



**SUITCASE  
THEATRE**

**CELEBRATING 15 YEARS!**

**ANNUAL REPORT  
2021 - 2023**

**SUITCASE THEATRE ARTS AND  
EDUCATION OUTREACH INC.**





## LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Suitcase Theatre is based in Toronto, Ontario, Canada. We acknowledge that we are on the traditional territory of many nations including the Mississaugas of the Credit, the Anishnabeg, the Chippewa, the Haudenosaunee and the Wendat peoples and is now home to many diverse First Nations, Inuit and Métis peoples. Suitcase Theatre also acknowledges that Toronto is covered by Treaty 13 signed with the Mississaugas of the Credit, and the Williams Treaties signed with multiple Mississaugas and Chippewa bands. We do not support colonial forces that undermine, destroy or erase the vital role of Indigenous people around the world.

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## OUR MISSION

**CREATE AND FACILITATE THEATRE EXPERIENCES THAT ARE ACCESSIBLE TO ALL AND PROVIDE A POSITIVE AND LASTING INFLUENCE ON CHILDREN AND FAMILIES.**

## BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Dr. Bernard Lawless, Chair  
Tiffany Jay, Secretary  
Julian DeZotti  
Brian Jamieson

## STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES

Provide children and youth with outstanding experiences in all aspects of live theatre production and creative activities.

Deliver creative outreach programs for children in priority schools, neighbourhoods, and care facilities.

Nurture healthy well-being through inclusive messaging about timely social issues such as bullying, appreciation for diversity, and creative problem-solving.

Explore and develop relationships with strategic partners to ensure program sustainability.

Create and develop interactive curriculum-based programs with arts professionals and education consultants.

Implement these programs and initiatives so that everyone can feel safe to learn in a fun and nurturing environment.



# THANK YOU TO OUR FUNDERS

Suitcase Theatre is grateful for the continued support of donors including:

- ★ THE TACHANE FOUNDATION
- ★ DR. BERNARD LAWLESS AND DR. KEVIN RUSSELO
- ★ MACLELLAN JAY FAMILY
- ★ JOHANNA WEAVER
- ★ YPI CANADA
- ★ ANONYMOUS DONORS

All financial and CRA reporting is managed by Young Associates

Youth and Philanthropy Initiative Canada (YPI Canada) helps students learn about social issues impacting their community by researching and visiting a charity that addresses an issue, and then sharing what they learned with their peers through a classroom presentation.

As part of their Grade 10 Civics and Careers class, the students pictured below researched and learned about the impact of Suitcase Theatre in schools, hospitals and the community, created a compelling and interactive presentation sharing the work of Suitcase Theatre in creating equitable arts experiences for all children.

A youth-led panel of judges selected one team to win a \$5000 grant for the charity they represented - and this team WON! Thank you to Bishop Allen Academy and YPI for offering a student-driven initiative that impacts the communities they live in!



# A MESSAGE FROM THE BOARD CHAIR



A handy pocket manual summarizing key steps in how to be perfectly prepared for a global pandemic does not exist. Trust me, I've looked. And even if it did exist, it's doubtful it

would leave any one individual, organization or level of government feeling perfectly prepared.

It is challenging, if not impossible, to predict the magnitude of impact a pandemic will have across a society. Add in a generous dose of fear of the unknown and even the best laid plans can be rendered ineffective.

The COVID-19 pandemic impacted every facet of daily life and upended our usual day to day routines. A long time will pass before we understand the magnitude of this impact. School closures, community lockdowns and physical distancing measures eroded the very core of what Suitcase Theatre relies upon as the vectors for delivering our programs. The future held a potentially bleak outcome, or at the very least, getting back to a "new normal" might be slow and tortuous. As a governing Board, working closely with the Executive Director, planning potential options for maintaining active delivery of programs while trying to anticipate when things would return to "normal" was challenging. Distilling information that had a habit of changing frequently allowed for tentative planning, at best.

As we turn the corner to a considerable ebb in COVID-19 activity levels and life, in general, returning to something recognizable, we are excited and grateful to see the work of Suitcase Theatre experiencing a steady uptake. The ability to deliver Suitcase Theatre programs in person enables participants to experience the maximum benefit of having arts and theatre programs available to children and youth. The return to

in-school performances of Stronger Together is a significant post-pandemic milestone when considering just a short time ago this was a significant uncertainty. With its strong focus on children's mental health the experience that is Stronger Together could not be more timely. The re-introduction of Suitcase Theatre March Break Camp was very successful and a good signal for strong interest in this year's sold-out Summer Camp program. Despite the prolonged hiatus, the programs offered by Suitcase Theatre are valued and needed.

