



November 2021 Sustained Grantee Spotlight: Bond Street Theatre

Through pandemic delays and political upheaval, Bond Street Theatre has continued its mission to promote peace and mutual understanding through the arts. Over the past year, much of the work was put on hold as borders closed and the virus raged. Now, as some parts of the world relax restrictions, Bond Street is again hard at work, with recent programs in Egypt launching a revamped schedule of events.

This month, the organization begins work on a project in South Africa as part of its sustained grant with Together Women Rise. With the Rape Crisis Cape Town Trust and Khayelitsha Art School, Bond Street Theatre aims to make an impact on the women and youth who lead the fight for racial and gender justice in Khayelitsha and Athlone townships.

Afghanistan

Bond Street has worked in Afghanistan since 2003 on projects that uplift the lives of women and girls, inform citizens about their legal rights and protections, and use theatre as a means to spread essential information. Its community improvement program engaged more than 400 youth in 25 provinces in activities to improve their communities. With the resurgence of Taliban control, there is concern that the work may be undone, mixed with gratitude for the seeds planted in girls who learned the power of their voice.

Information regarding work in the region is limited at this time for the safety of all involved, but as of early October 2021, Bond Street was still working to get the remainder of its Afghan staff (all women) out of the country, along with former students who are at risk. The work is frustratingly slow, but it does continue. The organization is also assisting refugees who were able to escape the country and raising funds to help them and others who are seeking a way out. Many refugees fled the country with only a backpack and their lives. Some women who are still in Afghanistan are no longer able to work, even though they are the sole financial support for their families. Others are families who need funds just to travel to an available border.

Consider the impact of the arts on young hearts and minds. In recent months, this scene from a Bond Street Theatre play promoting gender equality toured Aswan, Egypt:

What do I want? I've never been asked that before.

I want to feel respected, I want to have a safe space, I want to walk in the streets without being bothered, I want to be trusted, I want to have a meal I haven't cooked myself for once, I want to dream big, and actually have the chance to achieve, I want to be able to come home late – like my brother, I want to have my own opinion and be heard.

I want what I want, and I deserve what I want.

In 2022, work moves to Azerbaijan, then South Sudan and Ukraine.