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## **Accessibility Survey for Philadelphia Performance-Based Artists**

### **STAKEHOLDERS**

**-How many people in decision-making positions in your company are disabled? What percentage do these people comprise of your total company?**

- 2 of our 3 company members (those who do the administrative labor, and creative stewardship of projects) have psychological disabilities
- All 3 company members are able-bodied

**-Does your company provide opportunities for disabled artists to be meaningfully compensated for their work? Out of the number of people who are employed in your project, what percentage of them are disabled? Please include artists such as stage managers, designers, and producers.**

- We have not employed physically disabled performers, stage managers, or designers. We don't ask our creative teams/crews to disclose any psychological or invisible disabilities, but we do have daily check-ins regarding any accommodations needed, and adjust accordingly.

**-What percentage of your audience is disabled?**

- 5 - 7% - we've done some work to engage families with disabled children, disabled caregivers, and facilitated workshops with disabled attendees, but the majority of our audience are able-bodied.

**-If you have a pedagogy or method of making work, is it accessible to disabled people? Are you prepared to modify methods/pedagogies to allow people with a wide range of disabilities to adapt to them? Have you ever tried? Would you know how to do this safely and respectfully?**

- We don't have a codified training methodology – such as a Hot House -- merely a way we organize collective thought and idea formation, we don't place any value on able-bodied people being more worthy than disabled people.
- Dance and movement is a strong component of most of our work. We believe that anyone can dance. That every body is a good body. We carve out space for open dialogue around adapting movements, processes, and practices. We believe this is *the only* way to work. We have not done enough to invite disabled dancers and performers into our process and that is a complete failure on our part.

**-Does your work touch on the lived experience of people with disabilities? How many performances have you made where disability is explored? Of those performances, how many were led by disabled artists whose lived experience was reflected in the performance?**

- No, the content of our work has not explored disability so far. Our production of *Homeworld* allowed us the opportunity to collaborate with a family whose child had developmental delays that affected the child's speech and movement. The child's parents were incredibly generous with their time and their perspective and worked with us to adapt a lot of our practices to support creating an engaging and equitable experience for their child and other children with disabilities who would attend the show.

**-Have you ever made work that touched on disability but employed able bodied artists to create or embody this work? Have you ever cast an abled person as a disabled character? Have you ever made a work about a disability whose Lead Artist was an able bodied person?**

- No, we have not.

**-If there was a role you were casting where the character is disabled, would you be able to reach out to a disabled actor to cast it? If you were making work that discusses disability, would you be able to build a creative team that has disabled people in decision making positions?**

- Our work is devised by the creative team working on it, so our characters are built by those who will eventually play them. We would not write a character with a disability if the artists developing the role did not have lived experience with that disability or one like it. Hiring disabled performers, crews, and creative teams is something we have not done enough of.

**-Are these numbers you track and make plans to improve on regularly?**

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- As a smaller arts organization, data tracking of this type is not a regular part of our practice. We realize that paying careful attention to the dynamics of our creative and administrative teams is essential to improving our commitment to accessibility, and thus we will commit to building an intentional practice to make these gaps more apparent and work to eliminate them as time passes.

**-What does that process look like if it does happen?**

- We'll need to assess this with a group of trusted artists and collaborators (and welcome any suggestions from folks with more experience in this area), but I believe that building some sort of anonymous or front-facing questionnaire that allows for collaborators, audience members, and any involved party who identifies as a member of the disability community to disclose their disability, access or mobility needs, and other ways that our labor can support their needs. Once we collect this data, we can better strategize about to meet these needs. In terms of outreach to disabled artists in our community, I think we need to do better to decontextualize our company from the standard performance work happening in Philadelphia that is ableist and cis-heteronormative. As the answer above stated, we craft our work and each character in our performance work around the creator involved directly in its formation.

**-Do you have a network of disabled people whose disabilities comprise a wide spectrum of experience that you can turn to for practical advice about fulfilling their accessibility needs, and pay them for their labor?**

- We have a growing network of families bringing up children with a wide spectrum of disabilities, and we have company members and collaborators who have done research and/or have live experiences with psychological disabilities. We have some close colleagues who are Deaf / Hard of Hearing. We acknowledge that our network is not comprehensive enough, and it must continue to grow and diversify. We are working with some community partners to host some Town Hall discussions about how our work as a company, and the spaces we work within can better support people with disabilities.
- We did have quite a few babies with disabilities attend a production and Homeworld and we chatted with families at the start of each show to make sure we understood how to best support them in their experience, but we have yet to pay anyone to consult with us.

**-Do you have a person in your network that is a disability access expert, who can ensure that your accessibility practices live up to the needs of your community?**

- No, we do not have a company member or advisory board who is an expert, but we are actively searching for someone with more knowledge in this area. We are considering this as a primary base of expertise for a potential new Advisory Board Member.