As we emerge from the global pandemic and celebrate 15 years, we acknowledge the many factors that contribute to achieving the mission of Suitcase Theatre. We value the partnerships that have remained strong during these unprecedented times. The local school boards, the Hospital for Sick Children, Ronald McDonald House and others who help facilitate the success of bringing arts programming to children and youth. We remain very grateful for the ongoing commitment and generosity of many donors, especially when usual revenue sources were not possible. The very patient, steadfast, clever and extraordinary leadership of Lucie Grys, Executive Director of Suitcase Theatre, combined with her knowledge, empathy and intuition cannot be overstated as a key element in the success of Suitcase Theatre.

We may not be able to plan perfectly for what lies on the horizon, but with immense gratitude for the many and varied contributors to the work of Suitcase Theatre, we will continue to be inspired by imagination as we learn and grow.

**DR. BERNARD LAWLESS**



# A MESSAGE FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



As Suitcase Theatre celebrates their 15th anniversary in 2023-2024, I am delighted to present the Executive Director's report. While we did not have a report during COVID

as the organization pivoted online to the best of our ability and collectively held our breath for a return to in-person programs, it is with extreme joy that Suitcase Theatre once again can deliver on its mandate and fulfill our strategic objectives.

Our mission is to inspire and entertain young audiences through quality theatrical productions and educational programs. With the support of our dedicated team, enthusiastic volunteers, generous donors and loyal patrons, we have been able to make a significant impact on the lives of children and families from all communities. Included in this direction, is celebrating diversity, inclusion and arts equity that Suitcase Theatre strives for in the representation of different cultures, experiences and orientations.

## Partnerships

Suitcase Theatre's formal educational partnerships with the Toronto Board of Education and Toronto Catholic Board of Education allow us to perform for children with the support of school and hospital staff. As a carefully vetted and approved organization, ensuring a strong relationship with school boards is key to our success. Suitcase Theatre worked very closely with the Chief of Mental Health and Well Being with the TCDSB and school social workers in scheduling 50 school shows to elementary schools in 2022 and 2023.

We will continue to work closely with principals, parent councils and school representatives to assist Suitcase Theatre in reaching schools in underserved communities

with positive mental health messaging in Stronger Together.

## Workshops and Outreach

Our educational outreach programs continue to be a cornerstone of our mission. We conduct interactive workshops in schools, Sick Kids Hospital, Ronald McDonald House and with Girl Guides of Canada providing hands-on theatre experiences for children of all ages and abilities. These programs not only foster artistic expression but also encourage inclusivity, teamwork, confidence and creative problem-solving.

Our strong partnerships with Sick Kids Hospital and Ronald McDonald House enable Suitcase Theatre's arts educators to deliver enriching workshops to children receiving care in a hospital or care environment. While Sick Kids workshops and programs are still held virtually, we have very recently been allowed back into RMH for in-person programs and look forward to working with children through their summer camp program in 2023.



**Thank you to @suitcasetheatre for visiting the RMHC Toronto school! Our students loved the performance ❤️**



### **Camp Programs**

For the past ten years, Suitcase Theatre's camps have provided a nurturing environment for young children. While we ran summer camp in 2022, our numbers were down as parents navigated decisions about in-person programs. Summer 2023 is on target and we are very close to selling out our summer camp programs at All Saints Kingsway Church.

In addition to offering employment to emerging actors and art educators, Suitcase Theatre also provides an opportunity for young adults to complete their high school volunteer hours. In the past two years, 20 high school students have fulfilled their 40 hour commitment to volunteer hours required for graduation by assisting with Suitcase Theatre's programs. Our relationship with All Saints Kingsway Church is strong and they are very appreciative of the impact Suitcase Theatre has in the community. Past campers have now returned as volunteers and staff and the circle continues as more families register for the community camp program.

### **Financial Performance**

The dedication of our supporters means everything to Suitcase Theatre. While our camps and performances generate revenue for the organization, generous donations allow the organization to plan into the future knowing there is an element of funding security. Our previous fundraising efforts and grant applications were successful in securing additional financial support for the organization. These funds were primarily

used to enhance our educational programs and improve production quality. We will make funding a priority for 2023-2024 and review eligible grants and foundation support now that Suitcase Theatre is back after COVID. The CEBA loan that Suitcase Theatre received will be repaid by December 2023.

