



Hello everyone!

My name is Stephanie Bond and I am the Executive Director of ReThink Theatrical. Today I am coming to you from a COVID-safe green screen studio to tell you about some exciting news and updates from our organization.

You may be seeing this video and thinking - where have these folks been all year? Why did they disappear? Great question! While we took a step back from producing new work and connecting via social media this year, we have been active and changing internally all year long.

ReThink Theatrical's mission has been "to provide free and accessible storytelling to local communities. With an educational and creative approach, we produce professional quality theater for everyone."

These words - "accessible" and "everyone" - they are bold, sometimes scary, goals. Over the last 6 months we took a step back to think critically about who we are and what we stand for and what those words really mean to us. And the resounding answer is that - we can no longer allow equity and inclusion in our organization to fall to the bottom of our priority list. If we are bold enough to claim that the stories we tell are accessible for everyone, then we need to make that the number one priority.

So, your next question is likely "We've heard that from a lot of organizations this year - what exactly are you, ReThink Theatrical, going to do to live this out day to day and year to year?"

1. Over the last 6 months our entire Board of Trustees, Executive Staff, and Internal Staff have undergone a series of trainings and consultations with the Truth, Racial Healing,

and Transformation Center of Rutgers Newark. Through the Transformation Center, we've connected with and learned from many creators of color who have offered us council and strategic planning. Their lessons are being implemented in our immediate upcoming season and the work we're going to do ongoing as an organization that is committed to being anti-racist.

2. The first major internal change we have made in the last 6 months is the creation of an Artistic Council. In years past our theatrical season was chosen by one or two people in key power positions of the organization. In 2021, the shows we produce will be decided by 9 incredible artists from many walks of life and diverse artistic specialties working together to choose stories that best represent the experiences of our direct community - Middlesex County. The power to choose what stories we tell each year no longer belongs to one or two people - it belongs to a self-governed group of folks who know the county we live in, and seek to serve those needs first.
3. The second major change is the implementation of a Participatory Budgeting Task Force. With Participatory Budgeting, a group of trusted people that represent the community are given the power to meet with folks who will be most impacted by our budgetary decisions for the year. Then they create that budget that they believe will be most impactful. As a non profit organization, we take in money from real people every day and redistribute it back out to the larger community in the form of theatrical productions. But now, it's not just me and the Director of Productions making budget decisions in a vacuum - now the people who are impacted by the budget most get to have a say in where the money goes.
4. The last update that I will share with you is that, for the first time in our history, ReThink Theatrical has been able to actively seek out grants, sponsorships and larger donations. We are working to build enough revenue in 2021 to compensate creatives for their work - a crucial step in building pathways to the arts for many people in our community. Most community theaters do not pay their creative teams - we are working diligently to be one of the first in the state of New Jersey to do so.

We know that accessible theater for everyone is an immense, far-reaching goal, but we believe that it is attainable if we change our understanding of what "community theater" can be. It should be a place for people of any identity to see themselves respected and celebrated. A place where high-level decision making is given back to the people. A place where radical empathy creates spaces of healthy creativity, learning, and expression.

So here is my call to action for you:

1. Keep us accountable. Join us on this journey of re-discovering all that community theater can be and how it can serve people within our county and our state broadly. We want to make changes that last and we need your sharp eyes to do it. You can participate with us by subscribing to our newsletter, attending our shows, volunteering with us, even just keeping in touch with us via email and social media.
2. The second thing I will ask is that you become a financial partner in this work. If you are encouraged by the idea of community theater being driven by radical empathy, we hope you will consider giving to our organization so that we can keep moving forward despite the pandemic. You can donate quickly by jumping on our website - rethinktheatrical.org

3. And the third thing I'll ask of you is that you share this video and this information with a friend and keep an eye out for more updates in the month of December. Over the next few weeks we will be introducing our Artistic Council members, our Participatory Budgeting Task Force, sharing some exciting opportunities within the organization, and announcing our 2021 season!

ReThink Theatrical is made up of a bunch of incredible folks who not only love theater - they love people. And they are desperate to serve you all well. We hope that you'll come with us on this journey as we try each day to reclaim community theater for all of us.

Stay tuned, and stay safe!