

Transcript

Inclusion in the Creative Workplace

Interview with Cole Alvis, Executive Director – Indigenous Performing Arts Alliance

My name is Cole Alvis, I am an actor and a theatre creator. I am Métis from the Turtle Mountains in Manitoba, and I'm the leader of the Indigenous Performing Arts Alliance, an art service organization for indigenous performance in Canada. The Indigenous Performing Arts Alliance claims space for all performing artists. We have membership across Turtle Island, which is North America, uh in the form of indigenous performing artist individuals, indigenous performing arts organizations, and allies. The allies are an integral part of IPAA and the work that we do. Um, we create resources and service our community from the artists' and organizations' perspective, um but in order to see those individuals and organizations have their work tour, have their work be shown, it does require support from our allies. Um, so we do also build certain resources that create access points for individuals that are interested in engaging in indigenous performance but perhaps don't know how to begin.

Inclusivity is a better word, in my mind, than diversity because diversity can separate whereas inclusivity does require a certain amount of space afforded to all people.

A mentor of mine said "If you are working on systemic change, sectoral change, and it's going well, you're not doing something right." Um, this is hard work. Um, there's a reason why people are less inclusive, and it's not just because, uh, not just because of ignorance or just because of prejudice - it's hard work. And often what it requires is the structure of the organization shifting, evolving, a rethinking of how is it that we do the things that we do. And from what world view are we doing them? And that can be a challenge, particularly when funding is an issue, and particularly when resources are an issue, um it gets really tempting to cut corners and just go for the easiest route. Um, and often diverse practices are not easy and therefore it makes sense to me why folks may not prioritize it. But I think the benefits of meaningful engagement with various communities will outweigh those, those cut corners, I think in the long run. And that's something that I would like to impress upon is, um, thinking about a working in a way that doesn't seem efficient at the start in order to get somewhere much greater than where we are at now.

I'm on the advisory committee for Equity in Theatre. It's a gender-equity initiative that the Playwrights Guild of Canada have started, and we had a symposium recently and one of the action items that came out of the symposium was infiltrating the boards across Canada and ensuring that there are people sitting on boards who have inclusivity as part of their um personal outlook. Um, because often when it comes to hiring, uh from a theatrical perspective, the, even the selection of the season, um needs to be run by a board. So there is a fair amount of power that that structure has. And so if we can, all the way from the top, so not just the Executive Director or Artistic Director, the leader of the organization, but the but the board that they then report to, um if there are folks there that believe in the positivity that can come from diversity, um I think that's where we'll start to see real change. Whether it's for gender equity or really any type of inclusivity.

I think some folks respond well to a bottom-dollar pitch, um, and that can be a challenge. Um, it's not always an efficient way when you are reaching out to an underserved community, or a

community that has not had the same level of access to education and opportunities. Um, those candidates, while they may be strong in certain areas have been operating likely under a certain level of disadvantage. And so, there's there's often some professional development and training opportunities that are required. Um, when you do invest in in those types of hiring practices and when I have, what I've experienced with my organization is, um, there's a level of engagement with the broader community or rather the specific community that that individual comes from. And there's - through that connection comes the opportunity to have more access to the cultural knowledge, to individuals from that community participating in whatever events it is that you're doing. Um. And so when it comes to audience development for performing arts or increased engagement in whatever artistic practice you're looking at, um, that's where I develop new audiences or engagers. When communities feel see themselves represented in the art or represented by the organization, they are more likely to participate.

I think best practices around inclusivity initiatives often start with "What are the goals of the organization?" and particularly as it pertains to the community that that organization operates within. And perhaps the communities that haven't had, for whatever reason, a level of access to that organization or to that arts practice. And when it comes to best practices, often I recommend an engagement [process - a consultation process - with the community that you would like to see an increased engagement with. Um, one of the main things of that I think of around best practices is seeing artists or leaders from that community being given the opportunity to be leaders within your organization. So by that I mean having the opportunity to make decisions or think critically around what is the programming or what is the direction that we're going So that they're able to bring their cultural knowledge and their understanding of what the community responds to and is looking for.

The organization that I run has, is a national organization but it has spotty membership. And by that I mean there is a lot of activity in sort of, Toronto and Ontario and in Vancouver. So the north, the maritimes, French-speaking aboriginal artists, very low membership. And one of the things that I try to do is think of is in what ways are we creating resources? In what ways are we serving the needs of folks in those regions so that they will want to be part of this organization. And so that's what I mean when I talk about consultation is engaging with leaders and individuals in the community to ask them what it is that they need and how can our organization evolve in such a way that it becomes something that they want to be a part of.

