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Contact:

Jacki Ward Kehrwald, Communications Manager, 971.222.4662, jackiward@thecircusproject.org

Cirque du Soleil awards the Circus Project a \$10,000 Grant for its Pathways Program for Marginalized Youth

The Circus Project was one of only three US recipients of the Cirque du Monde grants for social circus programming

January 9, 2019 (PORTLAND, OR)—Portland-based nonprofit [the Circus Project](#) announced that it has received a \$10,000 grant from Cirque du Soleil to fund a new performance project that engages marginalized youth through circus arts.

“We are so proud that the Circus Project was one of only three US recipients,” says Kirsten Collins, Circus Project Executive Director. “This grant will fund a year-long, social-justice focused performance group for our Pathways students.”

The new performance project will engage students involved in the Circus Project’s [Pathways program](#), its award-winning outreach program that provides support for people who face systemic barriers to arts participation.

“We offer multiple approaches to address the diverse spectrum of needs and abilities and provide opportunities for continued engagement and advancement within our recreational and pre-professional programs,” explains Collins. “We’ve learned that finances are only one of the possible barriers people face.” In 2018, the Circus Project restructured its social circus component in order to interconnect its various programs and more comprehensively meet the needs of its students.

The new performance group will meet for a year, learning circus skills as well as exploring issues of systemic oppression while sharing and reflecting on their own narratives. As the program progresses, the group will have the opportunity to focus in on issues that are meaningful and relevant to their lives and experiences. The program will culminate with a capstone performance that will be open to the public.

“When people feel valued, validated, affirmed and seen, it can be incredibly healing,” says Rhen Miles, the manager of the Pathways program. Miles is a circus artist and coach who also is a social worker and doctoral candidate with extensive experience in participatory-driven youth development. “Ultimately, this project is about working towards creating a place where people belong, while also being challenged,” she adds. “Being considered worthy of being challenged is an important part of the process.”

[Cirque du Soleil](#), the Montreal-based circus company with numerous Las Vegas shows and touring productions, administers the grant through [Cirque du Monde](#), their social outreach program that focuses on using circus arts as a means of intervention with disenfranchised youth.

The Circus Project recently celebrated its tenth year and has grown from serving just a handful of students in 2008 to over 1,500 students in 2018. It also offers a range of circus arts classes for kids, teens and adults at its studio in NW Portland. Additionally, it hosts performances such as [Living Room Circus](#), a performance series where performers present works in progress.

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About The Circus Project

The Circus Project uses the circus arts as a catalyst for personal and collective transformation. What began in 2008 as a pioneering experiment to engage and empower traditionally underserved and marginalized youth in a transformational program utilizing circus training and performance arts has evolved into a thriving arts organization that includes a public circus school, professional performances and youth circus workshops in partnership with social service agencies and after-school programs. www.thecircusproject.org

Caption for attached photo 1:

Circus Project students explore choreography on aerial rope.

Caption for attached photo 2:

Circus Project students perform together on trapeze.