All financial reporting is overseen by Young Associates, a professional accounting firm that provides financial support and oversight for many charitable arts organizations.

### **People Power and Passion**

Without the dedication of the board, staff and volunteers, Suitcase Theatre would not have reached over 10,000 children in the past year alone. I can't thank everyone enough for their unwavering support. We lead with kindness and compassion. I truly believe this is returned to the organization a million times over as we help launch young careers, support the creativity of art educators, create opportunities for development for staff and reach children and families with inspiring programs that bring joy and laughter.

It is an extreme pleasure to share the joy of Suitcase Theatre with so many as we look forward to many more years of enriching the lives of children through the magic of theatre and the arts. We extend our heartfelt gratitude to everyone who has contributed to our success and invite the community to join us in the upcoming year's exciting endeavors.

**LUCIE GRYS**





Suitcase Theatre was thrilled to be back touring *Stronger Together* during the 2022/23 school year.

Thank you to the Toronto Catholic District School Board who worked with their social workers to identify schools who could benefit from a sponsored show. Suitcase Theatre was also able to restart the Play if Forward program and donate a free show for every paid school performance. We look forward to continued partnerships with school boards as we plan our touring schedule for the 2023-2024 school year.

**SUITCASE THEATRE VISITED  
30 SCHOOLS AND  
PERFORMED 50 SHOWS OF  
STRONGER TOGETHER FOR  
CHILDREN FROM DIVERSE  
COMMUNITIES. 42 SHOWS  
WERE SPONSORED AND  
PROVIDED FOR FREE FOR  
LOW INCOME SCHOOLS.**

## SCHOOLS VISITED

St. Margherita  
 St. Charles Grenier  
 St. John the Evangelist  
 Our Lady of Lourdes  
 St. Robert  
 Our Lady of Victory  
 Central Etobicoke High School  
 (special needs class)  
 Darcy McGee  
 Holy Angels  
 St. Bonaventure  
 Annette Public School  
 Briarcrest Public School  
 Broadacres Public School  
 St. Gabriel  
 St. Agnes  
 St. Bartholomew  
 St. Florence  
 St. Anthony  
 All Saints Catholic School  
 C.S. Aube  
 St. Paschal Baylon  
 St. Jane Frances  
 St. Francis de Sales  
 St. Kateri Tekakwitha  
 St. Ambrose  
 St. Matthew  
 Our Lady of Guadalupe  
 Annunciation Catholic School  
 Our Lady of Sorrows  
 St. Cecilia  
 Bakersfield Public School



# OUR TEAM

## MEET OUR 2022–2023 STRONGER TOGETHER TOUR CAST!



**Tyler Check**  
ARTIST DIRECTOR



**Jessi Elgood**



**Jen Fong**



**Ali Hand**



**Tristan Hernandez**  
STAGE MANAGER



**Katie Martin**



**Alex Panneton**  
STAGE MANAGER



**Hanuel Yi**

**SUITCASE THEATRE  
EMPLOYED 24 FREELANCE  
STAFF THROUGH OUR  
PERFORMANCES, CAMPS AND  
ART EDUCATION PROGRAMS.**



## CAMP STAFF 2022 –2023

Jess Vandenberg  
Jacquie Janas  
Alessandra Caruso  
Fynn Cuthbert  
Julia Womby  
Holly Rees May  
Alicia Barban  
Andrew Case  
Ethan Chekalla  
Jocelyn von Antzigen  
Jayden Sutherland  
Siobhan Klein  
Palmer Gryns

Thank you to the many dedicated student volunteers who worked at Suitcase Theatre's camp programs to fulfill their high school volunteer hours.



# A MESSAGE FROM THE EDUCATION MANAGER



It's hard to believe it's been nearly 10 years since I joined the Suitcase Theatre team back in 2014. That year we launched our workshop program and it's been a very rewarding

experience watching it adapt and grow over the past decade. I'm proud of the solid relationships we have built with schools, hospitals, day camps, day cares, girl guide/scout groups and community centres over the years providing our customized and set programs.

In 2021, Suitcase Theatre was still on hiatus as the pandemic continued and the future in regards to social restrictions was still unknown. We considered pivoting to a virtual platform to deliver our workshop content but hesitated as we were so hopeful all would be "back to normal" soon. By 2022, the world was slowly reopening so we began a soft relaunch of our workshop program offering both in person and virtual options.