So the Indigenous Performing Arts Alliance is developing a resource, this doesn't yet exist, but traditional protocol that is quite important is land acknowledgement. So when you come to see a show at Native Earth Performing Arts they will come out and they will acknowledge the traditional caretakers of this land. And that is a traditional practice, it shows a sign of respect, and it replaces, and whether that's an effective thing or not, uh a welcoming which traditionally would be done by the people of this land. Um, based on colonization that's not always possible. Um, so if someone whose nation and people are, from here, are not available one can acknowledge them in that absence. And, so one of the resources that IPAA's building is going out to, specifically in, the land that is now called Toronto, speaking with those original caretakers and asking how would you like to be acknowledged? Um, we've done our research to identify who we think the nations are, and there are various ways that you can in your acknowledgement add by saying "recorded and unrecorded, acknowledged and unacknowledged" because, of course, because of colonization we don't know necessarily all of the Nations that were through here. Um, and so that resource that we're building starts by again asking the Nation itself "What

is the way that you would like to be acknowledged?" and opening up our process. And even what the resource might end up looking like, based on the feedback that we receive from these communities. And so this will be something that we can ultimately share with other performing arts groups that want to, to perform a land acknowledgement before the show as well as other arts groups before important meetings that come through here, or really any time that you want to be bringing.. uh, that you really want to be bringing respect to the land and to the place. And so that I would use that as an example of best practices around resource-building and particularly as it pertains to engaging with, with community.

So IPAA has the great fortune of being able to engage Dr. Mique'l Dangeli. This is an indigenous woman from the west coast who runs the Git Hayetsk Dancers. She's a traditional dancer, she has training in visual arts, and now has her PhD. And her PhD was on the intersection of indigenous protocols and performance. So she spent the last many years of her life being steeped in learning and developing a vocabulary around this. And so she was an excellent candidate when we had resources to hire someone that understands indigenous protocols and performance. Um, and so she worked with us as a consultant so that as we're coming up with these resources, um, to share and create access points for non-native of indigenous folks that maybe aren't from that particular Nation, to be more familiar with protocols. There's the trust there that that she understands the sensitivity around these things and the vocabulary in such a way that, um, she can guide us through this process. One of the things that's quite sensitive about this type of resource building is that ceremony and tradition are living things that aren't necessarily meant to be written down into a document from a traditional, oral tradition perspective. Folks in the community can be concerned around institutionalization of ceremony and tradition and that's a concern of mine and that's why we look to Mique'l and various other leaders and mentors, to ensure that as we are moving towards that will create more access points and encourage more inclusivity we're doing it in such a way that it doesn't sell out a community or make light of something that is very personal and very sacred.

A challenge that I think many people who are engaging in issues of inclusivity for the first time - a challenge is the level of distrust that's out there in certain communities. And that comes from years of being shut out and excluded, particularly in aboriginal communities it can be a challenge to, uh, to be the new person on the scene and get engaged with the community. I think that's where I would like to speak about relationship-building. I think to be inspired to have inclusive practices is of course this is an early step, but it is a long road, and it requires meaningful engagement, meaningful relationships, and a dedication that I'd like to describe around ally vocabulary, being a good ally. The way that I understand that is being an ally isn't something that you do once and then you get to wear the ally hat. Every day you have to prove that you are an ally, particularly depending on your degree of privilege in whatever relationship you're engaging in. And so that's a challenge and an opportunity for organizations to, everyday, even when it's not convenient, check someone when they say something that may be inappropriate or perhaps just aren't thinking about how that vocabulary or that verbiage is received from cultures that aren't necessarily their own.

Measurement and evaluation, makes me think immediately of world-view. Through which lens are we looking to decide when something is a success. And this is something that many of the indigenous performing arts organizations and individuals that IPAA represents, uh, encounter, particularly when it comes to reporting for funders or various other bodies that require a certain kind of bottom-dollar "how well did you do this year?" type of response. And this relates to any and all inclusivity approach where

the outcomes are not necessarily going to look great on a graph for the CADAC chart that you might be filling out for your operating, or the various other reporting that you might do. Um, and I go back to world-view here because if we're thinking about community first, if we're thinking about meaningful engagements and developing work and art that has all of us moving forward together, that may not necessarily fit within a capitalist model. And so that's where a certain amount of creativity is required and articulation as far as telling the story of the work that you've done thus far or the successes that you perceive and see in your organization in your community you're engaging. That, that may not fit within those metrics. I think a certain amount of advocacy is required, I think that we have some work to do as far as explaining this to the funders and the various powers-that-be, so that we do acknowledge contributions and efforts and outcomes that may not show up on, on pie charts and graphs. Um, and I don't immediately know how all to do all that, I'm happy to help anyone who has ideas because I think, I think it is necessary and I think it's doable, it just requires, again, a change to the system with which we're operating. It's not easy to do, to have inclusive practices and to engage in this. But it is worth it.

Transcript

Inclusion in the Creative Workplace

Lisa de Wilde, Chair of the Board – Toronto International Film Festival

So, I'm Lisa de Wilde and I'm the chair of the board of TIFF. Uh I also serve as Chief Executive Officer at TVO, and I'm on a couple of private sector boards as well.

So I would say it was less than ten years ago, TIFF was embarking on some pretty big ambitious projects, like building the Lightbox in downtown Toronto. And, you know, was looking at what kind of a board would we need to be successful going out the next 10, 20 years. And I think, you know, building a board is something that takes a long-term perspective and you know, we just got really clear that we wanted to have a skills-based board. So we created a matrix of the type of skills that would be relevant to a film organization. And then we just sort of started setting objectives of how do we recruit people, um to bring those different skills to the board and at the same time bring different uh, perspectives and to represent, you know, different groups within Toronto.

I think that everything starts with a commitment around you know, what outcome are you seeking to obtain. And, you know, I think that an organization will want to get really clear on why they want to increase the inclusiveness of their board. And start with that really clear commitment, and then from that place you can then put in place processes that will produce a really robust board recruitment process.