**ADMINISTRATIVE WORK**

**-Can you afford to pay people who do the administrative work that supports your art, such as fundraising, website design, project management, communications work?**

- For the first time ever, this last fiscal year we had a total budget of \$4500 to pay for this labor done by our admin team.

**-Does working on your project mean that people need to devote a substantial portion of time and energy without being paid?**

- Our three company members and on one occasion, a producing partner, have been required to do administrative and artistic labor without pay in order to fundraise and produce our work, but aside from those instances, our hired artists are always paid for their labor.

**-Is someone volunteering to do work for free the best way for someone interested in working with you who is outside of your social network to get involved in your company and be considered for future opportunities?**

- No, we are always interested in making connections with people who are interested in devising original work, or who are interested in community-powered performance making. We do as much as well can to offer an open-door policy during rehearsals

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**-Do you make an effort to accommodate people's schedules and physical needs when planning administrative work for your company?**

- Yes, we always do our best to accommodate schedules and physical needs of collaborators, seeing as this is often someone's second or third job.

**-Does your administrative schedule allow for people to drop out of an administrative task if something important comes up or they need to prioritize their paid work?**

- When a conflict arises, we do our best to work collaboratively to redistribute the work load among the other administrators/artists involved.

**-Do you check in regularly about people's capacity as it relates to doing administrative work and is there a way that ensures mutual accountability while not burning anyone out?**

- We have an office hours check in twice a week, and check ins at the start of every rehearsal or collaborative work session regarding any accommodations needed, and adjust accordingly.

**-Could someone work on a project or join your company if they needed to prioritize paid work or work that provides them with health insurance?**

- Yes, we are already set up that way because our company members often must work that way. We will be set up that way until we can provide part-time or full-time salaries to our company members.

**STRUCTURAL/PROCEDURAL ACCESS**

**-How much/what kind of research have you done to ensure that your work is accessible to people with disabilities? If a Deaf person/ someone hard of hearing, a Blind person/ someone with vision impairments, an Autistic person or someone on the spectrum, or someone who uses a wheelchair, powerchair, or other type of mobility device attended one of your performances, would you know how to best accommodate that person?**

- We have not had extensive training, and for that we *absolutely* must do better. Nia has done a lot of independent reading around accommodations for people with disabilities, and we are working to make it clearer that we support and acknowledge people's differing access needs. It is our goal to create relationships with community members with disabilities so that we can have a clear channel for feedback and critique. We know that we cannot infer what accommodations people need.

**-Do you as policy offer warnings about any and all content or technical elements in particular performances that would make it hard for a physically or mentally disabled person to enjoy the show safely, such as content warnings when shows delve into trauma, the presence of smoke, flashing lights, etc.?**

- Not enough. As Ninth Planet, we haven't used any of these devices in our shows, nor have any of our performances been directly about trauma. We have not openly spoken about adopting this practice. Thank you for bringing this to our attention.

**-If your shows delve into trauma, what resources are you providing for folks who may be triggered? Cooling down areas? Literature of community resources? A hotline number? Do you understand why the depiction of trauma is necessary for the art?**

- We included a cool down area for babies and caregivers during our production of *Homeworld*, as a place to go if audiences were overly stimulated or needed quiet. This is a practice we could also adopt for our work for young adults and mature audiences as well. Thank you for these suggestions.

**-What kinds of accommodations do you offer for folks with disabilities at your performances? Listening devices? Audio description services? Open captioning? ASL interpretation? Sensory friendly performances? Do you offer large print or braille programs?**

- We haven't had the funding to provide ASL interpretation, listening devices or audio description services, but it is a goal for our next fiscal year to pursue funding to allow for these accommodations and to write that in as a budget line in our company moving forward.
- Our performance of *Homeworld* was built to be sensory friendly.

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**-What happens when someone with a disability lets you know an accommodation is insufficient, before, during, or after a performance?**

- We haven't openly received any of these complaints. Because of our creation process, community / groups of collaborators are involved in the making of each of our shows and we include feedback and idea generation as a part of our open rehearsals, showings, and invited performances. The aforementioned family was able to talk directly with staff and the creative team about adjusting our practices to fit their baby's needs and were hands on with telling us about adjustments. We were incredibly fortunate to have them so deeply enmeshed in our process.

**-Do you allow and encourage free movement as needed by audience members, and allow audience members to respond to your work however they need, such as people who have disabilities that mean they need to talk or make sounds to feel safe and comfortable?**

- Yes, we do. We encourage our audiences to respond authentically to the work we invite them to see and participate in. *Homeworld* had no seats, and we offered stools/benches for those who couldn't sit on the floor, as well as the opportunity for wheelchair users to enter the space. Public work in progress showings we have done at Cherry Street Pier, UArts, Painted Bride, and Art Sanctuary were mostly has open floor plans and had fully flexible seating available as well. Showings we have done at Children's Community School and Headlong were not accessible by wheelchair and therefore did not offer full accommodation, but once inside the performance area, audiences were encouraged to move around as they needed to.