Over the years, we have been able to provide monthly workshops and programs to both Sick Kids and Ronald McDonald House thanks to the generous support of donors and supporters. Before Covid, we recorded our monthly show at Sick Kids in Marnie's Studio and provided in-person workshops to the students at RMH. In 2022, Covid restrictions continued to remain at both RMH and Sick Kids so we pivoted and began to create virtual content so we could continue to provide some much needed programming to both students and patients. Thanks to the creative talents of our art educators and the purchase of a green screen we were able to offer a hybrid of pre-recorded and live content virtually. Via Zoom, Suitcase appeared as guests a few times for Sick Kids Story Time Show and monthly virtual

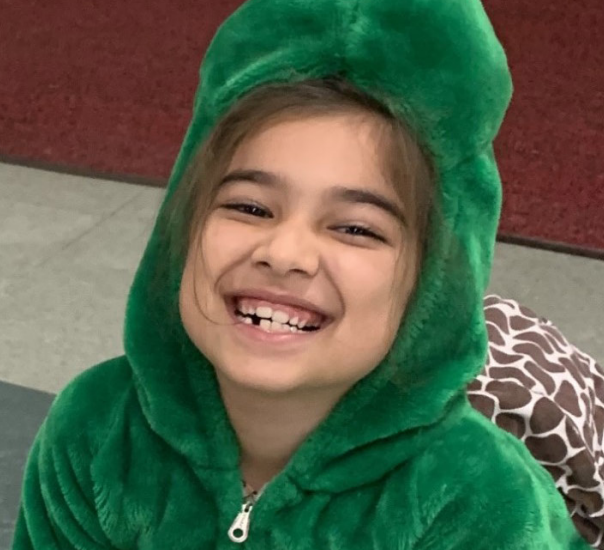
workshops recommenced at Ronald McDonald House. Suitcase Theatre is now back in person at Ronald McDonald House delivering our programs and hope to be in person at Sick Kids by 2024.

Shortly before the pandemic hit we had worked hard at creating new content for our school workshop brochure as well as hiring additional art educators to our roster. Sadly, some of these new workshops never had a chance to run and the few that did, only a handful of times. In 2022, we decided to quietly relaunch our workshop brochure with only a few of our half-day programs on offer to allow some time to run them and tweak them as needed. We were also unsure if there would yet be a demand for in-person workshops at various schools and centres so we decided to reopen this program slowly but surely. I am grateful we are taking our time relaunching school workshops as one of the biggest challenges is supplying the demand. We have a wonderful team of talented, dedicated and creative art educators to facilitate these workshops but it is small and mighty. Most of us have other work obligations as it is a freelance role so scheduling can be challenging. My goal for 2023 is to continue to grow our roster of art educators so we can facilitate the growing demand of in-person workshops.

We are finally coming out from the other side of this pandemic but the long term after effects will linger for years. The connection and healing power of art is so important now as many children's mental health was impacted by the pandemic. The quality programming Suitcase Theatre offers is needed now more than ever for both children and their families.

**VICTORIA SNELL**





## MORE THAN 10,000 CHILDREN EXPERIENCED OUR WORKSHOPS, CAMPS AND SCHOOL SHOWS.

"We are so grateful for our partnership with Suitcase Theatre. We have had the pleasure of getting to work with Ali, Dani, and Morgan in both virtual and in-person workshops. The children are always excited to participate in the activities they have planned for them, especially when the staff has taken the time to know their individual names and make them feel special! I can say that the choreography we learned back in December is our youngest student's favourite dance to do in class! The team is engaging and has been able to pivot to our fluctuating numbers while catering to our various age groups. We look forward to continuing our partnership as we see the children's individual personalities shine during the workshops!"

Alyssa Ferrer, RECE,  
Ronald McDonald House Toronto



Suitcase Theatre is in  
Toronto.

1m · 🌐

💙 So many awesome book donations for Sick Kids! 📖







**225 CHILDREN ENJOYED MARCH BREAK AND SUMMER CAMPS.**



**SUITCASE  
THEATRE**

SUITCASE THEATRE ARTS AND EDUCATION OUTREACH INC.

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Twitter: [SuitcaseTheatre](https://twitter.com/SuitcaseTheatre)

Phone: 647-654-7529 (PLAY)

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Toronto, ON M6S 4Z7

Location of camp programs:  
All Saints' Kingsway Church  
2850 Bloor Street West  
Etobicoke, ON

Charitable registration number: 81769 5190 RR0001