Well, I'm a big believer in having objectives, having them be measurable, and then making sure that you do it. That you, you look critically at your performance. You know, this, again, this is not rocket science. You look at the size of your board, you look at the skills, the talent, the experience that you need, that you're missing. And have a plan. The, the turn over on boards can be a powerful way to accelerate and to get momentum more quickly. Um, so looking at things like the term limits on boards is a good way to help to re-develop your board more rapidly.

I think it really does come down to why wouldn't you want to tap into the full talent pool. YOU know? It's a point that I think has been used to good effect when we talk about women on boards, and those type of initiatives. But, you know, I mean really it goes back to first principles. In most organizations the human capital, the talent, is, you know, one of the most important, if not the most important uh, part of running a successful organization. So of course you want to tap into the, the best people, you know, who are available to you. I think it does come back to, you know, the question of, um, marshaling all available talent to serve the organization and its objectives. Um, I think it is about, uh, being relevant to your community. So reflecting the community that you serve and that you work as part of. And, uh, I think it's important to be seeing inclusivity as really just a fundamental part of the way that talent across, you know, all parts of the organization are recruit, are trained, um, and developed.

I'm a big believer in a skills matrix. So look to see what skills you're missing and then focus on developing a really rich pool of potential candidates to fill that gap on your board.

Well, I think that with like so many things now it really is about how do you avail yourself of the best [practices that other organizations have used. This is not a a new initiative so there are other people out

there, other organizations that have been successful,. And so this is like a great opportunity to reach out and uh, and tap into existing uh, networks of people.

And really, you're not alone is, is the important message. Ok, so when an executive wants to open up the conversation with their board about how do we start to um embark on an inclusivity project, I think it can be pretty simple uh, to look to the audience, to look to who is the community that your organization is set up to serve, and you know, take them for a walk down the street in Toronto and just start to ask really simple basic questions about how do we reflect this amazing city that we are a part of.

I think one of the things I'm proud of with TIFF is that it was a deliberate, um, choice using a skills-based approach to the board. So really trying to understand what the skills were that the board needed. So, from, you know, tactical, financial acumen, legal , understanding technology, understanding people-management. And so it was really using that template, um, and then going out and really, you know, looking for and being, you know, happily being able to find really great people.

I think challenges are kind of the nature of building any organization. And so it really is just about being committed to what you want to do, and not being fussed by the fact that it might be harder than you think it will be. I think it's about being committed to what you're setting out to do. Um, and being very self-aware, being very deliberate about what you're doing. And having lots of open communication as you go through that recruitment process. I mean it is a process that takes lots of dialogue and, uh, lots of meetings lots of interviews. You want to make sure that every candidate that you're talking to is really getting a good understanding of what the organizations objectives are and you really want to match what the organization is looking for with what the candidate wants to bring to the organization.

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Inclusion in the Creative Workplace

Interview with Nina Lee Aquino, Artistic Director – Factory Theatre

I'm Nina Lee Aquino. I am the artistic director of Factory Theatre. I'm also a freelance director, and dramaturg, sometimes a playwright, not so much an actor anymore. So...

First and foremost my first, kind of, real theatre was Carlos Bulosan Theatre, which is a Filipino-Canadian theatre company. SO, it's... I kind of see my career as kind of a ripple, like, you know... the Filipino-Canadian in me working with CBT. And then I founded a theatre company, Fu-Gen Asian Canadian Theatre Company, which is still the foremost kind of, theatre company dedicated to the development of Asian-Canadian theatre artists, which is now under the leadership of David Yee. And then I went on to Cahoots, which has been for, what? 30 years, now? Or almost 30 years, kind of the flagship diversity theatre company in the country. So, you know, I kind of went there. And then now at Factory. So yeah, like the ripples of my career in terms of, um, the reach that, my desire to really reach from myself and who I really am to kind of, really being an Asian-Canadian, to being a diverse artist, to now being a Canadian period. So, you know, that's for me - being in these theatre companies and being able to reach more and more and more people. Um, and being able to put my passions at a larger stage, so to speak, has kind of been the goal. You know, and so yeah - makes - hopefully it makes sense, kind of where I'm trying to go. And bringing the people on my back with me.

And think it's important to not only state what your best practices are, and that means you know, when it comes to inclusivity and being able to really cast the net to finding a whole range of people with whole range of backgrounds and walks of life, is that it starts internally, within the structure, so to speak. So I think that in a leadership role, me being a Filipino Canadian, they see that you know, I'm an artist of colour. So hopefully that inspires and that opens the doors for all artists of colour to apply freely here at Factory. Um, and that's important. I think that, you know, you can keep touting and write out your philosophy on that, but if they see that you, the staff is made up of, you know, kind of the same colour of people, then I don't think you're going to get the results that you want. For me, I'm really passionate about inclusivity and being able to really reach out to, um, artists and potential employees that don't normally think that they have a chance at working here at Factory. But because it's me and they see me in this role, I think it allows for these artists and employees to actually come and they think that it is possible. Because for me they're my priority, and that's just natural being who I am, right? So, I not only practice inclusivity and diversity, I am that.