**-Are all of the spaces where you operate, including administrative space, rehearsal space, performance venues, and places where you throw parties, accessible for folks who use wheelchairs or have other mobility issues? Are they easily accessible via public transit? Are they on streets with smooth, level ground?**

- Using Headlong as our satellite space...No. It's a huge shortcoming. We have performed in accessible venues including Cherry Street Pier, The Painted Bride, The University of the Arts, Christ Church Neighborhood House, Art Sanctuary, but prior to *Homeworld* and *Honey Honey* work in progress showings we were not performing in accessible venues. Sam's work as an independent producer prior to Ninth Planet was generally not performed in accessible venues and she realizes that this was a huge shortcoming of her practice.

### **STRUCTURAL/PROCEDURAL ACCESS (cont'd)**

**-Do you offer descriptions that could be helpful for folks to determine their access needs when planning to see your performance, such as accessibility by public transit, terrain descriptions, any needed descriptions of architecture such as stairs or landings including descriptions of the height of stairs, how many are there, the presence of a railing, the height of steps or stoops? Is there information on accommodations you're offering for disabled people such as ASL Interpretation, audio description services, listening devices, open captioning, etc? Are there clear instructions for how folks may request these accommodations?**

- We have not had the funding previously to provide services such as those listed above, but we have provided information about the accessibility of venues on occasion. Disclosing that information is a practice we will commit ourselves to once we begin hosting live events again. We speak directly with audience members and collaborators regarding accommodations, and we invite people to get in touch with to discuss their needs.

**-If your show is immersive, have you considered the needs of people with mobility issues? Are there places to sit where a fulfilling artistic experience can be had throughout the performance?**

- This is something we have strived to achieve as Ninth Planet, but we can always do better. This has much to do with the scale of our immersive work. This was most certainly the case for *Homeworld*, which is performed inside a small tent. However, some of our work in progress showings of *Honey*

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Honey were so spread out across large rooms that it would have been difficult for a person with mobility to follow the show easily and safely. Thank you for asking this question. It is most certainly an area where we can improve.

**-If your show involves performers or other audience members touching members of the audience, have you considered the needs of folks with sensory processing issues, have lived through trauma, or simply don't want to be touched?**

- Performers in our shows do not touch audience members without enthusiastic consent. In our participatory work, we build in systems that allow audience members to give verbal or physical cues to consent to touch.

### **REMOTE ACCESS/WEB ACCESSIBILITY**

**-Do you offer programming that is carefully designed and reflective of your mission or your project that can be accessed via the web for folks who might not be able to partake in your programming in person?**

- Yes. We're already planning accessible ways to engage with our art through our *Community Film* project, at home activities for families, and other virtual offerings.

**-Is your website compliant with text to speech readers, and formatted in a way that considers those living with vision impairment or people who are blind? Those who are Deaf or hard of hearing? Do you use image descriptions in your emails and social media posts? Is all video content captioned? Do you embed audio description into the audio of your video content?**

- Our website currently features visual indicators for visitors with low vision to easily see what page they have navigated to and what they have selected. All of our text is compliant with text to speech readers, and we do our best to consider high contrast for those with vision impairment. We can and will do better to make sure all of our future (and past where applicable) work is captioned and are working to better embed image descriptions in our web communications and social media posts.

### **PLANNING/MOVING FORWARD**

**-Will you commit to answering these questions in full and make a good faith effort to be transparent and open to feedback that might come up as a result of the answers?**

- Yes. Please give us hell to make sure we don't make empty promises.

**-Please publish how you plan to discover your access limitations, solicit and incorporate feedback from your community, including reaching out specifically to disabled people, and implement concrete changes based on their feedback. Please also state how often you plan on releasing progress reports on your efforts and incorporating any feedback that comes up there as well.**

- We commit to publishing more assessments of our practices and publishing the plans we have to make our work more accessible through research, funding and direct consultation with disabled people. We plan to include this assessment in our yearly company retreat activities and we plan to publish a statement once every year.

**-Are you willing to make a commitment to building partnerships with organizations whose mission is to increase access for disabled people and who have a majority disabled constituency? Are you willing to commit to making these partnerships mutually beneficial and based in respect?**

- Yes. We are not experts on this, nor will we ever be. And it is imperative that we do better. Now.

**-Are you willing to thoroughly research the industry best practices in accessibility and to prioritize accessibility in your next project, including budgeting for paying for consultations from disability access experts and disabled people, as well as for increased costs due to needed accommodations or an accessible venue?**

- Yes! We are already working on it!