forward, so we feel a survey would help us identify our staff and artists' needs for the next season. After that point, we hope to redesign our manual and request form for the 2023/2024 season.[1]

Sustainability

When considering how best to continue the Compassion Fund, our two main focus areas are budgeting and communication. Considering the financial instability of our sector, financial forecasting has been difficult recently. However, because of this financial instability, there is more need than ever for support of this kind. We have set aside a small fund for the next two seasons, but we will have to see how things develop before solidifying long-term plans. When it comes to communication, we are considering different methods of providing information to potential donors, though we have to be cautious to not overwhelm the limited resources we have available.

Key pieces of advice

During this project, we have learned not to make assumptions about the needs of collaborators and colleagues with respect to care. We discovered that even small changes, considerations, and conversations are greatly welcomed by parents and caregivers, which goes to show how little they have been considered in the past in the sector. Our goal is to build care into the core values of our organization. We want everyone to have access to the conditions that help them produce their best work while taking care of their individual needs.

[1] Editor's Note: Théâtre la Seizième has continued to offer the Compassion Fund in subsequent seasons to support staff and artists with dependents. The Compassion Fund manual is reviewed annually and updated as needed to address evolving needs and organizational capacity.