The Canadian theatre landscape right now, I'm one of the very few artistic directors of colour and artistic directors that are female. So already I think, you know, it's not a specific anecdote, but the everyday struggle to prove myself and my company's worth under my leadership is a thing, let's face it. That is just, you know, still very much entrenched in the way we think about women leaders. Like, why? Why isn't there a lot of women leaders? Let alone women-of-colour leaders? Because it's hard to break into that game and for the most part I'm surrounded by what we lovingly call, kind of "the old boys club." And so to be treated seriously, to be treated as somebody with strong opinions, to be in a place of power is something I don't take for granted. But it is, uh, it is a struggle. But I will continue to be loud,

and brave, um, and stand up for what I believe in and what I'm passionate about. I can get really, um, despairing at times, for sure. Because you realize "Oh! It's 2015 and we're still..." you know sometimes it can feel like we're still at this point where our stage or not diverse yet, you know the stages are not in full colour yet, and so a theatre administrative staff is not in full colour... So it can get really discouraging. but, you know, you focus on the work and you keep going through the walls.

So, you know, we also... it's also helpful to define diversity. And so I often say, you know... Yes, ethnicity, skin colour, but that also includes gender, sexuality, class - that's a big thing and I think that's taken for granted as well. So, um, when we're looking for artists to nurture, to grow like that next generation of artists and storytellers. And even emerging artists, uh sorry, established artists or veteran artists, I always ask them, like try and think of the Canadian experience in full colour. Like, really don't bound your imagination in just, kind of, typical, conventional way. Like really imagine your world in full colour.

When it comes to, kind of, you know the overall messaging when I became the artistic director of Factory it was important that, you know, when they hired me or even before they hired me - that was something I put on the table right away. That, you know, my priorities would be staging diversity. That I would be putting on the stages the Canadian experience in a very prismatic way. So those terms, you know, we use in our mandate, in the vision, you know, again - the TTC bus kind of analogy has been kind of adopted by some of the theatre artists here. Because, yeah, you know, you can't, you know, you can't tout being Toronto's theatre community if again what you see on the stage and your audiences and the staff if it doesn't look like the inside of a TTC bus. Um, and that's huge. And that's really accessible to our general public to get an idea of the kinds of stories we tell here at Factory. And the kinds of plays that I'm interested in investing in and the kinds of artists that I'm interested in investing in as well.

I think that the art of taking a risk is a challenge that, you know, you need your board and you need your audience to really kind of fully embrace. Because it is challenging, um, you know, to do kind of a play that typically, you know all the characters for example are set in live in Nova Scotia and the first thing you think of is... they're, the default would be like they're all caucasian. because for some reason white is the default for, uh, you know, for most of directors in the city here. But I think that, uh, taking a risk and kind of going "No! I'm going to make this fully, like again, the spectrum of colour on stage". That, that in itself is like but will the audience get it? Or is it stretching the imagination too much, or is it, you know? The audience doesn't get it will we get bums in the seats? Or will that turn away potential audiences because they don't believe that that black Canadian actor is from Nova Scotia from nineteen-something-something? Do you know what I mean? So, that is always, kind of the fear. I think, I think we're right now fear is a big struggle because it's connected to box office, it's connected to money, it's connected to audience numbers, and you don't know if its going to be received well critically at al. So you know, will it translate to, you know, good box office numbers. So I think taking the risk is a big, is a big issue. Luckily, I am supported by a board that is completely on board with this vision, of being able to stage diversity on our stages. And they're like "Well, sometimes it takes one audience at a time, right?" It's educating and re-educating every production. It's challenging the notion of, you know, what it is to be Canadian, that it's not just one colour, one perspective, one facet. That it's multi it's prismatic, it's all colours, you know. But, it's, um, again a lot of our audiences are not used to that and we just need to keep, we just need to keep ploughing through. And we need to persevere and be determined and vigilant to keep staging the way we want to. Because sooner or later, again, those audience members are going to be replaced by a new generation of audience members that will, to them, it's standard. That colour is the norm, you know? And there are lots of theatre companies here in the city like Young

People's Theatre who do that already, have been practicing that for years and have been a pioneer in diversity. You know? So they have a Chinese-Canadian Alice for "Alice in Wonderland" and the kids embrace that and love it and it doesn't, doesn't really um, matter to them. As long as it's a compelling story, the performances are fantastic, the story will get told, the message will go across.

Well, there's not a lot of us out there. I think that is a big challenge. Sometimes, no matter how far I cast the net there are, um, not a lot of artists of colour are willing to step up. Especially in the theatre administrative side, you know. We have a lot of actors that want to be on our stages, but the people working behind - you know, producers, marketers, development people - like, that's that's still um.. we failed to nurture those kind of theatre creators. And to me they're still theatre creators, but just in a different vision of theatre. It's hard. And there is still far and few in between, and I'm not liking it. So, again, it's about inspiring the next generation of theatre administrators that will kick ass. And, um, again, if we can continue to you know, if people see - you know, they go to my website and they see our staff, you know, being as diverse and inclusive as, you know, as we can be - then hopefully that'll give the future, you know, people who are thinking about going into theatre business in this way, will be inspired and be hopeful that they have a chance of working here with us. I'd love them to, it's just where are they? You know? Sometimes it's a challenge, and again, if they're not in the limelight, it's like "What's the point? How can I make theatre a viable profession?" - you can. I am living proof of that, and you know... All I can do is provide mentorship, a sense of Factory being a training ground, a stepping stone. And that too is another challenge in that - yes, you know, a kick ass person can come in here, of colour, lots of potential, and then two or three years working here and then they get snatched by a bigger theatre company. So it's like ugh, you know? So, sustainability is one thing, because, again, the third challenge is compensation. You know? We're a mid-size theatre company with our own financial struggles, you know theatre we already know that it doesn't pay well. You really need to be here because you love it, and you're passionate about it. And money shouldn't matter, but it does, and so we often do become a training ground or sort of the first doorway into theatre and then they go off to someplace else that can pay them better. So yeah, I would say that wouldn't kind of be the third challenge when we do get the right people. Last season, which was our 45th season, all our productions that we presented - we presented 5, I believe - all of them were in partnerships with another theatre company. Um, and that was super important, because a) you know, with the way our theatre scene is now, never mind in Toronto but in the entire country, you know with funding being cut consistently, um and resources money-wise and venue-wise and being, you know, shrinking by the minute, partnerships and collaborations really play an important part, um, not just for survival but to really grow and thrive. And so, last season, um yeah, we partnered with awesome theatre companies like bcurrent, again quite diverse. So I mean, you know again in the partnerships I look for, I look for sister/brother companies that are in line and believe in the same things we believe in here at Factory. Um, because again, it's kind of like having two megaphones instead of just one. And their audience then is able - you know their reach which is, you know, is sizeable plus ours, then you know the net just gets wider, and their audiences can come in to our building and become our audiences and our audiences get to know their theatre company. So again, the sharing just becomes a little bit bigger, and that's important. Because again, you know, being able to send that message that theatre in full colour and staging diversity, is again, you know you kind of just have to do it, you know? It has to reflect in your programming choices, it has to reflect in your partnerships, and um, so yeah. Like we, we decided for last season to produce diverse works but also partner up with indie theatre companies that believe in the same thing we do. So...

Again, cross-pollination, sharing of resources, not just money but, um, ideas on how to reach certain target audiences that we have per production. Um, that's huge, because again our brain is like, we have to have our loyal Factory audiences but how do we cultivate outside of that? Um, being able to, you know because again we partnered with smaller theatre companies and all of them are, for the most part are venue-less, being able to be a home for these theatre indie companies. Which again allows them, the smaller company to, kind of, with our name, um promote their, promote the shows that we're producing together in a larger - at a larger scale. And, you know, you know the staff of that theatre company and our theatre company, yeah being able to cross-pollinate ideas and have a great exchange of, you know, to-do lists, which is important. But also, the one AD and then me would, like, be able to kind of exchange roster of artists to consider who to cast. Um, not just on stage but again the creative team, the designers, or you know people that I didn't know are now on my radar or vice versa. So, yeah, I think the impact is huge and should be done more often. And not just for Factory, but you know, the larger stage, you know, theatre companies like Canadian Stage or Soul Pepper. They're starting to do that now, slowly, right? Where they used to be kind of on their own. But again with the climate right now for theatre in general - the partnerships and collaborations thing will be more important than ever.

In, at least in the city of Toronto, our theatre community, we tend to be isolated from one another. I mean we do talk, and again it's starting now, but I think stronger networking of artistic directors and general managers and business managers I think can really, um, benefit from a good dialogue of how to really make, both on the stage and off the stage, as diverse as a TTC bus. And again, I think we tend to go by our defaults, for a lot of you know, the men that are sitting in these powerful positions that can actually make those decisions, their default list of people or roster of artists are really are reflection of who they were back in the day. And that list needs to change and the roster needs to evolve. So I think that's one thing. I think having a dialogue with theatre companies, in particular with you know, with um leaders that are new to the game like me, for example, I just kind of got started here at factory. But also speaking with younger leaders and women leaders and asking for our advice and what we think. because then I have the power to recommend you know, people that they might actually consider. Like I have a roster of people that I think, I can go here's my list how about you suss them out, check them out. And see what, you know, what who knows, right? Who knows? You can only try.

I'm not a big, like, I don't know any books or any websites about it. Again, like for me, I live it so it's, it's, I take it for granted that it's second nature to me and, and I expect that of my staff. But I think that, um, for other people considering it it would be great for them, again, to network and to reach out to other theatre companies that practice the same thing. And Toronto in particular, we have a great kind of array of ethno-specific theatre companies, smaller than Factory, that I go to sometimes for help if I am really looking to, uh put out a call for auditions for a production and you know my list isn't good enough I will call the AD of Cahoots Theatre Company or Obsidian Theatre Company, you know that theatre company is dedicated to the black Canadian, um, experience and artists. Native Earth Performing Arts, Aluna, so those are great living, breathing resources that people can actually, you know - we're good ADs! We're not snobs! We answer emails promptly, um and are always willing to be there. And take us out for coffee, have a conversation with us, and um, I'm always welcoming- you know I have an open door policy. I'm always open to talking about what the scene is like here in the city, and what it is like to pioneer and practice inclusivity and diversity. So, I think that's kind of my one thing that I would recommend, is pick up the phone, we're all Google-able, in that sense. Pick up the phone and talk to people who are living that experience and practicing it on a daily basis.

And again, you know create an advisory board of, you know, artists, or you know, other theatre companies. Again, there's something to be said about being able to call me, or Majorie Chen from Cahoots, or Phillip Akin, like we're all connected in this community. And I know that Fringe, the Fringe Festival for example started up the culturally diverse, kind of, fund because they really wanted to increase the diversity of the people applying to the Fringe. And they got, like, you know, Money to actually fund culturally diverse applicants. And so Gideon, who was the ED at the time, called me up and said "Hey, I have a posting out and this is a call for artists of colour. I will be honest with you, I don't know if this is PC or not, if it's gonna offend, but can you just... I need help.. Can you just read it over, guide me, tell me if I, you know?" and he did this with other artistic directors of colour, as well. To make sure. And sure enough, it's like yeah! We helped him. And now it's, like what? Fourth year running, that funding program? And it's been great! It's actually a great funding program that encourages more artists of colour to participate in the Fringe. Because again, there is this perceived idea that, you know, Fringe is only open to so-and-so and, sometimes the artists of colour need that leg up to, to get into the Fringe and be inspired. Um, so yeah. Like, he went and called for help. So again, if you're scared or you're, when in doubt, um, consult. Ask for help. We're right here. Um, and we are your resource. So, I don't take offence to any of those. It's better to kind of be honest than be paralyzed by your fear of never knowing what to do. Like how, then how will you progress if you don't take the leap of faith and take a risk, right?

Because again, you know, I mean you can have the one or two kind of, the South Asian actor or the Chinese actor on stage, but when you read the program you go "Ooh! Lighting designer was also culturally diverse! And the Stage manager ..." that means there's holistic and well rounded about that. You know, then we're not doing tokenism. Then we're not doing, like "Ok, the one Asian is cast, we're done" kind of deal. Because, again, I'm like one is not enough. For me, it has to be 50/50 or 51% at least. So that's a way of measuring. For me, when I program a season that is my checklist. It's the 51 or the 50/50. So, are there enough women playwrights? Are there enough, um, playwrights of colour? are the directors, again the key positions are usually also important to note. Not just actors, but the key, the power positions. Are there enough women directors? Are there enough directors of colour? So that's sort of how I assemble and select my programming. Um, and a measure of success is when people love it! When critically, you know, the reviews are good and, it's either two ways, either they don't highlight anything, the reviewers don't say anything about, like "Hm, I wonder why they cast a Chinese Hamlet?" or they do highlight it in a positive way. Then, that's something. Then, you can go, ok, this is this is good, we're going somewhere. there's a dialogue that's gonna happen. Um, and so yeah, critically, like if that's if that's even mentioned or highlighted. And if our audiences, yeah audience feed back is good. Um, and inspiring and we have audiences that come out inspired and are talking about it. Again, either not specifically about "Ooh, you know, the Chinese actor was great as Hamlet" or just like "Isn't that a great actor who played Hamlet". Like, do you know what I mean? That, that can, that says a lot, uh in terms of success. Again, if audiences love it, and the box office numbers, its a typical way of measuring success I think. That if we hit, you know, our box office targets, um, it says something for sure. Um, recognition in the community, you know? If a particular company has been recognized with nominations for awards, I use that as a measure of success. Definitely not an obsessive goal, it's nice to be able to go "In my season, five plays were nominated for this and that" and if especially the plays that were highlighted again were you know, written by a playwright of colour or had a really big ensemble of actors of colour or are you know, Asian-Canadian set designer was nominated, like that, that's huge. And that means

that we're doing our job well, you know? So, I think that's as far as I can tell you in terms of measures of success. Because it's hard because art is such a intangible thing.

I think that, you know, it takes a lot of courage to be inclusive. Like, believe it or not, again, we're in the year 2015 and you know, sometimes I do question, like, why? Why am I one of six artistic directors of colour or women artistic directors, you know? So it means that we have a lot of work to do still. Um, but, you know, in in you know, this is my third year right now at Factory, but my first year as, you know, as the sole artistic director, you know? I realize, like yeah, it it a lot, a lot of our practices right now are currently run with, you know by extremely limited imagination and paralyzing fear that the audience is not going to get it, that they're not going to buy a whatever, you know, if you become inclusive and diverse. Um, fear that productions will not be good enough, will not be universal enough. So it takes a lot of guts to be able to, again, imagine um running a theatre company and putting on a show in full colour. And um, so I say, well you know, put your brave face on and do it. You know, there's no other way to just be inclusive than to just do it. You know?It's, you know that this is the right thing to do so do it! So, you know, you just gotta cast the net wider and or if you've reached the bottom of the barrel, go find another barrel! You know?

Transcript

Inclusion in the Creative Workplace

Interview with Sage Lovell, Founder – Deaf Spectrum

Sorry, I'll try it again. Hi! My name is Nika Sage Lovell, I am called Sage. I graduated from Gallaudet University three years ago and my major was psychology. While I was at Gallaudet University, I really gained a lot of knowledge with regards to accessibility and social justice. And after graduation I moved to Toronto and I started experiencing a lot of frustrations, experiencing a lot of barriers. And as I dealt with those barriers I realized that things really needed to change. And I spent a lot of time growing up waiting for change to happen, and experiencing frustration after frustration, and then I realized that I had to be part of that change, I had to be active to make that change actually happen. So I moved to Toronto after graduation, I got involved with ORAD, Ontario Rainbow Alliance of the Deaf, I was there for two years involved with that organization. I spent time with SOY - Supporting Our Youth, volunteering for that organization. I've also been involved with Tangled Arts and Disability. And a variety of organizations such as H3, International News, Hands-On ASL which is an organization that teaches ASL to queer and trans* identified people. I've also started my own initiative, and I'm really focused on accessibility for deaf through the use of American Sign Language. It involves creating vlogs that are online, that are always captioned, that always have transcripts attached, and that shares information that really allows for accessible information for anyone within the deaf community, because they can see these vlogs in their own language and they don't have to struggle through English translations and English scripts. So they immediately have access to information I've American Sign Language on my vlogs. So I spend a lot of time working with English scripts, translating them to ASL, something I'm very good at doing. And lately I've been recruiting more deaf people within the community as a way of empowering them and giving them the opportunity to come and help me and create these vlogs. So I've been partnering as best I can with the community at large.

Well I would want to approach it with the asking about the value of the community and how much they value their community because usually you're going to get a positive answer. And you know, most hearing people on a board or otherwise are going to answer "Yes, of course" and every community, when we are talking about them have deaf people within them. So if you really value your community, from my perspective, there are deaf people in every community so you also want to value deaf people, because it's equivalent.

Um, well specific things come to mind - wheelchair accessible buildings, obviously, gender-neutral bathrooms, having scent-friendly environments, asking people their preferred pronouns. I think too that training should be included. I think organizations should go after some training, anti-oppression training workshops, cultural sensitivity workshops. Often I feel like people, hearing people, or people with power, they really need to take moment to check their privilege. You know, they really need to take a moment to think about how privilege affects everyone, how systematically we see this oppression, and how certain acts and accessibility oppresses small marginalized groups.

First thing I would do is suggest to the organization that they should set up a meeting, and that they should bring in people who are deaf, they should bring in someone from the blind community, uh, a

wheelchair user, perhaps people representing other communities such as people who are very sensitive to smell, the autistic community, uh people of colour, perhaps a trans man, a trans woman, as well as perhaps someone who represents the non-binary community. So really, set up a meeting where you have a variety of people who identify in diverse ways and start asking questions. Starting from ground zero, you know you have to start with questions, you have to ask the right questions, it's the first thing you have to do and you have to get responses from people who are speaking from lived experience. But in terms of when we talk about full accessibility and inclusion, I think the most important thing at a meeting such as that is ask "What is - what are your accessibility needs?" and get answers like "I need interpreters" or "I need live captioning" or "I need, you know, FM systems in the room so that the sound is higher" or "Accessible washrooms, " or "large print materials." Answers might also include such things as high-contrast paper, because white paper might not be suitable for certain people who have certain visual impairments. Uh, wheelchair accessibility, in terms of location and buildings. You know, smells that are reduced in the environment. And that's just the beginning, it's the first thing I think of.

I think beyond that there really needs to be focus on diverse identities, because everyone's experience is unique and different. There's no one person that can speak for everyone. And if you are able to have a meeting with that many people there I think that would be hugely beneficial to an organization that's just starting out. And it would be nice if there was something to offer those folks at the end. Whether it was an honorarium or just something to offer them to honour their inclusion in this meeting and their willingness to attend. Because I know a lot of the people that I just mentioned come from marginalized and oppressed communities, so to be able to honour their presence in that meeting would be a good thing as well.

So as I said during my bio earlier, I've developed my own initiative which I call Deaf Spectrum. And the initiative involves creating vlogs and the idea of the vlog is that there is access for members of the deaf community because information is being presented in American Sign Language, their first language. You know, growing up my experience has always been English was the first thing you see and you have to work through reading that. It was never comfortable. But to be able to have a vlog where the information is immediately there and the deaf person can forget the transcript and enjoy just watching a video that presents to them, you know, in their own language. IT makes a huge difference. So the idea came to me in terms of my initiative was that if we were able to set up something that allows for vlogs consistently they will avoid miscommunications and misunderstandings. Because when you have a long transcript all in English there can be miscommunications and misunderstandings all the time. And it's really hard to read through that. Especially if you're looking for a specific piece of information within paragraph after paragraph of language that's not your first, it can be really frustrating. So the idea of having a vlog makes in the information immediately accessible and lessens any misunderstandings that could occur.

Well in terms of American Sign Language Interpreters, there are a few different services. You can go to the Ontario Interpreter Services, which is under CHS - Canadian Hearing Society - so they run the Ontario Interpreters Services. The other organization is Toronto - TS... Toronto Sign Language Interpreter Services, so TSLIS. Interpreters can be booked through TSLIS. There are freelance interpreters in the community who work for themselves. The Canadian Rainbow Alliance of the Deaf has a queer, trans*, LGBTQ-friendly interpreter list. And that list was developed specifically with interpreters in mind who, you know, are comfortable in the community and also for safety reasons, they are interpreters who are recommend for events in that community specifically. Some of the challenges in terms of looking for

interpreters are, you know, if you're looking for an interpreter of colour that can be difficult. Most of the interpreters that you come across tend to be white women. So depending on the event that's being run that doesn't always match. Often you're looking for an interpreter who can also be a part of that community, come from that community. So I always encourage that where possible. Um, vlogs, you can contact Deaf Spectrum. Or Deaf Cloud is another service. Though in terms of Deaf Cloud, their business has been growing quite slowly, so in terms of them as a resource they are still fairly new. The Ontario Association of the Deaf, the Toronto Association of the Deaf is another resource. The interpreter is just clarifying. The Toronto Association of the Deaf as well as Robert Denny's email list.

With the Rainbow Alliance of the Deaf, when I was involved with that organization they did partner with Supporting Our Youth, SOY. At that time isn't wasn't so much about there wasn't a lot of interpreters but we had performances, um they ran the FLAME program that had interpreter services. Another program was Heat - the Human Rights Access Team that gained a lot more knowledge about interpreters and providing access to those services. And in terms of Tangled Art and Disability I've worked with them quite a bit, mainly involved with education on how to get interpreters, how to provide interpreter services, the part that vlogs can play in getting events and information out to the community. One struggle can be to find interpreters. At times it can be very hard to book interpreters. And often when I'm partnering with these organizations one thing that I'll suggest is that if the event is scripted there are deaf interpreters who can be hired who will come and get the script, translate it to ASL and sign the event. That way you might not need to hearing interpreters, you could have one hearing interpreter in the audience who is there to support, and they work as a team, but the deaf person is there, has that opportunity and interprets the event because it was scripted and they were able to memorize it. Um it works really well in terms of the language you get, because that's the native language of a deaf person so they are able to really put it out there in amazing ASL. They grew up, you know, signing that language that's there very first language. So they do an amazing job. Um, sometimes with hearing interpreters who have learned the language as a second language they deal with all sorts of things from fatigue, mentally and physically, to carpal tunnel syndrome and repetitive stress in their arms. But with deaf people who've grown up with this language they are able to just beautifully put out these interpretations and provide access and inclusivity that way. So that's one thing that I suggest when, when we're talking about interpreting services and the idea of not being able to get hearing interpreters, is that if you have a deaf interpreter there you are empowering someone within the deaf community, you're given them that opportunity.

Interpreters can be expensive. The cost of interpreting can have quite a cost to it. And I know many non-profit organizations always tend to have, tend to have a little bit of money left, you know, they may have some money on the side or some petty cash or what have you. If that's not possible there are grants, Community One, the Ontario Arts Council, there are quite a number of different grants that are available that can be applied for and they really love giving money for accessible reasons, for accessibility. So if it's for interpreting costs, that's what they're for. Uh, also in terms of sponsors, if you have sponsors, you're looking for sponsors, to be able to say we have accessibility costs. You know, York University, um Ryerson University, CUPE, um OPSEU, there are so many different unions and different organizations that tend to really sponsor small no -profit events and really support that accessible piece. You really have to do a lot of searching sometimes to find it, but Google is your best friend.

One thing I would say from my experience - feedback forms? Not so much. Face-to-face discussions are a much better way to go about getting feedback when you want to ask deaf people how they felt about

an event. Whether that's with an interpreter or not. But when you send out feedback forms, it's based on English, and you're writing answers. Versus when you have someone face-to-face and they're able to express in American Sign Language, in their own language, it goes much better and people are much, from the deaf community, are much more comfortable. We recently had an international film festival here in Toronto, and at the end there was a survey sent out and it was in English, and there was so many deaf in the audience but they were from all around the world. There were deaf people from Europe, from various places in Canada, from the States, and so in terms of accessibility English wasn't accessible to them coming from other countries, much less having American Sign Language as a first language. There were people on site who were volunteers, and so they were approached and, um, many deaf people told them that the feedback forms weren't understood, and they were asked "Could you sign these feedback forms to me?" in which case that was done, and they were able to access the questions in a signed language, in a visual language. I actually approached the director, I said "Can I sign some feedback to you? I have some ideas" and the response was "Do you mind just getting it down on paper? Or getting it down in text and giving it to me?" And at that point I sort of felt like, the idea that expression for deaf people in terms of comfort and first language is American Sign Language, it wasn't really being thought of. Having to work through English is, you know, is the grammar right is the structure right, does that actually make the point that I want to make in this other language? It's really stressful, and it becomes a barrier. You end up feeling, it's too demanding, where you get to this point where you have this feedback and you feel it's really, really important and you have some really good ideas but you don't feel comfortable putting it in that other language. So first language, native language is always best. So in terms of the deaf community, that would be face-to-face, in American Sign Language. And really what it comes down to is using American Sign Language in all instances. I think you, in terms of, if you're speaking from the perspective of the deaf community, they need to be asked directly, they need to be asked directly. And that's how you know. You may, you may go ahead and start to ask questions, um, what often happens actually is a hearing person starts to ask questions to a deaf person and the deaf person may feel like "Oh, you know, it's no big deal. No, it was fine." but if you actually have a deaf person involved in the feedback process approaching other deaf, collecting the feedback the comfort level goes up tremendously because it's a deaf person speaking to a deaf person. Or communicating with a deaf person. And they'll tend to share a lot more. And they know that the person asking for the feedback can see it from their perspective and know what they are offering, and so the comfort level goes way up in that case.